PAGE NOT AVAILABLE

Digitized by Google

Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

INDIANA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

INDIANA
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

Digitized by Google
Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

A DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS

Digitized by Google

Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

SHE BLEW THROUGH THE GAP OF THE PASS IN A WHIRLWIND OF VAPOR

See page 40

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

A DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS

BY

Jack London

AUTHOR OF "THE SON OF THE WOLF" AND "THE GOD OF HIS FATHERS"

With Illustrations in Color by

FREDERICK C. YOHN

PHILADELPHIA

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

MCMII

Digitized by Google

Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

COPYRIGHT, 1902
BY
JACK LONDON

Published October, 1902

212914

PS3523
.O96D2

Electrotyped and Printed by
J. B. Lippincott Company, Philadelphia, U. S. A.

gift 1-27-30

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

SHE BLEW THROUGH THE GAP OF THE PASS IN A WHIRLWIND OF VAPOR . . . . . *Frontispiece*

AND AS HE LOOKED UPON HER THE MIGHTY PAST ROSE BEFORE HIM 148

"VINCENT, A WORD TO THE WISE: YE'LL NIVER LAY HOLY HAND OR OTHERWISE UPON HER" . . . 199

"WE CAN KEEP AHEAD," FRONA PANTED 276

Digitized by Google

Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Digitized by Google

Original from
INDIANA UNIVERSITY

A DAUGHTER OF THE SNOWS

CHAPTER I

"ALL ready, Miss Welse, though I'm sorry we can't spare one of the steamer's boats."

Frona Welse arose with alacrity and came to the first officer's side.

"We're so busy," he explained, "and gold-rushers are such perishable freight, at least——"

"I understand," she interrupted, "and I, too, am behaving as though I were perishable. And I am sorry for the trouble I am giving you, but—but——" She turned quickly and pointed to the shore. "Do you see that big log-house? Between the clump of pines and the river? I was born there."

"Guess I'd be in a hurry myself," he muttered, sympathetically, as he piloted her along the crowded deck.

Everybody was in everybody else's way; nor was there one who failed to proclaim it at the top of his lungs. A thousand gold-seekers were clamoring for the immediate landing of their outfits. Each hatchway gaped wide open, and from the lower depths the shrieking donkey-engines were hurrying the misassorted outfits skyward. On either side of the steamer, rows of

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

scows received the flying cargo, and on each of these scows a sweating mob of men charged the descending slings and heaved bales and boxes about in frantic search. Men waved shipping receipts and shouted over the steamer-rails to them. Sometimes two and three identified the same article, and war arose. The "two-circle" and the "circle-and-dot" brands caused endless jangling, while every whipsaw discovered a dozen claimants.

"The purser insists that he is going mad," the first officer said, as he helped Frona Welse down the gang-way to the landing stage, "and the freight clerks have turned the cargo over to the passengers and quit work. But we're not so unlucky as the Star of Bethlehem," he reassured her, pointing to a steamship at anchor a quarter of a mile away. "Half of her passengers have pack-horses for Skaguay and White Pass, and the other half are bound over the Chilcoot. So they've mutinied and everything's at a standstill."

"Hey, you!" he cried, beckoning to a Whitehall which hovered discreetly on the outer rim of the floating confusion.

A tiny launch, pulling heroically at a huge tow-barge, attempted to pass between; but the boatman shot nervily across her bow, and just as he was clear, unfortunately, caught a crab. This slewed the boat around and brought it to a stop.

"Watch out!" the first officer shouted.

A pair of seventy-foot canoes, loaded with outfits, gold-rushers, and Indians, and under full sail, drove down from the counter direction. One of them veered sharply towards the landing stage, but the other pinched the Whitehall against the barge. The boat-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

man had unshipped his oars in time, but his small craft groaned under the pressure and threatened to collapse. Whereat he came to his feet, and in short, nervous phrases consigned all canoe-men and launch-captains to eternal perdition. A man on the barge leaned over from above and baptized him with crisp and crackling oaths, while the whites and Indians in the canoe laughed derisively.

"Aw, g'wan!" one of them shouted. "Why don't yeh learn to row?"

The boatman's fist landed on the point of his critic's jaw and dropped him stunned upon the heaped merchandise. Not content with this summary act he proceeded to follow his fist into the other craft. The miner nearest him tugged vigorously at a revolver which had jammed in its shiny leather holster, while his brother argonauts, laughing, waited the outcome. But the canoe was under way again, and the Indian helmsman drove the point of his paddle into the boatman's chest and hurled him backward into the bottom of the Whitehall.

When the flood of oaths and blasphemy was at full tide, and violent assault and quick death seemed most imminent, the first officer had stolen a glance at the girl by his side. He had expected to find a shocked and frightened maiden countenance, and was not at all prepared for the flushed and deeply interested face which met his eyes.

"I am sorry," he began.

But she broke in, as though annoyed by the interruption, "No, no; not at all. I am enjoying it every bit. Though I am glad that man's revolver stuck. If it had not——"

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"We might have been delayed in getting ashore." The first officer laughed, and therein displayed his tact.

"That man is a robber," he went on, indicating the boatman, who had now shoved his oars into the water and was pulling alongside. "He agreed to charge only twenty dollars for putting you ashore. Said he'd have made it twenty-five had it been a man. He's a pirate, mark me, and he will surely hang some day. Twenty dollars for a half-hour's work! Think of it!"

"Easy, sport! Easy!" cautioned the fellow in question, at the same time making an awkward landing and dropping one of his oars over-side. "You've no call to be flingin' names about," he added, defiantly, wringing out his shirt-sleeve, wet from rescue of the oar.

"You've got good ears, my man," began the first officer.

"And a quick fist," the other snapped in.

"And a ready tongue."

"Need it in my business. No gettin' 'long without it among you sea-sharks. Pirate, am I? And you with a thousand passengers packed like sardines! Charge 'em double first-class passage, feed 'em steerage grub, and bunk 'em worse 'n pigs! Pirate, eh! Me?"

A red-faced man thrust his head over the rail above and began to bellow lustily.

"I want my stock landed! Come up here, Mr. Thurston! Now! Right away! Fifty cayuses of mine eating their heads off in this dirty kennel of yours, and it'll be a sick time you'll have if you don't hustle them ashore as fast as God'll let you! I'm losing a thousand dollars a day, and I won't stand it!

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Do you hear? I won't stand it! You've robbed me right and left from the time you cleared dock in Seattle, and by the hinges of hell I won't stand it any more! I'll break this company as sure as my name's Thad Ferguson! D'ye hear my spiel? I'm Thad Ferguson, and you can't come and see me any too quick for your health! D'ye hear?"

"Pirate, eh?" the boatman soliloquized. "Who? Me?"

Mr. Thurston waved his hand appeasingly at the red-faced man, and turned to the girl. "I'd like to go ashore with you, and as far as the store, but you see how busy we are. Good-by, and a lucky trip to you. I'll tell off a couple of men at once and break out your baggage. Have it up at the store to-morrow morning, sharp."

She took his hand lightly and stepped aboard. Her weight gave the leaky boat a sudden lurch, and the water hurtled across the bottom boards to her shoe-tops; but she took it coolly enough, settling herself in the stern-sheets and tucking her feet under her.

"Hold on!" the officer cried. "This will never do, Miss Welse. Come on back, and I'll get one of our boats over as soon as I can."

"I'll see you in—in heaven first," retorted the boatman, shoving off. "Let go!" he threatened.

Mr. Thurston gripped tight hold of the gunwale, and as reward for his chivalry had his knuckles rapped sharply by the oar-blade. Then he forgot himself, and Miss Welse also, and swore, and swore fervently.

"I dare say our farewell might have been more dignified," she called back to him, her laughter rippling across the water.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"Jove!" he muttered, doffing his cap gallantly. "There is a *woman!*" And a sudden hunger seized him, and a yearning to see himself mirrored always in the gray eyes of Frona Welse. He was not analytical; he did not know why; but he knew that with her he could travel to the end of the earth. He felt a distaste for his profession, and a temptation to throw it all over and strike out for the Klondike whither she was going; then he glanced up the beetling side of the ship, saw the red face of Thad Ferguson, and forgot the dream he had for an instant dreamed.

Splash! A handful of water from his strenuous oar struck her full in the face. "Hope you don't mind it, miss," he apologized. "I'm doin' the best I know how, which ain't much."

"So it seems," she answered, good-naturedly.

"Not that I love the sea," bitterly; "but I've got to turn a few honest dollars somehow, and this seemed the likeliest way. I oughter 'a ben in Klondike by now, if I'd had any luck at all. Tell you how it was. I lost my outfit on Windy Arm, half-way in, after packin' it clean across the Pass——".

Zip! Splash! She shook the water from her eyes, squirming the while as some of it ran down her warm back.

"You'll do," he encouraged her. "You're the right stuff for this country. Goin' all the way in?"

She nodded cheerfully.

"Then you'll do. But as I was sayin', after I lost my outfit I hit back for the coast, bein' broke, to hustle up another one. That's why I'm chargin' high-pressure rates. And I hope you don't feel sore at what I

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

made you pay. I'm no worse than the rest, miss, sure. I had to dig up a hundred for this old tub, which ain't worth ten down in the States. Same kind of prices everywhere. Over on the Skaguay Trail horseshoe nails is just as good as a quarter any day. A man goes up to the bar and calls for a whiskey. Whiskey's half a dollar. Well, he drinks his whiskey, plunks down two horseshoe nails, and it's O.K. No kick comin' on horseshoe nails. They use 'em to make change."

"You must be a brave man to venture into the country again after such an experience. Won't you tell me your name? We may meet on the Inside."

"Who? Me? Oh, I'm Del Bishop, pocket-miner; and if ever we run across each other, remember I'd give you the last shirt—I mean, remember my last bit of grub is yours."

"Thank you," she answered with a sweet smile; for she was a woman who loved the things which rose straight from the heart.

He stopped rowing long enough to fish about in the water around his feet for an old cornbeef can.

"You'd better do some bailin'," he ordered, tossing her the can. "She's leakin' worse since that squeeze."

Frona smiled mentally, tucked up her skirts, and bent to the work. At every dip, like great billows heaving along the sky-line, the glacier-fretted mountains rose and fell. Sometimes she rested her back and watched the teeming beach towards which they were heading, and again, the land-locked arm of the sea in which a score or so of great steamships lay at anchor. From each of these, to the shore and back again, flowed a steady stream of scows, launches, canoes, and all sorts of smaller craft. Man, the mighty

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

toiler, reacting upon a hostile environment, she thought, going back in memory to the masters whose wisdom she had shared in lecture-room and midnight study. She was a ripened child of the age, and fairly understood the physical world and the workings thereof. And she had a love for the world, and a deep respect.

For some time Del Bishop had only punctuated the silence with splashes from his oars; but a thought struck him.

"You haven't told me your name," he suggested, with complacent delicacy.

"My name is Welse," she answered. "Frona Welse."

A great awe manifested itself in his face, and grew to a greater and greater awe. "You—are—Frona—Welse?" he enunciated slowly. "Jacob Welse ain't your old man, is he?"

"Yes; I am Jacob Welse's daughter, at your service."

He puckered his lips in a long low whistle of understanding and stopped rowing. "Just you climb back into the stern and take your feet out of that water," he commanded. "And gimme holt that can."

"Am I not bailing satisfactorily?" she demanded, indignantly.

"Yep. You're doin' all right; but, but, you are—are——"

"Just what I was before you knew who I was. Now you go on rowing,—that's your share of the work; and I'll take care of mine."

"Oh, you'll do!" he murmured ecstatically, bending afresh to the oars. "And Jacob Welse is your old man? I oughter 'a known it, sure!"

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

When they reached the sand-spit, crowded with heterogeneous piles of merchandise and buzzing with men, she stopped long enough to shake hands with her ferryman. And though such a proceeding on the part of his feminine patrons was certainly unusual, Del Bishop squared it easily with the fact that she was Jacob Welse's daughter.

"Remember, my last bit of grub is yours," he reassured her, still holding her hand.

"And your last shirt, too; don't forget."

"Well, you're a—a—a crackerjack!" he exploded with a final squeeze. "Sure!"

Her short skirt did not block the free movement of her limbs, and she discovered with pleasurable surprise that the quick tripping step of the city pavement had departed from her, and that she was swinging off in the long easy stride which is born of the trail and which comes only after much travail and endeavor. More than one gold-rusher, shooting keen glances at her ankles and gray-gaitered calves, affirmed Del Bishop's judgment. And more than one glanced up at her face, and glanced again; for her gaze was frank, with the frankness of comradeship; and in her eyes there was always a smiling light, just trembling on the verge of dawn; and did the onlooker smile, her eyes smiled also. And the smiling light was protean-mooded,—merry, sympathetic, joyous, quizzical,—the complement of whatsoever kindled it. And sometimes the light spread over all her face, till the smile prefigured by it was realized. But it was always in frank and open comradeship.

And there was much to cause her to smile as she hurried through the crowd, across the sand-spit, and

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

over the flat towards the log-building she had pointed out to Mr. Thurston. Time had rolled back, and locomotion and transportation were once again in the most primitive stages. Men who had never carried more than parcels in all their lives had now become bearers of burdens. They no longer walked upright under the sun, but stooped the body forward and bowed the head to the earth. Every back had become a pack-saddle, and the strap-galls were beginning to form. They staggered beneath the unwonted effort, and legs became drunken with weariness and titubated in divers directions till the sunlight darkened and bearer and burden fell by the way. Other men, exulting secretly, piled their goods on two-wheeled go-carts and pulled out blithely enough, only to stall at the first spot where the great round boulders invaded the trail. Whereat they generalized anew upon the principles of Alaskan travel, discarded the go-cart, or trundled it back to the beach and sold it at fabulous price to the last man landed. Tenderfeet, with ten pounds of Colt's revolvers, cartridges, and hunting-knives belted about them, wandered valiantly up the trail, and crept back softly, shedding revolvers, cartridges, and knives in despairing showers. And so, in gasping and bitter sweat, these sons of Adam suffered for Adam's sin.

Frona felt vaguely disturbed by this great throbbing rush of gold-mad men, and the old scene with its clustering associations seemed blotted out by these toiling aliens. Even the old landmarks appeared strangely unfamiliar. It was the same, yet not the same. Here, on the grassy flat, where she had played as a child and shrunk back at the sound of her voice echoing from

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

glacier to glacier, ten thousand men tramped ceaselessly up and down, grinding the tender herbage into the soil and mocking the stony silence. And just up the trail were ten thousand men who had passed by, and over the Chilcoot were ten thousand more. And behind, all down the island-studded Alaskan coast, even to the Horn, were yet ten thousand more, harnessers of wind and steam, hasteners from the ends of the earth. The Dyea River as of old roared turbulently down to the sea; but its ancient banks were gored by the feet of many men, and these men labored in surging rows at the dripping tow-lines, and the deep-laden boats followed them as they fought their upward way. And the will of man strove with the will of the water, and the men laughed at the old Dyea River and gored its banks deeper for the men who were to follow.

The doorway of the store, through which she had once run out and in, and where she had looked with awe at the unusual sight of a stray trapper or fur-trader, was now packed with a clamorous throng of men. Where of old one letter waiting a claimant was a thing of wonder, she now saw, by peering through the window, the mail heaped up from floor to ceiling. And it was for this mail the men were clamoring so insistently. Before the store, by the scales, was another crowd. An Indian threw his pack upon the scales, the white owner jotted down the weight in a note-book, and another pack was thrown on. Each pack was in the straps, ready for the packer's back and the precarious journey over the Chilcoot. Frona edged in closer. She was interested in freights. She remembered in her day when the solitary prospector

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

or trader had his outfit packed over for six cents,—one hundred and twenty dollars a ton.

The tenderfoot who was weighing up consulted his guide-book. "Eight cents," he said to the Indian. Whereupon the Indians laughed scornfully and chorused, "Forty cents!" A pained expression came into his face, and he looked about him anxiously. The sympathetic light in Frona's eyes caught him, and he regarded her with intent blankness. In reality he was busy reducing a three-ton outfit to terms of cash at forty dollars per hundred-weight. "Twenty-four hundred dollars for thirty miles!" he cried. "What can I do?"

Frona shrugged her shoulders. "You'd better pay them the forty cents," she advised, "else they will take off their straps."

The man thanked her, but instead of taking heed went on with his haggling. One of the Indians stepped up and proceeded to unfasten his pack-straps. The tenderfoot wavered, but just as he was about to give in, the packers jumped the price on him to forty-five cents. He smiled after a sickly fashion, and nodded his head in token of surrender. But another Indian joined the group and began whispering excitedly. A cheer went up, and before the man could realize it they had jerked off their straps and departed, spreading the news as they went that freight to Lake Linderman was fifty cents.

Of a sudden, the crowd before the store was perceptibly agitated. Its members whispered excitedly one to another, and all their eyes were focussed upon three men approaching from up the trail. The trio were ordinary-looking creatures, ill-clad and even

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

ragged. In a more stable community their apprehension by the village constable and arrest for vagrancy would have been immediate. "French Louis," the tenderfeet whispered and passed the word along. "Owns three Eldorado claims in a block," the man next to Frona confided to her. "Worth ten millions at the very least." French Louis, striding a little in advance of his companions, did not look it. He had parted company with his hat somewhere along the route, and a frayed silk kerchief was wrapped carelessly about his head. And for all his ten millions, he carried his own travelling pack on his broad shoulders. "And that one, the one with the beard, that's Swiftwater Bill, another of the Eldorado kings."

"How do you know?" Frona asked, doubtingly.

"Know!" the man exclaimed. "Know! Why his picture has been in all the papers for the last six weeks. See!" He unfolded a newspaper. "And a pretty good likeness, too. I've looked at it so much I'd know his mug among a thousand."

"Then who is the third one?" she queried, tacitly accepting him as a fount of authority.

Her informant lifted himself on his toes to see better. "I don't know," he confessed sorrowfully, then tapped the shoulder of the man next to him. "Who is the lean, smooth-faced one? The one with the blue shirt and the patch on his knee?"

Just then Frona uttered a glad little cry and darted forward. "Matt!" she cried. "Matt McCarthy!"

The man with the patch shook her hand heartily, though he did not know her and distrust was plain in his eyes.

"Oh, you don't remember me!" she chattered.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"And don't you dare say you do! If there weren't so many looking, I'd hug you, you old bear!

"And so Big Bear went home to the Little Bears," she recited, solemnly. "And the Little Bears were very hungry. And Big Bear said, 'Guess what I have got, my children.' And one Little Bear guessed berries, and one Little Bear guessed salmon, and t'other Little Bear guessed porcupine. Then Big Bear laughed 'Whoof! Whoof!' and said, '*A Nice Big Fat Man!*'"

As he listened, recollection avowed itself in his face, and, when she had finished, his eyes wrinkled up and he laughed a peculiar, laughable silent laugh.

"Sure, an' it's well I know ye," he explained; "but for the life iv me I can't put me finger on ye."

She pointed into the store and watched him anxiously.

"Now I have ye!" He drew back and looked her up and down, and his expression changed to disappointment. "It cuddent be. I mistook ye. Ye cud niver a-lived in that shanty," thrusting a thumb in the direction of the store.

Frona nodded her head vigorously.

"Thin it's yer ownself afther all? The little motherless darlin', with the goold hair I combed the knots out iv many's the time? The little witch that run barefoot an' barelegged over all the place?"

"Yes, yes," she corroborated, gleefully.

"The little divil that stole the dog-team an' wint over the Pass in the dead o' winter for to see where the world come to an ind on the ither side, just because old Matt McCarthy was afther tellin' her fairy stories?"

"O Matt, dear old Matt! Remember the time I

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

went swimming with the Siwash girls from the Indian camp?"

"An' I dragged ye out by the hair o' yer head?"

"And lost one of your new rubber boots?"

"Ah, an' sure an' I do. And a most shockin' an' immodest affair it was! An' the boots was worth tin dollars over yer father's counter."

"And then you went away, over the Pass, to the Inside, and we never heard a word of you. Everybody thought you dead."

"Well I recollect the day. An' ye cried in me arms an' wudden't kiss yer old Matt good-by. But ye did in the ind," he exclaimed, triumphantly, "whin ye saw I was goin' to lave ye for sure. What a wee thing ye were!"

"I was only eight."

"An' 'tis twelve year agone. Twelve year I've spint on the Inside, with niver a trip out. Ye must be twinty now?"

"And almost as big as you," Frona affirmed.

"A likely woman ye've grown into, tall, an' shapely, an' all that." He looked her over critically. "But ye cud 'a' stood a bit more flesh, I'm thinkin'."

"No, no," she denied. "Not at twenty, Matt, not at twenty. Feel my arm, you'll see." She doubled that member till the biceps knotted.

"'Tis muscle," he admitted, passing his hand admiringly over the swelling bunch; "just as though ye'd been workin' hard for yer livin'."

"Oh, I can swing clubs, and box, and fence," she cried, successively striking the typical postures; "and swim, and make high dives, chin a bar twenty times, and—and walk on my hands. There!"

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"Is that what ye've been doin'? I thought ye wint away for book-larnin'," he commented, dryly.

"But they have new ways of teaching, now, Matt, and they don't turn you out with your head crammed——"

"An' yer legs that spindly they can't carry it all! Well, an' I forgive ye yer muscle."

"But how about yourself, Matt?" Frona asked. "How has the world been to you these twelve years?"

"Behold!" He spread his legs apart, threw his head back, and his chest out. "Ye now behold Mister Matthew McCarthy, a king iv the noble Eldorado Dynasty by the strength iv his own right arm. Me possessions is limitless. I have more dust in wan minute than iver I saw in all me life before. Me intintion for makin' this trip to the States is to look up me ancestors. I have a firm belafe that they wance existed. Ye may find nuggets in the Klondike, but niver good whiskey. 'Tis likewise me intintion to have wan drink iv the rale stuff before I die. Afther that 'tis me sworn resolve to return to the superveeshion iv me Klondike properties. Indade, and I'm an Eldorado king; an' if ye'll be wantin' the lind iv a tidy bit, it's meself that'll loan it ye."

"The same old, old Matt, who never grows old," Frona laughed.

"An' it's yerself is the thrue Welse, for all yer prize-fighter's muscles an' yer philosopher's brains. But let's wander inside on the heels of Louis an' Swiftwater. Andy's still tindin' store, I'm told, an' we'll see if I still linger in the pages iv his mimory."

"And I, also." Frona seized him by the hand. It

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

was a bad habit she had of seizing the hands of those she loved. "It's ten years since I went away."

The Irishman forged his way through the crowd like a pile-driver, and Frona followed easily in the lee of his bulk. The tenderfeet watched them reverently, for to them they were as Northland divinities. The buzz of conversation rose again.

"Who's the girl?" somebody asked. And just as Frona passed inside the door she caught the opening of the answer: "Jacob Welse's daughter. Never heard of Jacob Welse? Where have you been keeping yourself?"

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER II

She came out of the wood of glistening birch, and with the first fires of the sun blazoning her unbound hair raced lightly across the dew-dripping meadow. The earth was fat with excessive moisture and soft to her feet, while the dank vegetation slapped against her knees and cast off flashing sprays of liquid diamonds. The flush of the morning was in her cheek, and its fire in her eyes, and she was aglow with youth and love. For she had nursed at the breast of nature, —in forfeit of a mother,—and she loved the old trees and the creeping green things with a passionate love; and the dim murmur of growing life was a gladness to her ears, and the damp earth-smells were sweet to her nostrils.

Where the upper-reach of the meadow vanished in a dark and narrow forest aisle, amid clean-stemmed dandelions and color-bursting buttercups, she came upon a bunch of great Alaskan violets. Throwing herself at full length, she buried her face in the fragrant coolness, and with her hands drew the purple heads in circling splendor about her own. And she was not ashamed. She had wandered away amid the complexities and smirch and withering heats of the great world, and she had returned, simple, and clean, and wholesome. And she was glad of it, as she lay there, slipping back to the old days, when the universe

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

began and ended at the sky-line, and when she journeyed over the Pass to behold the Abyss.

It was a primitive life, that of her childhood, with few conventions, but such as there were, stern ones. And they might be epitomized, as she had read somewhere in her later years, as "the faith of food and blanket." This faith had her father kept, she thought, remembering that his name sounded well on the lips of men. And this was the faith she had learned,—the faith she had carried with her across the Abyss and into the world, where men had wandered away from the old truths and made themselves selfish dogmas and casuistries of the subtlest kinds; the faith she had brought back with her, still fresh, and young, and joyous. And it was all so simple, she had contended; why should not their faith be as her faith—*the faith of food and blanket?* The faith of trail and hunting camp? The faith with which strong clean men faced the quick danger and sudden death by field and flood? Why not? The faith of Jacob Welse? Of Matt McCarthy? Of the Indian boys she had played with? Of the Indian girls she had led to Amazonian war? Of the very wolf-dogs straining in the harnesses and running with her across the snow? It was healthy, it was real, it was good, she thought, and she was glad.

The rich notes of a robin saluted her from the birch wood, and opened her ears to the day. A partridge boomed afar in the forest, and a tree-squirrel launched unerringly into space above her head, and went on, from limb to limb and tree to tree, scolding graciously the while. From the hidden river rose the shouts of the toiling adventurers, already parted from sleep and fighting their way towards the Pole.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Frona arose, shook back her hair, and took instinctively the old path between the trees to the camp of Chief George and the Dyea tribesmen. She came upon a boy, breech-clouted and bare, like a copper god. He was gathering wood, and looked at her keenly over his bronze shoulder. She bade him good-morning, blithely, in the Dyea tongue; but he shook his head, and laughed insultingly, and paused in his work to hurl shameful words after her. She did not understand, for this was not the old way, and when she passed a great and glowering Sitkan buck she kept her tongue between her teeth. At the fringe of the forest, the camp confronted her. And she was startled. It was not the old camp of a score or more of lodges clustering and huddling together in the open as though for company, but a mighty camp. It began at the very forest, and flowed in and out among the scattered tree-clumps on the flat, and spilled over and down to the river bank where the long canoes were lined up ten and twelve deep. It was a gathering of the tribes, like unto none in all the past, and a thousand miles of coast made up the tally. They were all strange Indians, with wives and chattels and dogs. She rubbed shoulders with Juneau and Wrangel men, and was jostled by wild-eyed Sticks from over the Passes, fierce Chilcats, and Queen Charlotte Islanders. And the looks they cast upon her were black and frowning, save—and far worse—where the merrier souls leered patronizingly into her face and chuckled unmentionable things.

She was not frightened by this insolence, but angered; for it hurt her, and embittered the pleasurable home-coming. Yet she quickly grasped the signifi-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

cance of it: the old patriarchal status of her father's time had passed away, and civilization, in a scorching blast, had swept down upon this people in a day. Glancing under the raised flaps of a tent, she saw haggard-faced bucks squatting in a circle on the floor. By the door a heap of broken bottles advertised the vigils of the night. A white man, low of visage and shrewd, was dealing cards about, and gold and silver coins leaped into heaping bets upon the blanket board. A few steps farther on she heard the cluttering whirl of a wheel of fortune, and saw the Indians, men and women, chancing eagerly their sweat-earned wages for the gaudy prizes of the game. And from tepee and lodge rose the cracked and crazy strains of cheap music-boxes.

An old squaw, peeling a willow pole in the sunshine of an open doorway, raised her head and uttered a shrill cry.

"Hee-Hee! Tenas Hee-Hee!" she muttered as well and as excitedly as her toothless gums would permit.

Frona thrilled at the cry. Tenas Hee-Hee! Little Laughter! Her name of the long gone Indian past! She turned and went over to the old woman.

"And hast thou so soon forgotten, Tenas Hee-Hee?" she mumbled. "And thine eyes so young and sharp! Not so soon does Neepoosa forget."

"It is thou, Neepoosa?" Frona cried, her tongue halting from the disuse of years.

"Ay, it is Neepoosa," the old woman replied, drawing her inside the tent, and despatching a boy, hot-footed, on some errand. They sat down together on the floor, and she patted Frona's hand lovingly, peering, meanwhile, blear-eyed and misty, into her face.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"Ay, it is Neepoosa, grown old quickly after the manner of our women. Neepoosa, who dandled thee in her arms when thou wast a child. Neepoosa, who gave thee thy name, Tenas Hee-Hee. Who fought for thee with Death when thou wast ailing; and gathered growing things from the woods and grasses of the earth and made of them tea, and gave thee to drink. But I mark little change, for I knew thee at once. It was thy very shadow on the ground that made me lift my head. A little change, mayhap. Tall thou art, and like a slender willow in thy grace, and the sun has kissed thy cheeks more lightly of the years; but there is the old hair, flying wild and of the color of the brown seaweed floating on the tide, and the mouth, quick to laugh and loth to cry. And the eyes are as clear and true as in the days when Neepoosa chid thee for wrong-doing, and thou wouldst not put false words upon thy tongue. Ai! Ai! Not as thou art the other women who come now into the land!"

"And why is a white woman without honor among you?" Frona demanded. "Your men say evil things to me in the camp, and as I came through the woods, even the boys. Not in the old days, when I played with them, was this shame so."

"Ai! Ai!" Neepoosa made answer. "It is so. But do not blame them. Pour not thine anger upon their heads. For it is true it is the fault of thy women who come into the land these days. They can point to no man and say, 'That is my man.' And it is not good that women should be thus. And they look upon all men, bold-eyed and shameless, and their tongues are unclean, and their hearts bad. Wherefore are thy women without honor among us. As for the boys,

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

they are but boys. And the men; how should they know?"

The tent-flaps were poked aside and an old man came in. He grunted to Frona and sat down. Only a certain eager alertness showed the delight he took in her presence.

"So Tenas Hee-Hee has come back in these bad days," he vouchsafed in a shrill, quavering voice.

"And why bad days, Muskim?" Frona asked. "Do not the women wear brighter colors? Are not the bellies fuller with flour and bacon and white man's grub? Do not the young men contrive great wealth what of their pack-straps and paddles? And art thou not remembered with the ancient offerings of meat and fish and blanket? Why bad days, Muskim?"

"True," he replied in his fine, priestly way, a reminiscent flash of the old fire lighting his eyes. "It is very true. The women wear brighter colors. But they have found favor in the eyes of thy white men, and they look no more upon the young men of their own blood. Wherefore the tribe does not increase, nor do the little children longer clutter the way of our feet. It is so. The bellies are fuller with the white man's grub; but also are they fuller with the white man's bad whiskey. Nor could it be otherwise that the young men contrive great wealth; but they sit by night over the cards, and it passes from them, and they speak harsh words one to another, and in anger blows are struck, and there is bad blood between them. As for old Muskim, there are few offerings of meat and fish and blanket. For the young women have turned aside from the old paths, nor do the young men longer honor the old totems and the old gods. So these

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

are bad days, Tenas Hee-Hee, and they behold old Muskim go down in sorrow to the grave."

"Ai! Ai! It is so!" wailed Neepoosa.

"Because of the madness of thy people have my people become mad," Muskim continued. "They come over the salt sea like the waves of the sea, thy people, and they go—ah! who knoweth where?"

"Ai! Who knoweth where?" Neepoosa lamented, rocking slowly back and forth.

"Ever they go towards the frost and cold; and ever do they come, more people, wave upon wave!"

"Ai! Ai! Into the frost and cold! It is a long way, and dark and cold!" She shivered, then laid a sudden hand on Frona's arm. "And thou goest?"

Frona nodded.

"And Tenas Hee-Hee goest! Ai! Ai! Ai!"

The tent-flap lifted, and Matt McCarthy peered in. "It's yerself, Frona, is it? With breakfast waitin' this half-hour on ye, an' old Andy fumin' an' frettin' like the old woman he is. Good-mornin' to ye, Neepoosa," he addressed Frona's companions, "an' to ye, Muskim, though belike ye've little mimory iv me face."

The old couple grunted salutation and remained stolidly silent.

"But hurry with ye, girl," turning back to Frona. "Me steamer starts by mid-day, an' it's little I'll see iv ye at the best. An' likewise there's Andy an' the breakfast pipin' hot, both iv them."

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER III

FRONA waved her hand to Andy and swung out on the trail. Fastened tightly to her back were her camera and a small travelling satchel. In addition, she carried for alpenstock the willow pole of Neepoosa. Her dress was of the mountaineering sort, short-skirted and scant, allowing the greatest play with the least material, and withal gray of color and modest.

Her outfit, on the backs of a dozen Indians and in charge of Del Bishop, had got under way hours before. The previous day, on her return with Matt McCarthy from the Siwash camp, she had found Del Bishop at the store waiting her. His business was quickly transacted, for the proposition he made was terse and to the point. She was going into the country. He was intending to go in. She would need somebody. If she had not picked any one yet, why he was just the man. He had forgotten to tell her the day he took her ashore that he had been in the country years before and knew all about it. True, he hated the water, and it was mainly a water journey; but he was not afraid of it. He was afraid of nothing. Further, he would fight for her at the drop of the hat. As for pay, when they got to Dawson, a good word from her to Jacob Welse, and a year's outfit would be his. No, no; no grub-stake about it, no strings on him! He would pay for the outfit later on when

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

his sack was dusted. What did she think about it, anyway? And Frona did think about it, for ere she had finished breakfast he was out hustling the packers together.

She found herself making better speed than the majority of her fellows, who were heavily laden and had to rest their packs every few hundred yards. Yet she found herself hard put to keep the pace of a bunch of Scandinavians ahead of her. They were huge strapping blond-haired giants, each striding along with a hundred pounds on his back, and all harnessed to a go-cart which carried fully six hundred more. Their faces were as laughing suns, and the joy of life was in them. The toil seemed child's play and slipped from them lightly. They joked with one another, and with the passers-by, in a meaningless tongue, and their great chests rumbled with cavern-echoing laughs. Men stood aside for them, and looked after them enviously; for they took the rises of the trail on the run, and rattled down the counter slopes, and ground the iron-rimmed wheels harshly over the rocks. Plunging through a dark stretch of woods, they came out upon the river at the ford. A drowned man lay on his back on the sand-bar, staring upward, unblinking, at the sun. A man, in irritated tones, was questioning over and over, "Where's his pardner? Ain't he got a pardner?" Two more men had thrown off their packs and were coolly taking an inventory of the dead man's possessions. One called aloud the various articles, while the other checked them off on a piece of dirty wrapping-paper. Letters and receipts, wet and pulpy, strewed the sand. A few gold coins were heaped carelessly on a white handkerchief.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Other men, crossing back and forth in canoes and skiffs, took no notice.

The Scandinavians glanced at the sight, and their faces sobered for a moment. "Where's his pardner? Ain't he got a pardner?" the irritated man demanded of them. They shook their heads. They did not understand English. They stepped into the water and splashed onward. Some one called warningly from the opposite bank, whereat they stood still and conferred together. Then they started on again. The two men taking the inventory turned to watch. The current rose nigh to their hips, but it was swift and they staggered, while now and again the cart slipped sideways with the stream. The worst was over, and Frona found herself holding her breath. The water had sunk to the knees of the two foremost men, when a strap snapped on one nearest the cart. His pack swung suddenly to the side, overbalancing him. At the same instant the man next to him slipped, and each jerked the other under. The next two were whipped off their feet, while the cart, turning over, swept from the bottom of the ford into the deep water. The two men who had almost emerged threw themselves backward on the pull-ropes. The effort was heroic, but, giants though they were, the task was too great and they were dragged, inch by inch, downward and under.

Their packs held them to the bottom, save him whose strap had broken. This one struck out, not to the shore, but down the stream, striving to keep up with his comrades. A couple of hundred feet below, the rapid dashed over a toothed-reef of rocks, and here, a minute later, they appeared. The cart, still loaded, showed first, smashing a wheel and turning over and

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

over into the next plunge. The men followed in a miserable tangle. They were beaten against the submerged rocks and swept on, all but one. Frona, in a canoe (a dozen canoes were already in pursuit), saw him grip the rock with bleeding fingers. She saw his white face and the agony of the effort; but his hold relaxed and he was jerked away, just as his free comrade, swimming mightily, was reaching for him. Hidden from sight, they took the next plunge, showing for a second, still struggling, at the shallow foot of the rapid.

A canoe picked up the swimming man, but the rest disappeared in a long stretch of swift, deep water. For a quarter of an hour the canoes plied fruitlessly about, then found the dead men gently grounded in an eddy. A tow-rope was requisitioned from an up-coming boat, and a pair of horses from a pack-train on the bank, and the ghastly jetsam hauled ashore. Frona looked at the five young giants lying in the mud, broken-boned, limp, uncaring. They were still harnessed to the cart, and the poor worthless packs still clung to their backs. The sixth sat in the midst, dry-eyed and stunned. A dozen feet away the steady flood of life flowed by, and Frona melted into it and went on.

The dark spruce-shrouded mountains drew close together in the Dyea Canyon, and the feet of men churned the wet sunless earth into mire and bog-hole. And when they had done this they sought new paths, till there were many paths. And on such a path Frona came upon a man spread carelessly in the mud. He lay on his side, legs apart and one arm buried beneath him, pinned down by a bulky pack. His cheek was pil-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

lowed restfully in the ooze, and on his face there was an expression of content. He brightened when he saw her, and his eyes twinkled cheerily.

"'Bout time you hove along," he greeted her. "Been waitin' an hour on you as it is."

"That's it," as Frona bent over him. "Just unbuckle that strap. The pesky thing! 'Twas just out o' my reach all the time."

"Are you hurt?" she asked.

He slipped out of his straps, shook himself, and felt the twisted arm. "Nope. Sound as a dollar, thank you. And no kick to register, either." He reached over and wiped his muddy hands on a low-bowed spruce. "Just my luck; but I got a good rest, so what's the good of makin' a beef about it? You see, I tripped on that little root there, and slip! slump! slam! and slush!—there I was, down and out, and the buckle just out o' reach. And there I lay for a blasted hour, everybody hitting the lower path."

"But why didn't you call out to them?"

"And make 'em climb up the hill to me? Them all tuckered out with their own work? Not on your life! Wasn't serious enough. If any other man 'd make me climb up just because he'd slipped down, I'd take him out o' the mud all right, all right, and punch and punch him back into the mud again. Besides, I knew somebody was bound to come along my way after a while."

"Oh, you'll do!" she cried, appropriating Del Bishop's phrase. "You'll do for this country!"

"Yep," he called back, shouldering his pack and starting off at a lively clip. "And, anyway, I got a good rest."

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

The trail dipped through a precipitous morass to the river's brink. A slender pine-tree spanned the screaming foam and bent midway to touch the water. The surge beat upon the taper trunk and gave it a rhythmical swaying motion, while the feet of the packers had worn smooth its wave-washed surface. Eighty feet it stretched in ticklish insecurity. Frona stepped upon it, felt it move beneath her, heard the bellowing of the water, saw the mad rush—and shrank back. She slipped the knot of her shoe-laces and pretended great care in the tying thereof as a bunch of Indians came out of the woods above and down through the mud. Three or four bucks led the way, followed by many squaws, all bending in the head-straps to the heavy packs. Behind came the children burdened according to their years, and in the rear half a dozen dogs, tongues lagging out and dragging forward painfully under their several loads.

The men glanced at her sideways, and one of them said something in an undertone. Frona could not hear, but the snicker which went down the line brought the flush of shame to her brow and told her more forcibly than could the words. Her face was hot, for she sat disgraced in her own sight; but she gave no sign. The leader stood aside, and one by one, and never more than one at a time, they made the perilous passage. At the bend in the middle their weight forced the tree under, and they felt for their footing, up to the ankles in the cold, driving torrent. Even the little children made it without hesitancy, and then the dogs, whining and reluctant but urged on by the man. When the last had crossed over, he turned to Frona.

"Um horse trail," he said, pointing up the moun-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

tain side. "Much better you take um horse trail. More far; much better."

But she shook her head and waited till he reached the farther bank; for she felt the call, not only upon her own pride, but upon the pride of her race; and it was a greater demand than her demand, just as the race was greater than she. So she put foot upon the log, and, with the eyes of the alien people upon her, walked down into the foam-white swirl.

She came upon a man weeping by the side of the trail. His pack, clumsily strapped, sprawled on the ground. He had taken off a shoe, and one naked foot showed swollen and blistered.

"What is the matter?" she asked, halting before him.

He looked up at her, then down into the depths where the Dyea River cut the gloomy darkness with its living silver. The tears still welled in his eyes, and he sniffled.

"What is the matter?" she repeated. "Can I be of any help?"

"No," he replied. "How can you help? My feet are raw, and my back is nearly broken, and I am all tired out. Can you help any of these things?"

"Well," judiciously, "I am sure it might be worse. Think of the men who have just landed on the beach. It will take them ten days or two weeks to back-trip their outfits as far as you have already got yours."

"But my partners have left me and gone on," he moaned, a sneaking appeal for pity in his voice. "And I am all alone, and I don't feel able to move another step. And then think of my wife and babies. I left

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

them down in the States. Oh, if they could only see me now! I can't go back to them, and I can't go on. It's too much for me. I can't stand it, this working like a horse. I was not made to work like a horse. I'll die, I know I will, if I do. Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"Why did your comrades leave you?"

"Because I was not so strong as they; because I could not pack as much or as long. And they laughed at me and left me."

"Have you ever roughed it?" Frona asked.

"No."

"You look well put up and strong. Weigh probably one hundred and sixty-five?"

"One hundred and seventy," he corrected.

"You don't look as though you had ever been troubled with sickness. Never an invalid?"

"N-no."

"And your comrades? They are miners?"

"Never mining in their lives. They worked in the same establishment with me. That's what makes it so hard, don't you see! We'd known one another for years! And to go off and leave me just because I couldn't keep up!"

"My friend," and Frona knew she was speaking for the race, "you are strong as they. You can work just as hard as they; pack as much. But you are weak of heart. This is no place for the weak of heart. You cannot work like a horse because you will not. Therefore the country has no use for you. The north wants strong men,—strong of soul, not body. The body does not count. So go back to the States. We do not want you here. If you come you will die, and what then of

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

your wife and babies? So sell out your outfit and go back. You will be home in three weeks. Good-by."

She passed through Sheep Camp. Somewhere above, a mighty glacier, under the pent pressure of a subterranean reservoir, had burst asunder and hurled a hundred thousand tons of ice and water down the rocky gorge. The trail was yet slippery with the slime of the flood, and men were rummaging disconsolately in the rubbish of overthrown tents and caches. But here and there they worked with nervous haste, and the stark corpses by the trail-side attested dumbly to their labor. A few hundred yards beyond, the work of the rush went on uninterrupted. Men rested their packs on jutting stones, swapped escapes whilst they regained their breath, then stumbled on to their toil again.

The mid-day sun beat down upon the stone " Scales." The forest had given up the struggle, and the dizzying heat recoiled from the unclothed rock. On either hand rose the ice-marred ribs of earth, naked and strenuous in their nakedness. Above towered storm-beaten Chilcoot. Up its gaunt and ragged front crawled a slender string of men. But it was an endless string. It came out of the last fringe of dwarfed shrub below, drew a black line across a dazzling stretch of ice, and filed past Frona where she ate her lunch by the way. And it went on, up the pitch of the steep, growing fainter and smaller, till it squirmed and twisted like a column of ants and vanished over the crest of the pass.

Even as she looked, Chilcoot was wrapped in roll-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

ing mist and whirling cloud, and a storm of sleet and wind roared down upon the toiling pigmies. The light was swept out of the day, and a deep gloom prevailed; but Frona knew that somewhere up there, clinging and climbing and immortally striving, the long line of ants still twisted towards the sky. And she thrilled at the thought, strong with man's ancient love of mastery, and stepped into the line which came out of the storm behind and disappeared into the storm before.

She blew through the gap of the pass in a whirlwind of vapor, with hand and foot clambered down the volcanic ruin of Chilcoot's mighty father, and stood on the bleak edge of the lake which filled the pit of the crater. The lake was angry and white-capped, and, though a hundred caches were waiting ferriage, no boats were plying back and forth. A rickety skeleton of sticks, in a shell of greased canvas, lay upon the rocks. Frona sought out the owner, a bright-faced young fellow, with sharp black eyes and a salient jaw. Yes, he was the ferryman, but he had quit work for the day. Water too rough for freighting. He charged twenty-five dollars for passengers, but he was not taking passengers to-day. Had he not said it was too rough? That was why.

"But you will take me, surely?" she asked.

He shook his head and gazed out over the lake. "At the far end it's rougher than you see it here. Even the big wooden boats won't tackle it. The last that tried, with a gang of packers aboard, was blown over on the west shore. We could see them plainly. And as there's no trail around from there, they'll have to camp it out till the blow is over."

"But they're better off than I am. My camp outfit

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

is at Happy Camp, and I can't very well stay here." Frona smiled winsomely, but there was no appeal in the smile; no feminine helplessness throwing itself on the strength and chivalry of the male. "Do reconsider and take me across."

"No."

"I'll give you fifty."

"No, I say."

"But I'm not afraid, you know."

The young fellow's eyes flashed angrily. He turned upon her suddenly, but on second thought did not utter the words forming on his lips. She realized the unintentional slur she had cast, and was about to explain. But on second thought she, too, remained silent; for she read him, and knew that it was perhaps the only way for her to gain her point. They stood there, bodies inclined to the storm in the manner of seamen on sloped decks, unyieldingly looking into each other's eyes. His hair was plastered in wet ringlets on his forehead, while hers, in longer wisps, beat furiously about her face.

"Come on, then!" He flung the boat into the water with an angry jerk, and tossed the oars aboard. "Climb in! I'll take you, but not for your fifty dollars. You pay the regulation price, and that's all."

A gust of the gale caught the light shell and swept it broadside for a score of feet. The spray drove inboard in a continuous stinging shower, and Frona at once fell to work with the bailing-can.

"I hope we're blown ashore," he shouted, stooping forward to the oars. "It would be embarrassing—for you." He looked up savagely into her face.

"No," she modified; "but it would be very miser-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

able for both of us,—a night without tent, blankets, or fire. Besides, we're not going to blow ashore."

She stepped out on the slippery rocks and helped him heave up the canvas craft and tilt the water out. On either side uprose bare wet walls of rock. A heavy sleet was falling steadily, through which a few streaming caches showed in the gathering darkness.

"You'd better hurry up," he advised, thanking her for the assistance and relaunching the boat. "Two miles of stiff trail from here to Happy Camp. No wood until you get there, so you'd best hustle along. Good-by."

Frona reached out and took his hand, and said, "You are a brave man."

"Oh, I don't know." He returned the grip with usury and looked his admiration.

A dozen tents held grimly to their pegs on the extreme edge of the timber line at Happy Camp. Frona, weary with the day, went from tent to tent. Her wet skirts clung heavily to her tired limbs, while the wind buffeted her brutally about. Once, through a canvas wall, she heard a man apostrophizing gorgeously, and felt sure that it was Del Bishop. But a peep into the interior told a different tale; so she wandered fruitlessly on till she reached the last tent in the camp. She untied the flap and looked in. A spluttering candle showed the one occupant, a man, down on his knees and blowing lustily into the fire-box of a smoky Yukon stove.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER IV

She cast off the lower flap-fastenings and entered. The man still blew into the stove, unaware of his company. Frona coughed, and he raised a pair of smoke-reddened eyes to hers.

"Certainly," he said, casually enough. "Fasten the flaps and make yourself comfortable." And thereat returned to his borean task.

"Hospitable, to say the least," she commented to herself, obeying his command and coming up to the stove.

A heap of dwarfed spruce, gnarled and wet and cut to proper stove-length, lay to one side. Frona knew it well, creeping and crawling and twisting itself among the rocks of the shallow alluvial deposit, unlike its arboreal prototype, rarely lifting its head more than a foot from the earth. She looked into the oven, found it empty, and filled it with the wet wood. The man arose to his feet, coughing from the smoke which had been driven into his lungs, and nodding approval.

When he had recovered his breath, "Sit down and dry your skirts. I'll get supper."

He put a coffee-pot on the front lid of the stove, emptied the bucket into it, and went out of the tent after more water. As his back disappeared, Frona dived for her satchel, and when he returned a moment later he found her with a dry skirt on and

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

wringing the wet one out. While he fished about in the grub-box for dishes and eating utensils, she stretched a spare bit of rope between the tent-poles and hung the skirt on it to dry. The dishes were dirty, and, as he bent over and washed them, she turned her back and deftly changed her stockings. Her childhood had taught her the value of well-cared feet for the trail. She put her wet shoes on a pile of wood at the back of the stove, substituting for them a pair of soft and dainty house-moccasins of Indian make. The fire had now grown strong, and she was content to let her under-garments dry on her body.

During all this time neither had spoken a word. Not only had the man remained silent, but he went about his work in so preoccupied a way that it seemed to Frona that he turned a deaf ear to the words of explanation she would have liked to utter. His whole bearing conveyed the impression that it was the most ordinary thing under the sun for a young woman to come in out of the storm and night and partake of his hospitality. In one way, she liked this; but in so far as she did not comprehend it, she was troubled: She had a perception of a something being taken for granted which she did not understand. Once or twice she moistened her lips to speak, but he appeared so oblivious of her presence that she withheld.

After opening a can of corned beef with the axe, he fried half a dozen thick slices of bacon, set the frying-pan back, and boiled the coffee. From the grub-box he resurrected the half of a cold heavy flapjack. He looked at it dubiously, and shot a quick glance at her. Then he threw the sodden thing out of doors and dumped the contents of a sea-biscuit bag upon a camp

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

cloth. The sea-biscuit had been crumbled into chips and fragments and generously soaked by the rain till it had become a mushy, pulpy mass of dirty white.

"It's all I have in the way of bread," he muttered; "but sit down and we will make the best of it."

"One moment——" And before he could protest, Frona had poured the sea-biscuit into the frying-pan on top of the grease and bacon. To this she added a couple of cups of water and stirred briskly over the fire. When it had sobbed and sighed with the heat for some few minutes, she sliced up the corned beef and mixed it in with the rest. And by the time she had seasoned it heavily with salt and black pepper, a savory steam was rising from the concoction.

"Must say it's pretty good stuff," he said, balancing his plate on his knee and sampling the mess avidiously. "What do you happen to call it?"

"Slumgullion," she responded curtly, and thereafter the meal went on in silence.

Frona helped him to the coffee, studying him intently the while. And not only was it not an unpleasant face, she decided, but it was strong. Strong, she amended, potentially rather than actually. A student, she added, for she had seen many students' eyes and knew the lasting impress of the midnight oil long continued; and his eyes bore the impress. Brown eyes, she concluded, and handsome as the male's should be handsome; but she noted with surprise, when she refilled his plate with slumgullion, that they were not at all brown in the ordinary sense, but hazel-brown. In the daylight, she felt certain, and in times of best health, they would seem gray, and almost blue-gray.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

She knew it well; her one girl chum and dearest friend had had such an eye.

His hair was chestnut-brown, glinting in the candle-light to gold, and the hint of waviness in it explained the perceptible droop to his tawny moustache. For the rest, his face was clean-shaven and cut on a good masculine pattern. At first she found fault with the more than slight cheek-hollows under the cheek-bones, but when she measured his well-knit, slenderly muscular figure, with its deep chest and heavy shoulders, she discovered that she preferred the hollows; at least they did not imply lack of nutrition. The body gave the lie to that; while they themselves denied the vice of over-feeding. Height, five feet, nine, she summed up from out of her gymnasium experience; and age anywhere between twenty-five and thirty, though nearer the former most likely.

"Haven't many blankets," he said abruptly, pausing to drain his cup and set it over on the grub-box. "I don't expect my Indians back from Lake Linderman till morning, and the beggars have packed over everything except a few sacks of flour and the bare camp outfit. However, I've a couple of heavy ulsters which will serve just as well."

He turned his back, as though he did not expect a reply, and untied a rubber-covered roll of blankets. Then he drew the two ulsters from a clothes-bag and threw them down on the bedding.

"Vaudeville artist, I suppose?"

He asked the question seemingly without interest, as though to keep the conversation going, and, in fact, as if he knew the stereotyped answer beforehand. But to Frona the question was like a blow in the face. She

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

remembered Neepoosa's philippic against the white women who were coming into the land, and realized the falseness of her position and the way in which he looked upon her.

But he went on before she could speak. "Last night I had two vaudeville queens, and three the night before. Only there was more bedding then. It's unfortunate, isn't it, the aptitude they display in getting lost from their outfits? Yet somehow I have failed to find any lost outfits so far. And they are all queens, it seems. No under-studies or minor turns about them,—no, no. And I presume you are a queen, too?"

The too-ready blood sprayed her cheek, and this made her angrier than did he; for whereas she was sure of the steady grip she had on herself, her flushed face betokened a confusion which did not really possess her.

"No," she answered, coolly; "I am not a vaudeville artist."

He tossed several sacks of flour to one side of the stove, without replying, and made of them the foundation of a bed; and with the remaining sacks he duplicated the operation on the opposite side of the stove.

"But you are some kind of an artist, then," he insisted when he had finished, with an open contempt on the "artist."

"Unfortunately, I am not any kind of an artist at all."

He dropped the blanket he was folding and straightened his back. Hitherto he had no more than glanced at her; but now he scrutinized her carefully, every inch of her, from head to heel and back again, the cut

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

of her garments and the very way she did her hair. And he took his time about it.

"Oh! I beg pardon," was his verdict, followed by another stare. "Then you are a very foolish woman, dreaming of fortune and shutting your eyes to the dangers of the pilgrimage. It is only meet that two kinds of women come into this country. Those who by virtue of wifehood and daughterhood are respectable, and those who are not respectable. Vaudeville stars and artists, they call themselves for the sake of decency; and out of courtesy we countenance it. Yes, yes, I know. But remember, the women who come over the trail must be one or the other. There is no middle course, and those who attempt it are bound to fail. So you are a very, very foolish girl, and you had better turn back while there is yet a chance. If you will view it in the light of a loan from a stranger, I will advance your passage back to the States, and start an Indian over the trail with you to-morrow for Dyea."

Once or twice Frona had attempted to interrupt him, but he had waved her imperatively to silence with his hand.

"I thank you," she began; but he broke in,—

"Oh, not at all, not at all."

"I thank you," she repeated; but it happens that —a—that you are mistaken. I have just come over the trail from Dyea and expect to meet my outfit already in camp here at Happy Camp. They started hours ahead of me, and I can't understand how I passed them—yes I do, too! A boat was blown over to the west shore of Crater Lake this afternoon, and they must have been in it. That is where I missed them and came on. As for my turning back, I appre-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

ciate your motive for suggesting it, but my father is in Dawson, and I have not seen him for three years. Also, I have come through from Dyea this day, and am tired, and I would like to get some rest. So, if you still extend your hospitality, I'll go to bed."

"Impossible!" He kicked the blankets to one side, sat down on the flour sacks, and directed a blank look upon her.

"Are—are there any women in the other tents?" she asked, hesitatingly. "I did not see any, but I may have overlooked."

"A man and his wife were, but they pulled stakes this morning. No; there are no other women except —except two or three in a tent, which—er—which will not do for you."

"Do you think I am afraid of their hospitality?" she demanded, hotly. "As you said, they are women."

"But I said it would not do," he answered, absently, staring at the straining canvas and listening to the roar of the storm. "A man would die in the open on a night like this.

"And the other tents are crowded to the walls," he mused. "I happen to know. They have stored all their caches inside because of the water, and they haven't room to turn around. Besides, a dozen other strangers are storm-bound with them. Two or three asked to spread their beds in here to-night if they couldn't pinch room elsewhere. Evidently they have; but that does not argue that there is any surplus space left. And anyway——"

He broke off helplessly. The inevitableness of the situation was growing.

"Can I make Deep Lake to-night?" Frona asked,

Digitized by Google Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

forgetting herself to sympathize with him, then becoming conscious of what she was doing and bursting into laughter.

"But you couldn't ford the river in the dark." He frowned at her levity. "And there are no camps between."

"Are *you* afraid?" she asked with just the shadow of a sneer.

"Not for myself."

"Well, then, I think I'll go to bed."

"I might sit up and keep the fire going," he suggested after a pause.

"Fiddlesticks!" she cried. "As though your foolish little code were saved in the least! We are not in civilization. This is the trail to the Pole. Go to bed."

He elevated his shoulders in token of surrender. "Agreed. What shall I do then?"

"Help me make my bed, of course. Sacks laid crosswise! Thank you, sir, but I have bones and muscles that rebel. Here—— Pull them around this way."

Under her direction he laid the sacks lengthwise in a double row. This left an uncomfortable hollow with lumpy sack-corners down the middle; but she smote them flat with the side of the axe, and in the same manner lessened the slope to the walls of the hollow. Then she made a triple longitudinal fold in a blanket and spread it along the bottom of the long depression.

"Hum!" he soliloquized. "Now I see why I slept so badly. Here goes!" And he speedily flung his own sacks into shape.

"It is plain you are unused to the trail," she in-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

formed him, spreading the topmost blanket and sitting down.

"Perhaps so," he made answer. "But what do you know about this trail life?" he growled a little later.

"Enough to conform," she rejoined equivocally, ing out the dried wood from the oven and replacing it ith wet.

"Listen to it! How it storms!" he exclaimed. "It's growing worse, if worse be possible."

The tent reeled under the blows of the wind, the canvas booming hollowly at every shock, while the sleet and rain rattled overhead like skirmish-fire grown into a battle. In the lulls they could hear the water streaming off at the side-walls with the noise of small cataracts. He reached up curiously and touched the wet roof. A burst of water followed instantly at the point of contact and coursed down upon the grub-box.

"You mustn't do that!" Frona cried, springing to her feet. She put her finger on the spot, and, pressing tightly against the canvas, ran it down to the side-wall. The leak at once stopped. "You mustn't do it, you know," she reproved.

"Jove!" was his reply. "And you came through from Dyea to-day! Aren't you stiff?"

"Quite a bit," she confessed, candidly, "and sleepy."

"Good-night," she called to him several minutes later, stretching her body luxuriously in the warm blankets. And a quarter of an hour after that, "Oh, I say! Are you awake?"

"Yes," his voice came muffled across the stove. "What is it?"

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"Have you the shavings cut?"

"Shavings?" he queried, sleepily. "What shavings?"

"For the fire in the morning, of course. So get up and cut them."

He obeyed without a word; but ere he was done she had ceased to hear him.

The ubiquitous bacon was abroad on the air when she opened her eyes. Day had broken, and with it the storm. The wet sun was shining cheerily over the drenched landscape and in at the wide-spread flaps. Already work had begun, and groups of men were filing past under their packs. Frona turned over on her side. Breakfast was cooked. Her host had just put the bacon and fried potatoes in the oven, and was engaged in propping the door ajar with two sticks of firewood.

"Good-morning," she greeted.

"And good-morning to you," he responded, rising to his feet and picking up the water-bucket. "I don't hope that you slept well, for I know you did."

Frona laughed.

"I'm going out after some water," he vouchsafed. "And when I return I shall expect you ready for breakfast."

After breakfast, basking herself in the sun, Frona descried a familiar bunch of men rounding the tail of the glacier in the direction of Crater Lake. She clapped her hands.

"There comes my outfit, and Del Bishop as shamefaced as can be, I'm sure, at his failure to connect." Turning to the man, and at the same time slinging camera and satchel over her shoulder, "So I must say

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

good-by, not forgetting to thank you for your kindness."

"Oh, not at all, not at all. Pray don't mention it. I'd do the same for any——"

"Vaudeville artist!"

He looked his reproach, but went on. "I don't know your name, nor do I wish to know it."

"Well, I shall not be so harsh, for I do know your name, MISTER VANCE CORLISS! I saw it on the shipping tags, of course," she explained. "And I want you to come and see me when you get to Dawson. My name is Frona Welse. Good-by."

"Your father is not Jacob Welse?" he called after her as she ran lightly down towards the trail.

She turned her head and nodded.

But Del Bishop was not shamefaced, nor even worried. "Trust a Welse to land on their feet on a soft spot," he had consoled himself as he dropped off to sleep the night before. But he was angry—"madder 'n hops," in his own vernacular.

"Good-mornin'," he saluted. "And it's plain by your face you had a comfortable night of it, and no thanks to me."

"You weren't worried, were you?" she asked.

"Worried? About a Welse? Who? Me? Not on your life. I was too busy tellin' Crater Lake what I thought of it. I don't like the water. I told you so. And it's always playin' me scurvy—not that I'm afraid of it, though."

"Hey, you Pete!" turning to the Indians. "Hit 'er up! Got to make Linderman by noon!"

"Frona Welse?" Vance Corliss was repeating to himself.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

The whole thing seemed a dream, and he reassured himself by turning and looking after her retreating form. Del Bishop and the Indians were already out of sight behind a wall of rock. Frona was just rounding the base. The sun was full upon her, and she stood out radiantly against the black shadow of the wall beyond. She waved her alpenstock, and as he doffed his cap, rounded the brink and disappeared.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER V

THE position occupied by Jacob Welse was certainly an anomalous one. He was a giant trader in a country without commerce, a ripened product of the nineteenth century flourishing in a society as primitive as that of the Mediterranean vandals. A captain of industry and a splendid monopolist, he dominated the most independent aggregate of men ever drawn together from the ends of the earth. An economic missionary, a commercial St. Paul, he preached the doctrines of expediency and force. Believing in the natural rights of man, a child himself of democracy, he bent all men to his absolutism. Government of Jacob Welse, for Jacob Welse and the people, by Jacob Welse, was his unwritten gospel. Single-handed he had carved out his dominion till he gripped the domain of a dozen Roman provinces. At his ukase the population ebbed and flowed over a hundred thousand miles of territory, and cities sprang up or disappeared at his bidding.

Yet he was a common man. The air of the world first smote his lungs on the open prairie by the River Platte, the blue sky over head, and beneath, the green grass of the earth pressing against his tender nakedness. On the horses his eyes first opened, still saddled and gazing in mild wonder on the miracle; for his trapper father had but turned aside from the trail that the wife might have quiet and the birth be accom-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

plished. An hour or so and the two, which were now three, were in the saddle and overhauling their trapper comrades. The party had not been delayed; no time lost. In the morning his mother cooked the breakfast over the camp-fire, and capped it with a fifty-mile ride into the next sun-down.

The trapper father had come of the sturdy Welsh stock which trickled into early Ohio out of the jostling East, and the mother was a nomadic daughter of the Irish emigrant settlers of Ontario. From both sides came the Wanderlust of the blood, the fever to be moving, to be pushing on to the edge of things. In the first year of his life, ere he had learned the way of his legs, Jacob Welse had wandered a-horse through a thousand miles of wilderness, and wintered in a hunting-lodge on the head-waters of the Red River of the North. His first foot-gear was moccasins, his first taffy the tallow from a moose. His first generalizations were that the world was composed of great wastes and white vastnesses, and populated with Indians and white hunters like his father. A town was a cluster of deer-skin lodges; a trading-post a seat of civilization; and a factor God Almighty Himself. Rivers and lakes existed chiefly for man's use in travelling. Viewed in this light, the mountains puzzled him; but he placed them away in his classification of the Inexplicable and did not worry. Men died, sometimes. But their meat was not good to eat, and their hides worthless,—perhaps because they did not grow fur. Pelts were valuable, and with a few bales a man might purchase the earth. Animals were made for men to catch and skin. He did not know what men were made for, unless, perhaps, for the factor.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

As he grew older he modified these concepts, but the process was a continual source of naïve apprehension and wonderment. It was not until he became a man and had wandered through half the cities of the States that this expression of childish wonder passed out of his eyes and left them wholly keen and alert. At his boy's first contact with the cities, while he revised his synthesis of things, he also generalized afresh. People who lived in cities were effeminate. They did not carry the points of the compass in their heads, and they got lost easily. That was why they elected to stay in the cities. Because they might catch cold and because they were afraid of the dark, they slept under shelter and locked their doors at night. The women were soft and pretty, but they could not lift a snowshoe far in a day's journey. Everybody talked too much. That was why they lied and were unable to work greatly with their hands. Finally, there was a new human force called "bluff." A man who made a bluff must be dead sure of it, or else be prepared to back it up. Bluff was a very good thing —when exercised with discretion.

Later, though living his life mainly in the woods and mountains, he came to know that the cities were not all bad; that a man might live in a city and still be a man. Accustomed to do battle with natural forces, he was attracted by the commercial battle with social forces. The masters of marts and exchanges dazzled but did not blind him, and he studied them, and strove to grasp the secrets of their strength. And further, in token that some good did come out of Nazareth, in the full tide of manhood he took to himself a city-bred woman. But he still yearned for the edge of things,

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

and the leaven in his blood worked till they went away, and above the Dyea Beach, on the rim of the forest, built the big log trading-post. And here, in the mellow of time, he got a proper focus on things and unified the phenomena of society precisely as he had already unified the phenomena of nature. There was naught in one which could not be expressed in terms of the other. The same principles underlaid both; the same truths were manifest of both. Competition was the secret of creation. Battle was the law and the way of progress. The world was made for the strong, and only the strong inherited it, and through it all there ran an eternal equity. To be honest was to be strong. To sin was to weaken. To bluff an honest man was to be dishonest. To bluff a bluffer was to smite with the steel of justice. The primitive strength was in the arm; the modern strength in the brain. Though it had shifted ground, the struggle was the same old struggle. As of old time, men still fought for the mastery of the earth and the delights thereof. But the sword had given way to the ledger; the mail-clad baron to the soft-garbed industrial lord, and the centre of imperial political power to the seat of commercial exchanges. The modern will had destroyed the ancient brute. The stubborn earth yielded only to force. Brain was greater than body. The man with the brain could best conquer things primitive.

He did not have much education as education goes. To the three R's his mother taught him by camp-fire and candle-light, he had added a somewhat miscellaneous book-knowledge; but he was not burdened with what he had gathered. Yet he read the facts

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

of life understandingly, and the sobriety which comes of the soil was his, and the clear earth-vision.

And so it came about that Jacob Welse crossed over the Chilcoot in an early day, and disappeared into the vast unknown. A year later he emerged at the Russian missions clustered about the mouth of the Yukon on Bering Sea. He had journeyed down a river three thousand miles long, he had seen things, and dreamed a great dream. But he held his tongue and went to work, and one day the defiant whistle of a crazy stern-wheel tub saluted the midnight sun on the dank river-stretch by Fort o' Yukon. It was a magnificent adventure. How he achieved it only Jacob Welse can tell; but with the impossible to begin with, plus the impossible, he added steamer to steamer and heaped enterprise upon enterprise. Along many a thousand miles of river and tributary he built trading-posts and warehouses. He forced the white man's axe into the hands of the aborigines, and in every village and between the villages rose the cords of four-foot firewood for his boilers. On an island in Bering Sea, where the river and the ocean meet, he established a great distributing station, and on the North Pacific he put big ocean steamships; while in his offices in Seattle and San Francisco it took clerks by the score to keep the order and system of his business.

Men drifted into the land. Hitherto famine had driven them out, but Jacob Welse was there now, and his grub-stores; so they wintered in the frost and groped in the frozen muck for gold. He encouraged them, grub-staked them, carried them on the books of the company. His steamers dragged them up the Koyokuk in the old days of Arctic City. Wherever

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

pay was struck he built a warehouse and a store. The town followed. He explored; he speculated; he developed. Tireless, indomitable, with the steel-glitter in his dark eyes, he was everywhere at once, doing all things. In the opening up of a new river he was in the van; and at the tail-end also, hurrying forward the grub. On the Outside he fought trade-combinations; made alliances with the corporations of the earth, and forced discriminating tariffs from the great carriers. On the Inside he sold flour, and blankets, and tobacco; built saw-mills, staked town-sites, and sought properties in copper, iron, and coal; and that the miners should be well-equipped, ransacked the lands of the Arctic even as far as Siberia for native-made snow-shoes, muclucs, and parkas.

He bore the country on his shoulders; saw to its needs; did its work. Every ounce of its dust passed through his hands; every post-card and letter of credit. He did its banking and exchange; carried and distributed its mails. He frowned upon competition; frightened out predatory capital; bluffed militant syndicates, and when they would not, backed his bluff and broke them. And for all, yet found time and place to remember his motherless girl, and to love her, and to fit her for the position he had made.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER VI

"So I think, captain, you will agree that we must exaggerate the seriousness of the situation." Jacob Welse helped his visitor into his fur great-coat and went on. "Not that it is not serious, but that it may not become more serious. Both you and I have handled famines before. We must frighten them, and frighten them now, before it is too late. Take five thousand men out of Dawson and there will be grub to last. Let those five thousand carry their tale of famine to Dyea and Skaguay, and they will prevent five thousand more coming in over the ice."

"Quite right! And you may count on the hearty co-operation of the police, Mr. Welse." The speaker, a strong-faced, grizzled man, heavy-set and of military bearing, pulled up his collar and rested his hand on the door-knob. "I see already, thanks to you, the newcomers are beginning to sell their outfits and buy dogs. Lord! won't there be a stampede out over the ice as soon as the river closes down! And each that sells a thousand pounds of grub and goes lessens the proposition by one empty stomach and fills another that remains. When does the Laura start?"

"This morning, with three hundred grubless men aboard. Would that they were three thousand!"

"Amen to that! And by the way, when does your daughter arrive?"

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"'Most any day, now." Jacob Welse's eyes warmed. "And I want you to dinner when she does, and bring along a bunch of your young bucks from the Barracks. I don't know all their names, but just the same extend the invitation as though from me personally. I haven't cultivated the social side much,—no time, but see to it that the girl enjoys herself. Fresh from the States and London, and she's liable to feel lonesome. You understand."

Jacob Welse closed the door, tilted his chair back, and cocked his feet on the guard-rail of the stove. For one half-minute a girlish vision wavered in the shimmering air above the stove, then merged into a woman of fair Saxon type.

The door opened. "Mr. Welse, Mr. Foster sent me to find out if he is to go on filling signed warehouse orders?"

"Certainly, Mr. Smith. But tell him to scale them down by half. If a man holds an order for a thousand pounds, give him five hundred."

He lighted a cigar and tilted back again in his chair.

"Captain McGregor wants to see you, sir."

"Send him in."

Captain McGregor strode in and remained standing before his employer. The rough hand of the New World had been laid upon the Scotsman from his boyhood; but sterling honesty was written in every line of his bitter-seamed face, while a prognathous jaw proclaimed to the onlooker that honesty was the best policy,—for the onlooker at any rate, should he wish to do business with the owner of the jaw. This warning was backed up by the nose, side-twisted and

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

broken, and by a long scar which ran up the forehead and disappeared in the gray-grizzled hair.

"We throw off the lines in an hour, sir; so I've come for the last word."

"Good." Jacob Welse whirled his chair about. "Captain McGregor."

"Ay."

"I had other work cut out for you this winter; but I have changed my mind and chosen you to go down with the Laura. Can you guess why?"

Captain McGregor swayed his weight from one leg to the other, and a shrewd chuckle of a smile wrinkled the corners of his eyes. "Going to be trouble," he grunted.

"And I couldn't have picked a better man. Mr. Bally will give you detailed instructions as you go aboard. But let me say this: If we can't scare enough men out of the country, there'll be need for every pound of grub at Fort Yukon. Understand?"

"Ay."

"So no extravagance. You are taking three hundred men down with you. The chances are that twice as many more will go down as soon as the river freezes. You'll have a thousand to feed through the winter. Put them on rations,—working rations,—and see that they work. Cordwood, six dollars per cord, and piled on the bank where steamers can make a landing. No work, no rations. Understand?"

"Ay."

"A thousand men can get ugly, if they are idle. They can get ugly anyway. Watch out they don't rush the caches. If they do,—do your duty."

The other nodded grimly. His hands gripped un-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

consciously, while the scar on his forehead took on a livid hue.

"There are five steamers in the ice. Make them safe against the spring break-up. But first transfer all their cargoes to one big cache. You can defend it better, and make the cache impregnable. Send a messenger down to Fort Burr, asking Mr. Carter for three of his men. He doesn't need them. Nothing much is doing at Circle City. Stop in on the way down and take half of Mr. Burdwell's men. You'll need them. There'll be gun-fighters in plenty to deal with. Be stiff. Keep things in check from the start. Remember, the man who shoots first comes off with the whole hide. And keep a constant eye on the grub."

"And on the forty-five-nineties," Captain McGregor rumbled back as he passed out the door.

"John Melton—Mr. Melton, sir. Can he see you?"

"See here, Welse, what's this mean?" John Melton followed wrathfully on the heels of the clerk, and he almost walked over him as he flourished a paper before the head of the company. "Read that! What's it stand for?"

Jacob Welse glanced over it and looked up coolly. "One thousand pounds of grub."

"That's what I say, but that fellow you've got in the warehouse says no,—five hundred's all it's good for."

"He spoke the truth."

"But——"

"It stands for one thousand pounds, but in the warehouse it is only good for five hundred."

"That your signature?" thrusting the receipt again into the other's line of vision.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"Yes."

"Then what are you going to do about it?"

"Give you five hundred. What are you going to do about it?"

"Refuse to take it."

"Very good. There is no further discussion."

"Yes there is. I propose to have no further dealings with you. I'm rich enough to freight my own stuff in over the Passes, and I will next year. Our business stops right now and for all time."

"I cannot object to that. You have three hundred thousand dollars in dust deposited with me. Go to Mr. Atsheler and draw it at once."

The man fumed impotently up and down. "Can't I get that other five hundred? Great God, man! I've paid for it! You don't intend me to starve?"

"Look here, Melton." Jacob Welse paused to knock the ash from his cigar. "At this very moment what are you working for? What are you trying to get?"

"A thousand pounds of grub."

"For your own stomach?"

The Bonanzo king nodded his head.

"Just so." The lines showed more sharply on Jacob Welse's forehead. "You are working for your own stomach. I am working for the stomachs of twenty thousand."

"But you filled Tim McReady's thousand pounds yesterday all right."

"The scale-down did not go into effect until to-day."

"But why am I the one to get it in the neck hard?"

"Why didn't you come yesterday, and Tim McReady to-day?"

Digitized by Google Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Melton's face went blank, and Jacob Welse answered his own question with shrugging shoulders.

"That's the way it stands, Melton. No favoritism. If you hold me responsible for Tim McReady, I shall hold you responsible for not coming yesterday. Better we both throw it upon Providence. You went through the Forty Mile Famine. You are a white man. A Bonanzo property, or a block of Bonanzo properties, does not entitle you to a pound more than the oldest penniless 'sour-dough' or the newest baby born. Trust me. As long as I have a pound of grub you shall not starve. Stiffen up. Shake hands. Get a smile on your face and make the best of it."

Still savage of spirit, though rapidly toning down, the king shook hands and flung out of the room. Before the door could close on his heels, a loose-jointed Yankee shambled in, thrust a moccasined foot to the side and hooked a chair under him, and sat down.

"Say," he opened up, confidentially, "people's gittin' scairt over the grub proposition, I guess some."

"Hello, Dave. That you?"

"S'pose so. But ez I was sayin', there'll be a lively stampede fer the Outside soon as the river freezes."

"Think so?"

"Unh huh."

"Then I'm glad to hear it. It's what the country needs. Going to join them?"

"Not in a thousand years." Dave Harney threw his head back with smug complacency. "Freighted my truck up to the mine yesterday. Wa'n't a bit too soon about it, either. But say . . . Suthin' happened to the sugar. Had it all on the last sled, an' jest where the trail turns off the Klondike into Bonanzo, what

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

does that sled do but break through the ice! I never seen the beat of it—the last sled of all, an' all the sugar! So I jest thought I'd drop in to-day an' git a hundred pounds or so. White or brown, I ain't pertickler."

Jacob Welse shook his head and smiled, but Harney hitched his chair closer.

"The clerk of yourn said he didn't know, an' ez there wa'n't no call to pester him, I said I'd jest drop round an' see you. I don't care what it's wuth. Make it a hundred even; that'll do me handy.

"Say," he went on easily, noting the decidedly negative poise of the other's head. "I've got a tolerable sweet tooth, I have. Recollect the taffy I made over on Preacher Creek that time? I declare! how time does fly! That was all of six years ago if it's a day. More'n that, surely. Seven, by the Jimcracky! But ez I was sayin', I'd ruther do without my plug of 'Star' than sugar. An' about that sugar? Got my dogs outside. Better go round to the warehouse an' git it, eh? Pretty good idea."

But he saw the "No" shaping on Jacob Welse's lips, and hurried on before it could be uttered.

"Now, I don't want to hog it. Wouldn't do that fer the world. So if yer short, I can put up with seventy-five——" (he studied the other's face), "an' I might do with fifty. I 'preciate your position, an' I ain't low-down critter enough to pester——"

"What's the good of spilling words, Dave? We haven't a pound of sugar to spare——"

"Ez I was sayin', I ain't no hog; an' seein' 's it's you, Welse, I'll make to scrimp along on twenty-five——"

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"Not an ounce!"

"Not the least leetle mite? Well, well, don't git het up. We'll jest fergit I ast you fer any, an' I'll drop round some likelier time. So long. Say!" He threw his jaw to one side and seemed to stiffen the muscles of his ear as he listened intently. "That's the Laura's whistle. She's startin' soon. Goin' to see her off? Come along."

Jacob Welse pulled on his bearskin coat and mittens, and they passed through the outer offices into the main store. So large was it, that the tenscore purchasers before the counters made no apparent crowd. Many were serious-faced, and more than one looked darkly at the head of the company as he passed. The clerks were selling everything except grub, and it was grub that was in demand. "Holding it for a rise. Famine prices," a red-whiskered miner sneered. Jacob Welse heard it, but took no notice. He expected to hear it many times and more unpleasantly ere the scare was over.

On the sidewalk he stopped to glance over the public bulletins posted against the side of the building. Dogs lost, found, and for sale occupied some space, but the rest was devoted to notices of sales of outfits. The timid were already growing frightened. Outfits of five hundred pounds were offering at a dollar a pound, without flour; others, with flour, at a dollar and a half. Jacob Welse saw Melton talking with an anxious-faced newcomer, and the satisfaction displayed by the Bonanzo king told that he had succeeded in filling his winter's cache.

"Why don't you smell out the sugar, Dave?" Jacob Welse asked, pointing to the bulletins.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Dave Harney looked his reproach. "Mebbe you think I ain't ben smellin'. I've clean wore my dogs out chasin' round from Klondike City to the Hospital. Can't git yer fingers on it fer love or money."

They walked down the block-long sidewalk, past the warehouse doors and the long teams of waiting huskies curled up in wolfish comfort in the snow. It was for this snow, the first permanent one of the fall, that the miners up-creek had waited to begin their freighting.

"Curious, ain't it?" Dave hazarded suggestively, as they crossed the main street to the river bank. "Mighty curious—me ownin' two five-hundred-foot Eldorado claims an' a fraction, wuth five millions if I'm wuth a cent, an' no sweetenin' fer my coffee or mush! Why, gosh-dang-it! this country kin go to blazes! I'll sell out! I'll quit it cold! I'll—I'll—go back to the States!"

"Oh, no, you won't," Jacob Welse answered. "I've heard you talk before. You put in a year up Stuart River on straight meat, if I haven't forgotten. And you ate salmon-belly and dogs up the Tanana, to say nothing of going through two famines; and you haven't turned your back on the country yet. And you never will. And you'll die here as sure as that's the Laura's spring being hauled aboard. And I look forward confidently to the day when I shall ship you out in a lead-lined box and burden the San Francisco end with the trouble of winding up your estate. You are a fixture, and you know it."

As he talked he constantly acknowledged greetings from the passers-by. Those who knew him were mainly old-timers and he knew them all by name,

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

though there was scarcely a newcomer to whom his face was not familiar.

"I'll jest bet I'll be in Paris in 1900," the Eldorado king protested feebly.

But Jacob Welse did not hear. There was a jangling of gongs as McGregor saluted him from the pilot-house and the Laura slipped out from the bank. The men on the shore filled the air with good-luck farewells and last advice, but the three hundred grubless ones, turning their backs on the golden dream, were moody and dispirited, and made small response. The Laura backed out through a channel cut in the shore-ice, swung about in the current, and with a final blast put on full steam ahead.

The crowd thinned away and went about its business, leaving Jacob Welse the centre of a group of a dozen or so. The talk was of the famine, but it was the talk of men. Even Dave Harney forgot to curse the country for its sugar shortage, and waxed facetious over the newcomers,—*chechaquos,* he called them, having recourse to the Siwash tongue. In the midst of his remarks his quick eye lighted on a black speck floating down with the mush-ice of the river. "Jest look at that!" he cried. "A Peterborough canoe runnin' the ice!"

Twisting and turning, now paddling, now shoving clear of the floating cakes, the two men in the canoe worked in to the rim-ice, along the edge of which they drifted, waiting for an opening. Opposite the channel cut out by the steamer, they drove their paddles deep and darted into the calm dead water. The waiting group received them with open arms, helping them up the bank and carrying their shell after them.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

In its bottom were two leather mail-pouches, a couple of blankets, coffee-pot and frying-pan, and a scant grub-sack. As for the men, so frosted were they, and so numb with the cold, that they could hardly stand. Dave Harney proposed whiskey, and was for haling them away at once; but one delayed long enough to shake stiff hands with Jacob Welse.

"She's coming," he announced. "Passed her boat an hour back. It ought to be round the bend any minute. I've got despatches for you, but I'll see you later. Got to get something into me first." Turning to go with Harney, he stopped suddenly and pointed up stream. "There she is now. Just coming out past the bluff."

"Run along, boys, an' git yer whiskey," Harney admonished him and his mate. "Tell 'm it's on me, double dose, an' jest excuse me not drinkin' with you, fer I'm goin' to stay."

The Klondike was throwing a thick flow of ice, partly mush and partly solid, and swept the boat out towards the middle of the Yukon. They could see the struggle plainly from the bank,—four men standing up and poling a way through the jarring cakes. A Yukon stove aboard was sending up a trailing pillar of blue smoke, and, as the boat drew closer, they could see a woman in the stern working the long steering-sweep. At sight of this there was a snap and sparkle in Jacob Welse's eyes. It was the first omen, and it was good, he thought. She was still a Welse; a struggler and a fighter. The years of her culture had not weakened her. Though tasting of the fruits of the first remove from the soil, she was not afraid of the soil; she could return to it gleefully and naturally.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

So he mused till the boat drove in, ice-rimed and battered, against the edge of the rim-ice. The one white man aboard sprang out, painter in hand, to slow it down and work into the channel. But the rim-ice was formed of the night, and the front of it shelved off with him into the current. The nose of the boat sheered out under the pressure of a heavy cake, so that he came up at the stern. The woman's arm flashed over the side to his collar, and at the same instant, sharp and authoritative, her voice rang out to the Indian oarsmen to back water. Still holding the man's head above water, she threw her body against the sweep and guided the boat stern-foremost into the opening. A few more strokes and it grounded at the foot of the bank. She passed the collar of the chattering man to Dave Harney, who dragged him out and started him off on the trail of the mail-carriers.

Frona stood up, her cheeks glowing from the quick work. Jacob Welse hesitated. Though he stood within reach of the gunwale, a gulf of three years was between. The womanhood of twenty, added unto the girl of seventeen, made a sum more prodigious than he had imagined. He did not know whether to bear-hug the radiant young creature or to take her hand and help her ashore. But there was no apparent hitch, for she leaped beside him and was into his arms. Those above looked away to a man till the two came up the bank hand in hand.

"Gentlemen, my daughter." There was a great pride in his face.

Frona embraced them all with a comrade smile, and each man felt that for an instant her eyes had looked straight into his.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER VII

THAT Vance Corliss wanted to see more of the girl he had divided blankets with, goes with the saying. He had not been wise enough to lug a camera into the country, but none the less, by a yet subtler process, a sun-picture had been recorded somewhere on his cerebral tissues. In the flash of an instant it had been done. A wave message of light and color, a molecular agitation and integration, a certain minute though definite corrugation in a brain recess,—and there it was, a picture complete! The blazing sunlight on the beetling black; a slender gray form, radiant, starting forward to the vision from the marge where light and darkness met; a fresh young morning smile wreathed in a flame of burning gold.

It was a picture he looked at often, and the more he looked the greater was his desire to see Frona Welse again. This event he anticipated with a thrill, with the exultancy over change which is common of all life. She was something new, a fresh type, a woman unrelated to all women he had met. Out of the fascinating unknown a pair of hazel eyes smiled into his, and a hand, soft of touch and strong of grip, beckoned him. And there was an allurement about it which was as the allurement of sin.

Not that Vance Corliss was anybody's fool, nor that

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

his had been an anchorite's existence; but that his upbringing, rather, had given his life a certain puritanical bent. Awakening intelligence and broader knowledge had weakened the early influence of an austere mother, but had not wholly eradicated it. It was there, deep down, very shadowy, but still a part of him. He could not get away from it. It distorted, ever so slightly, his concepts of things. It gave a squint to his perceptions, and very often, when the sex feminine was concerned, determined his classifications. He prided himself on his largeness when he granted that there were three kinds of women. His mother had only admitted two. But he had outgrown her. It was incontestable that there were three kinds,—the good, the bad, and the partly good and partly bad. That the last usually went bad, he believed firmly. In its very nature such a condition could not be permanent. It was the intermediary stage, marking the passage from high to low, from best to worst.

All of which might have been true, even as he saw it; but with definitions for premises, conclusions cannot fail to be dogmatic. What was *good* and *bad?* There it was. That was where his mother whispered with dead lips to him. Nor alone his mother, but divers conventional generations, even back to the sturdy ancestor who first uplifted from the soil and looked down. For Vance Corliss was many times removed from the red earth, and, though he did not know it, there was a clamor within him for a return lest he perish.

Not that he pigeon-holed Frona according to his inherited definitions. He refused to classify her at all. He did not dare. He preferred to pass judgment

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

later, when he had gathered more data. And there was the allurement, the gathering of the data; the great critical point where purity reaches dreamy hands towards pitch and refuses to call it pitch—till defiled. No; Vance Corliss was not a cad. And since purity is merely a relative term, he was not pure. That there was no pitch under his nails was not because he had manicured diligently, but because it had not been his luck to run across any pitch. He was not good because he chose to be, because evil was repellant; but because he had not had opportunity to become evil. But from this, on the other hand, it is not to be argued that he would have gone bad had he had a chance.

He was a product of the sheltered life. All his days had been lived in a sanitary dwelling; the plumbing was excellent. The air he had breathed had been mostly ozone artificially manufactured. He had been sun-bathed in balmy weather, and brought in out of the wet when it rained. And when he reached the age of choice he had been too fully occupied to deviate from the straight path, along which his mother had taught him to creep and toddle, and along which he now proceeded to walk upright, without thought of what lay on either side.

Vitality cannot be used over again. If it be expended on one thing, there is none left for the other thing. And so with Vance Corliss. Scholarly lucubrations and healthy exercises during his college days had consumed all the energy his normal digestion extracted from a wholesome omnivorous diet. When he did discover a bit of surplus energy, he worked it off in the society of his mother and of the conven-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

tional minds and prim teas she surrounded herself with. Result: A very nice young man, of whom no maid's mother need ever be in trepidation; a very strong young man, whose substance had not been wasted in riotous living; a very learned young man, with a Freiberg mining engineer's diploma and a B.A. sheepskin from Yale; and, lastly, a very self-centred, self-possessed young man.

Now his greatest virtue lay in this: he had not become hardened in the mould baked by his several forbears and into which he had been pressed by his mother's hands. Some atavism had been at work in the making of him, and he had reverted to that ancestor who sturdily uplifted. But so far this portion of his heritage had lain dormant. He had simply remained adjusted to a stable environment. There had been no call upon the adaptability which was his. But whensoever the call came, being so constituted, it was manifest that he should adapt, should adjust himself to the unwonted pressure of new conditions. The maxim of the rolling stone may be all true; but notwithstanding, in the scheme of life, the inability to become fixed is an excellence par excellence. Though he did not know it, this inability was Vance Corliss's most splendid possession.

But to return. He looked forward with great sober glee to meeting Frona Welse, and in the meanwhile consulted often the sun-picture he carried of her. Though he went over the Pass and down the lakes and river with a push of money behind him (London syndicates are never niggardly in such matters), Frona beat him into Dawson by a fortnight. While on his part money in the end overcame obstacles, on

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

hers the name of Welse was a talisman greater than treasure. After his arrival, a couple of weeks were consumed in buying a cabin, presenting his letters of introduction, and settling down. But all things come in the fulness of time, and so, one night after the river closed, he pointed his moccasins in the direction of Jacob Welse's house. Mrs. Schoville, the Gold Commissioner's wife, gave him the honor of her company.

Corliss wanted to rub his eyes. Steam-heating apparatus in the Klondike! But the next instant he had passed out of the hall through the heavy portières and stood inside the drawing-room. And it *was* a drawing-room. His moose-hide moccasins sank luxuriantly into the deep carpet, and his eyes were caught by a Turner sunrise on the opposite wall. And there were other paintings and things in bronze. Two Dutch fireplaces were roaring full with huge back-logs of spruce. There was a piano; and somebody was singing. Frona sprang from the stool and came forward, greeting him with both hands. He had thought his sun-picture perfect, but this fire-picture, this young creature with the flush and warmth of ringing life, quite eclipsed it. It was a whirling moment, as he held her two hands in his, one of those moments when an incomprehensible orgasm quickens the blood and dizzies the brain. Though the first syllables came to him faintly, Mrs. Schoville's voice brought him back to himself.

"Oh!" she cried. "You know him!"

And Frona answered, "Yes, we met on the Dyea Trail; and those who meet on the Dyea Trail can never forget."

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"How romantic!"

The Gold Commissioner's wife clapped her hands. Though fat and forty, and phlegmatic of temperament, between exclamations and hand-clappings her waking existence was mostly explosive. Her husband secretly averred that did God Himself deign to meet her face to face, she would smite together her chubby hands and cry out, "How romantic!"

"How did it happen?" she continued. "He didn't rescue you over a cliff, or that sort of thing, did he? Do say that he did! And you never said a word about it, Mr. Corliss. Do tell me. I'm just dying to know!"

"Oh, nothing like that," he hastened to answer. "Nothing much. I, that is we——"

He felt a sinking as Frona interrupted. There was no telling what this remarkable girl might say.

"He gave me of his hospitality, that was all," she said. "And I can vouch for his fried potatoes; while for his coffee, it is excellent—when one is very hungry."

"Ingrate!" he managed to articulate, and thereby to gain a smile, ere he was introduced to a cleanly built lieutenant of the Mounted Police, who stood by the fireplace discussing the grub proposition with a dapper little man very much out of place in a white shirt and stiff collar.

Thanks to the particular niche in society into which he happened to be born, Corliss drifted about easily from group to group, and was much envied therefore by Del Bishop, who sat stiffly in the first chair he had dropped into, and who was waiting patiently for the first person to take leave that he might know how to compass the manœuvre. In his mind's eye he had

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

figured most of it out, knew just how many steps required to carry him to the door, was certain he would have to say good-by to Frona, but did not know whether or not he was supposed to shake hands all around. He had just dropped in to see Frona and say "Howdee," as he expressed it, and had unwittingly found himself in company.

Corliss, having terminated a buzz with a Miss Mortimer on the decadence of the French symbolists, encountered Del Bishop. But the pocket-miner remembered him at once from the one glimpse he had caught of Corliss standing by his tent-door in Happy Camp. Was almighty obliged to him for his night's hospitality to Miss Frona, seein' as he'd ben side-tracked down the line; that any kindness to her was a kindness to him; and that he'd remember it, by God, as long as he had a corner of a blanket to pull over him. Hoped it hadn't put him out. Miss Frona'd said that bedding was scarce, but it wasn't a cold night (more blowy than crisp), so he reckoned there couldn't 'a' ben much shiverin'. All of which struck Corliss as perilous, and he broke away at the first opportunity, leaving the pocket-miner yearning for the door.

But Dave Harney, who had not come by mistake, avoided gluing himself to the first chair. Being an Eldorado king, he had felt it incumbent to assume the position in society to which his numerous millions entitled him; and though unused all his days to social amenities other than the out-hanging latch-string and the general pot, he had succeeded to his own satisfaction as a knight of the carpet. Quick to take a cue, he circulated with an aplomb which his striking

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

garments and long shambling gait only heightened, and talked choppy and disconnected fragments with whomsoever he ran up against. The Miss Mortimer, who spoke Parisian French, took him aback with her symbolists; but he evened matters up with a goodly measure of the bastard lingo of the Canadian *voyageurs*, and left her gasping and meditating over a proposition to sell him twenty-five pounds of sugar, white or brown. But she was not unduly favored, for with everybody he adroitly turned the conversation to grub, and then led up to the eternal proposition. "Sugar or bust," he would conclude gayly each time and wander on to the next.

But he put the capstone on his social success by asking Frona to sing the touching ditty, "I Left My Happy Home for You." This was something beyond her, though she had him hum over the opening bars so that she could furnish the accompaniment. His voice was more strenuous than sweet, and Del Bishop, discovering himself at last, joined in raucously on the choruses. This made him feel so much better that he disconnected himself from the chair, and when he finally got home he kicked up his sleepy tent-mate to tell him about the high time he'd had over at the Welse's. Mrs. Schoville tittered and thought it all so unique, and she thought it so unique several times more when the lieutenant of Mounted Police and a couple of compatriots roared "Rule Britannia" and "God Save the Queen," and the Americans responded with "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" and "John Brown." Then big Alec Beaubien, the Circle City king, demanded the "Marseillaise," and the company broke up chanting "Die Wacht am Rhein" to the frosty night.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"Don't come on these nights," Frona whispered to Corliss at parting. "We haven't spoken three words, and I know we shall be good friends. Did Dave Harney succeed in getting any sugar out of you?"

They mingled their laughter, and Corliss went home under the aurora borealis, striving to reduce his impressions to some kind of order.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

CHAPTER VIII

"AND why should I not be proud of my race?"

Frona's cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkling. They had both been harking back to childhood, and she had been telling Corliss of her mother, whom she faintly remembered. Fair and flaxen-haired, typically Saxon, was the likeness she had drawn, filled out largely with knowledge gained from her father and from old Andy of the Dyea Post. The discussion had then turned upon the race in general, and Frona had said things in the heat of enthusiasm which affected the more conservative mind of Corliss as dangerous and not solidly based on fact. He deemed himself too large for race egotism and insular prejudice, and had seen fit to laugh at her immature convictions.

"It's a common characteristic of all peoples," he proceeded, "to consider themselves superior races,—a naïve, natural egoism, very healthy and very good, but none the less manifestly untrue. The Jews conceived themselves to be God's chosen people, and they still so conceive themselves——"

"And because of it they have left a deep mark down the page of history," she interrupted.

"But time has not proved the stability of their conceptions. And you must also view the other side. A superior people must look upon all others as inferior peoples. This comes home to you. To be

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

a Roman were greater than to be a king, and when the Romans rubbed against your savage ancestors in the German forests, they elevated their brows and said, 'An inferior people, barbarians.'"

"But we are here, now. We are, and the Romans are not. The test is time. So far we have stood the test; the signs are favorable that we shall continue to stand it. We *are* the best fitted!"

"Egotism."

"But wait. Put it to the test."

As she spoke her hand flew out impulsively to his. At the touch his heart pulsed upward, there was a rush of blood and a tightening across the temples. Ridiculous, but delightful, he thought. At this rate he could argue with her the night through.

"The test," she repeated, withdrawing her hand without embarrassment. "We are a race of doers and fighters, of globe-encirclers and zone-conquerors. We toil and struggle, and stand by the toil and struggle no matter how hopeless it may be. While we are persistent and resistant, we are so made that we fit ourselves to the most diverse conditions. Will the Indian, the Negro, or the Mongol ever conquer the Teuton? Surely not! The Indian has persistence without variability; if he does not modify he dies, if he does try to modify he dies anyway. The Negro has adaptability, but he is servile and must be led. As for the Chinese, they are permanent. All that the other races are not, the Anglo-Saxon, or Teuton if you please, is. All that the other races have not, the Teuton has. What race is to rise up and overwhelm us?"

"Ah, you forget the Slav," Corliss suggested slyly.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"The Slav!" Her face fell. "True, the Slav! The only stripling in this world of young men and gray-beards! But he is still in the future, and in the future the decision rests. In the mean time we prepare. It may be we shall have such a start that we shall prevent him growing. You know, because he was better skilled in chemistry, knew how to manufacture gunpowder, that the Spaniard destroyed the Aztec. May not we, who are possessing ourselves of the world and its resources, and gathering to ourselves all its knowledge, may not we nip the Slav ere he grows a thatch to his lip?"

Vance Corliss shook his head non-committally, and laughed.

"Oh! I know I become absurd and grow overwarm!" she exclaimed. "But after all, one reason that we are the salt of the earth is because we have the courage to say so."

"And I am sure your warmth spreads," he responded. "See, I'm beginning to glow myself. We are not God's, but Nature's chosen people, we Angles, and Saxons, and Normans, and Vikings, and the earth is our heritage. Let us arise and go forth!"

"Now you are laughing at me, and, besides, we have already gone forth. Why have you fared into the north, if not to lay hands on the race legacy?"

She turned her head at the sound of approaching footsteps, and cried for greeting, "I appeal to you, Captain Alexander! I summon you to bear witness!"

The captain of police smiled in his sternly mirthful fashion as he shook hands with Frona and Corliss. "Bear witness?" he questioned. "Ah, yes!

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"'Bear witness, O my comrades, what a hard-bit gang were we,—
The servants of the sweep-head, but the masters of the sea!'"

He quoted the verse with a savage solemnity exulting through his deep voice. This, and the appositeness of it, quite carried Frona away, and she had both his hands in hers on the instant. Corliss was aware of an inward wince at the action. It was uncomfortable. He did not like to see her so promiscuous with those warm, strong hands of hers. Did she so favor all men who delighted her by word or deed? He did not mind her fingers closing round his, but somehow it seemed wanton when shared with the next comer. By the time he had thougnt thus far, Frona had explained the topic under discussion, and Captain Alexander was testifying.

"I don't know much about your Slav and other kin, except that they are good workers and strong; but I do know that the white man is the greatest and best breed in the world. Take the Indian, for instance. The white man comes along and beats him at all his games, outworks him, out-roughs him, out-fishes him, out-hunts him. As far back as their myths go, the Alaskan Indians have packed on their backs. But the gold-rushers, as soon as they had learned the tricks of the trade, packed greater loads and packed them farther than did the Indians. Why, last May, the Queen's birthday, we had sports on the river. In the one, two, three, four, and five men canoe races we beat the Indians right and left. Yet they had been born to the paddle, and most of us had never seen a canoe until man-grown."

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

"But why is it?" Corliss queried.

"I do not know why. I only know that it is. I simply bear witness. I do know that we do what they cannot do, and what they can do, we do better."

Frona nodded her head triumphantly at Corliss. "Come, acknowledge your defeat, so that we may go in to dinner. Defeat for the time being, at least. The concrete facts of paddles and pack-straps quite overcome your dogmatics. Ah, I thought so. More time? All the time in the world. But let us go in. We'll see what my father thinks of it,—and Mr. Kellar. A symposium on Anglo-Saxon supremacy!"

Frost and enervation are mutually repellant. The Northland gives a keenness and zest to the blood which cannot be obtained in warmer climes. Naturally so, then, the friendship which sprang up between Corliss and Frona was anything but languid. They met often under her father's roof-tree, and went many places together. Each found a pleasurable attraction in the other, and a satisfaction which the things they were not in accord with could not mar. Frona liked the man because he was a man. In her wildest flights she could never imagine linking herself with any man, no matter how exalted spiritually, who was not a man physically. It was a delight to her and a joy to look upon the strong males of her kind, with bodies comely in the sight of God and muscles swelling with the promise of deeds and work. Man, to her, was pre-eminently a fighter. She believed in natural selection and in sexual selection, and was certain that if man had thereby become possessed of faculties and functions, they were for him to use and could but tend to

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

his good. And likewise with instincts. If she felt drawn to any person or thing, it was good for her to be so drawn, good for herself. If she felt impelled to joy in a well-built frame and well-shaped muscle, why should she restrain? Why should she not love the body, and without shame? The history of the race, and of all races, sealed her choice with approval. Down all time, the weak and effeminate males had vanished from the world-stage. Only the strong could inherit the earth. She had been born of the strong, and she chose to cast her lot with the strong.

Yet of all creatures, she was the last to be deaf and blind to the things of the spirit. But the things of the spirit she demanded should be likewise strong. No halting, no stuttered utterance, tremulous waiting, minor wailing! The mind and the soul must be as quick and definite and certain as the body. Nor was the spirit made alone for immortal dreaming. Like the flesh, it must strive and toil. It must be workaday as well as idle day. She could understand a weakling singing sweetly and even greatly, and in so far she could love him for his sweetness and greatness; but her love would have fuller measure were he strong of body as well. She believed she was just. She gave the flesh its due and the spirit its due; but she had, over and above, her own choice, her own individual ideal. She liked to see the two go hand in hand. Prophecy and dyspepsia did not affect her as a felicitous admixture. A splendid savage and a weak-kneed poet! She could admire the one for his brawn and the other for his song; but she would prefer that they had been made one in the beginning.

As to Vance Corliss. First, and most necessary of

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

all, there was that physiological affinity between them that made the touch of his hand a pleasure to her. Though souls may rush together, if body cannot endure body, happiness is reared on sand and the structure will be ever unstable and tottery. Next, Corliss had the physical potency of the hero without the grossness of the brute. His muscular development was more qualitative than quantitative, and it is the qualitative development which gives rise to beauty of form. A giant need not be proportioned in the mould; nor a thew be symmetrical to be massive.

And finally,—none the less necessary but still finally,—Vance Corliss was neither spiritually dead nor decadent. He affected her as fresh and wholesome and strong, as reared above the soil but not scorning the soil. Of course, none of this she reasoned out otherwise than by subconscious processes. Her conclusions were feelings, not thoughts.

Though they quarrelled and disagreed on innumerable things, deep down, underlying all, there was a permanent unity. She liked him for a certain stern soberness that was his, and for his saving grace of humor. Seriousness and banter were not incompatible. She liked him for his gallantry, made to work with and not for display. She liked the spirit of his offer at Happy Camp, when he proposed giving her an Indian guide and passage-money back to the United States. He could *do* as well as talk. She liked him for his outlook, for his innate liberality, which she felt to be there, somehow, no matter that often he was narrow of expression. She liked him for his mind. Though somewhat academic, somewhat tainted with latter-day scholasticism, it was still a mind which per-

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

mitted him to be classed with the "Intellectuals." He was capable of divorcing sentiment and emotion from reason. Granted that he included all the factors, he could not go wrong. And here was where she found chief fault with him,—his narrowness which precluded all the factors; his narrowness which gave the lie to the breadth she knew was really his. But she was aware that it was not an irremediable defect, and that the new life he was leading was very apt to rectify it. He was filled with culture; what he needed was a few more of life's facts.

And she liked him for himself, which is quite different from liking the parts which went to compose him. For it is no miracle for two things, added together, to produce not only the sum of themselves, but a third thing which is not to be found in either of them. So with him. She liked him for himself, for that something which refused to stand out as a part, or a sum of parts; for that something which is the corner-stone of Faith and which has ever baffled Philosophy and Science. And further, to like, with Frona Welse, did not mean to love.

First, and above all, Vance Corliss was drawn to Frona Welse because of the clamor within him for a return to the soil. In him the elements were so mixed that it was impossible for women many times removed to find favor in his eyes. Such he had met constantly, but not one had ever drawn from him a superfluous heart-beat. Though there had been in him a growing instinctive knowledge of lack of unity,—the lack of unity which must precede, always, the love of man and woman,—not one of the daughters of Eve he had met had flashed irresistibly in to fill the void.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Elective affinity, sexual affinity, or whatsoever the intangible essence known as love is, had never been manifest. When he met Frona it had at once sprung, full-fledged, into existence. But he quite misunderstood it, took it for a mere attraction towards the new and unaccustomed.

Many men, possessed of birth and breeding, have yielded to this clamor for return. And giving the apparent lie to their own sanity and moral stability, many such men have married peasant girls or bar-maids. And those to whom evil apportioned itself have been prone to distrust the impulse they obeyed, forgetting that nature makes or mars the individual for the sake, always, of the type. For in every such case of return, the impulse was sound,—only that time and space interfered, and propinquity determined whether the object of choice should be bar-maid or peasant girl.

Happily for Vance Corliss, time and space were propitious, and in Frona he found the culture he could not do without, and the clean sharp tang of the earth he needed. In so far as her education and culture went, she was an astonishment. He had met the scientifically smattered young woman before, but Frona had something more than smattering. Further, she gave new life to old facts, and her interpretations of common things were coherent and vigorous and new. Though his acquired conservatism was alarmed and cried danger, he could not remain cold to the charm of her philosophizing, while her scholarly attainments were fully redeemed by her enthusiasm. Though he could not agree with much that she passionately held,

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

he yet recognized that the passion of sincerity and enthusiasm was good.

But her chief fault, in his eyes, was her unconventionality. Woman was something so inexpressibly sacred to him, that he could not bear to see any good woman venturing where the footing was precarious. Whatever good woman thus ventured, overstepping the metes and bounds of sex and status, he deemed did so of wantonness. And wantonness of such order was akin to—well, he could not say it when thinking of Frona, though she hurt him often by her unwise acts. However, he only felt such hurts when away from her. When with her, looking into her eyes which always looked back, or at greeting and parting pressing her hand which always pressed honestly, it seemed certain that there was in her nothing but goodness and truth.

And then he liked her in many different ways for many different things. For her impulses, and for her passions which were always elevated. And already, from breathing the Northland air, he had come to like her for that comradeship which at first had shocked him. There were other acquired likings, her lack of prudishness, for instance, which he awoke one day to find that he had previously confounded with lack of modesty. And it was only the day before that day that he drifted, before he thought, into a discussion with her of "Camille." She had seen Bernhardt, and dwelt lovingly on the recollection. He went home afterwards, a dull pain gnawing at his heart, striving to reconcile Frona with the ideal impressed upon him by his mother that innocence was another term for ignorance. Notwithstanding, by the following day he

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY

had worked it out and loosened another finger of the maternal grip.

He liked the flame of her hair in the sunshine, the glint of its gold by the firelight, and the waywardness of it and the glory. He liked her neat-shod feet and the gray-gaitered calves,—alas, now hidden in long-skirted Dawson. He liked her for the strength of her slenderness; and to walk with her, swinging her step and stride to his, or to merely watch her come across a room or down the street, was a delight. Life and the joy of life romped through her blood, abstemiously filling out and rounding off each shapely muscle and soft curve. And he liked it all. Especially he liked the swell of her forearm, which rose firm and strong and tantalizing and sought shelter all too quickly under the loose-flowing sleeve.

The co-ordination of physical with spiritual beauty is very strong in normal men, and so it was with Vanée Corliss. That he liked the one was no reason that he failed to appreciate the other. He liked Frona for both, and for herself as well. And to like, with him, though he did not know it, was to love.

Digitized by Google
Original from INDIANA UNIVERSITY