



The Ladder

[BY CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS.]

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The bare, three-storied, barn-like structure which served the millhands for a boarding-house was on fire. The old fire-hose, brought hurriedly from the mill, had burst under the first strain. The flames were having it all their own way.

But suddenly a groan of horror went up, and the calm of the crowd broke into tumult. A child's form had appeared in the topmost window at the right. Men raced for ladders. But one tall figure, in shirt-sleeves and top-boots, had dashed straight for the front door.

"It's Mart Block," went the word among the crowd. "If anybody kin, he'll get through."

A ladder was thrust into place, held almost perpendicular by the men at its foot. It did not quite reach the window-sill, but no one doubted that Block could get to it with his hands. Nevertheless, he seemed to hesitate.

"Come up and get her, someone!" shouted Block. A riverman was half-way up the ladder before the sentence had passed his lips. Block reached out, put the child into his hands, and watched her being carried down to safety.

But he made no motion to follow. A light flashed into the room behind him. He turned and looked at it. Was he mad? Suddenly he shouted:

"A rope! Fling me a rope!"

In a moment a coil came circling up to him. Block seized it and made it fast to the bedstead in the room. Then he slipped out from the window and, to the speechless bewilderment of the crowd, came swiftly down the rope hand over hand, ignoring the very existence of the ladder beside him.

An hour later Martin Block, his scorched face and hands shining with sweat, was sitting in the back room of the Mills store. The storekeeper, Sandy MacNutt, was there, and big Steve Corrigan and Jim Sayres, the river boss.

"Martin!" drawled Sayres, "what did ye do it for?"

"Do what for?" asked Block after a pause.

Sayres grunted impatiently. "I was afraid to come down the ladder," answered Block quietly.

An incredulous laugh greeted this unexpected statement.

"It's true, so help me!" persisted Block. "Boys, it was just something I couldn't do. I'd have jumped out sooner. I'm scared of a ladder!"

"Once upon a time, I was just about ten years younger than I am now, and more than ten years foolish, down at Progress, on the Gulf of Mexico. I hadn't been overy lucky, but I'd found enough gold to give me the taste for it. And just now my head was buzzing with fool yams of buried treasure. When one gets that bee in his brain, he's ready for any kind of nonsense that's put up to him."

"I was sitting alone in front of a little posada, looking out over the hot, shining water, all streaked blue and green so lovely one never gets tired staring at it, when up came a couple of hard customers. I knew they were bad ones in right. I knew there was lots of rope looking for the both of them up along New Mexico and Arizona, where the climate had got unhealthy for them."

"One of the two, and a greaser," Antonio, he called himself, never seemed to need any more name than that. The other was mostly American, with a dash of everything else we can think of. He was not bad looking, except for his mouth, which was just a kind of a hard-edged gash across his face. The name he answered to was 'Baldy'."

"Well, I was glad to see them, and they came right to business. 'It was a man's job, all right, that they were putting up to me. And I'm a rank one, too, but you'd better believe, and wrong seemed to get mixed up at every turn, the rankness of it just didn't strike me.'

"You fellows have never heard, likely, of a little tribe called the 'Queztals,' down in Yucatan. No, of course not. But every one down round Mexico and Central America has heard of them and their treasure. They're so rich that they are able to pay the Government well to let them alone. Where they keep their gold, everybody knows well enough, somewhere up among the tremendous mountain cliffs. But it had never been considered healthy to try to find out anything more about it than that."

"Well, I'm not going to tell you about that journey into the interior in the heat. It was bad enough to make an other story, but I'll cut it all out. We kept well clear of their gold, and higher, aiming to come down upon the town from the interior—a direction from which the Queztals would never be expecting a visitor. When we did come on the place was just by accident. It was going to say good luck, but that wouldn't be just the right word."

"Baking in the sun, the village lay huddled beneath us, a sort of a nest of brownish yellow, flat-roofed adobe houses, on a great shelf of the mountain-side."

"Then we started off to work our way around the base of the canon. It was high sunset when we reached the bank of the river, above the canon, and found it here a pleasant, quick stream, running between two low banks, and looking as if it might have trout in it. Here we knew we were in danger at once, so we backed off into the brush again and decided to lie low until moonrise."

"From our hiding place we could see quite a way down the slope, to a spot where a heavy spring spouted out from under a rock. When Baldy and Antonio got thirsty both at the same time it seemed quite right that they should creep down to the spring and get a drink."

"Well, the fellows had no more than reached the spring when I saw them kind of stagger up, pull their knives, and second heard a cry and a scuffling. I was up and after them in a jiffy, pulling my own knife as I ran, for you will understand that was no time or place to use our guns if we could help it. There at the side of the trail was an old man, crumpled up on his face, with Baldy just pulling the knife from out of his back, behind the shoulder-blade. In the middle of the trail lay a boy. He had evidently been running away when Antonio's bowie-knife caught him. The way

the greaser could fling a knife was a caution."

"At the sight of the old Injun and the boy lying there in their blood, I felt pretty sick, I can tell you. This was not the kind of fighting I was looking for. It was just the coldest, bloodiest kind of murder. But I understood it all in a glance—and having gone into such a game with those two ruffians, it was no more than I had a right to expect. There was nothing I could say very well, so I just stood there chewing in disgust."

"Taking turns, two sleeping while the other kept watch, we rested until well into the night, when the moon was just getting up. Then knowing

that it was the time when every Injun would be in out of the way, we started up the trail."

"I tell you we didn't make any more noise than so many ghosts as we crept along in the blackness of the shadowed side of the trail. Pretty soon we came to the bridge for us, and of their Injun bridges, flimsy enough to our eyes, but answering their purpose as well as anything more fancy."

"From this point the trail left the river, climbed, climbed, zigzagging through a tumbled, broken country for maybe a couple of hours. Then it began to descend—first little by little, then so quick it was like going downstairs. And at last we reached the mouth of the canon, with the river rolling out of it."

"The mouth of the canon was wide and the woods came down thick to the trail. We reckoned it would be no kind of a healthy place for us around daylight, so the first grayness just then sitting down among the trees, we quit the trail."

"Along toward the middle of the afternoon we caught a queer kind of noise. We made it out, at last, to be a woman's voice crying and moaning. I said I'd go and kind of prospect around a bring back word what was the matter. Baldy and Antonio allowed they'd go along, too."

"We didn't have to go far before we saw what it was. There at the bend of the trail, and to a tree, was a girl with long, coal-black hair all down her face to her knees. And in front of her, where she could see it plain, but couldn't any way get at it, was a jar of water keeping nice and cool in the shade. It struck us, but the girl's simple, self just then—as a mighty simple but ingenious kind of torture."

"Well," whispered I, "I reckon we've got to see what can be done for that kid. Antonio's eyes showed 'whites' at me with a leer of misunderstanding and approval. Baldy protested."

"What for, Martin?" he demanded. "You haven't got much sense, Baldy. Have you? Can't you see this is our big chance? We'll make her show us the way."

"I slipped out of the brush with my knife in my hand. The girl gave a cry of terror as she saw me coming. Then her face lighted up with hope."

"Don't be frightened, we won't hurt you any," says I in Spanish as I cut the leather thongs that lashed her to the tree."

"She didn't seem to understand Spanish, but began to thank me kind of wild like in an Injun lingo which I'd picked up down on the coast; and she tried to kiss my hands. The moment I'd freed her little feet, she grabbed my arm and fairly dragged me into the brush."

"We must get away quick," she whispered, all shaking with terrible excitement. But while we were talking, Baldy and Antonio she looked scared and slipped behind my arm."

"They're friends," says I to her. This satisfied her."

"Come on, then, come quick!" she panted, and started me down away as if to get me out of the canon, but I wouldn't stir."

"Not," says I. "Not that way, yet. We have come to get the gold. I've saved you. We'll fight for you, but you must show us how to get the gold."

"She seemed terribly frightened at this and fell on her knees and begged me to take her away at once or we'd all be killed. She said she could show us that we'd be tortured; and as firm as a rock—(more cheers)—and is, I believe, the strongest and the sanest Englishman who has appeared in British politics in our times. Today he remains as unmoved as the masses of the people themselves by the concerted strike of wild and despairing malice. The truth is all this talk of civil war is at bottom absurd. No sane man in his heart believes it."

While alarmist shrieks were filling the air (Mr. Redmond went on) the world was going on just as if no great dreadful doom were impending over it. (Laughter.) Trade and business in Belfast and Ulster were booming, and the great body of the people of Great Britain remained quite unmoved. Yet every sane man knew that, barring accidents, the home rule bill would have the force of the law in the year 1901. There cannot be a war (he proceeded) without two contending parties. Sir Edward Carson—(hisses)—is never tired of saying that what he calls his "army" is for defence and not for attack. It will never be needed, for he and his friends in Ulster will never be attacked. (Hear, hear.)

The Limits of Compromise. I say exactly the same today. Of course there are limits. The Prime Minister laid down these limits explicitly in a recent speech, and I accept that limitation. He said: "Any change in the home rule bill must be consistent with (1) the creation of a parliament for Ireland, with an executive responsible to it; (2) the immediate settlement of this question; (3) the unity and integrity of the United Kingdom." Speaking in Belfast the other day, Sir Edward Carson said: "I am, above all things, a man of peace, not at any price, and I know this full well, that there are some things on which there can be no compromise. There are many matters of detail, matters of expediency, but there are other matters which go to the root of the life and liberty of our people, and to the great trust which has been handed down to us on which we dare not compromise."

For my part (continued Mr. Redmond) I adopt these words as my own. They accurately represent my views on the limits of concession and change. Subject, however, to these limitations I am, as I always have been, prepared to pay a big price for a settlement by consent. My position has never wavered. It is worth paying a price, and a large price, to buy the goodwill of these men."

Mr. Redmond has now been created in the city of Cork with the avowed intention and desire of precipitating at this supreme and critical moment in the fortunes of the home rule bill a contest between two professing Nationalists. Such a desire is of itself an unanswerable argument against such a proceeding. There are, I am afraid, some of our countrymen who desire even at this time of day to justify the savage sneer of Thackeray against the Repealers when he described them as "fighting like devils" for concession and "kissing each other for the love of God." (Hear, hear.)

Such a proceeding to me is hateful, and I will do all in my power to prevent such a scandal and such an injury to our cause at this moment. I have, I think, too true an appreciation of the real meaning of the words conciliation and toleration, to well know what heartily these words of mine will cause to brave and devoted friends and supporters in Cork, but I must ask them, after the magnificent victory they have just won, to bring all these sons of militant Ulster into line in the battle for Ireland."

In conclusion, fellow-countrymen, I say lift up your hearts. Ireland's long travail is almost at an end. You are about to witness the re-birth of Irish freedom, prosperity, and happiness. ("Thanks to you, Sir," and cheers.) Let the holy spirit of consolation and peace to make of you will usher in this happy new year for my party. I go back to the British Parliament, I hope, for the last time before home rule is passed—(cheers)—strong in the consciousness of your loyalty and your confidence. (Great and prolonged cheering.)

Ulster's Goodwill Worth Purchasing. Will the home rule bill pass exactly as it stands? (A voice: "It must.") Well, it is a good bill, it has been accepted as it stands by Ireland, by the House of Commons, and by Great Britain; we desire it to pass exactly as it stands. (Hear, hear.) I have seen no change suggested by our opponents or our critics which is not in itself a bad change. If any change be made it must be to enable it to pass, that is unnecessary, but to buy the goodwill of our opponents in the north of Ireland, and I must say to you frankly that at present I see no prospect whatever of that goodwill being purchased by any concession or at any price whatever. (A voice: "We are as well without them.") No, we are not as well without them. It is a fallacy to suppose that we can afford to say that for Ireland can afford to lose no single son. (Cheers.) Their goodwill is worth purchasing, and at a big price. I have always held so. Long before the home rule bill was introduced, seven years ago, I used these words: "Over these men I want no party triumph. I want to influence them, to enable them to pass the bill, to suspend, and I want to soften their hearts. And, therefore, so long as it is possible for me to do so, even against hope, I will preach to them the doctrine of conciliation. I say there are no lengths, short of the abandonment of the principles which you and I hold, to which I would not go to win the con-

science of these men and not to have them lost to Ireland. There are no safeguards which I would object to in the home rule bill tomorrow to save the fears which these men entertain about their religion, and I say he is the best Irishman who does his best today by preaching toleration and conciliation to bring all these sons of militant Ulster into line in the battle for Ireland."

MORE MILLIONS FOR "TIN KING'S" WIDOW

Special Correspondence.

New York, Feb. 20.—By the will of her father, W. S. Stewart, Cleveland multimillionaire, Mrs. W. B. Leeds, widow of the "tin-plate king," receives \$20,000,000, becoming one of the wealthiest women in the world. Mrs. Leeds inherited more than \$20,000,000 when her husband died. She is as rich in beauty as in bank notes, and Hellean, the famous French artist, says that she possesses 98 of the 100 points essential to beauty. She has declined to marry European fortune hunters and is devoting her time to the care of her young son, William B. Leeds Jun.

MINARD'S LINIMENT CURES COLDS, ETC.

Disheartening Effect of Piles

It is not only the itching and stinging of piles that is to be dreaded, but also the depressing and debilitating effect on the whole system. The victim of piles cannot do efficient work. There is an uneasiness and discomfort by day, and at night the distress from the itching prevents sleep and rest, and undermines the general health.

From almost the first application of Dr. Chase's Ointment you get relief from the annoying itching and burning, and gradually the ulcers are healed up and the disease thoroughly cured. Do not make the mistake of discontinuing treatment as soon as relief is obtained. Dr. Chase's Ointment is a proven cure, but it depends on you to apply it persistently until a cure is effected.

Even the most severe cases of long standing yield to the soothing, healing influence of Dr. Chase's Ointment. Surgical operations are no longer necessary, as a matter of fact, Dr. Chase's Ointment has cured cases that were not cured by operations. No sufferer from piles can afford to delay the use of Dr. Chase's Ointment.

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I am, as I always have been, prepared to pay a big price for a settlement by consent. My position has never wavered. It is worth paying a price, and a large price, to buy the goodwill of these men.

Mr. Redmond concluded his speech by advising his followers in Cork not to contest the by-election in that city.

The first meeting was at the city hall, where Mr. Redmond, who was accompanied by Mr. Redmond, was presented with a series of addresses from a large number of public and political bodies.

Mr. Redmond, who was loudly cheered, said, in reply, that that ceremony was a significant and important one. It was in a sense a Parliament of selected representatives of the people over a large portion of Ireland. These representatives were picked men elected by the popular franchise of Irishmen to fulfill representative positions, and they represented all these public bodies of which the people of Ireland today had control. They had come there to prove to the world that Ireland was capable of self-government. (Hear, hear.) When the local government act was passed, and when the great powers of taxation and of administration were first put into the hands of the people—the common people, as they were called—it was thought a great risk was being run—that these men who had had no training in self-government, and gradually the ulcers are healed up and the disease thoroughly cured. Do not make the mistake of discontinuing treatment as soon as relief is obtained. Dr. Chase's Ointment is a proven cure, but it depends on you to apply it persistently until a cure is effected.

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Mr. Redmond concluded his speech by advising his followers in Cork not to contest the by-election in that city.

The first meeting was at the city hall, where Mr. Redmond, who was accompanied by Mr. Redmond, was presented with a series of addresses from a large number of public and political bodies.

Mr. Redmond, who was loudly cheered, said, in reply, that that ceremony was a significant and important one. It was in a sense a Parliament of selected representatives of the people over a large portion of Ireland. These representatives were picked men elected by the popular franchise of Irishmen to fulfill representative positions, and they represented all these public bodies of which the people of Ireland today had control. They had come there to prove to the world that Ireland was capable of self-government. (Hear, hear.) When the local government act was passed, and when the great powers of taxation and of administration were first put into the hands of the people—the common people, as they were called—it was thought a great risk was being run—that these men who had had no training in self-government, and gradually the ulcers are healed up and the disease thoroughly cured. Do not make the mistake of discontinuing treatment as soon as relief is obtained. Dr. Chase's Ointment is a proven cure, but it depends on you to apply it persistently until a cure is effected.

Even the most severe cases of long standing yield to the soothing, healing influence of Dr. Chase's Ointment. Surgical operations are no longer necessary, as a matter of fact, Dr. Chase's Ointment has cured cases that were not cured by operations. No sufferer from piles can afford to delay the use of Dr. Chase's Ointment.

change suggested by our opponents or our critics which is not in itself a bad change.

If any change be made it must be to enable it to pass, that is unnecessary, but to buy the goodwill of our opponents in the north of Ireland, and I must say to you frankly