

Concrete is the best building material

A BROAD statement—Yet literally true. The aim of man from the beginning has been to make his building materials as nearly like natural stone as possible. The great labor required to quarry stone led him to seek various manufactured substitutes. The only reason he ever used wood was that it was easiest to get and most convenient to use. Wood is no longer easy to get. Like most building material, its cost is increasing at an alarming rate. The cost of concrete is decreasing. So, from the standpoint of either service or economy, concrete is the best building material. Canada's farmers are using more concrete, in proportion to their numbers, than the farmers of any other country. Why? Because they are being supplied with

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TRIMMED

By William Stevens McNutt, in Ainslee's.

Big Tom Darragh first saw Blackie Winn on the Seattle water front late one night in the early spring of ninety-eight; saw him, in the feeble light cast by a single electric bulb over the door of a lonely warehouse, struggling silently with four men.

Tom didn't know any of the four men; he didn't know what the fight might be about; but he was Irish, a foe to the majority on general principles. Then, too, the game silence of the swathy little fellow's battle against odds appealed to him.

He crossed the street on the jump, and declared himself in on the fuss with a smashing right swing that caught one of the four, who crouched

a few feet from the struggling Blackie, waiting for a good opening to land with the blackjar that jangled from his raised right hand. He caught him just under the ear, and sent him skittering off the sidewalk, to lie prone and quiet with his face pressed into the muck of the street.

Two of the men had Blackie garroted from behind, and a third, with his left hand clutched in the neckband of the well-nigh helpless little fellow's shirt, was raining blows on his unprotected face with his free right.

Tom caught the fellow's hand as he drew back his fist to strike, and, turning, levered the surprised thug's arm over his shoulder and bent far forward

with a sudden mighty heave. The man's feet described an arc in the air as he shot over Tom's shoulder. A scream of pain came from him as he thudded limply on the board walk, with a broken arm twisted helplessly under him.

Before Tom could straighten up he was caught from behind by one of the men who had held Blackie. His head was twisted in dancery, and a quick succession of dancing uppercuts thudded upon his face. Tom struggled desperately to break the hold, but strain as he might, he could do nothing.

His legs were sagging from the brain daze of the blows on his jaw, and the blackness of unconsciousness was close upon him when he felt the grip that held and choked him loosen. With a supreme effort, he wrenched himself free tottered and fell backward.

He lay inert for a moment, fighting for a grip on his senses. Then he rose weakly on one elbow and started into the battered anxious face of little

Blackie, who leaned over him, panting. "All right?" Blackie questioned jerkily between hard-won breaths. "Sure you are! That bucko had you on the run there for a minute, though, didn't he? I got loose and landed on him just in time."

Tom sat up and looked around him. The circle of light cast by the electric bulb showed no one but himself and Blackie. The little man grinned.

"Skipped," he explained tersely. "Weather got too warm for 'em. Y'all right now?"

Tom felt of his battered face gingerly. "Sure!" And then quizzically: "Say, what was the fightin' about, anyhow?"

Blackie shrugged. "I flashed a little money in a saloon up the line, an' they tolled me off down here an' tried to peel it away from me." He studied Tom critically.

"Miner?" he questioned. Tom nodded. "Some. I just blew in from Colorado."

Arizona mostly, Blackie submitted for himself. "Goin' north?"

"Yeh."

"So'm I." The two men studied each other for a long minute in the dim light, and in that minute a partnership that needed no legal word to bind either party in luck or trouble was formed. Darragh nodded in the general direction of up town.

"Let's go have a drink," he suggested. "Sure!" Blackie fell into step beside him. "You're some scrapper," he praised.

Darragh nodded fondly down at him. "There ain't much of you," he bantered in return, "but I reckon what there is 'll do to take out in rude company."

Two weeks later they sailed together for Skagway. They owned jointly a piece of ground on Eldorado, in the Klondike, which they sold for a hundred thousand dollars. Together they journeyed out to San Francisco, and burned up half of it in one wild, joyous, three months' spree. Together they went back into the North, and sank the remaining fifty thousand in a hole in the ground on one of the Fairbanks creeks that never panned out. They were together in Nome after that—all over the great Northland. Sometimes they had small strokes of luck, and were in funds; much of the time they were broke, all the time they were firm friends. They spent whole winters inside alone, holed up together in a little log hut throughout the long arctic darkness, with never a harsh word between them—and than this there is no greater proof of perfect friendship. They were known the length and breadth of Alaska, and everywhere that men of the North gathered the strength of the tie that bound these two was a stock subject of conversation.

Late in the summer of nineteen-eight they fought their way four hundred miles up the Kuskokwim, and secured a lay on two claims on Geary Creek, in the newly-discovered Mulkhatna country. It was there that the first break occurred in the friendship that had been so suddenly formed that spring night ten years before on the far-away Seattle water front.

It was caused by a woman. The manner of woman she was, and the things she did demand a description of Malamute City, the main camp in the Mulkhatna district, and of the life of its people.

It was a log-hut and whip-sawed-lumber town, for transportation was difficult, and the camp was too new to boast a local sawmill. There was one street, an eighth of a mile long, and lined on both sides with saloons, dance halls, and an occasional trading store. On either side of the street the little cabins etched a ragged fringe of picturesque semi-civilization on the half-cleared hillsides. The camp was in the first year of its existence, and was tremendously difficult to get into. This will tell any one acquainted with the country the breed of men gathered there that winter. Not all of them, nor a majority were bad; but every man in Malamute City that first year was a hard man. Otherwise he wouldn't have been there.

The fact of a man's arrival in camp was a guarantee that he was a hard-fighting man, for to arrive there meant to have dared, and fought hard, and won. If a man didn't win he didn't arrive. The glacial waters of the Northern streams and the melting snows of mountain and valley often reveal in grisly terms the tragedy of those who lost.

There were about four hundred men in Malamute City that first winter, and thirty women. Some were the wives of the miners and merchants in the camp; some were the women of the dance halls; and one of the thirty was Nellie Porter.

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She was Alganik Porter's sister. Alganik was a shyster lawyer who had come into the country in the first days of Dawson. He hadn't been a shyster when he came, but his mortality was not of the fiber that holds firm in the drear, wild immensity of the North. Loneliness, "hooch," and gambling did their work and he stayed on in the arctic, a jackal prowling after ignorant miners at new strikes. At Malamute he had a saloon and general store. His sister had joined him at Bethel, at the mouth of the Kuskokwim, that summer, and he bought her up the river with him. She was a sinuous, brilliant blonde, with lips that were too full and red, and eyes that were too bright and cold. She was in the store a great deal of the time, and it was there that Blackie and Tom met her.

They had neither boilers nor drills for the taking of a winter dump, so soon after the freeze-up they left their cabin out on the creek and packed into Malamute City to spend the winter. Within a week after they had been introduced to Miss Porter in the store each was harboring a concealed grudge against the other. Neither admitted even to himself that this grudge was caused by jealousy, or that Miss Porter had anything whatever to do with it.

Blackie was mad because Tom snored intolerably. This had never before bothered him in all the years of their association; but now he became very indignant about it, Tom had no business to keep a man awake like that. If he couldn't keep from snoring he ought to have the grace to suggest getting a separate cabin. If he didn't make some acknowledgement of his fault pretty soon, or quit it, he—Blackie—would have something to say about it himself. The fact that he said nothing at all to Tom about it was an indication of trouble. Grudges grow fat on silence.

Tom discovered that Blackie didn't wash the dishes clean. Blackie had no business to be careless that way. If he didn't mend his ways pretty soon, he—Tom—would have something to say about it that Blackie would remember. On the days when it was Blackie's turn to wash the dishes Tom always made an examination of them in his absence, and always found cause for anger. He would wash them over again, pitying himself meanwhile, and then take long walks alone, carefully planning the cutting things he would say to Blackie some time.

Blackie took to staying awake purposely until after Tom went to sleep. Then he would lie in his bunk in the dark, tense with anger, and curse his unconscious partner in savage whispers.

It was near to the spring break-up before the change in their long relationship was vocally acknowledged by either. They had not spoken for four days, and this morning, as Blackie drew up his chair to the breakfast table, he accidentally set one leg of it on Tom's foot.

Tom tried to speak naturally, but his voice shook as he said: "Excuse me, but—you—you've got your chair on my foot."

Blackie got up quickly. "I beg your pardon," he said thickly. "I didn't mean to—"

The men's eyes met and held. The memory of the friendship that had been theirs was sacred to each, and each fought against the savage spell of hate that jealousy had woven about them; but it was useless.

Tom rose slowly, silently, inch by inch, out of his chair, and, with no other sound than their gradually quickening hoarse breaths, the two men, glaring unutterable hatred into each other's eyes, legged slowly toward each other, as if drawn together by an invisible, irresistible force that encircled them and was gradually tightening.

It was Blackie who broke the tension. He broke it with a hoarse, madly uttered scream of animal rage, and lunged at his partner.

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