

twitching symptoms, but I held a tight reign and a stiff upper lip and kept the bluebeech gad poised ready for action. When we turned on to the side road towards the distant walls of the elm bush that lay betwixt us and the ashpen six miles distant, the dusk had begun to huddle up from the fields. The lights came out. Farmers went about doing their chores. This was a bad road. Sam was foaming a little at the jaws. His continued self-restraint was making him angry. The beast persisted in hauling most of the load himself. Every time I tried to gad up Liza he lunged ahead more heavily. White suds began to come out along her breeching straps. He was getting his unreasonable dander up, as I knew. The night was coming. How I wished I had that load turned on to the concession that jogged on to the sideroad leading to the ashery.

About five miles from home came the dramatic moment when Sam chose to let the blue devils seize him. It was now the eerie hour of just about dark. Windows twinkled far and near through a spindrift of cold rain. We were the only wagon on the road. The click of our axles might have been heard for half a mile. It was a ghost of an evening, and a most lonesome part of the road, all the houses being at the end of long lanes. I had no fear of highway robbery because there was nothing in five miles that looked half as much like a bandit as I did perched up on that hickory seat driving a beast that would have given the cold creeps to Dick Turpin.

Sam was working up a tragedy in harness. I could feel all sorts of discomforting vibrations from his side of the tongue. In the dim dusk his great uncouth corporation rocked and creaked ominously. He was like a ship pitching in a gale. I knew he was in a super-world all his own. His state of mind had nothing whatever to do with a load of ashes or a scared, ridiculous whiff of a boy who pretended to be driving him. I realized that not I but Sam was piloting that load of ashes. Whatever he decided to do under the influence of his insane genius he must and would do. The moment he got it into his head that—

And all of a sudden the precise moment came. Sam abruptly stopped his mate. As he did so he let drive one high and awful kick at all that remained of the dashboard. The crack of it echoed far in the bush. I heard the echo.

"Go on, Sam," I squeaked, with the emphasis of a scared child scolding an angry father.

I unlimbered the bluebeech. But before I could fetch it down Sam did what I had never known him to do before: he straddled his off leg over the wagon tongue and sat down. So doing, he pivoted his head and glared back at me with two deep-red balls of absolute insanity.

PATIENTLY and afraid I got down to disentangle him by letting down the tongue at the neck-yoke. Immediately he thrust his head over the neck of his mate and acted as though he would jump a hurdle clean over her. All his actions were studiously insane. They were hostile. To him I was a "bete noir." At that time I did not know this. To me Sam was the reincarnation of the devil mixed up with prehistoric horse. He was the terrifying protest of all the kingdom and commonwealth of horse against the absurd tyranny of mankind. Nevertheless, I felt it my bounden duty to go on with the farce of disciplining Sambo. I called him diabolical names as I unbuckled his harness and took him away from his mate. With trembling energy I knotted his part of the lines into his bit.

"Now you son of a gun," I remarked, chattering at my chops, "I'll show you whose boss of this job."

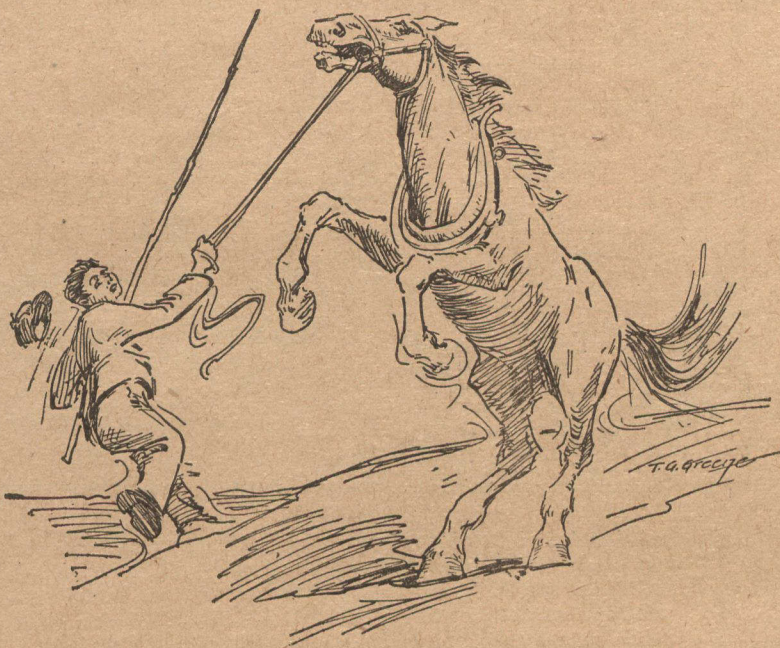
I knew better. It wasn't a job. It wasn't even an occasion. It was a reversion to savagery. In Sambo's brain it was time to show me why a scapegoat horse upon whom was loaded the sins and the misfortunes of his kind should refuse to be dominated by mankind as represented by me. Intuitively I grabbed the bluebeech, and with the gusto of a bayoneteer proceeded to act as though I would cut Sambo's hide into ribbons.

He anticipated my intentions. I knew now that I should have tethered him to a hind wheel and gone at the job with both hands. He knew it too. Peeling his top lips in a most sardonic way he laughed at me silently. Baleful contempt gleamed from his bulging inset eyes. He made no attempt to escape, because he knew I had the end of the lines wrapped about my hand. Indeed, he saw nothing to escape from. It was all the other way.

I landed him one gratifying wallop with the gad. That made me feel good. I was ready to fight now. The music of that swish got into my soul. I gritted

my teeth. From now on it would be a tussle. By the time I got through waltzing with Sam from ditch to ditch in the dark and the mud and the rain he would be a conquered horse glad to put his neck once more to the collar and take that load home.

Eh? What was this? Were my eyes deceiving me? Oh, merciful clouds and drizzling rain! What was this spectre that rose up before me? Not the heels of Sambo. Not his great hind legs kicking



at the clouds in lieu of a dashboard. No, it was the other end of Sam that came up. He reared upon his hind feet and heaved his torso into the gloom. Waving his hoofs like a prize-fighter he walked towards me on two legs as I gazed helplessly and dumb up at the awful length of his black, foaming belly that seemed like a wall of destruction. In that moment he was no longer a horse. He was the whole of animal-kind in one beast ready to annihilate me as the impersonation of humanity.

I quite realized the historic dignity of the occasion. I also obeyed the first law of nature when I let the leathers slide through my hand and got as far from the upstalking beast as possible.

"Come down, Sam," I said, remembering how the circus master cracked his whip.

He came down. His eyes transfixed me. I felt that I had a red glow on my face. He could see me all over. To him I was a confession of ultimate weakness. He could see me trembling. He had shown me himself in a new light.

"Oh, you great gazabo!" I mumbled. "You are it." He tossed his head, agreeing with me.

I shivered in the rain. He paid no heed to nature. He could have stayed there all night playing Jacob and the angel with me. But I wanted to get home.

No longer was it possible to dream of hitching Sambo to the waggon. In fact I had some hesitation even to put back the harness.

"I won't hook you up again, you old devil," I admitted, apologetically. "Stand still."

Hearing this he refrained from biting off my arm. I buckled up the harness, fixed up the basket and the scoop in the ashes, mounted Liza and rode away leading Sam alongside—leaving that great load of ashes in the middle of the King's highway.

Not to pursue a humiliating subject further—because I had a humble time explaining all that had

happened to Tom Bump—it was several days before that load lifted out of the ruts on the distant roadside. That night the rain turned to half a foot of snow. When the snow melted there was mud nearly a foot deep. Five days later I went back with the plow team to get it home. After smashing a single-tree and hewing another from the bush I got it that night as far as the top end of the side road on which stood the ashery at the end of a mile of pitch-holes. There I left it again. That was Saturday. There it stood all day Sunday. Monday, in a pouring rain, I took Sam and Liza back to finish up the job. Bump told me—

"If he wants to kick play on the bud and let him flicker."

THE result of which is contained in the last picture on this page, which shows the load of ashes from Smith's Mills one week after being loaded, making the turn at twelve miles an hour into the ashery in a sea of mud and a slither of drenching rain. How we did it without going over the end of the bridge or clean over a gatepost I never knew. And I never much cared, either.

That load of ashes had taught me more than all I had ever learned at Sunday-school. My acquaintance with Sam formed on that occasion never deepened into open friendship. There was a barrier beyond which neither of us ever could pass. He had accumulated a contempt for my knowledge of horse-ology that was equalled only by my humiliation in his presence. I drove him often afterwards. And there were times when he kicked unbelievably; when it was only by patience and perseverance that I ever got home at all.

And there came days after a while when I was glad he did. There were times in the itinerant history of an ashcat when the glories of nature plus the meannesses of other people were not enough to keep me from absolute pessimism. At such times the violent outbreaks of the protestant horse relieved my feelings. Looking back on those experiences now I understand Sam and his psychology better than I used to. I know that Sam has been dead a good many years. He did not live in vain. His life was brief because he lived at high pressure and was always kicking against the pricks. He kicked most when to do so gave him most punishment at other hands than mine. I know now that he was a wiser and more human brute than some of his owners. Too many horses are easily cowed. When a horse gets the spirit of a cow it's time for him to chew a cud and go raising calves. Sam was never a cowed horse. He was always his damnable, diabolical and unquenchable self; the primal ego of the horse raised to its highest dimension. And among the worth-while characters that I have been permitted to take as real illuminators of life, I am proud to count Sam the kicker.

TO him no day was necessarily quite the same as the one before it. If it gave symptoms of going to be, he rose to the occasion and changed it. There was only one way he could do it. But he made that one way a very interesting business. And I have known a lot of people who had far less brains than Sam the Kicker. This has nothing to do with what some people call horse sense. It simply means that if a lot of people would smash a few more dashboards it would be all the better.

