

me from the pit mouth, I found Miss Armstrong worried because she had learned of your intention to 'shoot up' the town. It then became my duty to prevent you doing what you intended."

"Do you think you can?"

"Of course I knew there was no use in attempting to reason with you, so the instant necessity was to get one man of common sense to counteract the stupidity of the bunk house—that I set out to do. I rode to Bleachers; called on Lawyer Ricketts; paid him five dollars for whatever knowledge he could give me concerning the whereabouts of Mr. Armstrong. He could give me none that I did not already possess. You saw me go off in the train. I merely went to the next town to do some telegraphing that might be more or less secret from Ricketts. A detective agency will find Mr. Armstrong, hand him two hundred dollars and ask him at the same time to come home by the first train. Mr. Armstrong will prevent you carrying out your foolish scheme."

Jim pondered over this announcement for some minutes. At last he broke the silence.

"What you say may be true, but I don't believe a word of it. It's more likely Ricketts is your boss, and you went in to report to him and tell him what we intended to do. Ricketts will see that Bleachers is prepared to meet us."

"That would be a simple way of turning the trick. There are good points about that way, too, but it happens not to be my way, as you will learn when Mr. Armstrong returns."

Again Jim meditated, and finally rose, walked to the farther end of the room, and engaged for some moments in earnest talk with his companions, in tones so low that Stranleigh could not hear. Resuming his seat, he spoke with deliberation: "You want to make us believe you're a friend of Mr. Armstrong?"

"I don't care whether you believe it or not. I can hardly be a friend of Mr. Armstrong, because I've never seen him."

"We'll put your good feeling to the test. When Armstrong gets here, he'll be stone broke. Now, unless we shoot 'em up in Bleachers when they try to sell this place, Armstrong will lose it. We take it you're a rich man. Will you lend him money enough to hold the ranch and run the mine?"

"That I won't," said Stranleigh, with decision.

"THEN here you stay till you put up the cash! Even if Armstrong comes, he'll never know you're here. We'll tell him you've gone east. There isn't a chance of a search being made."

"This is rank brigandage," replied Stranleigh.

"That's about the name for it," said Dean, "but a man of so much brain as you have, ought to see that if we're ready to 'shoot up' a town, we won't stop at such a trifle as brigandage."

"True, quite true," concluded Stranleigh with conviction. "And now, gentlemen, I'm tired after my journey, and I think we've talked to very little purpose, so if you'll show me my bunk, I'll turn in."

"There are six unused bunks, Mr. Stranleigh, and you can take your choice."

Stranleigh made his selection, and rough though the accommodation was, he slept soundly as ever he had done in his London palace or his luxurious yacht.



Stranleigh shouldered his rifle, crossed the barricade, and strolled down to the farm house. Miss Armstrong greeted him with astonishment.

ALTHOUGH the Earl of Stranleigh was naturally an indolent man, the enforced rest of the following days grew very irksome. He had expected the guard over him to relax as time went on, but this proved not the case. The genial Jim saw to that, and it was soon evident to Stranleigh that Dean ruled his company with an iron hand. Such casual examination of the premises as he was able to make impressed him more and more with the difficulty of escape. Had the structure been built of logs, there might have been some hope, but the imperviousness of the thick stone walls was evident to the most stupid examiner. The place was lit in daytime by two slits, one at each gable, which were without

panes, and narrow, so that they might, as much as possible, keep out the rain. No man could creep through, even if he could reach the height at which they were placed.

During the day the stout door, fit to encounter a battering-ram, was open, but a guard sat constantly at it, with a rifle across his knee. At night it was strongly locked, barred and bolted. Stranleigh was handicapped by the fact that heretofore he had had merely to give an order, and other people did his thinking for him. Thus it happened that the means of escape were so obvious that a ten-year-old boy might have discovered them.

THE evenings passed very pleasantly, for Stranleigh was a good story-teller, and had many interesting tales to relate. In spite of the fact that his captors were unanimous in their opinion that Stranleigh was a useless encumbrance upon earth, they began rather to like him. One night Stranleigh asked if anything had yet been heard of Mr. Armstrong, and Jim, after hesitating a moment, replied that there was, so far, no news of him.

"I'm sorry for Armstrong," said Stranleigh, more as if talking to himself than to anyone else, "away from home all this time, and yet compelled to support six stalwart loafers without common sense enough to do the obvious thing."

"What is the obvious thing?" asked Dean.

"Work, of course. There's the mine; you've plenty of dynamite to go on with, and yet you lounge here not earning enough to keep yourselves in tobacco. If there's silver in that hole, you could, by this time, have had enough out to buy the ranch, and furnish your own working capital. You say you are partners in the scheme, but you seem to me to be a dunderhead lot of hired men, determined not to work."

Jim answered with acerbity: "If you knew anything about it, you'd know we'd gone already as far as hard work can go. We need an engine and a crusher."

"An engine?" echoed Stranleigh. "Why should you pay for coal, railway haulage, and the cost of getting it up here from the line, when right here, rushing past you, is all the power you need. You've only to make a water-wheel, with a straight log as axle, thrown across the falls, and there you are. Pioneers have done that sort of thing since civilization began, and here you don't need even to build a dam."

Jim was about to make an angry retort when the group was scattered by a roar and a heavy fall of soot on the log fire. The chimney was ablaze, but that didn't matter in the least, as the house was fire-proof. In a short time the flames had died out, and the party gathered round the hearth once more.

"Well," said Jim, "go on with your smart talk."

Stranleigh replied dreamily, gazing into the fire:

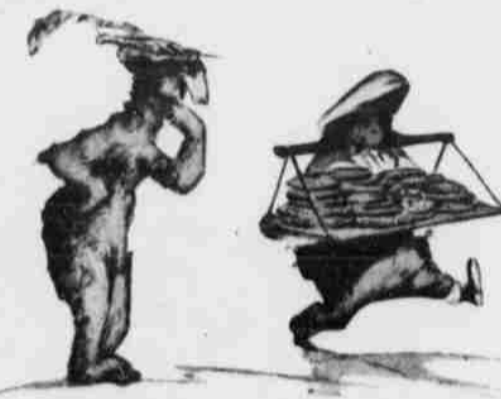
"Oh, well, as you hinted, I don't think my talk does amount to much. It's none of my affair. You are a most capable body of men, I have no doubt. I find myself becoming garrulous, so I'll turn in. Good night!"

But the fall of soot had suggested to him a method of escape.

(Continued on Page 16)

SIMPLE SIMON

Drawn by Frank Ver Beck



I. Simple Simon met a pieman
Going to the fair:



II. Says Simple Simon to the pieman
"Let me taste your ware."



III. Says the pieman to Simple Simon.
"Show me first your penny."



IV. Says Simple Simon to the pieman,
"Indeed I have not any."