

The Sealed Valley

By HULBERT FOOTNER

Author of "Jack Chaney"

(From Friday's Daily.)
It was upon the ridge, working among the rock masses with pine poles for levers, that Stack's sharp eyes had spotted the two tiny figures.

Joe finally got them within the field of his glasses. A frightful rage took possession of him. His face turned purple.

He frothed at the mouth and stamped on the ground like a madman. Stack slyly took the binoculars out of his hand or he would have dashed them to the ground.

From his broken exclamations and curses the others gathered that he had recognized Philippe and Nahya. Stack satisfied himself as to the identity of the figures.

Another great stone started to roll down the gigantic slide. They saw it coming before they heard the noise of its passage. They gazed, fascinated.

As it gathered its terrific way it started to leap higher and higher in the air like a mad elf. It struck the rock ledge with a deafening crash and, like its predecessor, bounded high over the ravine and shattered the trees on the other side.

The force suggested by the soaring of these tons of matter lightly through the air struck awe into the souls of the beholders. The silence following the final crash of the projectile was broken by a long, dull rumble of the smaller stones displaced in its course. A long cloud of yellow dust arose behind it.

Other rocks, small and large, followed. Stack, through the binoculars, watched the two on the height working desperately with their levers. Joe Mixer had exhausted himself in his transports. He now looked up dumb and suffering with rage, his thick lips smacking and his nails pressed into his palms.

Suddenly a light broke in his face, and he cried out:

"There's no danger! The cliff makes a screen. Look, how all the rocks jump clear of the gulch. Come on back!"

Stack had seen this before. But had kept it to himself. Both Stack and Crasoe turned white with terror at the thought of venturing up the ravine beneath that bombardment.

"You white-livered cowards!"

cried Joe! "you skulkers! you shivering curs! I'll go alone! And I'll keep what I find!"

No one denied Joe Mixer brute courage. Paying no more attention to the descent of the rocks, he methodically separated a portion of their food for himself, and, rolling it with his blanket, strapped the pack on his back.

Fastening a belt of ammunition around his waist, he picked up his rifle and went doggedly down the bank and up the bed of the ravine.

All the gold in the world would not have tempted the others to follow. While he was in the ravine the two on the mountain succeeded in wrestling loose a bigger mass of rock.

It came down with a frightful impetus. The noise of its coming leaped out of nothingness and stunned the ears. When it struck the ledge of rock they felt the shock below.

Joe crouched under a boulder. The mass made a gaping wound in the forest where it earthed itself.

The succeeding rumble from above did not subside, but slowly deepened and increased in volume. Stack, looking up, saw an incredible, an insupportable sight as in some hideous nightmare. The whole face of the mountain was in motion.

He screamed and cast himself on his face, covering his head with his thin arms. Crasoe followed his example. Joe, hearing the ominous sounds above his head, wavered.

The thrill sound of terror died.

He started to run back down the ravine, but too late. A cataract of broken rocks came pouring over the lip of the cliff.

When Jim Sholto found Ralph that morning he saw at a glance that he had a desperately sick man to deal with.

The exertion and the terrible excitement following too soon upon his fever had brought about a relapse. Jim carried him into camp, and Kitty did what little she could for his comfort.

Humanity forbade Jim's leaving her alone with the patient, though he chafed to be away with the other men after the gold. To this he owed his life.

They were attending to Ralph when they heard the fall of the first



Daddy, how did you vote in the Big War Election?

stone. It was a sound they were not unfamiliar with in their own camp, and caused them no perturbation.

When several others followed in close succession Jim looked up.

"That's funny!" he said. "I never knew so many to fall together!"

A minute later they heard Stack's scream. Jim jumped up.

"Somebody's caught!" he said grimly.

"Don't go!" cried Kitty sharply. She had no need to speak. Jim was rooted to the spot. "A whole landslide!" he murmured.

During the next few seconds chaos succeeded. There was a rushing sound as of millions of great wings beating the air, and a shock under which the earth beneath them rocked nauseatingly.

The uproar was such that human ears could not encompass it.

It was like mountainous seas breaking over their heads. Kitty and her father clutched the earth. It shook under their bodies like a jelly.

Ralph knew nothing of what was happening. A tremendous silence succeeded, broken only by the de-

HE'LL WANT TO KNOW

heap until he came to a point where he could overlook the entire height. This was on the edge of the ravine behind Joe Mixer's camp.

Jim stood, struck to the soul with amazement. The giant had waved their wands and the face of the earth was changed. There was no stream below him; above where he stood there was no longer any gulch or any cliff rising above it.

The mountain had stepped forward and stamped them out.

A great new spur of raw rubble reeking with yellow dust now reached across in front of him, blotting out the forest like grass as far as he could see on that side. The entrance to the Bowl of the Mountains was somewhere under the middle of the mountain; no man could tell now where it had been, so complete was the change.

Joe Mixer's camp had not been in line with the slide, but tons and tons of rock had overlooked at the sides like a liquid, and the place where the fire had been was drowned fathoms deep.

Jim remembered the scream they had heard. "Nothing to do here!" he thought grimly. He retraced to Kitty.

Nahya and Philippe reached a little plateau of rock after a long climb, and sat down to breathe themselves.

Their faces were calm. For the moment they were concerned only with their journey. On every side great, snowy peaks looked down on them over each other's shoulders.

The white fields dipped almost to the level where they sat. Behind them and far below the forest ended in the throat of a valley, before them lay a shallower valley of a bleak aspect. It supported only a little scrub and a carpet of moss, and the gorges on either hand were choked with ice.

"This is a divide," Nahya said. She spoke in Cree. "St. Jean Baptiste told me this trail. The water out of that valley goes to the Burning River, he says. It is five days' journey from here."

"I have heard of that river," said Philippe. "It goes to the place of the rising sun, and joins with the Great River of the Ice."

The sun had disappeared some time since behind the peaks on their left hand. Philippe cast a look at the threatening sky. "It will rain to-night," he said. "Let us go down. There is nothing here to make a shelter. There is no wood for a fire."

"Wait a little," Nahya said. "We must talk—what we do after."

Her simple-sounding words had an electric effect. Both faces changed subtly; hers became wary; his sullen. They avoided each other's eyes.

"We will do what comes," said Philippe, feigning unconcern. "We will walk to the Burning River, and make a raft and float to the Great River of the Ice. Then we can go where we want."

(Continued in Monday's Issue.)



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