

in this brief space had regained his composure; "that I cannot possibly accept these in change," and he turned the hand with the chips in it to Doles.

"Huh!" said that man, bending his head to get a good look at the chips. "Why, of course you can't!" he exclaimed, straightening up and glaring at his clerk. "You, Shad, you're gettin' too darn careless for me, boy! First thing you know, if you don't change your ways, I'll be a-changing of my clerk. Hear that? Hand me that there box!"

Shadrach shrugged his shoulders and passed over the box of chips. Doles threw the three that had been tendered to the new minister back into the box and stirred the chips with his finger until he had brought a blue one to the surface. This he carefully picked out and pressed into Hapsworth's hand, saying:

"There you are, parson. Just the same six bits, only it's all in one piece and won't rattle in your pocket."

"I think, Brother Hapsworth," said Rathbone, suppressing a smile, "that we had better be going," and he stepped out to the plaza. The new minister took up his box of collars and followed him without another word.

They went up to the court house, where in a doorway on the second floor balcony they found a man whittling.

"That is the sheriff of the county, Mr. Johnson," said Rathbone, nodding to the man.

"Morning, parson," said the sheriff pleasantly.

"I would like to have you meet Brother Hapsworth, your new minister," said Rathbone, acknowledging the salute.

"Seeing the town, heh?" he said when the ceremony had been completed. "Well, you just come right out here on the balc'ny and you can get a bird's-eye view of the whole shooting match."

He led the way, and then stood pointing out the landmarks to the new minister. "And it's all yours if you want it, parson," he said.

"You haven't pointed out the meeting house," Hapsworth observed.

"No, sir, and I just can't," he replied. "You see, there ain't no meeting house. It burned down. Leastwise the school house did, and it was that we was using for a church. Been holding the meetings here in the co't house lately. It's public property, you know, and we been using it for shows and parties and such, so we couldn't shut it to them what wants to pray and sing. But you 'uns ought to build a church; you really ought, for the singing and the preaching makes them fellers down there in the jail cut up ugly. Here comes the stage!" exclaimed Johnson, leaning out over the railing to look up the road. "Now what you reckon's the matter? Must a-been a-whooping her up some. She's full two hours ahead of schedule."

The stage rumbled past, four dust and foam covered horses straining at the traces. The observers on the balcony caught a glimpse of a pallid, pinched face peering out of the window, and the owner of that face was pressing a bloodstained handkerchief to his lips. "Why, that's Billy Britt," exclaimed the sheriff, "and he's got his ticket to the next world right in his fist! Been having more hemorrhages. This'n 'll 'bout fetch him, I reckon. Well, parson," reflectively, "that'll make a bit of business for you. We ain't had a funeral in quite sometime now."

THE stage driver dropped Britt off at the Martin House on his way to the stables, and considerably shouldered the sick man's saddle bags and a small red leather case and followed him into the hotel.

On the threshold Britt was seized with a fit of coughing, during which Martin instructed Mrs. Martin to make Britt's old room, "the front parlor," ready for him. The process of making ready calling merely for the opening of the windows and the suspension of a gourd shaped clay bottle of well water from a hook in the top of one of the window frames, where the draft would serve to keep the water cool.

Britt supervised the placing of the saddle bags across the low headboard of the bed and the red leather case under the counterpane at the foot of it, and then, with Martin's assistance, he disrobed and got between the sheets.

"Can't clean up till I've rested a bit," he murmured weakly. "Send for Doc Cummings, and get me some good liquor. None of Boke Doles's stuff," he added as an afterthought. "That old road agent 'ud be mean enough to pizen me. Get it from Cranston."

THE Rev. Henry Hapsworth not only preached religion, but he practised it. He knew when to sermonize and when to substitute human comradeship for spiritual consolation. He was not worldly-wise; but his impulses were good, and instinctively and naturally he touched those chords in nature which "make the whole world kin."

When he came into Britt's presence, Martin was there, and the hotel proprietor, caught at the moment of pouring out a drink of whisky for the sick man, made a futile effort to hide bottle and glass by putting his hands behind him. Hapsworth walked over to the bed, saluted Britt cheerfully as if he always had known him, hung his hat on the footboard, and then increased Martin's embarrassment by relieving him of the bottle and glass. "We must not keep him waiting for his medi-

cine, you know," he said pleasantly. He smiled at Britt, and adding, "Tell me when to stop," began to pour. Then he slipped an arm under the sick man's pillow and raised him so that he might drink. The stimulant put a little color into Britt's face and strengthened his voice.

"This is good of you, parson," he said.

"Now we must fix you up a bit, so that you can sleep in comfort," said Hapsworth. He took off his coat, threw it across a chair, and rolled up his sleeves. "Proprietor, will you see if you can get a sponge? But leave the bottle," he said, taking it from him. "We are not through with that yet."

Hapsworth did not desist until Britt had been sponged down, first with water and then with spirits and water, and had been tucked back in bed. And in all this his attitude was that of a physician preparing a patient for life, not for death. No word of the Scriptures was quoted. The great Master's example was followed, not conscientiously but naturally, and practical Christianity then and there gained several staunch supporters.

Britt was not altogether satisfied with himself. There lurked in his mind a suspicion that these things would not have happened to him had the parson known him better. And by and by, after he had turned the matter over in his mind, he broke out with, "I ain't playing fair with you, parson. I'm holding out something—something I'm kinder sorry for now, but I ain't going to lie to you about it. Fact is, I'm a gambler,—one of those fellers Parson Rathbone says are doomed to hell fire. I can't help it now; but I want to be honest with you."

"I know all about that," said Hapsworth quietly.

"Don't distress yourself needlessly. I saw you

Hapsworth listened patiently only because he was unwilling to distress the dying man by refusing to do so. And it went to the heart of that system of local coinage to which Rathbone had introduced him before leaving. It also was the story of Britt's last hand at poker in the town and of the strange manner in which the game had come to be played in Devalu. In some of its features it had to be explained again and again before Hapsworth could master its intricacies and ramifications.

BRIEFLY, the game had been in continuous session for two years. As Britt explained, it began in a room back of Doles's store. Doles was the original banker of the game; that is to say, he sold the poker checks to the players, taking silver in exchange, the silver to be paid out to the holders of the checks at the end of the game. It happened that ten persons desired to sit in at the opening session at Doles's, and as the table would accommodate only six the candidates drew straws for the privilege of playing; but a table rule was adopted that the possession of checks thereafter should entitle the holder to sit in any time, no matter how many were at table.

When it came time for a recess in the game, this rule was taken advantage of by the original six. One of them declared that he did not intend to cash in, as by holding his checks he would be entitled to sit in again at his convenience. That established a precedent, which the other players were quick to follow, when Doles announced that he would be pleased to accept the checks over his counter at their face value in the game. It also established the poker chip as a medium of exchange in the markets of the town. Incidentally it was discovered that Doles enjoyed a monopoly of poker chips (no other storekeeper had them in stock), and as they were carried off by the players, to drift up and down in the channels of trade, Doles kept adding to his supply.

Finally the game grew too large for Doles's limited quarters and was passed on to the bar rooms of the village; but not until the value of the chips had become well established. The whites were everywhere accepted as being of the face value of twenty-five cents, the reds of fifty cents, the blues of seventy-five cents, and the yellows of one dollar. In relinquishing the game to his neighbors, Doles did not cease participation in it, nor did he cease to be banker.

These things were with difficulty made clear to Hapsworth, and then Britt proceeded with the story of his own difference with Doles. The winnings of the latter person at one time had created an active demand for checks among the other players, and Doles was not one to sell poker chips on credit. "The hard silver every time," was his rule, and there were no exceptions to it.

While Doles was enjoying this winning streak Britt and one or two others were becoming suspicious of his methods. Britt decided to act on the first evidence of crooked work, and in preparation always sat into the game with his six-shooter within easy reach of his hand, knowing that Doles was similarly prepared and that he would resent promptly any attempt to show him up.

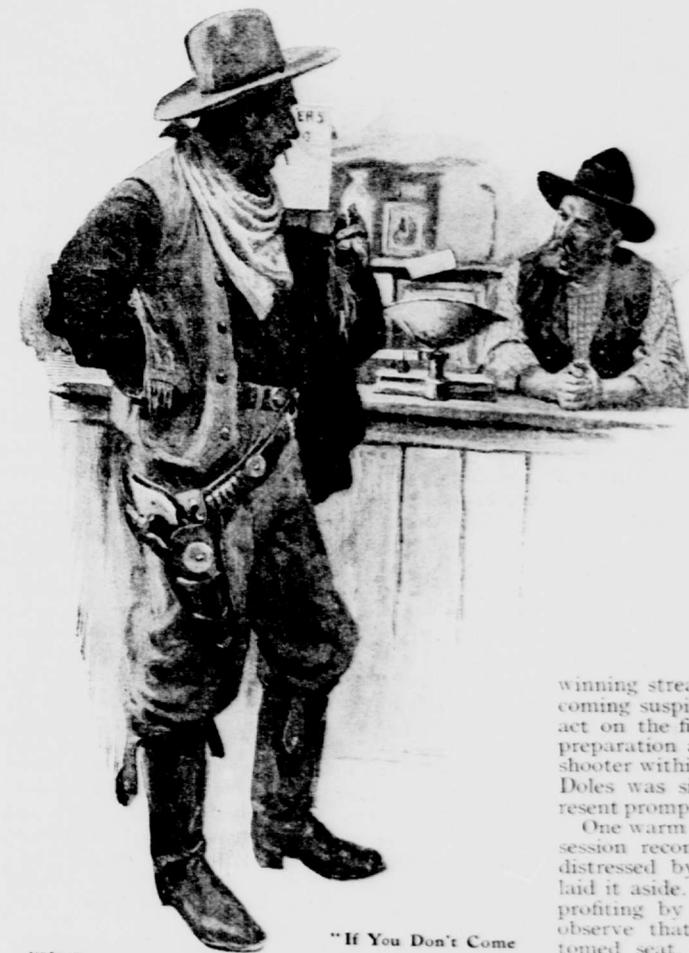
One warm evening Doles did not appear when the session reconvened; and, being in ill health and distressed by the weight of his armament, Britt laid it aside. The action was rapid, and Britt was profiting by it extensively when he happened to observe that Doles had dropped into his accustomed seat. Thereafter he devoted most of his attention to Doles and very little to his own play, with the result that good fortune deserted him and passed on to one of his neighbors.

After some hours of play Britt found himself contesting with Doles and two others for possession of a pot of large value. Doles had made it expensive to draw cards, and Britt, believing that Doles was trying to steal the pot, had still further increased the cost of the operation. After the draw Doles promptly tapped the other players,—i.e., bet as much as each of the others had before him in chips.

Two players dropped out; but Britt called the play. His illness had made him nervous, and his hands trembled. Before his eyes, Doles, who was dealing, had discarded four cards and drawn only two. He must therefore have dealt himself seven cards to start with,—a crude piece of work and an insult to the craft of his confederates. Britt had been expecting something more finished and artful. However, the discards were still in a pile and could be counted. It was the psychological moment.

Britt felt that Doles was watching him in a way which indicated also that he was prepared. Britt pulled himself together, shoved his chips to the center for the call, and reached around for his gun.

It wasn't there! He had forgotten to reattach



"If You Don't Come to the Funeral, You'll Regret It!"

when the stage came in and asked some questions about you. Your environment made you what you are; mine made me what I am. In your place who knows but I might have done just as you have? Some of these days, when you get stronger, we'll have a long talk about this. But just now I think you had better rest and try to get over the effects of your journey."

The story of that afternoon made many friends for the Rev. Henry Hapsworth. The town turned out to do him honor at his first Sunday meeting in the court house. Boke Doles even condescended to listen to his discourse from the safe vantage ground of the balcony.

Britt did not attend that service; but Shadrach told him of Doles's having been there. And when Hapsworth made his regular daily call on Britt he was astonished at the vehemence with which the sick man warned him to keep his eyes on Doles and his hands on his pockets whenever he was in that person's presence.

"He did me, and he'll do you," said Britt. "He ain't square. If I can play even with him, I'll die happy."

All this involved a long explanation to which