

shock that jarred and almost disconcerted him. It was somewhere about noon of a day in February, and he had just touched the button for John Hampstead, rate clerk. Instead of John, Heitmuller answered the summons, laughing softly.

Now in the rate department John had made an amazing success. In six months gray-headed clerks were seeking his opinions earnestly. At the present moment he was in charge of all rates west of Ogden, Albuquerque, and El Paso, and half the department took orders from him.

"John's away at rehearsal," explained Heitmuller, still chuckling.

"At rehearsal?"

"Yes,—he's going to play Ursus, the giant, in *Quo Vadis*, with Mowrey's Stock Company at the Burbank next week."

"The hell!" ejaculated the General Freight Agent, while a look of blank astonishment came upon his usually placid features. "When did that bug bite him?"

"I can't tell yet whether it's a bite or only an itch," grinned Heitmuller. "For a while he was reciting at smokers and parties and things, and then I heard he was teaching elocution at home nights. Now he's got a small dramatic company and goes out around giving one-act plays and scenes from Shakespeare. Pretty good, too, they say!"

"Well, I be damned," Mitchell commented, when Heitmuller had finished.

"He's only away from eleven-thirty to one-thirty," explained Heitmuller. "He was so anxious and does so much more work than any two men that I couldn't refuse him."

"Of course not," assented Mitchell.

"Besides," added the chief clerk, "he might have gone,