

The Lesser Half

A VICE-PRESIDENTIAL candidate is part of the sand with which the proverbial party ostrich covers its head at convention time.

By THE GENTLEMAN AT THE KEYHOLE

to take Judge Kenyon. They gave him General Dawes, and Mr. Coolidge never forgave Dawes for being thrust upon him.

There is no more persistent delusion than that a party can compensate for the weakness of its candidate for President by naming exactly the opposite kind of man for Vice President.

In the last seventy-five years nobody has ever been elected President because of the strength which his associate on the ticket gave him, and no one has ever been defeated for President because of the weakness of his political partner.

Well, how about the Vice-Presidential candidate's ability to carry his own state and thus add electoral votes to his ticket? Nil too. One cannot conceive of an election so close that the friends of the Vice-Presidential candidate hailing from one state will swing that decisive state into line.

As a matter of fact, even candidates for President do not carry their own states unless those states are normally carried by their own party. John W. Davis did not carry New York or West Virginia, whichever state he came from. Governor Cox did not carry Ohio. Woodrow Wilson did not carry New Jersey in 1916 and carried it in 1912 only because the Republicans were split.

So there is a lot of hokum about the geographical considerations to which party managers pay so much attention.

Wasted Mental Horsepower

THE Vice-Presidential humor was exemplified at both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions of 1924. At New York John W. Davis was nominated by 103 arduous ballots. A mate had to be got in a hurry. Senator Thomas J. Walsh wouldn't run. Governor Silzer of New Jersey was practically selected when someone said, "My Gosh, you may say that this man Davis comes from West Virginia, but everyone knows he comes from New York. You can't nominate for Vice President a man who comes from just across the Hudson River!"

Someone suggested Charley Bryan! Mr. Davis was Morgan's lawyer, and Charley Bryan's big brother, Bill, had said a lot of unkind things about Morgan. So it was Charley Bryan, making with Davis the most absurd ticket ever offered—a ticket doomed anyway.

The Republicans missed a similar absurdity only by the narrowest margin. Mr. Coolidge wanted a radical on the ticket with him. He preferred Senator Borah, but failing Borah he was willing

Vice-Presidential nominations was that which ultimately put the somber Mr. Coolidge in the White House. The Republicans in Chicago were all set to nominate Senator Lenroot as Mr. Harding's running mate, when an egoist from Oregon shouted, "Coolidge!"

All the delegates earlier had received a copy of the book, "Have Faith in Massachusetts." So the word "Coolidge" set a whole current of prayer-meeting associations going in their minds. It is the only time on record that a title of a book ever made a President.

The Democratic candidate for President will be practically already chosen when the Houston convention meets, so the choice of a Vice President to run with Governor Smith will receive a good deal of attention.

There are doubtful sections of the country and two theories about the opinion as to prohibition that the candidate for Vice President should hold. One area for whose support the Democrats should bid is the doubtful states, especially Kentucky and Tennessee, and the other is the corn belt.

Then one notion is that, Governor Smith being a Wet, his running mate should be a Dry. The other is that the enthusiasm of the Wets for Governor Smith will be chilled unless a Wet is also nominated for second place on the ticket. The election of a wet President will not make any practical difference, since the President cannot change and must enforce the dry law.

Whether a Dry, aspiring to preside over the Senate, likes his toddy and a Wet drinks nothing stronger than ice-cream soda is of no practical importance, nevertheless it consumes vast amounts of mental horsepower.

There are two leading candidates for the second place on the Democratic ticket, Representative Cordell Hull, a Dry from the doubtful border state of Tennessee, and ex-Senator Gilbert M. Hitchcock, a Wet from the doubtful corn-belt state of Nebraska. One would no doubt make vast numbers forget that Al Smith was a Wet who couldn't do anything about it. And the other would make an equal number forget that Al Smith is an Eastern city man who never saw a plow.

A real solution of this problem would be to have at least six candidates for Vice President on each ticket, so that every section and every shade of opinion might be conciliated.

The Law Beaters

Continued from page 6

and slipped the silencer into my pocket. I put the gun in his right hand. Yes, I made sure he was right-handed. Then I went out, letting the door lock itself behind me. But before I went I opened his bathroom window about six inches.

"What for?"

"I'm coming to that. I told you I always worked things out in advance—and this was one job that had to be perfect. No mistakes. I walked out of the building. I was absolutely calm and clear-headed. I went to a store on Broadway and bought something and then came back to my house and dropped in on the manager, whom I knew, a decent old Scotsman who thought I was a Wall Street man. I chatted with him a bit and then asked him how he'd like to play a little bridge in my place that evening. I knew he was a bug about the game. He jumped at the chance and said he'd get two other players.

IN THAT building lived two doctors, the Andersons, father and son, well-known eye specialists, and Black, the manager, brought them along to my apartment, and we played bridge for half an hour or so. Then, while I was dummy, I stepped into my bathroom and took from my pocket the firecracker I had bought, lit its long fuse, and tossed it through Vogel's bathroom window, which was across a narrow areaway, not four feet from mine.

"I was back at the table, dealing the cards, when the cracker exploded. We all jumped when we heard it. 'Sounds like a shot next door,' one of the Andersons said. 'We'd better investigate,' Black said.

"So Black and the rest of us went to Vogel's apartment and pounded on the door, and, getting no answer, Black opened it with his master key. There lay the detective, still warm, and the smell of powder from the cracker filled the room. Naturally, the doctors and Black bent over the dead man, so no attention was paid to what I did, which was to slip into the bathroom, grab up what was left of the cracker and stuff it into my pocket. When I came back the Andersons were solemnly pronouncing it a case of suicide. I had three very substantial citizens who could swear that when the shot was fired I was innocently playing bridge with them at a quarter of a cent a point—

"Neat!" ejaculated Repton. "Damn neat!"

"It wasn't bad for a beginner, I thought," said Shreve.

"Lord," said Repton. "It's 'way after midnight. I wish I could get to sleep. But I can't."

"Well, you've got a story," Shreve suggested. "You might as well come across with it. I did, you know."

Repton stared at the floor a while in brooding silence.

"Yes, I've got a story," he said. "Why shouldn't I tell it? It's better than sitting here—doing nothing."

"That's true," said Shreve. "Here's the bottle. Well?"

"I had to eliminate a man too," Repton said. "I had no more compunction about doing it than I would have about crushing a tarantula. I hated him. I think he was born into the world for no other reason than to devil me. We started out by being partners, Andrew Erskine and I. Not that I ever really liked him. But he was as clever as sin. I trusted him about half an inch, but I woke up one day to find that even that was too much. We'd been promoting a little company together, with the general idea of skimming the cream and leaving the stockholders with nothing but some thin blue water.

"In the middle of it, I had to go to Albany on some other business, and when I got back home I found that Erskine had played me as filthy a trick as ever one white man played on another. He'd walked off with the spoils and left me holding the bag, and the worst part of it was that I couldn't do a thing about it. He was a smooth

worker. He fixed it so he came out of it with cash and credit, and I was left with a black eye and empty pockets.

"I swore I'd get Erskine some day. I tried. But he kept getting richer and fatter and smugger, and every time I had a tilt with him he sneaked over a punch below the belt and left me flat on the mat. While we're being confidential, I might as well admit that I was afraid of Erskine, which, after all, is the chief reason why anybody hates anybody. Anyway, I hated Andrew Erskine and felt I had good and sufficient reason for hating him. But everyone in Blansford knew we were bitter enemies. So it was a sure thing that if anything violent happened to Erskine, fingers would point straight at me. All I could do was to let my hate fester inside me.

"I did pretty well at that—in spite of Erskine. I made big money—and spent it fast. What I was after was one big killing that would put me on Easy Street the rest of my days. At last my big chance came. Or, rather, I made it come. No need to go into details. It was my own idea and a sound one. Not exactly ethical, maybe, by the strictest standards—but within the law. It was an elaborate water-power operation—and I worked on it a good six years. I put every dime I could lay my hand on into it.

"Then I found out something that almost cracked my spine. One man held the key to my door, and he could block me. Of course it was Andrew Erskine. He stood squarely in my path and there was no way round him. I could see only one solution. Erskine had to go. The question was: How? My enmity for him was well known. I could take no chances. I couldn't picture myself enjoying my money much if I had to spend most of it to keep out of jail. So I sat down and considered the question—and I found an answer.

"What?" questioned Shreve.

"What does a good executive do," Repton asked, "when a job must be done for which he hasn't the technical training? Why, he hires an expert, of course. That's what I did."

Shreve grinned. "Sensible idea, but how did you find one?" he said.

"It took some hunting," Repton said. "I went to Chicago, where I didn't know a soul, and hung around the underworld dives and kept my eyes and ears open, and pretty soon in a speak-easy I spotted a man who was in the business. He was a soft-spoken, well-dressed chap with a pinched white face—a dope, I guess. Ike Mance was his name. I made a date to meet him that night. I rented a car and drove it myself out Oak Park way and picked Ike up at a street corner where I'd told him to wait.

WE DROVE into the country and parked in a lonely lane, and had a talk. He was as businesslike as if he'd been selling me a ton of coal. My proposition didn't surprise him one bit. We dickered about the price, and he finally agreed to do it for twenty-five hundred down, in cash, and twenty-five hundred when the job was done. He agreed to start east on the midnight train. I went to French Lick Springs and played some golf with a party of Albany business men I knew, who were staying there. When Andrew Erskine died suddenly I intended to have plenty of unimpeachable witnesses who could swear that I was hundreds of miles away from the scene of the sad event.

Four days after I parted from Mance I read in a New York newspaper a headline I'd been looking for—"DEATH OF UP-STATE CAPITALIST." The police, the story said, were somewhat mystified by the death of Andrew Erskine. He had been found in his roadster, which had hit a tree and had been smashed up some but hardly enough to account for the injuries which had caused his death. They called it a queer accident, those brainy cops did, and let it go at that. Mance was a capable workman, all

right. Two days later I went to Chicago to meet him and pay him off—

"You took a chance there, Repton," Shreve said. "A lad like that wouldn't stick at blackmail. While he lived, he had a hold on you—"

"Well, I had a hold on him, remember," said Repton. "Besides, Mance didn't live very long—"

Shreve whistled.

"You are a thoroughgoing son of a gun," he said.

"It was part of my plan from the first," said Repton. "Mance might never have let a peep out of him about my hiring him, and then again he might. You never can tell what a hop-head may do. Mance had to go out of the picture, so he went. I met him in a deserted spot outside of Chicago, took him for a ride in the country in my rented car, and left him in a ditch. I figured I had left no loose threads."

"I had a perfect alibi as far as Erskine was concerned, and there was no way of connecting me and Mance. Nobody had ever seen us together. His death wouldn't cause much of a flurry. What with all the gang wars out that way, the police expect a fellow like Ike Mance to be bumped off, and they don't greatly concern themselves when he is. The whole thing went through without

any flaw or slip-up, so far as I could see. I drove the car back to the garage where I'd hired it—assumed name, of course—and took the express east for Blansford."

"I don't see any holes in it," said Shreve. "Not a hole. I thought I was pretty clever—but that beats me. Have another drink?"

"Yes, I need one," said Repton. "Pass back the bottle. Hey, be careful. Lord, you've done it now! Smashed to pieces!"

HIS voice suddenly became desperate. "What are we going to do now, Shreve?" he said. "What are we going to do now?"

"Aw, pull yourself together, Repton," said Shreve. "It won't be long. I just heard a cock crow. They come for us at daybreak."

"Will it hurt?" Repton asked hoarsely. "Do you think it will hurt much, Shreve?"

"Not much," said Shreve. "Just one shock, and it's all over."

Down the stone corridor there was a muffled shuffling of feet.

"Listen," Repton cried, his voice raw with terror. "They're coming."

"Let them come," grated Shreve. "Let them come. I'm ready."

The Old Dud

Continued from page 20

"One of you fellers better hold on to it." He trembled, his eyes protruding.

"Sit on the floor of the truck and hold on to it. If we happen to hit a bump or a brick or something, it's liable to roll off that plank, and then—"

"I wish to Gawd it would pop," chattered Private Smith. "Pop, and end my blinkin' misery."

Private Jones looked beseechingly at the driver. His tongue was dry as wood. "You ain't got a drop of rum with you, eh?" he asked in a plaintive voice.

"Don't talk to me," shivered the driver. "I hate the sight of the two of yer. This ain't war. It's suicide—that's what it is."

IT WAS a terrible journey. The slightest roll brought agony. Every bump induced additional beads of perspiration to break out on their faces. They lived through an age of quaking dread.

"Let's end it all," repeated Private Smith. "For Gawd's sake give it a kick on the nose with your boot."

"You do it," groaned Private Jones. "I haven't the blinkin' strength."

By the grace of a miracle they reached Saint-Germain. There they were told to deposit the dud somewhere outside Corps Headquarters. They did so. They left it standing on its base on the top step of the entrance to the château. Then they slunk away. Like men haunted by the memory of their misdeeds, they staggered brokenly in the direction of the village, groped blindly for the nearest tavern, stumbled up to the bar and commenced to drink. And they drank. They drank until their legs gave way under them. Then they fell under the bench, pie-eyed, blind to the blinkin' world.

In the meantime Corps Headquarters was shivering to its very foundations. Not a soul, dog, cat, fly, or anything connected with Corps went anywhere near the château entrance. Generals, colonels, majors, captains and a multiplicity of aides, orderlies, cooks and whatnots entered and departed by way of the kitchen door. The general's bedroom was hurriedly shifted to the back of the building. The orderly-room was transferred to the pantry. In fact, the whole of the front part of the house was severely deserted. Colonels swore; majors cursed. Nobody knew what to do. What had those two fools been thinking of to leave the shell right in the entrance to Corps Headquarters? Where were they? Somebody find them and tell them to take the damn' thing away.

But the old dud, sitting on the front step like a plump and rather besmirched old lady, remained where she was; absolutely queen of her castle.

"Get Army on the phone!" roared the general. "By gad, sir, tell them to come for their blasted dud. I won't have it round here, I tell you."

Army was called and seemed entirely amenable about it. Would Corps kindly see to it that the dud was sent over to them? No, by gad! Corps would do nothing of the sort! Army had promised to come and fetch the damned thing, and it was now up to them to collect it at once. True enough, but Army would be greatly obliged if Corps met them in this little matter and arranged to have a truck bring it over. Corps would be damned if they would.

This went on for five days. On the fifth day Army sent up its bespectacled major to inquire into the matter and view the cause of all the trouble.

Privates Jones and Smith spent the first three days in a state of blissful inebriation. Then their money gave out. It took two days to sober them up. Then, for want of food, they were forced to report to Corps Headquarters. The cook gave them something to eat, and the orderly sergeant told them to stand by and take the first army truck going up the line back into the salient.

Waiting for the truck, they sat down on the lawn outside the château. Behind them was a lake. In front of them, on the steps, was the old dud. They gazed at it with awe and respect, and tried to chuckle.

SUDDENLY a crowd of officers appeared in view. With them was a tall, thin, bespectacled major in brass and red and shining leather. He viewed the old dud from quite a respectable distance.

"Ah—er—yes," he said. "A nine-centimeter, you know. Demmed disagreeable customer. Know all about it. Examined one before, and all that. Jolly touchy old lady. Fuse all wrong, but liable to blow up when least expected. Thanks, Corps—demmed nice of you and all that. Find we don't want the beastly thing, after all."

Turning, he spied Privates Smith and Jones lying on the grass. He had no idea who they were. It merely occurred to the major that there were two men who for the moment happened to be doing nothing.

"Look here, you two," he said authoritatively, "get hold of a punt, will you? Then take this demmed shell here and drop it right into the middle of that lake!"

WALK-OVER SHOES



The man at the beach is wearing the "Traymore," which retails at \$9.00.

Advertised in Vanity Fair for June is the "Belmont," a Walk-Over Custom Grade model at \$12.00.

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THE brilliant sunshine of country or seashore reveals unmercifully whether or not a man is well dressed.

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Walk-Over Shoes are made by men who have spent their lives selecting fine leathers, and fashioning them into shoes of first quality and correct appearance.

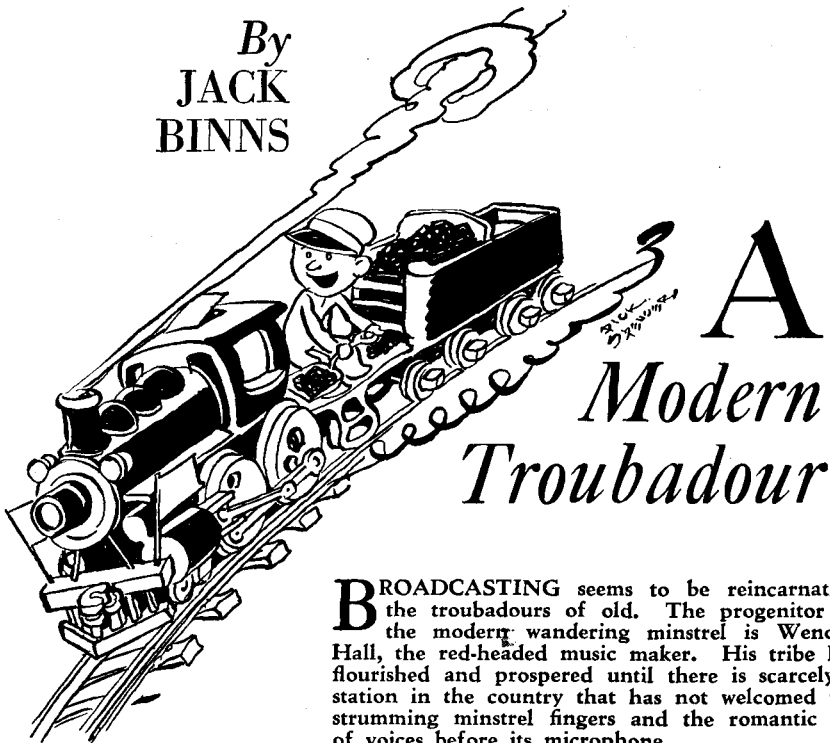
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By
JACK
BINNS



A Modern Troubadour

BBROADCASTING seems to be reincarnating the troubadours of old. The progenitor of the modern wandering minstrel is Wendell Hall, the red-headed music maker. His tribe has flourished and prospered until there is scarcely a station in the country that has not welcomed the strutting minstrel fingers and the romantic lilt of voices before its microphone.

A worthy member of this cult is Howard Melaney, the "Singing Fireman," who wanders from mike to mike wafting the dulcet tones of his tenor voice upon the night ether. His is one of those cheery souls who sing while they work. It is but three years ago that his voice was "discovered" by train passengers in Montana who had alighted to stretch their travel-kinked legs at a wayside station. They were drawn to the locomotive by the rich tones that seemed to emanate from the great driving wheels. There they discovered Melaney oiling cups and warbling as he worked.

A year later Mme. Schumann-Heink sang in the auditorium of the Fair Grounds in Billings, Mont. A few moments after she had finished her concert she was leading the five thousand present in applauding the railroader with the golden voice. That was the beginning of his professional career in the realm of music, and his metamorphosis into a radio troubadour.

Who Cares?

FOR some few years we were lulled into false composure over the comforting thought that the statistical fiend had passed away along with his blood brother, the souvenir hunter. You know the bloke I mean. He took particular delight in telling us that if all the hot dogs made in one day down at Coney Island were placed end to end they would bark their way to Mars and back.

Alas, he has not gone to his reward, but merely transferred his activities to radio. From the factory floor of a well-known manufacturer he takes time out to broadcast the statement that if all the bits of metal used in making the transformers produced every four months were laid end to end they would stretch across the continent. Probably these are the bits of metal that went into the long-distance set my neighbor is always boasting about but which he never turns on when I drop in.

International Concerts

ABOUT six months ago we were receiving assurances that daily exchanges of programs with British broadcasters, through the marvelous medium of short waves, would be shortly inaugurated. These promises were so definite that I had distinct visions of various export firms contracting to sponsor British-American programs as good-will advertising.

Although I do not desire to assume the rôle of a captious critic, I can't refrain from pointing out that six months have come and gone without a British program competing for preference in our overcrowded ether. My object in stating this is to emphasize the fact that miracles cannot be accomplished by short waves. In fact, they are beset by many natural difficulties that will require almost miraculous engineering to overcome.

Some recent experiments at Schenectady, N. Y., and Chelmsford, England, demonstrate that progress has been made, but a lot of real work remains to be done. I am informed that a great deal of difficulty has been experienced in devising a suitably stable receiver for those short waves. Another grave problem is the acute fading, which, of course, ruins music and speech.

Let us hope those difficulties will soon be surmounted. An exchange of programs between America and Europe would go a long way toward developing friendliness between the two continents and at the same time spur both to intense competition in improved programs.

Putting 'Em to Sleep

ONE of the New York radio critics in reviewing routine programs invariably uses this formula: "Madame Yell-alot, coloratura soprano, etherized a standard program from station WXYZ."

Did He Mean This?

THE young lady who interviews movie personalities for the listeners of WHN in New York ran across an unexpectedly heartfelt exclamation when she tackled Harry Carey. She had elicited from the cowboy actor all of the unfortunate details of his loss when the ranch he owned was washed out by the St. Francis dam catastrophe in California.

"Are you going to establish another ranch there?" she asked.

"Not by a damsite!" exploded Harry. The fervor and promptness of his remark caused me to doubt whether I have spelled his reply correctly.

A Pleasant War

THREE organizations representing the realms of art, music and drama have been welded into a single commercial radio agency.

The new agency is the first of others that will undoubtedly follow. Its main purpose is to bring the combined experience of the three arts to bear in preparing distinctive and original programs for companies interested in using radio as a means of good-will advertising. Its origin rests upon the assertion that program departments of broadcasting stations have not shown any ingenuity and that there is little to choose between any of the commercially sponsored programs designed by them.

I hold no brief for either side in this controversy, but I hope that neither side loses, because so long as the new war rages there will be no lack of novelty at the microphone no matter who the originator may be.

The Blue Lamp

Continued from page 22

With scarcely a jar, the ceiling stairs lifted.

Hinged to the top, balanced to a hair, the lower end of that "ceiling" swung upward from the north. The reporter and Pump-ton turned to confront the startled faces of Squire Butterworth, Dr. Chapin, Paul Lyman and the Fowlers. From their faces in the upper hallway, to which they had returned from the front windows, the group looked down through the aperture produced.

"How'd you do that?" exclaimed the lawyer.

"I pulled on one of these corner ropes, I guess, when I was in here; before I was too surprised at the girl on the cot to glance overhead."

"So the stairs tilt up to the top of the archway. Now, who could 'a' put those in, and when?"

The squire and Lyman came down in the cubby.

"**W**HAT'S this tall hole that's chopped in the corner?" demanded the caretaker, crossing toward it.

"That's where Uncle Amos's gone, I guess. That's prob'ly the passage that leads down to the tool shed."

"Look!" exclaimed Seba Fowler. "See what's under this pillow."

They thought he meant the barrow iron, and Jimmy opened his mouth to protest. Instead young Fowler was holding up a garment.

"It was wrapped round this pair o' woman's slippers," he declared. "You can see for yourselves."

"Lemme take your flashlight, Battles," requested the squire. And when the lad had handed it over he cried: "Jumpin' Jehoshaphat! This—this wrap and slippers fit the description o' what Mary Harmon wore when last seen alive! Silk kimono thing! Covered with blue flowers! Now, how'd that get up here?"

"But what's become of Uncle Amos?" Jimmy cried frantically. "I'm going down after him, inside these walls."

"Look out you don't get hurt," warned the squire. "Watch where you put your feet, every step o' the way."

"The rest of you stay up here till I've got to the bottom. This woodwork looks flimsy. More than my weight may break it down."

Pointing the flashlight into the pit, Jimmy soon descended to a junction of the lower floor sills and foundation. There the stairs stopped.

A well yawned. Protruding from this shaft was a ladder.

This ladder must have been inserted there before the superstructure of the stairs was reared overhead, else it never could have come there on account of the angles made by the walls.

It took courage to lower oneself down that well. Yet, befouling himself with cobwebs and filth, the boy followed where his uncle must have gone before him. The flashlight revealed the feet of the ladder planted in cobwebs so thick the ray could not penetrate them. Yet Sheriff Crumpey had not fallen to the bottom or he would have disturbed them.

"Are you all right?" the squire's voice called from above.

"Yes. There's a dry well down here. With a ladder in it. I'm nearly to the bottom. But don't try to come down till you've got ample light."

As Jimmy spoke he arrived at a point which he judged must be under the cellar. He had faced the south in descending the shaft. Now, directly behind him, opening northward, was a yawning hole. He turned the beam in to it.

Someone, in past years, had cut a crude tunnel deep down here in the earth. It was oval in shape and walled with rock projections. In places whitened timbers shored up the roof or kept the walls from caving inward. Advancing inward cautiously, Jimmy was compelled to step around these oblique supports.

"It goes to the tool house, and no mistake," he muttered aloud. At once he understood why his uncle might not have answered his shoutings; the close, tomblike confines of this tunnel muffled all sounds with a curious deadness.

Ten feet, twenty, thirty, Jimmy advanced as he stepped around timbers. At one point the gravel had caved in and spilled down till barely enough room was left to squeeze through. By chance his light turned on this loose earth, picked out the impress of foot-treads—several of them—of different sizes. He made out a man's big boot mark plainly, but whether his uncle's or not must later be revealed.

"Uncle Amos!" he called once, thinking the sheriff might be somewhere ahead. But the acoustics of the warren killed his voice within twenty feet of distance.

It was the craziest, most menacing experience of his life to date, penetrating step by step along the uneven jags of this passage with nothing but a flashlight to show him the way.

The boy seemed to have been exploring down there hours and hours when a sound reached him that stopped him abruptly from further progress. He became as rigid as the timber which he clutched as he blinked off his flashlight.

Distinctly he heard a woman's sobs! Down there, verily in the "bowels of the earth," something feminine was in distress.

The weeping continued, and Jimmy snapped on his light. Six or seven feet further on the burrow veered slightly to the right. With grit down his neck, clothes smeared with cobwebs and mold, sand in his shoes and the dead miasma of the tunnel distressing him, the boy reached the twin uprights at the point where the passage turned.

A circular pit was at once disclosed, six feet in diameter and of indefinite height, its floor three feet below the floor of the burrow, which now ended. As the yellow eye of the boy's flashlight gleamed along the burrow the sobbing broke off in a little shriek of terror.

Jimmy reached the edge of the step down into this pit. Squatting on his heels, he played the light on a crouched feminine figure. Back against the opposite wall of the pit she shrank and lifted an arm to screen her sight. It was the second time that night young Battles had seen that gesture.

AFANNING of the place with the beam disclosed no signs of Sheriff Crumpey, however. Its only occupant was a terrified girl. A girl and the thing on the ground at her feet!

Jimmy spoke first. "How'd you get down in here?" he demanded.

"I came down the ladder and through the passage—the same way you did, I suppose."

"How long have you been here?" "Only a few minutes. Though it seems like hours."

"Have you seen anything of my uncle?"

"You mean an elderly man with a lantern?"

"Yes! You've seen him?"

"It was he who trapped me in this frightful place."

"Trapped you?"

"He pulled up the ladder so I couldn't get out."

"Pulled it up?"

For the first time the boy sent his flash beam into the space overhead. Ten or twelve feet above, the ceiling of the pit looked boarded. Those boards were cleated diagonally together to be a door—a barn door.

"He said something about 'being sure' of me. And he jerked the ladder out of my fingers so I couldn't follow him. Look, he hurt my hands!"

She submitted her outstretched palms in proof. Something had bruised them with splinters and dirt.