

or big boulders to be climbed over, Emile Foulquier my second assistant is sent down. He too is a splendid fellow, also from Aveyron, considerably over six feet in height, and as strong as a horse.

If we come to a rock or shelf that is not more than ten or eleven feet high, he grips me by both ankles and lifts me above his head as though I weighed no more than a baby, so that I can clamber on the top; or if there is an underground lake or river, he carries the collapsible boat. He is also useful when there is a pit within a pit, as frequently happens.

Sometimes there are a terrifying series of pits, one below the other, sinking one knows not how far into the earth. Soon after I took to cave-hunting, I explored the cave of Vigne Clos, in Ardèche. The lead gave me the depth as one hundred and seventy feet, so we lowered that much rope-ladder, and I went down. When I reached the bottom, however, I saw I was on a landing measuring some eight or nine feet each way, and in front of me was another yawning gulf.

I measured this with the lead, and found it to be one hundred and fifty feet still lower; so I climbed back to the surface and sent down Armand, Foulquier and six other men, with ropes, ladders and tools. When all was ready, I followed last. I had a safety-lamp fastened to a buttonhole of my coat, and had not gone down many feet when the lamp was knocked off by a rung of the ladder and sent flying down the shaft. I shouted "Look out!" and the men below drew themselves close to the wall. The lamp knocked the candle out of Armand's hands, just grazed his foot, and went hurling down the second pit. I was far more concerned about the accident than he was.

After some delay, Armand and I got to the bottom of the second abyss, and there we found another landing, and still a third vast mouth, but this turned out to be only seventy feet deep. To our amazement when we conquered that obstacle, there came a fourth, also seventy feet deep. More ropes were brought, and we got down that pit, congratulating ourselves that a record series were conquered at last. But on resting and looking

round, judge of our feelings when we came to a good big landing with a fifth yawning, horrible maw, which the lead told us was nearly one hundred and seventy feet deep.

For the first and only time since I took to cave-exploring I felt sick and ill. The incident of the lamp had upset my nerves, and these never-ending pits and the fear of being buried alive gave me an awful feeling of terror and suffocation. To make matters worse, the telephone-wire had been nearly severed by sharp rocks, and I had been obliged to leave a man on each landing and signal by horn.

However, a good dinner with a stiff glass of rum after it, at the foot of a stupendous gleaming stalagmite which no mortal eyes but ours had ever beheld, restored my courage, and we got to the bottom of the fifth pit, which proved to be really the last.

The barometer showed that we were more than six hundred and twenty feet below the surface of the earth. There was only a small chamber in this last recess, which did not take long to explore, and we returned to daylight, or rather starlight, for it was past midnight when we reached the earth again.

The workmen we employed were the worst off, however, for each had to stand alone and almost motionless on a rocky ledge for several hours. The man at the bottom of the first pit was on duty over twelve hours, but he at all events could see a glimpse of daylight and talk to the folks overhead.

Once on the surface after this uncanny experience, we set up the tents and slept at the mouth of the cave. It has often taken me two and sometimes three days to explore a cave, and I sometimes pass the night underground; but I never sleep there—that would be highly dangerous—I am at work all the time, wandering in remote recesses of the earth all night long.

I flatter myself that where I have not been the first to visit a cave I have been the first to explore it scientifically; for the accounts of former observers are full of absurdities and exaggerations. For in-

stance, there is the St. Marcel d'Ardèche, a great cave discovered in 1838 by a huntsman chasing a wounded hare.

It was visited a little later by Paul Vibert, who gravely declared it was four miles long. I have mapped and measured every bit of this cavern, and know for certain that it is one hundred and fifty yards short of a mile and a half. Vibert was also sure there was another abyss underneath it, because the floor of the cave was sonorous. That argument proves nothing, for the walls and floors of many caves are sonorous, and in this very cave there is a wall that gives a musical sound when tapped. I know caves where it would be possible to play a tune on the walls, so varied are the tones given off by the towering rocky walls when struck.

St. Marcel is a most interesting cave, and thanks to me it has now been thrown open to the public. So also has Padirac, which I bought and presented to the French people. It is in the Department of Lot, about ten hours' journey from Paris. The mouth of the Padirac cave is a huge pit, one hundred feet in diameter. Of course it was made by the Devil! He was going home with his day's "takings," according to popular tradition, when he was shadowed by St. Martin, who wanted to relieve him of his spoils. Satan, who in the old legends always seems to have been a bit of "sport," immediately made this pit, and offered to give up his gains if St. Martin could jump across its yawning mouth. The saint promptly spurred up his mule and went over the abyss like a bird. Then he challenged the Devil to jump his own pit. Satan accepted; but saints never had any idea of fair play, and while the Evil One was in mid-air, St. Martin put a cross on the ground where he was going to land, and of course the poor Devil jumped short and fell to the bottom of the pit. It was a nasty tumble—close on two hundred and fifty feet—but he had had worse falls than that, as related to me.

The Padirac cave is now a great resort of the French public. I have had a staircase constructed, a fence put along the bank of the subterranean

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THE TEST OF A STORY

WHAT is the best proof that a story—a novel, if you please—has real value? Almost any thoughtful critic will reply: "General and enduring interest."

But how are the endurance and extent of the interest to be ascertained? Certainly not by considering the volume of sales in the year of publication, for some books that sold a hundred thousand or more in their first year can scarcely be given away to-day. The dicta of the ultra-literary class is equally unsatisfactory, for the works of Jane Austen, George Meredith and other much- and oft-praised writers are seldom asked for at book-stores.

A few days ago I received a letter from a sick friend a thousand miles away and in an utterly out-of-the-way part of the country. He said he was slowly convalescing and well cared for, but that there was nothing to read in his vicinity and he would be eternally grateful if I would send him a few novels, new or old, that he did not doubt I could spare from my own library—the shabbier the covers and the worse thumbed the leaves, the less would he feel like a robber.

He knew that almost everything in fiction came my way, in the line of my business, and that I had often weeded out my shelves for the benefit of free libraries, hospitals and prisons. But what a man may give away, partly in charity but principally to make room for something better, is not good enough to send to a friend—a sick friend, who is also a man of taste and culture.

Slowly I looked over a shelf, drew forth one highly esteemed book after another, and meanly pushed all back into their places. I had read each and everyone of them several times—they had become dear to me; they were my friends; I simply could not spare them. I might replace them in time, according to title; but the new books would not be the same—every reader with a heart in him knows why.

Suddenly I bethought me of the hundred or more New-York shops full of second-hand books, the small-

By John Habberton

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est containing at least a thousand volumes. Fiction is their principal stock in trade, for novels form the class of books of which people first rid themselves when cleaning house or in need of more shelf-room, and which are always first to go, when the unfortunate owner, in poverty, has to pawn his treasures. Besides, second-hand books badly worn, would really seem to have come from my own library: the deception would be innocent, or at least pardonable.

So I took a day off, a ten-dollar bill and a list of the books which I had wished to send yet retained. Here are the titles, just as the books were arranged—an odd assortment, yet anyone familiar with

fiction old and new will admit that each is good of its kind and highly creditable to its author:

- "Henry Esmond" (Thackeray).
- "Rudder Grange" (Frank Stockton).
- "Friend Olivia" (Mrs. Barr).
- "David Copperfield" (Dickens).
- "Ivanhoe" (Scott).
- "Vestry of the Basins" (Sarah Pratt McLean).
- "The House of the Seven Gables" (Hawthorne).
- "Peter Stirling" (Paul Leicester Ford).
- "The Rise of Silas Lapham" (Howells).
- "Trilby" (Du Maurier).
- "The Caxtons" (Bulwer).
- "The Day's Work" (Kipling).
- "Uncle Remus" (Joel Chandler Harris).
- "St. George and St. Michael" (George Macdonald).
- "Mr. Smith" (Mrs. Walford).
- "Westward Ho" (Kingsley).
- "Old Creole Days" (George W. Cable).
- "Adam Bede" (George Eliot).
- "Huckleberry Finn" (Mark Twain).
- "The Circuit Rider" (Edward Eggleston).

THE CONFLICT

Illustration by John Boyd



By Edwin L. Sabin

Upon the roadside's parapet
The sumac's signal glows—
A beacon-light by summer set
In warning of the snows.
Swift spreads the word; and none who hears
But heeds the tidings dire,
And high his lambent torch uprears
To combat cold with fire.

In silence now the legions stand,
Imbued by subtle thrill,
As vale with vale joins valiant hand,
And hill is leagued with hill.
But see! The wondrous host is tamed;
The torches fade and die,
And o'er the ashes where they flamed
The snows triumphant lie!

Some other shelfful might have been equally good, but few contained so many books that had been published in large quantities, so I had no doubt of finding the lot quickly. But I tramped from shop to shop for half a day without getting a single book. My last call was on a ratty—a second-hand dealer who really knew something of the insides of books. I had known him of old. I approached him with confidence and showed him my list. He glanced at it, returned it and shook his head. "Do you mean to say," I asked, "that you haven't any of them?"

"Not one."

"Why not?"

He looked at me wonderingly and replied: "You ought to know. These are all first-rate stories—the kind that people keep, instead of selling to us chaps."

It was a homely test of the relative value of fiction; but the officer I recall it the better I think of it.

As to my sick friend, he got my own shelfful as a loan, to be returned in full at his earliest reasonable convenience.