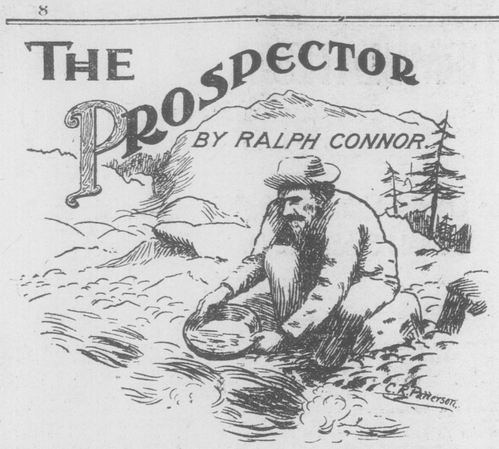
THE PROSPECTOR

BY RALPH CONNOR.



CHAPTER XI—(Continued.)

Hitherto, a man who paid no respect to the decencies of religion Shock had regarded as "a heathen man and a publican," but with Ike religion, with all its great credos, with all its customs, had simply no bearing. Shock had not talked long with Ike until he began to feel that he must readjust not only his whole system of theology, but even his moral standards, and he began to wonder how the few sermons and addresses he had garnered from his ministry in the city wards would do for Ike and his people. He was making the discovery that climate changes the complexion, not only of men, but of habits of thought and action.

As Shock was finding his way to new adjustments and new standards he was incidentally finding his way into a new feeling of brotherhood as well. The lines of cleavage which had hitherto determined his interests and affinities were being obliterated. The fictitious and accidental were fading out under this new atmosphere, and the great lines of sheer humanity were coming to stand out with startling clearness. Up to this time creed and class had largely determined both his interest and his responsibility. He realized as never before that a man was the great asset of the universe—not his clothes, material, social or religious.

It was this new feeling of interest and responsibility that made him ask, "What was that lad that rode the winning horse to-day?"

"That chap?" replied Ike. "He's my boss. The Kid, they call him."

Men of laconic speech say much by tone and gesture, and often by silence. In Ike's tone Shock read contempt, admiration, pity.

"A rancher?" he enquired.

"Well, he's got a ranch, and horses and cattle on it, like the rest of 'em. But ranchin'——" Ike's silence was more than sufficient.

"Well," said Shock, with admiring emphasis, "he seems to be able to ride, anyway."

"Ride! I should surmise! Ride! That Kid could ride anythin' from a he-goat to a rampagin,' highpottopotamus. Why, look here!" Ike waxed enthusiastic. "He's been two years in this counry, and he's got up all licked good and quiet. Why, he could give points to any cattle man in Alberta."

"Well, what's the matter with him?"

"Money!" said Ike wrathfully. "Some blamed fool uncle at home—he's got no parents, I understand—keeps a-sendin' him money. Consequently, every remittance he cuts things loose, with everyone in sight a-helpin' him."

"What a shame!" cried Shock. "He has a nice face. I just like to look at him."

"That's right!" answered Ike, with no waning of his enthusiasm. "He's white—but he's soft. Makes me so blank mad! He don't know they're playin' him, and makin' him pay for the game. The only question is, will he hold out longer'n his money."

"Why! hasn't he any friends here who would remonstrate with him?"

"Remonstrate! Remonstrate!" Ike rolled the word under his tongue as if he felt good. "You try to remonstrate, and see him look at you, and then smile, till you feel like a cluckin' hen that has lost her nest. Not any for me, thank you. But it's a blank pity! He's a white kiddie, he is."

"And that friend of his who was riding with him—who is he?"

"Harricomb—Captain Hal Harricomb, they call him. Good sort of fellow, too, but lazy—and considerable money. Goin' at a pretty good lick. Wife pulls him up, I guess. Good thing for him, too. Lives up by the General's—old gent, you know, sat by when you set me down out yonder. Mighty slick, too. Wasn't on to you, though."

"No," Shock hastened to say, "it was a fluke, of course. General Brady, you mean. Yes, he was very kind, indeed."

"Oh, the General's a gentleman, you bet! Horse ranch. Not very big, but makes it go."

"Could not a man like the General, now, help that young fellow—what is his name?"

"His name? Well, he goes by 'The Kid.' His name's Stanton, I think. Yes, Stanton—Vic Stanton. Though he never gets it."

"Well, could not the General help him?" repeated Shock.

"Help The Kid? Not he, nor anyone else. When a horse with blood in him gets a-goin', why, he's got to go till his wind gives out, unless you throw him right down, and that's resky. You've got to wait his time. Then's your chance. And that reminds me," said Ike, rising and knocking the ashes out of his pipe, "that I've got a job on hand. There'll be doin's to-night there after the happy time is over."

Shock looked mystified.

"They'll get the ladies off, you know, and then the fun'll begin."

"Fun."

Ike winked a long, significant wink. "Yes. Lit'rary Society, you know. A little game in the back room."

"And are you going to play, Ike?"

"Not to-night, thank you. I aint no saint, but I aint a blank fool altogether, and to-night I got to keep level. To-day's the boss's remittance day. He's got his cheque, I've heard, and they're goin' to roll him."

"Roll him?"

"Yes, clean him out. So I surmise it'd be wise for me to be on hand."

"Why, what have you got to do with it, Ike?"

Ike paused for a few moments, while he filled his pipe, preparatory to going out.

"Well, that's what I don't right know. It aint any of my own business. Course he's my boss, but it aint that. Somehow, that Kiddie has got a hitch onto my innards, and I can't let him get away. He's got such a blank slick way with him that he makes you feel like doin' the things you hate to do. Why, when he smiles at you the sun begins to shine. That's so. Why, you saw that race this afternoon?"

"Yes, the last heat."

"Well, did you observe Slipper come in?"

"Well, yes, I did. And I could not understand why Slipper was not running. Why didn't you run him, Ike?"

"Why?" said Ike, "that's what I don't know. There aint nothin' on four legs with horsehide on in these here Territories that can make Slipper take dust, but then—well, I knowed he had money on the Swallow. But I guess I must be goin'."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Oh, I'll fall down somewhere and go to sleep. You see lots of things when you're asleep, providin' you know how to accomplish it."

"Shall I go with you?" asked Shock. Ike regarded his curiously.

"Guess you wouldn't care to be mixed up in this kind of thing. But blame it, if I don't think you'd stay with it if it was in your line, which it aint."

"But suppose you get into difficulty."

"Well," said Ike, smiling a slow smile, "when I want you I'll send for you," and with that he passed out into the night.

CHAPTER XII.

His Keeper.

Till long after midnight Shock sat over the fire pondering the events of the day, and trying to make real to himself the strange series of happenings that had marked his introduction to his work in this country. His life for the last month had been so unlike anything in his past as to seem quite unnatural.

As he sat thus musing over the past and planning for the future, a knock came to the door, and almost immediately there came in a little man, short and squat, with humped shoulders, bushy, grizzled hair and beard, through which peered sharp little black eyes. His head and face and eyes made one think of a little Scotch terrier.

"Ye're the meenister?" he said briefly.

"Yes," replied Shock, greatly surprised at his visitor, but warming to the Scotch voice.

"Aye. Ye're wanted."

"Wanted? By whom?"

"The man that lives in this hoose. He's deein', I'm thinkin'."

"Dying!" said Shock, starting up and seizing his hat. "What! Ike?"

"Aye, Ike. He's verra ill."

"Go on, then," said Shock. "Quick!"

"Aye, quick it is." And the little man, without further words, plunged into the darkness.

A few minutes' swift walk through the black night brought them to the Ranchers' Roost. There, in a corner of the room at the back of the bar, he found Ike lying almost unconscious, and apparently very ill.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Shock, dropping on his knees beside Ike. But Ike seemed stupified, and mumbled a few incoherent words. Shock caught the words, "the gang," and "dope."

He looked in an agony of helplessness at the little Scotchman, who stood by looking down upon the sick man with face quite unmoved.

"Do you know what he says?" enquired Shock.

"He's no sayin' much," said the little Scotchman calmly.

Again Ike tried to speak, and this time Shock caught the words, "The boss—gang's got him—Smiley Simmons—back room—fetch him."

"What does he mean?" cried Shock. "It's ha-r-r-d to tell that," said the little Scotchman. "He's talkin' about some boss or other."

"Oh, yes, I know what that means. He is referring to his boss, young Stanton.'

"Oh, ay!" said the little Scotchman, with a light breaking on his face. "I saw the bodies. They've gaen o'er to the creature Simmons'."

"Show me the way," said Shock. "Quick!"

"Come, then," said the little Scotchman, leading once more into the darkness.

Some distance down the street stood Smiley—or as some preferred to call him Slimy—Simmons' general store. At the back of the store there was a side door.

"They're in yonder," said the little Scotchman, and disappeared.

Shock knocked at the door, but there was no response. He turned the handle, opened the door, and walking in found himself in the back of the store, in a room dimly lighted by a hanging lantern. Seated on a stool at a high desk, evidently busy with his ledger, sat a man, tall, slender and wiry. He had a sharp, thin face, with high forehead, protruding nose and receding chin. The moment he spoke Shock discovered at once how it was he came by his nickname. His smile was the most striking characteristic of his manner. Indeed, so permanent and pervasive did his smile appear, that it seemed almost to be a fixed feature of his face.

He came forward to Shock, rubbing his hands.

"Ah, good evening," he said, in a most insinuating voice. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," said Shock, instinctively shrinking from him. "I want to see Mr. Stanton."

"Mr. Stanton—Mr. Stanton? Let me see. I saw Mr. Stanton some hours ago. Let me think. Was it at the International? Yes, I think it was the International. No, in the Royal. I have no doubt you will find him there. I shall be pleased to show you, for I see you are a stranger. We are always delighted to see strangers and we try to make them welcome to our town."

He moved toward the door as he spoke. Shock knew at once he was lying.

"Mr. Stanton is not at the Royal. I have been informed he is in this building somewhere."

"In this building?" murmured Smiley, in a puzzled tone. "In this building?" He glanced up at the ceiling as if expecting to see the missing man there. "Strange," he continued. "Now, I have been here for some time, for hours, indeed. I am a busy man, Mr. ——"

"Macgregor," replied Shock.

"Mr. Macgregor. I find it necessary to pursue my avocation into the hours we generally devote to slumber. And to-day business has been unusually interupted. But I have failed to notice Mr. Stanton enter."

At the further end of the room Shock's eyes fell upon a door through the cracks of which a light was shining.

"It is possible,' said Shock, "he is in that room," pointing to the door.

"Hardly, my dear sir, hardly."

But even as he spoke a voice, loud and clear, rang out. "Now, my dear fellow, go to the deuce. That comes to me."

The reply Shock could not catch.

"I think," he said, turning to Smiley, "we shall find Mr. Stanton in there."

As he spoke he walked toward the door. But Smiley slipped before him.

"Pardon me, my dear sir, that is a private room—some friends of mine who would greatly dislike being disturbed. I am exceedingly sorry I cannot oblige you."

"I must see Mr. Stanton," said Shock, putting his hand upon the door knob.

"My dear sir," said Simmons, his thin lips drawn back over his yellow teeth. "I regret to say it is impossible. If Mr. Stanton is in there—mark me, I say if he is in there, which is extremely unlikely—but if he is in there, he would be very unwiling to be disturbed at this hour. However, since you are so anxious, I shall take him a message."

As Smiley said this, he bowed with an air of gracious condescension, as if he expected Shock to be profoundly impressed with this concession to his persistence. But Shock was not at all impressed.

"I cannot wait longer," he said. "It is a matter of life and death. I must enter that room."

"My dear sir," said Simmons, rubbing his hands, his smile becoming more and more expansive, "this is my house, that door is my door. If you break it I should be grieved to have to exact the full penalty of the law."

Shock hesitated. He had never willingly broken a law in his life. It would be a most unfortunate beginning for his mission in this town, and, after all, what business had he to interfere? If this young fool was determined to waste his money, let him do so. But he thought of Ike, and the entreaty in his voice as he whispered out his broken words, and he thought of the look of reverence and love on the lad's face that afternoon when he gave his toast, "My mother! God bless her!" Shock's face set hard.

"I must see him," he said simply, but with such an air of determination that Simmons weakened.

"Well, if you wait a few minutes," replied Smiley, "I will see if he will speak to you."

Shock waited till Smiley opened the door, whereupon, stepping quickiy forward, he set his foot against the lower panel and pushed the door wide open.

In a small room, bare of furniture except for tables and chairs and a hanging lamp, sat four men, of whom Shock recognized two. The Kid was one, and Macfarren the other. Across the table from these sat two men, one by his uniform the inspector of the Mounted Police. The face of the other had to Shock a familiar look, but where he had seen him he could not remember.

As Shock opened the door the man in uniform started up with an oath, and Macfarren blew out the light.

"What's that for, Macfarren?" said The Kid.

"Shut up, you fool," growled Macfarren.

"What did you say, sir?" enquired The Kid, in a voice somewhat thick and unsteady.

"Get him out of here," said Macfarren, in a low tone.

"I want to have a few words with Mr. Stanton," said Shock, standing in the doorway.

"Here you are. Fire away," replied the boy. "The light is not good, but I can hear in the dark."

"You are wanted, Mr. Stanton, very earnestly by a friend of yours."

"Let him walk right in if he wants me," replied The Kid.

"That he cannot do. He is very ill."

"Ah! who is he, may I ask?" enquired Stanton, striking a match.

It was promptly blown out.

"I wouldn't do that again," he said gently. "What is it?" he repeated, striking another match and lighting the lamp.

"It is Ike," said Shock. "He is very ill—dying, for all I know, and he wants you."

For answer there was a contemptuous laugh from the Mounted Policeman, in which Macfarren joined.

"Rather good that," said Macfarren.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the boy, making a strenuous effort to pull himself together. "I hate to leave this good company, but I must go. I happen to pay Ike wages, but he is my friend. He has asked for me, and I am going to him."

"Oh, blank it all! Don't be a fool," said the policeman. "Ike's all right. He has been taking an extra drink, but you can't kill Ike. Wait for half an hour, and we'll go down and see how he is."

The young lad hesitated. The stranger made a signal to Smiley, and suddenly Shock found himself pushed backward from the entrance, and the door slamed in his face.

"Open that door!" he heard The Kid cry.

There was a murmur in response.

"Open it, I say, Simmons."

Again a murmur.

"No, I am going. I will go myself. Ike wants me." The boy's voice was loud and hard.

"That's mine," the voice cried again. "Let that go at once!"

There was a sound of scuffling and of falling chairs. With a kick Shock sent the door flying open, and saw three men struggling with Stanton. Smiley had wound his long arms about him from behind, the inspector held his arm in a firm grip with one hand and with the other had hold of the stranger, who had The Kid by the throat. Macfarren was still at the table, evidently gathering up what lay upon it.

In an instant Shock sprang into the fray. With a single jerk he tore Smiley from his victim and flung him on the floor. Reaching for the stranger, who was choking The Kid, he caught his wrist and gave it a slight turn. With a yell of pain the stranger's turned upon him and aimed a blow at Shock's face. Catching the blow on his arm, Shock seized his assailant by the shoulder, jerked him clear of his feet, and flung him far into the corner of the room. At this the policeman immediately gave back.

For a few seconds The Kid stood swaying unsteadily. Then, after he recovered his breath he turned to Shock and said, "I hardly expected to ever feel grateful to you, but I assure you I appreciate your timely help."

Then utrning to the others, and regaining his wonted smile and easy manner, he continued, "Gentlemen, you are somewhat insistent in your hospitality. It is always instructive, and sometimes pleasant, to extend your knowledge of our friends, and now let me say that a more blackguardly lot of thieves I have never met, and if this gentleman who has dropped in so opportunely will kindly stand at my back for a few minutes, I shall be delighted to make good my words by slapping your faces." The Kid's tone was low and gentle, even sweet.

"Mr. Macfarren, your venerable beard prevents me. Simmons, your general slininess protects you, but as for you, Inspector Haynes, it gives me great pleasure to express my opinion of you—thus!" His open hand flashed out as he spoke and caught Haynes on the cheek a stinging blow.

With an oath the inspector jerked out his pistol and sprang at him. "I arrest you, sir, in the name of the Queen. Move your hand and you are a dead men."

"So be you, Mr. Inspector," drawled a quiet voice in the door.

Shock turned, and to his unspeakable amazement saw his sick friend standing with his gun covering the inspector.

"One step back, please, Mr. Inspector. Quick! This trigger goes mighty easy. Now, right wheel!" The inspector hesitated a second. "Quick!" cried Ike sharply. "Don't you fool too long obeyin' orders. I aint used to it. I'm here exercisin' a public function, preventin' murder, in short, and I'll drop you in your tracks if you don't move at the next word. You here me? And if you don't intend to move at the next word, say your prayers in this interval. Now then, back up to that table and put down that gun. Correct. Very nice, indeed."

Ike's voice took on more and more of its customary drawl.

"Now, two steps forward. Right. Now, you can—go—to—the—devil!"

Ike stepped to the table, took up the pistol, and returned to his place at the door, saying:

"Say, boss, the prayer meetin's over. Let's go home."

"Not until the inspector says so," said The Kid, who had recovered himself, and who was now quite sober. "He has the word now, Ikey, so don't interfere."

"All right, Kiddie, play your game. You're equivalent to it, I surmise."

"I think so," said The Kid sweetly. Then, turning to the inspector, he continued in a voice of gentle consideration, "There is something on your cheek, Inspector Haynes. You have not observed it. Allow me to point it out to you."

He moved forward as he spoke, but Shock interposed.

"I think that is enough, Mr. Stanton," he said. "Let the matter drop now."

The boy turned quickly, and looking steadily into Shock's face, began in a quiet, even voice, "Mr.—ah——"

"Macgregor," supplied Shock.

"Mr. Macgregor, you are a stranger. In this country in a matter of this kind we never allow interference."

"And yet," said Shock in a voice equally quiet, "interference is not unwelcome at times."

"What you say is quite true," replied the boy, "and, as I have said, I am not ungrateful for your timely assistance."

"Oh, I was thinking of Ike," said Shock hurriedly. "Ehr surely you will let this matter drop now."

"Drop!" roared the inspector. "Blank your impudence! He has called me a thief, and he has slapped my face while doing my duty. I will have the lot of you arrested for interference with justice. And as for you, Stanton, we shall settle this again."

So saying, the inspector made for the door.

At the door Ike still stood on guard.

"When you want me, Mr. Inspector," he said, "don't have any delinquency in sendin' for me. I surmise I can contribute some valuable evidence on the point of guns, games and such."

The inspector glared at him.

"I'll take my gun," he said.

"Your gun? Why, cert! Did you drop it somwhares? Perhaps if you look round when the light's good you'll find it. Slimey, here, will help you. I'm pretty nigh certain you'll extradite that weapon in the morning. Good-night."

With a curse the inspector passed out.

"Now, Ikey," said The Kid coolly, "stand aside, for there is a cur here that had the audacity to throttle me."

With these words he sprang past Shock, seized the stranger by the throat, cuffed him with his open hand, and dragging him to the door sent him forth with a parting kick and an imprecation.

"Now, Macfarren," he said, turning to that gentleman, who still sat by the table, "you have some money not belonging to you. Put it on the table."

Without a moment's hesitation Macfarren hastily poured forth from his pocket poker-chips, gold pieces and bills.

"I assure you, Mr. Stanton," he hurried to say, "I was simply holding them till the—ah—trouble should be over."

"That was most kind," replied Stanton. "I have no very clear remembrance, but I was under the impression that it was your suggestion to lock the door." As he spoke he swept the money into his pocket.

"Certainly, but my only intention was to keep out—ah—strangers and—intruders. You know, Mr. Stanton, I would be no party to robbery, and, indeed, I do not believe for a moment that any robbery was intended. It was an unfortunate eagerness on the part of Crawly to secure his winnings that precipitated the trouble. I really hope you do not think me capable of anything of the sort."

Macfarren's manner was abject, but his tone was evidently sincere.

"You were unfortunate in your company, then, Mr. Macfarren. Come on, Ike. We are done with this gang. Lucky I was not quite slewed, or my creditors would have been in mourning to-morrow. Mr. Macgregor, where do you put up?"

"He's with me to-night," said Ike, "and a mighty fortunate circumstance it was for us all. This here business had got beyond my capabilities. Some of us need a keeper."

"That's me, Ikey. Yes, I know. Rub it in. It's a keeper I need. Well, I give you my word I am done with this gang. Fool! Fool!" he continued bitterly, "a cursed fool, Ikey. Three years of it now."

"That's what," said Ikey, leading the way down the street. "For the past two years, boss, you know you've beat me. Though I don't hold myself out as not sort of paradox——"

"Paragon, Ikey," said The Kid, with a gentle laugh. He always found his cowboy's English amusing.

"Paragon, eh? Well, all the same, I aint no sort of paragon, but I know where to stop."

"Where are we now, Ike? At the end of the rope, eh?"

"No, by the livin' Gimmini! but gettin' there on the jump," said Ike, with grave emphasis.

Without further conversation they made their way through the dark streets till they reached Ike's shack, the doctor lay still asleep in the corner.

"He kidnapped him," was Ike's explanation to The Kid, nodding his head toward Shock. "So I'd advise that you hitch on to the preacher here for a period. Give him the job of windin' you up."

"Could you undertake that, do you think?" There was a curious smile on the boy's face, but an undertone of seriousness in his voice.

"No," said Shock gravely. "I could not undertake that.'

"You see, Ike, I am too uncertain. Too far gone, I guess."

Ike was too puzzled to reply. He had a kind of dim idea that in Shock there was some help for his boss, and he was disappointed at Shock's answer.

For some time Shock sat in silence, looking at the fire. His heart was sore. He felt his helplessness. This clever, gay-hearted young fellow, with all his gentleness of manner, was unapproachable. He belonged to another world, and yet Shock yearned over him with a tenderness inexplicable to himself. The Kid gave him no opening. There was a kind of gay defiance in his bearing, as if he had read Shock's heart and were determined to keep him at arm's length. Instinctively Shock knew that he must wait his opportunity.

"Well, guess we'd better turn in," suggested Ike. "Can you two bunk together? That bed'll hold you both, I guess."

"No, thanks," said Shock decidedly. "That is your bed. I'll spread my blankets on the floor."

"In this country," said Stanton, "we give the stranger the bed, so you need not scruple to turn Ike out of his. Ike and I will take the floor."

"Not this time," said Shock firmly. "I am thankful enough for shelter, without taking a man's bed. Besides," he added, suddenly remembering, "Ike needs his bed to-night, after his sick turn."

"Yes, by Jove! By the way," exclaimed Stanton, "what happened, Ike?"

"A sudden and unexpected predisposition which takes me now and then," turning his back upon Shock and solemnly winking at The Kid; "but I recover just as quickly, and when I do I'm as slick as ever, and slicker. These here turns work off a lot of bad blood, I guess."

During his speech he continued winking at The Kid. That young gentleman gazed at him in amazed silence. Gradually, a light broke in upon him.

"Look here, Ike, what in thunder do you mean?"

"I say, boss," said Ike persuasively, "just go easy. You oughn't to excite yourself. 'Taint good for you, and 'taint good for me, either. My doctor says so. I wouldn't persecute your enquiries at this late hour of the night."

Ike's gravity was imperturbable.

"Well, I be blanked! I beg your pardon, Mr. Macgregor. Ike, you're a cool one. You've got the nerve of——" Here The Kid began to laugh, and Shock, all unsuspecting of Ike's scheme for getting his boss out of the clutches of his spollers, gazed from the one to the other with an air of such absolute perplexity that The Kid went off into immoderate fits of laughter. Ike's gravity remained unbroken.

"All the same, boss," he said, "you want to keep an eye on that outfit. They'll get even. That man Crawley and the inspector aint goin' to rest easy where they are. Marks like what you put on 'em burn to the bone."

"They cannot hurt me, Ike," said The Kid lightly, "and I think they will be afraid to try. But Mr. Macgregor here has got into trouble. Is not Macfarren a church warden, or something, in your church?"

"He is a manager, I think," said Shock. "Pretty much the same thing."

"Well, he is a man to look out for. I can get along without him, but you cannot, can you? I mean, he can hurt you."

"No," said Shock quietly, "he cannot hurt me. The only man that can hurt me is myself. No other man can. And besides," he added, pulling a little Bible out of his pocket, "I have a Keeper, as Ike said."

As Shock opened the little Bible he became conscious of a sense of mastery. His opportunity had come.

"Listen to this," he said, and he read in a voice of assured conviction:

"The Lord is thy keeper.

The Lord shall keep thee from all evil.

He shall keep thy soul.

The Lord shall keep they going out and thy coming in.

From this time forth and forevermore."

He closed the book and put it in his pocket.

"No," he said, "no man can hurt me." Then turning to Ike he said quietly, "I always say my prayers. My mother started me twenty-five years ago, and I have never seen any reason to quit."

While his tone was gentle and his manner simple, there was almost a challenge in his eyes. The fair face of young Stanton flushed through the tan.

"You do your mother honor," he said, with quiet dignity.

"I say," said Ike slowly, "if you kin do it just as convenient, perhaps you'd say 'em out. Wouldn't do us no harm, eh, Kiddie?"

"No, I should be pleased."

"Thank you," said Shock. Then for a moment he stood looking first at Ike's grave face, and then at The Kid, out of whose blue eyes all the gay, reckless defiance had vanished.

"Don't imagine I think myself a bit better than you," said Shock hastily, voice and lip quivering.

"Oh, git out!" ejaculated Ike quickly. "That aint sense."

"But," continued Shock, "perhaps I have had a little better chance. Certainly I have had a good mother."

"And I, too," said the boy, in a husky voice.

So the three kneeled together in Ike's shack, each wondering how it had come about that it should seem so natural and easy for him to be in that attitude.

In a voice steady and controlled Shock made his prayer. Humility and gratitude for all that had been done for him in his life, an overwhelming sense of need for the life demanded in this God-forgetting country, and a great love and compassion for the two men with whom he had so strangely been brought into such close relation, swelled in his heart and vibrated through his prayer.

Ike's face never lost its impassive gravity. Whatever may have been his feelings, he gave no sign of emotion. But the lad that kneeled on the other side of Shock pressed his face down hard into his hands, while his frame shook with choking, silent sobs. All that was holiest and tenderest in his past came crowding in upon him, in sad and terrible contrast to his present.

Immediately after the prayer Shock slipped out of the shack.

"I say, boss," said Ike, as he poked the fire, "he's a winner, aint he? Guess he hits the sky all right, when he gets onto his knees. By the livin' Gimmini! when that feller gits a-goin' he raises considerable of a promotion."

"Commotion, Ikey," said The Kid gently. "Yes, I believe he hits the sky—and he says he needs a Keeper."

"Well," said Ike solemnly, "I have a lingerin' suspicion that you're correct, but if he needs a Keeper, what about us?"

CHAPTER XIII.

The President of Guy's, London.

Dr. Burton was never quite clear as to how he had found himself in the early morning on the Loon Lake trail, with a man whom he had never seen before, nor how, after he had discovered himself in that position, he had been persuaded to continue his journey, much less to take up with such enthusiasm the treatment of the cases to which he had been summoned by that same stranger. Indeed, he did not come to a clear consciousness of his sayings and doings until he found himself seated at a most comfortable breakfast in the house of the Old Prospector, with this same strange gentleman sitting opposite him. Even then, before reaching a solution of the problem as to how he had arrived at that particular place and in that particular company, to his amazement he found himself interested in the discussion of the cases on hand.

With the Old Prospector he had little difficulty. Inflammatory rheumatism, with a complication of pneumonia; in itself not necessarily fatal, or even dangerous, but with a man of the Old Prespector's age and habits of life this complication might any moment become serious. He left some medicine, ordered nourishing food, perfect rest and quiet, and was about to depart.

"How soon shall I be up, doctor?" enquired the Old Prospector.

"I wouldn't worry."

"A week?"

"A week! If you are on your legs in a month you may be thankful."

"Doctor," said the Old Prospector in a tone of quiet resolution, "it is vitally important that I should be on my journey sooner than a month. My business admits of no delay."

"Well," said the doctor in his courteous, gentle tone, "if you move you will likely die."

"I shall certainly die if I do not."

For once the Old Prospector broke through his wonted philosophic calm. His voice trembled, and his eyes glittered in his excitement.

"Well, well," said the doctor soothingly, noting these symptoms, "wait a week or so. Follow the directions carefully, and we shall see."

"I shall wait a week, doctor, but no longer. In ten days I shall be on the trail."

"Well, well," repeated the doctor, looking keenly into the old man's face, "we won't worry about it for a week."

"No; for a week I am content."

Leaving the Old Prespector's shack, Shock conducted the doctor to the little room at the back of the Stopping Place where little Patsy lay. At the door they were met by the mother, vociferous with lamentations, prayers, blessings and entreaties. Within the room, seated beside the bed, was Carroll, gloomy and taciturn.

The doctor drew back the blind and let in the morning light. It showed poor little Patsy, pale and wasted, his angelic face surrounded with a golden aureole of yellow curls that floated across the white pillow. The doctor was startled and moved.

"What is this?" he cried. "What is the matter?"

"Just an accident, doctor," said Mrs. Carroll volubly. "It was a blow he got."

"I struck him wid a chair," said Carrol bitterly.

"Whisht, now, darlin'. You're not to be blamin' yourself at all, at all. Sure you didn't mane to do it. And what's a bit of discoosion between men? The little Patsy, the brave little heart that he is, run in to help his dad, so he did!" And Mrs. Carroll continued with a description which became more and more incoherent and more and more broken with sobs and tears.

"It's a wonder he didn't kill him," said the doctor.

"Arrah, ye may say it. But they do be tellin' me that his riverence there beyant, he stood in under the blow. God bless his sowl! It's a hairo he is—a hairo!"

She ran tword Shock as if to embrace him, but Shock, who had come to know her ways, avoided her, dodging behind the doctor.

"Not at all," he said. "Any man would have done the same."

"Now, God pardon your riverence for the lie ye've told."

"But how did you get into the row?" asked the doctor, turning to Shock.

"And ye may ask," interrupted Mrs. Carroll. "It's all av that squirmin' little worm of a Frenchman. May the divil fly away wid him! I'm not sayin' but Carroll there is quick with his tongue, and betimes with his hands, too—the high spirit that he has! but sure, it's a tinder heart he carries inside av him if they'd lave him be."

Meantime the doctor had been proceeding with his examination.

"He has lain a week like this, eh?"

"Yes, a week, with never a move till him, and niver a look out av his lovely eyes."

"But he takes nourishment, does he?"

"Yes, once in a while a cup of milk with a wee drap av whisky intill it, doctor."

The doctor nodded.

"Won't hurt him. Not too much, mind. A teaspoonful in a large cup."

The doctor stood for some moments after he had finished his examination, looking down upon the little white face, so wasted, so beautiful. Then he shook his head sorrowfully.

"Ah, doctor, darlin'!" burst out Mrs. Carroll. "Don't say the wurrd! Don't say the wurrd!"

At this Carroll lifted his head and enquired briefly. "Will he get better, doctor?"

"He has a chance. He has a slight chance?"

And with a look at Shock he left the room. After speaking a few words of comfort and hope to the mother Shock followed the doctor from the house.

"It is a case for trephining, I fear," said the doctor. "A clear case. It is the only chance he has, and it ought to be done at once."

"You mean to-day?" asked Shock.

"Yes, to-day. But——" The doctor hesitated. "I am not ready."

"I could get your instruments and anything else you might order," said Shock eagerly.

"No, it is not that," said the doctor. "The truth is, I have not the nerve. Nice confession to make, isn't it? Look at that hand."

He held out his hand as he spoke, and Shock saw that not only the hand, but the whole arm, indeed the whole gaunt frame of the doctor, was all in a tremble. Shock's experience in the city wards made him realize something of the shame and humiliation of the moment to the doctor. He hastened to turn his attention in a happier direction.

"You have performed this operation before?"

"Yes, freuently in the old country, once or twice here. I have seen some practice, sir," said the doctor, straightening himself up. "But there it is," holding out again his shaking hand.

"Well," said Shock, "we must wait till—till everything is ready."

"Yes," said the doctor. "Not before three days would I dare to touch a knife. In three days, sir, I shall return, bringing all the appliances necessary, and in the interval the time will not be entirely lost. We shall take every means to tone the boy up. By the way, I suppose there is someone in the village with sufficient nerve to render assistance?"

"I do not know. There is only one man in this country whom I can think of as being reliable for an affair of this kind. Do you happen to know of the cowboy, Ike?"

"The very man," said the doctor. "He lives on the Stanton ranch between this and the fort. We can see him on our way.

Before the doctor left for home he had called to prepare the Carrolls for the operation. At first Tim would not hear of it. He fiercely declared that he would kill any man that dared put a knife on his lad. His wife was equally determined that the operation should not take place.

"Very well," said the doctor, "then your boy will die, and, Carroll, I shall have you arrested for manslaughter forthwith."

(To be continued.)

At Rheims, France, on Thursday, violent anti-Masonic rioting occurred. Many persons were injured, and the police made one hundred and fifty arrests.

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