



CHATTERBOX.

NO THOROUGHFARE.



“Oh, monsieur, look at Mademoiselle Val!”

WANDERERS IN THE WAR.

By A. A. METHLEY.

(Continued from page 287.)

IT seemed at first sight as if a funeral were taking place there under the laden apple-trees, for old George stood knee-deep in a narrow trench, busily shovelling out spadeful after spadeful of earth, and beside him on the dewy grass was lying a small iron-bound wooden chest. Marie, ready dressed for the journey in cloak and hood, was standing close by with the baby in her arms and with tears streaming down her white face. The other children, two boys and a girl, were huddled together in an awestruck, bewildered little group. Everything could be seen clearly in the light of a lantern which had been hung on a gnarled apple-bough above old George's head.

Thud, thud, thud: the heavy fall of the clods of earth made a dreary, monotonous sound, and they seemed to echo the muffled thunder of the German guns, which could still be heard away in the distance.

'Suzanne,' Val whispered, 'what are they doing? Is anything the matter?' But before Suzanne could answer, old George threw out his last spadeful of earth and straightened his shoulders.

Marie looked up at the same moment, and, seeing the new-comers, came forward with a rather tremulous smile of recognition. 'Ah, Suzanne,' she said, 'have you come to bid us farewell? Or is it that you go with us, after all? To think that we should have to leave our home; but these are sad times.'

'Sad times, indeed.' Old George Bernard echoed the words as he clambered stiffly out of the hole in which he was standing. 'And we are having a burial, as you see, before we go; hiding away our valuables where the Germans will not find them.'

And then he knelt down on the wet grass, unlocked the iron-clamped box with an old-fashioned key, and flung back its lid.

Marie took down the lantern from the tree above. 'It is all our little treasures, you see,' she said, sadly. 'We could not take them with us, for the box is heavy, and doubtless, too, we shall have to travel in rough company. There may be dishonest folk among these Belgians who come to take refuge in France. So we bury the things here. Some day, maybe, we shall return.'

She swung the lantern low over the box, and as Suzanne, Roger, and Val peered into it, they saw canvas bags and the bright gleam of silver. All the heirlooms and valuables of the family were there: a silver candlestick, some thin worn spoons, a gold watch that was almost as big as a turnip, two or three medals, a massive locket, and the linked chain that had belonged to Marie's grandmother, and that she had worn so proudly on saints' days and festivals.

'Of course we shall return, and that soon,' old George spoke almost harshly, 'and meanwhile the things will be safe enough here.' And then he closed the box, relocked it, and lowered it into the hole. As he began to shovel in the earth, Marie turned away with a sob, the baby clutched tightly in her arms. Suzanne and the children followed her to the house, leaving the man to finish his task alone.

Val felt as if she could have sobbed too, and even Roger was conscious of a strange lump in his throat

when they stood in the dismantled living-room of the farm, with around them all the litter and rubbish of the hurried preparations for flight. On the table was a coffee-pot and some cups and plates that there had not been time to wash. The floor was untidy with straw and scraps of paper, and the embers were already growing cold and grey on the wide hearth.

Marie stirred the dying fire into a glow, and then, having made the guest sit down, listened while Suzanne explained their errand. She agreed willingly to the proposal that Val and Roger should accompany them on the journey. 'Ah, yes, the little English lady should go with them, and her brother too. It was right, quite right that they should leave St. Denis at once, but—' and then she paused and, with puckered brows, glanced rather dubiously at the boy and girl who were standing with her own children.

Roger was wearing his English tweeds, which Suzanne had cleaned and mended, and his straw hat with the ribbon of his school, and Val had her knitted rose-coloured coat over her blue serge frock, and a wide-brimmed panama. It could not be denied that they looked an incongruous pair among the group of little peasants. Marie thought for a moment, and then began to speak to Suzanne in a low voice, one brown hand emphasising the meaning of her words. 'Monsieur and mademoiselle should go with them, of course; but their clothes—had Suzanne thought of that? People would wonder and ask questions, there might be difficulties. But she had things upstairs, garments that had belonged to her sister's children, and that were put away until Robert and Paul and Pierre were big enough to wear them. Perhaps they would never need them now, who could tell, and if the young gentleman and lady would wear them—'

Val's quick ears caught the drift of this speech, and she gave a little exclamation of delight and excitement. 'Oh, yes, yes; that will be splendid! Roger, she says that we must be disguised—that it will be safer if we look like a French boy and girl. Oh, what a lovely, lovely plan!'

'Why? I don't see what's the matter with our things.' Roger was not altogether pleased with the new plan, but he agreed to it after a little more explanation. Certainly he and Val did not want to be conspicuous among the crowd of peasant fugitives, and, as Marie said, it would be easy to take their own things with them and change back again when they reached a large town, where there would be trains running, and the first rush and confusion of the flight would be at an end.

Marie lit a couple of candles, and they went upstairs to an attic, where the out-grown clothes were stored in a large wooden chest. Bundle after bundle of the things were taken out, and it was evident that, although well worn, they were all scrupulously clean and neatly mended.

'These are the largest—they belonged to my nephew, Jerome, and will fit monsieur,' Marie said; and then Roger went off, feeling rather foolish, with a pile of garments that included corduroy trousers, a loose black smock, and a peaked cap.

'And now for me,' cried Val, rummaging in the chest; but then difficulties arose, for the only girl's clothes were much too small, and all her efforts to struggle into them were in vain. Scissors were produced, and tucks and gathers undone; but it was quite useless, and Val was obliged to face the

horrible prospect of having to wear her own clothes on the journey, while Roger enjoyed the romance and distinction of a disguise. It was suggested that one of Marie's gowns might be utilised, and the two women went off into another room, leaving the little girl alone with the chest of clothes and the pair of scissors.

And then suddenly a brilliant idea flashed into Val's head, an idea which almost took her breath away with its daring, for she had remembered a conversation which she had had with Roger a few days ago, when he had been describing his adventures with Jules, and she had said how she wished she had been with them in the long tramp through the forest.

'My dear girl, you could never have done it.' There had been a touch of scorn in Roger's voice as he spoke. 'It must be an awful bother to be a girl. Just think how your skirts and your hair would have been getting in the way and catching on the bushes all the time.'

Hair and skirts! Val searched in the box once more, and this time it did not take her long to find what she wanted. Then she took up the scissors and gathered all her long, curly hair into one hand.

A few minutes later, Roger, after sundry shouts from below, hurried upstairs to say that George and the donkey-cart were ready.

He found Suzanne and Marie staring with horrified amazement at a boyish little figure that was standing in the middle of the room with arms akimbo, and with a sunburnt straw hat pulled well down over an untidy shock of yellow hair.

'Oh, monsieur, look at her!—look at Mademoiselle Val!' wailed Suzanne; and then Val thrust her hands deep into her trousers pockets and smiled merrily into her brother's astonished face. You must say "Monsieur Val" now, please,' she cried. 'And oh, Roger, do say that you think it's a good plan. Now I shall be able to climb hills and get through the bushes just as well as you or Jules.'

CHAPTER XII.

It was nearly four o'clock when the heavily laden donkey-cart lumbered away from the door of the farm, for there were so many things to be done at the last moment, so many directions to give to Suzanne, and so many little household odds and ends that, after all, could not be left behind.

The actual departure was not quite so sad as it might have been, for Val's escapade had the effect of cheering every one up. The Bernard children shouted with delight when the boyish little figure appeared among them, old George's grim face relaxed into a smile, and even poor Marie, who was broken-hearted at the thought of leaving her home, could hardly help laughing through her tears when she saw 'Monsieur Val' perched on the front of the donkey-cart with a bundle of hay at her back, the black cat in her arms, and a wicker crate full of tightly packed yellow hens under her feet.

'Adieu, au revoir, bon voyage.' Suzanne stood at the gate to see them go, and Val waved her hat; but, although the farewells rang out cheerily enough, when once they were really off, the spirits of the fugitives sank again, and their voices died away into silence.

It was very still and gloomy, there in the forest, and a sudden chill had crept into the air with the coming of dawn. Everything looked strange and ghost-like in the dim, grey light.

Old George walked ahead by the donkey, a gaunt,

melancholy figure, with his shoulders bowed, and his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Roger trudged at his side, and the little boys ran behind, each carrying a bundle, which contained some special treasure of his own. Four-year-old Babette sat beside Val on the cart, and last of all came Marie, weeping bitterly, under the shelter of the heavy cloak, which was pulled forward over her head, and covered the baby in her arms.

From far away beyond the wooded hills could still be heard the dull mutter of the German guns, and that sound, distant as it was, seemed to hurry the footsteps of the travellers, and urge them forward, as if they were being hunted through the forest by some huge, growling beast.

After a time, however, perhaps because the light breeze veered to the south, the muffled thunder died away, and then suddenly the sun rose, and the dark mysterious woodland became a dew-spangled fairy-land. Every one breathed more freely, birds began to sing in the bushes, and before long the laughter and merry voices of the children were heard once more.

Val soon got tired of her place on the jolting car, and then she walked with her brother and George Bernard, translating the questions of the one and the answers of the other, so that Roger soon knew all about the plans for the journey.

They were to go west, or rather south-west, for in George's opinion the danger of invasion would come from the east, as it had done forty-four years ago, and by keeping to the narrow lanes and byways which he knew well, it would be possible for to-day, at least, to avoid high roads, which by all accounts were crowded with fugitives, and almost impassable.

'To-morrow it will be different,' he said. 'The first rush may be over then, and we shall be near a railway. You, monsieur, and your sister will be able to go on by train, and as for the rest of us, I have a sister who lives at Rheims, and we can stay with her till the war is over.'

Roger agreed willingly in these arrangements, and before long, at about seven o'clock, a halt was made, and Marie heated coffee, and prepared a meal under the trees.

(Continued on page 302.)

THE VENTURESOME CHICKS.

A SPECKLED Hen her brood would call—
Such yellow, downy things;
Thirteen there were (she'd hatched them all),
With tiny legs and wings.

The mother's heart was full of pride
To see her young ones grow;
And where she went, close at her side
They followed in a row.

One day she took them near the lake,
When, to her great dismay,
Into its depths their way they take,
And gaily swim away!

She shrieked and squawked and rushed about
In agony of mind:
'They'll all be lost, without a doubt;
How can they succour find?'

'Come back, my chicks; you'll all be drowned!
Oh, dearie, dearie me!

Such madness was there ever found,
Such imbecility?

Yet all her cries and tears were vain;
They'd vanished from her sight;
Her mother-heart was full of pain;
No more the sun shone bright.

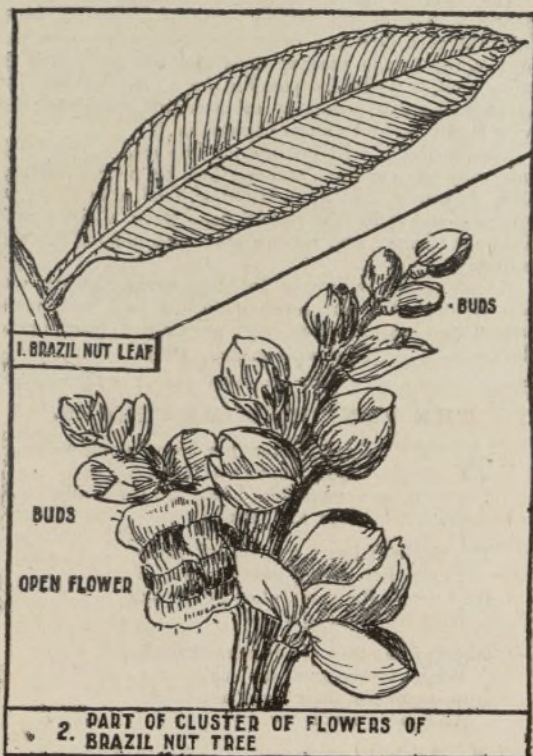
Yet safely soon they all returned,
Amid her joyful 'clucks';
The little chicks o'er whom she yearned
Were thirteen little ducks.

F. LE N. BOWER.

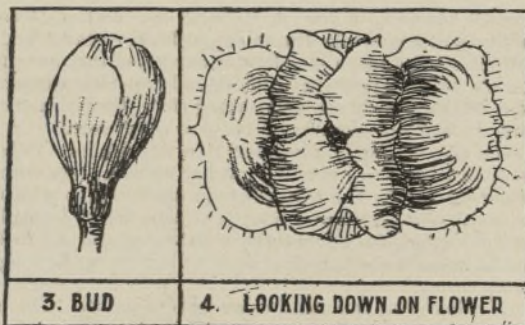
FRUITS FROM ACROSS THE SEAS.

III.—THE BRAZIL NUT.

SOME years ago I had a very strange experience when seeking information about the Brazil Nut. I was commissioned to design a school picture on the Brazil nut. It was to depict all the details of the growth of the nut, and also to contain a drawing of a Brazil nut tree. Well, I visited libraries and museums, and other places, where I fairly easily got together a mass of information and sketches, but nowhere could I find a picture of a tree! I obtained an interview with the Brazilian Consul, and I visited all kinds of people

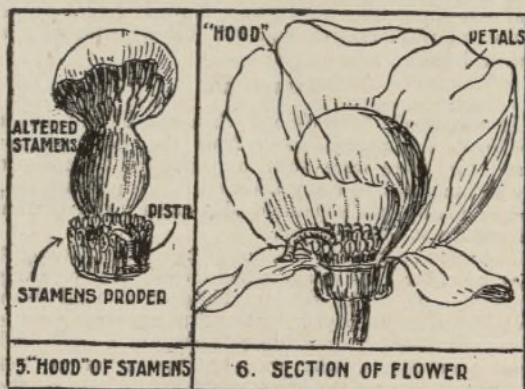


who might be able to give me the information as to where I could get hold of a picture. The amusing part about all the interviews was that, as soon as I asked for information about a Brazil nut tree, the people interviewed always did, and said, the same thing! They placed their hands as though clasping some large ball-



like object and said, 'Well, you know, the nuts are contained in a large sort of cannon ball.' Here I would stop them and say, 'Oh yes! I know all that part about the nuts, but what is the tree like?' This always 'stumped' them, and I really thought it would stump me too!

But at last, after long searching, I found what I wanted at the Economic Museum at Kew Gardens (where most things about trees and plants can be discovered). I found a photograph of a tree, and read that it is a forest tree of very hot countries, viz., Guiana, Venezuela, and Brazil. There are large forests of them on the banks of the Amazon, Rio Negro, and Orinoco. They are very high trees, and they only branch at the top. They are from a hundred to a hundred and fifty feet high. How can I convey to you a good idea of that height? An ordinary room is about ten to twelve feet high, so if you can picture a house which has about fifteen floors, you will get an idea of the great height

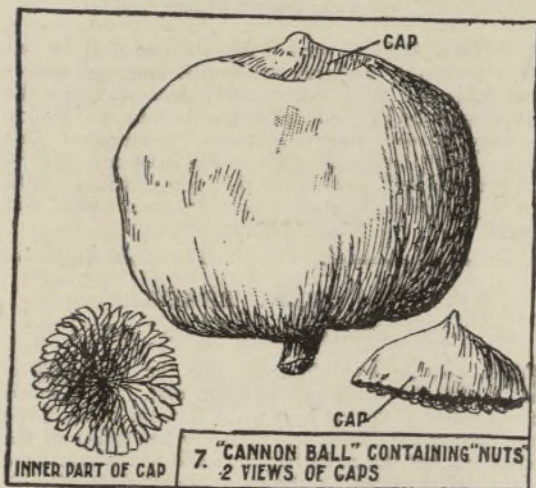


of a Brazil nut tree. Then, the branching only starts at about forty or fifty feet from the top, and so you see it must be a queer-looking tree! The photograph which I saw was of a tree or two which had been left standing in a part of a forest which had been cut down, for, as you know, most trees when grown in thick groups, do not branch much near the ground, for they are all struggling to reach the light, and of course foliage likes light. I am inclined to think if a Brazil nut tree was grown out in the open, it would develop more branches lower down; but, as I said before, the only picture I could find was as I describe.

I went to Kew Gardens because I had been told that they had a tree growing there. When I got there and

inquired, I was told that was quite correct, and I was taken to a very hot house, where I was shown a plant about *twelve inches high* with, I think, *four leaves!* Picture my disappointment! But my guide told me that they were very proud of this plant, because it was the only seedling they had ever been able to rear. It seems that the nuts require great heat to make them germinate, a heat peculiar to the ground where the forests are.

I could not find anything much about the early history of the tree, but samples were brought to France



in the early part of the nineteenth century. The man who then discovered it, not knowing any name for it, called it after a friend, and thus it got its proper name (botanical name, I mean), *Bertholletia excelsa*, which means Berthollet's tall tree; so you see the discoverer was struck by its height! It belongs to the natural order Myrtaceæ.

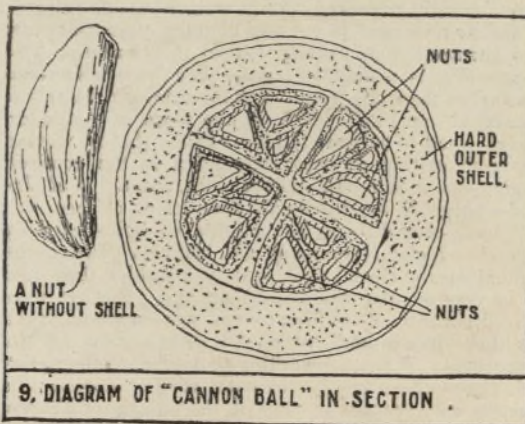
Now for details. I do not intend to give you a picture of the tree, because to draw it to the scale that I should have to use to get it into a page here would simply make it look ridiculous! The leaves are large, as we know leaves of forest trees; they are about two feet long and six inches wide, that is, nearly as wide as this page, and more than twice as long. They are of a



beautiful clear shiny green, like an evergreen in texture, but lighter in colour. A sweet (Spanish) chestnut leaf is the leaf most like it that I know; but the Brazil nut's edge is uncut. It has very strong mid-veins and a number of other veins almost at right angles, finishing in a netted edge (fig. 1).

The flowers grow in large pyramidal clusters something like the clusters on the Horse Chestnut, only more fleshy. They are cream-coloured, and rather peculiar in structure. Fig. 2 is a sketch of part of a cluster. There are two sepals which tear apart when the flower is ready to open (fig. 3), and expose six petals (fig. 4). When in flower, it appears as though one petal is still folded over the middle, but this is really a hood-like structure formed by the alteration of a number of stamens. The filaments, or stalks, have joined and formed a common stalk, and the anthers have joined and formed the hood. At fig. 5 I give a sketch of this structure and the stamens proper, over which the hood stands like an umbrella. Fig. 6 is of a section of a flower showing the very young fruit, with its style and stigma hanging out of the flower.

Now, when the flower fades, it all disappears except that little ball in the middle, and that swells and swells till you get a hard, woody sort of a cannon-ball arrangement, as shown in fig. 7. This is generally about six inches across, and very hard. It contains the Brazil



nuts as you and I know them; about fifteen or twenty of them all neatly packed in as shown in fig. 8. It is said (I have never tried it) that when once the nuts are removed from the outer shell, you are unable to replace them. There is a Japanese puzzle sort of an idea about it!

In fig. 7, I show you two views of that funny little cap or lid, which fits on the top of the shell. I call your attention particularly to this, because you often find one or two of these among nuts which you buy, and now you will know what they are.

There are four main divisions in the outer shell, and each contains several nuts. Fig. 3 shows you a diagram of a whole 'cannon ball' cut through, and you see the true nuts inside.

So high are the trees, that the nuts cannot be gathered in the usual way; so they are allowed to fall, and woe betide any one who happens to be around when they come down! I have read that the natives who go to collect these cannon balls wear a sort of wooden shield

to protect their heads and shoulders from oddments from above!

The 'cannon balls' are taken down the rivers to the towns, there split open with hatchets, dried in the sun, packed into sacks, and shipped all over the world.

The nuts contain much oil, which, in some parts, is extracted and used for burning. You can prove the presence of oil by burning a nut, and observing what a fine flame you get.

E. M. BARLOW.

WASHING-DAY.

IN a Highland village that I know very well, the cottage mothers have decided upon an interesting plan, by which washing-day is robbed of some of its troubles. Down by the burn, all through the summer months, stands a mangle, a wash-tub, and all preparations for a fire; and on certain days of the week the sounds of talk and laughter, and loud splashing and dashing are added to the noise that the burn makes as it rushes over the stones. Few of these folk have 'water laid on' at home; and so, as the water will not come to the washing, it has seemed to them wise to take the washing to the water!

But this clever idea is not really a new idea at all; in a great many of the continental villages it is quite a common sight to see the cottage women washing clothes in the streams; and in our own country, years and years ago, garments were usually washed in the river. Also—and this is a dreadful idea—they were sometimes washed in the wells from which the drinking water was obtained! In 1467, indeed, in the town of Leicester, an order had to be made to hinder this; 'that no woman do wash clothes or other corruption in the common wells'—so it ran. In another town, too, a fine of six-and-eightpence was threatened for such an offence.

I have seen girls in the Highlands, light-heartedly and bare-footed, 'tramping the blankets' during the annual spring-clean; that again is a fashion that used to be very popular years and years ago. Clothes were placed in the wash-tub, and several women would 'tuck up their dresses and dance upon them to beat out the impurities.' When the washing took place at the water-side the clothes were beaten with wood or stones; this custom still prevails in some of the villages of France, and proves very destructive to the clothes, I believe.

But in the olden days, the family washing-day came seldom. To begin with, as far back as the Tudor and Stuart periods, 'articles which required washing were few and far between.' It was much more usual to employ a dyer than a washer-woman, for clothes were made of materials that would not stand a wash. For instance, garments of rich silk material or velvet were worn by the rich people, without under-clothes, and the lower classes wore coarse woollen dresses, also without under-garments.

There were no such things as linen night-dresses in those days, and only very few of the highest nobles had such a luxury as a linen shirt. Anne Boleyn possessed a night-gown of black satin, lavishly trimmed; one of Queen Elizabeth's night-dresses was made of black velvet; while there is a record of an order given by the Good Queen Bess for 'three-score and six of the best sable-skins to furnish us a night-gown!' Night-caps, too, which were commonly used, were made of velvet or silk, and never saw the washing-tubs at all!

However, the 'ruffs' of Queen Elizabeth's day—which figure always in the pictures of that great queen—needed the laundress's care; they were starched very carefully, and had also very often to be kept in shape by a wire frame. All the same, in spite of the 'ruff' fashion, the washer-women of the Tudor period had very little indeed to do compared with the busy laundresses of to-day.

ETHEL TALBOT.

A SEVERE TEST.

A FOREIGNER once rashly asserted that he had thoroughly mastered the English language, whereupon some one asked him to write from dictation the following: 'As Hugh Hughes was hewing a Yule-log from a yew-tree, a man in clothes of a dark hue came up to Hugh and said, "Have you seen my ewes?" "If you will wait until I hew this yew, I will go with you anywhere in Europe to look for your ewes," said Hugh.'

E. D.

THE STEEL TRACK.

BY HAROLD BINDLOSS.

THE weather had changed since the boys got on board the construction train, and heavy snow-clouds rolled about the hills when Dawson stood at the open door of the calaboose. No snow had fallen in the valley yet, but the rocks two thousand feet above were white, and the pines by the noisy river glittered with hoar-frost. The cars rocked and banged, for in the mountains of British Columbia the track is sometimes roughly laid, and a heavy snorting rolled down the incline from the front of the train.

Sulphurous fumes filled the calaboose, where men sat round the walls, and a stove rattled in the middle of the floor. The men were going to 'salve,' or make the best of a locomotive and some freight cars that had left the rails after a snow-slide had broken the line. Dawson and Jake Winthrop had no particular business in the calaboose, but they wanted to see the wreck, and a fireman whom they knew had let them get on the train. It was not often they got a holiday, and Dawson found the trip a pleasant change after chopping trees and helping to cut up the fallen trunks. The trunks were large, for perhaps the heaviest timber in the world grows upon the wet Pacific slope of North America.

Pulling a cross-cut saw through gummy wood is laborious work, but it must be done where the ranchers hew their oatfields out of giant forest, and Dawson was glad to straighten his aching back and rest his blistered hands. He was an inch or two broader round the chest than when he left England, and his muscles were firm. On the whole, he liked ranching, but had found it much less romantic than he thought. Mr. Winthrop generally saw that Jake and he had something useful to do, and adventures only came, as it were, by accident.

In the meantime, the locomotive laboured up the climbing track, and ranks of trees began to roll between the line and the angry green river. The rivers of British Columbia are, for the most part, stained a muddy pea-green by the clay beneath the glaciers. By-and-by, when the pines at the edge of

a foaming rapid looked strangely small, a cluster of wooden buildings and a big water-tank appeared beside the track. The engine slowly rolled past an iron-roofed hut, backed the train across the switches, and stopped for the station hands to couple on some cars. Then the fireman walked down the line.

'The accident's two or three miles farther up, but I hear we're not going back to-night,' he said to Dawson. 'If you want to get home, you'll have to catch the Vancouver train, but it seems they've had deep snow in the back country, and she's late. That will give you time to go on with us.' He paused, and shouted to a station hand, 'When do you expect the West-bound?'

'In about two hours,' said the other, and Jake Winthrop looked at his new watch.

'Guess we shall see all we want to see. The cold's pretty fierce up here,' he remarked, and polished the watch-glass with his handkerchief before he added, 'She's a daisy. When I try her by a station clock, she's dead on railroad time.'

'When you don't forget to wind her,' Dawson said dryly, for they had not long since allowed Mr. Winthrop's sloop to ground through mistaking the time of high-water when Jake's watch had stopped.

Now Dawson had mentioned it, Jake was not sure if he had wound up the watch. He was very sleepy when he went to bed, but he did not mean to let his comrade banter him, and resolved to try the winding-knob later. In a few moments the locomotive-bell began to toll, there was a clash of couplings, and the train went on again.

The valley got narrower. Great rocks overhung the track, and the roar of the angry river drowned the din of the wheels; but the snorting of the locomotive came back hoarsely, and a long plume of smoke eddied about the cars. They stopped by-and-by at a spot where a gang of men were busy throwing gravel into a gap between the rails. A mass of snow and frost-split rock had slipped down and smashed the track. The wreck of two or three box-cars was scattered about, and a locomotive lay, wheels uppermost, five hundred feet below.

Dawson buttoned his skin coat and put on his mittens as he looked about. To the east a row of rugged peaks shone for a few moments, fiery yellow, against the dark storm-cloud; then the light faded and mountains glimmered a faint, cold blue. A bitter wind blew through the gorge and snow began to fall.

'Let's look at the locomotive,' Jake said, and they scrambled down the steep slope.

When they stopped near the river, the men at work, with hydraulic jacks and coils of wire-rope, looked strangely small and the wrecked engine looked remarkably big. American locomotives are much larger than English, and Dawson hardly thought it possible to get the huge machine back to the line. The men, however, obviously meant to try, and as it was too cold to loaf about, the boys began to help. In the meantime the snow got thicker, and one could not see far, when Jake looked at his watch. He frowned impatiently, for he saw that it had stopped.

'If you hadn't got after me about it, I'd have wound her up,' he said. 'Anyhow, we had better pull out for the station. It would be awkward if we missed the train.'

Dawson nodded silently. It was wiser not to banter

Jake just then, and since there was only one passenger train a day he did not want to be late. They were breathless when they reached the track, but they set off down the valley as fast as they could walk, although the sleepers were spaced unevenly and the ballast was large and rough. Besides, the snow was getting deep, and in places they sank in the drifts.

At length Jake stopped. 'Hullo!' he said. 'What is that?'

At first Dawson heard nothing but the turmoil of the river among the rocks; then a dull throb came down the gorge. 'It sounds like a train,' he said, and they began to run.

The station was invisible; one could not see a hundred yards in the driving snow, but the throb got louder behind them. After a time Jake seized Dawson, and as he pushed him off the line, a huge black object, half veiled in smoke, came out of the tossing flakes. It leaped past them while they stood panting, and a blast of wind nearly dragged them off their feet; lights flashed in the streaming smoke, and a deafening clamour echoed among the rocks as the long train went by. Then the mist of snow that had whirled about the boys blew away, the flakes came down at an even slant, and the uproar died away.

'Come on!' Jake shouted. 'We may make it yet, if the engineer stops to fill his tank.'

Dawson could not remember how long he ran, but while he stumbled among the ties it got dark, and he was breathless when a few dim lights shone close ahead. A minute or two later they reached the station, but the train had gone, and there was nobody about.

'This is certainly awkward,' said Jake. 'I don't see how we are going to get home before to-morrow night, but we will look for the agent.'

The station-agent had no comfort to offer them. 'You're not very smart if you can't catch a train that's two hours late,' he remarked. 'Now you have got to wait for the next, to-morrow.'

'What about the Express freight?' Jake asked. 'Can't you let us go out on her if we buy a ticket?'

'I can't,' said the agent; 'it's not allowed. Better try the hotel, though I don't know if they can take you in.'

The boys crossed the lines to a small wooden building. But the landlord looked doubtful. 'I can give you supper, and might fix you up on the floor; but the construction gang is stopping here, and the house is full.'

For a few minutes they warmed themselves at the stove in the untidy general room. And then Jake remarked: 'It's pretty cold for sleeping on the floor, and if we don't get back to-night, our folk will be scared. They don't know where we are, and it's snowing fierce. If we *could* get on the express freight, we'd make home all right. Let's go and see if she's coming.'

Dawson said nothing. The agent had stated plainly that they would not be allowed to travel by the train; but Jake was obstinate, and sometimes got his way when it looked impossible. The Express freight ran across the North American continent, from Montreal to Vancouver, with valuable goods for Japan, and must reach the wharf before the Empress liner sailed. Still, she would stop for water at a station near the Winthrop ranch, because American locomotives, hauling enormous loads, empty their boilers fast.

(Continued on page 298.)



"Jake seized Fawson, and pushed him off the track."