

A Mystery of the Firing Line.

The Kansas man had served with Funston in the Philippines, had returned safely, had been a town hero for a month or so, and was now on the stump in the campaign, advocating, like all the soldiers who had been on the ground and had come back, that policy which would mean the full retention of the islands under the American flag. Several of the campaign orators had met for a Sunday in a Western hotel where their roads crossed in their journeys to assignments, and were comparing notes. The man who had served with Funston gradually assumed command of the conversation, and the talk drifted from a discussion of the question why men rushed to serve in the Philippine campaign to one of the problems why men, in many cases unexpectedly, show not only rare bravery but downright recklessness in battle. The Kansas man, for whom the name Maxwell will do so far as this article is concerned, said:

'As I was saying, we found men out there who had been wild and whose parents were glad to see them enter the army; we found men who had been crossed in love; we found men who had been a failure in life, even if they were mere youths; we found many daredevils, and, curiously enough, most of them were cautious on the firing line; we found some who had pasts that they wanted forgotten; we found some under assumed names, for one reason or another; we found the usual number of bullies, braggarts and bluffers, and being once under fire was the cure for them. But all these made up a very small number in comparison with those who had enlisted for love of country, with perhaps a desire for adventure thrown in.

'But of all the curious characters I came across the strangest was a man named Bond. He was silent as to his past; he made few friends, there was a glitter in his eye when we were in danger which was positively magnetic, and we came gradually to respect his reserve and to be proud of him. There was one man in our company however, whose propensity for nosing into others' affairs was especially marked, and who, it was plain to be seen, was offensive to Bond. The name of Peters will do for this inquisitive man. He was a good fellow and meant nothing more than friendly interest when he was poking around to find out all about his companions, and we learned at last to overlook his weakness—all but Bond. It was evident that Bond was desirous of curing Peters or of punishing him for his offensive behavior. Bond gradually became reckless on the firing line. Any one could see it was not assumed, but was genuine, and this conduct deepened the mystery as to his past and made Peters the more zealous to find out all about him.

'One day Bond fell with a wound, Peters carried him to the rear, cared for him, stayed by him as long as he could, did everything that could be done under the circumstances, like offering to write home and all that sort of thing. Bond spent an hour in deep thought. He was apparently sizing up his chances of living. He was also thinking whether it was worth while to forgive Peters for the past or to give him a thrust he would never forget. It was about midnight that Peter returned to his place with us and the next morning he had a story to tell to three of us in whom he confided.

Maxwell paused and, just as his hearers were becoming uneasy, he said this was the story Peters had related:

'Boys, we've got a murderer among us, not only a murderer but the worst kind of one, a man who killed his father and who if it were proved against him would, up to this time, have pretended that it was an accident. He's Bond. It explains why he has been so reckless lately; he wanted to be killed. Matter of conscience, you see. He whispered it all to me, asked me to write home, saying that he was dead and had passed away forgiving every one and revealing the secret. His name isn't Bond, but I'm under pledge not to tell what it is. He asked me to write without waiting for him to die actually and he wanted me to get him reported dead so that it would be cabled home; said his friends would recognize him under the assumed name. It's a mighty sad story.

'Bond told me that he came from Ohio. His father was a bank president and was found murdered in the bank vault two years ago. Robbers had killed him and had made their escape. He had evidently surprised them. Young Bond was the real murderer. He was just under 21. He had been stealing from his father's private business for more than a year so as

to keep on gambling with a fast set of young fellows, whom a sharper got together regularly and was plundering right along. On Bond's twenty-first birthday there had to be a settlement of the books for his father intended to take him into business partnership. Bond had to have not less than \$5,000 to make good his stealings. There was no other way left to him than to steal it. He knew all about the bank, the combinations to the locks, the ways of the watchman and all that, and he had studied up knock-out drops. He left some liquor that had been doctored with drugs for the watchman to drink, knowing the man's weakness, and the rest was easy. He entered the bank from the rear stealthily having made sure that the watchman was unconscious, had just got into the inner vault, when he heard a noise and saw a dim light in the outer room. He knew it could not be the watchman, and he once raised his revolver for action and crouched to one side. Then he heard a voice, saying: 'My God, I must have killed him. I didn't know it was so powerful. Wake up, Mike!'

'There was no response, and Bond says he recognized the voice as that of his father just in time, for he intended to shoot and escape in a rush if possible. Then Bond became conscious of his own danger. His father might shoot him. The father soon saw the open doors of the vault. 'What does this mean?' he said. 'Mike, you didn't do this; you couldn't! Who is there? Speak, or I'll shoot. Quick! Then it was that Bond saw he had no show and he shouted to his father not to shoot, and revealed his own identity.

'Then there followed a strange scene in

that bank vault. There were the father, the son and the unconscious watchman together in the early hours of the morning. 'What does this mean, son?' said the father, sternly. 'Has it come to this—my son a bank robber?' Young Bond said he was game, and he replied: 'What are you doing here? Are you a bank robber yourself? Who put Mike in this condition?' You see he had overheard his father make that exclamation about Mike, and he took chances. 'Explain your position on the inside of that vault,' said the father. 'Explain what you said about not knowing that something was so powerful when you saw Mike,' said the son. And then the father broke down completely and the son went to pieces, and each, thinking that Mike was about to die, confessed to the other. The father had been speculating in the Eastern markets, had used up a lot of trust funds in his charge, and the only way for him to get out was to rob his own bank. He had also left some knock-out drops for the watchman and it was the combined dose that made father and son think that the man would die. The son owned up to the father, and then followed a discussion as to what was best to be done.

'They agreed that the bank must be robbed; that was their only salvation. They agreed also that it would be best for one of them to appear to be defending the bank's treasure. It was finally decided that it would be best for the son to wound his father slightly in the side, take enough money to suit their purposes and leave their father there to be discovered in the morning. The old man said he was so desperate that he would take chances, and would tell a story about feeling uneasy in his dreams as to the condition of affairs at the bank and of getting up in the night and going down there to see if all was right, of encountering a robber or set of robbers; of having a mighty struggle with them, ending so far as he could recollect, with a revolver shot which made him unconscious. He had no fear as to Mike. If Mike re-

covered he would be so ashamed of being drunk that he would invent some story of being gagged, especially as father and son had arranged to bind him with a gag and tie his hands.

Then father and son planned the details of the shooting, disarranged the furniture, bound and gagged the watchman, took the money and broke the locks, and the father lay down after tearing his clothing, and had the son give him what he supposed was only a slight flesh wound in the side. The old man was full of nerve and after the shooting was over hurried the son away and told him how to act when the discovery was made in the morning. They had wounded the watchman, also.

Bond says he went home and to bed and acted his part thoroughly when they roused him to tell him of the dreadful accident to his father. It turned out really to be a creditable affair, for both the father and the watchman were found dead and the bank robbed. Young Bond says he made good his gambling debts and enlisted in the army so as to get away from the storm that arose when it was found that his father was insolvent. It soon became the general theory in the town that the elder Bond had gone there to rob the bank and had been killed by a real bank robber, and there were those who thought they could remember the exact looks of certain mysterious strangers that had been seen about town.

'Bond's conscience could stand it no longer, he says, and he went to Kansas and enlisted and came out here, hoping secretly that he would be killed, for he had not the courage to commit suicide. He wanted me to write to his relatives clearing up the entire mystery and telling them that he had expiated his crime, so far as he could, by dying for his country. The one thing I can't understand,' said Peters, in telling the story, 'is why he wants me to write all this before he dies. He must have a dreadful conscience. He said to me: 'I am wounded exactly in the place in which my father was wounded when I shot

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him. I know I can't live. Just tell the truth about me, and make sure that the boys will not despise me too much. I have done my duty by them and by the flag,' says he. I broke down and wept, I'll admit, and I'm prepared to say that there's no living soul but has some good in them. And then there's the duty of deciding what's to be done if Bond recovers. Ought we to give him away? I say no.'

According to Maxwell the bugles just then blew for a forward movement, and soon all were lying on the firing line shooting at the Filipinos. Maxwell made another awkward pause, and one of his auditors said:

'Well, I suppose Bond really died and you fellows did the right thing by him even in death.'

'Die?' said Maxwell. 'Great Scott, no. At least, not then. Less than two hours after Peters had told that story Bond came stealing up to me all day working like a demon. 'I thought you were dying,' I said to him. 'The devil, no,' he replied. 'It was only a little wound. Scarcely bled at all. When Peters wasn't around the doctor told me it amounted to nothing but urged me to stay in the rear for one night. This morning he put a little plaster on the broken skin and here I am again. Did Peters tell you a long story about my mysterious past? Did eh? I thought so. I told him that yarn porpoesety. I thought it about time to call him off and make him a laughing stock. Pretty good story, wasn't it? Any truth in it. Thunder, no. I knew I was not hurt. Even if Bond shouldn't happen to be my real name, there's no occasion for getting up such a yarn as that. What's that? Am I hurt? Yes, old man, I guess I am.'

'I saw that he had been wounded seriously this time. I supported his head on my knee, gave him a drink of water, his eyes became fixed and between his gasps he said to me:

'Maxwell, I guess you had better tell Peters to write that story home after all, just as I told it to him. I thought I was dying or near to it last night when I talked to him. I'm—going—now. Be—sure—to—tell—him—to—write—'

'Was he really a murderer and bank robber?' asked one of Maxwell's listeners. 'The army records do not show that he was,' was the response.

The Hen's Delusion.

Ephraim Knox lived in the center of his native village, and his hens wandered here and there at their own sweet will, to the frequent annoyance of his neighbors. Ephraim, however, was no respecter of persons, and considered his hens "as good as anybody" and desirable visitors.

When it was decided that the town library should be built in a vacant lot "next door to him," Ephraim was filled with pride and joy, and he and his hens superintended operations from the first.

Ephraim's brother Seth was not devoted to hens. One day he was passing the site of the library with a friend and stopped to view the progress of affairs. Ephraim's hens were there, cackling away as if their lives depended on it. Seth looked at them in disgust.

'What in the world are these hens making such a noise for, do you suppose? There ain't any grain in there,' said the friend.

'Well,' remarked Seth, dryly, 'they've had the oversight of 'most everything in town. You know the corner-stone of the building was laid yesterday, and I calculate that speckled hen over there thinks she laid it!'



THE FAVORED KNIGHT.