

Quarantine Camp

(Continued from page 9.)

"Every last one of us." At a motion from Randall the ring of men closed between Sark and his sledge. They expected trouble for they knew Eric Sark as a fighting man. But he did not charge. He understood that cunning and not force must prevail.

"Better not stand so close to the kid," he advised, pushing gently at the closed ring. "For your own good don't do it. He's got smallpox!"

The word split the ring like a wedge. Startled, the men shied aside. Sark leaped through their ranks, and before they recovered from their shock, his whip fell on the huskies' backs.

"Mush!" he roared. "Mush!" and threw himself face down on the sledge alongside Foam, sliding from under the clutch of the Stewart men's hands.

DAWSON was ninety miles away. Sark's wild hope of making it in twenty-four hours commenced at once to fade. The ice cracked under him at every yard, buckled at every rod. Four times he went through before he reached the mouth of Henderson Creek. The sledge with its boyish load was light. The ice bore it well enough, also the dogs which were traced three or four yards apart so that their weight might not bear on one spot. But Sark, with his two hundred and fifty pounds of bone and muscle, took the brunt of the peril. He gripped a short rope fastened to the rear of the sledge, and in three out of the four mischances between Stewart and Henderson this constituted his salvation. The dogs held him up while he drew himself out on the rim ice with his arms.

Each time after the chill bath he warmed himself by runs along the rocky banks, still holding the rope and keeping the team hugging the shore. But every time his blood surged warm, the river waited to congeal it again. Thus it went with thin ice, skim ice, rim ice, and a toil that broke the spirit. Only a shining miracle brought him to Sixty Mile. Only the grace of God took him over the treacherous shell beyond. Those of the camps he passed stared at him and called him maniac, not daring to venture out and intercept. And, indeed, he travelled as if mania-ridden. He had even forgotten to eat at noon, forging on and on till his tortured stomach rebelled against the injustice. Then he halted for minutes and bolted some food. Nothing could be forced between Foam's raving lips. The boy's condition was such as to frighten Sark into greater speed, and in endeavouring to attain that, he accepted huger risks. He took a chance on the skim ice that stretched for miles far above the mouth of Sixty Mile, took a chance and plunged through with sled and dogs. Sark went over-head, but drew to the surface again by means of his tried rope. The four large tins kept the sled buoyantly afloat, and the dogs were swimming and clawing their way out upon the ice which promptly collapsed again under their efforts. Thus were they compelled to break their way to land, Sark clinging behind and urging them on till the firmer shore ice gave solid footing.

Soaked man and dogs burst into a fierce gallop. Lucky for Sark that day that the mercury stood above zero, or he could not have travelled an hour without freezing. As it was, his body remained warm under the tremendous exertion although his moccasins were icy lumps and his garments hardened shells. The fire that burned within him was the old primeval fire, the flare of the man-soul in battle with the elements. And what lent him mightier power was the fact that he fought, not for self-preservation, but for the preservation of a child. A gigantic man himself, he wrestled with the spirit of a gigantic land, an inimical spirit that gave no quarter and struck before he could guard the blow. In this unexpectedness lay the Yukon's greatest strength. It strewed dangers underfoot, filmed air-holes, unfrozen springs, rotten ice-bridges. And it was such a stroke of the unexpected that fell at dark when Sark's lead dog slipped through the scum on an eddy and was swept down by the current. Sark vainly tried to extricate him, and nearly getting trap-

ped himself, had at last to cut the traces. With two dogs his progress was slower. Above all, travelling the river by night seemed like seeking destruction. The stars gave little light. The aurora flared only at intervals. He had to rely upon the sagacity of his huskies to find safe ice.

Midnight saw him past Indian River, but in the rapids near Ensley Creek he lost his second dog. The remaining one was of no use to Sark. He cut it loose and abandoned the sledge. Again was Foam Challis strapped like a papoose to a broad back—this time the back of a white man. With his burden slung in pack straps, and the tump line biting into his throbbing forehead, Sark struck over the land. There was a rough trail that wound by Caribou Creek and Baker Creek onward to Dawson, and Sark staggered along it. He had poured out his last reserve of strength upon the river work. Those miles were punishment. Those of the land were agony. He consumed his very soul to supply the furnace of motion. As if in mockery of his efforts the night grew colder. The blast of real winter was coming. It was going below zero, and in his wet, exhausted condition Sark knew that would be the end, the end of effort, the end of the boy. Strangely enough he did not trouble about his own dissolution except in so far as it angered him to know that it must come soon. This anger was a sort of incandescence that heated his soul for a last flaming forth. It stirred within him a fictitious energy, a power that belonged to the superman, which put impulse into his deadened muscles and swept him forward at a rapid rate. He stumbled blindly ahead, lurching and swaying but covering ground with amazing strides.

Like a monster grizzily, spent with wounds in defence of its young, he swung from side to side in the trail, battling against the unseen foe. His eyes were glazed, his face raw and bleeding. His clothing was a coat-of-mail. He stumbled on his stiffened moccasins as on two wooden legs. Yet he thrashed forward, upborne by that fictitious incandescence which was like a spark from the forge of life. When the spark burned out, Sark knew he would collapse in a heap, and he wondered why this gift of the infinite should have been tendered him only to prolong his agony. And even while vaguely wondering this, the fire within him failed. His incandescent vigour went out as a shooting star goes out. He fell on the crest of a ridge beyond Ensley.

Below him his glazed eyes saw a line of torches ascending and phantoms bearing the torches, and his dimming consciousness accepted them as the army of the dead. For he was dead to this earth. It seemed fitting that he should join the ranks of the shadow world. Vaguely he watched them come his way. The light of the foremost torch fell upon him. A voice cried out. The sound was a shock to Sark. For he still had reason enough left to know that the dead did not speak. He raised his head and saw men, live men, brawny and strong, with stampeding packs on their backs. "Who is he? Drunk, eh? How in thunder'd he get here?" Their voices rose in a babel, but Sark did not hear. In the midst of the crowd he recognized Tom Bassett, and he stretched frantic hands to him and gasped for the words that would not come.

Bassett pushed his way up. "Jumping Jupiter!" he exclaimed, "it's my partner, Sark. I left him at the Stewart. What's the matter, Eric? What's happened? You're drowned. You're frozen. How'd you get here?"

"On the ice," declared an old sour-dough, who knew the signs.

"Ice—your grandmother!" exploded Bassett. "He has no wings."

"Got something like it on his shoulders."

Tom pulled at the ends of the blanket and disclosed the boy's face. "Foam!" he yelled. "Now what in—Oh, Doc! Come here. Shove Doc Martin forward. There's something wrong, boys." He loosed the straps on his partner's back and set Foam down in his blankets on the trail.

Doctor Martin, shoving through the crowd of stampedeers, held a torch to the

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