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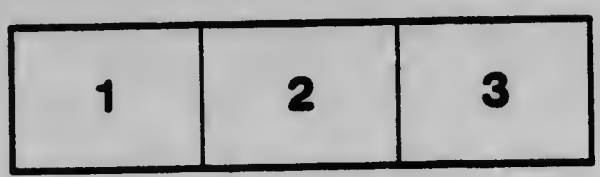

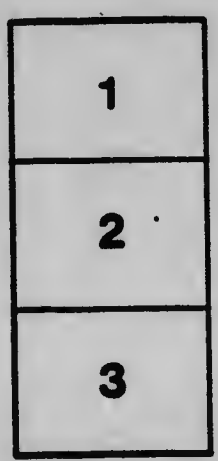

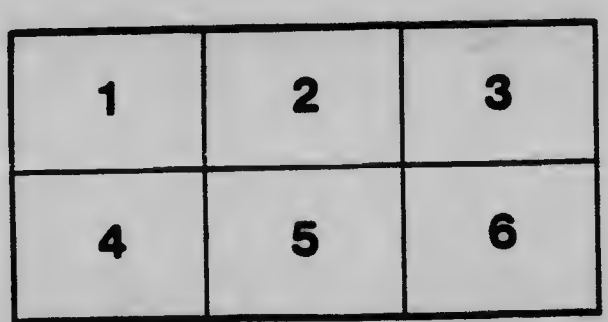

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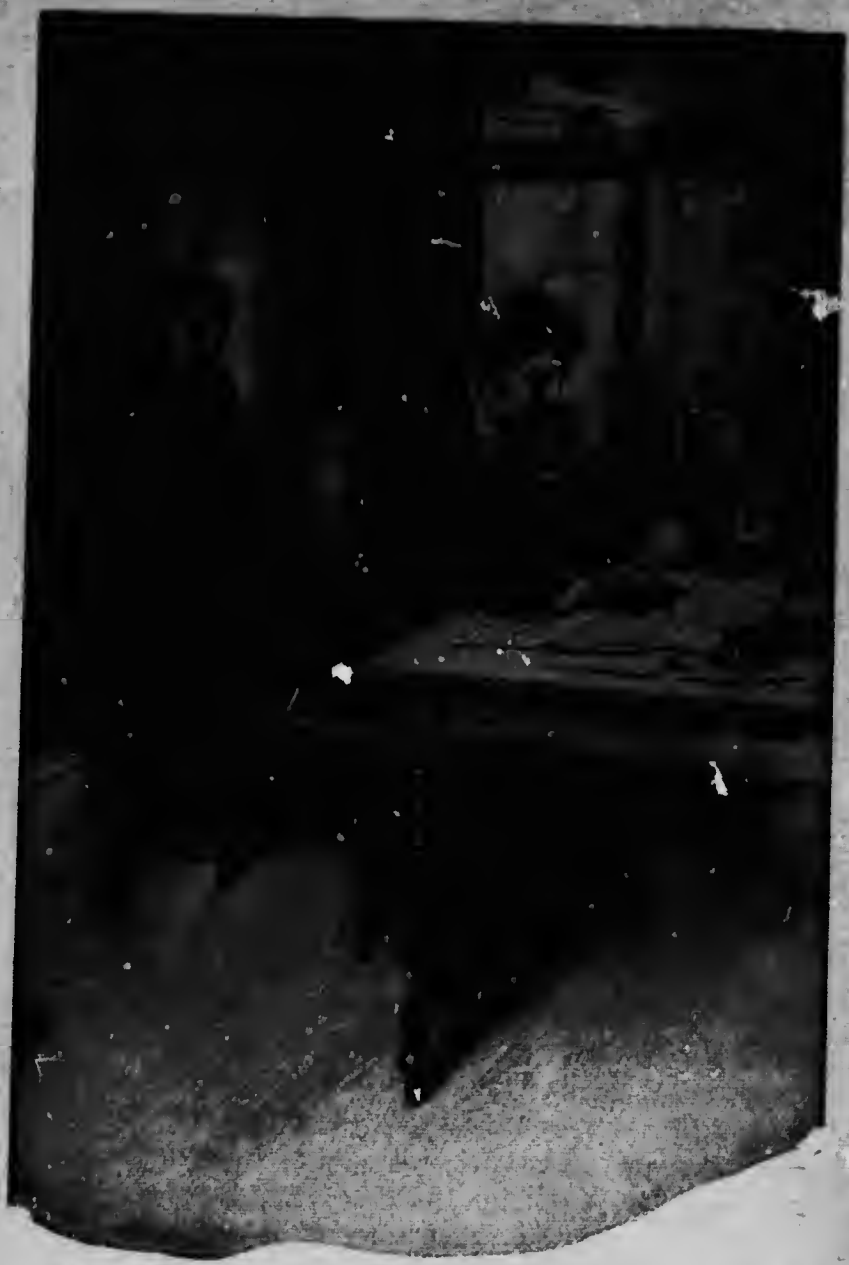

"HE EDGED A LITTLE NEARER TO THE DESK, SHOOTING A FURTIVR LOOK AT CASHEL. [*p.* 35.

Billy's Hero

or

The Valley of Gold

By
Marjorie L. C. Pickthall

WITH SIX ILLUSTRATIONS BY
C. W. JEFFERYS

Charles W. Jefferys

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Contents

Billy's Hero

or

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CHAPTER I

THE GOOD PHYSICIAN

For the seventh time that evening the outer door-bell rang. There was a tentative stamping of heavy boots in the passage, and then a heavy rap at the surgery door.

"Come in!" cried Hugh Cashel. He dropped a copy of *The Lancet* over some papers and a pair of scissors that lay upon his desk. He had, in fact, been cutting out paper dolls for the store-keeper's little sick daughter. Then he ruffled his red hair until it stood upright and twitched his necktie straight. "Come in!" he repeated in his dryest business voice.

A man tramped into the room, a huge man, black with the grime of the mines. "Crushed me hand, doc," he observed gruffly. He held out the injured hand, as a dog holds out an injured paw, and his eyes were full of dumb suffering.

"Careless again!" answered the doctor snappishly.

He unwound the grimy red handkerchief from the hand, and snarled so suddenly that the big man jumped. "How often have I told you fellows to wash the dirt out of a hurt, not to rub it in?" he demanded fiercely. "Now you'll have to keep that tied up for a fortnight, Bat Morgan. And serve you jolly well right, say I. Why didn't you come to me at once?"

"I—I still owed ye for all ye'd done for Bess," stammered the big man, "and—and I felt bad about comin' to ask ye to do for me. Times has been hard, doc, and th' little lass still need things that takes every extry cent I makes. I—I felt bad about comin', but the pain drew me at last."

Young Cashel snorted indignantly. "You should have come sooner," he said. "Man alive, don't you think I trust you to pay me when you can?"

The man's dull eyes lightened, and his slow head went higher. "Ye may trust me, doc," he said simply.

With fingers steady and infinitely gentle, Cashel bound up the hurt. And when the man had gone, soothed and grateful, he turned to the paper and the scissors with a little smile. "Now," he said, "my sister used to be able to make these dolls with frocks and hats that would take off and on. I wonder if I could. She cut 'em this way——"

The bell rang again. This time it was a shivering child, escorted by a masterful aunt, with an aching tooth to come out. And when Cashel had abolished the trouble, and supplied a peppermint bull's-eye as the best comforter to clap upon the sore place, he pocketed his fee with unaffected satisfaction. "My first fee this evening," he murmured, as he bowed the

broad woman out, and the child smiled at him through tears.

Then for ten minutes he had peace. But for no longer. For again the bell rang, and a heavy tread stumbled along the little hall. Cashel rose to his feet. He was a tall young man, with that boniness sometimes seen in a well-bred pup. His square jaw grew squarer, and above his prominent nose his eyes, usually so gentle, took on a harder look.

The surgery door was flung open, and a man staggered in. The young doctor looked at him, and his nose expressed disgust, though it was unable to turn up. "Clear out o' this, Bruce," he commanded sharply, "you've been drinking again."

Bruce stumbled forward, his eyes flaring truculently. "Indeed, then, I'll not budge till ye've dressed me cut," he said thickly. "I've as good a right to yer services as any one else, so I have."

Cashel leaned forward and spoke steadily, though a flame of anger was in his eyes. "I told you before," he said, "that I'd not lay a finger on you if you came to me in this condition! And what's more, your wife came to me this afternoon with a bad bruise on her head. She said she had slipped and fallen on the steps, but I knew better. I knew the mark of a fist when I saw it. And I tell you plainly, that I'll not touch your cut this week. The only way to make you brutes ashamed is to make you suffer, and you'll suffer in a day or so, I can tell you! Now you clear out, and be quick about it."

Bruce, a great, hulking, dark-skinned brute, lurched forward with an inarticulate howl of rage. "You'll—you'll not do anythin' for me?" he yelled. "You—

you—you——" he raised a heavy fist, stuttering upon the brink of a flood of bad language.

"Don't be a fool!" said Cashel shortly.

"I'll—I'll teach yer to negleck ye patients," roared Bruce; "I'll teach ye, ye dirty young sawbones!" He lurched forward again, as Cashel backed away.

Young Cashel sighed and shook his head. "'If it be possible;'" he said to himself,—"'if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.'" He sighed again as Bruce's great fist lifted. "Under the present circumstances——" His fist shot out, and caught the foul-mouthed bully fair and square upon the jaw. He reeled, staggered, and fell with a crash.

"A fair knock-out," sighed Hugh Cashel regretfully. "And now, Mister Bruce, you may cool your hot head in the hall until you come to." He dragged the recumbent figure out into the passage, and there deposited it against the wall with a thump. Then he returned to the surgery and washed his hands.

"That's the third man I've knocked down in a month," said he. "I wonder what the little mother would say if she knew! She's dead against forcible methods. But—sometimes physical strength is a good teacher when applied to those who respect nothing else. And this is a rough place, sure enough."

He looked at the surgery window, where the neat gold letters of his name showed black and inverted to the gas-lit room. He looked at the long box-sofa in the corner, he looked at his grey-bound books in the rough case of pine, which breathed the incense of the hills. From the uncurtained window to the geological

specimens on the shelf. Hugh Cashel was proud of that little surgery—for it was his own, and his first.

Down in the southward city, where his widowed mother lived with his married sister, there had been a position open to Cashel when he finished his course with flying colours. It was a good position—that of assistant in a large and rich practice. Most youngsters would have been as anxious to accept the offer of it as Hugh Cashel had been to avoid it. "It isn't my fault that my grandmama was a red-haired Welshwoman," he told his mother, "and I think, dear, I might really do better work as my own boss. When you are inclined to find fault with me, you say I have an independent spirit. So what must others think? I have a little money of my own. I think I'll go West and see what I can find to do there."

And finally he had settled in the new mining town of Chilko, a straggling place of tents and shanties clinging to the shoulder of heaven-kissing Khadintel. Here he found a large enough practice ready to his hand. But it was not a remunerative one.

Soon, all that rough, fluctuating population came to him with their hurts and their ailments—but not so often with their fees. To skill he added sympathy, to courage he added patience, to endurance he added foresight; but to his small bank account the additions were small, and at rare intervals. But he grew to love the lonely place and the poorly paid work. He gave his heart to both. And he gave his help to the folk of Chilko, and grew to be beloved among them. He was needed in Chilko. For sixty or seventy miles around he was the only resident doctor. Therefore he won experience beyond his years. He grew wise in the ways

of the weather, of ponies, and of suffering mankind; and as his body won height and breadth in the wonder of the mountain air, so his soul won them also in the face of pain, poverty, and ignorance incredible. He had met with lawlessness, with godlessness, with intemperance, with cruelty. But except in the man Bruce and one or two like him, he had not met with ingratitude.

"It's a rough place," said Cashel to himself, "but I shouldn't like to leave it now. When it settles down a bit, and I get some more money saved, I'll get the mother up here. Bet her headaches 'd scuttle before the onslaught of the winds of Khadintel. Good old Khadintel. When I get some more money saved," —he stopped, sighed sharply, and changed the subject of his musings.

From the passage came the sound of stealthy stumblings. Bruce was conveying himself away in chastened silence, and Cashel was glad as he listened.

"Now," he murmured, "perhaps I'll get those dolls finished. I shouldn't like any one to come in and find Dr. Cashel, the 'eminent practitioner of Chilko,' engaged in cutting out paper dolls with his smallest surgical scissors." With infinite labour he shaped a pink paper dress, and was just beginning upon a blue hat, when again the bell rang!

"Bother the bell!" cried Dr. Cashel angrily. He clapped the copy of *The Lancet* over the staring flat doll, over the pink dress and the blue hat. Then he awaited the opening of the surgery door with an air of resignation. But the door did not open.

"Whoever it is must be waiting on the doorstep," said Cashel, "in spite of the notice to 'Walk in and

knock.'" Then he roared "Come in!" with all the power of the lungs that had developed in the keenest airs of Khadintel. But still no one appeared.

"Come in!" roared Cashel again. A sudden draught took the copy of *The Lancet* and blew the pink paper dress about the room. Doctor Cashel pounced upon it like a very large kitten upon a leaf, pocketed it, and resumed his official chair with a much heightened colour and an air of the most oppressive dignity. Then he was aware that the door had opened in silence about an inch, and that an eye, some four feet above the floor, was intently regarding him through the aperture.

"Didn't you hear me say 'Come in'?" observed young Cashel, still with that air of crushing dignity; for the pink paper dress crackled in his pocket. "What do you want?"

The door opened farther, and there slid into the room the figure of a boy known to Cashel,—a wild, furtive young scamp, always up to mischief. Shy as a young animal, he stood blinking in the gas-light. "What is it, Billy?" asked the doctor.

"There's a man sick at t'other end o' the town," gasped Billy, disburdening himself of his message, "and they say will you please to come, for he don't know no one and seemin'ly no one don't know him, and he lays in his tent and coughs and coughs, and coughs, sir, until you'd think he'd cough hisself up, and will you be so kind——"

"That's enough," said Cashel briskly, "I'll be ready in five minutes. You must tell me exactly where to find him, Billy. Pneumonia, I suppose, though you wouldn't know anything of that." He

bustled round the surgery, filling his little black bag, while Billy gazed at him with awe, open-mouthed. "Now, where is he?" asked the doctor at last, as he snatched a nondescript cap from a shelf.

Billy was not easily awakened into speech again, but presently delivered the rest of his message breathlessly. "And if you will be so kind for to come the foreman of the Royal Sovereign ses that by so doin' you shall not be the loser from it, and I am to lead you there, sir."

"That's good," said Cashel with a laugh, "I'll get there all the quicker. No friends, you say? Poor beggar."

He opened the door for himself and his restless guide, and shut it behind him with a decisive bang. They turned northwards up the steep street. The stars rose palely behind Khadintel, and the shadow of the mountain lay black upon Chilko. In the west, a faint yellow coronal of daylight still lingered above the lower hills.

The air was like some thin, sharp wine of life, sparkling, throbbing with life. Cashel drew in deep breaths of it as if to invigorate him for the probable fight with death that lay before him. Hearing his guide sniffing, he admonished him in a business-like tone. "When you're walking, Billy, breathe through your nose instead of your mouth. It expands the lungs, prevents irritation of the air passages, and the access of micro-organisms to the throat." Whereupon Billy shut his mouth with a panic-stricken snap, and utterly refused to open it again, either for breath or speech.

Now and then men passed them, miners going on night-shift at the Royal Sovereign or the Chilkotin. One and all these had a touch of the cap or a nod for young Cashel, and a cordial "Good evenin', doc." A hurrying figure plunging out of the twilight with a lantern swung about and caught him by the arm. It was Macmurtry, the foreman of Gang Seven. "Are ye goin' to that poor cuss up at the other end?" he asked hastily. "He'll be needin' you, doctor. We boys 'll see ye don't tend him for love alone. I wish you good fortun' an' a fair fight."

Cashel answered abstractedly, and strode on, Billy trotting beside him and snorting at intervals. Yes, the sense of coming conflict was in the air—conflict with the very Angel of Death for the life of a man who "don't know no one and seemin'ly no one don't know him." Cashel's spirits rose to meet the stress of that battle.

They turned sharply to the right, among a row of weatherworn tents and wretched shacks whose inhabitants were the lowest and poorest of the folk of Chilko. And in the meanest of these tents, and the last, Cashel's patient lay.

Billy pointed to the tent, one hand pressed upon his mouth, the other gesticulating jerkily. Cashel laid his hand upon the torn canvas. "Wait for me, Billy," he commanded; "I may want you to go and fetch something." Billy spluttered in dumb obedience, and Cashel entered the tent.

It was quite dark, and there was no sound within it but the sound of a man gasping for breath. Cashel felt upon the tent-pole, found a lantern, lighted it, and turned to his patient.

Planks had been laid upon the bare earth, and on these Foreman Macmurtry had put blankets from his own bunk. The man was huddled in these blankets, panting for breath. Cashel bent over him. "Now, my friend," he said gently, "let's see what we can do."

The man opened his eyes. "Are you the doctor?" he whispered. "It was—good o' you to come so quick. But you—can't do nothin.' It's too late, all too late."

A wind swept down from Khadintel, and the sick man shivered as it blew through the poor tent. Cashel frowned, and sighed suddenly with the conviction that he had indeed come too late.

But he did not accept defeat easily. And he stepped out of the tent and spoke to Billy.

"Go back to the surgery," he said, "and bring me the pillow from the sofa, a blanket from my cot, and the red striped rug from the trunk behind the door. Quick, Billy, and I'll give you ten cents." Billy nodded, and dashed off into the twilight.

The stars were crowning Khadintel with glory; but heavily fell the shadows on the ragged grey tent sheltering Cashel's new patient. Heavily they fell upon Chilko, upon the valley beyond, hiding the silver thread of river and the black battalions of the pines, reaching out vast ghostly wings to the round hills beyond. The wind came coldly from the crest of Khadintel. Not yet clear of snow were the lower folds of the land. But to Cashel it seemed that the shadows and the cold centred around that tent.

Billy appeared in an incredibly short space of time, the pillow upon his bullet head, the rug and

"CASHEL TURNED TO HIS PATIENT" [p. 15.

the blanket folded round his shoulders. But when Cashel proffered the ten-cent piece, it was refused with some indignation. "You done a heap for us," said Billy, "an' I'd do more than this for you any day in the week."

"I beg your pardon, Billy," said Cashel, "that's very good of you." Then he went back to the tent, and for a time forgot every one but the man, unknown and friendless, for whose life he was fighting.

CHAPTER II

THE BATTLE

Cashel stood outside the tent, drawing deep breaths. Dawn was showing behind Khadintel in a flush of rose and lilac, soon to deepen to a firier gold, up-flaming gloriously. The first ascending shafts of sun showed the doctor's young face, haggard and weary.

For all night long he had been fighting for the life of the man "who knew no one, and no one didn't know him." And there was no light of triumph in his eyes. The man was still alive, thanks to his care and skill. Yet Cashel knew that in the not very distant end he would be worsted. He had been called too late.

A beam of sun struck the shaft-house of the Chilkotin mine, turning it to a fairy house of gold. Cashel withdrew his tired eyes from the young splendour of the day, and went softly inside the tent again. His patient was asleep, and he sat down beside him on an old soap-box, waiting till he should awaken.

The long battle throughout the night had left him utterly wearied in mind and body. Twice he caught himself nodding. And then he must have dozed for several minutes, for he aroused with a start to find his patient's eyes fixed upon him wistfully.

Cashel bent over him instantly. "Is there anything I can get you?" he asked.

The man shook his head. "No," he said, "no,

there's nothin', thank you kindly. But I should like to know the truth. It was—too late, eh?"

Cashel nodded gravely. "I'm afraid so," he said; "it has gone too long. I can do nothing but make the end easy, my friend."

"Ah!" said the man faintly, though with no fear and little regret in his voice. And he lay quiet, staring upwards at the grey canvas above his head. Again the doctor bent over him, a great pity in his eyes.

"I don't even know your name," he said, "nor if there's any one you'd like me to send for. Have you no one belonging to you?"

"Bert Lyon's the name," answered the man, "and there's no one belongin' to me, thank you. The only kin I have, that I know on, is an old aunt in England. I've been alone all my life, doctor, and I'll be alone at the end. Ye needn't be sorry for me—I'm used to it so.

"So the journey's near done, eh, doctor?" he went on dreamily. "I can't say I'm sorry. I've been wanderin' all my life, north an' south, east an' west hither an' yon, fightin' an' sinnin' an' repentin'. Now I'll rest. For I do hold that there's a rest for such as me, who've maybe never had much chance."

"'In My Father's house are many mansions,'" quoted Cashel under his breath. Lyon's eyes grew yet more peaceful, and more dreamy, and he lay silent awhile, resting.

"Ay," he went on, "I've been wanderin' all my life. I know those mountains yonder behind Khadintel as few does, save the eagle and the swallow." He spoke with a certain rough eloquence which had a beauty

of its own, and the young doctor sat silent and wondered, infinitely touched.

"I've climbed hills no other white man has," he went on, with many pauses for strength and breath, "an' I've seen queer things. I've seen lakes lie in the hold o' the hills where no lakes are writ upon the maps. I've seen the birth o' the blizzard and the snow slide, and I've seen the great rock-slide that changes the face o' the land. There was a little lake I seen once, no bigger 'n' a pond, but beautiful more'n I can tell; 'twas fed by one broad stream. And a landslide turned the stream. When I came back there again, the lake was gone, dried and gone; and in the mud on the shore, all caked in, I found the shell of an old dug-out, very small; and in it the bones of a man, all stonylike. I went away, leavin' him there at peace; and soon I'll be restin' as deep as he. But who was he, and what was he doin' with a little dug-out on that little lake? None'll ever know."

"Aren't you tiring yourself?" put in Cashel gently.

The man smiled. "No amount of talkin' 'll harm me now," he said, "and ye know it, doctor. 'Tis a relief to talk to one that'll listen with sympathy. Ay, I've seen queer things. I've set foot upon hills that I've never been able to find a second time. They've gone as if they was mirages." He paused, panting, and Cashel gave him a spoonful of some stimulant, after which he lay quiet again for a time. "Ay," he went on at length, "I've found queer things. And one thing I've found that 'most any man in the broad west'd give his very best soul and hope o' forgiveness to find also. And none knows of it but me." He

stared at the young doctor with eyes grown suddenly keen.

"This thing I found I'm half minded to tell you of for your goodness to a friendless, penniless man."

"What was it?" asked Cashel, who was intensely interested.

"Gold," said Lyon quietly. "Gold enough to make me rich as the richest! Gold! Out beyond and beyond, beyond Khadintel, beyond Kayopé and Œhultzœn, crowned with snows! Gold! In a little bit of a black valley shaped like a star, tucked down between Na'hal and Nechachay—Siwash names? I've but to tell ye the names they have on any map big enough to show 'em, for they're only hillocks, 'hose two; and my secret's yours. Only hills, oulders on the great flanks o' him the Siwashes call Samahl'to——" He stopped again panting, and again Cashel slipped the spoon between his lips.

"Now," said the doctor, the eager boyishness gone from his face, "now, you are not to talk any more. I'm afraid I've let you talk too much as it is. I must go in a few minutes now. But I'll send some one to look after you until I come again this evening. And, mind, you are to do no more talking."

Lyon smiled faintly up and shook his head.

"D'you think I'm—wanderin'?" he whispered. "Nay, doctor, I'm sane enough, although I'm dyin'. The secret o' that valley is mine, and only mine. But now I've made up my mind. It shall be yours—yours also, for good or evil, because o' the kindness you've tended me with. So stoop down, an' I'll tell you—ay, I'll tell you."

Cashel stooped, used to the humouring of the sick.

And when he straightened again, he held the secret of the richest valley of gold found for fifteen years in that country.

"Good-bye, Lyon," he said. "I'll come again this evening. You're to rest, mind. And I guess I need some rest too. You have my promise that, if possible, I'll make good use of this knowledge. And if I cannot, you have my solemn promise, also, that I'll tell no one else of it."

"A whim of mine," whispered the sick man. "I've took a fancy to you, lad—with your kind eyes—and your kind hands. But I'd not let loose this secret for the use o' worse men. I've seen the horror and the misery of a rush to a new gold-field, and I've no heart to let that evil upon the world. Good-bye, doctor, you've been real good to me."

On the way home he called at Foreman Macmurtry's shanty, and bespoke the services of broad, kindly Mrs. Macmurtry to watch beside the sick man whom he had just left.

"I'll go over wit[illegible]n the hour," she promised him, wiping the soa[illegible]ads from her arms; and when he would have thanked her—"Pshaw! Don't say a word, now, doctor. 'Tis lots you've done for us that's never been put to a bill. I'll tend this Lyon. And you go home and rest, for you look clean wore out."

Yet when he was in his little sanctum he could not rest. He wrapped himself in a rug and lay down on the comfortable box-sofa, intending to have two or three hours' sleep before going out on his daily rounds. But for a long time sleep would not come to him. He lay with wide-open eyes, and thought of many things;

of the life in that ragged grey tent on the higher slope of Khadintel, that life so inevitably drawing to its end. Of the long night of work and watching. Of all the clean-blown splendour of the dawn. Then he thought of the Valley of the Star, and the little stream that ran upon golden sands.

Gold! Gold would do many great and noble things in the world. So his musings went. Gold, like fire, was a good servant but a bad master. Gold! Gold would bring the dearly loved mother to grow young again in the sweet breath of Khadintel. Gold would give him ease and means that could be devoted to chemical research for the good of Humanity with a capital "H." Humanity with a small "h," the struggling, suffering, sinning humanity of Chilko, sometimes palled upon the scientific soul. Gold would mean power, and power would mean—what? "In my hands," thought Cashel, "it would mean good, good to the sick, to the friendless, to the poor." He was a very honest young man, and he was quite sincere in his musings. Musing was changing into dreaming, when the bell pealed, and a small girl appeared demanding quinine in capsules. Wearily Cashel dragged himself to his feet, went to a drawer, and supplied her wants. But, as she was leaving the surgery he darted after her, and caught her by anything that came handy, which happened to be her long brown plaits.

"Hold on, Lizzie!" he cried, "hold on! I've given you the little cough drops instead!"

He gave the astonished child the right medicine, carefully disconnected the electric bell, locked the door, and again flung himself upon the sofa. This time his thoughts slid immediately into dreams.

He dreamed that he was wildly climbing Khadintel, and that just on the farther side lay the little black Valley of the Star, with its stream running over golden sands. He climbed frantically from ledge to weather-worn ledge; and as he advanced, all the sick and the suffering folk of Chilko stood beside his path, stretching out their hands to stay him. But he brushed aside these detaining hands, and reached the crest of the mountain. Then, suddenly, all the world slid away, and he began to plunge down, down, down into the darkness. In that still darkness he found dreamless rest.

He was aroused from his rest by a hand upon his shoulder. "Wake up!" cried a voice in his ear. "Wake up, doctor!" He looked, and saw Mrs. Macmurtry's massive figure looming above him. There was that in her face that sent him to his feet. "Eh!" he cried, "what is it?"

"The poor man Lyon's gone," she answered solemnly: "he went an hour after I got there, doctor." She dabbed her eyes in a perfunctory manner with her checked apron. She was large of heart, but to death in all its loneliest phases she had grown accustomed. "He wandered a little at the end, Doctor Cashel, but at last it came to him like sleep. Ay, like sleep. I doubt he'd had a hard life, poor feller. He talked a deal o' you and of a valley, and a star, and once he ups and ses, 'There's sure a rest for such as me.' Ah! There's sure a rest for such as us, doctor, and he's won to it."

"Gone, is he, poor chap?" asked the doctor in a puzzled voice; "I didn't expect the end so soon. I can't thank you enough, Mrs. Macmurtry, for all you've done. But how did you get in?"

"Through a broken board in the back fence and an open winder," said she. "There was no one to see. And I kicked at the front door for ten minutes first."

"I do most sincerely apologise," said Cashel earnestly, "and I'm very much obliged to you. You're a good woman."

"Bless us," cried she, "there's no need to make so much of it! And now I'll bid ye goodbye."

He escorted her to the front door, and then returned to the surgery, but not to rest. He stood at the window, looking up at the towering bulk of Khadintel, and thinking of the lonely man who lay at last asleep under its shadow. That man Lyon had come into his life as many another had done, and had gone from it as many another had done also. But he had left a curious legacy behind, a legacy of conflicting doubt and hope, of content and unbelief. And young Cashel stood at his surgery window, staring out and up, and thinking that now he, and he alone, held the secret of the black valley upon the flanks of Samahl'to, the Valley of Gold.

CHAPTER III

THE LEGACY

Mrs. Macmurtry wrapped her arms in her apron, and leaned them upon the top of the rickety board fence which separated her yard with its washing, old tins, and little Macmurtrys, from Mrs. Jordan's containing a like assortment.

"'Deed, now, Mrs, Jordan," she said confidentially, "I do believe our doctor's in love, for he's absent-minded beyond all knowin'. He went stridin' past me in the street t'other day without so much 's a howdy-do, an' I ups an' ses, 'Good-mornin', doctor; am I so small ye don't see me?' Ses he, flushin' like a gurl, 'I do think I'm blind, passin' me frien's like this way,' he ses; 'but ye must forgive me, Missis Macmurtry, for me mind's fair wanderin' with thinkin'."

"It's come on him real suddent, if it's that," said Mrs. Jordan, with interest. "And who'd the lady be, Liza? More like it's some sick folks that's puzzlin' him. P'raps 'tis Dick Parson's crooked arm, where 'twas broke an' the travellin' perfesser sit it so queer. Or p'raps 'tis my Loreena's croup. I always did say that child's croup was different to any one's else's, an' he was real int'rested in her. 'Give her eppy-cack an' warm baths,' ses he, 'an' do you take good care o' her, for she's a fine child, 'n' she'll be a credit to her

family some day,' ses he. If she hadn't been croupy I'd ha' had her sing, 'Sweetheart, Lay Your Little Hand in Mine,' fer him."

"Land sakes, Sadie Jordan, he ses the same thing to me over my 'Gustus," said Mrs. Macmurtry, with her big, good-natured laugh. "'Don't let a chill strike in,' ses he, when 'Gustus was that covered with measles you never see the like, 'don't risk losin' him, for he's a likely lad, 'n' he'll astonish ye all some day.' Our doctor's got the tongue, Mrs. Jordan."

"He's got the learnin' too," replied Mrs. Jordan, "and I don't know what we folks 'd do without him. When Jordan broke his leg at the bottom o' the shaft, I downs on my knees an' I thanks God for Dr. Cashel, so I did."

"Ay," said Mrs. Macmurtry, "in the last year there's scarce one of us that hasn't thanked God fer Hugh Cashel. Sure, he's like the good an' beloved physician o' the Scripters. He don't lose many cases, for all he's so young. But he ses the mountain air has a say in that. He was called too late to that poor feller last week, though."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Jordan, shaking her head mournfully, "that was a sad case, Liza. But I hear Macmurtry and three or four others seen that the doctor didn't lose by it."

"They paid him all he'd take, which was only about enough to pay for the drugs he'd used," answered Mrs. Macmurtry, "but 'twas out o' his own pocket the doctor paid for a cross on this man Lyon's grave—a cross o' wood, and on it, 'Thou shalt take thy rest in safety.'"

"Why didn't he put a more touchin' tex', like 'Tho' lost to sight to mem'ry dear?" asked Mrs. Jordan, who was a small woman with weak eyes and tousled light hair.

"Land sakes, Sadie Jordan," said Mrs. Macmurtry in a shocked voice, "that's no tex'; that's just a sentiment! For myself I'd ask nought better than a grave on the side o' Khadintel and a tex' like that o' the doctor's chosir' above me."

"You always had the brains, Liza," replied Mrs. Jordan meekly. "But have ye heard the talk o' this man Lyon? You know he came into Chilko lookin' for work about a month agone, and then took sick? Well, Jordan told me, and he had it from Jim Carter, and Carter had it from Bat Morgan, and Bat had it from Bruce, that Lyon has been 'way over nobody knows where, right out east among the hills, and that he'd some heavy secret on his soul."

"Eh, 'tis more like off it now," said Mrs. Macmurtry placidly, "and 'f I was you, Sadie, I'd tell your man not to take much stock in sayin' that come round-about from 'Fisty' Bruce—the brute! He's a tongue as long as his arm, and that's not sayin' little."

"They did say," went on Mrs. Jordan's meek, monotonous voice, "that the secret had to do with gold."

"Gold?" said Mrs. Macmurtry sharply.

"Gold," answered the other. It was curious, the look of sharpness and dread that came into their faces on the word. Then Mrs. Macmurtry laughed comfortably.

"Ah, pshaw!" she cried, "such rumours is as plentiful as berries in autumn. Now I'll say good day to ye, Sadie. I must back to the kitchen and finish me work."

Yet when she was bending above her ironing once more, her broad, comely face was troubled. "Please God," she said to herself, "please God there ain't another gold rush comin' into me life. I've lived through one, but if another came and drew Mac into it, it's like I'd give up an' die. I wonder, now, if poor Lyon had any such secret? If any one knows it now, it's the doctor. Yet how should Bruce get hold of it? 'Tis true I met him wanderin' round there when I was goin', up to take care o' Lyon, and never gave him another thought from then till now. I wonder, now—I wonder—— 'Tis since then that the doctor's been unsettled in his mind." She glanced out of the window. "My!" she remarked, "there's Doctor Cashel now."

She watched him out of sight interestedly. He strode along, arms swinging, head down, in one hand a thick stick. "Looks as if he was makin' for the cimet'ry," thought Mrs. Macmurtry, returning to her work. But young Cashel went farther than the farthest shanties of Chilko, farther than the desolate little cemetery on one of the lower levels on the side of Khadintel. He glanced at the rough mound and the wooden cross which marked Lyon's resting-place. Then he turned sharply to the left, and faced the higher slopes.

"Guess I'll climb to the Ridge and have a look at the view from there," he muttered; "perhaps a little violent exercise and air will chase the cobwebs out o' my brains."

The Ridge was a lor hog-back of bare granite halfway up the height Khadintel, before the gentler slopes sprang p' ,ly upwards to the peak. A plainsman would have counted the ascent to the Ridge as an hour's stiff climb. But Cashel, at his ease among the hills, mounted to the Ridge whenever he felt troubled or depressed, that the splendid view therefrom and the rush of the keen air might bring him refreshment unfailing.

A green veil was spreading about the flanks of old Khadintel, and in every gully and ravine the first shy spring flowers were thrusting upwards from the rocky soil. The sky was a spring sky; cold blue, covered with great ragged blots of cumulus cloud driving before the wind, and apparently undecided whether they might not descend a little lower in the clear atmosphere and chill the wakening world with a wild flurry of snow. Cashel loved such clean, keen days, when the knowledge that winter was indeed past came to the soul, and the northern spring showed only in faint, exquisite promise. Yet to-day the trouble and unrest in his eyes did not give place to peace.

He plunged through a long slope of shade, almost up to his knees, and felt the frost beneath his feet. Then he had easy going upon a gradual slope of turf. Next he skirted a great boulder resting in a cup of granite which was full of glittering clear water; here Cashel paused and drank, for the mere pleasure of feeling the tingle of the icy water against his lips. After that he came out upon a path some two feet wide, with a seamed rock face above, and clear drop of three hundred feet below. To this succeeded a shoulder of bare granite in the clefts of which snow and ice still

lingered; and this shoulder gradually sharpened and lifted itself into the Ridge.

Here Cashel stayed. Behind him the peak of Khadintel towered sharply to the snowline. Beneath him were slopes of shale and rubble ending in a sufficiently impressive precipice. But before him —ah! before him lay all the wonder of the hills. "I will lift mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." Round rocky shoulders, out-spreading peaks, these faced him from across a broad valley into which fell the white threads of many streams. But beyond and above these were mountains upon whose crests the blue heavens seemed to rest, to whom the high-sailing cumuli were but white vapour about their knees. "I will lift mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

But Cashel won neither help nor comfort from the great hills that day. A clear voice seemed to be repeating certain words over and over within his brain. "Somewhere beyond and beyond those hills is the valley on the slope of great Samahl'to—the valley of gold, the valley of gold!" From the summit of Khadintel one could see, on clear days, the needle point of Kayopé uplifting like an ivory finger in the crystalline distance. Perhaps from Kayopé one might likewise behold the vast bulk of Œhultzœn crowned with snow eternal. And from Œhultzœn might it not be possible to see "him the Siwashes call Samahl'to," kingliest peak of all that kingly brotherhood? And the slopes of Samahl'to—how near in fancy they seemed!—the slopes of Samahl'to held wealth incredible, almost untouched by the hand of man, gold known only to the eagle and the mountain

wolf. Inviolate it had lain there since the shaping of the ranges, the rearing of the peaks. Gold!

For a long time Cashel stood upon the Ridge, gazing with wide eyes at the hills which hid Kayopé from his sight. Then he shook himself together, sighed, and turning, plunged down the long slope of granite as if he feared to look behind. The mountain wind had chilled him to the bone; and vaguely he felt as if some part of his hopefulness and courage and content had gone from him for ever, lost while he looked so long at the hills which hid the peaks whereof he dreamed. The clouds hung lower, and a grey, dreary shadow seemed to lie upon Khadintel and little Chilko.

When he was back in his surgery again, he opened a drawer in his desk, and took out a map of the great range. With wide, excited eyes, and flushed cheeks and quivering fingers, he unfolded it. Slowly he traced river and valley and tableland with a pencil that left a red trail behind. Finally, the pencil rested for a long time, motionless, upon the circle that marked Samaht'to. Hugh Cashel stared at it. "The valley of gold!" he said; "the valley of gold! I cannot drive it from my mind."

He sat without stirring while the surgery bell jangled, and light moccasined feet moved in the passage. When the door opened he looked up vaguely, and saw Billy at his elbow.

"What is it?" he asked, forcing himself back to the real, every-day world. "What is it, Billy?"

"Mrs. Jordan's Loreena's got another bad attack o' the croup," said Billy, in his high, sing-song voice, "an' she ses will you please go at oncet?" His eyes

glanced here and there like the eyes of a little fierce animal, and at length rested upon the map, uncomprehendingly at first. And then suddenly into them sprang a look of the keenest understanding and excitement. He edged a little nearer to the desk, shooting a furtive look at Cashel. But the young man was not noticing him. He was fingering his pencil irritably.

"Bother the woman!" said Cashel. "She knows what to do." His hungry eyes still followed the red line upon the map. "I'm busy, very busy."

"She ses will you please to go at oncet?" repeated Billy indifferently. "I was passin' an' took the message. Guess I'm errand boy to the hull town o' Chilko."

Cashel opened his mouth to speak—and closed it again quickly. For the first time in his life he had been upon the verge of refusing to go to a patient, who, for all he knew, might be in need of him! There was a look of horror on his young face as he rose to his feet. "I'll start right away, Billy," he said in a low voice. Horror of himself still held him, and the flush of excitement on his cheeks had turned to the darker flush of shame. Never before had he so nearly failed in his duty.

He shoved the map into a drawer, snatched his cap, and was off, followed by Billy. It was some minutes before the cool airs of Khadintel blew the red from his cheeks. "Guess we'll be having rain, Billy," he said at last, "the clouds are gathering towards Khadintel. Look at them, like long grey veils about the summit." There was no answer. Billy had vanished.

"He slips about like a rat," thought Cashel. "And he lives the life of a hunted rat, too, poor little urchin! Let's see, he claims some sort of relationship with 'Fisty' Bruce, doesn't he? And he lives with the Bruces, as much as he may be said to live anywhere. Poor little wretch!"

At the Jordan's doorstep he was met by Mrs. Jordan, tearful, wringing her hands. "She can't turn her breath, doctor," she cried wildly. "Oh, say I'll not lose her—say I'll not lose her!" At the sound of her voice something seemed to slip from Cashel, leaving him his young, kind, capable self once more.

"Mrs. Jordan," he said quickly, "I don't think we'll lose her. Anyhow, we'll try not to. I'll fight for her, and you will fight too. Come, no tears." His voice rang cheerily, and the little woman choked back her terror and followed him into the room where little Loreena lay.

"And that's all right," said Cashel, some hours later, bending over Loreena's cot and smiling at the child. "Yes, we're quite comfy now, and in a few minutes we're going to sleep. Aren't we, Loreena? And you can just tell your silly mother that if she has to cry she can just go and get Mrs. Macmurtry to wipe her eyes for her, and not cry over your pretty patchwork quilt, makin' it all mussy. Nothing to cry for, is there, 'Reena? To-morrow I'll come in and you sh[illegible] sing me 'Sweetheart, Lay Your Little Hand in [illegible]ne.'"

The child giggled huskily as Dr. Cashel seized Mrs. Jordan and marched her gently but firmly out of the room.

"What's the use of letting Loreena see you break down?" he demanded, in his severest professional manner. But suddenly Mrs. Jordan fairly flung her arms around his neck and hugged him.

"Oh, you dear lad!" she cried. "Oh, you dear lad! What would we do without you?" She looked up at him, her worn, foolish face transfigured. "There's one woman in Chilko that'll remember you night and morn in her prayers."

"Thank you, Mrs. Jordan," said Cashel quietly; "and now you are to go and rest. I'm going home too, and I'll be in later on—it's morning now, isn't it? I'll be in to see the little girl."

Laughter began to struggle with Mrs. Jordan's tears. "Land sakes!" she sobbed; "if I ain't hugged you! I surely beg your pardon! Tom Jordan, see the doctor out, can't ye?" She threw her apron over her head and fled, laughing and crying.

Tom Jordan came out of the shadows, opened the door for Cashel, a[illegible]zed his hand as he passed out with a mighty gra[illegible]hen Cashel was alone under the white stars.

He took off his cap, and stood looking up at them. The triumph had gone from his face, leaving it worn and grave beyond his years. "Thank God," he said very solemnly, "thank God I went when I did! Thank God I went at once! If I hadn't, if I hadn't the child would have d[illegible]d."

When he was back in his surgery, he pulled out the drawer, and looked long at the folded map within, though he did not take it out. Apparently it was just as he had left it when Mrs. Jordan's

urgent call came to him. Yet alien hands had touched it in his absence, though nothing was missing but an insignificant sheet of white tissue paper.

Cashel, Dr. Cashel, you do not appear to know it, but a rat has been at your papers.

CHAPTER IV

BILLY

A soft, fine rain was falling through the night, and all the winds of the hills were stilled. Chilko, a mass of square shadows and dim lights straggling upon the base of Khadintel, was cut off from all the rest of the world by clouds. The little town seemed to be imprisoned in a great, cloud-filled desolation.

Cashel, returning from a visit to Loreena Jordan, turned up his collar and shivered. "My word, but Chilko's a miserable spot when the weather's bad," he complained. "Now, if I wasn't a poor penniless medico, I'd be safe and cosy with a book and a wood fire, instead of rushing about a little dirty town attending to people who are neither grateful nor profitable." He checked himself suddenly, remembering many things—the look he had seen in the eyes of men and women when he had fought back death from the bread-winner or the house-mother, the confiding faces of the children. "It's I that am the ungrateful grumbler," he sighed, "but sometimes it seems that nothing's any good without money." With this not very articulate expression of feeling, he settled down to his stride, swinging down the steep street with the step of the man who is at home upon the hills. From the earth came a smell of growth and green things, the rain tingled in his face with all its infinite promise.

But just then life was very stale and unprofitable to Hugh Cashel.

A man passed him with a cheery "Good evenin', doc," and was gone again in the mist before Cashel could answer. From the yard of one of the biggest shanties a dog, half hound, half huskie, dashed out upon him in threatening silence. "Hello, Jock!" said Cashel, and the dog fawned under his hand; he also knew the doctor, and escorted him to the surgery door.

"Good-night," said Cashel absent-mindedly, as the dog trotted away home. And then grinned at himself half unwillingly. When one intends to be thoroughly miserable, it is annoying to grin, even at one's own follies.

"What an ass I am!" said Cashel, fumbling for the key. He shook himself as if he would shake off a heavy load. Sometimes a secret weighs heavily, crushingly, though it be a golden one. He glanced backward to where the mist hid Khadintel and a certain lonely grave among the rocks, wishing, with a sudden, swift foreboding, that Lyon had taken his secret with him to rest.

"What an ass I am!" he said again, springing up his rickety step impatiently.

But upon the topmost step he started back with an exclamation, and hurriedly struck a match. The flaring flame showed him a crouching figure and a boy's face, drawn and half unconscious from pain or sickness. "Why, Billy," said Cashel, "what in the world's the matter? Are you ill?"

Billy stirred and moaned a little, trying to stand up. Cashel slipped his arm around him, and very gently raised him to his feet, while, with the other hand

he unlocked the surgery door. And as he did so he made a little sound of surprise and pity, for the small, sodden figure he supported seemed nothing but bones.

"What's the matter, Billy?" he asked again. And then, because the boy seemed weak and shaken, he picked him up in his strong young arms, and carried him into the room and set him down on the big sofa. Whereupon Master Billy gave a gasp and quietly fainted. "Heavens!" said Cashel, and bounced to the mantelshelf; "the poor little beggar's badly hurt! Here, Billy, open your mouth, old fellow—yes, I intend to get it down. It may choke you, but you've got to swallow it. There, that's better."

In a minute the boy sat up, white-faced, shivering with pain. His eyes, usually so hard and sharp and cunning, were wide and frightened, and bright with tears. "It's me shoulder," he grasped, "it's me shoulder. I was—wanderin' round—up the rocks yonder—an' I fell. I fell on a rock that was sharp." He shivered again under Cashel's swift, gentle touch.

"Dislocation and collar-bone," murmured Cashel. "I guess it did hurt, Billy, but you're not killed this time. What we want is a bandage, so—and a little pull and a tug—ah! that hurt like jiminy, didn't it?—and now a big soft handkerchief for a sling. I'll—I'll take you up to the Ridge and throw you into the river. How's that?"

"Fine!" said Billy. "It aches some, but it's fine. This han'kerchief's great." He sniffled, and looked at it proudly. Then he glanced up at Cashel with a strange look in his eyes. "I—I didn't know of no one to come to but you," he said—"I had to come."

"I'm the right one to come to," said Cashel gently "And now there's another thing you need, Billy—and that's some supper."

"Ah!" said Billy.

"Ah!" echoed Cashel, with a laugh. "Come into the next room. The table's all ready. Wait till I get another plate. Here's tinned beef and baked potatoes and—yes, Mrs. Macmurtry left me an apple pie. Forge ahead, Billy."

And Billy "forged ahead" surprisingly, managing a fork with dexterity in his right hand; and, when that failed, using those other implements which we are told were invented before forks. Between mouthfuls he gazed appreciatively at the white table-cloth with its red border, at the two or three Christmas-number pictures on the walls, and at the proprietor of all this comfort and elegance. His eyes still held that strange, ashamed, wistful expression whenever they rested upon Cashel.

"How long is it since you had a square meal?" asked that young man at length gravely.

Billy looked down at his plate uneasily. "I sure have ett a heap," he mumbled, "but I felt all holler, like. Mis' Bruce, she gave me some bread 'n' drippin' this mornin', but I ain't had nothin' since. I didn't go back there again to get nothin' more."

"Why didn't you go back there for dinner?" asked Cashel severely.

"'Cause there weren't goin' to be no dinner," said Billy, with much simplicity.

"My word!" remarked Cashel, under his breath. "Poor little wretch! I suppose I can't interfere further with the domestic affairs of the Bruces. But

perhaps I can help Billy. See here," he went on aloud, "if you have to go with no dinner again, you come to me. Rolled oats and molasses are all I have, sometimes—but you shall have a share of whatever's going."

"What's that?" asked Billy incredulously.

"You shall have a share of whatever's going," repeated Cashel. "Don't wriggle, or you'll hurt your arm."

"Jiminy sinkers!" breathed Billy. His eyes were still fixed upon Cashel—wide, astonished, wistful eyes. Then he looked down at his plate again. "Th-th-thanks, doctor," he stammered. It was the first word of gratitude Cashel had ever heard upon his untaught lips.

"That's all right," said the doctor; "I shall expect you. What relations are the Bruces to you?" he went on, more to put the boy at his ease than from any other motive. Again Billy glanced quickly up; his face had grown hard and furtive again, and he eyed Cashel suspiciously. "He's me uncle," he muttered.

"Then he's not a very good one," answered the doctor grimly.

Billy squirmed upon his chair, and grew uneasily pink. "He's all right enough," he stammered at length; "he leave me pretty much to meself."

"So I should imagine," returned Cashel drily. "Ever go to school, Billy?"

"No," returned Billy uncomfortably, "an' I don't want to, I guess."

"Mrs. Macmurtry told me that, as far as she remembered, you never had a mother or father," continued Cashel; "is that so, Billy?"

"I don't remember ever havin' any," answered Billy. "I've lived with me uncle Bruce all me life, I guess. But I goes pretty much's I like."

"Ah!" said Cashel gently.

The boy looked up again, and again the furtive, cunning was gone from his eyes, leaving them boyish and eager.

"I goes pretty much by meself," he repeated, nodding his head; "you'd never guess where I sleep now the weather's warm enough. No one in Chilko knows. But I'm goin' to tell you." He looked at Cashel intently, with a sudden smile.

"Well?" said Cashel, smiling in answer.

"Right away over the Ridge," confided Billy, in a far-carrying whisper, "I oncet found a little dry cave. Guess a b'ar lived there 'fore Chilko was built. An' I've built a little fire-place there with bricks, an' I've got some old sacks filled jam-full o' pine needles for me bed, an' two old horse blankets an' some soap boxes, an' boards that keep the wind out, an'—an' ever s' many things. It's great. I'll show it to you, 'f you'd like to see it."

"You guess I would," returned Cashel. He remembered his own civilised boyhood, not yet very distant, when he had begged to be allowed to sleep in a big packing-case in the backyard during the summer —"because it feels just like a robber's cave, mother." "I'd have gone fairly crazy with pride if I'd had a cave of my own, not many years ago," he told Billy, with a laugh. "You must have a fine time there when the weather's warm."

"I'm gettin' so 's I can scarce bear to sleep in a house," answered the boy; "houses are dreadful stuffy.

In my cave, when I wake up in the night, I can stick my head out an' see the big stars go sailin' up above. Oncet, I stuck me head out an' there was somethin' crawlin' about on the hillside below, somethin' big an' quiet an' slow, snuff-snuffin' along the stones. My, I was scaret! I pulled the boards acrosst, an' the thing came an' snuffed through the cracks, an' clawed 'em gently. Then it went away; guess 'twas a b'ar from way over the valley. I slep' in a house for two 'r three nights after that."

"Houses are stuffy," agreed Cashel quietly.

"There's a little trickle o' water near my cave," said Billy, "and oncet, when I went to the pool in the early mornin', there was a great big eagle settin' there, drinkin'. It looked at me with its big, yeller, angry eyes, but it didn't move for a long while. Then it flapped its wings slowly above its back, an' rose in the air, an' went sailin' away right acrost the valley. I could scarce believe that it had ever bin there, only I found a long brown feather floatin' in the pool."

"And doesn't your uncle, Mr. Bruce, mind your sleeping in caves and running about the hills like a wild goat?" asked Cashel, watching the boy thoughtfully.

Again, at the mention of Bruce, that veil of uneasy cunning drew across Billy's face. "He don't interfere with me much," he repeated, "I'm left pretty much to meself." He glanced at Cashel suspiciously. "I guess I'll be clearin' off," he said. "And—and thanks—for all ye've done f' me." Once more gratitude vanquished that other look of doubt and distrust.

Cashel, puzzled at the conflict of feelings shown by

Billy's face, led his guest to the door of the surgery. "Good-night," he said; "don't take your arm out of the sling, and come to me again to-morrow."

"G'night," muttered Billy, and was gone in the rainy darkness.

But before Cashel had the door shut he was back again, clinging to the doctor's arm with a small hard hand.

"Wait," he gasped, "wait! There's somethin' I must tell you. I hadn't oughter, but I must—oh, I must. Ye've been that good to me. Listen, here." Cashel bent forward, a vague fear chilling him.

"Uncle Bruce and Injun Tom's off prospectin'," whispered Billy, "no one knows where, 'cept me. Don't ye say a word, an' don't ye ask me nothin', for I'll tell nothin' at all if ye do. But they've off to-morrow. And say, doc—they're goin' east, over beyond Kayopé!"

In a second he had darted from the doctor's grasp and was gone again.

Slowly Cashel shut the door and returned to the surgery. There he sat down at the desk, holding his head in his hands and trying to think. The thing that he feared had come upon him. His secret was known, in some way, to others—to Bruce and Indian Tom. They also knew of that valley on the flanks of "him the Siwashes call Samahl'to." What was he to do?

"I give this secret to you and to you alone," poor Lyon had said; "I will not let it loose in the world for the use o' worse men." And again, "Go yourself, doctor. Or if ye don't, keep the secret o' the Valley of the Star." And Cashel had promised. What was he to do?

Suddenly, as he sat there, a fiercer, harder flame sprang into his bewildered eyes. Only a hair's-breadth, an instant of time, separates doubt from decision. In that instant Cashel thought of many things. Of his mother; of Lyon; of his own dull round of hard and profitless work; and then of Bruce and Indian Tom, and the star-shaped valley of gold. His hand fell heavily upon the desk.

"Those two!" he said aloud. "They shall not get it! I vow they shall not get it!" His voice was harsh in his own ears, and his lips were set in a grim white line. "I will go myself," said Hugh Cashel. And he meant it.

He sprang to his feet and began pacing feverishly up and down his office. His head was thrown back defiantly and his eyes were glittering, while a storm raged in his soul. "I'll go, and that at once," he said, "or I shall be too late. Chilko? Chilko must look after itself. The sick who will be without medical aid for weeks, perhaps? I can't help it. No one in their senses would stand aside while those two roughs went and found the gold. Gold! My valley! My gold!" He sat down at his desk again, that new expression hardening and ageing his young face. Gold! His gold! He did not know how Bruce and his companion had found out the secret. But of one thing he was bitterly sure: they should not profit by it.

Hitherto he had despised Bruce; now, suddenly he hated him. It was a significant change of feeling.

He sat staring at his papers. His brain was working with abnormal quickness and certainty. If he was going to start immediately—he would have started long ago if he had not been so terribly over con-

scientious, he told himself—there were many things to be done. First, he would have to go to the little corrugated-iron bank and draw out all his savings for an outfit. His savings! A sudden doubt gripped his heart, but he resolutely thrust it aside. Why, he might return almost a millionaire. And yet he hesitated over taking those hard-won dollars which suddenly seemed so paltry. For a long time Cashel paced up and down, his eyes aflame. Dawn was touching the crest of Khadintel with faint rose when he finally threw himself on the sofa to snatch an hour's uneasy rest. But he could not sleep. Before his eyes danced a continual glitter of gold. "A little black valley shaped like a rough star. A stream at the bottom whose sands are all o' gold." Gold!

"I will go," said Cashel again.

CHAPTER V

THE GOLDEN TRAIL

"Another day ended," said Cashel with a sigh.

He leaned back against a boulder, gazing westward to where a sea of lesser peaks showed like faint purple clouds in the twilight. That morning he had looked his last upon the crest of Khadintel, and he was glad that he should see it no more. For six days it had been uplifted behind him, catching the light of dawn, a fiery figure of reproach. For on its western slope was Chilko, and from Chilko and its needs he had for ever severed himself.

Behind him Kayopé's ivory spire towered to the great stars. A fire, cunningly built between two rocks, sent a faint glow into the twilight. A few wind-warped pines sheltered him. He could hear Sam and Sinker, his two ponies, munching the thin mountain grasses to be had in the neighbourhood—wiry, enduring, sore-footed; and they represented the greater part of his savings. To him speed might mean success.

Behind him, many miles behind, lay Chilko and all his weary, toiling, monotonous days. Before him was the Valley of the Star—the golden valley upon the flanks of great Samahl'to. But before him also were Bruce and his comrade. How far ahead were they? Did they know he was following them? He could

not answer either question; but grimly, steadfastly, he followed the trail—the trail Lyon had followed—the trail that led to the gold.

In those six days Cashel's whole nature seemed to have suffered a change. His whole life seemed to be concentrated on that one object—gold. All the wonders of the hills brought him no sense of peace, though among them the Hand of God seemed at times to move visibly. He saw the rains far beneath him, the solemn beauty of dawn and eve, the birth of snow-slide, stream and tempest, of wind and cloud. Yet he thought of nothing but the gold, dreamed of nothing else, prayed, when he remembered to pray at all, for nothing else.

He pushed forward with a certain defiant recklessness, disregarding the fact that, at the pinch, Bruce's recklessness would exceed his own. Sooner or later he would be obliged to travel still fast and pass his enemies by the way. For once let them reach the valley ahead of him, two such rascals would hold it against all comers. In those remote places dead men tell no tales. But—"Two can play at that game," thought Cashel, with a darkening face, and a hand upon his revolver. Sooner or later that journey would resolve itself into a race for the gold, and then the strong hand and the steady brain would come into play—unless both were stilled for ever by a stealthy bullet. Cashel knew that this finale was possible, and set his square jaw in yet grimmer determination. If he lived, Bruce and Indian Tom should not lay a finger on that gold which had been the dead man Lyon's, and was now his.

He sat chin in hand, his back against the boulder,

his eyes fixed now upon the lingering lilac of the west, now upon the resinous glow of the fire.

"The fire could be seen for miles from here," he thought. "It was unfortunate that I should have to camp in such an exposed place. If Bruce doesn't know already that I'm following him, the fire will tell him."

At this hour the glaring gaslights would be beginning to flare along the crude streets of Chilko. Perhaps there would be letters waiting for him at the post office. From that office a letter had gone a week ago to his mother, telling her of this—what had he called it? Oh, "unforeseen opportunity." The flaring gas, the grimy faces of the men, the patient women, the shanties strung all along the slope of old Chadintel—these had been the setting of his life for long. Ah, well, it was over now—over for ever. He had risked his all for an unknown valley of gold.

An owl fluttered over his head with a melancholy cry. Its wings showed crimson for a moment in the glow of the fire, and then it was gone. From far beneath him came the clamorous song of the Kayopé River, swollen by the melting of the snow. The slopes above him were still clad in snow, and the wind blowing from them was very cold. The wind, the river, the faint owl-calls—these were all the sounds that broke the mighty silence of the hills, the great enfolding silence which yet brought him no peace. He rolled himself in his blankets, but could get only fitful sleep, troubled with many dreams.

He awoke in the chill dawn, the shadow of these dreams heavy upon his spirit. Before the sun had

cleared the slope of Kayopé he was on his way once more with Sam and Sinker.

This morning their road was an easy one: down a series of steep slopes of shale, along a narrow ledge, and so by many windings to the valley of Kayopé.

A green and gracious place was this rock-walled valley after the stern grandeur of the peaks. Through it Kayopé River ran, from its springs upon the western face of Kayopé peak, in a long, clean curve towards the north. A noisy river was the narrow Kayopé, for all the cliffs were streaked with the white threads of spouting streams that fed it. In one place a shoal was forming behind a young spruce tree that had come down from the head-waters and grounded upon a rock.

This music of many waters was a pleasant sound in Cashel's ears after the silence of the mountains around it. Sam and Sinker lingered above the thick, juicy grass, and ferns showed half-unfurled in the sunny places. Cashel was in no hurry to find the ford. For a little while he was content to gaze at the handiwork of spring.

Down the curve of the river another tree came whirling, and Cashel watched its swift career. "My word," he said aloud, "it's coming at a pace! Quite a big pine. I wonder if it'll ground where the other has. Perhaps—hullo! What's that?"

His keen eyes had been caught by a blot upon the smooth brown water in front of the whirling tree—a small blot, now showing white, now dark, now disappearing, now tossed clear again, sweeping down upon the new-formed shoal. Cashel gazed for a

moment, doubting his senses. Then he leaped from Sinker's back and ran to the water's edge.

"A man!" he cried aghast—"a man!" But whether dead or alive he could not tell.

The body, living or dead, was being swept down upon the little shoal, rolled and tossed, drawn under and flung clear again, as if the river were playing with it with malicious hands. And behind it swept the great pine, wallowing in foam, riding high upon the flood. Cashel had but a moment, and in that moment he made his decision.

When the driven body came down to the end of the little shoal, Cashel was out at the end of the stranded spruce awaiting it.

He stood up to his knees in the rush of the icy brown water, upon the submerged roots of the spruce. With one hand he held to the roots that rose above his head, the other swung free and ready. He caught a glimpse of helpless hands, of black hair, and a bruised, unconscious face beneath the glimmer of the current. Then he leaned outwards and gripped with all his strength.

For a moment he thought that he and the lad he had tried to save would be carried away together, so great was the rush of the river behind the helpless body he held. But in a moment the numbing effect of the sudden wrench and shock passed from his muscles, and his great strength reasserted itself. His knees straightened, his feet steadied upon the rounded, treacherous roots, and he drew the body towards him. Another moment, and with a stifled exclamation of utter astonishment he had it in his arms. He caught a glimpse of a shower of foam, of

the broken branches of the pine lifting high above his head. Still clasping his unconscious burden, he made a wild leap for shoal water. He felt the sand yield horribly under his feet, catching at them with a stealthy, sucking motion. With a great effort he sprang free, scrambled upon the bank, and fell forwards into the kindly grass, rescuer and rescued together alike helpless.

There was a crash and a roar behind him. Still lying in the grass he turned to look. The pine, striking the stranded spruce with the force of a battering ram, had crumpled it as a hammer would crumple a match, and both trees were whirling down the stream in a tangle of broken branches, and stark roots. Already the river was washing away the shoal in an eddy of thick foam.

"My word," gasped Cashel, his long nose in the grass, "that was a—close call!"

He lay for a while longer, breathless, aching in every muscle, wet to the skin. Then he gathered himself together, and turned to the one he had saved.

Every expression but bewildered amazement was gone from his face as he bent over the still figure.

"Billy!" he murmured under his breath—"Billy! By all that's incredible, Billy!"

Billy it was, who lay so limp and still on the long green grass. "Billy, by all that's impossible!" said Cashel again. "How did he——? No, I won't begin to ask questions till he can answer 'em. Guess this is a case for First Aid to the Partially Drowned."

For half an hour he worked over that small battered figure—worked his wet and shivering self into a scarlet glow—before any signs of life rewarded him.

"HE LEANED OUTWARDS AND GRIPPED WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH." [*p.* 53.

But after a while Billy's eyes opened in a dazed way, he groaned, kicked, coughed, and sat up in the warm sunlight. A little while longer, and he was able to speak.

Light and a measure of peace had returned to Cashel's face while he worked over Billy. Now the trouble and the shadow were upon it once more, though amazement was as yet uppermost. "Now, Billy," he said severely, "I should like to know how in the name of all that's wonderful you got here?"

Billy scuffled his feet in the grass, and refused to meet Cashel's eyes. "I was—comin' careful round a ledge—upon th' hill there," he whispered reluctantly, "'n' I slipped 'n' fell. I couldn't stop meself, 'cause me arm was in the han'kerchief jus' as ye'd left it, sir, so 'twas. 'N' I fell 'n' I bumped 'n' I rolled—till I fell inter the river. My, 'twas cold! Did ye pull me out?" he shivered.

"Yes," said Cashel, "I did. But what were you doing up on Kayopé at all?"

"I follered ye," answered Billy sullenly.

"Why?" asked Cashel sternly. Then he suddenly checked himself, for he saw that Billy's thin cheeks were wet, not only with river water, but with tears, and that his mouth was trembling like a scolded child's. The boy looked suddenly very young, very starved, very much in need of a friend. "Why, Billy?" repeated Cashel gently, entirely bewildered.

Suddenly Billy turned to him, clutching his arm with cold, shaking hands, meeting the doctor's gaze with young, desperate eyes. "Why?" he gasped—"why did I foller you day by day, from Chilko t' this place here, stoppin' when you stopped, movin' when

you moved? Why, but that I'm to blame that you was ever here at all, with them two in front o' you, an' murder in their minds? Why but that? An' you—so good ter me!" He stopped, coughing, his wretched eyes upon Cashel's darkening face.

"Ah!" said Cashel, startled. "Go on, Billy."

"I'll go on," cried Billy desperately, "an' back t' the beginnin', too. Bruce was wanderin' round the streets the day that man Lyon died. Lyon was alone fer a bit 'fore Mis' Macmurtry went to him. D'ye remember? He got to talkin' loud like sick folks do sometimes, 'n' Bruce he stopped outside the tent an' listened. He heard enough to tell him that Lyon held th' secret o' most won'erful gold, an' that he'd told it to you. But he learned no more 'cept that t'was east somewheres. When Lyon died, Bruce he waited to get it out o' you somehow where 'twas. He'd 'a' killed you to learn. But I was the one that learned it after all."

"But not from me, Billy," said Cashel—"not from me."

Billy nodded miserably. "Yes," he said, "from you. 'What'd you give to know where that gold is?' ses I to Bruce. 'My gun,' ses he, lookin' at me sharp. 'I'll get that gun,' ses I to meself. So I waited an' watched, an' then the chancet come." He paused again. "One day," he went on, "I come to your office with a message from Mis' Jordan, an' you was markin' a big map with a red pencil. At first I didn't guess what 'twas you was doing', an' then all of a suddent it come to me. 'That's the way to the gold,' ses I. So when you was gone to Jordan's I come back to your house 'n' climbed in at the winder. An'

I took a bit of thin tissher-paper, an' took out the map. An' I put the tissher-paper over the red marks an' drew a pencil along 'em, with a cross where the hills come in. Then I took the tissher-paper to me Uncle Bruce. 'Here's the way to the gold,' ses I. But he wouldn't gi' me the gun after all. Then I was real sorry I done it at all," said Billy naïvely.

"I was sorrier when you fixed me arm," he went on, "an' didn't know whatter do. I didn't dare to tell ye plunk out what I done, not then. But I warned ye 's well's I could. An' when I knew you was goin' after Bruce, I was scared. I knew them two'd shoot ye 's easy as pie, so I come after ye. Two's better 'n one in a fight, an' I'm stronger'n I look. An'—an' I just couldn't let ye come alone, maybe to—to yer death, after it's bein' my doin'. I got some pork an' some crackers an' come after ye. An'—if ye send me back I guess I'll die. I dunno whatter do." He bowed his head on his arms and wailed aloud.

Cashel stared at him, many expressions struggling in his face. He resented being reminded, by Billy's appearance, of his old life; he saw in Billy the cause of his troubles; but he was touched to the heart by the poor boy's bitter repentance, and somewhat heroic method of reparation. A half-starved, half-drowned lad, one arm helpless, following him for a week over those hills! Billy's presence was a decided inconvenience, but Cashel felt there was only one thing to be done. He did it.

He patted Billy's thin shoulder gently. "There, there," he said, "I wouldn't be brute enough to send you back alone. You were wrong to come. But now you're here, you'll have to go with me whatever

happens. I guess the grub'll hold out all right. You're a plucky little scoundrel, Billy."

Billy grasped the young man's hand. "You'll let me go?" he cried. "You won't send me back over them terrible big hills? Oh, bully!"

"No," said Cashel, laughing for the first time in many days, "we're partners now, Billy."

"Bully!" said the boy again, with a mighty breath of relief. "Now I'll get a stick an' go after them ponies."

He staggered to his feet, and was off in a moment at an unsteady trot after Sam and Sinker. Cashel watched him, still somewhat bewildered.

"He lopes like a Siwash," said Cashel wonderingly, "and he came over those hills with a broken shoulder —on pork and crackers—because he couldn't let me go on alone! Poor little plucky vagabond!"

CHAPTER VI

WHEN THE SNOW SPEAKS

"The snow's goin' too quick," said Billy.

He checked the ponies and touched Cashel's sleeve, pointing behind him to the peak of Kayopé They saw a stir and a movement upon the higher white slopes. A glittering mist uplifted itself and hung above the hillside. Then an acre of snow and ice slid downward to the valley, cutting off a couple of spruces as if they had been sawn through at the roots, and falling into the flats about the Kayopé River in a cascade of great white clots. A moment after, and the dull, roaring thunder of its descent came to their ears.

"That's only a little one," said Billy thoughtfully. He put the little cavalcade in motion again.

Cashel glanced behind him uneasily at the dust of the snow-slide still hanging in the air. Then he glanced above him. But the overhanging rock cut off all vision. They were going along a deep natural cutting in the side of one of the lesser mountains. Beneath them was a good six-foot-wide ledge, sliding down into a deep cleft full of forest growth. Above their heads a hard stratum of rock jutted out like a roof. They were walled in with rock above, below, on the left hand. Only on the right had they a clear view; and even this was interrupted by the countless threadlike streams of melting snow-water that fell

from the jutting rock-roof into the cleft, there to form a riotous brown stream that fed the deep Kayopé. Now and then Cashel fancied he heard faint grinding sounds, restless whispers, from the sun-warmed slopes above—the slopes he could not see. Billy heard them, too. "The Siwashes have a sayin'," he told Cashel, "that 'when the snows speak, men become silent for ever.' Guess we'll have to keep a sharp watch-out fer the nex' week or two."

Cashel nodded. "We'll have to watch out for more dangers than one," he said grimly. "Snow-slides are not what I fear most, Billy."

"No," agreed Billy, "and you don't know them two as I knows 'em. I wouldn't so much mind bein' killed in a snow-slide; there's something grand about bein' swep' down an' buried under a mountain o' white snow. But a shot in your back as you're sittin' over your fire ain't so excitin', an' it's eq'ally fatal, leastways generally."

"Oh, shut up!" said Cashel impatiently. Never before had the thought of death been so bitter to him. He had faced death for long among all the ills mankind is heir to. He had never feared it before.

"'When the snow speaks, men become silent for ever,'" repeated Billy thoughtfully. A stone slid down the slopes above them, crashed upon the jutting roof above their heads, and spun outwards into the narrow valley. Sinker checked and snorted.

"He's heard 'em too," said Billy, patting Sinker. The pony quieted immediately under his hand. One of the many things Cashel had found remarkable about Billy during the days of their companionship was his control over the ponies. At times he seemed to have

some method of communication with them beyond Cashel's understanding.

"Them's good ponies," said Billy, whom friendship, food, and the delight of shared dangers were fast rendering talkative, "but Sam'll scrape his pack off the first chancet he gets. I'll show ye the Diamond Hitch if ye like."

"The Diamond Hitch?" asked Cashel wonderingly —"the Diamond Hitch? Why, I've only met a dozen men in my life who knew how to throw the Diamond Hitch."

"I know," returned Billy, "an' I'll learn it t' you."

"You know a great many things," said Cashel; "where did you learn them?"

"I dunno," answered Billy blankly. "You see, I've been roamin' and wanderin' all me life—roamin' and wanderin'—and I've picked up things here an' there, from one or another, before I ever fetched up to Chilko with me Uncle Bruce. The hills an' the woods is home to me, an' there's others like me from whom I learned. Oncet I thought I'd like some money, an' I went all way down the river to Cascade, an' a man gave me work there in a stable. But I come back here again pretty quick, tho' I was sorry to leave his hosses." He paused, and glanced at Cashel watchfully. "The folks at Chilko ses they was goin' to Cascade fer a doctor," he continued.

Cashel's face darkened. Was he always to be reminded of Chilko and his deserted post therein? Was he never to have a chance to forget those he had forsaken in their need?

"Yes, they're going to send to Cascade for a doctor," repeated Billy thoughtfully. "Some of 'em was real

mad at you for clearin' off so quick. But Macmurtry, he ses, 'What can you expect from a lad so young? A colt won't run quiet in harness all the time,' he ses."

"That's enough about that," said Cashel restlessly. "I don't want to hear anything more, Billy. I've done with Chilko for good."

A shower of small stones shot from the jutting ledge, and splashed down into the stream far beneath. A lump of wet snow followed them. Billy checked the ponies, and stood with his ear against the rock wall of the passage way, listening intently.

"Guess the snow will come away in chunks this afternoon," said Cashel, "the sun's so warm. Feel it on this rock here."

Suddenly Billy flung himself upon him. His face was white, and his eyes were full of terror. "It's coming!" he cried—"it's coming!" He leapt upon Cashel and forced him back against the rock wall with all his strength. "It's coming!" he cried again.

"What's coming?" asked Cashel amazed.

"The snowslide," said Billy breathlessly. "I put my ear again' the rock, an' I heard it beginnin' to speak. Listen, an' stand still. Listen!"

Cashel listened. On the slopes of the hill above them a whisper grew and increased—a whisper of manifold voices, yet one. It changed to a roar so terrible that the human sense of hearing failed before it. The granite trembled beneath their feet, the rock against which they leaned was shaken. They pressed futile hands over their ears, cowering; and the ponies cowered with them, shivering and sweating with terror. Then the avalanche came, sweeping down the hill

above them, roaring outwards from the rock-ledge just above their heads, thundering into the narrow chasm. As it struck the slope leading to the valley it splashed like so much water, so that Cashel and Billy were half-buried in snow, stung with fragments of stone, while the terrible sound seemed to be stunning their senses into blackness. The whole world seemed to be reeling and roaring. Then a fragment of flying stone caught Cashel on the temple. He fell forward into the blinding, pelting rain of the upflung snow, and his dizzy senses left him.

He awoke to silence—silence complete and merciful. He lay pillowed in wet snow, half-buried in it, with Billy scrubbing his face with cold lumps of it. He felt sore and bruised all over, but otherwise unhurt.

"Any damage done?" he asked hastily.

"Not ter me," Billy reassured him, "an' seemin'ly not to you, though I thought you was a goner. My, I was scaret when I seen you go plunk!"

Cashel looked round anxiously. The roofed passage on the hillside was half-filled with the upsplashed snow; in places the rock-roof had given way entirely. Sinker was standing leaning against the wall, shivering and snorting with fright. Sam was fairly buried in the snow, but his indignant squeals and plungings showed that he was not badly hurt.

Each leading a frightened pony, they fought their way through the snow-piled rock-passage, slowly and painfully, and came out at last above a slope of clean, sheer granite beyond the track of the avalanche. They felt weary and bruised, and the ponies were also in need of rest.

"It's only about four o'clock," said Cashel, "but

when we find a good place, Billy, we'll camp. I guess we've all had about enough of it for one day."

They slanted down the long slope and round a bluff shoulder of rock. And then—"Here's our place," said Billy joyfully. "Look! Ain't it swell?"

It was not so much a valley as a small grassy cup of gentler land held safely in the granite hold of the hills, grown here and there with the hardier bushes which dare great altitudes. And in the centre of it was a tiny lake, so small, so perfect, so still, so radiantly blue, that it seemed like a sapphire set in jade.

"A bully place to camp," was Billy's opinion. So they relieved the faithful Sam from his load, pitched their tiny tent, and soon had a small fire burning, from which arose a thin column of blue smoke. "The wood ain't as dry's I could wish," said Billy; "it gives off a reg'lar signal smoke."

But Cashel, weary in body and a little in spirit also, asked nothing better than to rest on the scant young grass and watch the evening descend gloriously upon the hills. For a time that haunting vision of the valley of gold slid further from him, and seemed worth a little less. He was content to sit and watch the little lake turn to a golden-glowing topaz, and then to a wonderful amethyst, and then to a milky marvel of pearl, reflecting every change of the skies as they clouded or cleared, and the day drew leisurely to its end.

The ponies gazed contentedly, and Billy roamed away on a little exploring expedition of his own, promising not to exert his remarkable gift of getting into dangerous situations. But Cashel did not move. For a little while he tasted peace again.

The sun set behind those hills over which he had

come, and the sky turned rosy to the zenith. The little lake turned to a rose-petal blown down into the valley. Then Billy returned, scrambling among the rocks. "What's hill's this?" he asked briefly.

"I believe," said Cashel, "that it rejoices in the name of Puck's Powder-horn; why, I am unable to say. What do you want to know for, Billy?"

"Ah!" said Billy. "Never you mind. You come with me, jus' a little way, an' I'll show you somethin'." Cashel rose reluctantly. There was a delighted mystery in Billy's voice that no one could have resisted. He followed the boy up the steep slope from which they had entered the valley, then sharply northward along a narrow, weather-worn ledge. Then—"Turn to the east," ordered Billy—"turn to the east, an' look."

Cashel obeyed, turning cautiously on the treacherous ledge. Then he drew in his breath sharply. He had not realised before how great was the altitude of that cup of jade set with the single sapphire wherein they had made their camp.

"Look beyond," ordered Billy.

Again Cashel obeyed. And over a world of lesser ranges, already given over to twilight, he saw a great shape floating in pale amber air—a shape mysterious, solemn, remote, beautiful beyond any words—a shape which caught the last rays of sun upon a snow-crowned crest—a shape that seemed thinner, finer than a radiant mist, of the stuff that dreams are made of. Cashel's eyes grew wide and awed as he looked. "What is it?" he asked, in a hushed voice.

"Œhultzœn," answered Billy softly.

"Œhultzœn!" repeated Cashel—"Œhultzœn!"

At the word his new-built world of peace was shattered like a glass globe beneath the blow of a hammer. Tumult, unrest, the sense of coming strife, darkened his soul once more.

"Yes, Œhultzœn," repeated Billy proudly. "But it's farther off'n you'd think for—oh, miles 'n miles 'n miles farther! Don't it look fine, swimmin' way up the air like that? Looks like the shadder o' a mountain floatin' in a pool."

"Yes," said Cashel absently. "Yes—'Beyond Œhultzœn crowned with snows. Beyond Œhultzœn—a little bit of a black valley shaped like a star, tucked down between Na'hal and Nechachy—boulders on the flanks of him the Siwashes call Samahl'to.'" He stared at that wonderful floating presence, newly crowned with a white star, changing to the likeness of a lavender cloud as he watched. "Soon, perhaps, standing on those shadowy slopes, I shall look east and see the kingly summit of Samahl'to likewise, a beacon above the Valley of the Star, my valley of gold——" He stood silent so long that Billy grew uneasy.

"Ye can't see it no more," he said.

"No," said Cashel, "I can't see it any longer, Billy. But I know it's there, calling me on—and on——" They descended into the valley again in silence.

Billy made up the fire, and began to prepare their supper. "I have heard 'em say," he volunteered, "that Œhultzœn's a bad-luck mountain. The Siwashes don't like him, so I've heard. They say he draws all the storms and winds to himself, like—like the eddy in a river draws the old leaves."

"We won't bother with Siwash yarns, Billy," said

Cashel. "We'd never know where we were if we began on those." But he felt some faint sense of foreboding in his heart. He sat gazing into the heart of the little fire, sadly, regretfully.

Suddenly, without an instant's warning, the black stillness of the hills was rent with a little crimson flash. Something sang past Cashel's head with an angry hum, and buried itself in the fire, scattering a red shower of wood ashes around. The hills echoed a little stinging report. Billy flung himself flat on the ground with a yell.

"It's them," he cried; "it's them two!"

CHAPTER VII

IN THE FOG

Cashel sprang from the glow of the little fire. As he moved another shot rang past him, following another red flash from the darkness of the rocks.

"Drop!" yelled Billy. And Cashel obeyed. But no more bullets rent the peace of the surrounding night. Cashel's face was white with rage when he rose; his eyes were blazing.

"Two can play at that game," he thought. "To-morrow I have my revolver ready."

"I guess them two's watchin' around still," said Billy, when they set off again next morning.

Cashel looked at the dark boulders on either hand, any one of which might shelter the little red flash, the smoke, the stinging bullet that meant death. They were leading the ponies up the edge of a shallow stream, over bare slippery dark rock, in and out between dark boulders, with gloomy cliffs frowning at them from each side. In the last few days the character of the range had changed; the hills were darker, more rugged, indescribably more desolate. But before them, daily nearer, showed the great shape of Œhultzœn, a snow-crowned shadow against the dawn, at sunset a golden marvel reaching almost to mid-heaven—or so it seemed to them.

"CASHEL SPRANG FROM THE GLOW OF THE FIRE." [p. 70.

"I can't understand why we don't find any traces of them," said Cashel uneasily, glancing quickly behind as he spoke. The stress of these later days was telling upon him badly, as shown by his worn young face, his restless eyes, his nervous movements.

"Injun Tom'd see to that," said Billy, "an' p'raps they ain't goin' just exactly the same way's we are. Injun Tom, I guess, 'd know lots o' short cuts, maybe."

"Ah!" said Cashel grimly. "But, short cuts or no short cuts, they don't get that gold. No, Billy, not even if it comes to the question of who can shoot straightest. They commenced hostilities first. I'm not to blame if I fight them with their own weapons." But he was arguing more with himself than with Billy.

They splashed round a great rocking boulder, up to their knees in the swift, icy rush of the dark stream. Sinker slipped upon a rounded stone, and Billy paused a moment to pat his straining flanks. "Good hoss!" he said—"good hoss!" And then, rather gruffly to Cashel, "You'll get the ponies all wore out if we push on at this pace."

"We'll all have a good rest when we get to Samahl'to," said Cashel. "Unless," he went on, with rather an ugly laugh—"unless some of us take a rest till doomsday before ever we get there." He struck his fist upon a rock as they passed it, in one of those sudden out-flashings of blind, unforgiving, stealthy fury which perhaps came to him with his fierce Welsh blood. "But Bruce shall not touch that gold," he cried.

Billy looked at him in silence, shrugging his shoulders.

He was young, but he was widely experienced. He knew the gold-thirst when he saw it; and he knew also that it is as vain to argue with an avalanche as with a man on whom that fever-thirst descends; he knew, too, that his wild journey was his fault, though Cashel seemed to have forgotten it. Billy never did.

They wound upwards beside the stream for another weary hour, the ponies plodding onwards with drooping heads, Cashel buried in stormy thought. At length they came out of the cleft, with its dark rock walls, in a windy world far above the tree-line. The air was very cold, and so rare that they gasped in it. Before them towered the rugged black crest of the hill, shorn in twain as by a mighty sword-stroke. "Taya's Pass, I guess 'tis," said Billy; "we've to cross through it. No, we can't get round no other way, by all I've heard." He sniffed uneasily. "An' I guess we'd better push on quick, fer I c'n smell bad weather. An' we must camp among grass t'night fer the ponies."

So they faced the long slope that led them to the black gates of the Pass. The mighty wind leaped down upon them with a sound as of the laughter of many great voices. "Taya's voices," said Billy, in the manner of a guardian of a museum; "ekkers, I 'spect. But the Siwashes ses they're demons—black demons—chasing the souls o' white men out o' the hills, or somethin'. It'll—be—better—in the Pass."

"Charming spot for a—summer hotel!" cried Cashel, with a flash of his old cheery, nonsense-loving humour. The great wind roared around the black rock-chimneys, worn with the weather of ages; the

ponies stumbled on the clean-swept rock ledges. Through much labour they at length gained the dark portals of the Pass, and entered a passage of peace.

The Pass was like a long, narrow, downward-sloping cleft, cutting the black crest of Taya in twain. And between its barren black walls was silence and shelter from the many-voiced wind. But—"Look at Œhultzœn," said Billy.

Cashel looked, and saw the great peak framed in the high rock-pillars at the end of the Pass. Two-thirds to the summit it was hidden in a swirling sea of high white vapour, billowing, heaving cloud, heavy with the seed of storms. "That's comin' down on us," said Billy; "we're lower here. Git up, Sinker, old hoss. Steady, Sam."

They picked their way over the splintered, crumbled rock fragments that floored the Pass. Hard snow clung in grey buttresses to the walls of it. "That never goes away," said Billy. Œhultzœn, suspended in the skies before them, grew paler and more shadowy in outline. The white vapour came away from its flanks in woolly masses, throwing dark shadows on the hills. Cashel and Billy watched it uneasily, and the ponies sniffed the air with little content.

Presently they cleared the Pass, wound down a long slope, skirted a precipice, and climbed beneath a tall, misty waterfall. "There's trees again," said Billy: "two kinds o' spruce. There's—" He stopped, his mouth still amazedly open. For in an instant the whole lower world was blotted out in on-rushing cloud.

"My!" said Billy, "et's come quick!" Even as he spoke grey streamers of clouds encompassed them, blotted out the hill behind, and wrapped them around

in a restless, silent, hurrying sea of cold vapour. They stared at each other dimly, half dizzy with the ceaseless rush past of the mist.

"Follow the ponies," suggested Cashel; "they'll find their way down." For they could scarcely see two yards in front of them.

And Sam and Sinker led them safely down to a pleasant valley full of stunted spruce trees. They paused at the brink of a shallow stream that slid stealthily over a bed of smooth rock, and chose a level place, and pitched their little grey tent. The flying mists drove through the branches of the trees, and built an ever-shifting barrier between them and the rest of the world. "We may as well stay here," said Cashel, chafing at the delay; "we dare not go on. I'll go and get some dry wood. See if there are any fish to be had, Billy."

"All right," said Billy. "But you'd better tie a string to yourself b'fore you go. Won't you stay an' look for trout while I find the wood?"

For answer, Cashel laughed and strode off into the grey mists, threading his way between the low, spruce branches, tripping over bushes, making for the higher ground where the wood was likely to be drier. Under a shelving bank, where a rock slide had come down, he found a small pine half dead. And here he cut a noble armful of dry sticks for lighting, and long resinous roots for holding, the fire. When he had as much as he could carry, he started back to find the stream and the camp beside it. And he had not gone a hundred yards before the conviction came to him that he was utterly lost.

He sat upon a stone and called himself hard names,

and tried to puzzle out his whereabouts. "I'm not going to yell for Billy," he told himself, "like a lost kid in a cornfield. No, I must find the stream and follow it down." He heard the gurgle of water not far away, and cautiously tracked it down. Yes, there was a stream. He followed its course for a quarter of a mile through an interminable confusion of rocks and tree roots. Then he reluctantly came to the conclusion that it was a different stream.

"Donkey!" said Cashel to himself severely, and turned to retrace his steps. But now all his surroundings seemed suddenly grown unfamiliar. Silently, ceaselessly, the grey clouds drove past. He followed the course of the stream upwards, but he could not find the place where he had discovered it first, nor any of his own footprints—only some very large bear-tracks. "This is getting troublesome," said Cashel, grimly following the stream which seemed rushing out of the mist to meet him.

The mist grew thicker and whiter. A solid wall of it seemed to be driving down on him. He lowered his head, and turned in another direction, away from the stream. For an instant the mist parted, showing him an unfamiliar rock-face crowned with spruces. Then it shut down once more, thicker, whiter, more bewildering every moment.

Cashel felt his way past the rock-face, striving by its aid to keep a straight course. Presently the mist seemed to grow lighter, more luminous again ahead of him. "Perhaps it's going to break," he thought hopefully: "if I could only get a clear view of this valley for a minute—" He stepped forward hurriedly—and stepped forward into mist and space!

One wild effort he made to save himself, to fling himself back upon the rocks. But in vain. He fell, down and down into the silent fog, still clinging to the bundle of firewood. "Oh, what a tenderfoot trick!" flashed through his mind. Then breath and sense alike were shaken out of him upon a friendly ledge of rock that saved his life at the cost of many bruises.

When he came to himself he was lying on his back, his feet hanging over an apparently bottomless abyss of grey, driving cloud. He seemed suspended in a vast loneliness and silence. Shuddering, he drew his feet inwards. The silent, ceaseless rush and swirl of the grey vapour made him so dizzy he dared not move, except to edge nearer to the cliff down which he had fallen. "This is a pretty fix!" groaned Cashel, as his jarred bones and muscles resented even that slight movement.

He rested for a moment, with his hands over his face to shut out that sickening heave and rush of the fog. Then he shouted with all his strength—a ringing, far-carrying, mountaineer's call.

There was no answer. He waited three or four minutes, and then called again, with the same result. "My word," he thought again, "I'm in a nice fix!"

He must have given that far-carrying call at regular intervals for the best part of an hour before he heard an answer to it. Then from above him there came a shout that the fog and the great space seemed to render thin and distant. Cashel's heart gave a throb of relief. "Billy!" he yelled hoarsely—"Billy!"

"Where—are—you?" came the piping call, as if from immeasurable heights above. For the fog played

queer tricks with sound. Billy's voice was like the small voice that speaks through a telephone.

"Down here!" shouted Cashel. "Down here, on a ledge! Don't know how to get off!"

"Wait!" came the little bodiless voice. "I'll send —a rope—down."

"No good!" cried Cashel desperately. "I've wrenched both—my—arms! Couldn't climb up!"

There was silence, and then—"Wait!" warned the thin, far-off voice again; "wait, still! I'll—fetch—you —up—all right."

A shower of little pebbles fell stinging into Cashel's face, and bounced out into the void. Though he called, there came no more replies from above. Billy had gone. He was left alone again.

It seemed to him that the silence, the rushing mist, the loneliness, lasted an hour or more. In reality, it could not have been more than twenty minutes before Billy's call floated down to him again, and he shouted joyfully in answer.

"Don't—waste breath—askin' questions," came the words distinctly from above; "I'm goin' to—send—a rope—down. Get—the noose—under—y'arms—an'— hang—on. Hang on. That's—what you must—do. I'll—see—to—all th' rest."

Another shower of pebbles fell. Then silence. Cashel, though he strained his eyes through the fog, could see nothing. But presently, some two yards away from his hand, a black swaying line showed in the mist, jerking lower and lower. Billy, by some extraordinary accuracy of hearing, had let down the rope almost within Cashel's reach—almost, not quite.

"All right?" came the boy's voice from above.

"No!" shouted Cashel; "it's low enough, but—I—can't—reach it. Swing it, Billy!"

The rope was weighted by a stone. Now it undulated violently, swayed, and began swinging to and fro. At length Cashel snatched it, a thrill of pain passing through his strained arm as he did so. Then, in another minute, he had slipped the noose under his arms, caught the rope in both hands, and hailed Billy. "Haul away!" he called, setting his teeth.

Almost immediately he swung into the air with a violent jerk. All the strain came on his arms, and the pain made him feel faint and sick. Then the jerking ceased, and he began to rise steadily through the mist, with a swiftness that amazed him. Higher and more swiftly he rose, the cold vapour sweeping past so quickly he closed his eyes. He began to turn round as he rose, clung desperately to the rope, gritting his teeth against the dizziness and pain. And then, before he believed it possible, Billy's hands clutched his. With a mighty heave, he was dragged once more on to solid and safe foothold.

For some moments he lay still, for his muscles ached like red-hot cords. Billy fawned around him like a dog, and a wet, hairy nose breathed inquiringly into his face. At length he sat up, and drew a long breath.

"Well, you have give me a time," burst out Billy, looming large in the mist. "When you didn't come back inside the hour, I knew you was lost. An' 'twas ever so long before I heard you yellin'. An' then I couldn't a' hauled you up, on'y I thought o' the ponies. An' Sinker pulled you up as easy—oh! easier'n you pulled me up out o' the river. I—I'm that glad I thought o' tyin' the rope to Sinker."

"So am I," said Cashel gravely. "That day when I pulled you out of the river was a good day for me."

A bright flush came over Billy's face, and his eyes shone delightedly. "Thanks," he said gruffly. "Now you come back to camp before you stiffens all up."

"I shall be all right to-morrow," said Cashel. But he was not. It was a day later ere the weather cleared, or Cashel's bruises allowed him to travel. The delay irritated him almost beyond endurance. And Billy tended him loyally, and soothed him patiently. Cashel's heart warmed more and more to the wild boy. "Poor little beggar!" he thought. "When I get that gold, when I do—why—I'll set Billy up for life. But I wonder how! He's wilder than any Siwash."

At last the day came when they might start on their way once more, a morning of wind and cloud beneath a clear blue sky.

As the sun rose higher, the storms shrank away from the great shape of Œhultzœn, and passed above the lower valleys in great grey blots. Looking far downwards, Cashel could see the straight grey veils of rain suspended from them, sweeping across the levels, darkening the hill-sides, swaying the spires of the spruces that looked like little dark miniatures of trees. "Œhultzœn's evidently the weather-man of these parts," thought Cashel.

Presently their trail led them downstairs again towards these valiant armies of the spruce. They skirted a little precipice some three hundred feet in depth, which dropped to a smooth slope of grass. Looking down, Cashel saw two black bears here disporting themselves. With a wholly boyish impulse, he shouted and threw a pebble at the great brutes; and they

slouched away into the trees with incredible speed, glancing back at him with their small, sullen eyes, while Sinker snorted indignantly.

"Glad they wasn't grizzlies," Billy called back severely. And Cashel suddenly reddened, feeling himself, before that tone, an incurable tenderfoot.

They went on in silence for an hour, and, so many were the ups and down of their path that they gained about a mile as the bird flies. A recent rock-slide forced them into a long detour. The ponies slid miraculously down slopes of shale, and ascended slopes of granite at an incredible angle; and Cashel and Billy slaved and grunted, "boosting" them up, or fairly hanging to their tails as they eased them down. When they gained a smooth rock-ridge running between hill and hill they were all sore and grateful.

"Git up, Sam," said Billy, with a long breath of relief. They took the lead as usual, and Cashel and Sinker followed humbly behind. "All the sensations of mountaineering compressed into a brief hour," thought Cashel, wiping his face.

At the end of the ridge they dipped down again among trees. And then something happened.

Billy had turned a corner, and was hidden from Cashel. But in a moment he emerged again from the trees, running, his face white as Cashel saw even at that distance. Some vague fear and foreboding gripped at the young man's heart as he waited checking Sinker.

"There's somethin' round that corner," gasped Billy, white and shaking; "there's a tent there in a little holler. Sam near walked bung inter it. An'

there's somethin' in the tent—somethin' moanin' an' groanin' most awful. Don't ye go, doc., don't ye go nigh it. It's something horrible, moanin' and groanin'. Don't ye go!"

"Nonsense, Billy!" said Cashel sharply, though his own nerves were shaken anew by the boy's terror. "I must go on and see what it is."

Billy clung desperately to his arm. "Don't ye go," he insisted; "don't!—don't! Oh, I'm scaret! I'm scaret that—that it's one o' them!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE LONELY CAMP

Cashel stood, revolver in hand, on the brink of a little hollow, walled around with spruces. In the hollow was a small, soiled canvas tent, and the smouldering ashes of a fire showed behind a pile of freshly cut wood. Cashel looked at all these things amazed, his nerves and muscles held tense under the expectation of he knew not what. But his attention was arrested most of all by that faint, continuous moaning, little louder than a sigh, which came from the tent. He had heard that sound before on the lips of poor racked humanity, before the coming of the last great silence.

Twenty yards behind him Billy cowered white-lipped between Sam and Sinker, pouring forth a flood of entreaties. "Don't ye go nigh it," he besought him—"it's one o' them, I know 'tis; it's one o' them layin' low to do ye a mischief. Don't ye go nigh it, now. It's one o' them waitin' for ye in there. Oh, come away, before it's too late!"

For a second Cashel hesitated. If it should prove to be a ruse—if it should—why, he might pay heavily for his boldness. But that piteous, low moaning beat upon his heart, thrilled his nerves, steeled as they were for conflict, called to him for help. For a moment only he hesitated; then

the doctor in him awoke to life renewed to answer the call.

"Be quiet, Billy!" he commanded sternly. Billy subsided whimpering. Cashel advanced towards the little tent, his revolver ready. "I give warning," he said in a loud voice—"I give warning that at first sign of hostilities I shall fire." But there was no answer, nor any change in that faint, moaning sound. Cashel stooped and looked into the tent.

The thought flashed through his mind as he stooped, that now was the time for the man inside to show his intentions. And if those intentions were murderous—why, Hugh Cashel, a black figure against the outer light, would offer an excellent target. But there came no report, no stinging bullet, no figure springing upon him; nor, as it seemed, any sign of life from the dark heap at his feet, save that low, incessant sound. He stooped still lower, the revolver glinting blue in his hand, raised still to answer war with war. Then he sprang back with a quick exclamation.

The man lying at his feet, moaning, half-unconscious, apparently all but dead, was Bruce!

Bruce! Cashel advanced again, and looked down upon his enemy thus given into his hands. His face was very white, and his eyes blazed suddenly with all the pent-up fury of weeks. He looked down upon Bruce, Bruce the thief, the ingrate—Bruce, who had sought his very life, as well as all but broken his hopes.

At length he spoke to the moaning figure in bitter, half-whispered words that hissed through his clenched teeth. "If I had known it was you," he said, "you might have stayed here, and called the eagles and the

foxes to help you. If I had known!—You! You! You!"

Little less than hatred was in those few fierce words. Yet that little less was to prove Bruce's salvation—and perhaps young Cashel's also: by such small things are the workings of God shown forth. Little less than hatred. Yet that "little less" was the span of Bruce's helplessness.

Cashel still looked bitterly at the moaning figure. Bruce was apparently very near death, and knew nothing of the other's presence. Once he half rose from the blanket in which he was wrapped, gazing at Cashel from dull, wild eyes, stretching out gaunt hands in appeal. "Water!" he gasped—"water!" There was a small pan of water just out of his reach. Mechanically Cashel laid down his revolver, supported Bruce, and deftly held the water to his parched lips. Then he laid the man down again gently, though he was still shaken with a storm of angry thoughts and bitter temptations, and stepped out of the tent and called Billy. His face was such that Billy gazed at him open-mouthed.

"You were right," said Cashel in that queer, strained voice—"you were right. It's Bruce."

Billy turned to flee immediately from the dreaded presence, hesitated, wriggled, thought better of it, and returned to the young man's side. But Cashel had not noticed the momentary desertion. His burning eyes were fixed upon the ground, and he seemed to speak as much to himself as to the boy.

"I don't know yet," he went on in the same even tone—"I don't know yet how he's been hurt; but hurt he is, and badly. Nearly to death! to death!

He tried to kill me. I went in there, and my revolver was in my hand, and he was helpless. And I—I gave him drink, Billy." He looked at his hands in a curious, detached, impersonal way, and Billy shivered. "My revolver was ready," he repeated in a tense whisper, "and for a moment everything went red as fire, or as blood. I only knew that he was there and that I was there, and that *it* was in my hand." He looked at his hands again. "But they're clean," he whispered—"they're clean. Thank God, they're clean." He shuddered, and looked at Billy with haggard eyes, from which the flame was slowly dying.

Billy, with strong common sense, went up to him and took him by the elbow, and shook him violently. "Don't you think o' that," he advised, "you hadn't—you wasn't—you didn't—I knew 'twas one o' them. Now, what 're you goin' to do about it?"

Cashel put his hands to his head as if to try to steady his whirling thoughts. "I don't know," he answered in a low voice; "I—don't know. Where's the other man? We must pull Bruce round enough to get that out of him—if he'll tell. I don't know what I'm going to do, Billy."

"Find out where Injun Tom is first," advised Billy uneasily. "Then we c'n decide, I guess. You must find out that before we goes on."

"Yes," agreed Cashel, still in that strained voice, "we must find that out before we go on." Again he looked at his hands and shuddered. "God forgive me!" he whispered. "I'm no better than Bruce."

"You're a good 'un to hate," said Billy the untaught, rather admiringly.

Cashel looked at the great peaks and the skies

beyond them with sad, troubled eyes. But that terrible flame of anger no longer burned in them. "It's better work for a man," he said, "to be a 'good 'un' to forgive, Billy. Go and fetch me that little tin case from Sinker's saddle." He shook himself as though shaking off a mighty load, and returned to the tent and the man within it.

As he bent above Bruce with cleared eyes, Cashel saw that the man was indeed far gone. Suffering and sickness had curiously softened and refined his coarse face. He took the case which Billy brought and which contained some half-dozen simple remedies, and opened it doubtfully. Would it be any use? He did not know, but he intended to try.

In an hour or two, under Cashel's ministrations, Bruce's pain was eased, and his dull mind cleared a little. He looked up at the young man wonderingly.

"Is that you?" he said thickly. "You?"

"Yes," said Cashel abruptly. "Here, drink this."

"You?" gasped Bruce. "You?" Suspicion flared in his eyes. "What 're doin'?" he cried hoarsely. "You? Poisonin' me with yer drugs? Poisonin' me, that's what yer doin'." He tried to rise, but fell back with a groan, and lay panting.

"Stop that!" commanded Cashel, "and open your mouth. When I fight at all, I fight fair. Drink this."

Bruce's eyes met his steady gaze, failed before it, and he obediently drank from the tin cup Cashel held to his lips. Then for a moment he lay silent, watching Cashel with bewildered eyes.

"Was that you come in a while agone?" he asked weakly. Cashel nodded.

'You had a—gun in yer hand?" persisted Bruce.

"Yes," said Cashel shortly. His young face looked very tired and deeply lined in the shadows of the tent.

"And was it you—give me—a drink?" whispered the man. Cashel nodded again.

"Well!" said Bruce in a tone of utter amazement, "if I'd found you helpless—with a gun in me hand—I might 'a' shot you where you lay—ter save trouble." A sort of flicker of some savage humour shone for a second on his brutal face. "Yer a—white man," he finished slowly.

"Now," said Cashel, still in that stern way, "I want to know how you were hurt, and where your—companion is." Again that flicker of savage humour seemed to show on Bruce's battered face.

"Ye don't want much," he said, "but I'll tell ye. A rock fell on me, two days agone. We camped here. I couldn't move, but we thought I'd be all right with a few days' rest. But we didn't dare to waste no time, 'cause o' you follerin' us. So I ses to Tom, 'You go on 'n get the gold, an' I'll foller ye in three days.' Well, Tom, he didn't wanter leave me, but 't last I made 'm, an' he went, leaving' me here with supplies. An' the very day—after he'd gone—I got bad, as you c'n see."

"Ah!" said Cashel, drawing a sharp breath. "So he has gone on!" His eyes met Bruce's, each understanding the other's thought.

"Ah!" said Bruce, with a reckless laugh, "he's gone on—ter git the gold. Ye'll have ter hustle if ye wanter git there first."

In his pain and weakness, hovering on the verge of

death, Bruce seemed to hold himself aloof from the struggle for the gold, even in spirit; he watched Cashel with grim interest as one of the actors in a dark drama leading to almost inevitable tragedy, from which he himself was entirely withdrawn.

"I'm real bad—ain't I?" he asked suddenly.

"Yes," said Cashel gravely, "as bad as bad can be."

Bruce laughed again. "Well," he said, "it won't be long anyways. Ye'll go on to-night; an' the dark an' the silence 'll come creepin' down to the tent, an' the beasts o' the hills'll slink near and nearer—they did last night. Soon they'll have their will o' me. Comin' back, ye'll scarce be in time for the funeral. I made Tom go—anyways, he wouldn't understand, bein' as he is—but it's the loneliness that's killin' me." The hard, sneering brutality of his eyes wavered and broke suddenly. "'Twould be greater mercy," he said roughly, "if ye put a bullet inter me before ye go on, instead of leavin' me here to die—slow—o' the loneliness an' the terror an' the eyes o' the beasts in the night."

"Hush!" said Cashel in a low voice. He looked at Bruce strangely.

"Won't ye do—that much—for an enemy?" whispered the man; his wretched, terrified eyes still on the doctor.

Cashel looked at him aghast. "Is it as bad as that?" he asked.

Bruce nodded grimly. Without a word Cashel rose and left the tent. He wanted to be alone.

In the little hollow Sam and Sinker contentedly cropped the struggling grasses. Cashel turned from

them and from Billy and instinctively sought the heights in this his hour of greatest temptation. For his soul seemed to be torn asunder within him.

"A little bit of a black valley shaped like a star, tucked down between Na'hal and Nechachay—boulders on the great flanks of him the Siwashes call Samahl'to—a stream at the bottom whose very sands are all o' gold—gold flakes, and crumbs and nuggets behind every boulder—gold."

And against this? A sick man. And that man the one who had robbed him of the knowledge of the gold. That man his enemy. And on the side of this man, all his professional sense of honour, all his reluctant pity, all his mercy.

Without doubt or shadow, his choice showed clearly before him, uncompromising, inevitable. "If I do not start from here immediately, I shall lose all chance of the gold. If I leave Bruce now, he will die to-night, and I shall be responsible for his death."

He climbed to a narrow ridge, above the valley and the sheltering spruces. Before him towered Œhultzœn, a splendid shape floating as it were upon a sea of soft cloud. Somewhere between him and it, Injun Tom drove forward to gain the gold. His gold! His gold! "If I do not start from here at once, I shall lose my chance for ever."

And behind him? Bruce, his enemy, helpless; even praying the favour of death at his hands rather than be left alone to all the unutterable dark terrors of a lonely death in the hills. "If I leave Bruce now he will die, and for that I shall be responsible." He shrank from the thought as from an indelible stain upon his honour and his mercy. Yet—"a little black

valley shaped like a star, tucked down between Na'hal and Nechachey, boulders on the flanks of him the Siwashes call Samahl'to. A stream at the bottom whose very sands are all o' gold."

Out of sight of the little camp, Cashel raised his hands to the sky above the everlasting hills. "O God," he cried very simply—"O God, help me to do right!"

To do right? What right would come of gold won at the price of a man's life? What peace or pleasure would come of gold stained by violence, won by the brutal neglect of the dying? Bruce was his enemy, and to the eyes of men his life was a worthless one enough. "But," thought Cashel, with a sudden remembrance of a very noble pride, "there is no enmity between the doctor and his patient, no war between the healer and the healed." He thought of his promise to Lyon, of his own tottering hopes and wishes, of the ruin that faced him should he return to Chilko without the gold. But—what of that supreme call, the call of the sick to the man who could heal? It was but his old temptation, repeated in new form, intensified an hundredfold. Before, he had yielded to it. Now——?

"O God, help me to do right!" said Cashel again, very humbly and earnestly. And even as he spoke he knew what his decision would be, and he faced it bravely. He must stay with Bruce. He must fight with death for the life of his enemy, while Injun Tom went on and gained the gold.

That gold had meant so much. Cashel's honest eyes were blurred as he thought of all it would have done for his mother. Yet—he must stay with Bruce.

And at the instant of his decision, peace seemed to descend upon him from the everlasting hills, and he knew that he had chosen well. He would never see that little black valley shaped like a rough star, hidden on the flanks of Samahl'to, nor the stream that ran upon golden sands. His golden dream was ended. There remained what? Work, that healer of hurt and troubled souls. That lonely ridge would be his Pisgah, from which he must turn without even viewing from afar his Promised Land.

He looked up at royal Œhultzœn, splendid among storms, that yet seemed to breathe peace and a solemn, wordless blessing upon him. "I shall never reach even you," cried Cashel softly, as to some great conscious presence. "I shall never climb your ridges and look towards the dawn, and see, beyond your lesser brethren, your brother king Samahl'to, crowned with fire, who held all my hopes. I sought to reach good through evil, but it has come to an end."

He turned from the vision of the great peak, splendid, enduring, remote; and went down to the little valley of the spruces, and the ragged tent, and the man who suffered therein. And surely the angel of the Lord went with him.

CHAPTER IX

THE EYES IN THE NIGHT

As Cashel stooped and entered the tent, Bruce leaned forward and caught his wrists in fingers that seemed as hot as fire. "Don't ye leave me again," he entreated in a hoarse whisper, "don't ye leave like that again fer so long. Eh? Such long, long hours to spend in the dark, all alone, all alone, all alone—all night long, with the wind talkin' in the trees, an' the stars climbin' up the sky, an' the bright eyes o' the beasts comin' near and nearer in the dark——" He broke off suddenly, and eyed Cashel suspiciously under his hand. "What d'you want?" he asked harshly; "what d'you want here? Ye'll get no gold, I tell ye. A bit o' lead'll serve your turn. Who're you?"

"I'm the doctor," answered Cashel patiently for the h[illegible] time. "I'm the doctor, Bruce. Don't you [illegible]er? I'm taking care of you, and I've only [illegible]one ten minutes. It's not night now, you know; it's broad day, and the sun is shining."

"It's always night, I tells you," muttered Bruce, lying back and staring upwards with his fiery eyes. "It's always night, an' the beasts are out in it, waitin' fer me t' die. I ses to Tom, 'You mus' go on an' I'll foller.' An' he goes on ter git the gold. The gold? The gold? What gold? I dunno. But he goes on,

an' leaves me here, all alone, all alone, all alone, with the beasts o' the hills waitin' for me, their eyes shinin' in the night."

"Hush, Bruce!" said Hugh Cashel, quieting the man with hand and voice as he had quieted him countless times before. "Hush! I'll not let the animals get you, living or dead. Hush! now." Bruce clung to the doctor's gaunt young hands, whimpering like a frightened child, before he finally dropped again into a heavy slumber. With a long breath of relief Cashel crept from the tent.

Billy, coming up from the stream with a string of trout, hailed him anxiously. "Has he been bad agen?" he said, in a rasping whisper. Cashel nodded wearily.

"The animals again," he explained; "their eyes in the night. He's asleep now. Let's have our breakfast, Billy. I'm fairly worn out for want of food and rest. Guess I'll have to gag your precious relative for an hour to-night, and snatch a little sleep."

"I wonder you ain't done it long ago," said Billy gruffly. "I couldn't stand him an' his gabblin's night an' day 's you do. I can't see why you stayed to look after him, anyway." He glanced at the young man curiously. "Givin' up the gold fer the likes o' him, who'd tried ter shoot you an' all."

Cashel's tired face flushed a little under the shaggy, reddish hair. "I don't quite know how I did it myself, Billy," he answered, in a low voice. "But somehow I forgot that we were two men who hated each other, and remembered only that I was a doctor, and that he needed my help."

"Huh!" said Billy, in an indescribable tone.

"Here's the fish. Seven trout. An' I'm sure this 'un weighs 'most a pound."

"I don't know," said Cashel doubtfully. "D'you think so, Billy? He feels pretty light for a pound. Anyhow, they'll make us a jolly good breakfast. Where did you catch 'em?"

"I followed the strea n down," explained Billy, "where we've never been yet. It runs down in 'most a mile o' rapids to a big lake in a valley. I caught the trout in a pool washed deep by the scour o' the water. My! 'twas the clearest water I ever seen. I thought I was lookin' through a hole full o' clouds and fish, right to the blue sky at t'other side o' the world. But I bet yer we'd get land-locked salmon in that lake."

"Do you think so?" asked Cashel, with interest. "We must try, Billy. Salmon! We could dry some, like the Siwashes do. They'd help us out splendidly. Our stores are getting very low."

"You give him such a lot to eat," returned Billy, with some resentment. "He eats somethin' awful in 'tween times when he ain't queer; I'd keep him to them two tins o' corn beef."

Cashel grinned comprehendingly at the boy. "You think I'm going short?" he asked gently. Why——"

"I know y'are," interrupted Billy, in a voice that ended all argument. He was almost savagely devoted to Cashel.

"But we can't pull Bruce round on tinned beef," explained Cashel gravely. "He must have strengthening food in the intervals of the fever if we're to start home next week. The fever fits ought to pass off by then." He caught his breath in a sudden,

sharp sigh, and looked up at the wonderful shape of Œhultzœn, like a piled cumulus cloud, radiant in the morning. From those high slopes he had thought he would first see the crest of royal Samahl'to, like a star of promise in the dawn. Sometimes in these last dreary days he had found it impossible to realise that his golden hopes and dreams were ended for ever by his own action, and at his own cost. He found it impossible to realise that soon he would return to his old life—if his old life had still a place for him—penniless save for what the ponies would bring. This blank, hopeless, toiling future seemed at times more than he could face. But in a young man of his age and nature, courage dies hard; and Cashel never lost his.

"Yes, we must turn back to Chilko within a week," he said, smiling bravely at Billy with his tired eyes.

"You look all worn out," said Billy sharply. "Why don't you dope Bruce? You can't go on like this."

Cashel laughed aloud. "I've nothing to dope him with," he said. "I only brought three or four of the simplest drugs with me, and only two of them were any good at all to Bruce. I've had to let Nature work her own ends by her own slow ways, assisting her by a little chlorodyne. That's all gone now, so I want to get Bruce home as quickly as possible."

"What makes him go batty in 's head?" asked Billy.

"Illusions," answered Cashel smiling. "Hallucinations."

"That's seein' things as ain't there?" said Billy.

"Exactly," answered Cashel again, wondering at

the boy's persistence. "Like when he sees t animals coming round at night."

"Ah!" said Billy slowly. "Are you—sure—th ain't there—none o' them—for him to see?"

Cashel began to speak hastily, checked himself, a looked at Billy's unsmiling face. "What do yo know, Billy?" he asked at length.

"Come, an' I'll show," said Billy. "I only foun 'em this mornin' before I went fishin'." He l Cashel past the tent in silence; and on the edg of the spruce wood, where there was a stretch of so earth between two outcrops of granite, he stoppe Still in silence, he pointed to the ground; Cashel be and examined it.

"Bear tracks!" he exclaimed immediately.

"Measure them," Billy suggested, in an ominou voice.

Cashel laid his own hand beside the great clawe prints in the soft earth. Then he looked up at th boy with an excited face. But he read the answer t his unspoken question in Billy's eyes. "Yes," sai Billy, nodding, "grizzly, whopper. Come last night He glanced uneasily at the shadows of the spruces "I guess Bruce's beasts wasn't all 'lucinashuns," h went on. "Maybe that grizzly's watchin' us now."

"What luck!" cried Cashel in great excitement "What glorious luck! I've never been fond of shoot ing, Billy, but no sentimental considerations would prevent my trying a pot shot at a grizzly if I had a chance. My word, what luck!" He looked at Billy with some of his old whimsical humour. "You are not scared, are you?" he asked merrily.

Billy's face was not responsive. "You don't know

nothin' about grizzlies," he declared; "no one's never glad to have 'em around. I've heard about 'em. I knowed a Siwash oncet that said his prayers to grizzlies. They comes behind people an' squashes their skulls. They're "—he sought in his mind for a word—"they're bad medicine," he concluded, borrowing, perhaps, from Injun Tom, and frowning at the great tracks in the earth.

"Bad medicine's not bullet-proof," laughed Cashel.

"You don't know nothin' about grizzlies," persisted Billy, without a smile; "maybe he's watchin' us now. They comes up behind you"—he glanced over his shoulder—"an' squashes your head. When I seen these tracks this mornin', it give me a sinkin' feelin' in my stommick," he concluded gravely, "an' a creepin' in my back."

"Well," Cashel continued, in great excitement, "this afternoon I'm going down to that lake after salmon. And this evening I'm going to lie in wait for Mister Grizzly, 'bad medicine' or not."

"He'll come all right," answered Billy gloomily: "he'll come behind you an' squash your head. Don't ye get to foolin' with grizzlies."

"I'm going to fool with this one to some purpose," persisted Cashel vainglorioously. Billy grunted and was silent.

Cashel had a couple of hours' sleep, lying on sun-warmed spruce branches. And then he took his rod and started for the lake, leaving Billy and the gun to look after Bruce. Bruce, from the first, had accepte Billy's presence as a matter of course, showing neither pleasure nor resentment toward the untaught boy who had first aided, and then turned from him.

As the boy had told him, Cashel followed the stream for more than a mile before he caught sight of the lake, a flat shield of sapphire rimmed with the velvet green of spruce forest, clasped like a jewel in the hold of the mountains. He had seen scores of these mountain lakes, but their beauty never failed to make a fresh appeal to him. They were so lovely, so lonely, so untouched.

He turned from the brawling rapids that had guided him and struck through the spruces, crossing many moose-tracks on the way. At last he came out upon the beach of the lake, and looked down a sharply-shelving bank into water so clear that the shingle at the bottom seemed within reach of his hand. "I hope they're unsophisticated fish," he thought.

He walked along the bank until he came to a little cliff crowned with trees, beneath which the water was dark and deep and cool. And here, standing on a ribbon of white sand up to his ankles in the cold water, he cast his line with much difficulty. They were unsophisticated fish.

"This," said Cashel, mopping his scarlet face after half a hour's hard work with rod and landing-net, "this is not sport, it's slaughter. They're fairly hanging themselves on the hook. What in the world have I been doing? I'm wet up to my neck! That must have been when I was landing the second salmon, and fell in off this murderous little beach." He chuckled with pure pleasure, and again cast his line on the rippled water.

The sun was dipping towards the western mountains when Cashel finally folded up his rod and lifted his string of splendid fish. "I had no idea it was so late,"

he said to himself uneasily. "I hope the boy's all right. I must have lost all count of time. My word! I am wet."

He struck quietly into the spruces, where already a faint, beautiful twilight seemed to reign. Quickly skirting a rock he came suddenly upon a great high-shouldered brute, cropping grass in a marshy hollow. At sight of the man, the great ungainly beast snorted and vanished like a shadow or a puff of smoke, leaving Cashel gazing foolishly at the place where she had been. "Moose cow," he said thoughtfully; "on the whole, I'm rather glad she was not escorting a calf, for I have only my revolver and a patent collapsible fishing-rod."

He came out upon the rocky shore of the stream, and the music of the rapids greeted him pleasantly with the friendly roar of many voices. He had found the way down to the lake an easy one; but now, laden with fish, the great rock ledges he had scrambled down offered a more formidable barrier to his return, and would have done so had he been without the fish. Some of these great steps, that he had descended recklessly by a flying jump, he had now to go round. And before he was within earshot of the camp, the tall mountain peaks had taken the sun, and the valleys were given over to the wonderful amethyst twilight of the north.

Cashel turned from the stream, taking a short cut across a little hollow, and the bank behind him cut off the noise of the rapids, so that the blood left his face when he heard, very distinctly, the sound of a shot and a wild cry ahead.

"Billy's voice!" thought Cashel, a great dread

clutching at his heart. Had Bruce, in his delirium turned upon Billy—that queer, ignorant, conscienceless, faithful little vagabond whom he had grown to love? He dashed his fish down when he heard the shout, and hurried across the hollow, through the trees, and up the valley where the camp was, revolver in hand, more quickly, perhaps, than he had ever run in his life before.

Another shot and another tumult of yells told him that Billy, was, at least, living. He crashed through the last intervening trees, and leaped into the little clearing that held their camp.

At first the beautiful luminous twilight revealed nothing unusual. Then Cashel was aware of Billy, clinging like a monkey, in the swaying top of a spruce tree, and yelling in frantic terror. A black, confused heap upon the ground might or might not be Bruce and their outfit. And over it stood a great shape, snarling, doing its best to claw to shreds the strong, rough canvas of the tent. Of the ponies there was no sign.

"The grizzly!" said Cashel, and his heart stood still. The great brute turned its little fiery eyes upon him, hesitated, clawed again at the rent canvas, and then suddenly wheeled and charged down upon him after the manner of its kind, blind with red, reasonless rage.

Cashel stood quite still, feeling a curious pity for himself. No amount of revolver bullets would serve to stop a grizzly in full charge. It was all up. "It knocked the gun out o' me hand!" screamed Billy, in agony from the tree. "Run, run!" But Cashel knew it was too late to run. He closed his eyes,

"HE SAW BRUCE AIM AGAIN AND FIRE." [*p.* 105.

awaiting the crashing stroke of that steel-taloned paw.

He did not see the wild figure that rose from the ruins of the tent, snatched the gun from the ground, and stood with eyes blazing with fever, rocking upon his feet; but he heard the first shot, the thunderous snarl as the wounded bear spun round to view this new enemy, and he opened his eyes, stung from his momentary paralysis back to life and the love of life. He saw Bruce aim again and fire. The bear, wavering between its two enemies, plunged forward with a strange, hoarse cry of fury, tottered, fell, and lay still. Bruce stood for a moment, staggering. Cashel leaped across the great grey bulk from which the life had already gone, and dashed towards the man who had been his enemy; but he was not in time, for Bruce suddenly pitched forward, unconscious, at his very feet.

Cashel knelt beside him, and lifted the seemingly lifeless head on his knee; but it was some time before Bruce's eyes opened.

He saw the doctor's anxious face bent above him, and felt the strong young arms holding him. Looking upwards as he lay thus supported, a reluctant smile crept over his brutal face, transfiguring it.

"I'm—glad I was—in time," he said weakly, "though we ain't—quits yet—doc."

CHAPTER X

THE RETURN

"That's Khadintel," said Billy, pointing. "I thought he'd come in sight soon."

Cashel looked, and caught his breath sharply. It seemed impossible that he should be once more beholding that familiar crest. When he had last seen it, how different had been his thoughts and hopes! Then, he had looked forward to a golden future. Now, he scarcely knew what the next day might bring forth. From Chilko and its needs he had severed himself for ever. He dared not look before him, for the black-grey future almost shook his courage; nor dared he look behind to those mysterious hills which might hold—who knows?—many another Valley of the Star, shadowed with blood and hatred. Bruce, riding Sinker, glanced back at Cashel with a furtive curiosity not wholly unsympathetic. He guessed something of what must be passing in the young man's mind. But Cashel gave no further sign of what his thoughts might be after that quick intake of breath and long look at the familiar peak just uplifting itself upon the horizon. And they went on as swiftly as might be, in that silence men learn from the solitude of the hills.

They were all lean, gaunt, travel-worn, for the journey back had been a hard one. They had lived

almost wholly upon the fish they could catch in the mountain streams and the game they could shoot, and they had not been fortunate. They could have fared better had they been able to wait while Billy set his cunning traps and snares. But for this Cashel dared not spare the time. For Bruce, though free from the pain and fever that had at first racked him, grew weaker daily. Cashel feared that he had suffered some inward hurt which might at any moment declare itself and drag him down again to death. "It must be the hospital at Cascade for Bruce, and that as quickly as possible," thought Cashel. And for Billy? And for himself? He dared not think. And ahead, old Khadintel uplifted itself, a finger of reproach by day, a cloud of scorn by night, above the duties he had thrown aside, the post he had deserted.

As they drew nearer to Chilko, Cashel's thoughts grew more and more bitter and despairing. While they had been in the unfamiliar granite fastnesses of the eastern ranges, some of the glory of conquest, some of the joy of a spiritual victory, clung to Cashel's soul. But now, weary in mind and body, from his care of Bruce, under-fed, over-strained, he came face to face with a multitude of small sordid problems. How was he to live? What was he to find to do? Could he bear to live again in Chilko? What was he to do for Billy? And above all, what should he tell his mother?

"The truth," said Hugh Cashel; "the whole truth," he went on to himself, doggedly, wretchedly. "The whole truth, and nothing but the truth. And then she will never trust me again." And the thought shows that he had still much to learn. Day and night,

during the inexpressibly tedious days of their retur
he brooded over these questions. And Billy watche
him with faithful, adoring eyes, which love had touche
to understanding. He longed, this wise little urchi
for any event, any accident, which might turn th
young man's thoughts from this melancholy, hope
less brooding. But no incidents disturbed their hard
monotonous way. Even the weather was kind.

But on the evening of the day on which they had firs
sighted Khadintel, Billy had news for Cashel. H
told it when the fire was lighted, the camp made fo
the night, and Bruce asleep. He crept over softly t
Cashel's side, and touched his arm. "What is it
Billy?" asked the young doctor, who well knew tha
silent touch asking for his attention. "What i
it?" Billy jerked his head eastward.

"There's someone follerin' us," he whispered.

"How do you know?" answered Cashel listlessly.

"Two days ago," said the boy, frowning at the
indifferent voice, "two days ago I first guessed it. I
seen the sun glint on somethin' that moved, that
might 'a' bin a gun-barrel. I guess it's Injun Tom
Whoever 'tis, he's not keepin' more than five miles
behind us."

"How do you know?" asked Cashel again, looking
at Billy curiously. "I saw nothing."

"Maybe," said Billy, with a grin. "But I've seen.
Last night he, whoever 'tis, wasn't able to find dry
wood, an' I seen a little thread o' blue smoke from his
fire. 'Sides, I feel as there's some one on our trail.
Don't ye know the feel o' that? 'Tis like knowin'
that some one's in a dark room with you when you
can't see nothin'."

'Why do you think it's Bruce's crony?" asked Cashel in a low voice, for the sick man had moved uneasily in his sleep.

"Who else'd follow us?" exclaimed Billy. "I guess it's Injun Tom, wonderin' what we're doin' with Bruce. But I'm wonderin' what he's doin' away from the valley o' gold so soon. P'r'aps he didn't find it. P'r'aps it ain't there."

"Oh, what's the use of wondering?" said Cashel wearily. "At any rate, the gold's not for us. Go to sleep, Billy."

So they slept, both of them, quietly enough, while the great pure stars sailed above them and sank behind Khadintel. And in a cold, golden dawn they awoke—awoke to find the man Bruce gone, they knew not where; and Sinker had gone with him.

"Lemme go after him," cried Billy, raging almost to the point of tears. "Lemme go after him with the gun. I'll not bring him back, but I'll bring Sinker. That's his gratitude! Oh, lemme go after him with the gun!" But Cashel stayed him with that stern, hopeless, weary look that now was his usual expression.

"No, Billy, he said, "we'll let him go his own way, and we'll go ours. We'll not think of him any more, nor trouble about him. I'm sorry to lose Sinker. But Bruce is kind to horses, kinder than he is to women. Let him go his own way in his own fashion."

"I knew some one was follerin' us," Billy burst out again. "An' 'twas Injun Tom, like I thought 'twas. An' now that—skunk, he's gone off ter join Injun Tom, leavin' you who'd give up all fer him. An' took

our pony too. If I seen him," said Billy, shaking
rage, "I'd choke him, so I would, an' never k
I done it."

A smile flashed in Cashel's eyes for a moment, a
looked at the thin, queer figure, quivering with f
"Never mind, Billy," he said gently, "we'll let hin
his own way, and we'll go [illegible]—whatever it
prove to be. Such men as Bruce, I fancy, are not
enough stuff to bear the burden of gratitude. I th
all along I expected some such ending." He pa
Billy's heaving shoulders with a very tender ha
And suddenly Billy seized the said hand roughly,
with a curious movement rubbed his brown ch
upon it, as a dog rubs against the hand of its mas
Then h withdrew again into his usual wild reserve
if half-ashamed of that savage caress; but his e
were eloquent.

"Ain't you even goin' to look fer him?" he as
gruffly.

"No," said Cashel, "we'll not even look for hi
Billy. I think, with you, that he's slipped off
join Injun Tom. And I don't want to think anythi
more about it."

They had their breakfast of little freshly caught bro
trout in silence, while Sam neighed dismally for Sink
his lost brother in hardship and peril. And th
they started off on their way. Hour by hour the we
known crest of Khadintel uplifted itself a little high
in the sky. Day by day it grew a little nearer, a lit
less shadowy. When they could see the Ridge, th
knew that their journey was nearly done.

"An' it's time too," thought Billy anxiously, "
I'll bet the doc's goin' to keel over 's soon as we ge

back." During these last few days Billy had taken the lead in everything, Cashel passively following him and relying upon him. The young man seemed daily to sink deeper in a sort of lethargy of body, mind, and spirit.

"If he's goin' to break down," thought Billy, "I wonder wherever I'm goin' to take him, or what I'm goin' to do with him? There's lots o' folks in Cl..lko thinks kindly of him yet. But he's a sight too proud to take kindness willingly from the folk he ...red away from. I wonder where we'll go?"

He asked this question timidly of Cashel, the young man shook his head. "There's no one ...uld go to now," he said; "I don't know what we'll do, Billy."

A thought came to Billy, and his eyes lightened. "Come ter my cave," he said eagerly. "You 'member I told about it that evenin' you fixed me arm? Come to the cave under the Ridge on Khadintel! It's good 'n' warm 'n' dry, an' if any ba'rs have got inter it we'll chase 'em out. There's room inside .t fer old Sam too."

Cashel looked at him with an express n the ... could not read. "Thank you, Billy," he said gravely, "if you can put up with me and Sam, I'll be very ... to come. I should like nothing better than to stay ... your cave awhile. I've nowhere else to go."

"We'll have a swell time," said Billy, in great excitement; "it's a dandy cave. There's a little stick-up finger o' rock near the mouth that we can tie Sam to. An' behind him, in the back o' the cave, we'll fix up a place for ourselves with boards an' branches. It gets kinder smoky when we light a fire, but

that's nothin'." So it was arranged between two.

There came a day when Khadintel seemed withi stone's throw, and they knew their journey was but over. "We'll sleep in my cave t'night," said H proudly. Then he glanced back at the solemn east ranges with a sigh.

"I wonder how Œhultzœn's looking now," Cashel absently. Sam sniffed the wind and neigh

"The wind's west," said Billy, "I guess old Sam smells Chilko. As ter Œhultzœn, we'll never fo him, doc. The Siwashes has a sayin' that somethin' like this: 'Whoever sees Œhultzœn in dawn, will think of him even in love and death.' will be that way with us."

"Yes," said Cashel sadly, "it will be that way w us. What's that about 'An aspiration fixed, a made stone?' That's Œhultzœn."

"I dunno 'bout that," answered Billy, "but hill as real an' as different as folks to them what kn 'em. I wouldn't mind chuckin' pebbles at Khadintel there; but I felt like speakin' in a whis when I seen Œhultzœn."

Simultaneously they glanced back, as if seeking a sight of the great peak they had never reach Each met the other's glance with a complete und standing, bred of their long comradeship. "So day," said Billy in a low voice, avoiding another dir look at Cashel, "some day—when we've got no g nor nothin' to worry about—let's go—and have anot look at Œhultzœn."

Cashel's only answer was to quote Billy's own wo softly. "'Whoever sees Œhultzœn in the dawn, w

think of him even in love and death.'" Again they plodded on in silence. After half an hour or so, Billy spoke suddenly.

"I guess," he said gruffly, "that the hills has got inter us like the whoopin' cough." And Cashel's wistful eyes assented.

Late in the afternoon they came out above the broad valley which separated them from Khadintel, and of which every tree and stream was familiar. Cashel, looking up at the Ridge, thought of the day he had stood there and dreamed of the gold. So much had passed since then. He felt so much older, so much more hopeless, so much more tired. The knowledge that, at the last stern parting of the ways of good and evil, he had chosen good, failed now to uplift him above the sordid anxieties, the bodily weariness he endured.

Once more, ere they descended into the valley, they looked back along their trail. "Well," said Billy, with a long breath, "it's over. All over an' done. I wisht —I wisht ye'd let me go back and get Sinker. That skunk! But it's all done now."

"Yes," said Cashel, beginning to lead Sam down the rough path, "yes, it's all over and done. I come back poorer than I went, Billy." He took no notice of Billy's fierce reference to Bruce.

"Ah!" said Billy comfortably. "That's the best o' havin' nothin' at all, like me. Then ye can't get no poorer."

They crossed the valley slowly, pausing now and then for Sam's benefit, for the grass was long and sweet. The sun sank lower, and the shadow of Khadintel was heavy upon them. Heavy also were

the shadows in Cashel's heart, heavy and grey his thoughts.

Twilight was almost upon them when they gained Billy's cave beneath the Ridge. The opening of it was deeply sunken among stones, and boarded over roughly with planks worn by weather to the grey of the lichened granite around them. These planks Billy pulled aside cautiously. "But there ain't no b'ars been here," he said, "or Sam 'd have smelt 'em."

He vanished into the cave, found a battered lantern, and lighted it. "Everythin's all right," he called proudly to Cashel; "come an' bring Sam. There ain't no place fer him outside."

Cashel obeyed, and led in Sam, who came docilely. He found himself in a dry, warm rock-chamber some ten feet high, twelve feet long, and of irregular width. It was narrowest at the end, forming a sort of recess; and this was thickly floored with dry pine needles, breathing the very incense of the forest. Two soap boxes, a barrel, a couple of old horse-cloths, two old tin saucepans, and Indian fishing-spear, an old pair of moccasins, and some other characteristic odds and ends were all that the cave contained. Yet it had an air of wild comfort attractive to any one not too far from youth.

Billy set the lantern on the barrel, tied Sam to the finger of rock, unsaddled him, and covered him with a blanket. "You sit on the biggest box, while I gets supper," he said importantly to Cashel. "I guess we needn't mind about the light showing to-night." From some mysterious recess he produced hay for Sam, biscuits in a tin box, and a piece of ancient cheese. "Everythin's just as I left it," he said contentedly.

"It's a jolly place," said Cashel approvingly. "I'd no idea you could be so comfortable here. I'll make it my headquarters as long as you let me. Till I can find something to do."

"I'll go and see about sellin' Sam to-morrer," said Billy, "an' then you'll have a little money. Oh, things ain't so bad but they might be worse. I feels awful mad, though, when I think o' him stealin' Sinker and cuttin' off."

Cashel listened and watched, grateful in his weariness to have reached even this strange haven, a smile in his tired eyes. But Billy's queer consolations could not lighten his heart.

He ate the food Billy had prepared, and then threw himself on the sweet pine needles to rest. Billy blew the lantern out, and went and sat on a stone at the mouth of the cave, communing with himself. Sam stamped softly, and filled the cave with a warm, friendly smell of horse. The stars looked in upon Cashel as with shining eyes, more beautiful than plains-people ever see them. A little bar of cloud rose from the east and floated slowly past the stars. "Perhaps it's from Œhultzœn," thought Cashel drowsily. And before the shining cloud had floated out of sight, he was deeply asleep.

He slept all night, motionless, dreamless, upon the sweet pine needles. Billy crept in, saw how it was, smiled well pleased, and made himself comfortable elsewhere with a blanket. At the first pale beginning of dawn, Billy awoke, and slipped out softly to get water. But Cashel did not stir.

He was aroused at length by warm, triumphant beams of sun shining full upon his face: by a tumult

of shrill, familiar neighs and squeals; by a confusion of voices outside the cave. He sprang to his feet lightly, feeling his strength in him once more. But Billy ran into the cave before he could leave it.

The boy's face was pale, his eyes were shining excitedly.

"It's them two," he cried—"it's them two! No, ye needn't touch th' gun. It's them all right, but this time, doc, they're comin' as friends. This time they mean ye well."

"Ay, we do that," said a rough familiar voice outside.

CHAPTER XI

FROM THE VALLEY OF GOLD

Cashel stepped from the cave, doubting his own sense of hearing, and faced Bruce—Bruce, with hand extended, meeting the doctor's astonished gaze with level eyes—eyes grown large with suffering but honest, full of some kindly intent. Behind him stood another man, taller than he, slim and dark, with all the wild grace occasionally found in those men in whose veins runs blood both of the white and red races. And this man led Sinker by the bridle.

As Cashel appeared, the pony clattered forward with a squeal, and rubbed against his sleeve. And for a moment he stood silent, patting the faithful beast, and looking Bruce full in the face. But the man's eyes spoke more eloquently than his tongue could do. Cashel's hand frankly met his, and received a mighty grip. As their hands fell apart, both men drew a breath of relief. Not yet did Cashel understand. But already he felt lighter of heart.

"Well, doc," said Bruce, "we've much tc tell ye, Tom and me. But I guess I'll have ter do th' talking. So, if ye don't mind, I'll set down."

"Ah!" said Cashel. "You're feeling worse? Billy, go and get one of the boxes and a blanket." And upon this Bruce rested gratefully. He nodded slowly

as his eyes met Cashel's anxious ones fixed upo
him.

"Ay," he said faintly, "ye was always good ter m
doc. Even that day ye knocked me down in yer offi
ye did right, and I bear ye no grudge, now. I wa
diff'rent then. From th' time I was nought but a ki
every one's been again' me, an' me again' every on
But ye're a white man, Doctor Cashel, a white ma
all through. An'—an' I like ter act white by ye, a
the long last, before I—go."

"Go?" said Cashel gently, touched by the dum
appealing eyes of the man who had been his enemy
"Go?"

"Yes," said Bruce sombrely, "I doubt I'm to go
To the horspital at Cascade first; and then, maybe
further." His haggard face twisted as if with sudde
pain, and he glanced up at Injun Tom, standing silen
and attentive beside him.

"Ay," Bruce went on, turning again to the docto
in that new, infinitely sad voice of his, "'tis a black
outlook, and I've lived a black life. I'll not b
whinin' now I've ter face the end. Maybe I'd
'a' lived straight if it hadn't been fer the liquor
Nay, I don't ask nothin', but I'd like ter do righ
by ye before I—go. An' Tom here, he'd like i
too."

But Cashel was thinking only of Bruce's suffering
of Bruce's hopelessness. Suddenly through his mind
there flashed a memory. Some one had once told him
of a painting found in the catacombs of some where
the earliest Christians had worshipped—a painting
that showed the Saviour, the compassionate Shepherd
bearing in His arms not a pure-fleeced lamb, but a

fierce black goat. And the thought of the picture and its teaching struck home to his heart. He laid a hand on Bruce's shoulder.

"Please God," he said earnestly, "you've many a day to live, and live straight. But if not—God knows I'm not fit to preach, but it's never too late to be sorry. Think of the thief on the cross—at the last moment."

"Ah!" said Bruce simply, "I never heard o' him, you see. An' I'm too weary, like, to learn now. But I'm sorry for all I done, an' done wrong. Much there is that it's all too late ter undo. But I can undo some o' the wrong I done you. Ye're a white man, Doctor Cashel. Can ye guess why I've come here?"

Cashel shook his head.

"Well," said Bruce, "first, 'tis ter return th' pony. I on[illegible]crered him fer a few days, fer a good purpose. An' now fer th' other reason. Doc, Tom here found the gold—Lyon's valley of gold, that he left ter you."

"Ah!" said Cashel, looking from one to the other.

"Yes," said Bruce, watching him intently, "and 'twas far from all Lyon cracked it up ter be. Nuggets an' grains o' gold there was, lyin' thick behind the boulders in the bed o' the stream. But that stream that washes down the gold slips out from the front of a black cliff. An' the main vein lies somewhere hid in the innards o' Sumthl'to, where man'll never reach it, maybe. But all the gold there was Tom he brought away. An' here 'tis."

Suddenly Tom produced a weighty bag of canvas,

and laid it, without a word, in Cashel's hands. An silence fell on the little group.

Cashel stared at the bag, bewildered, amazed. Here after all, he held fortune in his hands. The gold h had sinned for, the gold he had suffered for, the gol he had prayed for, it was there, laid in his hands b the man for whose sake he had sacrified it. He fel amazed, overwhelmed, by the suddenness and unex pectedness of the action. Yet his true heart taugh his brain what to do.

He held out the bag again to Bruce. "Not the whole of it, Bruce," he said firmly, "but a third share if you like."

Reluctantly, Bruce took the bag again. After a silence—"I'll do your will, doc," he said in a low voice, "for Tom's sake, who but did my biddin' all through. But for my own, it's truth that I'd rather ye'd have the whole." And Cashel, meeting his eyes, had no reason to doubt his words.

"Thirds or nothing," said Cashel again, in a cheerful, matter-of-fact voice. "You pay in a third share of the profits to my credit at the bank. All right: that's settled. Shut up, Billy. Now, I want to know when you're going to Cascade. No more about the gold, please, Bruce."

But Bruce had him by the hand again, and Injun Tom's wild eyes softened and glowed. "I can't say more than that ve're the whitest man I ever knowed," said Bruce, "an' the straightest. I'll do yer will, 'cause it is yer will. Yes, I'm goin' now to Tom's shack for a rest. And to-morrow he takes me down ter Cascade by river. Nay, I want nothin'. I'd tell ye if I did." He leaned upon Tom's shoulder, breath-

"CASHEL STARED AT THE BAG, BEWILDERED." [p. 120

ing heavily. "When I left ye in the hills," he said dreamily, "ter meet Tom here that was follerin' us, an' tell him what ter do, I hoped I'd hold out till I'd set things straight betwixt us. The shot that saved ye from the b'ar did no more than wipe out that shot that near killed ye by the fire. But now I done yer will in this, I can shake ye by the hand, Doctor Cashel, an' wish ye well." He gripped Cashel's hand again, and turned as if to go.

"But surely I can do something," cried the young man, distressed, touched, "something to make things easier, Bruce?"

Again Bruce shook his head. "Nay," he answered sombrely, "there's nothin'. I doubt I'm all but done with any needs, thank ye kindly. But even if I go ter death, I know ye go to a happy life. The folk o' Chilko's all kind feelin' towards ye, doc. They know what led ye away, an' they know the hand I had in the dirty business. Ay, they've a doctor there from Cascade, but he's a rough sawbones, an' they hates him worse 'n p'ison. They'll give ye a warm welcome home."

"Thank you, Bruce," said Cashel gravely, understanding the fulness of the man's restitution. Once more they shook hands, and then Bruce turned hurriedly away, and went down the ledge, leaning upon his comrade. And Cashel stood quite still, watching them until they passed from sight.

When they were gone Cashel shook himself and pressed his hands to his head with the action of a man awakened from sleep.

"Well?" he said to Billy, manifold conflicting tones in his voice.

"Well!" returned Billy, non-committally.

"Am I awake or sleeping?" asked Cashel hurri
"Is it true? Is it possible that Bruce—Bruc
has actually given me back what was really
own?"

"Not all of it," grunted Billy, in an aggrie
voice, "'cause ye was soft 'n' wouldn't take it.
he's brung back old Sinker anyway."

"So he has," said Cashel, "bully for him! W
not be obliged to sell the ponies now, plucky li
beasts. No, I don't know how much a third share
the gold will amount to, and I don't know that
greatly care! But—the gold—that I'd given up
laid in my hands at last! Such a cold, heavy weigh
And the thought of all it had caused, and of all
came near causing, stood between me and it." H
gazed at the glorious eastern peaks with wide, gra
eyes, forgetting Billy's presence. "Plenty—peace
honour"—he whispered softly. "Thank God! Plent
for me and all of mine; and no shadow upon it sav
the shadow of repentance, which is surely none
Peace, through Bruce's gratitude. Honour, throug
the strength that was given me at the parting of th
ways." Something in this way ran his solemn
thoughts. Then he turned to Billy again, with
sudden smile. "And 'a warm welcome home,'" he
said; "Billy, I believe that's what I was longing for
To-morrow we go to Chilko, and—and see. And then
we go to Cascade."

"Ah!" said Billy softly, "and perhaps now—
some day—ye'll think of goin' to have another look at
Œhultzœn?"

"And have ye heard all the news about young Cashel?" said Mrs. Jordan confidentially. "They say he's taken Billy ter live with him for good, an' that the boy'll sleep nowheres but in the wood-shed or on the steps. 'Deed now, Liza, that's truth. An' that he's set up a pair o' ponies I seen with my own eyes. He must ha' made his pile, spite of all."

"Pshaw, now, Sadie," answered Mrs. Macmurtry, "'tis all old news. He'd take no more than a third share from Injun Tom an' that Bruce brute—Lord forgive 's, an' he a changed man, they say, at death's door in Cascade 'orspittle! That's the doctor's doin'."

"Ay, I know," said Mrs. Jordan eagerly. "Fine, wasn't it now? I'm not meanin' the death's door, but the change. Fancy that lad givin' up the last chancet at the gold to stay an' save Bruce! Well, I thought I was real mad at him, cuttin' off without nary a word or sign after some crazy valley o' gold. But when I seen him at the door three days agone, smilin', half proud an' half humble, like—when he ses, 'I've come back, Mrs. Jordan. Have ye a welcome an' fergiveness for me?' I ups an' I lets out a yell, an' I ses, 'Thank God fer that, an' let there be no thought o' fergiveness needed nor took,' an' I grabbed him by the hands——"

"Round the neck, ye mean," said Mrs. Macmurtry, shaking all over. "Jordan told on ye, Sadie—an' ye with yer hands all soapy from the tub."

"Ay," cried Mrs. Jordan defiantly, "an' not fer the first time neither. I thought o' the night he'd saved us our Loreena, an' I done it before I thought. Eh? Think o' all he's done fer us, Liza, an' then say 'f we

need to talk much o' pardonin' him because he fa
us oncet? 'Twas but a boy's trick, that we've
thank that—that we've ter thank Bruce for.
I hear 'tis straight between 'em now, so I'll
nought."

"Did ye know he's sent for his mother ter come
keep h.. ..e fer him?" said Mrs. Macmurtry. "
'twas only the trick of a colt that the harness weigh
on too heavy. There's scarce a house in Chilko th
he's not saved from the presence o' the Angel o' Dea
I ses with you an' all of us—'Thank God he's ba
an' let bygones be bygones.'"

"I sent up some jelly fer him to-day," said M
Jordan, leaning farther over the fence; "he's looki
real peaked and thin. We'll have ter feed him
before his mother sees him."

"Ay, we'll that," agreed Mrs. Macmurtry cordiall
"or she'd fair take a fit. But he's tough's a saplin
An' plumpin' out already. I'll be satisfied when h
chirks a bit more. He ain't near as uppity and plun
downright as he used ter be, an' that I don't like. M
lands! How he used ter bully us! 'Ye handle a sic
lad as if ye was twirlin' a rollin-pin,' he ses ter m
oncet over my 'Gustus." She gurgled merrily. "My
we was mad at him! But 'twas all 'long o' tha
Bruce."

"Did ye hear Bruce 'd asked fer his wife?" sai
Mrs. Jordan. "Ay, he did! An' Doctor Cashel, h
took her down ter Cascade with him. An' she in
yaller hat an' laylock gloves!"

"She was always a shif'less slattern, Lily Bruce,"
said Mrs. Macmurtry, "but the p'int is, Bruce askin'
fer her. My! he's changed. But I hear Billy 'll have

nought ter say ter him, changed or not! Eh! 'tis a queer world. 'Gustus, if ye teaze the cat, I'll tell the doctor what a bad boy ye are. Quit it now, this minute. Doctor Cashel 'll have no pep'mints fer ye next time ye burn yer hand if I tell him ye're a bad boy! Well, I smell my pies cookin', Sadie. 'Any one 'd grow thin lon.in' fer yer pies,' ses the doctor t' me yesterday. So I've an apricot an' an apple cookin' fer him now."

"I must be goin' too," answered Mrs. Jordan breathlessly, "or I'll be late with dinner. Jim Carter ses that Doctor Cashel's responsible for more spiled meals in Chilko durin' the last week than's been known in a year before." She glanced up the straggling street, and then grasped her friend's arm with unnecessary violence. "There's the doctor now!" she cried. "Ridin' too. Ain't he swell? Bet he's been ter Morgan's over Cissy's cough."

Cashel, riding Sinker, came down the street quickly. When he was abreast of the two women he drew rein and lifted his cap gaily. "Eh!" cried Mrs. Macmurtry in her big jolly voice, "ye ook a sight fer sore eyes, doctor! Have ye been courtin'?"

Cashel flushed and laughed. No," he called from the saddle, "but I've had a letter from my mother. She's coming next month. And—I thought you'd like to know—Bruce has taken a turn for the better, and they think he'll pull through. Good mornin'." Sinker loped away down the street, and the two women watched in silence.

"Well," said Mrs. Macmurtry, "we may have somethin' to fergive an' ferget—I don't say we ain't

—but what I do say is, 'Thank God fer Doctor Cashel!'"

And that thanksgiving was echoed in Chilko for many a year to come.

THE END

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