

length did he lay down the law to Joe Farley, who was to have charge of the water-can, whence a stream of water must be kept constantly playing upon the working drill.

Finally he signified his satisfaction with the arrangements, and nodded to Flanders to take his place. The younger man crouched down beside the rock with the shortest drill held firmly in both hands, its tempered point resting against the granite. Gassey was just behind, his feet solidly planted on the ground, his hammer held ready for the swing, all his muscles tense.

III.

"Strike!" shouted the umpire.

Almost with the word down came the sledge upon the drill-head. Around the hammer swung; but before it could descend again Flanders had turned the point a fraction of an inch, and with the second stroke there hopped out a small triangular chip of rock. So they continued, striking and turning, striking and turning, steadily grinding the drill-point down into the block's stubborn grain.

"Quarter minute!" announced the time-keeper; then: "Half! Three-quarters!" and finally, as the hand on his stop-watch was completing its circuit, he began to call the seconds: "One, two, three, four, five, six—"

Still holding fast with his right hand to the drill in use, Flanders now reached out with his left for the next longer one in the sequence. Working the new one towards the hole, he quickly shifted the two as the hammer rose from a stroke, making the exchange so deftly that there was no need for Gassey to alter the steady, regular swing.

"Seven, eight, nine," went on the time-keeper, emphasizing each call with a pump-handle movement of his arm.

Flanders had reached out now, and grasped with his free hand a hammer lying beside him on the ground.

"Ten!" rang out the voice of the time-keeper, and at the word Flanders sprang to his feet, swinging as his hammer as he arose, while Gassey simultaneously dropped and took his partner's former post at the drill. So precise and accurate had been their exchange of places that not to the most carefully attuned ear could there be detected the slightest variation in the measured rhythm of the clinking steel.

A roar of approval from the stand marked the performance of the feat, and more and more friendly became the encouraging shouts as the "talent" among the onlookers noted that the team had made two inches and three-quarters on their first essay.

"If they keep up that lick," gloomily prognosticated White Chip Martin who, on the strength of Flanders' rumored disability, had wagered heavily against the pair, "I'll be counting ties home tonight 'stid o' buyin' wine down at the Brown Palace as I was figurin'."

And, indeed, there seemed little question of their ability to "keep up the lick." Minute after minute passed; yet the interchange of labor was always featly effected; none of the drills battered or broke; instead of manifesting weakness, Flanders actually seemed to grow stronger and more eager; and the hole bored itself deeper and ever deeper into the granite. True, the score ran appreciably better when Gassey was doing the striking; but still they held fairly well to a general average, each of them maintaining a speed of from sixty to sixty-five blows to the minute.

At the end of the twelfth minute, when Gassey again took his turn at the hammer, he saw by the marks on the drill that they had made a total of twenty-seven inches, and that, barring accidents, the prize was theirs already. An overmastering ambition suddenly beset him.

"Let's beat the world's record. Kid," he proposed audaciously to his companion. "Seventy-five to the minute it goes."

Flanders nodded assent. He, too, was intoxicated with their imminent success, and an unaccustomed grin broke over his saturnine countenance, all bespattered as it was with the gritty mud from the drill-hole.

"Clink! Clink! Clink!" the hammer rang in accentuated tempo, and Flanders, responding to its demand, began turning his drill with almost feverish activity.

The crowd, quick to comprehend, leaned forward, silent in its intense expectancy, eagerly following every movement of the two sweating, straining men, every stroke of the hammer, every bite of the drill as it cut deeper and deeper into the rock.

Gassey's hard, red face was almost ferocious with its scowl of fixed purpose. His teeth were clenched, his eyes set in a determined glare, his forehead corrugated with swollen veins. The cords and muscles on his breast and shoulders stood out like welts upon his dripping skin. His breath came with each stroke of the hammer in quick, labored gasps like the puffing of a donkey-engine.

Yet faster and even faster he urged himself on. Clankety-clankety-clanketyclank! The melody of his ringing strokes was beating to a veritable hornpipe, so swiftly and regularly he sent them in.

And now the change was to be made. The time-keeper was commencing his monotonous count. Flanders had secured the new drill, and was preparing to step it into place—no easy task, mark you; for the hole was a good thirty inches deep, and the transfer must be made in an infinitesimal fraction of a second. And then—

Perhaps Flanders was slow in making the change; perhaps Gassey failed for once in the accuracy of his stroke. Who can tell? Certain it is that, instead of the ringing impact of steel against steel there came suddenly the dull, muffled thud of a heavy blow upon unprotected flesh, and the sharp crack of a fractured bone.

Flanders toppled over as if he had been shot, and his right arm, broken at the elbow, trailed limply on the ground beside him. Gassey hurled his hammer from him and sprang toward his disabled partner; but even in that moment of excruciating pain the thought of losing the prize so nearly won was uppermost in the injured man's mind.

"Don't chuck it up, Gassey," he appealed, struggling up on one shoulder. "Keep a-strikin'!" Then he rolled over in a dead faint.

Thompson gave a wild look to right and left. His own hammer had been tossed fully twenty feet away; but Flanders' lay on the ground right to his hand.

Snatching it up, he snapped the stout hickory haft across his knee as

though it had been a stick of kindling-wood. Grasping the shortened tool in his right hand, while he seized the drill with his left, he resumed his desperate striking, alone.

Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang! He rained down the blows with the speed and precision of a blacksmith at his anvil. Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang! No heed to the voice of the time-keeper now; no opportunity to change the drill; no chance even to note the progress of his efforts. Only the concentration of all his faculties—mind, heart, brain, muscle, and sinews—upon the driving of that drill. Up and down his arm flew with the momentum of the eccentric on a jig-saw. The sound of his hammer was no longer separate beats, but a continuous roll of clinking cadences. He was lost, beside himself, a madman, in the frenzy of his zeal.

An then the umpire had him by the shoulders and was dragging him back from the block.

"You fool," he bellowed in Gassey's insensate ear, "can't you hear me a hollerin' 'Time'? What in Sam Hill are you tryin' to do, any way? You've busted the world's record as it is!"

Ten minutes later, when Flanders blinking opened his eyes, and came back to the world of realities, Gassey Thompson was still the center of a tumultuous, whooping mob, which insisted on carrying him about on its shoulders, and would only desist when he urged the necessity of ministering to his disabled partner.

White-lipped, but smiling, the lad grasped both of Gassey's horny hands in his own uninjured left.

"Be keerful," cautioned Gassey hastily. "You don't want to frolic around none too much with that game wing o' yours."

"Darn the game wing," ejaculated Flanders with supreme contempt. "I'm goin' down to Denver to have some fun. Come on, Gassey; we've jest got time to ketch the five forty-five!"

IV.

About ten o'clock that evening Flanders and his partner stepped out of the door of a Denver saloon and strolled—a trifle unsteady, it must be confessed—down the street. The broken arm was suspended in a sling; but otherwise neither of the men showed any trace of their strenuous experiences of the afternoon.

In the throng of passers-by was a little, pale-faced woman in rusty black, with two tired, fretful children tugg-

ing at her skirts. She made her way along in uncertain, nervous fashion, and her light blue eyes wore the timid, haunted expression of a rabbit's when the dogs are closing in.

Just as she passed the two miners, the smaller of the children, a boy in kilts, stumbled and fell; but almost before he touched the sidewalk, Gassey had caught him in his arms and was awkwardly attempting to soothe his vociferous howls.

"If you don't mind, ma'am, I'll carry him for a spell," he said diffidently to the mother. "The pore little feller's clean tuckered out."

Without seeking permission, Flanders had scooped up the other child on his well arm, and so the three marched abreast down the street.

"Which way was you going, ma'am?" inquired Gassey politely, intending with ready mendacity to aver, as soon as she could point out her destination that he himself was headed in the same direction.

To his surprise and confusion however, the woman at his question suddenly burst into a storm of tears.

"I ain't got nowhere to go," she sobbed despairingly. "I've been put out 'cause I couldn't pay my rent, an' I can't git no work to do, an'—I don't know what's a goin' to become of us!"

Encouraged by Gassey's sympathetic interest, she told her story—the old pitiful story of this world's incapables. Her husband, a miner up at Eagle Pass, had been killed some eight months before by the premature explosion of a blast, and when the expenses of his gorgeous funeral had been met, the widow found herself practically penniless. In the hope of supporting herself and her children, she had come down to Denver; there had seemed to be no place that she could fill, and now the end had come. Evicted from her lodgings, friendless and alone, she knew not where she could find shelter for herself and her little ones that night, nor whence tomorrow's breakfast was to come.

"An' so you're George Seckington's wife?" exclaimed Gassey Thompson, in tones artfully blended of surprise and relief. The woman had ingenuously told them her name. "Well, if that don't beat all! An' here I run acrost you this way, when it might 'a' took me a whole week to hunt you up. I sure am in luck today! You see, Mis' Seckington—condescending to explain—"Seckington an' me, we took a claim up on Clear Creek about six year ago, an' we worked it awhile, then, calklatin' that it didn't amount to shucks, we dropped it; but—an' this is the good part of it—last week there come along a tenderfoot wantin' to buy, an' Seckington's share is two hundred an' fifty—"

For the past half minute, Flanders had been vigorously twitching at Gassey's coat-sleeve. Now he growled hoarsely:

"Half o' that five hundred's mine, ain't it?"

"Seckington's share, I should say," quickly corrected Gassey, "is five hundred dollars, an' I'm here to pay it over to you ma'am."

And with that he pressed into the astounded woman's hand five crisp hundred-dollar bills, which he had received a few hours earlier as the prize in the drilling contest.

The partners broke loose with difficulty from their beneficiary's thanks and blessings, and walked a block or two in silence.

"It ain't no use for us to think o' holdin' the lease now," finally observed Flanders, not complainingly, but as one stating a pertinent fact.

Gassey stopped short in his meditative saunter.

"By George, that's so, ain't it?" he exclaimed. "I never thought of that!"

The corners of his mouth, under the bristling mustache, dropped for a moment, and his eyes grew pensive. Then he braced back his shoulders, and the old, unconcerned smile returned to his lips.

"I don't keer, Kid," he asserted. "We're men, an' we kin hustle; but folks like her—with a jerk of his thumb in the direction of the widow—"they can't!"

Flanders silently nodded approval. "Sure!" was all he said.



TYPES—BLACK FACE.