

theodolite who kept making signals while his helpers planted small white stakes.

The fisherman grounded the boat at the little wharf he had built from float lumber gathered in the year of highest water, and trudged forward to the surveyors with a perplexed frown dragging his heavy gray eyebrows into a knot.

"Good afternoon," he began amiably. "What you all doin' here?"

The surveyor did not take time to answer until he had taken another squint through his telescope and waved both hands up and down. A man in the distance began to drive another peg.

"Surveying this island. Can't you see?" the engineer answered.

"What for? I didn't ask you to, did I? I own it." The surveyor turned toward him with a grin. "You own it? Oh, yes. You are the fellow they told us about—Squatter Bill."

"Yes, that's what they call me." The surveyor, who stood looking at him curiously, smiled a little, and then, on closer observation of the friendly old face, looked troubled and sympathetic. "See here," he said slowly, "you mustn't blame me. I'm only an engineer employed by the city, and have to do what I'm told; but, as I understand it, there's some question as to whether you have a very good title here, and the city is going to take it and build a pier on here for the new bridge.

"Goin' to take it away from me? Say I don't own it, after I've lived here for more'n twenty year?"

Squatter Bill ran his hand up across his eyes as if, in all the sudden bewilderment of this announcement, he couldn't see very plainly, and then looked out across the water, which was beginning to redden in the sunset, just as it always had in the long summers before.

"Why—why—that lawyer feller, Mr. Trude, made them papers out for me a long time ago. I got the paper, I have! It does belong to me, all right. Here, I'll show 'em to you!"

He walked across to the old cottonwood, and the young engineer, still looking troubled and sympathetic, followed and stood above him as he dragged away some long brush from the tangled roots with frantic haste, and then thrust a trembling hand into the hole and pulled out the fruit jar. It was half filled with small coins, his life's savings, and the precious paper. He unscrewed the top, got the document out, and handed it to the engineer to read.

"It's all right, ain't it?" he asked anxiously, as the surveyor ran his eyes over it. "It says this island is mine, that I claim it, don't it?"

"Yes," the engineer answered, speaking as if perplexed; "but I don't know anything about land titles. You should see a lawyer. Anyhow, the city could condemn it, you know. But they would have to pay you for it, then."

"But, you see, I don't want to sell her," Squatter Bill hastened to answer. "She's mine. She ain't for sale. You can't have her!"

"Maybe you had best go and see the City Attorney. Here, I'll give you his address. Go and see him to-morrow. He can explain it to you."

Squatter Bill held the card with the penciled name in his hand a long time after the surveyors had stepped into their boat and been pulled back to the shore which was beginning to dim into purple shadow, over which the smoke of the tall stacks was dying down as if tired after the day's work. Then, with feet that somehow dragged and were older than usual, he went into his cabin and took his water pail from the hook and started to fill it from the little filter box sunk at the edge of the sand.

He sat out on the bench under the cottonwoods after his supper was finished and the dishes washed and put away; but his pipe didn't taste good and things weren't the same. Mostly always the rows of city lights blinked at him like distant, interested eyes, and often he had said to them, "Say, I can remember when you weren't there, when it was always dark about this time at night and nothin' friendly shinin' from the other shore." But to-night the glittering spots had lost their cheeriness and gleamed hard and malevolent, like watchers greedily scrutinizing that little spot of land which he loved and called his own.

FEELING that there was much in appearance, he took endless pains with his clothes when, the following morning, he invaded a part of the city he had not entered for more than a decade and in which he felt a stranger, in quest of the City Attorney's offices. He found them. They were impressive rooms, impressively fitted, in a city hall that had been built on the site of an old one he could remember, which once stood in what was known as the "Town Square." Immaculate young men eyed him, and a pert boy wanted to know his name and all about his business before he could get an audience with the city official.

"You just tell him Weatherby wants to see him,—Squatter Bill they call me,—and that it's right impor-

tant to me that I should talk to him. I voted for him, and I've got a right to, I guess."

But the boy insisted that he should explain his errand, and he as persistently refused until a dapper young man came out and wormed from him the cause of his perturbation. The dapper young man passed inside another office, and Squatter Bill, with his nervous old hands holding tightly his black felt hat, waited and waited, until any patience but that of a lone fisherman, accustomed to waiting, would have been exhausted.

"The City Attorney says there is no use in his seeing you, and he is very busy," the young man asserted calmly, when he returned. "You have no title down there, Mr. Weatherby, and it is the advice of this office that you move off the island as soon as you can arrange for another domicile."

To be ignored and placidly dismissed was too much. Even the fisherman's patience was exhausted and a spark of his youthful temper asserted itself. He got upon his feet and jammed his hat down over his eyes, which flamed with that oldtime fire.

"You tell the lawyer for me," he said, "for old Squatter Bill, that there's goin' to be no movin' off that island and there'll be no movin' on. There won't, because I say so, and I'll prove it. I fought through the war, I did, and I wanted to go and help lick the Spaniards. I know how to use a gun, and there's an old musket hangin' up in my cabin that'll answer all claims after this. You tell him that's what I've got to say!"

Before anyone could attempt to expostulate with him



"Boys, I Want to Tell You What They're Tryin' to Do to Me"

he had buttoned his coat, squared his broad, bent shoulders, and stalked out of the office. He reached the street in a sort of reactionary daze, and walked straight through the city without seeing anything or anyone, and without sense of direction. He was for an instant surprised when he discovered himself in familiar scenes and saw that he was standing in the middle of the fish market. Around him were others of the fisher clan who had just disposed of their morning's catch, and it was a recognition of them that aroused him to a full sense of his wrongs.

"Boys," he called, his high, thin voice ringing above the clamor of trade, "get around me. I want to tell you what they're tryin' to do to me, Squatter Bill, that all of you know and that never done nobody any wrong nor robbed anybody of a penny in all his life."

There was a little spell of silence as if his words had attracted much attention, and he climbed on an empty fish crate, took off his hat, and in his way explained this rankling injustice. His speech lacked nothing of fervor or of fire. He was impassioned, and trying in the only way he knew to defend his rights—trying in that immortal way of the marketplace where, from ancient Rome to modern Belle City, it has always been man's prerogative to find a forum.

A crowd collected, and some of it was amused. He saw nothing of its laughing outskirts, only the grim, hard faces of fishermen whom he knew and, the first to answer his call, had crowded round the foot of his extemporized stand.

"Hire a hall!" a facetious voice in the distance

shouted. "That's right, old hoss, give 'em what's what!" another yelled, and roars of laughter swept around; but always in the outer edge of the throng. There was not a smile from the rugged fishermen who looked up at the pathetically determined old man making a fight as best he could to hold what he believed to be his own.

"Boys," he concluded, "I told 'em there that I wouldn't move off and that I'd keep them off—with a musket if I had to. That's why I'm here, to tell you beforehand how it all is; so if anything happens to me you'll say, after I've fought a good fight, 'Squatter Bill had some rights in that case, and he fought fair, givin' 'em one and all fair warmin'.' That's all."

He climbed down off his crate, and the crowd made way for him. He looked to neither side of the little lane he traversed; but tramped away over his regular route to the waterfront where his rusty old boat was moored. He hesitated for a minute, thinking as to the condition of his musket and powder.

"I'll get ammunition to-morrer," he said to himself at last, giving a shove with his oar against the wharf. "They ain't a goin' to jump me before then."

HE sat and brooded that night until long after the lights of the city on each shore had faded out, and then, in the glow of the stars, wandered up and down the length of his island, the island of which he had always felt himself master, the little kingdom in which he was royal. He knew every foot of it and, standing there

in the dim starlight, could trace the development of each year since he had planted the willows above to act as a crude riprap against the cut of angry spring currents. He had not fully realized until now how his island had grown from a mere speck in the river to a patch of several acres. In his slow way he could reason out something he had not thought of before,—that this piece of land was now valuable, and would become more valuable as the city crowded, swelled, and flowed over its practicable area bordering the waterfront. For the first time he comprehended that its very enlargement had been a disaster, and it terrified him. That very proud growth might be his undoing.

He was aroused from his troubled reverie by the muffled sound of oars, and his ears, keen and trained to the noises of the river, he it gurgle of tide or lap of wavelet against pressing prow, recognized some unusual movement in the night. He dropped to his knees on the moist sand so that the surface of the water with its luminous overflow might come to him, and watched. Four boats, shadowy and vague, were approaching. They crept nearer. He heard a muttered consultation. They stopped.

"Bill! Hey, Bill!" a voice called softly. "Are you awake?"

"Yes," he answered in the same pitch. "What do you want?"

"It's me, Hank Murdock, talkin'," came the reply. "A lot of the boys are with me. We're comin' ashore."

They took to the oars again, and he stood waiting for the boats to ground against the gravel. There were four of them, all loaded to the water's edge, and he saw, as their occupants climbed heavily out on his beach,

that they had brought two score passengers to this, his domain. He went among the men and peered into their faces. They were the men he had known for years, the fishermen who had stood at the foot of his fish crate, there in the marketplace, and listened with upturned, impassive faces to his outcry and challenge against injustice.

"We heard after you left," Murdock said, "that the city would send police to kick you off. It ain't right. We ain't goin' to let 'em."

Overwhelmed by this manifestation of friendship, Squatter Bill stood for a full minute before he could conquer the gulp in his throat. He had not expected so much from his fellows; even though, like himself, they were humble and knew the heel of the law. He peered round once more in the gloom and discerned black, sticklike shapes carried by each. He put out a hand and felt one of these shapes inquiringly. It was cold and double barreled. Guns! Guns to his defense!

The men who carried them were excited—grimly, stubbornly excited—and desperately in earnest. There was dumb heroism in them, the heroism that made them realize that they were taking desperate chances against overwhelming odds; but this old man, Squatter Bill, was one of them, and there was none in the crowd who could not remember favors from him, although he, the author, might have forgotten.

They asked him for no instructions, but fell to work with such tools and pieces of boxes as they could find and threw up crude earthworks for the defense of the morrow, and he watched them, thinking over this new