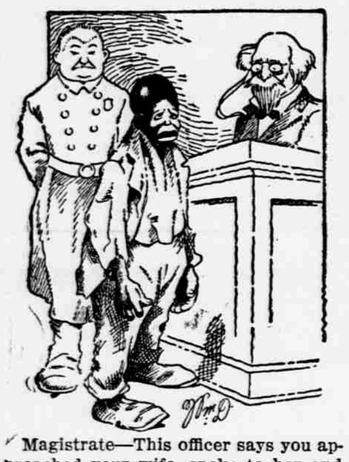
AWFUL SURPRISE.



Magistrate—This officer says you approached your wife, spoke to her and she fainted.

Rastus—Dat's right, Jedge.

Magistrate—What did you say to her?

Rastus—Jes' tole her dat I loved her, sah.

Not Knocking Slattery.

Mrs. Coogan—An' the little thing is the divil's own image of his father.

Mrs. Slattery—Yis, but I don't moind that so long as he kapes hilthy. —Puck.

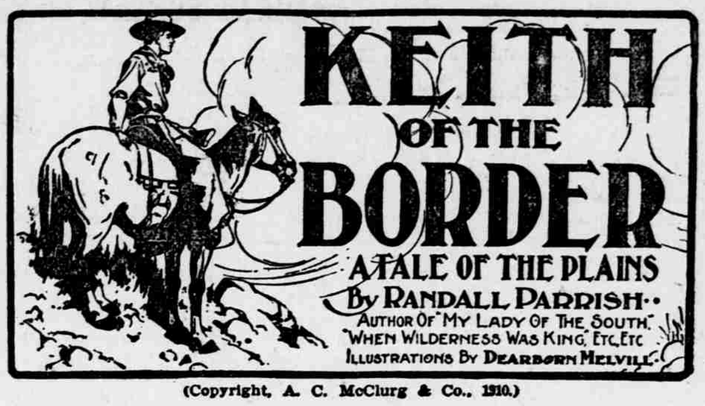
Two of a Kind.

"Going abroad this summer, Mrs. Leeder?"

"Why—ah—"

"Isn't that a coincidence? I'm not, either."

A man never gets too old to remember some of the things that never occurred when he was a boy.



SYNOPSIS.

Jack Keith, a Virginian, now a border plainsman, is riding along the Santa Fe trail on the lookout for roaming war parties of savages. He notices a camp fire at a distance and then sees a team attached to a wagon and at full gallop pursued by men on ponies. When Keith reaches the wagon the raiders have massacred two men and departed. He searches the victims finding papers and a locket with a woman's portrait. He resolves to hunt down the murderers. Keith is arrested at Carson City, charged with the murder, his accuser being a ruffian named Black Bart. He goes to jail fully realizing the peril of swift border justice. A companion in his cell is a negro, who tells him he is Neb and that he knew the Keith family back in Virginia. Neb says one of the murdered men was John Sibley, the other Gen. Willis Waite, formerly an officer in the Confederate army. The plainsman and Neb escape from the cell.

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

It was the quiet, confident voice of assured command, of one satisfied with his plans, and the obedient negro, breathing hard, never dreamed of opposition; all instinct of slavery held him to the dominion of this white master. Keith leaned forward, staring at the string of deserted ponies tied to the rail. Success depended on his choice, and he could judge very little in that darkness. Men were straggling in along the street to their right, on foot and horseback, and the saloon on the corner was being well patronized. A glow of light streamed forth from its windows, and there was the sound of many voices. But this narrow alley was deserted, and black. The fugitive stepped boldly forward, afraid that otherwise he might startle the ponies and thus create an alarm. Guided by a horseman's instinct he swiftly ran his hands over the animals and made quick selection.

"Here, Neb, take this fellow; lead him quietly down the bank," and he thrust the loosened rein into the black's hand.

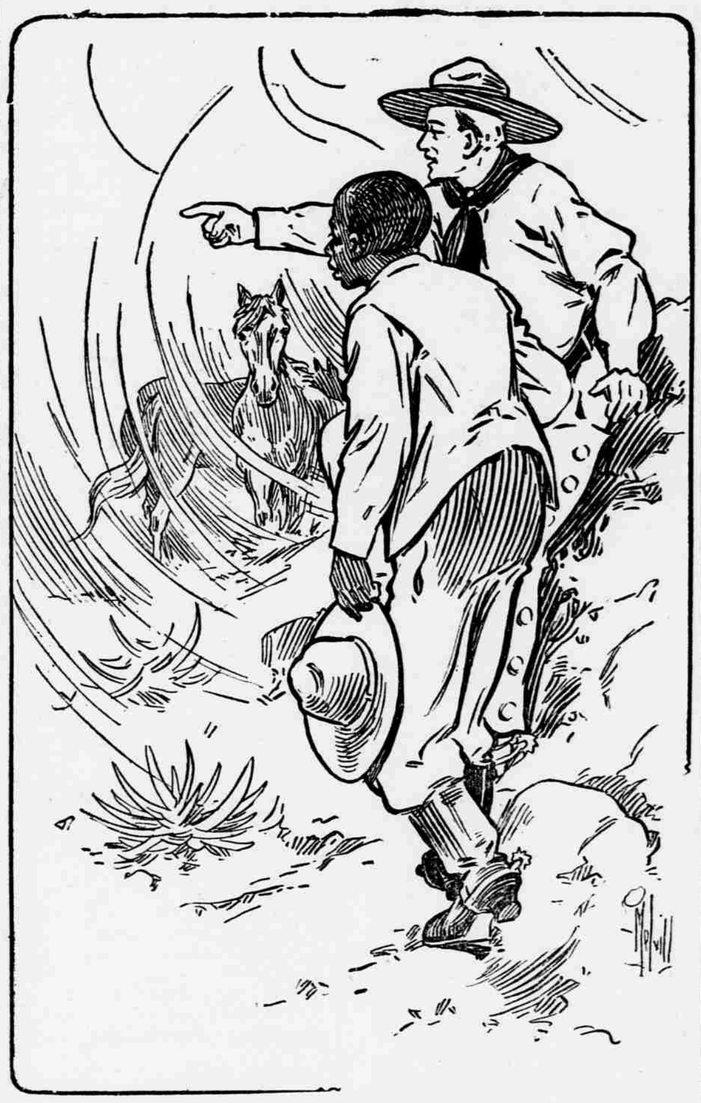
An instant later he had chosen his own mount, and was silently moving in the same direction, although the night there was so black that the obedient negro had already entirely vanished. The slope of the land not only helped cover their movements, but also rendered it easy for them to find one another. Fully a hundred yards westward they met, where a gully led directly down toward the river. There was no longer need for remaining on foot, as they were a sufficient distance away from the little town to feel no fear of being discovered, unless by some drunken straggler. At Keith's command the negro climbed into his saddle. Both ponies were restive, but not vicious, and after a plunge or two, to test their new masters, came easily under control. Keith led the way, moving straight down the gully, which gradually deepened, burying them in its black heart, until it finally debouched onto the river sands. The riotous noises of the drunken town died slowly away behind, the night silent and dark. The two riders could scarcely distinguish one another as they drew rein at the edge of the water. To the southward there gleamed a cluster of lights, marking the position of the camp of regulars. Keith drove his horse deeper into the stream and headed northward, the negro following like a shadow.

There was a ford directly opposite the cantonment, and another, more dangerous, and known to only a few, three miles farther up stream. Keeping well within the water's edge, so as to thus completely obscure their trail, yet not daring to venture deep for fear of striking quicksand, the plainsman set his pony struggling forward, until the dim outline of the bank at his right rendered him confident that they had attained the proper point for crossing. He had been that way only once before, and realized the danger of attempting passage in such darkness, but urgent need drove him forward.

"Follow me just as close as you can, boy," he said sternly, "and keep both your feet out of the stirrups. If your horse goes down hang to his tail, and let him swim out."

There was little enough to guide by, merely a single faint star peering out from a rift of the clouds, but Keith's remembrance was that the ford led straight out to the center of the stream, and then veered slightly toward the right. He knew the sand ridge was only used by horsemen, not being wide enough for the safe passage of wagons, but the depth of the water on either side was entirely problematical. He was taking a big chance, yet dare not wait for daylight. Summoning all his nerve and alertness, he urged his horse slowly forward, the intelligent animal seemingly comprehending the situation, and feeling carefully for footing. The actions of the animal gave the rider greater confidence, and he loosened his grip on the rein, leaving the pony's instinct to control. The latter fairly crept forward, testing the sand before resting any weight upon the hoof, the negro's mount following closely. The water was unusually high, and as they advanced it bore down against them in considerable volume; then, as they veered to the right, they were compelled to push directly against its weight in struggling toward shore. The men could see nothing but this solid sheet of water rushing down toward them from out the black void, and then vanishing below. Once Keith's horse half fell, plunging nose under, yet gaining foothold again before the rider had deserted his saddle. A dim darkness ahead already revealed the nearness of the southern bank, when Neb's pony went down suddenly, swept fairly off its legs by some fierce eddy in the stream. Keith heard the negro's guttural cry, and caught a glimpse of him as the two were sent whirling down. The coiled rope of the lariat, grasped in his right hand, was hurled forth like a shot, but came back empty. Not another sound reached him; his own horse went steadily on, feeling his way, until he was nose against the bank, with water merely rippling about his ankles. Keith driving feet again into the stirrups headed him down stream, wading close in toward the shore, leaning forward over the pommel striving to see through the gloom.

He had no doubt about Neb's pony making land, unless struck by some driftwood, or borne to the center of the stream by the shifting force of the current. But if Neb had failed to retain his grip he might have been sucked under by the surge of waters. A hundred yards below he found them, dripping and weak from the struggle, yet other[illegible] [illegible]urt. There were no words spoken, but the black and white hands clasped silently, and then Neb crept back into the saddle, shivering in his wet clothes as the cool night wind swept against him. Keeping close in toward shore, yet far enough out so that the water would hide their trail, the fugitives toiled steadily up stream, guided only by the black outline of the low bank upon their left.



"Do You See That Straight Ahead of You?"

CHAPTER VII.

In the Sand Desert.

Suddenly Keith halted, bringing his pony's head sharply about, so that the two faced one another. The wind was rising, hurling clouds of sand into their eyes, and the plainsman held one hand before his face.

"There's no need of keeping up a water trail any longer," he said quietly. "By all the signs we're in for a sand storm by daylight, and that will cover our tracks so the devil himself couldn't follow them. Got a water bag on your saddle.

"I reck'n dis am one, sah."

Keith felt of the object Neb held forth.

"Yes, and a big one, too; fill it and strap it on tight; we've got a long, dry ride ahead."

"Whar' yo' propose goin', Massa Jack?"

"To the 'Bar X' on the Canadian. I've worked with that outfit. They'll give us whatever we need, and ask no questions; I don't know of anything in between. It's going to be a hard ride, boy, and mighty little to eat except what I saved from supper."

"How far am it to dis yere 'Bar X?'"

"A hundred and fifty miles as the crow flies, and sand all the way, except for the valley of Salt Fork. Come on now, and keep close, for it's easy to get lost in these sand hills."

Keith had ridden that hundred and fifty miles of sandy desolation before, but had never been called upon to make such a journey as this proved to be. He knew there was little to fear from human enemies, for they were riding far enough east of the Santa Fe trail to be out of the path of raiding parties, while this desert country was shunned by Indian hunters. It consisted of sand hill after sand hill, a drear waterless waste, where nothing grew, and mid the dread sameness of which a traveler could only find passage by the guidance of stars at night or the blazing sun by day.

They had covered ten miles of it by daybreak, their ponies traveling heavily, fetlock deep, but could advance no further. With the first tint of rose in the east the brooding storm burst upon them in wild desert fury, the fierce wind buffeting them back, lashing their faces with sharp grit until they were unable to bear the pain. The flying sand smote them in clouds, driven with the speed of bullets. In vain they lay flat, urging their ponies forward; the beasts, maddened and blinded by the merciless lashing of the sand, refused to face the storm. Keith, all sense of direction long since lost, rolled wearily from the saddle, burrowed under the partial shelter of a sand dune, and called upon Neb to follow him. With their hands and feet they made a slight wind-break, dragging the struggling ponies into its protection, and burrowed themselves there, the clouds of sand skurrying over them so thick as to obscure the sky, and rapidly burying them altogether as though in a grave. Within an hour they were compelled to dig themselves out, yet it proved partial escape from the pitiless lashing. The wind howled like unloosed demons, and the air grew cold, adding to the sting of the grit, when some sudden eddy hurled it into their hiding place. To endeavor further travel would mean certain death, for no one could have guided a course for a hundred feet through the tempest.

It was three o'clock before it died sufficiently down for them to venture out. Even then the air remained full of sand, while constantly shifting ridges made travel difficult. Only grim necessity—the suffering of the ponies for water, and their own need for soon reaching the habitation of man and acquiring food—drove them to the early venture. They must attain the valley of the Salt Fork that night, or else perish in the desert—there remained no other choice. Tying neckerchiefs over their horses' eyes, and lying flat themselves, they succeeded in pressing slowly forward, winding in and out among the shifting dunes, with only the wind to guide them. It was an awful trail, the hoofs sinking deep in drifting sand, the struggling ponies becoming so exhausted that their riders finally dismounted, and staggered forward on foot, leading them stumbling blindly after. Once the negro's horse dropped, and had to be lashed to its feet again; once Keith's pony stumbled and fell on him, hurling him face down into the sand, and he would have died there, lacking sufficient strength to lift the dead weight, but for Neb's assistance. As it was he went staggering blindly forward, bruised, and faint from hunger and fatigue.

About them night finally closed in, black and starless, yet fortunately with a gradual dying away of the storm. For an hour past they had been struggling on, doubting their direction, wondering dully if they were not lost and merely drifting about in a circle. They had debated this fiercely once, the ponies standing dejectedly, tails to the storm, Neb arguing that the wind still blew from the south, and Keith contending it had shifted into the westward. The white man won his way, and they staggered on uncertain, the negro grasping the first pony's tail to keep from being separated from his companion. Some instinct of the plains must have guided them, for at last they dragged themselves out from the desert, the crunching sand under foot changing into rock, and then to short brittle grass, at which the ponies nibbled eagerly. The slope led gradually downward, the animals scenting water, and struggling to break away. Swaying in their saddles, the riders let them go, and they never stopped until belly deep in the stream, their noses buried. The men shivered in their saddles, until, at last satisfied, the ponies consented to be forced back up the bank, where they nibbled at the short tufts of herbage, but in a manner expressive of weariness. Keith flung himself on the ground, every muscle of his body aching, his exposed flesh still smarting from the hail of sand.

He had not the slightest conception as to where they were, except he knew this must be the Salt Fork. Utterly confused by the maze of shifting dunes, through whose intricacies they had somehow found passage, the blackness of the night yielded no clue as to their point of emergence. The volume of water in the stream alone suggested that in their wanderings they must have drifted to the eastward, and come out much lower down than had been originally intended. If so, then they might be almost directly south of Carson City, and in a section with which he was totally unacquainted. One thing was, however, certain—they would be compelled to wait for daylight to ascertain the truth, and decide upon their future movements.

Keith arose reluctantly, and removed the saddles from the animals, hobbling them so they could graze at will. Neb was propped up beneath an out-cropping of the bank, which partly protected him from the wind, a mere hulk of a shadow. Keith could not tell whether he slept or not, but made no effort to disturb him. A moment he stared vacantly about into the black silence, and then lay down, pillowing his head upon a saddle. He found it impossible to sleep, the chill of the wind causing him to turn and twist, in vain search after comfort, while unappeased hunger gnawed incessantly. His eyes ranged about over the dull gloom of the skies until they fell again to the earth level, and then he suddenly sat up, half believing himself in a dream—down the stream, how far away he could not judge, there gleamed a steady, yellowish light. It was no flicker of a camp fire, yet remained stationary. Surely no star could be so low and large; nor did he recall any with that peculiarity of color. If such a miracle was possible in the heart of that sandy desert he would have sworn it was a lamp shining through a window. But he had never heard of any settler on the Salt Fork, and almost laughed at the thought, believing for the instant his brain played him some elfish trick. Yet that light was no illusion; he rubbed his eyes, only to see it more clearly, convinced now of its reality. He strode hastily across, and shook Neb into semi-consciousness, dragging him bodily up the bank and pointing down the stream.

"Do you see that?" he inquired anxiously. "There, straight ahead of you?"

The negro stared, shaking with cold, and scarcely able to stand alone.

"Maybe it am de moon, Massa Jack," he muttered, thickly, "or a goblin's lantern. Lawd, I don't jest like de looks ob dat ting."

"Well, I do," and Keith laughed uneasily at the negro's fears. "All I wanted to know was if you saw what I saw. That's a lamp shining through a window, Neb. What in heaven's name it can be doing here I am unable to guess, but I'm going to find out. It means shelter and food, boy, even if we have to fight for it. Come on, the horses are safe, and we'll discover what is behind that light yonder."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Overpoliteness is the surest indication one is not to the manner born.

SEEMS EASIER TO REMEMBER

Remarks of Writer in Cleveland Plain Dealer Appear to Contain Much Sense.

There is a new science called mnemonics, which is trying to get itself introduced into our public schools. We have no knock on this science—only it seems to us to be a roundabout way of arriving at facts that you ought to remember right off the bat. It appears to work something in this manner:

"When was Lincoln born?" asks the teacher.

"I—f-f-forget," whines the pupil.

"Naturally you do. Go at it right. How many Muses are there in mythology?"

"Nine."

"Right. Now double that number."

"Twice-nine's-eighteen."

"Right again. Multiply it by 100."

"1800."

"Good. Add the number of Muses to that."

"1809."

"Aha! That's when Lincoln was born. Why don't you learn the scientific way of getting at these things?"

As we said in the first place, it's a noble science, but we'd rather remember dates.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

Two of a Kind.

"I find that my husband has been having the office boy call me up every day and mumble terms of endearment. That's a nice way to fool his wife. He's been going to the ball game."

"How is it that you didn't catch on to the voice?"

"Well, I'm busy at bridge every day, and I've been having the cook answer the telephone."

The Climatic Autocrat.

"What I should like," said the self-indulgent person, "would be to have wealth enough to permit me to live in a cool place in summer, and regulate the temperature according to my own fancy in winter."

"You don't need wealth. What you want is the job of janitor."

A Paraphrase.

"You take close notice of the places to which people are invited."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Cumrox; "in our circle invitations are the sincerest flattery."

Be sure your sorrow is not giving you its best, unless it makes you a more thoughtful person than you have ever been before.—Phillips Brooks.