

# THE REFUGEES

(The following from the last issue of the San Francisco Argonaut will be of especial interest to the hundreds of friends the late Charles A. Pringle had here. Aside from the personal interest of those who knew this splendid man, his letters contain much to commend them from a literary standpoint.—Editor.)

## Foreword

The notes of border life which follow are the work of Charles Alston Pringle, one of the eighteen Americans massacred by Villa's bandits at Santa Ysabel, Chihuahua, on January 10th. They deal more particularly with the flight of the foreign colony of Madera, Chihuahua, to El Paso when Villa was first achieving his international notoriety as a ruthless rebel and destroyer, and were written to provide Mr. Pringle's immediate relatives with a record of his experiences.

Mr. Pringle had spent a large part of his time mining in northern Mexico, after leaving college fifteen years ago. He had made at the University of California a country-wide reputation as a football player. He possessed the strength and the constitution which find stimulation in the challenge of the wilderness. A friend of his college days contributed to "Collier's Weekly" a short editorial article on the occasion of Mr. Pringle's death which we wish to reprint here for its disclosure of the man and the pity of his taking:

"The university is just across the bay from San Francisco and you can loaf there on the dusty grass under the big live oaks and look out through the Golden Gate to where the sun is blazing down into the Pacific. Charlie Pringle played tackle on the blue-and-gold team there sixteen years ago. Those were the days! Jimmy Hopper barking the signals (he's in France now), Cornish and Greisberg tearing holes in the Stanford line for Hall to charge through, Kaarsberg's punts soaring like gulls, and Charlie down the field with the ends. What was that last score—28-0 or so? Big, quiet fellow he was, with a gentle voice and a smile that kept coming back, and that level look in his eyes. 'Fifty miles west of Chihuahua City,' the paper said, robbed and shot and left there like a dead dog by some of Villa's greasers. Carranza's government? Well, one bunch of politicians is pretty much like another; they'll do a lot of dignified talking, but that won't bring Charlie Pringle back again."

It is one of the merits of the sketch printed below that it does bring him back in a very real sense. While presenting a typical drama of border life, typical since anarchy became established in Mexico, it reveals in the writer a pure nugget from the rich ore of American manhood. It is set forth here practically in its original form except for the alteration of the names of some of the persons involved, most of whom are still living.

Eddie was the seventh that we had buried. But the others all had had their fighting chance or at least a chance to avoid fighting. As we left the little group of graves on the hillside we met Captain Santa Ana Caraveo and his band of intimates. His "mujer," Dolores, was riding the manager's horse and he Tom Stone's sorrel. Our Mexican friends had told us that it was she who slew the American negro, old John Henry, and that El Capitan with his own hands had put the bullet into poor Eddie's neck.

That evening we had our last council. There was not a dissenting voice to our decision that at last the time had come for us all to fly for the border.

We guarded that night—four hours on and four hours off—yet had it been twelve hours on

it would have been no hardship, for few of us slept. At dawn the train blew its signal whistle to call us aboard, and all foreign Madera began working its way towards the depot. Here came a cart with a Chinaman's load and there was a wagon with a Spaniard's. To my lot fell the driving of a heavy wagon and I pulled a varied cargo.

Just as varied as the cargo that we carried was the temper of the people that followed it. I stopped at the urgent appeal of Jim Hurley's wife. "I can't see," she said, "why it is that Mrs. Stone can take a whole bed, springs and all, and yet you won't let me take my sewing machine." She drove on content with her little early morning complaint. That was hers forever and after all the sewing machine would wear out.

Tom Stone's wife the night of the fight had stood on her porch and watched the Mexicans walk up to defenseless Ed Hayes and shoot him down at arm's length. Tom had not sent her out before because he and the doctor were afraid of the long day's ride on the train. And yet that was when the trains were running, while now the bridges were burned out. But there was no alternative. So we curtained off half of the baggage-car and in it placed the only bit of furniture on our train—a single cot with a spring mattress.

Twelve days we were getting to the border, and in all that time I never passed the front end of the baggage-car but that a cheerful word came from Tom Stone's wife or a shout from the children or some other expression of happiness in the home, though the home was but the half of a baggage-car. When I came hot and sweating from shoveling a slide or cold and clammy from cribbing a bridge it was Tom Stone's wife who slipped me a bit of cold chicken or a steaming cup of coffee. In my eyes Tom Stone's wife personifies a greater measure of Christianity's teachings than any one I know, save one. That one is my father's wife. I am sure she was conscious of no impending trial. I am sure she was overwhelmed with the coming expression of love and all the joys that it would bring to her good heart. No halo could have made her more resplendent.

That first day out was hard on the men. Down on the Golandrinas a bridge had to be cribbed, and it was dark before it was done. Handling heavy ties and working waist deep in a mountain stream after the days and nights that we had had taxed heavily the strength of even such a rough crew as ours. It was eleven before we were in Tejolocachic and making ready for bed.

You rarely see birds of so many a feather as flocked together on that train. There were the Chinamen all huddled in a box-car. Not a word of complaint nor a wail at misfortune did we hear from them. Then came the Turks, the Spaniards, the Mexicans, and in that last car which so recently had been a shambles in a Federal defeat were the Americans, among whom I think the assortment was the most varied.

Conspicuously there was the doctor's wife—gorgeous, brilliant-haired, the frame of an Amazon, the manner of an invalid; and the Texas doctor with his long black hair that waved and spread when he shook his head. And Rose Mullin, the nurse, daughter of Pat Mullin of Santa Fe and of Mercedes Dominguez of the Sonora border. In the books where the villain is always dark they say that the mixture of races begets only the black spots, yet no Irish gentleman or queen of Spain has a sweeter temper or finer eye than Rose Mullin.

And there was pretty Nellie—divorced, besmirched at seventeen. She has always lived in the country, too. I wonder what could have done that to a had chance at the start, I think. And yet withal her eyes were as clear and her voice

as sure as the others. I wonder if her conscience was incapable of holding that in solution which in others would have muddled it for all time. It seems there must be great differences in consciences.

As I write this I cannot help but think of Bob Sloan, a Mormon friend of mine. "Chaste natures," I am sure he would say, "are born just as artistic natures are." Bob has seen a great deal of his world. He has a way of gleaning evidence that others pass by. I remember now that once before he reminded me of Joaquin Miller's lines:

"I hesitate to draw a line

Between the two where God has not."

I wonder if Texas Tim's baby girl is to share Nellie's fate. Texas Tim stayed in the box-car ahead of the Chinamen and helped Sandy McPhail with the baggage. With him was his Mexican "wife," "mujer," "companera," as you choose, and the three tiny bits of children whose only boast later in life will be that they were born of man and woman, of that only will they be sure.

There were many others on that train, including Dona Inez, large, florid, and much admired widow of Tommy Briggs, late of the Texas Rangers. Briggs had met his violent death as most of his kind do. In a duel with Pancho Portillo, over in the Mormon colony at Chulichupa, one small bullet cut short his life while the Mexican stood tottering with five forty-fives through his body.

Then there was that little lady of the daintiest, most delicate feather, she who is known in New York as the intimate friend of the president's daughter. But we know the president's daughter as the friend of our little lady. Once when I came from my post on the pilot of the engine where I had been a-watching for mines and dynamited bridges she leaned from the window and I swear it was lighted by her presence as she said to me: "Isn't it great! Isn't it exciting! Isn't it fun! Oh! I am so afraid that at any moment one will turn out the footlights." I wandered back the length of the train and thought that, after all, our anxiety must be born of overwrought minds. No one would dynamite a train.

At San Isidro we came to the worst bridge of all. A full forty feet it was to the bottom of that arroyo and not a stick had survived the rebel torch. But by dark it was bridged and we called for the engineer.

"No, señor, you don't get me to pull her across this time o' night."

"But, Bill, if we don't get across that bunch of rebels will probably come in tonight and burn it out again."

"A lot I'll care if I am lying under the engine at the bottom. Why, it is forty odd feet high and only a single tier of rough-hewn ties. Then they's been a dozen bosses setting her up—everything from doctors to cowpunchers on the job. No, señor, not tonight. Lucky, if I tackle it in the morning."

"I'll take the Old Hog across. My dad used to run engine on the B. & O." It was Kid Clary who spoke, he who was as yet scarcely seventeen. We had begged the authorities at Madera to let him out of jail so that we could get him out of the country.

"That's right," said Kearney, the old conductor, who, in his day had run better trains. "His ole man was pullin' me in the strike o' '93, and I tell you right now, boys, that kid is a good engineer."

And he was—and he is today, we all think.

That night we slept in the open plain on the other side. Amongst those of us who knew there was great anxiety. We knew that a rebel band