

"Well, what then?"

"Nothing, except that there happens to be a branch line of railway at Zuderns, and the Arch-duke, who is no fool, may have a special train waiting for him there."

But the line does not run to Wolf-snaden," Saunders objected.

"It runs to Stussi, which is only five miles distant," rejoined the Commander-in-Chief.

Saunders' forehead was lined with thought. Then he bent forward and whispered some command in Adolf's ear. The result was that the driver jammed on the brake and turned his front runners into the soft snow that banked the roadway.

"What the devil's that for?" demanded Meyer, who was jerked much more violently than he cared for.

"I have an idea," said Saunders.

"A very sudden idea."

"Sudden and sound. You know this valley road our friends are traversing; it is called locally the Schlect Weg—the 'evil way.' You know why it is so called."

"It is called the Schlect Weg because of its liability to avalanches," replied Meyer. "It is the most dangerous bit of roadway in Europe. Sleigh-drivers always take the bell-collars off their horses when travelling on it, and no coachman would crack his whip hereabouts for fear of starting the dreaded snee-rutsch."

"Precisely," agreed Saunders. "Well, we must start a snee-rutsch—or rather that more deadly species of snow peril, the shlag-lawine—the stroke-avalanche."

"But you'll kill young Karl—" began Meyer in horror.

"I do not propose to precipitate an avalanche on to the sleigh and its occupants," said Saunders coldly. "That would require an accurate mastery of the forces of nature to which neither I, nor any other man, can lay claim. But I propose to start a shlag-lawine as soon as possible, and if it comes off, it will block the Arch-duke's further progress as effectually as a battery of field guns and a brigade of Guards."

"Can we start it by all three shouting together?" asked Meyer.

"We might," agreed Saunders. "A lot of snow has fallen during the past twelve hours, and I should think it is as ripe for a big slide as it ever can be—especially as the sun is pretty hot just now. But I propose to adopt surer means."

MEYER watched his companion closely. Saunders was the only man whom he unreservedly admired, just as the late King was the only man whom he had unreservedly loved. But Saunders had only one available hand and the Commander-in-Chief was not permitted to be an idle spectator. Following the Englishman's directions, he ripped up several revolver cartridges and poured the grey powder into his handkerchief. Saunders meanwhile had scooped a hollow in the side of the snow overhanging the precipice; then, receiving the little bundle of explosive he pressed it tightly into its nest. He stepped back, took a pensive aim, and fired point-blank into his mine. There was a crisp report and a flare. And then occurred one of the most marvelous and terrible sights in nature—the brief, delirious life of the shlag-lawine. The contour of the mountain side melted and changed before their eyes. There was a noise like the broadside of a battleship, and a wind sprang up which snatched their caps from their heads and made them cling to the rocks behind for safety. Downward sped the great shapeless, shifting mass of snow, roaring, swelling, tearing out great boulders from the scarred hillside, snapping great trees like matchwood, sucking up stones and rubbish in its demon breath. When it reached the bottom it spread out like a fan some distance up the far side of the ravine, and for several minutes after its cessation the echoes rolled along the valley, and were tossed backwards and forwards from cliff to cliff, in a long-drawn cannonade of terrifying sound.

"That's stopped Cyril of Wolf-snaden," said Saunders, when the last

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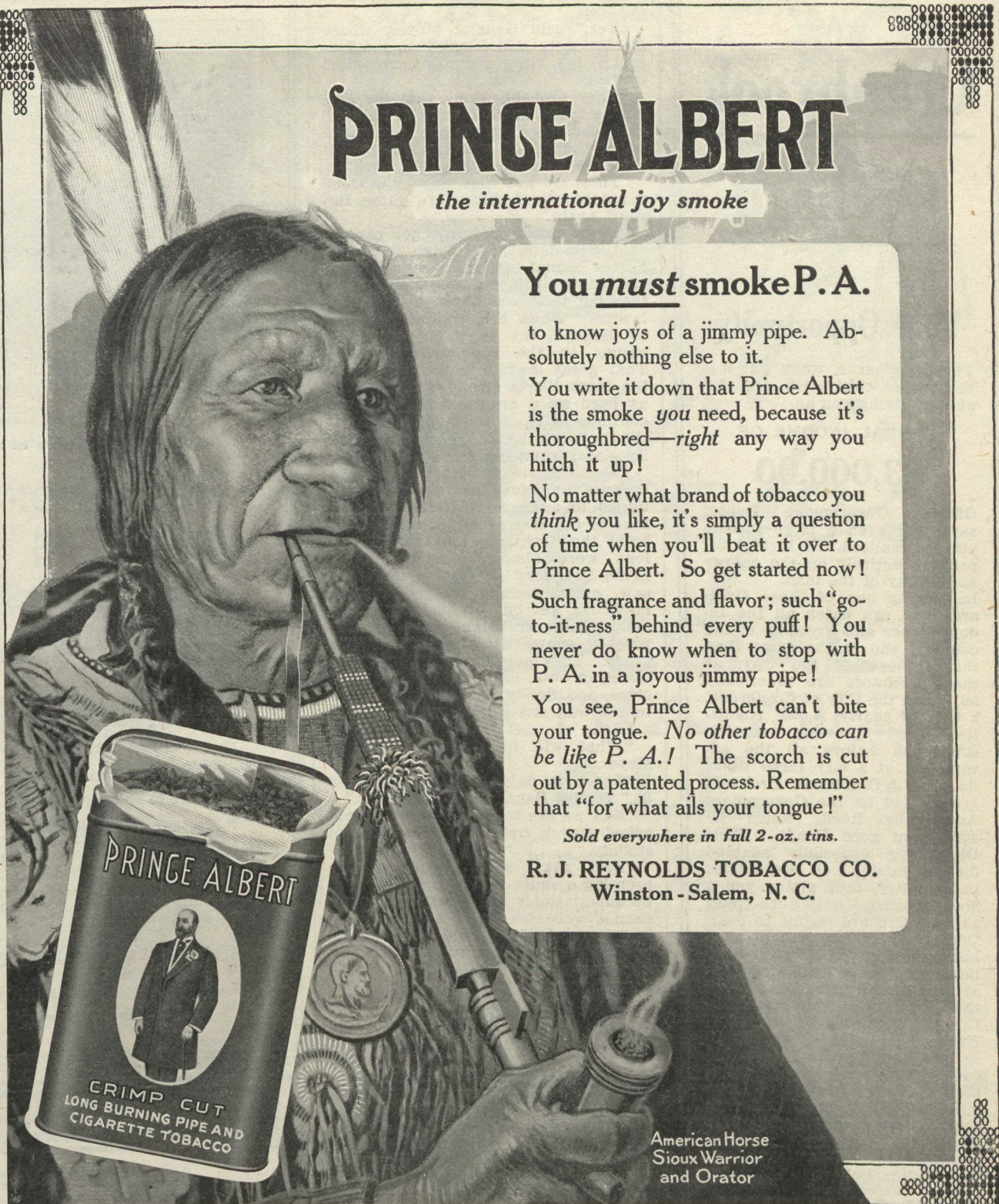
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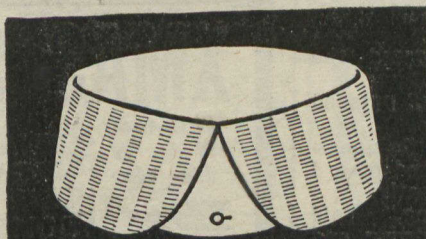
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