why Slipper was not running. Why didn't you run him, Ike?"

"Why?" said Ike, "that's what I don't know. There aint nothin' on four legs with horsehide on in these here Territories that can make Slipper take dust, but then—well, I knowed he had money on the Swallow. But I guess I must be goin'."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Oh, I'll fall down somewheres and go to sleep. You see lots of things when you're askeep, providin' you know how to accomplish it."

"Shall I go with you?" asked Shock.

Ike regarded him curiously.

"Guess you wouldn't care to be mixed up in this kind of thing. But blame it, if I don't think you'd stay with it if it was in your line, which it aint."

"But suppose you get into difficulty."

"Well," said Ike, smiling a slow smile, "when I want you I'll send for you," and with that he passed out into the night.

XII

HIS KEEPER

TILL long after midnight Shock sat over the fire pondering the events of the day, and trying to make real to himself the strange series of happenings that had marked his introduction to his work in this country. His life for the last month had been so unlike anything in his past as to seem quite unnatural.

As he sat thus musing over the past and planning for the future, a knock came to the door, and almost immediately there came in a little man, short and squat, with humped shoulders, bushy, grizzled hair and beard, through which peered sharp little black eyes. His head and face and eyes made one think of a little Scotch terrier.

"Ye're the meenister?" he said briefly.

"Yes," replied Shock, greatly surprised at his visitor, but warming to the Scotch voice.

"Aye. Ye're wanted."

"Wanted? By whom?"

"The man that lives in this hoose. He's deein', I'm thinkin'."

"Dying!" said Shock, starting up and seizing his hat. "What! Ike?"

"Aye, Ike. He's verra ill."

"Go on, then," said Shock. "Quick!"

"Aye, quick it is." And the little man, without further words, plunged into the darkness.

A few minutes' swift walk through the black night brought them to the Ranchers' Roost. There, in a corner of the room at the back of the bar, he found Ike lying almost unconscious, and apparently very ill.

"Why, what's the matter?" cried Shock, dropping on his knees beside Ike. But Ike seemed stupefied, and mumbled a few incoherent words. Shock caught the words, "the gang," and "dope."

He looked in an agony of helplessness at the little Scotchman, who stood by looking down upon the sick man with face quite unmoved.

"Do you know what he says?" enquired Shock.

"He's no sayin' much," said the the little Scotchman calmly.

Again Ike tried to speak, and this time Shock caught the words, "The boss—gang's got him—Smiley Simmons—back room—fetch him."

"What does he mean?" cried Shock.

"It's ha-r-r-d to tell that," said the little Scotchman. "He's talkin' about some boss or other."

"Oh, yes, I know what that means. He is referring to his boss, young Stanton."

"Oh, ay!" said the little Scotchman, with a light breaking on his face. "I saw the bodies. They've gaen o'er to the creature Simmons'."

"Show me the way," said Shock. "Quick!"

"Come, then," said the little Scotchman, leading once more into the darkness.

Some distance down the street stood Smiley—or as some preferred to call him Slimy—Simmons' general store. At the back of the store there was a side door.

"They're in yonder," said the little Scotchman, and disappeared.

Shock knocked at the door, but there was no response. He turned the handle, opened the door, and walking in found himself in the back of the store, in a room dimly lighted by a hanging lantern. Seated on a stool at a high desk, evidently busy with his ledger, sat a man, tall, slender, and wiry. He had a sharp, thin face, with high forehead, protruding nose, and receding chin. The moment he spoke Shock discovered at once how it was he came by his nickname. His smile was the most striking characteristic of his manner. Indeed, so permanent and pervasive did his smile appear, that it seemed almost to be a fixed feature of his face.

He came forward to Shock, rubbing his hands.

"Ah, good evening," he said, in a most insinuating voice. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," said Shock, instinctively shrinking from him. "I want to see Mr. Stanton."

"Mr. Stanton—Mr. Stanton? Let me see. I saw Mr. Stanton some hours ago. Let me think. Was it at the International? Yes, I think it was the International. No, in the Royal. I have no doubt you will find him there. I shall be pleased to show you, for I see you are a stranger. We are always delighted to see strangers and we try to make them welcome to our town."

He moved toward the door as he spoke. Shock knew at once he was lying.

"Mr. Stanton is not at the Royal. I have been informed he is in this building somewhere."

"In this building?" murmured Smiley, in a puzzled tone. "In this building?" He glanced up at the ceiling as if expecting to see the missing man there. "Strange," he continued. "Now, I have been here for some time, for hours, indeed. I am a busy man, Mr. ——"

"Macgregor," replied Shock.

"Mr. Macgregor. I find it necessary to pursue my avocation into the hours we generally devote to slumber. And to-day business has been unusually interrupted. But I have failed to notice Mr. Stanton enter."

At the further end of the room Shock's eyes fell upon a door, through the cracks of which a light was shining.

"It is possible," said Shock, "he is in that room," pointing to the door.

"Hardly, my dear sir, hardly."

But even as he spoke a voice, loud and clear, rang out. "Now, my dear fellow, go to the deuce. That comes to me."

The reply Shock could not catch.

"I think," he said, turning to Smiley, "we shall find Mr. Stanton in there."

As he spoke he walked toward the door. But Smiley slipped before him.

"Pardon me, my dear sir, that is a private room—

some friends of mine who would greatly dislike being disturbed. I am exceedingly sorry I cannot oblige you."

"I must see Mr. Stanton," said Shock, putting his hand upon the door knob.

"My dear sir," said Simmons, his thin lips drawn back over his yellow teeth, "I regret to say it is impossible. If Mr. Stanton is in there—mark me, I say *if* he is in there, which is extremely unlikely—but if he is in there, he would be very unwilling to be disturbed at this hour. However, since you are so anxious, I shall take him a message."

As Smiley said this he bowed with an air of gracious condescension, as if he expected Shock to be profoundly impressed with this concession to his persistence. But Shock was not at all impressed.

"I cannot wait longer," he said. "It is a matter of life and death. I must enter that room."

"My dear sir," said Simmons, rubbing his hands, his smile becoming more and more expansive, "this is my house, that door is my door. If you break it I should be grieved to have to exact the full penalty of the law."

Shock hesitated. He had never willingly broken a law in his life. It would be a most unfortunate beginning for his mission in this town, and, after all, what business had he to interfere? If this young fool was determined to waste his money, let him do so. But he thought of Ike, and the entreaty in his voice as he whispered out his broken words, and he thought of the look of reverence and love on the lad's face that

afternoon when he gave his toast, "My mother! God bless her!" Shock's face set hard.

"I must see him," he said simply, but with such an air of determination that Simmons weakened.

"Well, if you wait a few minutes," replied Smiley, "I will see if he will speak to you."

Shock waited till Smiley opened the door, whereupon, stepping quickly forward, he set his foot against the lower panel and pushed the door wide open.

In a small room, bare of furniture except for tables and chairs and a hanging lamp, sat four men, of whom Shock recognised two. The Kid was one, and Macfarren the other. Across the table from these sat two men, one by his uniform the Inspector of the Mounted Police. The face of the other had to Shock a familiar look, but where he had seen him he could not remember.

As Shock opened the door the man in uniform started up with an oath, and Macfarren blew out the light.

"What's that for, Macfarren?" said The Kid.

"Shut up, you fool," growled Macfarren.

"What did you say, sir?" enquired The Kid, in a voice somewhat thick and unsteady.

"Get him out of here," said Macfarren, in a low tone.

"I want to have a few words with Mr. Stanton," said Shock, standing in the doorway.

"Here you are. Fire away," replied the boy. "The light is not good, but I can hear in the dark."

"You are wanted, Mr. Stanton, very earnestly by a friend of yours."

"Let him walk right in if he wants me," replied The Kid.

"That he cannot do. He is very ill."

"Ah! who is he, may I ask?" enquired Stanton, striking a match.

It was promptly blown out.

"I wouldn't do that again," he said gently. "Who is it?" he repeated, striking another match and lighting the lamp.

"It is Ike," said Shock. "He is very ill—dying, for all I know, and he wants you."

For answer there was a contemptuous laugh from the Mounted Policeman, in which Macfarren joined.

"Rather good that," said Macfarren.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the boy, making a strenuous effort to pull himself together. "I hate to leave this good company, but I must go. I happen to pay Ike wages, but he is my friend. He has asked for me, and I am going to him."

"Oh, blank it all! Don't be a fool," said the policeman. "Ike's all right. He has been taking an extra drink, but you can't kill Ike. Wait for half an hour, and we'll go down and see how he is."

The young lad hesitated. The stranger made a signal to Smiley, and suddenly Shock found himself pushed backward from the entrance, and the door slammed in his face.

"Open that door!" he heard The Kid cry.

There was a murmur in response.

"Open it, I say, Simmons."

Again a murmur.

"No, I am going. I will go myself. Ike wants me." The boy's voice was loud and hard.

"That's mine," the voice cried again. "Let that go at once!"

There was a sound of scuffling and of falling chairs. With a kick Shock sent the door flying open, and saw three men struggling with Stanton. Smiley had wound his long arms about him from behind, the Inspector held his arm in a firm grip with one hand and with the other had hold of the stranger, who had The Kid by the throat. Macfarren was still at the table, evidently gathering up what lay upon it.

In an instant Shock sprang into the fray. With a single jerk he tore Smiley from his victim and flung him on the floor. Reaching for the stranger, who was choking The Kid, he caught his wrist and gave it a slight turn. With a yell of pain the stranger turned upon him and aimed a blow at Shock's face. Catching the blow on his arm, Shock seized his assailant by the shoulder, jerked him clear of his feet, and flung him far into the corner of the room. At this the policeman immediately gave back.

For a few seconds The Kid stood swaying unsteadily. Then, after he recovered his breath he turned to Shock and said, "I hardly expected to ever feel grateful to you, but I assure you I appreciate your timely help."

Then turning to the others, and regaining his wonted smile and easy manner, he continued,

"Gentlemen, you are somewhat insistent in your hospitality. It is always instructive, and sometimes pleasant, to extend our knowledge of our friends, and now let me say that a more blackguardly lot of thieves I have never met, and if this gentleman who has dropped in so opportunely will kindly stand at my back for a few minutes, I shall be delighted to make good my words by slapping your faces." The Kid's tone was low and gentle, even sweet.

"Mr. Macfarren, your venerable beard prevents me. Simmons, your general sliminess protects you, but as for you, Inspector Haynes, it gives me great pleasure to express my opinion of you—thus!" His open hand flashed out as he spoke and caught Haynes on the cheek a stinging blow.

With an oath the Inspector jerked out his pistol and sprang at him. "I arrest you, sir, in the name of the Queen. Move your hand and you are a dead man."

"So be you, Mr. Inspector," drawled a quiet voice in the door.

Shock turned, and to his unspeakable amazement saw his sick friend standing with his gun covering the Inspector.

"One step back, please, Mr. Inspector. Quick! This trigger goes mighty easy. Now, right wheel!" The Inspector hesitated a second. "Quick!" cried Ike sharply. "Don't you fool too long obeyin' orders. I aint used to it. I'm here exercisin' a public function, preventin' murder, in short, and I'll drop you in your tracks if you don't move at the next

word. You here me? And if you don't intend to move at the next word, say your prayers in this interval. Now then, back up to that table and put down that gun. Correct. Very nice, indeed."

Ike's voice took on more and more of its customary drawl.

"Now, two steps forward. Right. Now, you can —go—to—the—devil!"

Ike stepped to the table, took up the pistol, and returned to his place at the door, saying:

"Say, boss, this prayer meetin's over. Let's go home."

"Not until the Inspector says so," said The Kid, who had recovered himself, and who was now quite sober. "He has the word now, Ikey, so don't interfere."

"All right, Kiddie, play your game. You're equivalent to it, I surmise."

"I think so," said the Kid sweetly. Then, turning to the Inspector, he continued in a voice of gentle consideration, "There is something on your cheek, Inspector Haynes. You have not observed it. Allow me to point it out to you."

He moved forward as he spoke, but Shock interposed.

"I think that is enough, Mr. Stanton," he said. "Let the matter drop now."

The boy turned quickly, and looking steadily into Shock's face, began in a quiet, even voice, "Mr.—ah——"

"Macgregor," supplied Shock.

"Mr. Macgregor, you are a stranger. In this country in a matter of this kind we never allow interference."

"And yet," said Shock in a voice equally quiet, "interference is not unwelcome at times."

"What you say is quite true," replied the boy, "and, as I have said, I am not ungrateful for your timely assistance."

"Oh, I was thinking of Ike," said Shock hurriedly. "But surely you will let this matter drop now."

"Drop!" roared the Inspector. "Blank your impudence! He has called me a thief, and he has slapped my face while doing my duty. I will have the lot of you arrested for interference with justice. And as for you, Stanton, we shall settle this again."

So saying, the Inspector made for the door.

At the door Ike still stood on guard.

"When you want me, Mr. Inspector," he said, "don't have any delinquency in sendin' for me. I surmise I can contribute some valuable evidence on the point of guns, games, and such."

The Inspector glared at him.

"I'll take my gun," he said.

"Your gun? Why, cert! Did you drop it somewhere? Perhaps if you look round when the light's good you'll find it. Slimey, here, will help you. I'm pretty nigh certain you'll extradite that weapon in the morning. Good-night."

With a curse the Inspector passed out.

"Now, Ikey," said The Kid coolly, "stand aside,

for there is a cur here that had the audacity to throttle me."

With these words he sprang past Shock, seized the stranger by the throat, cuffed him with his open hand, and dragging him to the door sent him forth with a parting kick and an imprecation.

"Now, Macfarren," he said, turning to that gentleman, who still sat by the table, "you have some money not belonging to you. Put it on the table."

Without a moment's hesitation Macfarren hastily poured forth from his pocket poker-chips, gold pieces, and bills.

"I assure you, Mr. Stanton," he hurried to say, "I was simply holding them till the—ah—trouble should be over."

"That was most kind," replied Stanton. "I have no very clear remembrance, but I was under the impression that it was your suggestion to lock the door." As he spoke he swept the money into his pocket.

"Certainly, but my only intention was to keep out—ah—strangers and—intruders. You know, Mr. Stanton, I would be no party to robbery, and, indeed, I do not believe for a moment that any robbery was intended. It was an unfortunate eagerness on the part of Crawley to secure his winnings that precipitated the trouble. I really hope you do not think me capable of anything of the sort."

Macfarren's manner was abject, but his tone was evidently sincere.

"You were unfortunate in your company, then, Mr. Macfarren. Come on, Ike. We are done with

this gang. Lucky I was not quite slewed, or my creditors would have been in mourning to-morrow. Mr. Macgregor, where do you put up?"

"He's with me to-night," said Ike, "and a mighty fortunate circumstance it was for us all. This here business had got beyond my capabilities. Some of us need a keeper."

"That's me, Ikey. Yes, I know. Rub it in. It's a keeper I need. Well, I give you my word I am done with this gang. Fool! Fool!" he continued bitterly, "a cursed fool, Ikey. Three years of it now."

"That's what," said Ikey, leading the way down the street. "For the past two years, boss, you know you've beat me. Though I don't hold myself out as no sort of paradox——"

"Paragon, Ikey," said The Kid, with a gentle laugh. He always found his cowboy's English amusing.

"Paragon, eh? Well, all the same, I aint no sort of paragon, but I know where to stop."

"Where are we now, Ike? At the end of the rope, eh?"

"No, by the livin' Gimmini! but gettin' there on the jump," said Ike, with grave emphasis.

Without further conversation they made their way through the dark streets till they reached Ike's shack. The doctor lay still asleep in the corner.

"He kidnapped him," was Ike's explanation to The Kid, nodding his head toward Shock. "So I'd advise that you hitch on to the preacher here for a period. Give him the job of windin' you up."

"Could you undertake that, do you think?" There was a curious smile on the boy's face, but an undertone of seriousness in his voice.

"No," said Shock gravely, "I could not undertake that."

"You see, Ike, I am too uncertain. Too far gone, I guess."

Ike was too puzzled to reply. He had a kind of dim idea that in Shock there was some help for his boss, and he was disappointed at Shock's answer.

For some time Shock sat in silence, looking at the fire. His heart was sore. He felt his helplessness. This clever, gay-hearted young fellow, with all his gentleness of manner, was unapproachable. He belonged to another world, and yet Shock yearned over him with a tenderness inexplicable to himself. The Kid gave him no opening. There was a kind of gay defiance in his bearing, as if he had read Shock's heart and were determined to keep him at arm's length. Instinctively Shock knew that he must wait his opportunity.

"Well, guess we'd better turn in," suggested Ike. "Can you two bunk together? That bed'll hold you both, I guess."

"No, thanks," said Shock decidedly. "That is your bed. I'll spread my blankets on the floor."

"In this country," said Stanton, "we give the stranger the bed, so you need not scruple to turn Ike out of his. Ike and I will take the floor."

"Not this time," said Shock firmly. "I am thankful enough for shelter, without taking a man's bed.

Besides," he added, suddenly remembering, "Ike needs his bed to-night, after his sick turn."

"Yes, by Jove! By the way," exclaimed Stanton, "what happened, Ike?"

"A sudden and unexpected predisposition which takes me now and then," turning his back upon Shock and solemnly winking at The Kid; "but I recover just as quickly, and when I do I'm as slick as ever, and slicker. These here turns work off a lot of bad blood, I guess."

During his speech he continued winking at The Kid. That young gentleman gazed at him in amazed silence. Gradually, a light broke in upon him.

"Look here, Ike, what in thunder do you mean?"

"I say, boss," said Ike persuasively, "just go easy. You oughn't to excite yourself. 'Taint good for you, and 'taint good for me, either. My doctor says so. I wouldn't persecute your enquiries at this late hour of the night."

Ike's gravity was imperturbable.

"Well, I be blanked! I beg your pardon, Mr. Macgregor. Ike, you're a cool one. You've got the nerve of——" Here The Kid began to laugh, and Shock, all unsuspecting of Ike's scheme for getting his boss out of the clutches of his spoilers, gazed from the one to the other with an air of such absolute perplexity that The Kid went off into immoderate fits of laughter. Ike's gravity remained unbroken.

"All the same, boss," he said, "you want to keep an eye on that outfit. They'll get even. That man Crawley and the Inspector aint goin' to rest easy

where they are. Marks like what you put on 'em burn to the bone."

"They cannot hurt me, Ike," said the Kid lightly, "and I think they will be afraid to try. But Mr. Macgregor here has got into trouble. Is not Macfarren a church warden, or something, in your Church?"

"He is a manager, I think," said Shock. "Pretty much the same thing."

"Well, he is a man to look out for. I can get along without him, but you cannot, can you? I mean, he can hurt you."

"No," said Shock quietly, "he cannot hurt me. The only man that can hurt me is myself. No other man can. And besides," he added, pulling a little Bible out of his pocket, "I have a Keeper, as Ike said."

As Shock opened the little Bible he became conscious of a sense of mastery. His opportunity had come.

"Listen to this," he said, and he read in a voice of assured conviction:

> "The Lord is thy keeper.
> The Lord shall keep thee from all evil.
> He shall keep thy soul.
> The Lord shall keep thy going out and thy coming in.
> From this time forth and forevermore."

He closed the book and put it in his pocket.

"No," he said, "no man can hurt me." Then turning to Ike he said quietly, "I always say my

prayers. My mother started me twenty-five years ago, and I have never seen any reason to quit."

While his tone was gentle and his manner simple, there was almost a challenge in his eyes. The fair face of young Stanton flushed through the tan.

"You do your mother honour," he said, with quiet dignity.

"I say," said Ike slowly, "if you kin do it just as convenient, perhaps you'd say 'em out. Wouldn't do us no harm, eh, Kiddie?"

"No, I should be pleased."

"Thank you," said Shock. Then for a moment he stood looking first at Ike's grave face, and then at The Kid, out of whose blue eyes all the gay, reckless defiance had vanished.

"Don't imagine I think myself a bit better than you," said Shock hastily, voice and lip quivering.

"Oh, git out!" ejaculated Ike quickly. "That aint sense."

"But," continued Shock, "perhaps I have had a little better chance. Certainly I have had a good mother."

"And I, too," said the boy, in a husky voice.

So the three kneeled together in Ike's shack, each wondering how it had come about that it should seem so natural and easy for him to be in that attitude.

In a voice steady and controlled Shock made his prayer. Humility and gratitude for all that had been done for him in his life, an overwhelming sense of need for the life demanded in this God-forgetting country, and a great love and compassion for the two

men with whom he had so strangely been brought into such close relation swelled in his heart and vibrated through his prayer.

Ike's face never lost its impassive gravity. Whatever may have been his feelings, he gave no sign of emotion. But the lad that kneeled on the other side of Shock pressed his face down hard into his hands, while his frame shook with choking, silent sobs. All that was holiest and tenderest in his past came crowding in upon him, in sad and terrible contrast to his present.

Immediately after the prayer Shock slipped out of the shack.

"I say, boss," said Ike, as he poked the fire, "he's a winner, aint he? Guess he hits the sky all right, when he gets onto his knees. By the livin' Gimmini! when that feller gits a-goin' he raises considerable of a promotion."

"Commotion, Ikey," said The Kid gently. "Yes, I believe he hits the sky—and he says he needs a Keeper."

"Well," said Ike solemnly, "I have a lingerin' suspicion that you're correct, but if he needs a Keeper, what about us?"

XIII

THE PRESIDENT OF GUY'S, LONDON

DR. BURTON was never quite clear as to how he had found himself in the early morning on the Loon Lake trail, with a man whom he had never seen before, nor how, after he had discovered himself in that position, he had been persuaded to continue his journey, much less to take up with such enthusiasm the treatment of the cases to which he had been summoned by that same stranger. Indeed, he did not come to a clear consciousness of his sayings and doings until he found himself seated at a most comfortable breakfast in the house of the Old Prospector, with this same strange gentleman sitting opposite him. Even then, before reaching a solution of the problem as to how he had arrived at that particular place and in that particular company, to his amazement he found himself interested in the discussion of the cases on hand.

With the Old Prospector he had little difficulty. Inflammatory rheumatism, with a complication of pneumonia; in itself not necessarily fatal, or even dangerous, but with a man of the Old Prospector's age and habits of life this complication might any moment become serious. He left some medicine, ordered