

# Webster=Man's Man

By PETER B. KYNE

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

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## CHAPTER IV.

Day was dawning in Buenaventura, republic of Sobrante, as invariably it dawns in the tropics—without extended preliminary symptoms. The soft, silvery light of a full moon that had stayed out scandalously late had merged imperceptibly into gray; the gray was swiftly yielding place to a faint crimson that was spreading and deepening upward toward the east.

In the patio of Mother Jenks' establishment in the Calle de Concordia, No. 19, the first shafts of morning light were filtering obliquely through the orange trees and creeping in under the deep, Gothic-arched veranda flanking the western side of the patio. Presently, through the silent reaches of the Calle de Concordia, the sound of a prodigious knocking and thumping echoed, as of some fretful individual seeking admission at the street door of El Buen Amigo, by which euphonious designation Mother Jenks' caravanserai was known to the public of Buenaventura. In the second story, front, a window slid back and a woman's voice, husky with that huskiness that speaks so acutely of cigarettes and alcohol, demanded: "Quien es? Who is it? Que quiere usted? What do you want?"

"Ye might dispense wit' that paranoiac conversation whin addressin' the likes av me," a voice replied. "This me—Caffery. I have a cablegram Leher give me to deliver."

"Gawd's truth! Would yer wake the 'ole 'ouse with yer 'ammering?"

"All right, I'll not say another word!"

Without the portal stood Don Juan Cafetero, of whom a word or two before proceeding.

To begin, Don Juan Cafetero was not his real name, but rather a free Spanish translation of the Gaelic, John Caffery. Mr. Caffery was an exile of Erin with a horrible thirst. He had first arrived in Sobrante some five years before, as section boss in the employ of the little foreign-owned narrow-gauge railway which ran from Buenaventura on the Caribbean coast to San Miguel de Padua, up-country where the nitrate beds were located. Prior to his advent the railroad people had tried many breeds of section boss without visible results, until a Chicago man, who had come to Sobrante to install an inter-communicating telephone system in the government buildings, suggested to the superintendent of the road, who was a German, that the men made for bosses come from Erin's Isle; wherefore Mr. Caffery had been imported at a price of \$5 a day gold. Result—a marked improvement in the road bed and consequently the train schedules, and the ultimate loss of the Caffery soul.

Something in the climate of Sobrante must have appealed to a touch of laissez faire in Don Juan's amiable nature, for in the course of time he had taken unto himself, without bell or book, after the fashion of the proletariat of Sobrante, the daughter of one Esteban Manuel Enrique Jose Maria Pasqual y Miramontes, an estimable peon who was singularly glad to have his daughter off his hands and no questions asked. Following the fashion of the country, however, Esteban had forthwith moved the remainder of his numerous progeny under the mantle of Don Juan Cafetero's philanthropy, and resigned a position which for many years he had not enjoyed—to wit: salting and packing green hides at a local abattoir. This foolhardy economic move had so incensed Don Juan that in a fit of pique he upbraided his father-in-law (we must call Esteban something and so why split hairs?) under the tails of his cummer, with such vigor as to sever forever the friendly relations hitherto existing between the families. Mrs. Caffery (again we transgress, but what of it?) subsequently passed away in child birth, and no sooner had she been decently buried than Don Juan took a week off to drown his sorrows.

In this condition he had encountered Esteban Manuel Enrique Jose Maria Pasqual y Miramontes and called him out of his name. In the altercation that ensued Esteban, fully convinced that he had received the nub end of the transaction from start to finish, cut Don Juan severely; Don Juan had thereupon slain Esteban with a .44-caliber revolver and upon emerging from the railroad hospital a month later had been tried by a Sobrantean magistrate and fined the sum of \$20,000, legal tender of the republic of Sobrante. Of course, he had paid it off within six months from his wages as section boss, but the memory of the injustice always rankled him, and gradually he moved down the scale of society from section boss to day laborer, day laborer to tropical tramp, and tropical tramp to beach comber, in which latter state he had now existed for several months.

To return to Mother Jenks. Before Don Juan could even utter a mutual greeting, Mother Jenks laid finger to lip and silenced him. "Go back to Leher's and return in an hour," she whispered. "I've my reasons for wantin' that bloomin' cablegram delivered later."

Don Juan hadn't the least idea what

Mother Jenks' reasons might be, but he presumed she was up to some chicanery, and so he winked his blood-shot eye very knowingly and nodded his acquiescence in the program.

When he had gone, Mother Jenks went behind the bar and fortified herself with her morning's morning— which rite having been performed, her sleep-numbed brain livened up immediately.

"Gawd's truth!" the lady murmured. "An' me about to turn him adrift for the lawst fortnight! Well for 'im 'e alters himdired the picture o' my saluted 'Enery, as was the spittin' image of his own fawther, 'Evin's! 'E'll be here! But that was a bit of a tight squeak! Just as I'm fully convinced 'e's bent it an' I'm left 'oldin' the sack, all along o' my kindness of 'eart, 'e gets the cablegram 'e's been lookin' for this two months past; an' 'e alters claimd as 'ow any time 'e got a cablegram it'd be an answer to 'is letter, with money to follow! My word, but that was touch an' go!"

Still congratulating herself upon her good fortune in intercepting Don Juan Cafetero, Mother Jenks proceeded upstairs to her chamber, clothed herself, and adjourned to the kitchen. After giving orders for an extra special breakfast for two, Mother Jenks returned to her cantina, and formally opened the same for the business of that day and night.

To her came presently, via the tiled hallway, the object of her solicitude, a young man on the sunny side of thirty. He was thin for one of his height and breadth of chest; in color his countenance resembled that of a sick Chinaman. His hair was thick and wavy, but lusterless; his dark blue eyes carried a hint of jaundice; and a generous mouth, beneath an equally generous upper lip, gave ample ground for the suspicion that while Mr. William Geary's speech denoted him an American citizen, at least one of his maternal ancestors had been wood and won by an Irishman. An old Panama hat, and relic of a prosperous past, a pair of soiled buck skin pumps, a suit of unbleached linen equally befouled, and last but not least, the remnants of a smile that much hard luck could never quite obliterate, completed his attire—and to one a stranger in the tropics would appear to constitute a complete inventory of Mr. Geary's possessions.

"Dulce corazon mio, I extend a greeting," he called at the entrance. "I trust you rested well last night, Mother Jenks, and that no evil dreams were born of your midnight repast of frijoles refritos, marmalade, and art-an-art!"

"Chop yer spoonin', Willie," Mother Jenks simpered. "My heye! So I'm



"Chop Your Spoonin', Willie."

yer sweet'eart, eh? Yer wheedin' blither, makin' love to a girl as is old enough to be yer mother!"

"A woman," Mr. Geary retorted sagely and not a whit abashed, "is at the apex of her feminine charms at thirty-seven."

He knew his landlady to be not a day under fifty, but such is the ease with which the Irish scatter their blarney that neither Billy Geary nor Mother Jenks regarded this pretty speech in the light of an observation immaterial, inconsequential and not germane to the matter at issue. Nevertheless, there was a deeper reason for his blarney. This morning, watching the titillate tinge of pleasure underlying the alcohol-begotten hue of the good creature's face, he felt almost ashamed of his own heartlessness—almost, but not quite.

For two months he had existed entirely because of the leniency of Mother Jenks in the matter of credit. He could not pay her cash, devoutly as he hoped to do some day, and he considered it of the most vital importance that in the interim he should somehow survive. Therefore, in lieu of

cash he paid her compliments, which she snapped up greedily.

An inventive genius was Billy. He never employed the same defensive tactics two days in succession, and when personal flattery threatened to fall him, a large crayon reproduction of the late Henry Jenks, which hung over the back bar, was a never-failing source of inspiration.

This was the "sainted 'Enery" previously referred to by Mother Jenks. He had been a sergeant in Her Britannic Majesty's Royal Horse artillery, and upon retiring to the reserve had harkened to a proposition to emigrate to Sobrante and accept a commission as colonel of artillery with the government forces then in the throes of a revolutionary attack. The rebels had triumphed, and as a result 'Enery had been saluted via the customary expeditious route; whereupon his wife had had recourse to her early profession of barmaid, and El Buen Amigo had resulted.

However, let us return to our sheeps, as Mr. Geary would have expressed it. Seemingly the effect of Billy's compliment was instantly evident, for Mother Jenks set out two glasses and a bottle.

"I know yer a trifier, Willy Geary," she simpered, "but if I do s'y it as shouldn't, I was accounted as 'andsome a barmaid as you'd find in Bristol town. I've lost my good looks, what with grief an' worritin' since 'loast' my saluted 'Enery, but I was 'andsome oncel'."

"I can well believe it, Mother—since you are handsome still! For my part," he continued confidentially, as with shaking hand he filled his brandy-glass, "you'll excuse this drunkard's drink, Mother, but I need it; I had the shakes again last night—for my part, I prefer the full-blown rose to the bud."

Mother Jenks fluttered like a debutante as she poured her drink. They touched glasses, calloused worldlings that they were.

He tossed off his drink. It warmed and strengthened him, after his night of chills and fever, and brazenly he returned to the attack.

"Changing the subject from feminine grace and charm to manly strength and virtue, I've been marking lately the resolute poise of your martyred husband's head on his fine military shoulders. There was a man, if I may judge from his photograph, that would fight a wildcat."

"Oh, mybe 'e wouldn't!" Mother Jenks hastened to declare. "You know, Willie, I was present w'en they shot 'im, a-waltin' to claim 'is body. 'E kisses me good-bye, an' says: 'Brace up, o' girl. Remember yer 'usband's been a sergeant in 'Er Majesty's Royal 'Orse artillery, an' don't let the bloody blighters see yer cry.' Then 'e walks out front, with 'is fine straight back to the wall, draws a circle on 'is blue tunic with white chalk an' says: 'Shoot at that, yer yellin'-bellied bounders, an' be d—d to yer!'"

"To be the widow of such a gallant son of Mars," Billy declared, "is a greater honor than being the wife of a duke. Ah, Mother," he added with a note of genuine gratitude and sincerity, "you've been awfully good to me. I don't know what I'd have done without you." He laid his hand on her fat arm. "Mother, one of these days I'll get mine, and when I do I'm going to stake you to a nice little pub back in Bristol."

She smiled at him with motherly tenderness and shook her head. In a concrete niche in the mortuary of the Cathedral de la Vera Cruz the bones of her saluted 'Enery reposed, and when her hour came she would lie beside him.

"Yer a sweet boy, Willie," she told him, "an' I'd trust yer for double the score, s'help me. 'Evin' knows I 'aven't much, but wot I 'ave I share freely with them I likes."

Mother Jenks preceded him into the shady side of the veranda, where ordinarily she was wont to breakfast in solitary state. Her table was set for two this morning, however, Billy flipped an adventurous cockroach off the table and fell to with fine appetite.

He was dallying with a special brew of coffee, with condensed milk in it, when the Jamaica negro entered from the cantina to announce Don Juan Cafetero with a cablegram.

"A cablegram!" Mother Jenks cried. "Gawd's truth! I'll wager the pub it's for you, Willie, Bob"—turning to the negro, and addressing him in her own private brand of Spanish—"give Don Juan a drink, if 'e 'asn't helped 'imself while yer back is turned, an' bring the cablegram 'ere."

Within the minute Bob returned with a long yellow envelope, which he handed Mother Jenks. Without so much as a glance at the superscription, she handed it to Billy Geary, who tore it open and read:

"Los Angeles, Cal., U. S. A., August 16, 1913.

"Henrietta Wilkins, Calle de Concordia, No. 19, Buenaventura, Sobrante, C. A.

"Leaving today to visit you. Will cable from New Orleans exact date arrival. DOLORES."

The shadow of deep disappointment settled over Billy's face as he read. Mother Jenks noted it instantly.

"Wot's 'e got to s'y, Willie?" she demanded.

"It isn't a he. It's a she," Billy replied. "Besides, the cablegram isn't for me at all. It's for one Henrietta Wilkins, Calle de Concordia, No. 19, and who the devil Henrietta Wilkins may be is a mystery to me. Ever have any boarder by that name, Mother?"

Mother Jenks' red face had gone white. "Henrietta Wilkins was my maiden nyme, Willie," she confessed soberly, "an' there's only one human as 'ud cable me or write me by that nyme. Gawd, Willie, wot's 'appened?"

"I'll read it to you, Mother."

Billy read the message aloud, and when he had finished, to his amazement, Mother Jenks laid her hand on the table and began to weep.

## CHAPTER V.

Without quite realizing why he did so, Billy decided that fear and not grief was at the bottom of the good creature's distress, and in his awkward, masculine way he placed his arm around Mother Jenks' shoulders, shook her gently, and bade her remember that chaos might come and go again, but he, the said William Geary, would remain her true and steadfast friend in any and all emergencies that might occur.

"Gawd bless yer heart, Willie," Mother Jenks sniffed. "I dunno wot in 'ell yer ever goin' to think o' me w'en I tell wot I've been up to this past fifteen year."

"Whatever you've been up to, Mother, it was a kind and charitable deed—of that much I am certain." Billy replied loftily and—to his own surprise—sincerely.

"As Gawd is my judge, Willie, it started out that w'y," moaned Mother Jenks, and she squeezed Billy's hand as if from that yellow, shaking member she would draw aid and comfort. "Er nyme is Dolores Rucy. 'Er father was Don Ricardo Rucy, president av this blasted 'ell on earth w'en me an' my saluted 'Enery first come to Buenaventura. 'E was too good for the yellin'-bellied beggars; 'e tried to do somethin' for them an' run the government on the square, an' they couldn't hunderstand, all along o' 'avin' been kicked an' cuffed by a long line of bloody rotters. It was Don Ricardo as gives my saluted 'Enery 'is commission as colonel in the artillery."

"You've 'eard me tell," Mother Jenks continued, "ow the rebels got 'arf a dozen Hamerican gunners—deserters from the navy—an' blew 'Enery's battery to bits; 'ow the government forces fell back upon Buenaventura, an' as 'ow w'en the dorgs began to wonder if they mightn't lose, they quit by the 'undreds an' went over to the rebel side, leavin' Don Ricardo an' 'Enery an' 'is fifty o' the gentry in the palace. In course they fought to a finish; 'ristocrats, all of them, they 'ad to die fightin' or facin' a firin' squad."

Billy nodded. He had heard the tale before, including the recital of the saluted 'Enery's gallant dash from the



The Sainted 'Enery's Gallant Dash.

blazing palace in an effort to save Don Ricardo's only child, a girl of seven, and of his capture and subsequent execution.

"That ended the revolution," Mother Jenks continued. "But 'ere's somethin' I've never told a livin' soul. Shortly before 'Enery was hexecuted, 'e told me where 'e'd 'id the youngster—in a culvert out on the Malcoon; so I 'ired a four-wheeler an' went out an' rescued the pore lamb. I 'id 'er until the arrival o' the next fruit steamer, w'en I shipped 'er to New Orleans in care o' the stewardess. Hi 'ad 'er put in the Catholic convent there, for as 'Enery said: 'Henrietta, keep an eye on the little nipper, an' do yer damndest to see she's raised a ldy. 'Er father was a gentleman, an' you never want to forget 'e made you Mrs. Colonel Jenks.' So 'is 'e made a ldy out o' her, Willie; education, planner lessons, paintin', singin', an' deportment. After she graduated from the convent, I 'ad her take a course in the University o' California—New Orleans wasn't 'ealthy for 'er, an' she needed a chynge o' climate—an' for the last two years she's been teachin' in the 'igh school in Los Angeles."

"And you haven't seen her in all these years?" Geary demanded.

"Not a look, Willie. She's been aft-er me ever since she graduated from the convent to let her come 'ome an' wist me, but 'I've told 'er to wye—that I'd be comin' soon to wist her. An' now, s'help me, she won't wait no longer; she's comin' to wist me! Gawd, Willie, she's on her w'y!"

"So this cablegram would indicate," Geary observed. "Nevertheless, Mother, I'm at a loss to know why you should feel so cut up over the impending visit."

There was real fear in Mother Jenks' tear-dimmed eyes. "I caw'n't let 'er see me," she wailed. "I wasn't this w'y w'en my saluted 'Enery entrusted the lamb to me; it wasn't until aft'er they hexecuted 'Enery that I commenced to slip—an' now look at me. Look at me, Willie Geary; look at me, I s'y. Wot do yer see? Aw, don't tell me I'm young an' 'andsome, for I know wot I am. I'm a frowsy, drunken, disreputable baggage, with no heducation or nothink. All along, hever since she learned to write me a letter, I've been 'Henrietta Wilkins to 'er, an' Mother Jenks to every beach-combin' beggar in the Caribbean tropics. I've lied to 'er, Willie. I've wrote 'er 'as 'ow 'er fawther, before 'e died, give me enough money to heducation 'er like a ldy—"

Again Mother Jenks' grief overcame her. "Gawd, Willie, I ain't respectable. She's comin' to see me—an' I caw'n't let 'er. She mustn't know 'ow I got the money for 'er heducation—sellin' 'ell-fire to a pack of rotten dorgs an' consortin' with the scum of this stinkin' 'ole! Oh, Willie, you've got to 'elp me. I caw'n't 'ave 'er comin' to El Buen Amigo to see me, an' I caw'n't ruin 'er reputation by callin' on 'er in public at the 'Otel Mateo. Oh, Gawd, Willie, Mother's come a cropper."

Willie agreed with her. He patted the sinful gray head of his landlady and waited for her to regain her composure, the while he racked his agile brain for a feasible plan to fit the emergency.

"She been picturin' me in 'er mind all these years, Willie—picturin' a fraud," wailed Mother Jenks. "If she sees me now, wot a shock she'll get, pore sweet'eart—an' 'er the spittin' image of a hangel. And oh, Willie, wails she don't remember wot I looked like, think o' the shock if she meets me! In 'er lawst letter she said as 'ow I was the only hancher she had in life. Oh, yes. A sweet-lookin' hancher I am—an' 'I was 'opin' to die before she found out. I've got a hauerism in my 'eart, Willie, so the surgeon on the mail boat tells me, an' w'en I go, I'll go like—that!" Mother Jenks snapped her cigarette-stained fingers. I'm fifty-seven, Willie, an' since my saluted 'Enery passed away, I 'aven't been no bloomin' hangel. I she wrung her hands. "Oh, w'y in 'ell couldn't them harteries 'ave busted in time to save my lamb the 'umillatin' knowledge that she's be'oldin' to the likes o' me for wot she's got—an' 'ow I got it for 'er."

Billy Geary had a bright idea. "Well," he said, "why not die—temporarily—if you feel that way about it? You could come back from the grave after she's gone."

But Mother Jenks shook her head. "No," she declared. "While Dolores is self-supportin' now, still, if anythink 'appened an' she was to need 'elp, 'elp is somethin' no ghost can give. Think again, Willie. Gawd, lad, w're's yer brains?"

"Well," Billy countered thoughtfully, "apparently there's no way of heading her off before she takes the steamer at New Orleans, so we'll take it for granted she'll arrive here in due course. About the time she does, suppose you run up to San Miguel de Padua for a couple of weeks and leave me to run El Buen Amigo in your absence. I'll play fair with you, Mother, so help me. I'll account for every centavo. I'll borrow some decent clothes from Leher the day the steamer gets in; then I'll go aboard and look over the passenger list, and if she's aboard, I'll tell her you closed your house and started for California to visit her on the last north-bound steamer—that her cablegram arrived just after you had started; that the cable company, knowing I am a friend of yours, showed me the message and that I took it upon myself to call and explain that as a result of your departure for the United States it will be useless for her to land—useless and dangerous, because cholera is raging in Buenaventura, although the port authorities deny it—"

"Willie," Mother Jenks interrupted impressively, a ghost of her old debonaire spirit shining through her tears, "yer don't owe me a bloomin' s'pence! Yer've syved the day, syved my reputation, an' syved a ldy's peace o' mind. Kiss me, yer precious byby."

So Billy kissed 'er—gravely and with filial reverence, for he had long suspected Mother Jenks of being a pearl cut before swine, and now he was certain of it.

"I'll send her back to the United States and promise to cable you to await her there," Billy continued. "Of course, we can't help it if you and the cablegram miss connections, and once the young lady is back in the United States, I dare say she'll have to stay there a couple of years before she can save the price of another sea voyage. And in the meantime she may marry—"

"Or that hauerism may 'ave turned the trick before that," Mother Jenks suggested candidly but joyously. "In course she'll be disappointed, but then disappointment never lays 'eavy on a young 'eart, Willie; an' 'elp' disappointed at not seein' a person you ain't really acquainted with ain't as bad as some disappointments."

"I guess I know," Billy Geary replied bitterly. "If that cablegram had

only been for me! Mother, if my old partner could, by some miracle, manage to marry this Dolores girl, your arteries and your aneurisms might bust and be damned, but the girl would be safe."

"M'vha," Mother Jenks suggested hopefully, "yer might fix it up for her w'en I'm gone. From all haccounts 'e's no-end a gentleman."

"He's a he-man," Mr. Geary declared with conviction. He sighed. "John Stuart Webster, wherever you are, please write or cable," he murmured.

## CHAPTER VI.

The ancient bromide to the effect that man proposes but God disposes was never better exemplified than in the case of John Stuart Webster, who, having formulated certain daring plans for the morrow and surrendered himself to grateful slumber in his stateroom aboard the Gulf States Limited, awoke on that momentous morn to a distinct apprehension that all was not as it should be with him. His mouth reminded him vaguely of a bird-and-animal store, and riot and insurrection had broken out in the geometric center of his internal economy.

Webster was sufficient of a jack-leg doctor to suspect he was developing a splendid little case of promethe poisoning. He decided to go into executive session with the sleeping-car conductor, who wired ahead for a doctor to meet the train at the next station. And when the sawbones came and paved Jack Webster over, he gravely announced that if the patient had the slightest ambition to vote at the next presidential election, he should leave the train at St. Louis and enter a hospital forthwith. To this heart-breaking program Webster entered not the slightest objection, for when a man is seriously ill, he is in much the same position as a politician—to-wit: He is in the hands of his friends.

However, life had the habit of going hard with Webster so frequently that fortunately he was trained to the minute, and after three days of heroic battling the doctor awarded Jack the decision. Thereafter they kept him in the hospital ten days longer, "feeding him up" as the patient expressed it—at the end of which period Webster, some fifteen pounds lighter and not quite so fast on his feet as formerly, resumed his journey toward New Orleans.

In the meantime, however, several things had happened. To begin, Dolores Rucy spent two days wondering what had become of her quondam knight of the whiskers—at the end of which period she arrived in New Orleans with the conviction strong upon her that while her hero might be as courageous as a wounded lion when dealing with men, he was the possessor, when dealing with women, of about two per cent less courage than a cottontail rabbit. Being a very human young lady, however, she could not help wondering what had become of the ubiquitous Mr. Webster, although the fact that he had mysteriously disappeared from the train en route to New Orleans did not perturb her one-half so much as it had the disappearance. She had this advantage over that unfortunate man, whereas he did not know she was bound for Buenaventura, she knew he was; hence, upon arrival in New Orleans she dismissed him from her thoughts, serene in abiding faith that sooner or later her knight would appear, like little Bo-Peep's lost sheep, dragging his tail behind him, so to speak.

Dolores spent a week in New Orleans renewing schoolgirl friendships from her convent days in the quaint old town. This stop-over, together with the one in Denver, not having been taken into consideration by Mr. William Geary when he and Mother Jenks commenced to speculate upon the approximate date of her arrival in Buenaventura, resulted in the premature flight of Mother Jenks to San Miguel de Padua, a fruitless visit on the part of Billy aboard the Cacique, of the United Fruit company's line, followed by a hurry call to Mother Jenks to return to Buenaventura until the arrival of the next steamer.

This time Billy's calculations proved correct, for Dolores did arrive on that steamer. The port doctor came aboard, partook of his customary drink with the captain, received a bundle of the latest American newspapers and magazines, nosed around, asked a few perfunctory questions, and gave the vessel pratique.

Dolores observed a gasoline launch shoot up to the landing at the foot of the companion-ladder and discharge a well-dressed, youthful white man. As he came up the companion, the purser recognized him.

"Howdy, Bill," he called. "Hello, yourself." Mr. William Geary replied, and Dolores knew him for an American. "Do you happen to have as a passenger this trip a large, interesting person, by name John Stuart Webster?" added Billy Geary.

"I don't know, Billy. I'll look over the passenger list," and together they moved off toward his office. Dolores followed, drawn by the mention of that magic name Webster, and paused in front of the purser's office to lean over the rail, ostensibly to watch the cargo-doors in their lighters clustering around the great ship, but in reality to learn more of the mysterious Webster.

(To be continued)

Gold's Great Power. One of the funny things about human nature is the tender affection we all have for money, the way we work to get it, and then, the way we talk about everyone who has succeeded in getting a lot of it.