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FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN; OR, THE YOUNG INVENTOR'S TRIP TO THE FAR WEST.

E. P. LATHAM

FRANK READE, JR.
Frank Reade Jr., and His New Steam Man; OR, THE YOUNG INVENTOR'S TRIP TO THE FAR WEST.

By "NAMELESS,"

Author of "Frank Reade Jr.'s Electric Cyclone; or, Thrilling Adventures in No Man's Land," etc.

CHAPTER I

A GREAT WRONG.

FRANK READE was noted the world over as a wonderful and distinguished inventor of marvelous machines in the line of steam and electricity. But he had grown old and unable to knock about the world, as he had been wont once to do.

So it happened that his son, Frank Reade, Jr., a handsome and talented young man, succeeded his father as a great inventor, even excelling him in variety and complexity of invention. The son speedily surpassed his father.

The great machine shops in Rostedtown were enlarged by young Frank, and new flying machines, electric wonders, and so forth, were brought into being.

But the elder Frank would maintain that, inasmuch as electricity at the time was an undeveloped factor, his invention of the steam Man was really the most wonderful of all.

"It cannot be improved upon," he declared, positively. "Not if steam is used as a motive power."

Frank, Jr., laughed quietly, and nodded his father on the back.

"Dad," he said, with an affecting air, though lanterning as, "what would you think if I should produce a most remarkable improvement upon your Steam Man?"

"You can't do it," declared the senior Reade.

Frank, Jr., said no more, but smiled in a significant manner. One day later, the doors of the secret draughting-room of design were tightly locked and young Frank came forth only to his meals.

For three months this matter of closed doors continued. In the machine shop department, where the parts of machinery were accurately put together, the ring of hammers might have been heard, and a big sign was upon the door:

No admittance!

Thus matters were when one evening Frank left his arduous duties to spend a few hours with his wife and little boy.

But just as he was passing out of the yard, a darkly, short in stature and of genial features, rushed excitedly up to him.

"Oh, Marce Frank," cried the able seer, "jes' wait one moment!"

"Well, Pomp," said Frank, pleasantly, "what can I do for you?

The darkly, who was a faithful servant of the Reades, and had accompanied both on their tours in foreign lands, ducked his head, with a grin, and replied:

"Ya' father wants ye', Marse Frank; jes' as quick as eber yo' kin come!"

"My father," exclaimed Frank, quickly, "what is it?"

"I don't know nuffin' 'bout it all, Marce Frank. He jes' say to me to tell yo' he wants to see you!"

"Where is he?"

"In his library, wah."

"All right, Pomp. Tell him I will come at once."

The darkly darted away. Frank saw that the doors to the secret rooms were locked. This was a wise precaution for hosts of cranks and deformed inventors were always hovering about the place and would quickly have stolen the designs if they could have got at them.

Not ten minutes later Frank entered the library where his father was.

The elder Reade was pacing up and down in great excitement.

"Well, my son, you have come at last!" he cried. "I have much wanted to see you."

"I am at your service, father," replied Frank. "What is it?"

"I want you to tell me what kind of a machine you have been getting up.""

"Come now, that's not fair," said Frank Jr. with twinkling eyes.

"Well, if it's any kind of a machine that can travel over the prairies tell me so," cried the elder Reade, excitedly.

Frank, Jr., was at a loss to exactly understand what his father was driving at. However, he replied:

"Well, I may safely say that it is. Now explain yourself."

"I will," replied the senior Reade. "I have a matter of greatest importance to give you, Frank, my boy. If your invention is as good as your steam man even, and does not improve upon it, it will yet perform the work which I want it to do."

A light broke across Frank, Jr.'s face."

"Ah!" he cried. "I see what you are driving at. You have an undertaking for me and my new machine."

Frank, Jr., looked suddenly at Frank, Jr., and replied:

"You have hit the nail upon the head."

"What is it?"

"First, I must tell you a story."

"Well!"

"It would take me some time to go into the details, but I will not attempt to do that but give you a simple statement of facts; in short, the outline of the story."

"All right. Let us have it."

The senior Reade cleared his throat and continued:

"Many years ago when I was traveling in Australia I was set upon by bushmen and would have been killed but for the sudden arrival upon the scene of a countryman of mine, a man of about my own age and as plucky as a fox."

"His name was Jim Travers, and I had known him in New York as the son of a wealthy family. He was of a roving temperament, however, and this is what had brought him to Australia."

"Well, Travers saved my life. He beat off my assailants and nursing my wounds brought me back to life."

"I have felt ever since, and now I saved him a debt which could not be fully repaid. At that time I could make no return for the service."

"Before I left I drifted through the gold fields together. Then I lost track of him, and until the other day I have not seen or heard from him."

"But I now find that it is in my power to give him assistance, in fact to partly pay the debt I owe him. This brings us to the matter in hand."

Six months ago it seems that Jim who is now a man of great wealth, still a bachelor and for a few years past, living at a fashionable hotel in New York went to his club. When he returned in the evening he found a note written like this:

Mr. Reade laid a note upon the table, Frank read it:

"DEAR TRAVERS: I would like to see you to-night upon a very important matter. Will you meet me in twenty minutes at the cafe on your corner. I must see you, so be sure and come."

"A FRIEND."

"Of course Jim wondered at the note, but he did not know of an enemy in the world, so he felt perfectly safe in keeping the appointment. He started for the cafe."

"The night was dark and misty, Jim walked along and had not got near the cafe when somebody stepped out of a dark alley and grasped his arm."

"Come in here," a sharp voice said, we can talk better here than in the cafe."

"Before Jim could make any resistance he was pulled into a dark alley. Two men had held him and something wet was dashed across his face and over his hands, then he felt some liquid poured covering clothes and some object thrown into his pockets."

"Then the door opened again and he was flung out into the street. Jim was unhurt, but amazed at such treatment. He had not been hurt and was at a loss to understand what it all meant."

"It was no incident had taken but a few moments in its course. At first a thought of foul play had flashed across Jim. Then it occurred to him to look at his hands, which were wet with some substance."

"He gave a great cry of horror as he did so. There was blood upon them."

"A Friend."
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"In fact his hands and face and clothes were almost soaked in red blood. For to instant he was his eyes filled with tears, and his face was a mass of grief and anguish.

"What mystery was this? But he quickly changed his opinion and actually laughed.

"It occurred to him as a practical joke upon the part of his club friends. Saddened by this he resolved to get even with them.

"He tried to open the door, through which he had been pulled. It was locked, and the key for it was in the possession of the club men.

"Then he decided to go back to his room and wash off the blood. But he had not gone one step before he was met in the glare of the lamp by one of the club men.

""Thunder! What's the matter with you, Travers?" asked his friend.

"Jim, nothing, only a little practical joke the boys have been playing on me," replied Jim with a grin. Two or three others came along and Jim explains in like manner. Then he goes to his apartments. The door is then locked, and Jim finds the door open and a fearful scene within. The furniture, the light carpet and the walls in places are smeared with blood. Jim now got angry.

"This is carrying a joke a little too far!" he cried, heatedly. "This spoiling fine furniture is too much."

"But he went to washing the blood from his hands. This was a hard job and took time. Suddenly half a dozen officers came into the room and seized him.

"What do you want?" cried poor Jim is surprise.

"We want you," they replied.

"For what?"

"For murder."

Instead of being horrified, Jim was mad, madder than a March hare. He just laughed at the officers. "I don't like this sort of thing," he declared. "It's carrying a joke too far."

The officers only laughed, and slapped mauscles upon his wrists. Then they led him away to prison. Not until brought into court did poor Jim know that he had been made a victim of a delinquent scheme. More than one person was committed in that house into which Jim had been dragged, and where he was smeared with blood. A man unknown, was there found literally carved to pieces with a knife.

Blood had been found upon Jim in his room. A trail led from the house to his room. A knife was found in his coat pocket. The evidence was all against him and his trial had just come off and he had just been sentenced to death by hanging with only three months of grace.

Frank Reade, Jr., listened to this thrilling tale with sensations which the author deplored. It was so horrible, so strange, so ghastly that he could hardly believe it true. He arose and walked once across the room.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW STEAM MAN.

Here the young inventor paused before his father, and in a deeply impressed manner said:

"Then an innocent man stands convicted of murder!"

"Yes.

"In that case it is the duty of every philanthropic man to try and save the innocent.

"It is."

"We must do it."

"I am glad to hear you say that."

"But the question now arises as to how we shall be able to do it."

"Is there no clue to the real assassin?"

"No definite clue.

"That is very strange. Of course there must have been a motive. That motive would seem to be to get Travers out of the way."

"Yes."

"But he has no enemies?"

"None that he knew of."

"Ah, but what would any one gain by putting him out of the way?"

Frank Reade, Jr., passed. He gazed steadily at his father. Much passed between them in that glance.

"His fortune is a large one." put in the senior Reade, "the right to inherit would furnish the best motive. There is but one heir, and he is a nephew, Artemas Clift, who is a stockman, somewhere in the Far West."

"Could not?" Frank Reade, Jr., sat down and dropped into a brown study. After a time he arised.

"I am impressed in this case," he declared, "And my Steam Man is at the disposal of justice at any time. But you spoke of the prairies. Is there a clue in the West?"

"You really dwell possible to obtain at present," declared Mr. Reade, Jr., "You see detectives tracked two suspicious men to Kansas. There they lost track of them. Everybody believes that they were an assassin."

"Well, I believe it," cried Frank Reade, Jr., with impulse. "Can I take but one logical explanation of this matter. Either Artemas Clift invented the two ruffians to do this awful deed for the sake of traver's money—or the case is one not possible to solve with ease."

Frank Reade, Sr., did not display surprise at this statement of his son.

"Now you have the whole thing in a nutshell, my boy," he said. "Of course, you can do as you please, but if you wish to take any kind of a journey with your new invention, here is a chance, and a noble object in view. That object should be to track down the mysterious and clear Jim Travers. It may be that the nephew, Artemas Clift, is the really guilty one, but in any case, I believe that it is in the West you will find the solution of the mystery."

"Oh, my boy," said Frank Reade, Jr., "but now that this matter is settled let me show you the plans of the steam man."

Frank Reade, Jr., drew a roll of papers from his pocket and spread them out upon the table.

Upon them were the blue print plans and drawings of the mechanism of the Steam Man.

Frank Reade, Sr., examined them carefully and critically. From one place to another he went and after some time drew a deep breath saying:

"Well, young blood is the best after all. I must say, Frank, that I am impressed. There is no doubt about it that you have improved upon my Steam Man. I congratulate you."

"Thank you," said Frank Reade, Jr., with gratification.

"If I am anxious to make a man," he added. "You shall," replied the young inventor. "To-morrow the Steam Man will go out of the shop upon his trial trip."

A few minutes later Frank Reade, Jr., was on the way to his own house. He was in a particularly happy frame of mind. He had achieved great results in his new invention, and here, as by design, was a chance afforded him to use the Steam Man to a philanthropic and heroic purpose.

The idea of traveling through the wilds of the West was a thrilling one. Frank could already picture the effect of the Steam Man upon the wild haunts of the plains and the outskirts of Western Kansas and Colorado.

Also the level floor-lit prairie of that region would afford excellent traveling for the new invention.

Frank Reade, Jr., was a man of adventure. It was an inborn love. The prospect before him fired his very soul. It was just what he desired. The thought he unfolded all his plans to his wife.

Of course Mrs. Reade was averse to her husband undertaking such a dangerous trip. But after a time she overcame her scruples and reconciled herself to it.

The next morning at an early hour, Frank was at the engine house of the steam works. The wide doors were thrown open and a wonderful sight revealed.

There stood the Steam Man. Frank Reade, Sr., and a great number of friends were present. Pomp, the negro, was also there, as well as a queer-looking little Irishman with a genuine Irishman and twinkling eyes, who bespoke a nature brimming over with fun. This was Barney O'Sheen.

Barney and Pomp had long been faithful servants of the Reades. In all of their travels with their inventions they had accompanied them. Of these two characters we shall say no more, but permit the reader to become acquainted with them in the course of the story.

The senior Reade examined the mechanism of the new Steam Man with deepest interest.

"Upon my word, Frank," he cried, "you have beaten me out and on. I can hardly believe my eyes."

Frank Reade, Jr., laughed good humorously. Then he went about showing a party of friends the mechanism of the new Steam Man.

The man himself was a structure of iron plates joined in sections with rivets, hinges or bars as the needs required. The frame and form of the machine was a good imitation of a man done in steel. In no wise did he look ponderous or unwieldy, though his stature was fully nine feet.

The man stood erect holding the shafts of a wagon at his hips. The wagon itself was light but roomy with four wheels and a top covering of fine steel net work. This was impervious to a bullet while anyone inside could see quite well about them. There were loop-holes in this netting to put the rifle barrels through in case of a fight.

A part of the wagon was used as a coal hanger. Other small compartments held a limited amount of stones, ammunition and weapons. Upon the fender in front was a brake to regulate the wagon on a slight incline, and a slide in the work here and there to keep the waste from the reins, two long lines connecting with the throttle and whistle valves. A word as to the mechanism of the man. Here was really the finest work of the invention.

Steam was the motive power. The hollow legs and arms of the machine made the reservoir or boilers. In the head chest was the furnace. Fully two hundred pounds of coal was here placed, keeping up a fire sufficient to generate steam for a long time.

The steam chest was upon the man's back, and here were a number of valves. The tall bar from the man formed the smoke stack. The driving rods, in sections, extended down the man's legs, and could be set in motion so skillfully that a tremendous stride was attained, and a speed far beyond the plumes of my steam man. This was the new steam man. The improvements were many and manifold.

The mechanism was more nicely balanced, the parts more strongly joined, and the steel of finer quality. Greater speed was the certainty.
Fire was burning in the furnace, steam was hissing from the retort, and smoke was pouring from the top of the man. Frank Reade, Jr., suddenly sprang in the wagon.

He closed the screen door behind him. Pomp was engaged in some work at the rear of the man.

Frank took up the reins and pulled them. The throttle was opened and the whistle valve.

Three sharp shrieks the new Steam Man gave and then he was away on the trial trip.

Out of the yard he went and out upon the highway.

Everybody looked to the gates and watched the wagons go up. Down the highway went the Steam Man at a terrific gait.

The horses were long and powerful. So rapidly were they made that a tremendous amount of surface was covered.

It was a good stretch in the road.

Just ahead was a man riding a horse. Near him was a bicyclist who was noted as a fast rider.

Both had heard that the Steam Man would make his trial run that morning.

Both had been made by both that they could beat the Man.

Frank guessed the chance at once.

"Kil dar, Mars Frank," cried Pomp, with a chuckle and a shake of his woolly head. "Dem two chaps ain't got a pile ob gal. Jee y'yo show them dat dey ain't in it. Won't y'yo?"

Pomp had more than one reason for beating the horses and bicycle. He had made a small bet of his own on the result.

It was evident that the parties ahead were ready for the fun.

Frank Reade, Jr., smiled grimly, and opened the throttle a little wider.

The next moment the Steam Man, the bicycle rider and the trotter were all flying neck and neck down the road.

Sneerest! what a race that was!

Down the road they flew like a whirlwind. The dust flew up behind them in a cloud.

But the Steam Man just trotted by his competitors with seemingly no experience at all. Frank turned with a laugh to see how easily they were distanced.

After a good trial, the new Steam Man returned to the foundry yard.

As Pomp stepped down out of the wagon, his father came up and grasped his hand in an ecstasy of delight.

"Bravo, my son," he cried. "You have eclipsed my invention. I wish you luck, and I know that you will succeed in clearing Jim Travers.

"I shall take only Barney and Pomp with me," said Frank Reade, Jr., "I'll try to find him in the wagon for more."

"Well, they will be useful companions," said the Senior Reade.

"My son; may God be with you in your enterprise."

Frank Reade, Jr., at once proceeded to make preparations for his western trip.

He visited Travers in prison and talked with him.

"To tell the truth, I am distrustful of my nephew, Artemis Cliff. He is an arrant villain, and a number of times has tried to swindle me out of money. I know that he has led the life of an outlaw out there on the border."

"But he wished to gain your wealth, why did he not attempt your life in some direct manner?" asked Frank.

"I presume he may have failed detection," replied Travers. "If I am wrong for this unknown villain, the mystery will be solved forever. They real murderer will never be known."

"I believe you are right," agreed Frank Reade, Jr., "I will find this out the Ariz, and do the best I can towards clearing up the mystery and setting you right."

"Thank you!" said Travers with emotion. "I feel that you will succeed."

CHAPTER III.

ON THE PLAINS.

The scene of our story now undergoes a great change.

We will transfer the reader from Rendatown to the plains of the Far West. Fully fire hundred miles from civilization, and right in the heart of the region of the hostile Sioux.

Frank Reade, Jr., had transported the Steam Man as far as possible by rail.

From there he had journeyed the rest of the ways overland.

Nothing exciting had occurred during their journey, but they were upon the verge of the most exciting adventures as the reader will hereafter agree, possible to be experienced by man.

With the heads of rolling plant on every hand, one morning in Jane the Steam Man might have been seen making its way along at a moderate gait.

Frank Reade, Jr., with Barney and Pomp were in the wagon.

Frank held the reins and his keen gaze swept the prairie in every direction.

As far as the eye could reach there remained the same broad expanse.

There was little to break the monotonous.

Barney and Pomp had taken advantage of a hill in their duties to play a social game of poker in the rear of the man. These two delightful characters, although the warmest of friends, were nevertheless always engaged in bagging each other or the perpetration of practical jokes.

"Well, Pomp," said Barney, "I'm ten better on that, yes black apron," cried Barney, throwing down a handful of chips. "I'll take me wondry if it's a big bluff yez are playin'. Yes can't fool me."

"Yeene will jest find out dis digger nebber plays a bluff game," returned Pomp with a chuckle. "Just y'yo look out fo' yoleh, fish."

"Begorra, I ain't afraid av yez an' I'll go ye the tin," cried Barney. There was a broad grin upon Pomp's face. He quietly picked up ten chips and then put in ten more.

"Hold on, Pomp, I'll go yonse ten better,"

"Call yez, be hivenous!" cried Barney, chuckling in tea more.

Then he threw down his cards.

"Can yez bate that?" he cried, triumphantly. "Give up the pot, naygbur. Yez are no good.""

"Pomp put one blue chip over the pile of chips.

"Jes'a wait one minnit, fish."

"Wurrozey! Yez can't bate it!" cried Pomp, confidently.

He had thrown a good hand containing four kings and two aces.

But Pomp quietly laid down four aces.

The picture was one well worthy of an artist. For a moment the two players gazed at each of the six aces in amazement. It was a very curious anomaly that there should be six aces in one pack of cards.

Then Barney sprang up furiously.

"Begorra, it's a big cheat ye are!" he cried, angrily. "Whoever saw the jokers av that? Be no new, the one pile is mine!"

"Don' y'yo puny hands on dem chips, fish," cried Pomp angrily.

"Pomp y'yo kin tell me wharfor yez got dem two aces, maybe yez was in on y'yo's part."

"Bejabers, yez war in the pack, but yez kin tell me perhaps where yez got them four aces yez put down there!"

"I tell yeo', fish. Day was in de pack."

"Bejabers it's the fast pack av cards I ever saw with six aces in it," retorted Barney.

"Now don'y y'yo gib me any mo' ob yoa'ss, fish," blustered Pomp.

"I'll jes'make yez sorry if y'yo do!"

"Bejabers yez ain't the size!"

"Look out fo' yosef, fish."

"Wurrozey!"

Over went the table leaf, down went the chips in the bottom of the wagon, and the two angry poker players closed in a livelier wrestle.

When the moment was ripe, that the Steam Man tripped the Ceil up and both fell in a heap in the bottom of the wagon.

They chanced to fall against the wire screen door in the rear of the wagon.

It was unlocked and gave way beneath the pressure, and the two practical jokers went through it and out upon the hard floor of the wagon.

They were rolled about in a cloud of dust, and had they not been of something more than ordinary composition they would have suffered from broken bones.

But as it was both picked themselves up unhurt.

The Steam Man had gone on fully one hundred yards before Frank Reade, Jr., perceived that he was missing, and at once closed the throttle and brought the Man to a halt.

"Serves the rascal right," muttered Frank, as he saw them pick themselves up from the dust. "They are always skying and no good comes of it."

Frank had stopped the Steam Man. He waited for the two jokers to pick themselves up and return to the wagon.

But at that moment the wagon was seen occurring.

Barney and Pomp had fallen near a clump of timber.

From this with wild yells a band of mounted Sioux indians suddenly appeared.

They were a war party—painted and bedecked with feathers, and in the full paraphernalia of war.

The peril which threatened the two jokers was one not to be deplored.

It was quite evident that the savages meant to cut off their rejoicing the Steam Man. In that case their fate would be sealed.

But Barney was quick-witted, and saw the situation at a glance.

With a wild howl he broke into a mad run for the Steam Man. It was a question of life or death and he ran as he had never run before.

Pomp was not so lucky. While Barney was distancing his pursuers, and actually succeeded in reaching the wagon, the darkly suddenly found himself cut off.

Indian ponies were circling about him, the red riders whooping and yelling like virtuous demons.

The poor darky was beset with terror and perplexity. "Golly sakes alibet!" he yelled, with his wool literally standing on end. "Whatbeber am dis yer nigger gwine fo' to? I sez a goon soon fo' to."

It certainly looked that way. The savages circled nearer and half a dozen of them dismounted and rushed upon Pomp.

Now the darky was unarmed.

He had not even a pistol or a knife. Of course he was at their mercy. In less time than it takes to tell it, the savages had closed in about the terrified darky, and he was quickly thrown upon his back and bound.

Then he was laid across the back of a pony and tied on securely.

Then a lariat was attached to the pony's bridle, and the savages with their prisoner in their midst dashed away.

Barney had reached the Steam Man and climbed into the wagon.

Frank Reade, Jr., had seen the whole affair, and for a moment was too bewildered to act.

Then as Barney came tumbling into the wagon, Frank turned the man around and sent him flying toward the savages.

This move was quickly made, and the Steam Man ran forward
FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

Chapter IV.

The cowboys.

Frank had spoken truthfully. The land of savages was really a paradise, and Black Buffalo was the chief of the Pawnee tribe. Throughout all the Kansas border this blood thirsty band was known and feared.

One day a large body of the savages came in search of Black Buffalo. The savages had captured him and his brother, and were carrying him off to be sold as slaves.

Barney was a spy and was sent to check on the matter. He was successful and brought back the news that Black Buffalo had been captured.

Barney was determined to rescue Black Buffalo. He set out with a small band of cowboys and they soon met with the savages.

A battle ensued and the cowboys were victorious. Black Buffalo was freed and they all rejoiced.

"We are free," cried Black Buffalo, "and we thank you for your help."
Yes.

"Pardon, senor, but I cannot see in what manner I can serve you."

"You must assist me. One of my men—a colored man—has fallen into the hands of the Indians. They have made him prisoner and have just escaped with him into these hills. I ask your assistance in effecting his rescue."

A peculiar smile played about the cowboy's lips.

"He sêt the one you call Pomp?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And that man with you in your cage there is called Barney?"

"Yes."

"Ah, I see—Barney and Pomp. Well, Senor Reade, praet accept my compliments and the wish that you may see civilization again alive, which will be the case. Ha—ha—ha! You have undeservedly been a death-trap!"

Something like a correct comprehension of affairs now began to dawn upon Frank Reade, Jr., and he thought.

"What do you mean?" he gasped in surprise. "Who are you?"

"Well, since you ask me I will tell you," replied the cowboy chief with a laugh. "I am no Spaniard, as you might have thought. I am as good an American as you, and you will have good cause to remember my name in the near future, provided you escape from this trap. I am the man you are so eagerly looking for—I am Artemas Clift."

"Heavens!" gasped Frank Reade, Jr., "the man I am looking for!"

"The same," replied Clift, mockingly. "You have undertaken quite a daring deed, my fine inventor, but you will find that you have gotten off a very much larger horse than you can muscle."

"We will see," began Frank.

"You see these men?" continued Clift. "They are my followers, hired out of your stable. It is they who are your uncle, Jim Travis, who are hang for murder! You can never prove him innocent—at least, never will, for you will never go from here alive."

"Sounded! cried Frank. "You are the real murderer!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Prove it if you can!" laughed the cowboy chief, derisively.

"I will prove it, if I have to drag the confession from your lips!" cried Frank, resolutely.

"Pahaw! Talk is cheap. Attention, men! Grab the throttle rein of the Steam Man destroy him! Forward! Charge!"

Frank Reade, Jr., heard the command and knew well the danger. He was at a loss to account for Clift's knowledge of him and his invention.

The young inventor was not aware of the fact that for weeks previously the starring forth of the Steam Man spies had been busy in Roundtop.

But such was the truth.

Artemas Clift had covered his tracks well. He knew that Frank Reade, the young inventor's father, was a friend of Travess and would Metric through, if possible.

Therefore he had provided well for giving Frank Reade, Jr., and the new Steam Man a hot reception on the plains.

With hour the cowboys descended upon the Steam Man.

They urged their horses forward at full gallop.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew well that it was possible for them to greatly injure his invention, but he made quick motion to defeat their plans.

He shouted to Barney:

"Give it to them, Barney. Shoot every man you can."

Then Frank opened the throttle, and let the Steam Man out for all he was worth.

It was an easy matter to outstrip the horses, and the Steam Man kept ahead, while he was caustic thundering on in the rear.

Then Frank slackened speed so as to keep up a uniform distance between the Man and the horses.

While Barney pored in shot after shot into the midst of the gang of pursuers.

The cowboys began to drop from their saddles one by one. It was a destructive and deadly fire.

And they strained every nerve in vain in an effort to reach the Steam Man. Frank kept the Man just far enough ahead to ensure safety and enable Barney to pick off the cowboys with ease.

It took Clift some time to tumble to this little game.

When he did, and realized that he was simply decimating numbers without gaining ground, he called a halt.

The cowboys were now near the tanks of a wide river which was really the Platte. Frank Reade, Jr., saw his advantage and brought the Steam Man to a stop. Then he threw a rifle and joined Barney.

CHAPTER V.

POMP'S RESCUE.

Berr it was hardly likely that the cowboys would stand their ground long under such fire.

As fast as they could Frank and Barney worked the repeaters.

The result was that quite a number of the foe lay dead upon the plains.

But Artemas Clift knew the fatality of remaining there. Being unable to catch the man, he knew that their only hope now was in retreat.

All of the cowboys fired at the Steam Man. The bullets rattled harmlessly against the steel cage.

Frank at once sprang to the reins and the brake and started the Steam Man in pursuit. It was a saving of tables.

The pursuers were now the pursued.

So it continued until suddenly, by the orders of Clift, the cowboys turned their horses into the river and forced it.

On one side the Indians were soon beyond the reach of the rifle balls.

The Steam Man of course could not follow.

The encounter with the cowboys was an end.

Once again the horsemen were not return to the plains to pursue. It did not keep on until the rolling plains hid them from view.

Clift's deadly threat against the Steam Man and its inventor, had made its mark. Frank did not, by any means, desist with himself that the villain would relinquish the attempt so easily.

"Well, Barney," he cried, cherubly, when satisfied that the skirmishing was over. "We have been out of that scrape a little the best of it. It has all turned out as I expected. That Clift is the real murderer."

"Begorra, it licks that way, Mister Frank," agreed Barney.

"And what does it do. We must plan to capture the villain, and wring a confession from him."

"Be jakers that's true. If I only had an opportunity I'd pretty quick ungagging his lips of victorians."

"But that does not settle the question of Pomp's fate," declared Frank. "He must be saved."

"Share, Mister Frank."

"But how can we do it?"

"Here is a conundrum."

Frank and the faithful Irishman stood looking at each other. It was a long time before either spoke.

"Finally Frank said:"

"There's only one way, Barney."

"An' what's that?"

"We've got to get into those hills in some way. I don't like to leave the Steam Man, but, to save Pomp I'd—"

The young inventor cheated to him again. A strange melody of sounds came from the direction of the pass.

There were wild yells and pistol shots, and then, out upon the prairie, the astonished savages saw a motley crew of horses and savages emerge.

The savage were fighting furiously. Frank knew enough of the Indians of that region to know what it all meant.

A band of Sioux and a band of Pawns, the deadliest of enemies, were engaged in a terrific battle.

Frank looked in the scenes of a glances.

He at once understood.

The band which had captured Pomp was undoubtedly the one engaging in this conflict. They had very likely met the Pawns in the upper part of the pass.

When the Pawns and Sioux met a fight always followed. Generally the latter came off the victors.

As it seemed now, however, the Pawns had the best of it.

They were working the Sioux in good fashion. Frank and Barney watched the scene a moment until suddenly a sharp cry burst from Barney.

"Begorra, Mister Frank, if there ain't the nagyew," he cried, wildly.

Barny was right. Frank glanced in the direction indicated and saw a thrilling act.

In the midst of the Sioux was Pomp bound to the back of a mustang.

Suddenly in the midst of the melee the horse was seen to bolt from the rest and dash out upon the prairie.

The Sioux, Pomp had no control over the beast, having his hands tied behind him.

The mustang took his own course and ran like the wind. The Sioux did not dare to any of them attempt pursuit. The bee in their front claimed their attention.

"Bejakers, the horse is runnin' away wid the nagle," cried Barney.

"Pawar will we do, Mister Frank?"

"Catch him if we can," cried Frank, seizing the throttle rein.

He opened the throttle and let the Steam Man go ahead; with long strides the machine began to gain upon the mustang.

Pomp was vainly endeavoring to free his hands.

If he could have done so, and could have got hold of the reins once, he could easily have stopped the horse.

But this he was unable to do.

As a result, the animal carried him along swiftly, and along the base of the hills.

Suddenly the mustang swerved and darted into a narrow pass.

Barney, at the loop-holes of the wagon with rifle in hand, had been sorely tempted to fire at the runaway.

But the fear of hitting Pomp had restrained him.

Now, however, the horse was out of range. But Frank headed the Steam Man for the pass.

Fortunately, it was unobstructed by bowders, and had a good level floor.

The Steam Man was enabled to forge along with safety.

But the mustang and his black rider had gone from sight. However the pursuers kept on.

Suddenly they came upon a broad plateau with steep descent upon all other sides. This extended among the hills for a distance of several miles.

A cloud of snow now rose up from Frank and Barney.

The mustang was seen racing along the edge of a mighty chasm. In a few seconds he would be almost sure to take an impossible leap over a deep gorge.
The precipitated of the huge bovver upon the Steam Man would have destroyed the invention and the lives of those on board. Time Pomp had been the danger. Another moment and it would have been too late.

"Ki ya, don't yo' see now, Marse Frank?" cried Pomp, wildiy.

"Ya hear?" repeated Frank, the bovver facing him.

"My God! that is a narrow shado. We would have been crushed to atoms in another moment as I live!"

"Ya be a damn fo'head! Give the spalpeens a good hit 'or cold lead!" shouted Barney, rushing to one of the loopholes with his rifle.

"That's right!" cried Frank, doing the same.

"Ole, yo' kin hit well but ya don't know 'ow to do it," chided in Pomp.

The two cowboys, seeing that their game was exposed, sprang up with wild shouts of diemay.

As they did so they were exposed to shots from below. The three rifles spoke sharply in chorus.

The two would-be destroyers trembled in a heap. Their fall was followed by a wild chorus of yells from the thickets and billboard piles above.

A volley of bullets came from there and rattled harmlessly against the steel setting, showing that the cowboys were there located in great force.

How they had chanced to be there at that critical moment our audience could not guess.

But Frank mentally concluded that at best they were but a division of Chiff's gang, and they had had missed the spot by chance.

Seeing the Steam Man they had seized what seemed to them a fine opportunity to destroy it.

How far short they came of it we have already seen.

A red-hot contest now began between the cowboys and those in the steel setting.

Of course our three friends had a vast advantage inasmuch as they were protected from the shots of their foes.

Of course the outlaws were not at a disadvantage, but it was not at all a difficult matter to pick them off occasionally with a rifle bullet.

Volley after volley the cowboys fired at the Steam Man.

When at length it became patent to them that their shots were futile, they made the air ring with yells of belligerent rage.

Then they ceased firing and silence ensued. Every cowboy had disappeared seemingly from the canyon wall.

But this did not deceive Frank Reade, Jr.

He knew that this was only a game of the foe and that it yet be unsafe to try the pass.

"Bejabers, ain't there some other way we gettin' out at this place?" cried Barney, giving the plateau a sweeping glance.

But the claim of hills surrounding it did not lend color to such a possibility.

"It don't look like it," said Frank, dubiously.

"I jes' tink dat am de only way out ob dis place," said Pomp.

"We are in a kind of trap," declared Frank Reade, Jr.

"We were not sharp or we would have avoided this scrap.

But the claim of hills surrounding it did not lend color to such a possibility.

"They're tryin' to surround us!" cried Barney.

Frank watched the maneuver with deep interest.

It was not at all amusing.

This was certainly the purpose of the foe. But the young inventor was in a better position of his own chances.

"They will not gain what they hope to," he said, resolutely.

Then he saw that a line of armored men had deployed across the mouth of the Pass to prevent the Steam Man from escaping in that direction.

In Frank's judgment there were fully two hundred cowboys in the party. This was tremendous odds, but the young inventor did not fear the results.

With a wild cheer the cowboys began to close their line in about the Steam Man.

Frank Reade, Jr., opened the whistle valve and let out several sharp shrieks.

Then he started the Steam Man in a straight line for the pass. Pomp and Barney with their repeaters began to fire on the line of men before.

The repeaters did deadly work.

It was a constant fusillade, and the cowboys dropped like sheep.

The error of their plan could now be seen. In dividing their forces to make the surrounding line, they had weakened themselves. Frank had seen this.

They had been more than a hundred to a column, but splitting the pass, it would have been extremely doubtful if the Steam Man could so easily have escaped.

Just as fast as they could work the sixteen-shot Winchesters, Barney, Pomp and Mow dowmed the opposing line of cowboys.

The line was thin, and it would have required a very solid corps to have withstood that salting.

Down went the Steam Man toward the Pass with fearful speed.

Heads of the dead and wounded cowboys lay upon the ground. As
the Steam Man reached the Pass, a number of the cowboys tried to go through it and stop the machine.

But the ponderous body of the Man knocked them aside like flies, and the wheels of the heavy wagon crushed them into death or insensibility.

The Steam Man literally forged his way through the Pass like a rodeo.

Barney and Pomp cheered wildly and fired parting shots at the discomfited foe.

In a few moments the Steam Man ran out upon the pampa.

Frank did not waste time but set his course at once to the Southwest.

He was anxious to locate Ranch V. This he believed was his first and last important duty.

He was satisfied that nothing was to be gained by remaining in the hills.

He was confident that Cliff had gone to the Ranch V wherever it was.

More than all else, he was powerfully interested in the mysterious young lady as described by Pomp.

There was a constant desire to know who she was, and what Cliff held her in captivity for.

The day was rapidly drawing to a close.

After a short while the hills faded out of sight, and the rolling prairie was visible upon every hand.

Then, as the Steam Man took his long strides across the even plain, Frank suddenly caught sight of a beaten path or trail.

It was plainly a trail much used and bore a trifle east of south.

Frank brought the Man to a stop.

"Golly, Mars Frank!" cried Pomp, craning his neck and looking to the southward, "don't you see dat dix; over den dat dix; over den dat dix; I ain't dat some berry suspicious object?"

Frank gazed in the direction indicated and saw a tall, black-looking timber seeming to rise out of the roof in the prairie. But he knew that it was the leafless tree.

Frank let the Steam Man go along for a quarter of a mile, and topping the rise a startling sight was revealed.

There were a number of scattered buildings.

It was easy to see what these buildings had constituted.

The sight was a thrill for the old adventurers.

There were heaps of ashes, the bones of animals, and several charred skeletons of human beings.

At first it seemed inconceivable that a sight had occurred at the place, and that the ranch had been burned by either Indians or rival cowboys.

As chance had it the sign which, painted in broad letters, had once hung over the door of the yard gate, had not been destroyed, and lay upon the ground near.

Our explorers were enabled to read it plainly.

"Rodman Ranch."

Barney and Pomp descended from the wagon, and spent some time in exploring the ruins.

"I jes' like to imagine it burned up dis yer place," avered Pomp.

"We'll go and see," declared Barney.

"But Frank said, with conviction:

"Just as I'm going to the work of Cliff's hand his gang. They are outlaws at best, and if Rodman Ranch was a respectable place, they would be sure to visit it destroyed."

Barney and Pomp mounted the wagon now, and once more the quest for Ranch V was begun.

But night came on, and they had obtained no clue.

The night was cool and clear, and the Man was decided to wait until morning before pursuing the journey farther.

Accordingly everything was made comfortable with this end in view.

No camp fire was made, for this was not deemed necessary.

At night they always slept in the wagon, and Barney and Pomp served turns in watching.

The fires in the furnace were banked, and the Steam Man was given a rest just as the others.

One place was always as good as another in camping out thus, save that it was necessary to be near a body of water, so that the boilers could be filled with ease the next morning.

The Steam Man was thus cared for, the fires banked, and everything made shipshape when, after Barney had been on watch not more than two hours, the first of a series of thrilling incidents occurred.

The night was dark as Erebus, not a star twinkled in the ether, for heavy black clouds overhung all.

Suddenly Barney saw a light glimmering far out on the prairie.

It increased to quite a respectable size and continued to blaze for a long time.

The Copt watched it for a long while. Then his curiosity got the better of him.

"Bejibeh, that's queer," he muttered.

"I'll make sure there's something wrong about that now."

Barney, acting upon impulse, leaned over and grasped Frank's shoulder. The young inventor awoke with a start.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VIGILANTS.

"W-what's the matter?" gasped Frank, sleepily arouseing himself.

"What now, Mister Frank! There's a quare light out yonder on the prairie, an' I thought I'd jist see yere attention to the same, son."

"A light!" muttered Frank, now fully awake.

He got upon his feet, and rubbing his eyes, stared at the distant blaze.

"That is odd," he muttered. "I will do to investigate that."

"Sure! It may be a camp fire," vented Barney.

"If so, then we must find out who the campers are," declared Frank.

It was but an instant's work to arouse Pomp.

Then the fires in the furnace were stoked, a line of hose was run to a creek near, and the boiler was filled.

In an incredible short space of time steam was got up, and the Steam Man moved ahead.

Frank held the throttle steady and directed the Steam Man's course toward the distant camp fire.

For such it was, as became evident as they drew near.

At first no movement was made by the camping party, and Frank fancied that they had nobody on guard.

But as the Steam Man with blazing tread came within one hundred yards of the camp, a wild shout went out and a gun was discharged at the Steam Man.

Frank was now able to see the circle of the camp as revealed by the firelight.

Men had been rolled in blankets upon the ground to the number of a score.

But these were now upon their feet. Just beyond it could be seen that mustang was corralled.

Frank Reade, Jr., had no way of knowing whether the campers were friendly foes.

He had fancied them a part of Cliff's cowboys. Still there was a possibility they were not.

At any rate he could not treat them as foes until he learned positively that they were such.

So he brought the Steam Man to a stop just fifty yards from the camp.

The scene in the camp was now a ludicrous one.

The men were filled with mingled fear, amazement and stupification at the sight of the Steam Man. The fiery eyes and nostrils and mammouth proportions of the man in the darkness made him look like a monster from the Infernal regions.

The startled ones of the campers came to the amused hearing of those in the wagon.

"Great Jeezus! What d'yer call that thing?"

"It's the devil himself!"

"It's arter us!"

"That last drink at yer cross tails was too much for us boys. We've got 'em bad."

"I reckon we'll better fix up a prayer. Thar's some enufa have c'm to g'us."

Barney and Pomp exploded with laughter. It was very funny, and the episode so soon as the pandemonium had for a moment subsided, Frank Reade, Jr., hastened to shout:

"We're human beings the same as you. Have no fear. Who are you?"

The words had an astounding effect upon the campers. After a moment of stupified silence the answer came back:

"A Steam Man, by thunder, and built all of iron!"

"Wall, that beats ell!"

"What'll come next?"

"That beats the iron hoss all holler!"

The campers now came thronging about the wagon. As the number was limited, Frank did not feel particularly uneasy, though he held the throttle ready and Barney and Pomp had their repeaters at hand.

But the fears of the three adventurers were quickly alleviated.

One of the men, a tall, powerful framed man, came forward, and said:

"Wall, capen, we're glad to meet you an' yer Steam Man. My name is Jim Harmon, an' I'm captain of this band, who are all Vigilants from Poker Gulch. We're out on the trail of a gang of ruffians, Vigilants!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., with joy. "Then you are members of the Artemas Cliff band?"

"Artemas Cliff!" cried Harmon. "He is the chap we want. If we can lay hands on him we'll stratch his neck, you bet. Dyer know what we can find him?"

"I am on his trail myself."

"The deuce ye are."

"It's the truth."

"What for?"

Frank opened the door of the wagon, and descending shook hands with the Vigilant captain.

He told him explicitly of the mysterious murder of which Jim Trav
...had been adjudged guilty, but which it believed was the work of Cliff.

Harmon listened with interest.

"So there's another case of the kind," he cried. "Well, that's a bad one, but I reckon we've a wiser head than you, stranger."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank.

"Did you once cross the range out kyar on their perilous some miles?"

"I did."

"That was on Rodman Ranch, an' Ralph Rodman was one of the best men in this part of their West. But that ordinary case Cliff fell in love with pretty Bessee Rodman, his daughter, an' when Ralph Rodman found the right to come i' the matter, his saidolous, jes brought down a gang of hooligans an' burned down the ranch, toted off all their gear, an' killed all their real about their place."

"That's the story of Rodman. What they did with him we don't know. But I've heard that Bowen an' Ducey have returned, an' Rodman didn't come with 'em. It's my belief he's been done away with, an' it's my belief that I power of Travers is his possession."

A great cry broke from the lips of Frank Rosedale, Jr.

This story of Harmon's he had listened to eagerly, and, as it was unfolded, bit by bit, a clear, concise comprehension of all now came to light.

He saw the hideous details, the cold, sickening construction of a deep and awful plot, involving murder and abduction and terrible wrong.

"Great heavens!" he gasped, wiping cold perspiration from his brow. "Your story gives a great light upon the matter which I have in hand, Mr. Harmon."

"The dence you say?" gasped the captain of the Vigilantes.

"It is the dence, if you will," replied Frank. "It tells you the true fate of Ralph Rodman, and you will agree that Cliff is the projector of one of the most awful double plots of crime that human being could be capable of."

The Vigilantes all gathered around the young investigator, agog with interest.

"Yes, you mean it?" gasped Harmon, with amazement. "You're hunting Cliff the same as we are?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

You force a confession or explanation from him of a mysterious murder of which his own uncle, James Travers, of New York, has been adjudged guilty and who is now in prison awaiting his sentence of death at the end of a year from now."

"Oh, this villain is a deep one. But I have told you of that mysterious murder and, as Heaven is my judge, I believe the victim of that right as purposely was murdered at the hands of Travers was Rodman. You see Cliff's object in throwing the murder upon Travers was to see him hang and thus inherit his vast wealth."

For a moment after this statement silence reigned.

Appalled with the magnitude of the villain's plot all remained silent. But the mystery was cleared up at last.

Ralph Rodman, Jr., the nephew of Artimas Cliff.

But one sentiment reigned supreme in the breasts of all. Artimas Cliff should be brought to justice.

It was easy to see how the wretch in planning to win Rodman had enticed Rodman to the East and there murdered him. Then to kill two birds with one stone he had caused the awful crime by using circumstantial evidence to be thrown upon his wealthy uncle, James Travers.

Of course, with Travers' death, he would inherit the millions left by his father.

Ralph Rodman was dead. The ranch was a heap of ashes. For these crimes Artimas Cliff was responsible. But Bessee Rodman was also responsible. If Travers was the agent of Rodman, the deed was carried out.

...they clamped hands.

"If we catch him we both know what to do," declared the Vigilant captain tersely. "F'praps we kin work together. I'll help you all I kin."

"Then all right," answered Frank. "We will bring Cliff to justice if the Steamer can help us to do it."

"He will hang if I kin get my hands on him."

"He won't if we must make no mistake. He is strongly backed up. You have fifty-two men, you know."

"But they air all men," replied Harmon, flippantly.

"I will not question that," replied Frank, "but the weight of numbers would defeat you. Cliff has several hundred men in his command."

"We're not afraid of 'em. Yet ye're right enuf. It's well for us to see him."

"It is well to be careful," said Frank. "I think that you had better keep along with us for a time."

"All right," replied Harmon. "I think there is no doubt but that the young girl whom Pomp saw in the hills was Bessee Rodman."

"In course she was."

"They were taking her to Ranch V. Do you know where it is?"

"Yes," replied Harmon, quickly. "That's on Stone River, an' it's a hefty big place too. That's a big stockade around it an' an'asker will git in. So that's the place, eh? Well, it will be hard to git Bessee out of Ranch V."

"She shall be got out or I will give up my life in the attempt," cried a tall, handsome young plaintext with flashing eyes.

He looked much in earnest. Frank gazed at him critically. A little later he was introduced to him as Walter Barrows, a rising young stockman, and the lover of pretty Bessee Rodman.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON TO RANCH V.

Plans were quickly made.... It was decided to work on the stragglings, as their force was so much lighter than Cliff's.

"You see, if we can strike Lynch V. at a time when Cliff and the majority of his men are in, the hills we can capture the place," declared Frank, shrewdly.

"That's business," agreed Harmon, "but ye're the boss. I kin see we've got a better head piece now I, Mister Rosedale."

"We will not admit that," said Frank, modestly, "but rather let us work together, Mr. Harmon."

"That'll do, then."

Further plans were elaborated, then as only a few hours yet intervened until dawn, it was decided to snatch a few brief hours of sleep.

With the early dawn the Vigilants saddled their unsaddleable and all was soon ready for the start.

The Steamer Man was an object of great wonder to the平原men.

"By Jinks!" exclaimed Frank, "what a sight of it. But the Vigilants know the way to Ranch V., and this was, after all, the most important thing of all."

Frank considered it a great piece of luck in having fallen in with the Vigilantes.

He now understood exactly how matters stood all around.

It was near noon when a halt was called in a small basin near the Big Juntines.

Here camp was briefly made, and also at the same time an important discovery came to hand.

A broad trail made by a cavalcade of men and horses was discovered.

It pointed to the north.

Harmon examined it carefully and, with great exasperation, cried:

"It's good luck, friends. That trail I believe was made by the Steamer Man's cowboys an' too late into the night. It's over three days old, an' they haven't come back this way. I should think that the most of their men must be up there, in which case Ranch V. will be almost deserted.

Come on, boys, let's capture that bull point."

With a cheer the Vigilants sprang to saddle.

Soon they were once more galloping over the prairie.

In two hours later, or near the time of me, the sight of that great lookout, water overlooker, showed the life out of any of the vigilantes.

"I think the Steamer Man will all us much in accomplishing our ends," said Frank, modestly.

The start was made just after daybreak. The Vigilants rode alongside the Steamer Man on their mustangs.

Of course Frank was compelled to go more slowly on this account.

"Look yonder, Mr. Rosedale. Do ye see them lines of high ground? Well, this side of it is Ranch V."

A cheer went up from the clients.

"Begorra, it's Ranch Ours! ki'll be, if weiver we get there," declared Barnet Barrows.

"Golly, won't be a big 'prise party for dat vignet Cliff,' cried Pomp.

Frank Rosedale, Jr., held the Steamer Man at a steady stride, and very soon the ranch came in sight.

It was truly a most extensive establishment.

The stockade and buildings covered acres of ground. A great herd of cattle were feeding on the open plains.

The main ranch itself was surrounded by a high stockade, which would resist any ordinary attack with small arms.

I thought that the Vigilants and the Steamer Man came swiftly rushing down upon the place, a great commotion was seen to take place.

Men rushed out into the yard, horsemen went scurrying about, and down came the stockade in a blaze.

But Harmon and his men rode boldly down to the gate, and began to assail it with axes.

While Frank Rosedale, Jr., kept the Steamer Man on an elevation near, from which he with Barnev and Pomp covered the work of invasion by a hot fire with their Winchester.

The cowboys could not get upon the stockade to fire at the assailants for this reason.

Harmon's men therefore worked with perfect intemperance.

I suppose a的合作 time for an attack could have been chosen.

There were but few of the cowboys in the ranch, and these were picked off by the fire from the Steamer Man as fast as they appeared on the battle lines.
utes every cowboy in the place was a prisoner, and Ranch V. was captured.

Walter Barrows, the brave young stockman, was the first to enter the main ranch.

The instincts of a lover took him to the chamber in which Besse Rodman was sleeping.

He burst in the door and clasped the young girl in his arms.

That was a joyous meeting.

They were away in the yard the vigilantes cheered wildly. It was a brilliant victory.

Ranch V. was captured.

The stronghold of the outlaw Cliff, the den of villainy and vice, was captured. It did not require much time for them to reach a decision as to what to do.

"Every building must be laid low!" cried Harmon. "Put the torch to every accursed timber."

The cry was taken up and spread from lip to lip.

In haste torches were procured. Harmon himself lit the first, and was about to apply it to a building.

But he did not do so.

A thrilling incident stopped him. A loud cry went up.

"The cowboys! They are coming! To arms everybody! There comes Cliff at their head!"

Every eye was turned to the plain beyond the stockade.

Then he came to a halt.

It seemed as if they must feel safe here. Accordingly, arrangements were made for passing the night.

A comfortable seat was arranged for Besse Rodman and, much exhusted by the fatigue of her experiences, she quickly fell asleep.

But tears had welled her cheeks and trembled on her eyelashes. Frank had told her of her father's death.

"Oh, I fear it is more than I can bear," she declared, in agony of spirit. "Dearest, dear father. Oh, if I were a man, how I would avenge him!"

"There are plenty to do that," replied Frank, cheerily. "The villains shall surely pay for this bloodshed."

"I hope it may come to pass," she said, sincerely.

Then she dropped off to sleep. But even as she slept, deadly peril hung over her young and beautiful head.

CHAPTER IX.

POMP MISTAKES.

Frank Reade, Jr., felt comparatively safe as he rolled himself up in a blanket and went to sleep. He did not believe that the villain, Cliff, would be able to molest them that night.

It was Barney's first watch.

The Hibernian, until midnight, kept a good lookout in the cage. Then he called Pomp to succeed him.

Pomp saw to a good lookout until the early morning hours.

The darkness was most intense.

At about this time Pomp experienced a dreadful faintness at the pit of the stomach and a great longing for water.

His thirst became most consuming, and it seemed as if he must, at any cost, satisfy it.

But he found, upon looking in the tank, that it was empty.

There was not a gill of cold water in the wagon. Pomp grew sober with this dangerous reflection.

"This is a big risk," he thought. "If I had a bottle of water I would be all right," he muttered; "but how am I to get a drink of water?"

Pomp went to the steel screen and tried to penetrate the darkness.

He knew that not ten yards distant were the waters of a small creek. He could hear them rippling now.

He was at this time having an order to open the cage door. Yet it seemed to Pomp as if he must do so.

The risk did not seem great.

There seemed little like danger of the proximity of a foe.

Pomp felt certain that he could reach the creek, get his drink, and get back safely to the wagon.

He was not nearly tempted. He desired was most powerful.

"Golly!" he muttered, with a wary face. "What am I going to do? I doo believe dar's any danger ob going out dar, but if Mass Frank know it let's fix me quiet quick. Sales all out, but what am I a goin' gwine fo' to do? I am mos' styin' fo' a drink ob waish."

Pomp thought of awakening Barney and enlisting his aid.

But he reflected that the Celt would be certain to disagree with his scheme.

There was no other way but to assume the responsibility himself.

Pomp drew a deep breath.

Then he set out to the water's edge. Pomp flung himself flat and began to drink of the creek water.

But he had not taken one drink when he became aware of an appalling sensation. He turned his head and glanced back at the Steam Man.

The lantern hanging in the cage showed the open door and all as plain as day. But, great heavens! What did he see?

Dark forms were swarming about the machine. One was already in the wagon.

It was this much, and then his attention was claimed by another matter.

He suddenly felt a heavy body descend upon him and talon fingers clutched his throat.

In that flash of time Pomp had turned partly over.

He was just in time to see the flash of a knife blade. He made a convulsive upward blow, and grasped the wrist of his unknown assailant. He turned his head and glanced back at the Steam Man.

The lantern hanging in the cage showed the open door and all as plain as day. But, great heavens! What did he see?

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FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

It was truly a dubious outlook. The savages were of Black Buffalo's gang, and they seemed much elated at getting the prisoner once more into their clutches.

They chattered and gesticulated like a flock of magpies, and some of the more protracted with their tomahawks as though they would fain make an end of him then and there.

But the others held them back and an excited wrangle followed.

This while Pomp was writhing in his bonds. In vain he tried to break them.

For some while the savages wrangled. Then a compromise was made. Pomp was placed on his feet and carried through the pass and into a small glade among some trees.

Here he was tied to a tree and a great heap of fagots were piled at his feet.

With a chill of horror, the darky saw that the savages meant to take his life in a horrible manner.

He was to suffer death by flames. Pomp felt sick and faint. But even in that moment he thought not of himself, brave fellow, but of Frank Reade, Jr., and the others.

"Golly sakes, whoppeber am gwine fo' to sabe Marse Frank, now?" he groaned.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE ENEMY'S POWER.

Artemus Cliff shouted in evil gloe and triumph as he manipulated the Yoimi Man and let him out for a swift run across the prairie.

He amused himself by racing with his followers who were on horseback.

"By jingo!" he roared, "this is more fun than I ever had before. Why this beats the steam-cars all to smash. And it's all mine. Why I can travel like a prince now. Ha, ha! I'm the luckiest man on earth."

He turned and fixed a glowing gaze upon Bessie Rodman.

"And ye're mine too," he cried, "the lady of the plains. The happy little companion of Artemus Cliff. When I get my hands onto Uncle Jim Travers' millions, we'll travel the world over, my dear." Bessie did not appear to heed his words, though her face increased a shade in its pallor.

"Monster," cried Frank Reade, Jr., with intensity. "You will never succeed. Heaven will not permit it." Bessie don't have much to do with me," cried the villain, with a bier-ocht. "The devil has been a good friend of mine, and I ain't afraid of his place either."

"Begorra, they won't have ye even there," cried Bessie. "You're too wicked for aven that place."

"Oh, ho, Irish, you've got your tongue, eh?" cried Cliff, with a vicious laugh. "So ye've got a hankerin' for me, eh?"

"Be me sowl, thar can't be a place too bad for ye!"

"I'll have a nice little house fixed for yer right on this earth ain' I'll give ye a fair taste of it in advance, too," said the villain, vengefully.

"Arrah, yes can't scare me at all, at all," he retorted. "Yer threats are just as good as a puppy dog's bark."

"But I'm the kind of a dog that bites," averred the villain.

"He don't make me that cares for yer bites," said Bessie.

"We'll see about that. Don't blow your horn too soon."

"Begorra, that's good advice fer yerself, ye blatherin' kite! As o' lone I hadn't two hands to use now I'd bend the racers out o' yer for making a good job fer the trouble.

"Talk is cheap," sneered the villain. "Ye'd better save yer wind for the fright."

"It's yerself as nades it most," said Bessie, bound to have the last word.

Cliff evidently found Barney's tongue equal to his own, for he abandoned the conversation in a sullen fashion.

Bessie Rodman made no attempt at speech. She sat silently in one corner of the wagon.

Frank Reade, Jr., also remained silent.

The twenty miles were quickly covered by the Steam Man. It was yet far from the noon hour when they arrived at the camp of the prisoners.

The cowboys in full force were there, and as Cliff appeared with the Steam Man, they made the welkin ring with yells of delight and satisfaction.

All crowded around to examine the steam wonder and inspect its mechanism.

The prisoners looked out upon a sea of faces. They were not kindly regarded by the cowboys.

"Take 'em out and shoot 'em, Cliff!" cried a voice in the crowd.

"Give 'em twenty pounds and a grave seven feet deep," muttered Cliff.

"But Cliff refused to do this.

"Leave it to me!" he cried. "I've got a better plan."

"What is it?" asked a voice in the crowd.

"I want ye all to be ready in half an hour to go into the hills an' corner Hoffman an' his gang. There must not one of the vigilants go out of here alive."

"Hurrah," yelled the cowboys.

"We can give them the worst thrashing they ever had.

"In course we can.

In regard to these prisoners, the jail is going to be my wife. The others I'm going to have some fun with down to the ranch. We'll have a rabbius chase with 'em, or something of the kind."

"F generate me arms an' legs to save Artemus Cliff!"

"I'm done fo' dis time, an' dar am nobody to rescue Marse Frank!"

The trail kept on toward the hills, and the sanguine darky reflected that Cliff was likely going to the main body of his men.

"If jes' thin I can see what dat rascel am up to," muttered Pomp.

"He am just too sharp to let me saddle him once he gits his clutches in. I am jest goin' to come de Steam Man to him. Pomp, and dar's what dis darky must do an' try fo' to work some occult plan fo' to rescue Frank Reade, Jr., an' de others. Dat am a fact."
FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN

"Good!" yelled the mob, carried away with the plan. Thus the fate of the prisoners was decided by their captors. But the question of attack upon the vigilants was now the one in order. Preparations were at once made for carrying Harmon and his horse to the bank. Several parties of cowboys were dispatched to head off any possible attempt at rescue from the others. The vigilants were certainly hemmed in on all sides, and it was a most doubtful outlook for them.

The excitement of the cowboy was beyond expression.

"We've got 'em dead sure!" cried Cliff, triumphantly. "Not a one on 'em can possibly escape.

The cowboys now began to close the line in about their prey. A path was found through which the Steam Man was taken, and to a point within easy range of the position held by the vigilants.

Harmon had chosen an elevated position on a kind of small tableland or plateau. Here behind bowlders he had concentrated his forces. The position was not a bad one to defend.

To Waddy upon the cowboys would have to ascend a height of fifty feet or more in the face of a strong fire.

But this sacrifice of men Cliff did not intend to make, at least not all.

There were other points of view about, which the cowboys quickly took possession of.

So from these alleged history was kept up with the vigilants with some loss upon both sides. But Harmon's men could not very well withstand any loss whatever, the fire in their hands could stand better.

The Steam Man, however, could advance to very close proximity with the vigilants, and those on board were safe from any shots of return.

This made it bad for Harmon for he had no way of checking this most destructive fire.

It was a most gallant thing for Frank Reade, Jr., to remain idle and see his invention used in such a manner. He groaned aloud with horror and dismay. Barney did the same.

"Oh, if I could only free myself," declared the young inventor.

"Begorra, I wish I cut do that same," muttered Barney.

Cliff and the three cowboys with him in the cage were doing their best to shoot every Vigilant who exposed himself. They were thus so deeply engrossed that they paid no special heed to the prisoners for the time.

Barney, especially so, noted this fact. At a favorable moment he leaped over and whispered to Frank:

"Bejibers, Misther Frank, I think I know a way to turn the tables on them blasted vigilants who exposed himself.

"The descot!" gasped Frank.

"What is it, Barney?"

"Whist now an' work quiet, me gossoon!" whispered Barney.

"I'll lay down ferthest in the side here an' yez kin turn yer wrists to ward me mouth an' me teeth are no good at all. I can eat them in two before very long."

Frank experienced a thrill.

"Can you do it, Barney?"

"Aycour ice kim."

"But if they see you do that..."

"Tie never de trast. He say now, me gossoon, an' right on the shelf there's a knife an' yez cut my bonds at the same time. Thin we kin take care af yer four af thin. I'll take 'twixt you and me."

"And I'm good for the other two or I'll die!" muttered Frank.

"All right, Barney, do your best."

"I will do it."

But at this moment Bessie, Rodman leaned forward, and in a soft whisper said:

"Wath! There is a quicker way."

Frank and Barney were astonished.

"Wath!" exclaimed the young inventor.

By way of reply Bessie drew both hands from behind her.

They were free. There were livid lines upon the fair wrists, where the cruel thongs had cut in. But the sharply hewn were so small that Bessie had been enabled to slip them through the bonds and free them.

Up to this moment neither Frank nor Barney had looked upon the young inventor as the ordinary weak woman. That is to say, they had not given her credit for the amount of nerve she possessed.

But they were given ample evidence of it now, Quick as a flash, and with commendable resolution, she reached over and seized the knife upon the shelf.

It was not a moment's work for her to cut Frank's bonds. As they snapped, the young inventor took the knife and quickly cut Barney's.

Their captors were at the hoop-holes firing, and had not seen this move.

Nothing could have worked better.

Frank picked up a club, and Barney an iron bar. Nobody could have stopped them in the sort better than Lieutenant Washroo.

"Washroo bad ceed to yez for a pack ov o'oundness," cried Barney, dealing one of the cowboys a crushing blow on the head.

Before one could think, the iron bar came down upon the head of another. Both sank senseless to the floor of the wagon.

Frank Reade, Jr., had knocked Cliff senseless. Only one of the foes was left, and he was quickly knocked out.

In a twinkling, as it were, the tables were turned.

Barney and Frank Reade, Jr., were now masters of the Steam Man once more. The irrevocable Irishman pulled the whistle valve and sent up a sheet of delirium and excitement.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., swung open the wagon door.

"Throw them out!" he cried; "all but Cliff."

Barney obeyed the command. The three cowboys were quickly dumped upon the ground.

But Cliff was allowed to remain. The villain laysenseless in the bottom of the wagon.

Harmon was about to bind him, when an incoming peril claimed his immediate attention prevented him.

The cowboys were aware of the turning of the tables in the wagon. Unless immediate action was made they would succeed.

Frank knew well the danger of this move. It would be an easy matter for the cowboys to ruin the invention by a single blow. There was but one way, and that was to best a railroad. Barney seized his repeater and began firing into the crowd of cowboys. Frank opened the throttle and sent the Steam Man up into the clouds toward the stronghold of the vigilants.

Of course the latter had seen and understood all. They embraced the opportunity to pour a flank fire into the ranks of the vigilants. It was a moment of thrilling sort, but the Steam Man seemed to have the best of it when a thrilling incident happened.

CHAPTER XI.

WITH THE VIGILANTS.

In another moment the Steam Man would have been in the ranks of the vigilants. It would have been a great point scored, for Cliff would then be a prisoner and the way to save Jim Travers from the gallowes would have been paved.

But it was not to be.

The villain had come to the meanwhile, but cunning rascal as he was, had laid imitate in the bottom of the wagon in the interest of his colleague.

He had seen all that was going on, and when he saw that the Steam Man was certain to escape he knew that only desperate action upon his part would save him.

Accordingly while Frank and Barney were occupied at their posts, he made a sudden lightning leap for the door in the cage.

Unfortunately Barney had not fastened it.

A little scream of warning came from Bessie, but it was too late. The villain flung open the door and sprung out.

He tumbled heels over head down the slope, but was partly done off by a bullet or two sent after him. But none struck him, and he was the next moment in the ranks of his men.

Frank turned just in time to see the daring escape.

The young Inventor's disappointment was so great that he came near leaving the wagon to pursue the villain.

"Begorra, av yer drill, din't goix away entirely!" cried Barney in dismay.

"I'm sorry," returned Frank. "But take the precaution now, Barney, to hold that door."

Barney complied with alacrity.

Then he was obliged to return to his post, for the enemy were thick in the rear.

But the next moment the Steam Man topped the rise.

A volley from the vigilants drove the cowboys back for the time. Then Frank Reade, Jr., brought the machine to a halt upon the plateau.

The vigilants were wild with delight, and crowded about the Steam Man. Frank Reade, Jr., opened the door and descended among them. In an instant Harmon was by his side and had gripped his hand.

"God bless ye, Mr. Reade!" cried the whole dressed plainsman.

"It's like takin' the paw of one brought back from the dead. Dog, dost it, but I've goin' up entirely when I see that your Steam Man was in the hands of that coyote. It's all like a kind of miracle.

"I think we may congratulate ourselves," said Frank, "but do you know that we are in a tight box?"

"Nobody knows it better," declared Harmon.

"I doubt if we pull out of it."

"What kin we do?"

"Is there no avenue open for retreat?" asked Frank.

"There's none,"

"Then we can only stay here and fight to the last. Of course I might be able to elude them with the Steam Man, but I'd never try that while any of your band are left."

"It would be their best way," said Harmon, generously. "At least you could save the gal. It don't matter much about us. We're only rough men, and not one of us afraid to die."

"You heroes!" cried Frank, with fervor, "and if I should desert you, I would forsake my honor as a man. No, the Steam Man will stay here and fight for you till the last, depend on it."

"In course we need your help," replied Harmon. "Mebbe we'll whip their skunks yet."

"We'll try it."

"That we will," cried Barney. "Washroo av' I only had a good whack at that baste av' a Cliff now I'll shoot his beauty forever."

The Barrows and Bessie had been holding a joyful conference. But now the order went up.
"Every man to his post. The enemy are coming!"

There were no dillenquents. Not one in that heroic little band hung back.

It was true that the foe were coming again to the attack. With Cliff leading them they were charging furiously up the hill. But the Vigilants stood firm and gave them a running volley.

For a moment they wavered. Then once more they came on.

Cliff's voice could be heard as he rallied them:

"C'mere, ye, go on up that hill the fell crew of 'em'll be yonder. Don't let one of them escape alive! Kill 'em, every one, and don't give any quarter!"

"We'll see about that," muttered Frank Reade, Jr. "It may not be your fight, but that, Mr. Cliff.

Frank and Barney, from their position aboard the Steam Man, could pour a terrible fire into the ranks of the foe. If they surrounded it the sequel would be brief.

Overpowering muscles would quickly tell the story, and the little band would be massacred.

It was, without doubt, Cliff's purpose to give no quarter. A wholesale massacre would be the result.

The Vigilants pushed their lances for their lives. As well die, facing the foe as with back turned. Every man was resolute in this. But the tremendous body of men swept over the rise and gained the plain. Tar, the Vigilants were surrounded, and it seemed as if no power would intervene to save them from sure and total extinction.

Frank Reade, Jr., took in the situation at a glance, and cried despairingly:

"Barney, we are lost! Our end has come, and we are as good as dead men already!"

Poor Pomp saw no way out of the awful situation in which he was placed.

Death in his most awful form was upon him. A worse fate could not be imagined, and the thought chilled his blood. The savages piled the brushwood about him, and danced with demoniac yells about the pile.

If Pomp could have turned pale, he would have been whiter than chalk at that sight.

But for all this, the dandy's fears were even now more for his friends than for himself.

"Maman," he chirped, shivering like one with the ague,

"Wantebebe will be done o' all dis. Vere loo gwine fo' to be burned to death, and Marse Frank in de chutes ob dat rascal Clif, an' nobody to rescue him. Oh, goot head, I am done.

It was indeed a dreadful thing.

But Pomp was certainly powerless. Higher the brushwood was heaped, and then one of the savages advanced with a torch.

In a moment he had applied it to the pile.

The dry wood burned like tinder. In an instant great flames sprang up.

But they were at the edge of the pile. However, Pomp felt their heat and they would soon reach him.

The poor dandy was nearly insane with a frenzy of desperation. The savages now began a fiendish dance about the pile. They leaped and ran, and swung their tomahawks and made hideous faces at their victim.

But fate had ordained that this was to be Pomp's end. Even while death seemed certain, rescue was close at hand. Suddenly he saw upon the air the ring of horses' hoofs, and a quick sharp order, followed by the rush of carbines.

Indians fell in heaps before that volley. A panic resulted and the next moment through the smoke Pomp saw the gleam of uniforms, and knew that a body of United States cavalry had appeared upon the spot just in the nick of time.

The dandy was himself with the realization.

He tried to break his bonds, and cried:

"Sabe me, sogges—sabe Pomp! He am gwine fo' to burn to death of ye, feller!"

But the call was not necessary.

Through the smoke sprang two dismounted soldiers. In a twinkling the burning brush was kicked aside, and Pomp's bonds were cut.

Then the dandy was face to face with a tall, handsome young officer.

The Indians had been dispersed and the fight was over.

"I am Col. Clarke, of the United States Seventh Cavalry," said the young officer. "Who are you?"

"I am Pomp," was the dandy's prompt reply.

The officer added:

"Well, who do you belong to?"

"I belongs to Marse Frank Reade, Jr.," replied Pomp, with emotions. "I'm a f'weigger, but I go wherewhered Marse Frank goes jest de same.

"Oh, I see," replied the officer; "well, where is your master just now?"

"Golly, for goodness' sake! cried Pomp, excitedly. "He am in a heap of trouble, an' yo' kin help him out of it."

With this Pomp told Clark all about the Steam Man and their mission in the West.

The young colonel listened with deep interest, and then when apprised of the fact that the Steam Man and its passengers were in the hands of Cliff, he cried, excitedly:

"By Jupiter! that man Clif is just the chap I am after! Word was brought to the fort some time ago of a den of thieves here with a train, and a man called Barney V. Do you know of this?"

"Golly saaks, Marse colonel," cried Pomp, excitedly, "yo' kin jest but I doos! Jus' yo' find de cowboys and rescue Marse Frank and he don't show yo' where de steam greel is!"

"I shall be done if we are able," said Colonel Clark.

He turned to his men who were scattered about the vicinity, having been engaged in driving the savages out of the valley.

But the bugle quickly recalled them.

A spare horse was brought forward for Pomp and then the cavalrymen mounted and rode out after the savages.

As they struck the prairie below, the distant sounds of fighting came to their ears.

"There is the scene of the conflict between the Vigilants and the cowboys. Aided by the sounds Colonel Clark was able to gallop straight to the scene."

They passed in the hills they reached the plateau. They burst upon the cowboys in the rear just at the critical moment when it seemed as if Harmo's heroic little band was doomed.

It required but a glance for Clark and his men to take the situation.

Whirling his saber aloft he spurred his horse forward with the thrilling command:

"Forward! Charge!"

CHAPTER XVII
THE BATTLE OR WAR

Just at that moment when utter destruction threatened the brave little band of Vigilants the U.S. soldiers came upon the scene.

Nothing could have been more opportune, or saving of the day. The emotions of all at sight of the glittering uniforms may be imagined.

A great shout of triumph went up. A yell of dismay came from the cowboys.

Then followed the rattling of steel and the flash of sabre blades.

Before that charge what force could stand?

Backward the followers of Artemus Cliff were forced.

In vain the villain tried to rally them. They would not respond.

The odds were too great and they broke and fled in wild confusion. The next moment Pomp dashed up the incline and dropped from his horse almost at Frank Reade, Jr.'s, feet.

"Bress de Lor', Marse Frank," he cried ecstatically. "Yo' am all right, an' dis feller brought yo' a rescue safe all! Praps yo' forgib me fo' leavin' de Steam Man when I hadn't ought!"

"You are forgiven, Pomp!" cried Frank, lightly. "I might have done the same thing myself. I am glad no harm came to you. I had given you up."

"Deed no, Marse Frank!" cried the delighted dandy. "I is too bad fo' yo' to die. Hi dar, Tubb, I is glad to see you!"

"Well, if it ain't the naguer!" cried Barney, with a wild rush at Pomp. "Whurroo, its glad I am to see ye yet onc more alive an' well! Brother's that's so!"

The two friends embraced warmly. Then Colonel Clark rode up and saluted all.

"It seems that you've been having a bit of a squall, here," he declared, "but at any rate you've vanquished the enemy."

"With your timely assistance," replied Frank. "But I believe we are dangerous, colonel," agreed the colonel, but "I am anxious to see this man Cliff. Hello! what have you there? A great in iron? One of your new inventions is it? Well, that beats all."

With this Clark proceeded to make an inspection of the Steam Man. A great crowd of the natives were doing the same.

It was an object of great wonderment. Frank showed its working to the entertainers of all.

But Cliff's men had not been so easily beaten at the savages.

They had dispersed into the pastures and were somewhat scattered, but here they made a stand and rested shrilly.

It was necessary to disperse them as quickly as possible.

At any moment they might avail themselves of the fortunes of war and turn victory into defeat.

So Clark quickly called his men together.

Only a brief rest was all that he would accord them.

"The bugle sounded 'boots and saddles,' and every man was quickly mounted.

A plan was quickly outlined between Frank Reade, Jr., and Col. Clark.
This was that the cavalry should pursue and thoroughly rout the cowboys, even going down to Ranch V to effect its destruction. The vigilantes were to return home, and the cavalry would see to the punishment of any returns. But the Steam Man was to remain on a point below until the return of the cavalry.

If possible Chief Cliff was to be captured alive and a confession wrung from his lips. This plan had been agreed upon. The vigilantes were not wholly satisfied, yet did not demur. Clark and his command dashed away into the hills. The vigilantes and the Steam Man started for the open prairie. This crowd of forces very soon proved to be an unequaled and unfortunate thing. The fortunes of war are protuberance for changes. Strongly entrenched in the hills, Cliff's gang gave the soldiers a disastrous battle. In vain the quicky young colonel tried to dislodge them. He fought them to the last and showed all the courage of location, actually decimating the cavalry one half in number. Until nightfall, Col. Clark kept persistently waging the battle. Then he began to think of retreat.

But, to his horror, he found that this was not by no means as easy a matter as he had fancied. The foe had actually closed in upon him, and nearly every avenue of retreat was closed. He was literally surrounded by the foe.

"My soul!" he muttered, in deep-surprise; "this is not very good guardianship on my part. What was to be done?"

It was plainly impossible to dislodge the foe. The little band of cavalrymen were now hardly adequate to cope with the foe in their front. It really seemed as if Chief had received reinforcements. The number of the Indians in this mysterious manner increased. Darkness was coming on rapidly. Something must be done, and at once. Col. Clark racked his brain for an expedient. Certainly they must extricate themselves from this position, and without delay. Men were falling every moment about them, and the enemy's line, like a cord of death, was every moment drawing tighter about them.

"Cold sweat broke out upon the intrepid colonel's brow. "My God!" he muttered. "What is to be done?"

If it was a trap set, they were literally in a trap of death. Chief was aware of this, and his men made the air hideous with their yells. Closer they closed the line.

In this extremity Clark regretted having separated himself from the Vigilantes and the Steam Man, but this error had been made, and it was too late to correct it. But the brave colonel was not long without an expedient. He called out one of his pluckiest privates, and said:

"Jason, do you want to undertake a ticklish job?"

"Yes, sir, I'm ready," replied the private, with a smile.

"You know we are in a tight box?"

"Yes, sir."

"I must have reinforcements or the enemy will surely get the best of us."

"It looks that way, sir."

"Now, I want you to try to get through the enemy's line. Look for Chief, and if you can find him, tell him the Steam Man and Tell him that the vigilantes have come to his aid. Then ride to the fort as fast as you can for a fresh squad. Tell the officer in charge to send two hundred mounted men."

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think you can do this?"

"I will do it or I will not come back."

Clark knew that Jason meant just what he said. A few moments later the courier for relief slipped carefully into the shadows and was gone. A prayer trembled on Clark's lips.

"I don't care for myself," he muttered, "but I cannot bear to see my brave boys slaughtered like sheep."

Darkness now closed down. Of course no fighting could be done until the break of day. But the cavalrymen were not in a position to guarantee them much rest.

Fear of them dared to sleep, and then it was upon their arms. As the night hours dragged by, Clark paced the ground upon the outskirts of the camp and listened for some sign of the return of Jason. But, for all that he might be able to keep the foe at bay until the fresh squad should arrive.

Thus the plucky young colonel clung to hope. Time passed. It seemed to him that it would be impossible for the faithful courier to return from the fort under two days.

But if the cavalry division was reinforced by the Vigilantes and the Steam Man, he might be able to keep the foe at bay until the fresh squad should arrive.

Thus the plucky young colonel clung to hope. Time passed. It seemed to him that it would be impossible for the faithful courier to return from the fort under two days.

As it drew nearer he recognized the courier Jason. "Well, my man," he said, sharply. "You are back."

Jason saluted quickly.

"Where are the reinforcements?"

"I did not tell you to find them?"

began the colonel, angrily.

"Easy, colonel," said Jason, respectfully. "I think I have done a better thing, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I thought it was a good way to the fort. You might be cut to pieces before I could return. I have found an avenue by which I think we can escape."

Clark's manner changed instantly.

"You don't mean it?" he exclaimed, excitedly. "What is it?"

Jason drew nearer and lowered his voice in a mysterious manner.

"Just over that pile of howdahs," he whispered, "I found a narrow passage through the mountain side. It is almost a cavern, for the top is so closely overhung with bushes. It's a close squeeze for the horses, but I think we can all get through and out upon the prairie before daybreak."

Col. Clark was intensely excited.

"Good for you, Jason," he exclaimed, in a joyful manner. "Arose the camp, but do it quietly. Put every man in his saddle within ten minutes. You have solved our salvation, and you shall be prominent."

Jason hurried away to do the bidding of the colonel. In a brief space of time the camp was aroused. The little band had taken up their fighting, were only too glad to learn of the possibility of escape. At once preparations were made to steal a march upon the enemy. The passage described by Jason was found. It was necessary to first pry aside a huge howdah before passage could be made. Into the passage the little band went, and one by one filed out along the valley beyond.

So skillfully was the move executed that the foe never dreamed of it. Daybreak came, and Cliff was furious that his intended victim had given him the slip during the night.

The cavalrymen had reached the prairie in safety, and galloped away from the hills. Clark knew that his only and best move was now to return to the fort for reinforcements.

He could not hope to do anything with the foe with such a mere handful of men. Accordingly, just as the sun appeared above the horizon, the little covey broke, with its shattered ranks, galloped away across the plains. No effort was made to search for the Vigilantes. Clark knew that even with their aid it would be impossible to engage battle to the cowboys. Clearly it was necessary to have two hundred more men. The colonel kept his lips vengeful.

"I will teach that desperado a lesson," he muttered. "He shall be swept out of existence together with his rascal cry, and before another week."

On over the prairie they galloped toward the fort.

And as they rode, thrilling adventures were the lot of Frank Readie, Jr., and his friends on board the Steam Man.

Let us, therefore, for a time, deviate here and follow their fortunes.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ABDUCTION.

CHIEF HARROH OF THE VIGILANTS was not wholly content to abandon the trail of the cowboys, Jason's report.

He indulged in quite an argument with Frank Readie, Jr. His remarks were not without logic.

"I only look at the serious side of the thing," he declared. "It is by no means possible that the soldiers are going to have an easy time with Chief and his men. They may turn the tables on them yet. I tell you it is a premature thing for that colonel to do, to set us adrift so quickly."

"Yet he ought to keep his own strength," said Frank.

"I don't believe he will," replied the Vigilant leader. We can do this upon our own responsibility. You are to wait for Clark at a point below here, I believe?"

"Ah, but that is the idea. We must not let Chief defeat them. If he does, he will defeat us."

Frank saw that Harroh was right. He extended his hand and said:

"I agree with you."

"I knew you would," replied the Vigilant leader. We can do this upon our own responsibility. You are to wait for Clark at a point below here, I believe?"

"I knew you would," replied the Vigilant leader. We can do this upon our own responsibility. You are to wait for Clark at a point below here, I believe?"

"Very good. That point is on Willow Creek. We will accompany you there."

As it was nightfall before Willow Creek was reached. In a convenient spot camp was made. The darkness became more intense in the vicinity.

The men gathered around the fires, and told stories and cracked jokes.

Walker Barrows, the young Vigilant who was so deeply in love with Bessie Redman, had ridden upon her at the wagon step, and together they took a lover-like walk down the bank of the creek.
FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

Here without doubt was the spot where Barrow had been attacked by the Apaches. There were footprints and marks of a struggle. A rifle, with broken stock, was picked up.

"It is Barrow's gun," said one of the Vigilants.

Blood was found upon the ground, but no trace of the bodies.

They have been taken away as captives," declared Harmon, positively.

"There is no doubt of that," "Or thrown into the creek," suggested one of the Vigilants.

Investigation for a moment of the pursuers a thrill of horror.

There were footprints down to the water's edge, and the marks of some heavy body dragged thither.

In the shallow water, protected by reeds, was a body.

For a moment all expected to recognize Barrow. But all drew a breath of relief.

It was not him.

The body was that of one of the Apaches. Doubtless it was one shot by Barrows, and his body had been thrown into this place to escape the notice of the white pursuers.

"That's an Injun trick," declared Harmon, positively.

"I'm mighty well satisfied that the captives are alive.

"I hope you are right," said one man.

"Indeed," said another.

"Then let us take the trail," cried Frank Reade, Jr. "If possible, we must rescue them.

Barney and Pomp were at once desirous in their fun-making, and Barney proceeded to open the Steam Man's furnace.

The crack of rifles now sounded all around the camp.

Barrow had doubt, were drawing their line closer, and meant if possible to exterminate the little band of Vigilants.

But a line of defense was then thrown out, and the skulking savages were held at bay.

But a desultory and very unsatisfactory species of warfare was kept up in the darkness.

It was impossible to tell how to move or where.

The enemy fired from all directions and practically at random.

Many of the Vigilants were wounded, and Captain Harmon was among them.

"Confound it!" he muttered, in disgust. "They have such a mean' way of fighting. They alias attack one after dark, an' isn't goin' to come out in the open an' fight.

Everybody was bound to acknowledge the logic of this.

And the savages kept up the same mode of attack until Frank Reade, Jr., made a diversion.

They had succeeded in getting up steam once more in the Steam Man, and now Frank Reade, Jr., approached Harmon.

"Give me five men," he declared, "and I will whip the foe for you.

"Five men?" gasped Harmon. "Why, they're ten to one out here.

"I don't care if they are.

"But—"

"Will you give me the men?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes.

There's no time for questions, Captain Harmon. Leave it all to me.

"All right, Mr. Reade."

By Harmon's orders five of the Vigilants joined Frank Reade. He led them abroad the steam wagon. Then he closed the door and bolted the reins which connected with the throttle.

The Steam Man gave a shriek loud enough to perforate the ear drums of any one in the vicinity.

Then it dashed out upon the prairie.

The effect may be imagined.

The monster with fiery eyes and all flame and smoke, with clanking thunderous tread plunging into the midst of the foe, was an apparition well to be feared.

Right into the midst of the savages the Steam Man ran.

But the armed men in the screened wagon poured destructive volleys into the midst of the red foe.

Pena cannot adequately describe the situation.

For a moment the Apaches held their ground. Then, with wild, bulled yells they fled before the conqueror.

In less than twenty minutes the vicinity had been practically cleared of savages.

They retreated to a point below where their ponies were corralled.

Meantime, they dashed away to the westward. The Steam Man pursued until a crease, they escaped for good.

Then the Steam Man returned to camp.

But although the foe had been repulsed, matters were still bad enough.

Walter Barrows and Besse Rodman were missing.

Indeed, that were captives was a forlorn hope. That they had been seen again to go about.

Daisy was almost fatal in this case. Without loss of time a good rider was set upon the trail of the lovers.

Daisy was breaking in the east, and this enabled him to easily follow the trail.

Along the banks of the creek it ran for nearly a fifth of a mile.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN HOT PURSUIT.

The party of savages with the two captives in their midst, evi-
dently intended to reach the hills, if possible, before being overtaken by the Steam Man.  

At first Frank had fancied it easy to cut them off.  

But there was a stream running in the valley which the Man had to cross, and the distance was greater than Frank had really dreamed of.  

Like a runaway locomotive the Steam Man raced over the plain.  

The vigilantes were having a running fight with the savages.  

But Frank Reade, Jr., was doomed to disappointment.  

He failed to cut off the band of abductors, and they vanished from sight in a deep pass.  

It was too rocky a track for the Steam Man to follow. Thus far the vigilantes had the best of it.  

"Golly mules, Mass Frank!" cried Pompy, "d'y git dat wiff dem prisoners fo' suck."  

"It looks like it," agreed Frank in a hoisted tone, "but there ought to be ways to cut them off."  

"Begorra, there's only won way," declared Barney.  

"What's it?"  

"Let the man hear, the man, an' you'll go after the devils aloof," said the Celt.  

For a moment Frank entertained no hopes of the success of such a plot.  

Then he glanced back to the prairie where the vigilantes and the Indians were having their battle.  

It was all up and tuck between them, but Frank saw that the vigilantes were fast getting the best of it.  

Not more than half a dozen of the savages had the captives in charge.  

To think with Frank Reade, Jr., was to act.  

He did not waste time in expressions of the frieze:  

"Your idea is a good one, Barney. We will act upon it. Pompy, keep a sharp eye out for danger until we return."  

"Right, Frankie," replied the faithful darky.  

Barney, delighted that Frank had seen fit to adopt his plan, was quickly ready and they left the wagon.  

The hills to the south had the start of them, but the pass was rocky and it was hardly likely that they would succeed in getting a great lead.  

Swiftly the two rescuers pressed forward.  

They climbed over piles of boulders, crept through narrow defiles, and climbed steep highs.  

It seemed that progress must be slow for the ponies of the Indians, and they should be overtaken before long.  

Suddenly Barney paused with a sharp cry.  

He seized Frank by the arm and pulled him back into the cover of an angle in the mountains wall.  

He was none too soon.  

The crack of rifles smote upon the air and the shower of bullets came down into the pass.  

"Bejabers, I saw the scalpees just in the nick at time!" declared Barney, peering around the edge of the cliff wall.  

"Ar I hadn't we'd been dead gones before sure as you name is Barney," said Frank.  

"You're right there!" cried Frank, slipping extra cartridges into his rifle; that was a close call."  

"Indio it war," said Barney.  

"I had no idea we were so near the rascals."  

"Bejabers, I didn't miss till I see the top-knot ar wan of 'em over ther ridge yonder."  

"They are ready for us, then."  

"Bejabers, and we're ready too. If I ever got a head on any won or t'hem there'll be a job for the coroner, bad news to them."  

"Where are they? I can't see their position very well."  

"Aisy, Misher Frank," said Barney, "they're hiding up yonder just behind that big scrub ar an oak on the edge of the cliff."  

Frank looked in that direction. Suddenly Barney gave a sharp cry.  

"Whzumm!" he yelled.  

Quick as a flash his rifle went to his shoulder.  

Crack!  

A yell of agony rang through the gorge. Then down over the cliff tumbled an Indian almost at the Celt's feet.  

The bullet had pierced his skull and his final account was settled.  

"Dead shot, Barney!" cried Frank, "that only leaves five for us to tackle."  

Then quick as a flash the young inventor threw his rifle to his position.  

Crack!  

Another yell, a death cry went up on the air of the defile.  

"Bejabers, that's only four ar the divils left," chuckled Barney.  

"It's only two to wam, Misher Frank."  

"You're right, Barney!" cried Frank, with enthusiasm, "but the other two resuers know better than to assay an open attack.  

The Indian method of warfare was in this case far the best. They remained strictly under cover.  

All was over on the side of the defile.  

But it was not by any means likely that the foe were inactive.  

The great danger now was that they would continue to slip away deeper into the hills and reach some inaccessible hiding place.  

Our resuers waited as long as seemed consistent with safety.  

Then Frank said:  

"I think we'd better make a break, Barney."  

"All right, sorr," replied the Celt.  "Do you think it safe?"  

"We must use caution. It may be possible that they are trying to draw us from our hiding place."  

"So I thought, sorr."  

"Again, they may be far into the hills by this time. We will gain nothing by staying here."  

"All right, sorr."  

"Let's begin to scan the side of the cliff. A path was not visible anywhere. Yet the Celt did not believe it impossible to climb to the top.  

If this could be done they might then succeed in getting upon level ground with the foe and escape the risk of their bullets.  

Frank devised Barney's purpose and said:  

"I think we can climb it, Barney."  

"Believe we'll try," said the Celt.  

Barney had just got his hands and feet into niches in the cliff when a startling sound came up the pass.  

"Hark!"  

"What is it?"  

The tramp of ponies' feet could be heard and the distant bellowed yells of savages were wafted up on the breeze.  

"The Indians are coming up the pass," cried Frank, with dismay.  

"Begorra, there's not an instant to lose," said Barney.  

"Bejabers, we're right," cried the Celt, beginning to make his way up the cliff.  

It was a smart climb up the steep wall, but it was safely made at any rate.  

They were now on level ground with the four captors. But a careful reconnoitering of the vicinity showed that they had left.  

In the fall the conflict was on the plains west of the hills. But Barney took the trail and they went forward again in pursuit.  

The sounds of the the foe coming up the pass in their rear, however, every moment became plainer.  

But fortunately, just at a point where the trail diverged deeper into the hills, the foe must have turned in another direction for very soon the dust died out.  

"We have nothing to fear from them," cried Frank, with a breath of relief. "They have gone in another direction."  

Very soon the hills began to merge into a deep valley. Through this there ran a swift stream.  

As Frank and Barney entered the valley Barney shouted:  

"Be me soul, there's the Scalpeens now."  

"Where?" asked Frank.  

"Just down there fermest that grove of trees, Misher Frank."  

"Sure enough."  

"The four savages and their captors were plainly seen on the banks of the creek:  

They were just in the act of embarking in a canoe.  

Frightened at the size of the canoe.  

Frank saw that he must act quick if he would prevent this.  

So he said, sharply:  

"All right, sorr."  

"Away weel, Barney on the mad run. The savages had already got the canoe into the water.  

They saw him coming and a yell was the signal. The captives were bound into the light casket, and it was pushed out past the shore.  

Down into the current it went.  There was no time to lose.  

Frank Reade, Jr., came to a stop and raised his rifle. It was a desperate chance but he had no alternative.  

A quick aim, a bead skillfully drawn on one of the paddlers and——  

Crack!  

A wild Indian yelling went up and the prow of the canoe swung around.  

Over into the water went the doomed savage. The shot had been a good one.  

But the canoe was at the moment at the head of some swift rapids.  

The next moment it was racing down them, and turning a bend in the stream vanished from view.  

Frank had not time to draw another bead before it was out of sight, and when it reached the lower level and came into view again it was out of range.  

Barney came along now and shouted:  

"Be jabbers, you did well, Misher Frank. That was a beautiful shot. There were only three ar their red divils left."  

This was true, but the three savages seemed likely to elude their pursuers after all.  

The canoe was racing down the stream, and fast nearing a definite mark in the hills.  

If it should enter there, there was little doubt but that the fugitives would make their escape.  

Frank and Barney saw this in the same moment.  

"Begorra, Misher Frank, we must cut the divils off!" cried the Celt.  

"Forward, then!" cried a rifle cry.  

Both looked for this. In the same instant they sighted it.  

The canoe took a long turn, and by cutting directly across a meadow the two pursuers saw that they would be likely to cut off the savages.  

Accordingly they started forward on the run.  

The Indian captors saw their move at once, and an angry yell went up from them.
One of them rose in the canoe and took quick aim and fired. The bullet whistled close to Barney's ear. The Cat stopped and cocked his rifle.

"Be jibers, I'll spoil that fellow!" he cried. "Havo at you, ye blarneyin' devils!"

Barney's rifle spoke.

But the motion of the canoe very likely destroyed the aim, for the bullet seemed to miss its intended object.

At this point the canoe took a swift course, and in the twinkling of an eye seemed to have overcome the skilled hand at the paddles. in a flash it left the entire and the party were dumped into the waters of the river.

A great cry went up from Frank Reade, Jr.

"Get me! Get me!"

Rover and the brave young inventor rushed. He thought of poor Barrows and the man's old应用is.

Torned into the waters of the river, it did not seem as if any power on earth could save the man.

But two of the savages had seized the prisoners. The canoe had overturned in close proximity to the shore.

The third savage gave assistance, and as the water did not chance to be deep, all got ashore.

"Now we have them," cried Frank, confidently.

But his statement was premature.

Even as it seemed that the rescue was certain, an incident occurred to prevent it.

From behind a small hill broke appeared Red Bear's gang of Apaches, full half a hundred strong.

CHAPTER XV.

THE VIGILANTS TO THE RESCUE.

The appearance of the savages was most inopportune.

Mounted on their fleet ponies, with wild yells they swept down upon the party.

The three Indian captives yelled with delight.

Frank and Barney of course came to a halt. Of course it was folly to tempt fate.

To attempt to stand against that gang was folly. "By Jingo, they'd grass the young inventor. "It's all up with us, Barney! We are badly beaten!"

"Tare an' c'min!" grumbled the angry Celt. "That beats all me o' the reds; just leave it to us, Mister Frank!"

"Beat a retreat," declared the young inventor. "Come on, Barney."

"It's Messi as last to retreat," said Barney, stubbornly. "Oh, if we only had the Steam Man an' the naygur here now we'd mightily soon turn the thing about.

The two rescuers now turned about and hastily beat a retreat across the valley.

But they had not gone far when the Indians began to ford the creek for the purpose of giving pursuit.

Barney saw the move and called Frank's attention to it.

"Be me sow! Mister Frank!" cried the Irishman, excitement.

"We've got to make quick haste, or they'll have our scalps."

"You are right, Barney."

But at that moment Frank Reade, Jr., lifted his gaze, and a mighty cry escaped his lips.

In the distance in front of them, a body of armed men "swep out into the valley.

They were the Vigilants, and at their head rode Harmon. At sight of Frank and Barney they urged their horses forward with a loud cheer.

This was answered by the two fugitives, with a will.

The Vigilants, now changed their tactics. They turned their horses about and rode swiftly on the back trail.

Frank could tardly wait for Harmon and his men to come up.

Enthusiastic greetings were exchanged, and also experiences.

The Vigilants had driven the Apaches before them into the hills.

But upon entering the fastness, with which they were not familiar, the Indians had given them the slip.

In the search, they had come upon the scene at an opportune moment.

There seemed no better thing to do than to give pursuit to the savages at once.

Accordingly a couple of spare horses were provided for Frank and Barney to race forward on the charge.

The delay had been brief, but it had enabled the savages to cross the creek and start for the defile beyond.

So the Vigilants in hot pursuit.

The creek was quickly forced and the pursuers seemed to be gaining at every bound.

But of a sudden the savages executed a peculiar and inexplicable maneuver.

Suddenly and without warning they split in two sections, one going in the right hand and the other to the left.

In one division was the girl captive, Bettie Rodman, and in the other Walter Barrows.

The other was the girl in charge started for the defile.

The other made directly across the valley. In a flash of time the purpose of the savages was made apparent.

The Vigilants naturally go both ways splitting up.

As they were much less in number than the Apaches the result of this would be to greatly weaken them, if not actually place them at the mercy of the red men.

On the other hand it was a problem as to which direction to pursue or which party to follow.

Harmon drew a slight rein upon his horse and waved a moment.

The Indians naturally were incline to go to the rescue of their comrades, but Frank Reade, Jr., comprehending the folly of this, cried:

"The girl first. We can rescue the man later."

"Test!" cried Harmon, in a voice of thunder; "that is our duty! The girl first, boys; then we will try and save Barrows.

The Vigilants cheered, and away thundered the troop toward the defile.

A few moments later they reached it and entered it.

High walls of stone, forbidding rocks, rose on either side to a mighty height.

The bed of the defile was a tangled mass of brush and strewed with boulders.

It was harder for the horses of the Vigilants to pick their way through here than the foot-footed ponies of the savages, and accordingly the Indians gained quite a lead.

But after a quarter of a mile of the defile had been traversed the Vigilants were brought to a halt in an unceremonious manner.

The defile seemed suddenly to take an upward trend here, and high piles of boulders made a barrier of some height.

Suddenly from behind this barrier there came the flash of rifle muzzles, and a volley of bullets came rolling down through the defile.

Two of the vigilants were wounded, and Harmon instantly called a halt.

Cover was quickly sought behind rocks and cover near.

It was evident that the Indians had here made a stand. The Vigilant leader was puzzled.

But suddenly Frank Reade, Jr., gave a sharp cry:

"Listen!"

His acute ear had caught the sound of horses' hoofs coming up in the defile in their rear.

By hammer! exclaimed Harmon, with sudden terrible comprehension, "we are trapped!"

The men gazed blankly at each other.

The noise was more apparent.

The Apaches under the shrewd Red Bear had certainly very cleverly outmaneuvered them.

Led into the defile by one division of the Apaches, the other had proceeded to block up the outlet, and thus literally the Vigilants were in a trap.

There was not the advantage in facing a foe in this manner that there was in having him wholly at their mercy, as nearly as Misher Frank!

To be attacked both front and rear would demoralize even the largest and bravest of armes. Harmon was completely taken aback.

Will I stand? he asked, with embarrassment, "I never believed an Injun could beat me in any such way as that. We are but in for it, boys, and no mistake. We've got to fight hard."

The savages in front were keeping up a raking fire.

Those in the rear had now drawn near enough to also open fire.

The fun had begun.

But the brave band of white men had no thought of fear or retreat.

They at once, by Harmon's direction, sought safe places of cover and proceeded to return the fire.

Every time an Indian's top-knot showed above the fringe of rocks, it was made a target.

Thus, the battle was kept up for over an hour.

The situation appeared to be beyond the inventive mind of Frank Reade, Jr.

He had carefully examined the facts of the pass. In doing so he had discovered what looked like a feasible foot path on the other side of the defile.

At once he called Harmon's attention and explained a plan to him.

"I think we can defeat the savages easily in this manner," he declared. "Give me five men and I will guarantee to clear these Apaches out."

"Mr. Reade, take care you are used," declared the vigilant leader.

"I have full confidence in your ability to do as you say. May you succeed."

Frank at once selected five men from the troop, then with Barney he led the way cautiously up the path.

Fortunately, it was overhung with foliage to a large extent, so that they were hidden from the view of those in their rear.

In a few moments a position near the brow of the cliff had been reached. Then Frank's surprise was verified.

The little party could look down upon the heads of the savages. It was an easy matter to pour a volley amongst them with most demoralizing effect.

Frank sent one of the men back down the cliff, to give Harmon the case when to make a charge.

Then at a favorable moment Frank gave the order to fire.

Six repeating rifles were loaded upon this surprise for them, and as fast as they could be worked, they were engaged in firing a volley down upon the heads of the exposed savages.

The effect was startling.

The savage was never the one to stand in open field and fight. At once a panic seized them.

It was the moment for the charge, and Harmon's men rushed forward.

Up over the rocks they went. In a twinking the savages were driven from their entrenchments and utterly routed, and completely dispersed.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney saw their opportunity, and rushed up upon two of the savages who had Betsee Rodman in charge.

"In a moment the girl," cried the two guards for their lives.
All this had happened in a twinkling of an eye, comparatively speaking. But the fight was not over.

The force of the rain was constant and heavy.

At first, men were now in position to command the defense.

A quick, sharp conflict ensued, and the Apaches were driven back with great slaughter.

The vigilants had thus far the best of the fight.

The enemy had been routed, and Bessie Rodman rescued.

Only one other thing now remained to be accomplished, and this was the rescue of Walter Barrows.

But even as the question was being discussed a loud cry arose, and it was from the head of a hot, blood-stained young man came staking down over the cliff and falling fainting in the midst of the vigilants.

It was Barrows.

In the midst of the cheer the picky young plainsman had succeeded in breaking his bonds, and after a desperate fight with two of his captors, his face a mass of blood and gore, he exclaimed, "everybody extended congratulations to the young couple, and then plans for the future were discussed.

It was not certain that the savages would not return to the battle.

But a report was brought in by a number of scouts sent out.

The Apaches had withdrawn from the field entirely.

It was therefore decided to go back to Willow Creek.

It was not known whether Col. Clark had been victorious with the cowboys or not.

Until this question was settled Harmond had no idea of returning home.

"Until Clift and his gang have been wiped out of existence," he declared, "I shall not give up the chase of the Steam Man and Pomp.

For Barrows was anxious to return at once to the Steam Man and Pomp.

They were, by no means, assured that the darky was safe or that he might not have got into more danger than that.

Accordingly the party was once more for the prairie.

Down one of the defiles the vigilants rode. Coming out into the valley they crossed this and entered the pass.

But they had not proceeded a hundred yards into the pass when one of the advance scouts came rushing back and gave a thrilling report.

"There are Indians in the valley!

But what of Pomp?" exclaimed Frank Reade with alarm. "Barrows, we ought at once to ascertain where he is.

The young man, Mather Frank, agreed the Celt, "but how in the name of heaven will the scouts do it? Be jolly, these cowboys have got us cornered.

In a few minutes a large sized battle was in progress in the pass.

CHAPTER XVI.

POPP MAKES A STAND.

Now let us return to Pomp and the Steam Man, whom in the detail of the thrilling adventures just chronicled we have neglected.

The darky entertained nothing like fear at being left alone on horseback by the Steam Man.

Indeed, he rather enjoyed the responsibility thus put upon him.

He could occasionally hear rifle shots from the hills, which assured him that he had the best of the fight for the present.

"Golly!" he muttered. "I jes' reckon dem Indians git de worst of dat fight.

Ki dar, if dey aun' comin' dis yer way. I spec's I better move.

This was true.

The Indians had been driven before the vigilants, and starting for the hills were coming straight toward the Steam Man.

It was evident that they meant to enter the hills at this point.

Pomp knew that it would be folly to remain where he was with the Steam Man.

The savages might run the machine as he could not hope alone to hold them at bay.

So he opened the throttle and started away with the Man.

He kept on until satisfied that he had reached a safe point.

Meanwhile the Indians reached the pass and entered it.

The vigilants, however, did not seem in a hurry to pursue.

They remained on the battle ground for some while looking after their dead and wounded.

When they did start for the pass Pomp had returned and was there to meet them.

As they came up the darky put his head out of the screen door and shouted:

"Pomp! Pomp! Yo', Marse Harmon. Jis yo' good dem Indians a good lickin' fo' luck. I reckon yo' kin do it.

"I reckon we can, Pomp," replied Harmon. "At least we'll try it.

"If yo' see Marse Frank, jes' tell him fo' me, dat his carriage ain' foolin' him. Will yo?"

Harmon replied. "I reckon so, Pomp."

The vigilants all vanished up the pass.

It seemed ages after they had gone, when Pomp received another great surprise.

Suddenly, hearing the clatter of hoofs he turned his head, and scrutinized the prairie.

A thrilling sight met his gaze.

There, coming over a swell in the plain was a body of horsemen.

It was not for a moment or two that the vigilants and Pomp were conscious of the coming force.

They were the cowboys with Artuson Clift at their head. They were rousing directly upon the Steam Man.

They were just coming forward when a cheering victory over Clark.

Pomp's eyes stuck out like agates and he sprang to his feet.

"Golly! Bad luckin'!" he exclaimed. "Dat am Clift and his devils.

"By golly, I reckon I get out dere in a hurry.

In an instant he opened the throttle and let the Steam Man race out upon the prairie.

The cowboys gave a wild yell, and attempted pursuit,

But they could not keep anywhere near the Man, and finally abandoned it. With baffled yells they returned and disappeared in the pass.

"Golly, dat am a beauty of a tun for Marse Frank an' de colts," said Pomp.

"Dat will never be anticipating de comin' ob dem rascalos, an' dat will make tings herry bad, indeed.

The darky at once began to work anxiously as to the fate of his friends.

He began to feel as if it was very much his duty to enter the hills and render what assistance he could.

But what was to be done in the Steam Man?

Pomp reflected that he might make it with him if he could only find some way of doing so.

To attempt to traverse the rocky pass was out of the question.

The country was in a quadrangle.

Soon he heard the sounds of firing. The battle was on, and so near great distance, either.

The man could hardly contain himself. He walked up and down in the cage like a prisoner in his cell.

"Oh co'lee, I see Marse Frank's ordnans to stay yer," he muttered, "but it is evident dat Marse Frank needs all de help dat he can get.

What eber I kiu do, I jes' don' know what.

The darky sat down and began to reflect.

He was a shrewd fellow, and as a result he was not long in formulating a plan.

He sprang up finally.

He opened the throttle and started the Steam Man along the base of the hills.

With keen eye he studied the possibility of entering them.

By the pass it was impossible. But he imagined that it would not be difficult to find another means.

Nor was he disappointed.

At a certain point the hillside was shorn of trees and bowlders. It made a smooth surface even over the brow of the height.

As the Steam Man was provided with power to climb any height of this sort, Pomp at once set his course up the height.

Up went the Steam Man with prodigious strides.

Nearer the top he drew. Pomp had no means of knowing whether it would be possible to go further or not.

But his best hopes were realized near reaching the summit.

A gentle incline the Steam Man went, and through a scattered grove of trees, and came out into a valley deep in the hills.

The sound of firing was now distinctly heard.

Indeed, as Pomp guided the Man down into the valley, he saw the powder smoke of the conflict in the pass, just a short way up the valley.

"Golly!" muttered the darky, joyfully. "I reckon dat I get dar jes' in de bes' time. Won't Marse Frank be glad fo' to see me!"

But at that moment a thrill ran through the heart of the Man.

The Man was traveling slowly, when, just as the bottom of the incline was reached, two powerful savages sprang out of the grass and seized the throttle reins.

Pomp was so taken by surprise that for a moment he could not act.

The pulling of the reins closed the throttle, and the Man came to a halt.

Pomp could not use the rein to open it again, and had there been more of the red foe, the Steam Man would have been at their mercy.

But there were only two of them, and while one held the rein the other seized to hold his way into the wagon with his tomahawk.

Pomp acted with the rapidity of thought.

"G'way from dar yo' red India!" he yelled, picking up a revolver.

"If you don't, I jes' 'liver it in yo' yer!

But the red man did not desist, and Pomp, springing to a hoop fence at him.

The bullet went true to its aim, and the Indian fell dead.

The other savage seeing the fate of his companion let out a bawled yell, and relaxing his grip on the valve rein fled precipitately.

Pomp did not take the pains to fire at him, but coolly picked up the valve rein, opened the throttle and the Steam Man went on.

Straight for the scene of the conflict at the mouth of the Pass Pomp went.

When he came upon the scene he found a thrilling and sanguine conflict in progress.

A battle of the Steam Man a cheer went up from the vigilants.

In a moment Frank and Barney were aboard and shaking hands with Pomp.

The situation was quickly explained.

"I thought mos' like yo' would want de Steam Man, Marse Frank," said the faithful darky. "So I jes' fetched him ober to yo."

"You have done well, Pomp," said Frank, joyfully. "Of course,
FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

It was an opportune moment, too.

As the last cartridge of the vigilants was used the cavalry crew was scattered in all directions.

Instantly a panic seized Cliff’s men. They made a brief stand, and then were driven to the side ditches into the hills.

Here they made a stubborn stand.

The cavalry literally cleared the pass, and riding through came into the midst of the vigilants. The scene which followed baffles description.

Young Clark and Big Harmon were shaking hands with the deepest emotion.

He came just in the nick of time, Clark,” declared the vigilant chief. “In ten minutes more we might have all been dead men.”

“We are in luck,” cried the colonel, “for which I am very grateful, Mr. Reade, I am glad to see you.”

“The same,” replied Franklin, “for the grip hands with the colonel. Then Clark rode away the details of what was going on the side.

He found the fiercest kind of a battle in progress. The cowboys had interchanged themselves once more and were making a bold attack.

The cavalry outnumbered them, but they were in a very advantageous position.

The best efforts of Clark’s men would not suffice to dislodge them. For a long while the sangine battle went on.

In vain Clark tried to elicit them from their position. His bravest efforts met with failure.

The colonel exclaimed that if he could get the foe into the open he could hope to whip them.

But as it was it looked certainly as if his picky little hand would be badly demoted in the subsequent dismantlement of the desired end.

In this quandary Frank Reade, Jr., appeared upon the spot. The logging inventor had donned a horse of one of the vigilants and rode up to see how the fight was going on.

Well, colonel,” he said, greeting Clark, “how are you making on?”

“Not as well as I could desire,” replied the colonel in a dejected manner.

“Why not?”

“They have a position up there in the hills which is unsailable.”

“I disagree with you,” said Frank quietly. “I am not a military engineer, but I am a land surveyor and I tell you their position on that hill is not the best.”

Clark was staggered.

“Why, it is the best position about here,” he declared.

“Not so,” said Frank, gravely. “Youdoner is a much better position.”

He pointed to a hill to the right and which the one upon which the cowboys were seemed to overlook.

“What—try to command the foe from that hill?” cried Clark scornfully. “We would only expose ourselves, and they would sweep us from it like chaff before the wind.”

“No, they wouldn’t.”

“Now, Mr. Reade, what is the reason for you to talk that way? The hill upon which they are is higher than this one.”

“It may be higher in the number of feet,” replied Frank, “but not in advantage of position.”

“Then how do you make that?”

“Very easy enough to see. The top of this hill is smooth, is it not?”

“Yes,” said the colonel, “but the top of theirs is craggy and they cannot climb up to it. Their position is far from the top. A position on the top of your hill will easily look down into their camp.”

Clark was surprised, but he willingly took the loge of Frank’s remark.

“By Jove!” he cried. “Perhaps you are right.”

“I think you will find that I am.”

“But I would have taken my oath that they had the highest position around here.”

“Well, that would seem to be really so, for the hill itself is higher. Yet it is but an optical delusion.”

Clark extended his hand to Frank.

“Mr. Reade,” he cried warmly, “you are right. I acknowledge my mistake. Perhaps your opportune suggestion may enable us to whip the foe.”

“It is of any value, I am highly pleased!” said Frank, modestly.

“I feel that it is, and I shall at once proceed to take the hill.”

Clark at once proceeded to do this. By his command his men moved up the back side of the hill.

This protected them from the bullets of the cowboys. Arrived at the top of the smooth hill, it was found that Frank Reade, Jr., was right.

They were enabled to look right down upon the cowboys in their position.

Their hands were driven up a side ditch.

“Hurrah!” cried Clark, jubilantly, “that means victory.”

A volley was given the astonished cowboys. They returned with ill effect.

The tables were exactly turned upon them, and they were not able to take the point.

A red-hot fire was kept up for some little time, but the cowboys no longer held the advantage.

A red-hot fire was kept up for some little time, but the cowboys no longer held the advantage.

The cowboys were at the edge of the cliff.

“Suddenly all firing ceased.”

The cowboys were at the edge of the cliff.

But finally he became convinced that the cowboys had evacuated their position and had made a retreat.

Flushed with victory Clark ordered his men to charge.
Barrows himself sank down behind a pile of rocks.

All this was done in the twinkling of an eye.

The trained westerner whose life is in danger knows well the value of quick action.

It was this which saved the life of Barrows, for half a dozen bullets came whistling down from the mountain side the next moment.

"Heaven help me now!" he muttered, feverishly. "I must save her or die!"

From his position he could safely scrutinize the mountain side. He saw that far up on its side there was a rude cabin made of logs and barks. From this the storm of bullets had come.

Nothing could be seen of those within the cabin.

Suddenly the opportunity came. Once more the face appeared. Barrows raised his rifle quick as thought.

Came a wild cry went up, the sound of a falling body was heard, and then the trumping of feet and bitter curses.

Barrows knew that his rifle had done its work, but also that it was not the foe within, but also a bullet from the mysterious cabin.

"If they are in the cabin they are keeping mighty dark," he muttered.

"They surely must be there, for I have not seen them come out of that cabin a great length of time had elapsed.

Certainly an hour or two since the sniping had passed, and Barrows felt that he must do something and at once.

"I shall die of worry if I stay here," he muttered. "Perhaps"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LOVERS' QUEST.

"Till I tell ye how was, Mister Head," cried bluff Harmon; the vigilant, as he came up, "Ye see the gal took big chances. That's a spring in that bit av bushes there, an' who went over to git a drink of water. Nobody has seen her since."

"Have you made a good search?" asked Frank, sharply.

"An all done good one, sure." "How do you know that Cliff's gang have got her?"

Because we know that it could not be Injuns, for the ground was free from signs of the cowboys' shoes."

Frank received this information with sinking heart.

He knew that it must be too true that Bessie Rodman had again fallen into the hands of Cliff's band.

It was a discouraging reflection.

But one by one they found no easy task.

Just how to go to work to do it was a problem to Frank.

But he was not long in deciding upon a plan of action.

Mister Harman, Barrows, and the vigilante rode up the trail. They knew that the soldiers and Cliff's men were yet having it out.

"God give me strength to rescue Bessie Rodman!" he prayed, as

The young man had gone out.

When it was known that Barrows had been taken to Ranch 5 by bandits, they had half made up his mind to proceed thither when a thrilling thing occurred.

Suddenly a sharp crack of a rifle snote upon the air.

Barrows reeled in the saddle and his horse gave a plunge. He staggered back and fumbled under his face. The bullet had grazed his cheek bone.

It was a narrow escape.

Barrows was struck by the presence of men in another direction, and the bull might have penetrated his brain.

Young Barrows had faced danger and death times enough to

know what to do.

He instantly dropped from his horse and spoke a word of commendation to the animal.

The faithful and well-trained steed wheeled and galloped away into the cover of timber near.
Frank Reade, Jr., and His New Steam Man.

CHAPTER XIX.

FRANK READE, JR.'S NARROW ESCAPE.

Frank Reade, Jr., had decided to go at once in quest of the brothers of Bessie Rodman. But Pomp went aboard the Steam Man, and the start was made.

They were not aware that Barrows had startled out upon the same mission. It was decided to proceed up the Death Gulch, for Frank fancied that the party would there be struck by the trail of the fugitives. The gulch could be traversed by the Steam Man easily, and Frank feared it safer than to follow that way. Up the gulch the Steam Man went. For some distance all went well, and no incident worthy of note occurred.

But finally a branch of the canyon was reached, and here a halt was called.

This extended to the southward. Frank knew that the outlaws could not have crossed this without wide, deep gulches. The ground was high above the walls of the canyon, and the engineer decided upon a different move. The Steam Man proceeded up this canyon in some ways. Then Frank called a halt.

"Shure, Misher Frank," cried Barney, "I'm a-whistling away, I am.

"Shure enough, sir," replied Frank, "but I'm not sure that we are in the right path.

"Shure, Misher Frank," cried Barney, "I'm a-whistling away, I am.

"Nornine was lost.

Aimed with rifles and revolvers, the two explorers left the Steam Man.

A good path up the canyon wall was selected, and after an arduous climb they finally reached the summit. From here a mighty view of the country about was obtained.

As far as he could reach to the eastward was the level expanses of the desert, and to the westward the other direction mountains rose above them to a great height.

He had a powerful glass, and with this proceeded to scrutinize the country below.

Of the cattle of the cowboys, nor was he able to tell what direction Clark's men had gone. He described at once what he believed to be smoke ascending from the deserted camp, and fancied that this might be from the guns of the military and the cowboys.

If this was not sufficiently positive to venture to go thither, Will said it was, dubious as he closed the glass. "I don't know that we can locate the abode of Bessie Rodman from it."

"Golly, Misher Frank," cried Pomp, with dilated eyeballs, "what dark are we to bet to bet?"

"I believe I don't know."

The drive reckoned date of the cowboys had gone back to that ranch as far as I know."

Frank gave a start.

That had occurred to him that the cowboys might have started to the Desert."

"Is there no sign of the cowboys?"

"Yes, sir, I can see the smoke."

"Every man the cowboys?"

"Yes, but they are too far to be seen clearly."
CHAPTER XX.
THE FLOOD—CORNING THE FORD.

It was a thrilling experience which neither of them would ever forget. They saw Barney leaping up and down and gesticulating wildly.

"What is the matter?" cried Frank.

Barney looked before him with a faint smile, "He has fairly left his lips he saw what was the trouble.

Along the bottom of the gorge a thin stream of water was flowing.

Every moment it was increasing. Evidently, the flood was there more water coming in. You'll be on the rapids. " cried Barney. "Share if I'm thinkin' we'd better be getting away."

"Right!" cried the young inventor, excitedly, "but where can I come from?"

He ran to an eminence near and from which a good view of the upper canyon could be had. And there Frank beheld a thrilling sight.

The head end of the canyon was a large lake made by an accumulation of logs and debris across the source of the canal. The river formed a great circle of men with axes and iron bars were engaged in breaking the dam so as to let the whole lake down into the gorge.

It would mean a flood of awful sort if they succeeded. It would surely sweep the canyon clear, and the position of Barnie was a most perilous one.

Frank saw this with horror.

He knew at once that the workmen were of the cowboy gang. If they were set to work, he could not be giving way.

In a very few moments the flood must come. No time must be lost. Into the canyon the water would plunge and engulf everything in their path.

Frank waited no longer.

He sprang to the edge of the canyon and shouted to Barney:

"Go, for your life. Barney. Run for the plain. We will take care of ourselves."

"All right, said Barney, springing into the cage and away went the Steam Man with a shrill down the canyon.

The next moment terrible roar came from the headwaters of the gorge, and there Frank and Pomp saw the mighty flood coming. Like a race horse it surged down through the canyon.

It was now a mad race between the Steam Man and the flood. It was a long way to the plain below, and Frank groaned with horror as he realized the uncertainty of the Steam Man's reaching it. There were places where the Steam Man must go slowly, and this would mean an eternity being swept away.

But as the horse was a very strong wiry sort, he had realized this. He knew that it would be impossible for him to reach the plain before the flood.

So he decided upon a wise move. He reached the junction of the canyon with this other.

There was not a moment to spare. Looking back, he could see the water coming in mountainous billows.

The Steam Man had to be checked to a trifle in order to turn into the other canyon, but Barney had by now all the speed, and the Steam Man shot up a hillside and away through the trees.

The great lake had quickly emptied itself into the canyon. In a short while by the bed of the canyon was once more dry. Barney then ran the Steam Man back into the main canyon, and Frank and Pomp hailed him.

"You did well, Barney," cried the young inventor, joyfully.

"You made the best of the possible move," replied Barney.

Then they greeted Barney with joy and clambered aboard. Shaving passenger will yet do now, Misher Frank, cried Barnie, eagerly.

"Yes," said Frank.

A sharp took the reins and the Steam Man went on up the gorge.

In a short while they had reached the dam which had held back the lake.

The next course was found directly out upon a vast plain.

Frank was about to direct the man's course thither when an incident occurred for a moment's delay.

A loud and harsh voice came from the cliff above.

"Hello, down there.

The voice was not to be seen. The Steam Man came to a halt.

"Ye're Frank Read, Jr., eh?"

"That's my name."

"Well, I'm Artemas Cliff. I give ye fair warnin' to surrender. Ye're in a death trap.

"Thank you for informing us," retorted Frank, "but I don't believe I'll surrender yet."

"Ye won't then?"

"No."

"Then take the consequences."

"I can do that."

A savage curse came down upon the air. Then the crack of rifle was heard and bullets pattered against the stone, but none of these had done. Frank only smiled grimly.

He sent the Steam Man up the gorge, and in a few moments came across the plain, which was deep among the hills and hummocks with a line of timber.

The cowboys continued to pour volley after volley into the Steam Man.

Frank waited until he had reached a favorable position. Then he stopped the Steam Man, and picking up his rifle said:

"Come, boys! let's give 'em as good as they send.

Of course Pomp and Barney were ready and eager.

A destructive fire was sent down into the covert of the cowboys.

In a few moments it grew so hot that they could not remain there and had to get out.

With bellowing yells they retreated deeper into the hills.

Whurroo! yelled Barney jubilantly. "Share if its easy enough to whip such unamitish as they be."

"Golly! don't ye be too suah, Tish," remonstrated Pomp.

"What do ye know about it, ragsy?"

"Yes, I know Jew as much as yo' does, Tish."

"G'long! Yez are a big stunt."

"I ain't so big a wun as yo' am."

"Say that again, an' I'll break the face av yez."

"Huh! Yo' can't do it."

The two rogues would have had a friendly set-to then and there, but Frank interposed.

"One of that," he cried, sternly; "there is serious work before us."

This was a quietus upon the two rascals, and they ceased the skanking.

The cowboys had been driven back, but now a thrilling sound came from the distant hilly landscape.

It was the heavy volleying of many rifles. There could be but one explanation. Evidently the cavalry had come into conflict with the cowboys. A good sized battle was in progress. An impulse seized Frank on the notion that he ought to join that conflict. There was no doubt that the Steam Man could do much to aid the cavalry. So he started the Man across the plain, looking for an open in the hills in the direction of the firing. This it, however, seemed not easy to find.

But as the Man was skirring the line of timber, a thrilling sound suddenly brought him to the spot.

In a small clearing in the verge of the timber two men were sitting down to hold. It was a terrible and deadly struggle which was in progress.

The single fighter was holding his own well. Near by, with arms daily behind her, was a young girl.

It was Besse Broduin.

"My God!" cried Frank. "Quick, for your life, boys! We may put an end to that struggle. Don't you see it is young Barnie and he is fighting to rescue the girl."

"Golly, dat am a fact," replied a cavalryman, excitedly. "Jes' give us chance at dem rapskullz."

Up to the spot the Steam Man swiftly ran.

Very of wildest joy and hope welled up from Besse Broduin's lips.

Young Barrows also knew that rescuer was at hand and made exertions to overcome his foes.

The cowboys, however, seeing that suacer had come tried to get away.

As Barrows was too exhausted to restrain them they succeeded, and dashed away across the plain.

Reaching their ponies they mounted and were out of sight in a twinkling.

The next moment Barrows had clasped Besse in his arms, cutting her bonds.

"Thank Heaven!" he cried. "We are united once more, and at once let us hope never to part."

Those aboard the Steam Man pretended to be busy during an important meeting.

But soon the lovers came to the edge and a general welcome lowered.

An explanation of all followed, and then plans for the future were quickly decided upon.

CHAPTER XXI.
WHICH IS THE END.

The sound of firing now came from the hills quite plainly. It was evident that Clark's men were having a hard battle. Barrows detailed his experiences as we have recorded in a previous chapter.

Then it was decided at once if possible to join the cavalry. "If I can place Miss Besse in your charge, Mr. Reade," said young Barrows, gallantly, "I will gladly join the soldiers and face the repulse of the foe."

"You may do that," replied Frank, readily. "In fact, I think for the safe of the lady to remain in the wagon heretofore."

You are very kind.

"It is nothing."

Accordingly Besse was given a seat in the wagon. Then Barrows mounted one of the ponies left by the cowboys.

"I will see you later," he said lifting his hat to Besse.
Then he rode away to join the cavalry in their battle.

The Steam Man, of course, could not hope to follow so quickly.

The fleet pony could go through narrow paths, and of course Bar-poys reached there soon after, but no sooner had the Steam Man arrived along at a good pace.

After some search a path was found, and the Man made its way carefully through the trees, and suddenly came out upon the field of action.

The cowboys were strongly intrenched in the hills, and seemed disposed to make a final stand.

Col. Clark's men were making desperate attempts to drive them from their position.

And the Steam Man dashed up to the spot a great cheer went up from the soldiers.

Frank answered it by pulling the whistle valve of the Man and sending up a sharp note.

The Man could not hope to reach the position of the outlaws, for the ground was too uneven.

But a position was taken up from where the battle could be easily watched.

Then Col. Clark came up to the wagon.

Warm greetings followed, and Frank said:

"If there anything I could do to help you, colonel!"

"I think not," replied the gallant officer. "I believe we shall drive them out very soon now."

"I hope so."

"If I am not mistaken the day of Cliff and his gang are numbered."

"That is joyful news."

"Yes."

"I hope you will succeed."

"Thank you."

The colonel rode away and the voyagers watched the contest with interest.

One watching the beautiful face of Bessie Rodman could have seen that there was a sense of deep sympathy in her eyes;

But fortune was with the troopers, though they had experienced a battle.

The position of the outlaws was a very strong one and almost unassailable.

High walls of rock were there for them to use as a breastwork.

It was not easy to dislodge them except at great loss of life.

But Clark was not a man to be defeated.

He urged his men on and slowly but surely drove the foe before him.

Frank, Reade, Jr., now with Barony and Pomp and Bessie Rodman, came to the Steam Man out on to the prairie.

For over an hour a kind of desultory conflict was kept up in the air.

Then Col. Clark suddenly dashed up to the wagon.

"We have got them dislodged," he cried. "And I think they are in retreat."

For Barony, now, will show us the way, Mr. Reade, we will try and exterminate this poisonous gang."

"With pleasure," cried Frank.

"Let's start at once for Ranch V."

"Across the prairie the machine ran rapidly, and the cavalry galloped in the rear."

I was in the latter part of the day that all came out upon a rise overlooking the stockade of Ranch V."

It was the Dragoon, and the cowboy on horseback, and the cow beneath the bed of grass on which they rode.

Sudden thrilling cry went up."

"Yes! First!"

The stockade and ranch proper had been fired, and great columns of smoke arose.

The scene was fast becoming a thrilling one. Darkness was coming, and the rattle of firearms the dark shadows of night parted by the flames, gave a weird aspect to everything.

But sure but was the conquest of Cliff and his gang.

The remaining cowboys threw up their hands. But Cliff pitched forward in a heap upon the ground, struck by a pistol ball.

The hand of death came heavy down on the honest man. He was rushed to the camp near his wounds examined.

Bessie V. was a thing of the past.