

An Ancient Foe

To health and happiness is Scrofula— as ugly as ever since time immemorial. It causes buncbes in the neck, disfigures the skin, inflames the mucous membrane, wastes the muscles, weakens the bones, reduces the power of resistance to disease and the capacity for recovery, and develops into consumption.

Two of my children had scrofula sores which kept growing deeper and kept them from going to school for three months. Ointments and medicines did no good until I began giving them Hood's Sarsaparilla. This medicine caused the sores to heal, and the children have shown no signs of scrofula since." J. W. McGinnis, Woodstock, Ont.

Hood's Sarsaparilla

will rid you of it, radically and permanently, as it has rid thousands.

THE LOST MAIL BAG.

It was evening in Vladivostok. Out on the harbor the dark waters of the Sea of Japan reflected the twinkling lights from half a dozen vessels lying snugly at anchor, and westward behind the town the moon shone dimly on the snowclad plain and rugged slopes of the Sikota mountains, beyond which, across the frozen waters of the Amur, stretched for thousands of leagues the great Siberian desert. Vladivostok might almost be called the "jumping off place" of the world, lying as it does on the very eastern extremity of the great Russian empire.

A few years ago it was a barren spit of land, uninhabited and forlorn. Now the Russian drum beats at sunrise, and ships of all nations float their flags in the harbor.

On this particular evening, while in the narrow street of the town all was silent save for the occasional tread of a Russian sentry, sounds of mirth and laughter floated from the brilliantly lighted windows of the long, low garrison house, for the commandant of the station was giving a dinner.

It was quite a cosmopolitan gathering that filled the long table, for among the guests were Russian, French and English naval officers, and two or three Anglo-Indians who had come up from Shanghai on the mail steamer.

The last course had been removed, and the quickened conversation that comes with the cigars had just commenced, when the commandant was summoned outside, and when he returned a moment or two later, the most observant of the guests detected a faint shadow on his face.

The assemblage broke up at a late hour and as the guests passed out on the way to their vessels a young French officer cried out to the commandant: "What is the matter, mon capitaine? You look sad and depressed."

Captain Shanoff laughed. "It is nothing, Lieutenant Garceau," he replied—"nothing but the onerous burden of official duties. However, if you have on board your vessel a man with iron nerves and the bravery of an African lion, you can send him to me."

The Frenchman, taking this in jest laughed and passed on with a cheery "au revoir."

One young man, who had overheard this brief conversation, purposely lingered till the last, and as the commandant held out his hand to bid him good night, he said: "Captain Shanoff, pardon my intrusion. I heard your conversation with the Frenchman. I saw, though he did not, that you were in earnest, and now I offer you my services."

The captain looked at him in surprise. "You are one of the passengers by the mail steamer from Shanghai?" he said.

"You are correct," said the man. "My name is Luke Mowbray, of the Indian civil service."

"And what is your object in making this proposition?" asked the captain.

"I am fond of adventure and sport," replied Mowbray. "Since leaving India I have had a dull time of it, and any chance for excitement and change will be doubly welcome."

The Russian captain stood in hesitation for a moment, and then leading the way silently to an apartment beyond the dining hall, he motioned Mowbray to a seat and sat down facing him.

"Now," said Captain Shanoff, "I will explain my conversation with the Frenchman as briefly as possible. Thirty miles from here, among the Sikota mountains, there is a small detachment of Russians engaged in mining operations. Mail bags are conveyed to them twice a week by a native, who makes the return journey in two days. A month ago the carrier left Vladivostok for the encampment. We have not been heard of since. Two weeks ago a second carrier started, and he, too, has completely disappeared. For more than a month we have heard nothing of our companions. It is a profound mystery. To-night I learn that no one can be found who will undertake to carry the mail bag. The natives here are cowards, and what few men I have, while they are good soldiers, are not the men to unravel a mystery."

"What is your theory?" asked Mowbray. "Robbers? Wild beasts? Or could they have lost their way?"

"Wild animals are scarce," said the cap-

tain. "There are no robbers in this part of Russia, and the path, while difficult, is plain."

"When should the mail bags go?" went on Mowbray.

"It came by to-day's steamer, and should leave early in the morning," replied Shanoff.

"Well," said Mowbray, "the adventure promises well. I will undertake to reach the encampment with the mail bag."

Captain Shanoff at first refused to listen to his proposition; but Mowbray insisted so firmly that he at last gave a reluctant consent.

Although he hesitated to incur the responsibility that would assuredly fall on his shoulders in case anything should befall the brave young fellow, he was secretly overjoyed at his good fortune, for the strange disappearance of the two natives had produced such an effect upon both natives and soldiers that no one could be found in Vladivostok who would undertake the journey.

Moreover, the captain had a grave suspicion that the native carrier might have fled into the interior with the mail bag, for strangely enough the missing men were brothers.

This suspicion, however, was of the vaguest, for what possible motive could two ignorant natives have for stealing a lot of worthless letters and fleeing into an almost uninhabited desert?

Before day broke on the following morning Luke Mowbray slipped secretly and noiselessly out of Vladivostok, and turned westward toward the pine crowned ridges of the Sikota range.

He rode the commandant's horse and wore a huge pair of boots the Russian had lent him. Before him on the saddle rested the mail bag, and in his right hand he carried a loaded revolver, ready for instant use.

It was broad daylight when he crossed the plain and rode into the mountains. He had little fear of losing his way, for Captain Shanoff had impressed the road carefully upon his mind, and to further aid him the trees were marked with an axe at short intervals.

Luke was troubled with no misgivings as his horse slowly picked his way over the frozen ground. He was one of those adventurous fellows who roam the world over, seeking out strange places and untrodden paths, and he was keenly enjoying this little Siberian excursion.

Captain Shanoff had truly declared the road to be bad. For ten miles it led up and down hill, over stones and fallen trees, and more than once Luke had to dismount and lead the horse over some unusually bad spot.

About noon he reached the top of the highest ridge and made a brief halt for lunch. The valley below him was thickly wooded and was deep and narrow. The road led through it for seven or eight miles and then, the captain had said, it crossed a gap in the mountains at a point only three miles distant from the mining camp.

It had suddenly grown colder, and the air was keen and biting, as Luke rode slowly down the mountain side. The valley was wild and desolate, and Luke had to admit to himself as he spurred on his horse that it was a very uncomfortable bit of country.

For the first time in his recollection a strange feeling of uneasiness crept gradually over him, and he tried in vain to shake off its influence. To make matters worse, a fine snow began to come down and the sky grew dark and gloomy.

Luke was by no means superstitious, but the idea now took firm possession of him that some great peril was approaching, and for a moment he wished that he had not volunteered for such an uncertain piece of business. Then he grew angry with himself.

"What nonsense!" he cried half aloud. And whipping up his horse he galloped at a swifter pace up the valley, skimming over the crusted snow and leaping over rocks and bushes until the forest dwindled to the edge of the clearing, a long, low bit of ground undulated with hillocks of drifted snow.

On the very edge his horse stopped and sniffed the air uneasily. Then he dashed forward with a start, almost unseating his rider.

On the frozen ground was some dark object, and as Luke with difficulty pulled his horse up short he saw, with a thrill of horror that it was a mail bag similar to the one he carried.

It was lying half under the snow, and as he dismounted and tried to pull it loose he discovered dark red stains on the frozen crust. Horror-stricken, he stood still in amazement, forgetting to pull the bag loose, when suddenly the horse pricked up his ears and began to tremble violently.

With a sudden impulse Luke threw himself back into the saddle on the instant, for far in the rear came a long, mournful howl that trembled and died away.

The mystery was solved. Like a flash Luke realized the fate of the two mail carriers—a fate that might ere long be meted out to him, for the howl he heard was the cry of hungry wolves. Again and again it rose on the wintry air, louder and more savage. Already they scented their prey.

Driving the spurs deep Luke flashed up the valley at a blind and furious pace.

He knew too well the nature of his foes. The commandant had assured him that wild animals frequented that part of the country. So much the worse. The hungry brutes had been driven by starvation toward the coast, and having no doubt devoured the two natives they had taken up their habitation in the valley.

Soon the howl was repeated and taken up on each side until the forest rang with their doleful sounds.

They gradually come closer, though the brave horse was thundering onward with all his strength. A little while longer and he might be saved, for already dimly through the trees Luke could see the break in the mountains.

The forest became more open, and once, turning half around in the saddle, he saw the dusky forms leaping through the bushes. A terrific howl told only too plainly that they had sighted their prey. There was the gap before him now, with the path winding over its rugged slope. The brave horse dashed up at full speed and in an instant he had gained the summit.

But the maddened brutes were almost at his heels, and turning sharply around Luke fired at the foremost, a great, gaunt animal, with foaming jaws and bloodshot eyes. It was a good shot, for the beast tumbled over in the snow, and the rest of the pack turned on the wounded comrade and torn him to pieces. Luke was able to gain some yards.

In a moment they were after him again, full cry, as he dashed down the opposite slope, and twice turning round he fired into the midst of the pack.

There was a furious snarl and a howl of pain, but they came on unchecked.

His situation was now growing desperate, for the horse's speed was failing, and his strides growing feebler and feebler. The wolves were a dozen yards behind and gaining fast.

Luke turned again and fired, and as he aimed to give them a second shot a dire accident befell him. The barrel of the revolver caught in the fur trimmings of his coat and dropped to the ground, leaving him absolutely at the mercy of his savage foes.

Sick with despair he made one last effort to escape, leaning forward on the horse's neck and urging the brave animal to greater speed. In a moment more horse and rider would have been overtaken and dragged to the ground, when suddenly the sound of running water reached Luke's ears and some distance before him down the slope of the hill he saw a low, deep ravine crossing the path.

A little closer and he saw distinctly what was before him. A mountain stream, in ordinary times a mere brawling brook, but now swollen by rain to a rushing torrent, swept between two steep banks. Here was a chance for safety. If he could only leap the gulf his ravenous pursuers might be left behind.

Leaning forward on his horse's neck he urged him on with one last, despairing effort.

The brave animal thundered down the hill, still ahead of the howling pack, reached the brink of the gorge, rose without hesitation into the air and came down safely on the other side.

The wolves, rushing blindly on, plunged over the edge of the precipice, and though some of them perished on the sharp rocks, the remainder, struggling down into a deep pool some yards below, swam through the icy waters to the bank, and struggling to the top took up the chase again as though nothing had happened.

Luke, fifty yards in front by this time, looked back just as the topmost wolf came in sight over the bank, followed by half a dozen more in quick succession.

His heart sank within him, and for a moment he was tempted to give up the struggle.

As the horse, startled by the renewed howling of the pursuing pack, dashed off again, trembling and perspiring, Luke's eye caught the sight of a dark object lying on the snow ahead of him. It was a rifle, the lost property no doubt of one of the native mail carriers.

Guiding the horse directly toward it, he leaned down suddenly from the saddle and as he rushed past made a quick snatch at it.

The horse swerving at this critical moment, he missed his aim, and foolishly making a second attempt overbalanced himself and with a cry of horror shot headforemost into the snow, while his riderless horse thundered on his course.

For a second Luke lay stunned and dizzy, the howling of the wolves ringing faintly in his ears. Then, pulling himself upright, he looked eagerly around him.

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red jaws, was nearly upon him. Now, seeing his prey so still, defenceless—with in his grasp at last—the brute came stealthily forward, with sneaking tread.

Luke shouted at him, but the wolf only growled. Picking up the rifle, he snapped it in vain, and then, seizing it by the barrel, he swung it around his body.

With a furious spring the wolf was upon him. He dimly saw the glaring eyes close to his own, felt the hot breath on his neck, and then heard a blinding, deafening report ringing close to his ears, after which he knew no more.

Strange faces were bending over him when he regained consciousness. His rescuers were the Russians from the mining camp, who had hastened to his aid when the first bullets were fired. A fortunate shot had killed Luke's assailant in the nick of time, and the remainder of the pack, cheated of their human prey, had gone on in pursuit of the horse.

Luke was carried to the camp—it was only two miles away—and by the following day he was feeling himself again.

The mystery was cleared up at last. The fate of the two natives was only too clear, and in addition one of the Russians from the camp had doubtless met the same death, for he had made an attempt to reach Vladivostok a week before, and had not been heard from since.

Half a dozen of them ventured out fully armed, and found all the mail bags and the bones of poor Luke's horse. No trace of the two luckless natives were discovered, and nothing was seen of the wolves, either. Probably the remnant of the pack had been frightened out of the neighborhood.

Two days later Luke was escorted back to Vladivostok, and was eagerly welcomed by Captain Shanoff, who was overjoyed to see him safe and sound.

The commandant wished the brave young fellow to spend some time with him, but Luke declined. He had seen quite enough of Siberia, and the next steamer took him back to Shanghai, for he was more than satisfied with his experience with Russian wolves.

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