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ERIC BRIGHTEYES.

By H. RIDER HAGGARD.

CHAPTER V.

HOW ERIC WON THE SWORD WHITEFIRE.

Now Asmund the Priest beat down, and Eric saw him and spoke:

"Thou badest me to thy Yule feast, lord, by yonder slippery road and I have come. Dost thou welcome me well?"

"No man better," quoth Asmund. "Thou art a gallant man, though foolhardy; and thou hast done a deed that shall be told of while shalds sing and men live in Iceland."

"Make place, my father," said Gudruda, "for Eric bleeds." And she took the kerchief from her neck and bound it about his brow, and the rich cloak from her body and threw it on his shoulders, and no man said her nay.

Then they led him to the hall, and there he clothed himself and rested and he sent back the thrall Jon to Coldback, bidding him tell Saevuna, Eric's mother, that he was safe. But he was somewhat weak all that day, and the sound of waters roared in his ears.

Now Ospakar and Groa were ill pleased at the turn things had taken; but all the others rejoiced much, for Eric was well loved of men and they had grieved if the waters had prevailed against his might. But Swanhild brooded bitterly, for Eric never turned to look on her.

The hour of the feast drew on and, according to custom, it was held in the Temple, and thither went all men. When they were seated in the nave of the hof, the fat ox that had been made ready for sacrifice was led in and dragged before the altar on which the holy fire burned. Now Asmund the Priest slew it, amid silence, before the figures of the Gods, and, catching its blood in the blood-bowl, sprinkled the altar and all the worshippers with the blood-twigs. Then the ox was cut up, and the figures of the almighty Gods were anointed with its molten fat and, wiped with fair linen. Next the flesh was boiled in the cauldrons that were hung over fires lighted all down the nave, and the feast began.

Now men ate, and drank much ale and mead, and all were merry. But Ospakar Blacktooth grew not glad, though he drank much, for he saw that the eyes of Gudruda ever watched Eric's face, and that they smiled each on each. He was wroth at this, for he knew that the bait must be good and the line strong that should lure this fair fish to his angle, and as he sat, unknowingly his fingers loosed the peace strings of his sword Whitefire, and he half drew it, so that its brightness flamed in the firelight.

"Thou hast a wondrous blade there, Ospakar," said Asmund, "though this is no place to draw it. Whence came it? Methinks no such swords are fashioned now."

"Ay, Asmund, a wondrous blade indeed. There is no other such in the world, for the dwarfs forged it of old, and he shall be unconquered who holds it aloft. This was King Odin's sword, and it is named Whitefire. Ralph the Red took it from King Eric's cairn in Norway, and he strove long with the Barrow-Dweller before he wrenched it from his grasp. But my father won it and slew him, though he had never done this had Whitefire been aloft against him. But Ralph the Red, being in drink when the ships met in battle, fought with an axe, and was slain by my father, and since then Whitefire has been the last light that many a chief's eyes have seen. Look on it, Asmund."

Now he drew the great sword, and men were astonished as it flashed aloft. Its hilt was of gold, and blue stones were set therein. It measured two ells and a half an ell from cross-bar to point, and so bright was the broad blade that no man might look on it for long, and all down its length ran runes.

"A wondrous weapon, truly," said Asmund. "How read the runes?"

"I know not, nor any man—they are ancient."

"Let me look on them," said Groa; "I am skilled in runes." Now she took the sword and heaved it up, and looked at the runes and said, "A strange writing, truly."

"How runs it, housekeeper?" said Asmund.

"Thus, lord, if my skill is not at fault:

"Whitefire is my name—Dwarf folk forged me—
Odin's sword was I—Eric's sword was I—Eric's sword shall I be—
And where I fall there he must follow me."

Now Gudruda looked on Eric Brighteyes wonderingly, and Ospakar saw it and became very wrath.

"Look not so, maiden," he said, "for it shall be another Eric than yon flapper duck who holds Whitefire aloft, though it may well chance that he shall feel its edge."

Now Gudruda bit her lip, and Eric burned red to the brow and spoke:

"It is ill, lord, to throw taunts like an angry woman. Thou are great and strong, yet I may dare a deed with thee."

"Peace, boy! Thou canst climb a waterfall well, I gainsay it not; but beware ere thou setest up thyself against my strength. Say, now, what game wilt thou play with Ospakar?"

"I will go on holmgang with thee, byrnie clad or baresark, and fight thee with axe or sword, or I will wrestle with thee, and Whitefire yonder shall be to the winner."

"Nay, I will have no bloodshed here at Middalhof," said Asmund sternly. "Make play with fists, or wrestle if ye will, for that were great sport to see; but weapons shall not be drawn."

Now Ospakar grew mad with anger and drink—and he grinned like a dog, till men saw the red gums beneath his lips.

"Thou wilt wrestle with me, youngling—with me, whom no man hath ever so much as lifted from my feet? Good! I will lay thee on thy face and whip thee, and Whitefire shall be the stake—I swear it on the holy altar ring; but what hast thou to set against the precious sword? Thy poor hovel and its lot of land shall be all too little."

"I set my life on it; if I lose Whitefire let Whitefire slay me," said Eric.

"Nay, that I will not have, and here in this Temple I am master," said Asmund. "Bethink thee of some other stake, Ospakar, or let the game be off."

Now Ospakar gnawed his lip with his black fang and thought. Then he laughed loud and spoke:

"Bright is Whitefire and thou art named Brighteyes. See, now: I set the great sword against thy right eye, and if I win the match it shall be mine to tear it forth. Wilt thou play this game with me? If thy heart fails thee, let it go; but I will set no other stake against my good sword."

"Eyes and limbs are a poor man's wealth," said Eric; "so be it. I stake my right eye against the sword Whitefire, and we will try the match to-morrow."

"And to-morrow night thou shalt be called Eric One-eye," said Ospakar—at which some few laughed.

But the most of men laughed not, for they thought this an ill game and a worse jest.

Now the feast went on, and Asmund rose from his high seat in the centre of the nave, on the left hand looking down from the altar, and gave out the holy toasts. First, men drank a full horn to Odin, praying for triumph on their foes. Then they drank to Frey, asking for plenty; to Thor, for a rough in battle; to Freya, Goddess of Love (and to her Eric drank heartily); to the memory of the dead; and, last of all, to Bragi, God of all delight. When this cup was drunk, Asmund rose, according to custom, and asked if none had an oath to swear as to some deed that should be done.

For a while there was no answer, but presently Eric Brighteyes rose.

"Lord," he said, "I would swear an oath."

"Set forth the matter, then," said Asmund.

"It is this," quoth Eric. "On Mosfell mountain, over by Hecla, dwells a Baresark of whom all men have ill knowledge, for there are few whom he has not harmed. His name is Skallagrim; he is a mighty man, and he has wrought much mischief in the south country, and brought many to their deaths and robbed more of their goods; for none may prevail against him. Nevertheless I swear this, that, when the days lengthen, I will go up alone against him and challenge him to battle, and conquer him or fall."

"Then, thou yellow-headed puppy dog, thou shalt go with one eye against a Baresark with two," growled Ospakar.

Men took no heed of his words, but shouted aloud, for Skallagrim had plagued them long, and there were none who dared to fight with him any more. Only Gudruda looked askance, for it seemed to her that Eric swore too fast. Nevertheless, he went up to the altar, and, taking hold of the holy ring, swore his oath, while the feasters applauded, striking their cups upon the board.

And after that the feast went merrily, till all men were drunk except Asmund and Eric.

Now Eric went to rest, but first he rubbed his limbs with the fat of seals, for he still was sore with the beating of the waters, and they must needs be supple on the morrow if he would keep his eye. Then he slept sound, and rose strong and well, and going to the stream behind the stead, bathed, and anointed his limbs afresh. But Ospakar slept not well because of the ale he had drunk. Now, as Eric came back from bathing, in the dark of the morning, he met Gudruda, who watched for his coming, and, there being none to see, he kissed her often; but she chided him because of the match that he had made with Ospakar and the oath that he had sworn.

"Surely," she said, "thou wilt lose thine eye, for this Ospakar is a giant, and strong as a troll; also he is merciless. Still, thou art a mighty man, and I shall love thee as well with one eye as with two. Oh! Eric, methought I shoul! have died yesterday when thou didst leap from Wolf's Fang. My heart seemed to stop within me."

"Yet I came safely to shore, sweetheart, and well does this kiss pay for all I did. And as for Ospakar, if but once I get these arms about him, I fear him little, or any man, and I covet that sword of his greatly. But we can talk more certainly of these things to-morrow."

Now Gudruda clung to him, and told him all that had befallen, and of the doings and words of Swanhild.

"She honors me beyond my worth," he said, "who am in no way worthy to her, but on thee only, Gudruda."

"Art so sure of that, Eric? Swanhild is fair and wise."

"Ay, and evil. When I love Swanhild, then thou mayst love Ospakar."

"It is a bargain," she said. "Good luck go with thee in the wrestling," and with a kiss she left him, fearing lest she should be seen.

Eric went back to the hall, and sat down by the centre hearth, for all men slept, being still heavy with drink, and presently Swanhild glided up to him and gave him greeting.

"Ay, Blacktooth, if thou fearest; but first pay thou forfeit of the sword."

Now Ospakar grew very mad and shouted, "Thou wilt indeed stand against me in the ring! I will break thy back, youngster, and after tear out thine eye before thou diest."

"It may so befall," answered Eric, "but big words do not make big deeds."

Presently the light came and thralls went out with spades and cleared away the snow in a circle of two rods across, and brought dry sand and sprinkled it on the frozen turf, so that the wrestlers should not slip. And they piled the snow in a wall around the ring.

But Groa came up to Ospakar and spoke to him apart.

"Knowest thou, lord," she said, "that my heart bodes ill of this match? Eric is a mighty man, and, great though thou art, methinks that thou shalt lift low before him."

"It will be an ill matter if I am overthrown of an untried man," said Ospakar, and was troubled in his mind, "and it would be evil moreover to lose the sword. On no account would I have it so."

"What wilt thou give me, lord, if I bring thee victory?"

"I will give thee two hundred in silver."

"Ask no questions and it shall be so," said Groa.

Now Eric was without, taking note of the ground in the ring, and Groa called to her the thrall Koll the Half-witted, whom she had sent to Swinefell.

"See," she said, "yonder by the wall stand the wrestling shoes of Eric Brighteyes. Haste thee now and take grease and rub the soles with it then hold them in the heat of the fire, so that the fat sinks in. Do this swiftly and secretly, and I will give thee twenty pennies."

Koll grinned, and did as he was bid, setting back the shoes even as they were. Scarcely was the deed done when Eric came in and made himself ready, binding the greased shoes upon his feet, for he feared no trick.

Now all men went out to the ring, and Ospakar and Eric stripped for wrestling. They were clad in tight woollen jerkins and hose, and sheepskin shoes were on their feet.

They named Asmund master of the game, and his word must be law to both of them. Eric claimed that Asmund should hold the sword Whitefire that was at stake, but Ospakar gainsaid him, saying that if he gave Whitefire into Asmund's keeping Eric must also give his eye—and about this they debated hotly. Now the matter was brought before Asmund as umpire, and he gave judgment for Eric, "for," he said, "if Eric yield up his eye into my hand, I can return it to his head no more if he win; but if Ospakar gives me the good sword and conquers, it is easy for me to pass it back to him unharmed."

Men said that this was a good judgment.

Thus then was the arena made set. Ospakar and Eric must wrestle thrice, and between each bout there would be a space while men could count a thousand. They might strike no blow at one another with hand, or head, or elbow, foot or knee; and it should be counted no fall if the haunch and the head of the fallen were not on the ground at the self-same time. He who suffered two falls should be adjudged conquered, and lose his stake.

Asmund called these rules aloud in the presence of witnesses, and Ospakar and Eric said that should bind them.

Ospakar drew a small knife and gave it to his son Gizur to hold.

"Thou shalt soon know, youngling, how steel tastes in the eyeball," he said.

"We shall soon know many things," Eric answered.

Now they threw off their cloaks and stood in the ring. Ospakar was great beyond the bigness of men, and his arms were clothed with black hair like the limbs of a goat. Beneath the shaggy pelt they were as thick as a girl's thigh, his legs were also mighty, and the muscles stood out upon him in knotty lumps. A very giant he seemed and fierce as a Baresark, but still somewhat round about the body and heavy in movement.

From him men looked at Eric.

"Lo, Baldur and the Troll!" said Swanhild, and everybody laughed, since so it was indeed, for if Ospakar was black and hideous as a troll, Eric was beautiful as Baldur, the loveliest of the gods. He was taller than Ospakar by the half of a hand, and as broad in the chest. Still he was not yet come to his greatest strength, and though his limbs were well knit, they seemed but as a child's against the limbs of Ospakar. But he was quick as a cat and lithe, his neck and arms were white as whey, and beneath his golden hair his bright eyes shone like spears.

Now they stood face to face, with arms outstretched, waiting the word of Asmund. He gave it, and they circled round each other with arms held low. Presently Ospakar made a rush, and seizing Eric about the middle, tried to lift him, but with no avail. Thrice he strove and failed; then Eric moved his foot, and lo! it slipped upon the sanded turf. Again he moved, and again he slipped; a third time, and he slipped; a third time, and before he could recover he was full on his back and fairly thrown.

Gudruda saw and was sad at heart, and those around her said that it was easy to know how the game would end.

"What said I?" quoth Swanhild. "That it would fare ill with Eric were Ospakar's arms about him."

"All is not done yet," answered Gudruda. "Methinks Eric's foot slipped most strangely, as though he stood on ice."

But Eric was very sore at heart and could make nothing of this matter—for he was not overthrown by strength.

He sat on the bench and Ospakar and his sons mocked him. But Gudruda drew near and whispered to be of good cheer, for fortune might yet change.

"I think I am bewitched," said Eric sadly. "My feet have no hold of the ground."

Gudruda covered her eyes and thought. Presently she looked up quickly. "I seem to see gulls here," she said. "Now look narrowly on thy shoes."

He heard, and, loosening his shoestring, drew a shoe from his foot and looked at the sole. The cold of the snow had hardened the fat, and there it was, all white upon the leather.

Now Eric rose in wrath. "Methought," he cried, "that I dealt with men of honorable mind, not with cheating tricksters. See now! it is little wonder that I slipped, for grease has been set upon my shoes—and, by Thor! I will cleave the man who did it to the chin," and as he said it his eyes blazed so dreadfully that folk fell away from him. Asmund took the shoes and looked on them.

"Brighteyes speaks the truth, and we have a sorry knave among us. Ospakar, canst thou clear thyself of this ill deed?"

"I will swear on the holy ring that I know nothing of it, and if any man in my company has had a hand therein he shall die," said Ospakar.

"That will we also," cried his sons Gizur and Mord.

"This is more like a woman's work," said Gudruda, and she looked at Swanhild.

"It is no work of mine," quoth Swanhild.

"Then go ask thy mother of it," answered Gudruda.

Now all men cried aloud that this was the greatest shame, and that the match must be set afresh, only Ospakar bethought him of that two hundred in silver which he had vowed to Groa, and looked around, but she was not there. Nevertheless he gainsaid Eric in the matter of the match being set afresh.

Then Eric cried loud in his anger that he would let the game stand, as it was, since Ospakar swore himself free of the shameful deed. Men thought this a dalt saying, but Asmund said it should be so. Still he swore in his heart that, even if he were worsted, Eric should not lose his eye—no, not if swords were held aloft to take it. For of all things this seemed to him the very worst.

Now, again, Ospakar and Eric faced each other in the ring, but this time the feet of Eric were bare.

Ospakar rushed to get the upper hold, but Eric was too swift for him and sprang aside. Again he rushed, but Eric dropped and gripped him round the middle, and they were face to face, hugging each other like bears, but moving little. For a while things went thus, while Ospakar strove to lift Eric, but no how might he stir him. Then of a sudden Eric put out his strength, and they staggered round the ring, tearing at each other till their jerkins were rent from them, leaving them bare to the waist. Suddenly Eric seemed to give, and Ospakar put forth his foot to trip him. But Brighteyes was watching. He caught the foot in the crook of his left leg and threw his weight forward on the chest of Blacktooth. Backward he went, falling with the crash of a pine, and thus he lay on the ground, and Eric on him.

The men shouted "A fall! a fair fall!" and were very glad, for the fight seemed most uneven to them, and the wrestlers rolled asunder, breathing heavily.

Gudruda threw a cloak over Eric's naked shoulders.

"That was well done, Brighteyes," she said.

"The game is still to play, Sweet," he gasped; "and Ospakar is a mighty man. I threw him by skill, not by strength."

Now breathing time was done, and once more the two were face to face. Thrice Ospakar rushed, and thrice did Eric slip away, for he would waste Blacktooth's strength. Again Ospakar rushed, roaring like a bear, and fire seemed to come from his eyes, and the steam went up from him and hung upon the frosty air like the steam of a horse. This time Eric might not get away, but was swept up into that mighty grip, for Ospakar had the lower hold.

"Now there is an end of Eric," said Swanhild.

"The arrow is yet on the bow," answered Gudruda.

Blacktooth put out his might, and reeled round and round the ring, dragging Eric with him. This way and that he twisted, and time on time Eric's leg was lifted from the ground, but so he might not be thrown. Now they stood almost still, while men shouted madly, for no such wrestling had been known in the southlands. Grimly they hugged and strove; forsooth it was a mighty sight to see. Grimly they hugged, and their muscles strained and cracked, but they could stir each other no inch.

Ospakar grew fearful, for he could make no play with this youngling. Black rage swelled in his heart. He ground his fangs and thought on guile. By his foot gleamed the naked foot of Eric. Suddenly he stamped on it so fiercely that the skin burst.

"Ill done! ill done!" folk cried; but in his pain Eric moved his foot.

Lo! he was down, but not altogether down, for he did but fall upon his haunches, and still he clung to Blacktooth's thighs, and twined his legs about his ankles. Now with all his strength, Ospakar strove to force the head of Brighteyes down to the ground, but still he might not, for Eric clung to him like a creeper to a tree.

"A losing game for Eric," said Asmund, and as he spoke Brighteyes was forced back till his yellow hair almost swept the ground.

Then the folk of Ospakar shouted in triumph, but Gudruda cried aloud:

"Be not overthrown, Eric; loose thee and spring aside."

Eric heard, and of a sudden loosed all his grip. He fell on his outspread hand, then, with a swing and a bound once more he stood upon his feet. Ospakar came at him like a bull made mad with goading but he could no longer roar aloud. They closed, and this time Eric had the better hold. They closed, they struggled round and round till their feet tore the frozen turf, then once more they stood face to face. Now the two were well nigh spent; yet Blacktooth gathered up his mighty strength and swung Eric from his feet, but he found them again. He grew mad with rage, and hugged him till Brighteyes was nearly pressed to death, and black bruises sprung upon the whiteness of his flesh. Ospakar grew mad, and madder yet, till at length in his fury he fixed his fangs in Eric's shoulder and bit till the blood spurted.

"Ill kissed, thou rat," gasped Eric, and with the pain and rush of blood, his strength came back to him. He shifted his grip swiftly, now his right hand was beneath the fork of Blacktooth's thigh and his left on the hollow of Blacktooth's back. Twice he lifted—twice the bulk of Ospakar rose from the ground—a third mighty lift—so mighty that the wrapping on Eric's forehead burst, and the blood streamed down his face—and lo! the giant flew in air. Up he flew, and backward he fell in the bank of snow, and was buried there almost to the knees.

(To be continued.)

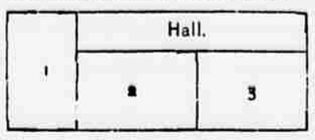
GOOD STORIES OF THE PRESENT DAY.

The Man Who Rented the Rooms Up Stairs.

"The Citizens' Bank of Venango" was a private bank in a town in Missouri. The "Venango" part of the title had been inherited from another bank, which had gone into liquidation years before, and referred to some land speculation in connection with banking.

Our building was a plain two-story brick standing at a corner, and the interior was plainly furnished, as was the rule in those days. To aid you to follow my story I here present a diagram of the first floor:

It was, as you see, simply a long room divided by a railing in the centre. Behind the railing were our desks, and at the rear end, as marked "V," was the vault. The diagram of the second floor is scarcely more intricate.



There was a front room and two rear rooms, with a hall the length of these latter. One room, as you see, was exactly over the vault, and this leads me to tell you how the vault was built. It was of brick, and two feet thick, and at the top the joists of the second floor were covered with boiler plates. The spaces between the joists were filled in with cement. On top of the second-floor joists, before laying the floor, we laid other plates of iron, and when the bank was opened for business we had little fear of our cash being stolen by any tenant of the up-stairs rooms.

The idea was to rent the rooms to lawyers or doctors, but the first caller decided to take all three, and to pay one year's rent in advance. He was a stranger to all, but gave his name as Samuel Goldwaithe, and explained that he was an inventor, and was then seeking to perfect certain tools for the use of miners. One of his ideas was a drill to be worked by turning a wheel. The man had a frank, open face, a smooth tongue, and when he offered to put down a whole year's rent in advance it would not have been business to keep him out. While Mr. Desnoyers, my partner, was perfectly satisfied as to our up-stairs man, I was not. There wasn't the slightest reason to suspect that he was not what he claimed to be, or that he had any designs against us, but I somehow felt myself suspecting him from the first moment I saw his face. He had got settled in his rooms when I planned that he would enter our vault by way of the back room, or at least make an attempt to do so, and this idea was never out of my mind thereafter. I was laughed at by my partner, but this only made me the more obstinate in clinging to my idea.

Goldwaithe furnished the front room as a reception room and office, the second as a bedroom, and the third as his workshop. Exactly over the vault he had a carpenter put up a heavy framework of beams, and among the stuff moved in were chisels, hammers, augers, bits, drills, files, saws, and many other carpenters' and mechanics' tools. I could say nothing, as he made use of all these as an inventor, but my suspicions regarding his final object were continually strengthened.

For three months our man up stairs scarcely entered the bank nor spoke to one of us, except as I met him at the hotel where we both boarded. He was so quiet and easy spoken that everybody had a good word for him, and he invited many of the townspeople to visit his rooms and examine his work. At the end of six months he was universally liked and respected, and if he had wanted a couple of hundred dollars at our bank a dozen business men would have backed his note. While I had the opportunity to longer mention my suspicions, they had by no means left me. We had no watchman, and the safe in the vault was one of the old pattern which was neither fire nor burglar proof. My chief dependence was on the strength of the vault. I made all sorts of estimates, but finally decided that Goldwaithe could not slip down into the vault and open the safe in less than twelve hours at the very least. The tools and appliances of that day were very crude compared to the modern.

The man up stairs had been with us half a year, and no one could find the least fault with his conduct, which seemed to make a special effort to win my friendship. Up to this time he had passed the evenings in his rooms. Without saying a word to my partner, I had passed my evenings in the bank, never leaving until about 10 o'clock. I did this to shorten Goldwaithe's time, providing he intended to enter the vault. I was always at the bank at half past 7 in the morning, and this would give him only nine and a half hours to work, where I had figured it would take him twelve.

One evening something was said about cards, and he so managed it that I invited him up to my room in the hotel to play a few games. As long as he was there I apprehended no danger, and so it finally came about that we used to spend almost every evening in company. Sometimes I went to his rooms, and sometimes he went to mine, and he never exhibited the slightest curiosity regarding our business in the bank. One evening he did not leave me until 11 o'clock. Next day Desnoyers said:

"Our man up stairs has been away, eh?"

"No."

"But I met him as he came from the depot last night at 10 o'clock."

"You are mistaken. He was in my room until 11."

"Is that so? Why, I met a man who looked exactly like him. He was carrying a satchel, headed for the bank, and I am sure he went up the stairway."

This statement puzzled and annoyed me and kept my suspicions active. Knowing that Goldwaithe was with me at the hour of 10 I was obliged to believe my partner mistaken, but yet there was some thing about the case I did not like. About four weeks later, one morning as I opened the bank, the ticket agent at the depot came along on his way to breakfast. A train passed at 6 o'clock, and he was obliged to be there.

"Lost your inventor?" he asked as he came up.

"How—what?"

"Why, Goldwaithe. He went off on the train this morning, and as he had a satchel with him, I didn't know but he was going for good. Bought a ticket for St. Louis."

As Goldwaithe had been with me up to 11 o'clock of the night before, and had said nothing of going away, I was puzzled. This state of mind was increased an hour later when I saw him in the bank. I started to ask for an explanation, but on second thought concluded not to. That evening I saw the ticket agent and asked:

"Are you sure you saw Goldwaithe go away this morning?"

"Perfectly sure. Why?"

"Because he didn't go. He came into the bank an hour after I saw you this morning."

"Great heavens, man, but I sold him his ticket and passed the time of day with him! You must be mistaken."

But I satisfied him that I was not, and then both of us were puzzled. About two weeks later I made an excuse to get into the back room up stairs. I found a piece of machinery mounted on the wooden frame, and though I asked no questions and Goldwaithe volunteered no information I felt positive that it was a drill which was to be worked by turning a handle. As I told you before, so long as I had the vault under my eye I did not fear for the vault. If he was with me evenings I cared not what he did daytimes.

Two or three weeks after the incident related above, I had a four-hand card party in my room, and Goldwaithe was one of the quartet. At 10 o'clock I was called down stairs by the ticket agent, who said:

"I want to know whether I have seen straight this time or not. Goldwaithe came in on the 8:30 St. Louis express."

"You must be crazy! He is right up stairs in my room at this moment, and Peters and Thompson are with him."

"But I tell you I saw him. More than that, he came up the street ahead of me and turned into the stairway."

I took him up stairs, and when he saw Goldwaithe sitting there he was dead beat. Here were three instances of queer deception. While I cogared them as deceptions or illusions, there was something uncanny in the incidents, and my interest in the movements of Goldwaithe was considerably increased. On one pretence or another I got into his rooms or sent friends up there every day or two, but everything appeared straight. One evening he sat down in the hotel office to write a letter, and while he was thus engaged I walked up the street four squares to speak to a merchant. On returning I met Goldwaithe face to face, and saluted.

"Ah, you cut it short."

"Yes."

"Well, mail it and hurry back."

I walked straight to the hotel, and there sat the man I had spoken to on the street three minutes before! He was still writing. I asked a friend who sat reading if Goldwaithe had been out, and he replied in the negative. I felt my hair standing on end as I sat down, and during all that long night I did not get a wink of sleep. My partner, the ticket agent, and myself had all seen what we had not seen. Was he of flesh and blood, or was he a wraith who could appear in two places at once?

It was on a Friday evening I thought I met our up-stairs man on the street. Saturday morning I took a stepladder and closely examined the top of the vault, and also sent a man up stairs to look at the floor of the back room and see if it was intact. Everything was reported all right, and Saturday evening our man said to me:

"I haven't slept well lately, and I believe I will try a change of beds. I will turn into the room next to you for a couple of nights, and see if the change won't bring sleep."

I rejoiced at this, as I need not fear that he was at work on the vault. I satisfied myself that he was in bed before I turned in, and that night I slept better than for months before. He occupied the same room on Saturday night, and on Sunday forenoon he surprised me by saying he would accompany me to church. He appeared to listen very closely to the sermon, and on the way home pointed out its strong and weak points.

It was his custom to enter the bank at noon to see if all was well, but on this day, after we had finished dinner and I was about to start, a friend came in and I was detained about half an hour. Everything seemed to be all right in the bank, but, from force of habit, I opened the vault, and one look showed me that the climax had come. There was a hole through the roof of the vault, our safe was open, and lying on the litter of papers was a man. I did not know whether he was dead or alive when I summoned help, but we soon found that he was dead and lying in his own blood. The safe had been opened with wedges, and the $8,500 it contained had been taken. It was half an hour before I thought of Goldwaithe, and then he could not be found. We burst into his rooms, and about the first thing we found was a satchel containing our money.

The machine which I took to be a drill was a drill. A piece of the floor had been cut out, the drill had then done its work on the iron plates, and later on a chisel had been used to pick out the cement and remove the bricks. The robber could have begun work at 5 o'clock on Saturday evening, and he probably did so. Who was he? It was Goldwaithe! Fifty of us could have sworn it was he, and yet it wasn't. I had left him alive at the hotel, and he had skipped. Then who was he? Dead to the town forever, as ascertained to a certainty. How did he meet his death? He had got into the vault and the safe and secured the money. He passed up and down by means of a rope. In going back the second time for further plunder he had encountered a piece of glass in the cement, and it had severed an artery in his leg.

Goldwaithe knew that I mistrusted him. He had, therefore, worked to throw me off my guard, and when the plan was ripe for execution he lay sleeping within ten feet of me, while his own brother was doing the work. We caught him three months later in New Orleans, and, while we could not prove that he was the man, one of the robbers, he was taken to Cincinnati on another charge and got a sentence of twelve years.

Where Jason was Off.

"Perhaps you gents would like to see a work of art?" queried the farmer with the fur cap and cardigan jacket.

No one encouraged him by look or word, but he carefully unrolled a paper, spread out a half sheet of cardboard, and exhibited a rather fine pen-and-ink drawing of a tombstone.

"Artist up at Syracuse did it for me," he explained. "It's a guide for the grave-stone man to follor. Isn't it rather scrumptious?"

"For your wife?" I asked.

"Oh, no; it's for my son Jason. See the name in there: Sacred to the memory of Jason Clark, who died, &c. It'll be the finest thing in our bull graveyard."

"Sick long?" I queried.

"Never sick a day in his life, and was killed deader'n a door nail when he went."

"Killed, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Bet a man $2 that he could hoof it over a bridge before the train caught him, and he come within ten feet of doing it, too. Engineer waved him about seventy feet, and he was dead when they picked him up."

"It was too bad," sighed one of the group by way of showing his sympathy.

"Yes. He lost the $2 by a mighty close shave. Probably stubbed his toe somehow. Poor Jason! Powerful good boy, but a little off on distances."

Valuing a Diamond.

There were five or six of "us boys" in a coach on an Erie train one day last summer, when a young man wearing a big diamond pin came in. As he seemed to take special pains to show off we presently began to talk about diamonds and how people were deceived in them, and he at once cocked up both ears and became interested. The agent of a Buffalo wall-paper house had a magnifying glass with him, and we selected him as an expert to test what jewelry we could pass up. He passed all the stones as fair to medium, and then the stranger came forward and said:

"I'd like your opinion on this stone. I got it at what I consider a bargain."

"Do you call this a diamond?" asked our "expert" after a long look through the glass.

"Certainly."

"Where did you get it?"

"Of an advance agent who was hard up."

"And you paid—?"

"Oh, well, I might as well tell you. I gave him $140, and it's worth $250 or $300."

"Is it? I shouldn't like to offer you $20 for it. You have been made a victim."

"What! Isn't that a diamond?"

"Yes, such a diamond as my house sells by the pint."

The stranger was knocked all to pieces by the information, and after considerable swearing he went off and sat down by himself. At Salamanca he saw some one on the platform he knew and hurried out to speak with him. When he returned the pin was gone, and one of the crowd asked if he had lost it.

"Not any lost!" he replied. "When I found out that I had been taken in and done for I determined to 'do' somebody else. I have just sold the pin for $35 to a sucker friend of mine, and will charge up the $105 to experience."

Every one of us turned cold, but no one spoke. That stone was a genuine first water, and worth $300 unset!

Not In That Business.

I was talking with the Sheriff in a county seat town in Indiana one day last summer when we saw a ragged and wayworn tramp heading for us across the street.

"Hang the fellow!" growled the Sheriff. "He's going to strike me for a quarter, and if he does I'll bounce him out of town!"

The tramp came up, passed the time of day, asked which was the Sheriff, and turned to him with:

"I am disgusted and discouraged, and want—"

"Oh, your sort are always broken up and always wanting," interrupted the official.

"I wanted to say that I have dodged around until I am tired of it and shall feel relieved to—"

"Yes, you look like a dodger! Dodging from one house to another after cold victuals! We don't want you in this town, and the sooner you take the road out of it the better it will be for you!"

"I want to give myself up," protested the tramp.

"Oh, you do! Want thirty days in jail to rest up and get fat in! Well, we are not doing that sort of business in this county. I'll give you just five minutes to find the dirt road leading to Indianapolis."

The man walked away without another word, his countenance wearing a puzzled expression, and in two minutes he was out of sight. I met the Sheriff in Chicago a week later and he at once turned and faced away and said:

"Rig me with about 40,000 horse power!"

"What ails you?" I asked.

"Remember the tramp who struck us that day in —?"

"Yes."

"Well, the fellow wanted to give himself up, and I wouldn't let him."

"I remember."

"And he turns out to be a Missouri robber with a reward of $500 on his head, and these Chicago police nabbed him three days ago."

Blotted Out.

I had gone to the cemetery with a friend to view the monument he had erected in memory of one of his family, and we were afterward strolling about in the winding paths, when we met an old woman, a gray-haired, wrinkled, and feeble old woman, who had been compelled to rest in her walk.

"I was looking for—for Potter's Field," she explained, as we came up.

We offered to show her the way, and as she limped along at a slow pace she said:

"They are all buried there—husband and three children. It was sickness, poverty, and death, and the dead had to go to Potter's Field. We felt the shame of it, but what could we do?"

"Will you remember the locality?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I used to come quite often, but it's been five years since I was here last, as I moved away. There's a big elm, with a limb branching off to the left, and near by is the tombstone of a soldier."

When we reached the space reserved for the bodies of the very poor she was all attention, but we had walked half a mile before she identified the tree.

"It's right here that he was buried, while the children's graves are further down," she said as she stood by the tree.

Next moment a wall of anguish was wrung from her heart. Men had been there and levelled the earth—blotted out the mounds and filled up the hollows to prepare for other pauper graves—to bury the dead atop of the dead. It was so further down. The rough mounds which had once marked the children's grave to a mother's eye were there no longer.

"I—I had to come once more!" she sobbed in her bitterness of spirit. "It is the last time, for I am old and feeble. If they had left the mounds I could have told mine from all others. But see! There are no graves here! My dead are gone, and I shall never find them again!"

And as we passed on she sank down on the grass beneath the shade of the tree she had kept so long in mind, and her tearful plaints followed us like those of some starving child desperate in his despair.

A St. Louis Charity.

A meek-eyed, mild-spoken man dropped around to the hotel in St. Louis one evening last fall, and as fast as he came to any one whom he had sized up as "safe" he said:

"It is a case of charity—a noble charity—but we are opposed to anything like a subscription. The widow wouldn't have it that way, you know. We have, therefore, arranged for a ten-round go between the Missouri Terror and the St. Louis Chain Lightning. Comes off at 10 o'clock—admission $1. It's for blood, and the money goes to the widow of the best dog-handler in the United States."

It seemed a sort of duty to go around with the crowd and pay the admission fee. The affair was to come off in a barn, and when the principals entered the ring there were sixty-two of us dollar men present. They shook hands, "put up" in good shape, and the knowing ones predicted a hot time. At the first punch the Terror made, however, the other fell down seemingly unconcious, and after working over him for five minutes the meek-eyed man stood up and said:

"Gents, I are sorry to inform you that Chain-Lightning is a dead man. He has evidently died of heart failure, and under the adverse circumstances the fight cannot go on. I'll have to send for the police."

Of course everybody made a hustle to get away, only too anxious to escape arrest and detention, and the barn was emptied in thirty seconds. Next day, as I was going down the river on a steamboat, I heard two men in the stateroom next to mine disputing.

"Well, make it an even divide," said one.

"Of course, its even," replied the other. "Bill worked in the crowd, you played dead on 'em, and I had the rig there to get us off. Purty slick game, but you didn't do too soon. You ought to have waited until I got in one on you."

NEW YORK'S FLOWER MAKERS.

How the Bonnets of America are Made to Bloom—Work and Wages.

While outward New York is held in winter's clutch, the interiors of a dozen great buildings in the French quarter are all aglow with the blossoms that are to make gay the hats and bonnets of American women next spring. Of all the dainty trades that flourish in the French quarter, none is daintier than that of the artificial flower makers. The process of flower making begins with the man that stamps out leaves and petals. He has perhaps 100 short, stout iron spikes, each bearing on one end an iron stamp fashioned so as to cut out of cloth bits shaped like the petals of one flower or another. The cloth, velvet, sateen, satin, or what not, is laid upon a leaden slab and the stamp is struck smartly with a hammer. In this way thousands of petals are struck out rapidly, the cloth being folded many times before the process begins. From the stamper the work passes to the dyer. The latter is usually a Frenchman or German learned in the art of mixing colors. Rose petals come in all shades, and he dabs each with a bit of carmine, leaving the points untouched. From him the petals, ranged in rows on a board, pass to a boy or girl, who applies a bit of yellow dye to the white point. Then the petals are put over a furnace to dry.

From this point onward the work is done exclusively by girls. Their tools are extremely simple. The gopher is a little iron implement for curling petals. Tweezers, scissors, and mucilage brush about complete the outfit. The flat rose petals are set before half a dozen girls seated around a table upon which glows a small gas furnace. Each girl is armed with a gopher, and the gopher, after being heated a moment in the flame of the furnace, is applied with a quick wrist motion to the petal as it lies upon a little cushion. Under the heat and pressure the petal is instantly curled into a hollow cuplike imitation of the natural object. The freshly gophered petals are presently put together along with the stamens or "pips," as they are called in the trade, which are usually made by machinery at another factory.

One West side factory in this city may see the signs of pip factories dotting the French quarter in all directions. Sometimes the stem and branch of the rose are imported and merely tacked on in the factory; but this part of the business is also carried on here, and there are some 40 workers in New York.

Although the work is thus minutely subdivided, the best flower makers learn the business in its entirety, save stamping and dyeing. Those branches seem to be left almost exclusively to men. The test of a girl's skill lies in her ability to make a rose. The best rose makers follow nature with marvellous fidelity. The manufactures show you bouquets of clustered roses with everything complete even to great natural-looking thorns and defective, worm-eaten blossoms.

Dozens of flowers are imitated in the factories of this town, but the more familiar blossoms are most in demand. It is a secret of the trade that blue corn flowers are to be popular next spring, and there are many hundreds of boxes of them blooming beautifully in the factories at this moment. The show rooms at the factories are a perfect delirium of color now, and the stock will go on accumulating until the retailers begin to get hold of it six or eight weeks hence. January is the height of the busy season with the flower makers, and the work goes on