Webster—Man's Man

By PETER B. KYNE

Author of "Cappy Ricks," "The Valley of the Giants," Etc.

"PLEASE LET ME HEAR FROM YOU."

John Stuart Webster, mining engineer, man's man, 29 years young, boards a train in Death Valley, California, on his way back to civilization after cleaning up $100,000. He is dreaming of cool baths, silk pajamas and ham and eggs. But he looks like a hobo to the porter and the conductor. His way of changing their views gives a hint of the mettle of the man. Then he meets a distressed lady, who makes his heart flop over for the first time in all his days. He eliminates the offending man after the style of the man's man the world over. Being what he is and also girl-shy, he does not take advantage of his opportunity. But he just had to find out who the no-longer-distressed lady is, being determined to hatch up a scheme to meet her again—and marry her. She is Dolores Ruey.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

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Webster struck the upholstery of an adjacent chair a terrific blow with his stick—the effect of which was to cause everybody in the room to start and to conceal Mr. Webster momentarily in a cloud of dust, the while in a bellowing baritone he sang:

"His father was a hard-rock miner;
He comes from my home town——"

"Jack Webster! The devil's own kin!" shouted Neddy Jerome. He swept the cards into a heap and waddled across the room to meet this latest assailant of the peace and dignity of the Engineers' club. "You old, worthless, ornery, no-good son of a lizard! I've never been so glad to see a man that didn't owe me money. I've been combing the whole civilized world for you, for a month, at least. Where the devil have you been?"

John Stuart Webster beamed happily upon his friend. "Well, Neddy, you old stocking-knitter," he replied quizzically, "since that is the case, I'm not surprised at your failure to find me. You've known me long enough to have remembered to confine your search to the uncivilized reaches."

"Well, you're here, at any rate and I'm happy. Now you settle down."

"Hardly, Neddy. "I'm young yet, you know—only forty. Still a real live man and not quite ready to degenerate into a card-playing, eat-drink-and-be-merry, die-of-inanition, sink-to-oblivion and go-to-h—— fireplace spirit!" And he prodded Jerome in the short ribs with a tentative thumb that caused the old man to wince. He permitted his friend to drag him downstairs to the deserted lounge, where Jerome paused in the middle of the room and renewed his query:

"Where have you been, I ask?"

"Out in Death valley, California, trying to pry loose a fortune."

"Did you pry it?"

John Stuart Webster arched his eyebrows in mock reproach. "And you can see my new suit, Neddy, my sixteen-dollar, made-to-order shoes and my horny hoofs encased in silken hose—and ask that question? Freshly shaved and ironed and almost afraid to sit down and get wrinkles in my trousers! Smell that!" He blew a cloud of cigar smoke into Jerome's smiling face. The latter sniffed. "It smells expensive," he replied.

"Yes, and you can bet it tastes expensive, too," Webster answered, handing his cigar-case to his friend.

Jerome bit the end of his cigar and spat derisively. "How much have you made?" he demanded bluntly.

"It's none of your business, but I'll tell you because I love you, Neddy. I've made one hundred thousand dollars."

"Chicken-feed," Jerome retorted. "Johnny, I've been combing the mineral belt of North and South America for you for a month."

"Why this sudden belated interest in me?"

"I have a fine job for you, John—"

"King's X," Webster interrupted, and showed both hands with the fingers crossed. "No plotting against my peace and comfort, Neddy. Haven't I told you I'm all dressed up for the first time in three years, that I have money in my pocket and more in bank? Man, I'm going to tread the primrose path for a year before I get back into the harness again."

Jerome waved a deprecatory hand, figuratively brushing aside such feeble and inconsequential argument. "Are you foot-loose?" he demanded.

"I'm not. I'm bound in golden chains—"

"Married, eh? Great Scott, I might have guessed it. So you're on your honeymoon, eh?"

"No such luck, you vichy-drinking iconoclast. If you had ever gotten far enough from this club during the past fifteen years to get a breath of real fresh air, you'd understand why I want to enjoy civilization for a week or two before I go back to a mine superintendent's cabin on some bleak hill. No, sir—— Old Jeremiah Q. Work and I had a falling out. Dad burn you——, Neddy, I want some class: I've been listening to a dago shift-boss playing the accordeon for three years—and he could only play three tunes. Now I want Sousa's band. I've been bathing in tepid, dirty water in a redwood sluice-box, and now I desire a steam room and a needle shower and an osteopath. I've been bossing Greasers and Italians and was forced to learn their language to get results, and now I want to speak my mother tongue to my old friends. By thunder I'm going to have a new deal all around."

"You——ol' Jack. Don't excite yourself. You——on exactly thirty days to sicken of it all—and then I shall come and claim my property."

"Neddy, I'll not work for you. I'm mad. I won't play."

"You're it. I just tagged you."

"I require a rest—but unfold your proposition, Neddy. I was born a poor, weak vessel consumed with a curiosity that was ever my undoing. I can only protest that this is no way to treat a friend."

"Nonsense! My own brother wants this job, and I have refused to give it to him. Business is business—and I've saved it for you."

Jerome leaned forward and laid his finger confidentially on Webster's knee; whereat the light-hearted wanderer carefully lifted the finger, brushed an imaginary speck of dirt from it, and set it down again. "Be serious, you ingrate," Jerome protested. "Listen! I've been working for two years on a consolidation up near Telluride, and I've just put it across, Jack, it's the biggest thing in the country. Colorado Consolidated Mines Company, Limited. English capital, Jack. Pay 'em 6 per cent. and they'll call you blessed. There's twenty-five thousand a year in it, with a house and a good cook and an automobile and a chauffeur, and you can come to town whenever you please, provided you don't neglect the company's interests—and I know you're not that kind of an engineer."

"Do I have to put some money into it, Neddy?"

"Not necessarily, although I should advise it. I can let you in on the ground floor for that hundred thousand of yours, guarantee you a handsome profit and in all probability a big cleanup."

"I feel myself slipping, Neddy. Nevertheless, the tail goes with the hide. I'm not in the habit of asking my friends to guarantee my investments, and if you say it's right, I'll spread what I have left of the hundred thousand when I report for duty."

"It's been a tremendous job getting this consolidation over, Jack. When—"

"In pity's name! Spare me. I've heard all I want to hear about your confounded consolidation. News! News! Give me news! I have to beg for a drink— Mose, you black sinner, how dare you appear before me without bringing a drink?"

Mose, the aged colored porter of the Engineers' club, flashed a row of ivories and respectfully returned the democratic greeting.

"Letter for you, suh. The secretary told me to give it to you, Mistah Webster."

"Thank you, Mose. Speak up, Neddy, and tell me something. Ever hear anything of Billy Geary?"

He was tearing the edge of the envelope the while he gazed at Jerome, who was rubbing his fat hands together after the fashion of elderly men who are well pleased with themselves.

"You have a chance to become one of the greatest and richest mining engineers in the world, Jack," he answered, "now that you've cut loose from that young crook Geary. I don't know what's become of him, and neither does anybody else. For that matter, nobody cares."

"I do—and you can take the brief end of that bet for your last white chip. Don't let me hear you or anybody else say anything against Billy Geary. That boy goes for my money, every turn in the box. Don't make any mistakes about that, oldtimer."

Webster's face suddenly was serious; the bantering intonation in his voice was gone, and a new, slightly strident note had crept into it. But Jerome waved his hand soothingly.

"All right, old Johnny Pepper-box, have it your own way. Nevertheless, I'm a little mystified. The last I knew of you two, you had testified against him in the high-grade trials at Cripple Creek, and he had pulled out under a cloud, even after his acquittal."

"Give a dog a bad name, and it will stick to him," Webster retorted. "Of course I testified against him. As engineer for the Mine Owners' association, I had to. The high-grade ore was found in his assay office, and the circumstantial evidence was complete, and I admit Billy was acquitted merely because I and others could not swear positively that the ore came from any certain mine. It was the same old story, Neddy. You can be morally certain that high-grade ore has been stolen from your mine, but unless you catch the ore thief in the act, how can you prove it? I suppose you read the newspaper reports and believed them, just as everybody else does."

"Well, forget it, Jack. It's all over long ago, and forgotten."

"It wasn't all over so long ago as you seem to think. I suppose you knew the Holman gang was afterward sent to the penitentiary for those same high-grade operations? Billy Geary's acquittal didn't end my interest in the case—not by a jugful! I fought the case against the friends of the Holman crew among the mine owners themselves; and it cost me my good job, my prestige as a mining engineer, and thirty thousand dollars of money that I'd slaved to get together. Of course you never knew this, Neddy, and for that matter, neither does Geary. I wish he did. We were good friends once. I certainly was mighty fond of that boy."

He drew the letter from the envelope and slowly opened it.

"And you never heard what became of Geary?"

"Not a word. I was too busy wondering what was to become of me. I couldn't get a job anywhere in Colorado, and I moved to Nevada. Made a million in Goldfield, dropped it in the panic of 1907, and had to start again—"

"What have you been doing lately?"

"Borax. Staked a group of claims down in Death valley. Bully ground, Neddy, and I was busted when I located them. Had to borrow money to pay the filing fees and incorporation, and did my own assessment work. Look!" Webster held up his hands, still somewhat grimy and calloused. "The Borax trust knew I was busted, but they never could quite get over the fear that I'd dig up some backing and give them a run—so they bought me out."

"Somebody told me Geary had gone to Rhodesia," Jerome continued musingly, "or maybe it was Capetown. I know he was seen somewhere in South Africa."

"He left the Creek immediately after the conclusion of his trial. Poor boy! That dirty business destroyed the lad and made a tramp of him, I guess. I tell you, Neddy, no two men ever lived who came nearer to loving each other than Billy Geary and his old Jack-pardner. We bucked the marts of men and went to sleep together hungry many a time during our five-year partnership. Why, Bill was like my own boy. Jerome, I curse the day I took that boy out from underground and put him in the assay office to learn the business. How could I know that the Holman gang had cached the stuff in his shack?"

"Well, it's too bad," Jerome answered dully. He was quite willing that the subject of conversation should be changed. "I'm glad to get the right dope on the boy, anyhow. Have another drink?"

"Not until I read this letter. Now, who the dickens knew I was headed for Denver and the Engineers' club? I didn't tell a soul, and I only arrived this morning."

He turned to the last page to ascertain the identity of his correspondent, and his facial expression ran the gamut from surprise to a joy that was good to see.

John Stuart Webster read the letter deliberately, after which he sat in silent contemplation of the design of the carpet for fully a minute before reaching for the bell. A servant responded immediately.

"Bring me the time-tables of all roads leading to New Orleans," he ordered, "—also a cable blank."

Webster had reread the letter before the servant returned with the time-tables.

"August, you go out to the desk, like a good fellow, and ask the secretary to arrange for a compartment for me to New Orleans on the Gulf States limited, leaving at 10 o'clock tomorrow night." He handed the servant his card. "Now wait a minute until I write something." He seized the cable blank, helped himself, uninvited, to Neddy Jerome's fountain pen, and wrote:

"William H. Geary, Calle de Concordia No. 19, Buenaventura, Sobrante, C. A.

"Salute, you young jackass! Just received your letter. Cabling thousand for emergency roll first thing tomorrow. Will order machinery. Leaving for New Orleans tomorrow night, to arrive Buenaventura first steamer. Your letter caught me with a hundred thousand. We cut it two ways and take our chances. Keep a light in the window for your old

"JACK-PARDNER."

"That's a windy cablegram," Neddy Jerome remarked as the servant bore it away. "Why all this garrulity? A cablegram anywhere generally costs at least a dollar a word."

"That's my delight of a shiny night, in the season of the year,'" quoted John Stuart Webster; "and why the devil economize when the boy needs cheering up?"

"What boy?"

"Billy Geary."

"Where is he?"

"Central America."

Neddy Jerome was happy. He was in an expansive mood, for he had, with the assistance of a kindly fate, rounded up the one engineer in all the world whom he needed to take charge of the Colorado Consolidated. So he said:

"Well, Jack, just to celebrate the discovery of your old pal, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll O. K. your voucher for the expense of bringing young Geary back to the U. S. A., and when we get him here, it will be up to you to find a snug berth for him with Colorado Consolidated."

"Neddy," said John Stuart Webster, "by my halidom, I love thee. You're a thoughtful, kindly old stick-in-the-mud—"

"No if's nor but's. I'm your boss," Jerome interrupted, and waddled away to telephone the head waiter at his favorite restaurant to reserve a table for two.

Mr. Webster sighed. He disliked exceedingly to disappoint old Neddy, but— He shrank from seeming to think overwell of himself by declining a twenty-five-thousand-dollar-a-year job with the biggest mining company in Colorado, but—

"Rotten luck," he soliloquized. "It runs that way for a while, and then it changes, and gets worse!"

When Jerome returned to his seat, the serious look in Webster's hitherto laughing eyes challenged his immediate attention.

"Neddy," said John Stuart Webster gently, "do you remember my crossing my fingers and saying 'King's X' when you came at me with that proposition of yours? It just breaks my heart to have to decline it, but the fact of the matter is, I think you'd better give that job to your brother, after all. At any rate, I'm not going to take it."

"Why?" the amazed Jerome demanded. "Johnny, you're crazy in the head. Of course you'll take it."

For answer Webster handed his friend the letter he had just received.

"Read that, old horse, and see if you can't work up a circulation," he suggested.

Jerome adjusted his spectacles and read:

"Calle de Concordia 19, Buenaventura,
"Sobrante, C. A.

"Dear John: I would address you as 'dear friend John,' did I but possess sufficient courage. In my heart of hearts you are still that, but after three years of silence, due to my stupidity and hardness of heart, it is, perhaps, better to make haste slowly.

"To begin, I should like to be forgiven, on the broad general grounds that I am most almighty sorry for what I went and done! Am I forgiven? I seem to see your friendly old face and hear you answer 'Aye,' and with this load off my chest at last I believe I feel better already.

"Jack, you poor, deluded old piece of white meat, do you think for a moment that I held against you your testimony for the operators in Cripple Creek? I thought you believed the charges and that you testified in a firm belief that I was the guilty man, as all of the circumstantial evidence seemed to indicate. I thought this for three long, meagre years, old friend, and I'm sorry. After that, I suppose there isn't any need for me to say more, except that you are an old fool for not saying you were going to spend your money and your time and reputation trying to put my halo back on straight! I doubt if I was worth it, and you knew that; but let it pass, for we have other fish to fry.

"The nubbin of the matter is this: There is only one good gold mine left in this weary world—and I have it. It's the sweetest wildcat I ever struck, and we stand the finest show in the world of starving to death if we tackle it without sufficient capital to go through. It will take at least thirty thousand dollars, and we ought to have double that to play safe. I do not know whether you have, or can raise, sixty cents, but at any rate I am going to put the buck up to you and you can take a look.

"This is a pretty fair country, Jack—if you survive long enough to get used to it. At first you think it's Paradise; then you grow to hate it and know it for hell with the lid off; and finally all your early love for it returns and you become what I am now—a tropical tramp! There is only one social stratum lower than mine, and that's the tropical beachcomber. I am not that—yet; and will not be if my landlady will continue to listen to my blandishments. She is a sweet soul, with a divine disposition, and I am duly grateful.

"I would tell you all about the geography, topography, flora and fauna of Sobrante, but you can ascertain that in detail by consulting any standard encyclopedia. Governmentally the country is similar to its sister republics. It's a cold day indeed when two patriots, two vivas and a couple of old Long Tom Springfield rifles cannot upset the Sobrante apple cart. We haven't had a revolution for nearly six months, but we have hopes.

"I am addressing you at the Engineers' club, in the hope that my letter may reach you there, or perhaps the secretary will know your address and forward it to you. If you are foot-loose and still entertain a lingering regard for your old pal, get busy on this mining concession P. D. Q. Time is the essence of the contract, because I am holding on to the thin edge of nothing, and if we have a change of government I may lose even that. I need you, John Stuart Webster, worse than I need salvation. I enclose you a list of equipment required.

"If you receive this letter and can do anything for me, please cable. If you cannot, please cable anyway. Do let me hear from you, Jack, if only to tell me the old entente cordiale still exists. I know now that I was considerable of a heedless pup a few years ago and overlooked my hand quite regularly, but now that I have a good thing I do not know of anybody with whom I care to share it except your own genial self. Please let me hear from you.

"Affectionately,
"BILLY."

Jerome finished reading this remarkable communication; then with infinite amusement he regarded John Stuart Webster over the tops of his glasses as one who examines a new and interesting species of bug.

"So Billy loves that dear Sobrante, eh?" he said with abysmal sarcasm. "Jack Webster, listen to a sane man and be guided accordingly. I was in this same little Buenaventura once. I was there for three days, and I wouldn't have been there three minutes if I could have caught a steamer out sooner. Of all the miserable, squalid, worthless, ornery, stinking holes on the face of God's green footstool, Sobrante is the worst—if one may judge it by its capital city. Are you going to chase off to this God-forsaken fever-hole at the behest of a lad scarcely out of his swaddling clothes? Jack Webster, surely you aren't going to throw yourself away—give up the sure thing I offer you—to join Billy Geary in Sobrante and finance a wildcat prospect without a certificate of title attached. Be reasonable. What did you wire that confounded boy?"

"That I was coming."

"Cable him you've changed your mind. We'll send him some money to come home, and you can give him a

"Cable Him You've Changed Your Mind."

good job under you. I'll O. K. the voucher and charge it to your personal expense account."

"That's nice of you, old sport, and I thank you kindly. I'll talk to Billy when I arrive in Buenaventura, and if the prospect doesn't look good to me, I'll argue him out of it and we'll come home. Let me go. I might come back. But I must go. I want to see Billy."

"You just said a minute ago you'd turned the forty-year post," Jerome warned him. "And you're now going to lose a year or two more in which you might better be engaged laying up a foundation of independence for your old age. For Heaven's sake, man, don't be a fool."

"Oh, but I will be a fool," John Stuart Webster answered; and possibly, by this time, the reader has begun to understand the potency of his middle name—the Scotch are notoriously pig-headed, and Mr. Webster had just enough oatmeal in his blood to have come by that center fire name honestly. "And you, you poor old horse, you could not possibly understand why, if you lived to be a million years old."

He got up from his chair to the full height of his six-feet-one, and stretched 190 pounds of bone and muscle.

"And so I shall go to Sobrante and lose all of this all-important money, shall I?" he jeered. "Then by all the gods of the Open Country, I hope I may. Dad burn you, Neddy, I'm not a Methuselah. I want some fun in life. I want to fight and be broke and go hungry and then make money for the love of making it and spending it, and I want to live a long time yet. I want to see the mirage across the sagebrush and hear it whisper: 'Hither, John Stuart Webster! Hither, you fool, and I'll hornswoggle you again, as in an elder day I hornswoggled you before.'"

Jerome shook his white thatch hopelessly.

"I thought you were a great mining engineer, John," he said sadly, "but you're not. You're a poet. You do not seem to care for money."

"Make it $10,000 and I will guarantee to deliver the man within 90 days."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HAVE PET BELIEFS

Few Men Are Without Some Superstitious Ideas.

And Most of Them Can Be Traced Back to a Comparatively Commonplace Origin.

What is your pet superstition?

"My pet superstition?" you'll probably answer, with elevated eyebrows. "Why, I haven't any. Superstitions are for the ignorant people."

But pause a moment and rummage around the shelves of your cerebellum among your store of modern information and see if there isn't tucked away in the corner some old, musty, long-forgotten superstition you'd forgotten was there.

Do you pick up the pin you see lying in the street?

If you break a mirror does it give you a moment's uneasiness? Honest, now?

When you knock over the salt cellar do you—not because you believe it does any good, of course, but because it can't do any harm—do you take a pinch and throw it over your left shoulder?

Do you dislike to accept a $2 bill?

Would you give your friend a knife without adding a penny to break the charm?

Would you walk under a ladder?

Do you mind being the thirteenth at dinner?

These superstitions are the most popular and they aren't at all confined to uneducated, or even uncultured people, as has been demonstrated.

Of recent years an eminent scientist who had collected much interesting data on superstitions among educated people decided to put his theory to a high test. He went to one of the leading universities of this country.

"My pet superstition?" The dignified old college professor echoed the question, removing his eyeglasses to get a better view of the impertinent stranger. "My dear fellow! Preposterous! Superstitions belong to the dark ages. We live in a period of culture."

Whereupon the professor proceeded to enlighten the stranger with a lengthy dissertation on his university and his high literary standing, saying:

"One of the oldest universities in the country, sir, one of the finest. At present we have an exceptionally high attendance. Everything has been running smoothly—" here the intellectual professor halted to lean over and tap lightly the wooden top of his desk.

It developed that 26 per cent of the college professors at this university were wholly without superstitions, but some of them had their fingers crossed.

A great many of our superstitions have grown up with us through so many generations that we are hardly conscious of their presence. Many of these date back to the early Romans and Greeks.

Salt in ancient times was used in religious rites, and supposed to possess propitiatory powers. But when some careless emperor's elbow knocked the salt dish over its powers were lost, and the only way to insure a peaceful resumption of the meal was to appease the evil powers by throwing a pinch of the spilled salt over the left shoulder.

The superstition connected with a broken mirror dates from Napoleon's campaign in Italy, when he accidentally broke the glass over the picture of Josephine. Since glass had always been connected in any form as symbolical of life and death, Napoleon was overcome with fear that some evil had befallen Josephine. And because the broken glass caused the great emperor uneasiness, the woman on the street car today pales when she drops her pocketbook and her mirror breaks.

Thirteenth Century Tomb.

An interesting Thirteenth century tombstone has been discovered at Workshop (England) Priory church, which is being restored as a war memorial to the local men who fell in the war. The tombstone which is beautifully carved, has been identified as that of Lady Furnival, who built the church in the Thirteenth century as a thankoffering for the return of her son from Palestine, where he had gone in order to bring home the heart of his brother, Gerald, who was killed by the Saracens. The tombstone bears evidence of elaborate brass work, but the metal itself has disappeared, apparently having been stolen or torn off. The Lady chapel is one of the most characteristic specimens of early English architecture in England, and its lancet windows are considered among the most perfect in the country.

Chaplin's Debt to Ingersoll.

In the life of Robert Ingersoll we read of a Fourth of July picnic at Dresden, N. Y., where little Bob and his playmates became uncommonly boisterous. When a dear old gentleman tried to quiet the roughhouse, Robert seized a custard pie and hurled it in the d. o. g.'s face. The higher comedy in America may owe as much to Robert Ingersoll as does the higher criticism.—Chicago Daily News.

As It Usually Is.

"What do you think about letting your son play football when he grows up?"

"I'm in a peculiar state of mind concerning that."

"In what way?"

"I feel that I shall not want him to play, but on the other hand I shall be disappointed in him if he doesn't want to play."