

A MAN and a horse were trekking slowly across that section of the Alberta foothills, known as Blueberry Ridge. Through the thicker undergrowth the man led his beast, mounting again when the riding became more tolerable, and steadily making his way north, avoiding the open trails. The man had his reasons for keeping off the trails.

"Bill, old chap," he said, stroking his horse's neck as they halted on the edge of an open stretch of plain, "Bill, old chap, you an' me's gotta lay low till it gits real dark."

He broke off, and pulled the horse quickly forward into the shadow of some birches. None too soon. His quick eye had caught sight of two horsemen moving eastward along the Edison trail. Distant a couple of miles their figures looked infinitesimal, but he knew that their eyesight was probably as keen as his own and—he wasn't taking any chances.

As he sat in the shade waiting for the sun to set and welcome dusk to come down and facilitate his further progress, he longed for a smoke.

"That's the worst o' hidin' out in these hills," he grumbled half aloud, "A guy can forage his grub an' make hisself comfort'ble in a campin' sort o' way, but he sure does miss his 'baccy!"

Red Bluff stands at the outermost fringe of the Alberta foothills. It is just like a hundred other little western towns of less than a thousand population—crude, pine-shacked, treeless, bitterly cold in winter and parched dry in summer, and also mightily “stuck on itself.”

Every soul in Red Bluff had been firmly convinced at one time, that their town was in line for a city—would have been a city long before this, only for several unfortunate setbacks. If that oil boom had only panned out properly! If that branch line of railway had come through! If they had only been able to secure the capital to work those coal deposits! If, if, and if ad infinitum!

So now, when people—strangers from the east mostly—asked what this town was called, facetious folk in the place would raise astonished eyebrows and demand to know from what part of the earth these benighted travellers came anyway!

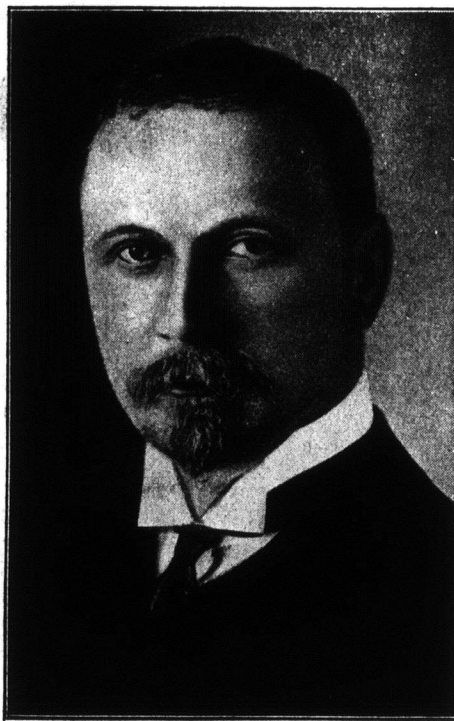
"What do we call her?" they would repeat. "Why we call her bluff!"

However, there was one point upon which this town could "put it over" her sister towns: Red Bluff had had a murder—yes sir, a real, live murder! Rattlesnake Jack, who had owned a quarter-section just three miles out of the little town, had been done to death by his neighbor, little Charley Pederson, a Swedish-American who had worked the adjoining quarter-section. That was six months ago. Pederson had escaped, leaving no trace of his whereabouts. A week after the Mounted Police had completed their investigation of Jack's shack—the floor of which had been in a terrible state, with pools of blood, broken bottles and smashed furniture—they had come upon the headless body of a man in a large slough seven miles to the south of the town. It had been in a badly decomposed condition—so much so that the coroner was unable to state just how long it must have lain in the water. But alkali water has a peculiar effect upon the human body and so, as the corpse answered in every particular the description of poor Rattlesnake Jack, being large-boned, dark skinned and lean, it was buried with fitting but hurried ceremonies, and the search for Pederson went on.

The strange part of the case was that Pederson, the alleged murderer, was much the smaller and weaker man of the pair. How he could have overcome big Jack, who stood six feet two in his socks, was the main mystery. And then, they had been such good friends! Both had been known as good shots, and every fall they used to go duck-hunting together and bring home quantities of game.

Of Charley Pederson little was known except that at one time he had been a sailor. He drank, but seldom became drunk, always managing to keep his head clear. Rattlesnake Jack seldom took liquor, but when he did he was like a wild animal, and his friend Charley, of whom he was very fond, was then the only person who could do anything with him. It was thought that Jack had Spanish blood in his veins. About twice a year he used to set out to "shoot up" the town and, of course, as a result, generally landed in the lock-up for a period of ten days. He used to tell of the wild doings down in Mexico where, it appeared, he had originally come from. Evidently he had the idea, while intoxicated, that he was back again below the Rio Grande. Nobody knew his last name. Jack was all he was known by and, after a time, "Rattlesnake" had been prefixed to it on account of the skin of a large rattlesnake that he wore around the crown of his sombrero.

The traveller on the sorrel horse jogged slowly into town. He had entered



Lieut. Gen. Jan Christian Smuts arrived in England March 12, to represent South Africa at the Imperial War Conference. General Smuts was recently made a Privy Councillor.

The Imperial Government acceded to South Africa's request that General Smuts be sent instead of General Botha, owing to the necessity for the presence of General Botha at the approaching session of the South African Parliament.

According to General Smuts the campaign on the East African battlefield is virtually at an end. He declares that after the rainy season in March and April the Germans will be obliged to surrender or enter Portuguese territory, where the Portuguese are ready to deal with them. The new Privy Councillor also says that he shudders to think what would happen if any part of the territory were given back to Germany. The natives would have stood by the British throughout. All the African colonies would be agast at the idea of returning the territory and British prestige would suffer materially.

After a while he ventured to make a tiny fire, and while he partook of a rough but fairly satisfactory meal he allowed his beast to wander at will and crop on the rich grass.

The horse had an intermittent mane, curvature of the spine, near-exposure of the ribs, a rasp in the throat that sounded like the exhaust from a steam-dredge, a moth-eaten coat of sorrel, a fragmentary tail and a general air of has-been-ness. When he wasn't browsing busily he was gazing droopingly at the earth as though he half expected it to open and swallow him up. The owner fitted into the picture with consistency and artistic thoroughness. He was a short, stock man with a nondescript and neglected beard, and was attired in chaps, grey shirt and a battered Stetson, in the rim of which were two jagged and burnt holes, bearing testimony to a couple of rifle or revolver shots fired at

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DAVID CUMMINGS.
Bowesville, Ont.

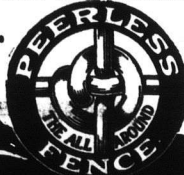
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