

THE GETTING EVEN OF BILL

BY ARTHUR STRINGER

IN the little crowded grub-tent, under the shadow of the Canadian Rockies, the talk had swung round to the "American Invasion," and to the escapades of outlanders, tragic and comic—escapades of strange folk from the steppes of Galicia to the alkaline plains of Arizona. And among all these tales figured more than one adventure of a certain Montana Bill.

"I always sort o' nursed the privit' idee Bill 'd never get along in these parts," ruminated Timber-Line Ike, toasting his heels before the grub-tent fire, "and I allow Bill's career in these territories weren't altogether meteoric. Bill were always hungerin' for something more strenuous 'n drivin' picket-pins and brandin' cattle, and he had a habit o' sayin' he'd just like to stir up us moss-backed, pig-eatin' Canucks for a merry round or two. And b'fore Bill left the country he did his consider'ble stirrin' all right!"

There was a pause in Timber-Line Ike's discourse, until a timely voice asked for explanations.

"What most soured Bill on the North-West was this bein' rounded up and corralled in Calgary for three weeks by the mounted p'lice as a smallpox suspect, when he didn't have no more smallpox than that dog has 'em. Cheyenne Charlie always said Bill were a reg'lar sensitive plant on wheels, and I allow he did get sot some dead again the p'lice, and said the force were breakin' the speerit of the West on the wheel o' Tyranny and robbin' life of its fittin' and natcheral liberty and romance, tryin', sez Bill, to turn the land of the bean-fed cowboy into a open-air kindergarten.

"Then Bill got to broodin', and just whether he followed on the trail o' that pur-soot too hot and got a bit queer in his garret, or whether it were just out and out cussedness on Bill's part, I ain't venturin' to remark.

"But Bill got kind o' miser'ble and peaky and home-sick, and after tryin' his hand at the illicit importin' o' whiskey done up in factory-made egg-shells and retailin' at three dollars a dozen, he gave up his ranch and any claim on a permanent abode, and went driftin' down Macleod way, waitin', we all allowed, for some appropriate oppoortoonity for doin' his stirrin' up a'fore slidin' over the line.

"Now I allow there had been certain ranchers who'd looked on Bill with rude and s'picious eyes, owin', I s'pose, to Bill's capacity for absorbin' unbranded cattle and his puzzlin' way of acquirin' a cayuse every now and then. And although there never were any out-and-out charges made agin Bill, it were pretty gener'ly understood that askin' noomerous questions weren't goin' to be the means o' hangin' any halos round Bill's long-haired brow.

"So, considerin' Bill's standin' in the community, I allow it were a reg'lar tidal-wave of astonishment that went over the Eastern Slope when it was reported that Bill had gone into the gospel-business down Macleod way, and was engineerin' a meetin' house along with a Montana sky-pilot who'd come over from Shelby Junction to regenerate what both him and Bill deemed a sure enough lost country.

"I ain't sayin' whether Bill started in at this business downright sincere or not. Mebbe he didn't! Mebbe he did, and like many another cuss got finally treed by a temptation there were no standin' off, and sort o' had to throw up the mits.

"That special temptation came to poor Bill when he was busy holdin' his meetin's down south o' Macleod, near the American border. Corporal Cotton and eighteen constables of the North-West Mounted P'lice came along in the shape of a specially strong patrollin' party, lookin' for a half-breed named Alexis, who'd sneaked half a dozen