The Octopus

by Frank Norris

Sunday Call
MAGAZINE SECTION
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THE recent sad and sudden death of Mr. Frank Norris marks the loss to the English speaking world of one of the greatest writers of the day. As an author he was just in his prime. His last novel, "The Octopus," published last year, has been recognized both here and abroad as the closest approximation to the great American novel of anything that has ever appeared from the pen of any writer.

As a Californian Mr. Norris made a name that brings the greatest credit to his State; and as the author of "The Octopus," Mr. Norris wrote the strongest book on California ever published.

This novel, under the author's primal idea—so disastrously interrupted by his death—was intended to be the first of a series of three books devoted to that greatest of all world forces, wheat. This story concerns itself with the growing of the wheat. It was Mr. Norris' idea to have the second book a novel with Chicago as a center and the motif of the book was the handling of wheat by the brokers in the pit; while the third book of the trilogy should tell of the final distribution of wheat in Europe.

Fortunately "The Octopus" is complete in itself, and as a matter of fact would naturally be the most interesting of the trilogy for us of California; for Mr. Norris chose as the scene for this book the most immense wheat field known the world over—our own plains of the San Joaquin Valley. The story concerns itself with the life of the farmers of the great plains and their struggles not only with soil and against the mishaps of weather, but also against the ravenous sharks of the business world who hover around to tear away the profits from the tiller of the land.

As a novel this is the nearest approach to the great American novel so long sought for by critics and public. As a story, it will keep you sitting up nights until you have finished it. The character studies in this book are peculiarly Californian, and particularly accurate and convincing.

Immediately upon the death of Mr. Norris, realizing the great interest that would naturally be awakened in his last novel, "The Octopus"—a masterpiece of fiction—The Sunday Call forthwith made arrangements at great expense with Mr. Norris' publishers for the exclusive rights of "The Octopus" for the Pacific Coast.

The first installment of this great book was published in The Sunday Call of November 9, and but few copies of that edition are left, so if you wish to read "The Octopus" you would better apply for the first issue—Sunday Call of November 9—at once.

"The Octopus" will be followed by "The Gospel of Judas Iscariot," by Aaron Dwight Baldwin, which has created a tremendous furor both in Europe and America. It throws a new light on the strange life, the character and motives of this, the most bitterly execrated man in either the biblical or profane history of all ages.

It shows the splendors, the vices and follies, the wars and the feasts, and the sports and pleasures of Rome as they have never been shown before, and tells of the coming of Christ and his long and glorious struggle to establish his kingdom of heaven on earth, and the remarkable part Judas played in his crucifixion.

Then will come "The Leopard's Spots," by Thomas Dixon Jr.; "When Knighthood Was in Flower," by Charles Major; "The Gentleman From Indiana," by Booth Tarkington; "Tainted Gold," by Mrs. C. N. Williamson, whose "Mystery Box," published a few weeks ago in The Sunday Call, was one of the best stories in this remarkable series; "The Turnpike House," by Fergus Hume, etc., etc.

Just ponder over this list of books, as well as the names of the writers, and remember you get all these stories free with The Sunday Call. Other announcements will be made later.

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Continued from Last Sunday.

While the words were yet in his mouth the sound of the hoofbeats rose to a roar, and a great, bell-toned voice shouted:

"Annixter, Annixter, Annixter!"

It was Dyke's voice, and the next instant he shot into view in the open square in front of the house.

"Oh, my God!" cried Presley.

The ex-engineer threw the horse on its haunches, springing from the saddle; and as he did so the beast collapsed, shuddering, to the ground, Annixter sprang from the window and ran forward, Presley following.

There was Dyke, hatless, his pistol in his hand, a gaunt, terrible figure, the beard immeasurably long, the cheeks fallen in, the eyes sunken. His clothes, ripped and torn by weeks of flight and hiding in the chaparral, were ragged beyond words, the boots were shreds of leather, bloody to the ankle with furious spurring.

"Annixter!" he shouted, and again, rolling his sunken eyes, "Annixter, Annixter!"

"Here, here!" cried Annixter.

The other turned, leveling his pistol.

"Give me a horse, give me a horse, quick, do you hear? Give me a horse, or I'll shoot."

"Steady, steady. That won't do. You know me, Dyke. We're friends here."

The other lowered his weapon.

"I know, I know," he panted. "I'd forgotten. I'm unstrung, Mr. Annixter, and I'm running for my life. They're not ten minutes behind me."

"Come on, come on," shouted Annixter, dashing stableward, his suspenders flying.

"Here's a horse."

"Mine?" exclaimed Presley. "He wouldn't carry you a mile."

Annixter was already far ahead, trumpeting orders.

"The buckskin!" he yelled. "Get her out, Billy. Where's the stableman? Get out that buckskin. Get out that saddle."

Then followed minutes of furious haste, Presley, Annixter, Billy, the stableman, and Dyke himself darting hither and thither about the yellow mare, buckling, strapping, cinching, their lips pale, their fingers trembling with excitement.

"Want anything to eat?" Annixter's head was under the saddle flap as he tore at the cinch. "Want anything to eat? Want any money? Want a gun?"

"Water," returned Dyke. "They've watched every spring. I'm killed with thirst."

"There's the hydrant. Quick now."

"I got as far as the Kern River, but they turned me back," he said between breaths as he drank.

"Don't stop to talk."

"My mother, and the little tad—"

"I'm taking care of them. They're stopping with me."

"Here?"

"You won't see 'em; by the Lord, you won't. You'll get away. Where's that back cinch strap, Billy? God damn it, are you going to let him be shot before he can get away? Now, Dyke, up you go. She'll kill herself running before they can catch you."

"God bless you, Annixter. Where's the little tad? Is she well, Annixter, and the mother? Tell them—"

"Yes, yes, yes. All clear, Pres? Let her have her own gait, Dyke. You're on the best horse in the county now. Let go her head, Billy. Now, Dyke—shake hands? You bet I will. That's all right. Yes, God bless you. Let her go. You're off."

Answering the goad of the spur and already quivering with the excitement of the men who surrounded her, the buckskin cleared the stable corral in two leaps; then, gathering her legs under her, her head low, her neck stretched out, swung into the road from out the driveway, disappearing in a blur of dust.

With the agility of a monkey, young Vacca swung himself into the framework of the artesian well, clambering aloft to its very top. He swept the country with a glance.

"Well?" demanded Annixter from the ground. The others cocked their heads to listen.

"I see him; I see him!" shouted Vacca. "He's going like the devil. He's headed for Guadalajara."

"Look back, up the road, toward the mission. Anything there?"

The answer came down in a shout of apprehension.

"There's a party of men. Three or four—on horseback. There's dogs with 'em. They're coming this way. Oh, I can hear the dogs. And, say, oh, say, there's another party coming down the lower road, going toward Guadalajara, too. They've got guns. I can see the shine of the barrels. And, oh, Lord, say, there's three more men on horses coming down on the jump from the hills on the Los Muertos stock range. They're making toward Guadalajara. And I can hear the courthouse bell in Bonneville ringing. Say, the whole country is up."

As young Vacca slid down to the ground two small black and tan hounds, with flapping ears and lolling tongues, loped into view on the road in front of the house. They were gray with dust, their noses were to the ground. At the gate where Dyke had turned into the ranchhouse grounds they halted in confusion a moment. One started to follow the highwayman's trail toward the stable corral, but the other, quartering over the road with lightning swiftness, suddenly picked up the new scent leading on toward Guadalajara. He tossed his head in the air, and Presley abruptly shut his hands over his ears.

Ah, that terrible cry! deep-toned, reverberating like the bourdon of a great bell. It was the trackers exulting on the trail of the pursued, the prolonged, raucous howl, eager, ominous, vibrating with the alarm of the tocsin, sullen with the heavy muffling note of death. But close upon the bay of the hounds came the gallop of horses. Five men, their eyes upon the hounds, their rifles across their pommels, their horses reeking and black with sweat, swept by in a storm of dust, glinting hoofs and streaming manes.

"That was Delaney's gang," exclaimed Annixter. "I saw him."

"The other was that chap Christian," said Vacca. "S. Behrman's cousin. He had two deputies with him; and the chap in the white slouch hat was the Sheriff from Visalia."

"By the Lord, they aren't far behind," declared Annixter.

As the men turned toward the house again they saw Hilma and Mrs. Dyke in the doorway of the little house where the latter lived. They were looking out, bewildered, ignorant of what had happened. But on the porch of the ranchhouse itself, alone, forgotten in the excitement, Sidney—the little tad—stood, with pale face and serious, wide-open eyes. She had seen everything, and had understood. She said nothing. Her head inclined toward the roadway, she listened to the faint and distant baying of the dogs.

Dyke thundered across the railway tracks by the depot at Guadalajara not five minutes ahead of his pursuers. Luck seemed to have deserted him. The station, usually so quiet, was now occupied by the crew of a freight train that lay on the down track; while on the up line, near at hand and headed in the same direction, was a detached locomotive, whose engineer and fireman recognized him, he was sure, as the buckskin leaped across the rails.

He had no time to formulate a plan since that morning, when, tortured with thirst, he had ventured near the spring at the headwaters of Broderson Creek on Quien Sabe, and had all but fallen into the hands of the posse that had been watching for that very move. It was useless now to regret that he had tried to foil pursuit by turning back on his tracks to regain the mountains east of Bonneville. Now Delaney was almost on him. To distance that posse was the only thing to be thought of now. It was no longer a question of hiding till pursuit should flag; they had driven him out from the shelter of the mountains, down into this populous countryside, where an enemy might be met with at every turn of the road. Now it was life or death. He would either escape or be killed. He knew very well that he would never allow himself to be taken alive. But he had no mind to be killed—to turn and fight—till escape was blocked. His one thought was to leave pursuit behind.

Weeks of flight had sharpened Dyke's every sense. As he turned into the upper road beyond Guadalajara he saw the three men galloping down from Derrick's stock range, making for the road ahead of him. They would cut him off there. He swung the buckskin about. He must take the lower road across Los Muertos from Guadalajara, and he must reach it before Delaney's dogs and posse. Back he galloped, the buckskin measuring her length with every leap. Once more the station came in sight. Rising in his stirrups, he looked across the fields in the direction of the lower road. There was a cloud of dust there. From a wagon? No, horses on the run, and their riders were armed! He could catch the flash of gun barrels. They were all closing in on him, converging on Guadalajara by every available road. The upper road west of Guadalajara led straight to Bonneville. That way was impossible. Was he in a trap? Had the time for fighting come at last?

But as Dyke neared the depot at Guadalajara his eye fell upon the detached locomotive that lay quietly steaming on the up line, and with a thrill of exultation, he remembered that he was an engineer born and bred. Delaney's dogs were already to be heard and the roll of hoofs on the lower road was dinning in his ears as he leaped from the buckskin before the depot. The train crew scattered like frightened sheep before him, but Dyke ignored them. His pistol was in hand as, once more on foot, he sprang toward the lone engine.

"Out of the cab!" he shouted. "Both of you. Quick, or I'll kill you both."

The two men tumbled from the iron apron of the tender as Dyke swung himself up, dropping his pistol on the floor of the cab and reaching with the old instinct for the familiar levers.

The great compound hissed and trembled as the steam was released and the huge drivers stirred, turning slowly on the tracks. But there was a shout. Delaney's posse, dogs and men, swung into view at the turn of the road, their figures leaning over as they took the curve at full speed. Dyke threw everything wide open and caught up his revolver. From behind came the challenge of a Winchester. The party on the lower road were even closer than Delaney. They had seen his maneuver, and the first shot of the fight shivered the cab windows above the engineer's head.

But spinning futilely at first, the drivers of the engine at last caught the rails. The engine moved, advanced, traveled past the depot and the freight train and, gathering speed, rolled out on the track beyond. Smoke, black and boiling, shot skyward from the stack; not a joint that did not shudder with the mighty strain of the steam; but the great iron brute—one of Baldwin's newest and best—came to call, obedient and docile as soon as ever the great pulsing heart of it felt a master hand upon its levers. It gathered its speed, bracing its steel muscles, its thews of iron, and roared out upon the open track, filling the air with the rasp of its tempest breath, blotting the sunshine with the belch of its hot, thick smoke. Already it was lessening in the distance, when Delaney, Christian and the Sheriff of Visalia dashed up to the station.

The posse had seen everything.

"Stuck! Curse the luck!" vociferated the cowpuncher.

But the Sheriff was already out of the saddle and into the telegraph office.

"There's a derailing switch between here and Pixley, isn't there?" he cried.

"Yes."

"Wire ahead to open it. We'll derail him there. Come on." He turned to Delaney and the others. They sprang into the cab of the locomotive that was attached to the freight train.

"Name of the State of California!" shouted the Sheriff to the bewildered engineer. "Cut off from your train."

The Sheriff was a man to be obeyed without hesitating. Time was not allowed the crew of the freight train for debating as to the right or the wrong of requisitioning the engine, and before any one thought of the safety or danger of the affair the freight engine was already flying out upon the down line, hot in pursuit of Dyke, now far ahead upon the up track.

"I remember perfectly well there's a derailing switch between here and Pixley," shouted the Sheriff above the roar of the locomotive. "They use it in case they have to derail runaway engines. It runs right off into the country. We'll pile him up there. Ready with your guns, boys."

"If we should meet another train coming up on this track—" protested the frightened engineer.

"Then we'd jump or be smashed. Hi! look! There he is." As the freight engine rounded a curve, Dyke's engine came into view, shooting on some quarter of a mile ahead of them, wreathing in whirling smoke.

"The switch ain't much farther on," clamored the engineer. "You can see Pixley now."

Dyke, his hand on the grip of the valve that controlled the steam, his head out of the cab window, thundered on. He was back in his old place again; once more he was the engineer; once more he felt the engine quiver under him; the familiar noises were in his ears; the familiar buffeting of the wind surged, roaring at his face; the familiar odors of hot steam and smoke reeked in his nostrils, and on either side of him, parallel panoramas, the two halves of the landscape sliced, as it were, in two by the clashing wheels of his engine, streamed by in green and brown blurs.

He found himself settling to the old position on the cab seat, leaning on his elbow from the window, one hand on the controller. All at once, the instinct of the pursuit that of late had become so strong within him prompted him to shoot a glance behind. He saw the other engine on the down line, plunging after him, rocking from side to side with the fury of its gallop. Not yet had he shaken the trackers from his heels; not yet was he out of the reach of danger. He set his teeth and, throwing open the fire door, stoked vigorously for a few moments. The indicator of the steam gauge rose; his speed increased; a glance at the telegraph poles told him he was doing his fifty miles an hour. The freight engine behind him was never built for that pace. Barring the terrible risk of accident, his chances were good.

But suddenly—the engineer dominating the highwayman—he shut off his steam and threw back his brake to the extreme notch. Directly ahead of him rose a semaphore, placed at a point where evidently a derailing switch branched from the line. The semaphore's arm was dropped over the track, setting the danger signal that showed the switch was open.

In an instant Dyke saw the trick. They had meant to smash him here; had been clever enough, quick-witted enough to open the switch, but had forgotten the automatic semaphore that worked simultaneously with the movement of the rails. To go forward was certain destruction. Dyke reversed. There was nothing for it but to go back. With a wrench and a spasm of all its metal fibers, the great compound braced itself, sliding with rigid wheels along the rails. Then, as Dyke applied the reverse, it drew back from the greater danger, returning toward the less. Inevitably now the two engines, one on the up, the other on the down line, must meet and pass each other.

Dyke released the levers, reaching for his revolver. The engineer once more became the highwayman, in peril of his life. Now, beyond all doubt, the time for fighting was at hand.

The party in the heavy freight engine, that lumbered after in pursuit, their eyes fixed on the smudge of smoke on ahead that marked the path of the fugitive, suddenly raised a shout.

"He's stopped. He's broke down. Watch, now, and see if he jumps off."

"Broke nothing. He's coming back. Ready, now; he's got to pass us."

The engineer applied the brakes, but the heavy freight locomotive, far less mobile than Dyke's flier, was slow to obey. The smudge on the rails ahead grew swiftly larger.

"He's coming. He's coming—look out, there's a shot. He's shooting already."

A bright, white sliver of wood leaped into the air from the sooty window sill of the cab.

"Fire on him! Fire on him!"

While the engines were yet two hundred yards apart the duel began, shot answering shot, the sharp staccato reports punctuating the thunder of wheels and the clamor of steam.

Then the ground trembled and rocked; a roar as of heavy ordnance developed with the abruptness of an explosion. The two engines passed each other, the men firing the while, emptying their revolvers, shattering wood, shivering glass, the bullets clanging against the metal work as they struck and struck. The men leaned from the cabs toward each other, frantic with excitement, shouting curses, the engines rocking, the steam roaring; confusion whirling in the scene like the whirl of a witch's dance, the white clouds of steam, the black eddies from the smokestack, the blue wreaths from the hot mouths of revolvers, swirling together in a blinding maze of vapor, spinning around them, dazing them, dizzying them, while the head rang with hideous clamor and the body twitched and trebled with the leap and jar of the tumult of machinery.

Roaring, clamoring, reeking with the smell of powder and hot oil, spitting death, resistless, huge, furious, an abrupt vision of chaos, faces, rage-distorted, peering through smoke, hands gripping outward from sudden darkness, prehensile, malevolent; terrible as thunder, swift as lightning, the two engines met and passed.

"He's hit," cried Delaney. "I know I hit him. He can't go far now. After him again. He won't dare go through Bonneville."

It was true. Dyke had stood between cab and tender throughout all the duel, exposed, reckless, thinking only of attack and not of defense, and a bullet from one of the pistols had grazed his hip. How serious was the wound he did not know, but he had no thought of giving up. He tore back through the depot at Guadalajara in a storm of bullets, and, clinging to the broken window ledge of his cab, was carried toward Bonneville, on over the long trestle and Broderson Creek and through the open country between the two ranches of Los Muertos and Quien Sabe.

But to go on to Bonneville meant certain death. Before, as well as behind him, the roads were now blocked. Once more he thought of the mountains. He resolved to abandon the engine and make another final attempt to get into the shelter of the hills in the northernmost corner of Quien Sabe. He set his teeth. He would not give in. There was one more fight left in him yet. Now to try the final hope.

He slowed the engine down, and, reloading his revolver, jumped from the platform to the road. He looked about him, listening. All around him widened an ocean of wheat. There was no one in sight.

The released engine, alone, unattended, drew slowly away from him, jolting ponderously over the rail joints. As he watched it go a certain indefinite sense of abandonment, even in that moment, came over Dyke. His last friend, that had also been his first, was leaving him. He remembered that day, long ago, when he had opened the throttle of his first machine. To-day it was leaving him alone, his last friend turning against him. Slowly it was going back toward Bonneville, to the shops of the railroad, the camp of the enemy, that enemy that had ruined him and wrecked him. For the last time in his life he had been the engineer. Now, once more, he became the highwayman, the outlaw against whom all hands were raised, the fugitive skulking in the mountains, listening for the cry of dogs.

But he would not give in. They had not broken him yet. Never, while he could fight, would he allow S. Behrman the triumph of his capture.

He found his wound was not bad. He plunged into the wheat on Quien Sabe, making northward for a division house that rose with its surrounding trees out of the wheat like an island. He reached it, the blood squelching in his shoes. But the sight of two men, Portuguese farm-hands, staring at him from an angle of the barn, abruptly roused him to action. He sprang forward with peremptory commands, demanding a horse.

At Guadalajara, Delaney and the Sheriff descended from the freight engine.

"Horses now," declared the Sheriff. "He won't go into Bonneville, that's certain. He'll leave the engine between here and there, and strike off into the country. We'll follow after him now in the saddle. Soon as he leaves his engine, he's on foot. We've as good as got him now."

Their horses, including even the buckskin mare that Dyke had ridden, were still at the station. The party swung themselves up, Delaney exclaiming, "Here's my mount," as he bestrode the buckskin.

At Guadalajara, the two bloodhounds were picked up again. Urging the jaded horses to a gallop, the party set off along the upper road, keeping a sharp lookout to right and left for traces of Dyke's abandonment of the engine.

Three miles beyond the long trestle, they found S. Behrman holding his saddle horse by the bridle, and looking attentively at a trail that had been broken through the standing wheat on Quien Sabe. The party drew rein.

"The engine passed me on the tracks further up, and empty," said S. Behrman. "Boys, I think he left her here."

But before any one could answer, the bloodhounds gave tongue again, as they picked up the scent.

"That's him," cried S. Behrman. "Get on, boys."

They dashed forward, following the hounds. S. Behrman laboriously climbed to his saddle, panting, perspiring, mopping the roll of fat over his coat collar, and turning in after them, trotting along far in the rear, his great stomach and tremulous jowl shaking with the horse's gait.

"What a day," he murmured. "What a day."

Dyke's trail was fresh, and was followed as easily as if made on new-fallen snow. In a short time, the posse swept into the open space around the division house. The two Portuguese were still there, wide-eyed, terribly excited.

Yes, yes, Dyke had been there not half an hour since, had held them up, taken a horse and galloped to the northeast, toward the foothills at the headwaters of Broderson Creek.

On again, at full gallop, through the young wheat, trampling it under the flying hoofs; the hounds hot on the scent, baying continually; the men, on fresh mounts, secured at the division house, bending forward in their saddles, spurring relentlessly. S. Behrman jolted along far in the rear.

And even then, harried through an open country, where there was no place to hide, it was a matter of amazement how long a chase the highwayman led them. Fences were passed; fences whose barbed wire had been slashed apart by the fugitive's knife. The ground rose under foot; the hills were at hand; still the pursuit held on. The sun, long past the meridian, began to turn earthward. Would night come on before they were up with him?

"Look! Look! There he is! Quick, there he goes!"

High on the bare slope of the nearest hill, all the posse, looking in the direction of Delaney's gesture, saw the figure of a horseman emerge from an arroyo, filled with chaparral, and struggle at a laboring gallop straight up the slope. Suddenly, every member of the party shouted aloud. The horse had fallen, pitched the rider from the saddle. The man rose to his feet, caught at the bridle, missed it and the horse dashed on alone. The man, pausing for a second, looked around, saw the chase drawing nearer, then, turning back, disappeared in the chaparral. Delaney raised a great whoop.

"We've got you now."

Into the slopes and valleys of the hills dashed the band of horsemen, the trail now so fresh that it could be easily dis-