

WICKLY'S WOODS

By H. W. TAYLOR

CHAPTER XVI.—(Continued.)

Imaginative boys of fifteen have repeatedly precipitated a panic by dashing down the Overcoat road with certain news of the rapid approach of the enemy, now that everybody knows that Sandtown is in the lawful and peaceful possession of the Sandtown Circuit Court—Judge Jim Skillet upon the bench for the purpose of hearing motions in injunction proceedings, in a vast number of cases of sales to take place on the morrow, unless enjoined.

Squads of riflemen marching in no particular order so far as the keeping of step and alignments are concerned—but not a whit the less formidable, be it understood—marched or straggled out along the Overcoat road past the fields of half-grown corn on the one side and the hazel-fringed edge of "Wickly's Woods," as the timbered hills upon the left had been christened a year ago.

Away to the east along this junction of bottom prairie and wooded hills there were unwonted movements of men across little patches of corn, or standing long and steadily behind a "string" of north and south fence from which the occasional scintillation of the sun upon a rifle barrel gave ominous electric warning of the presence of imminent war in the land.

All manner of reports came thronging into the Redden mansion, and directly up to the bedroom where Lizzy Wickly and her mother sat at an east window, and watched and thought, but spoke little save in answer to the frequent reports and comments that some one or another of the numerous visitors brought up at frequent intervals.

Now it was that Mr. Mason had been captured by the sheriff's re-enforced posse; and the Big Rattlesnake Creek were upon the point of "hossing him up," as the expression was, for summary and dire vengeance. This frequently recurring form of the report always had its effect upon Lizzy. Always startled her out of a pleasant reverie in which she was going over some part of last night's final colloquy with variations of her own invention in the line of her after thoughts and wishes.

Again there were martial stories of sanguinary encounters somewhere in the depths of "Wickly's Woods," or upon the neighboring banks of Big Rattlesnake, where, according to all accounts, the warlike clans were encamped and fortified.

One man brought in a new and unheard-of story to the effect that Conrad Redden and the sheriff were not in the hands of Mason and his men; but were captives in the camp of an opposing armed body of railroaders belonging to another and opposition company. He said, too, that the whole difficulty was really and in fact a sharp, keen trial of shrewd overreaching between two rival railroad companies. That Mason, representing one of these, had secured a legal advantage over the other in the purchase of some mortgage notes upon some very valuable mining property somewhere. And the other company discovering this, had sent down a force of armed operatives to prevent the making of a track upon the mining lands. He also said that Conrad Redden and the sheriff's posse had not been held prisoners by anybody. According to his story there had been a sharp and determined encounter between the men of the two contending interests, in which a number had been seriously or slightly wounded, and several killed outright. And that up to the present time Mason had the best of the fight, and his men were working like beavers, protected by two lines of riflemen. He himself had seen a few of these men on picket guard in some openings of the woods; and the hills fairly rang with the echoing blows of hundreds of axes, and the crash of falling trees.

This story, not at all suited to the notions and preconceived opinions of the people at Conrad Redden's, was generally discredited—especially as no one seemed to be "acquainted" with the man who told it. And hence, he was without a voucher, and his story was without corroboration.

However, word was brought down directly from Judge Jim Skillet that five hundred armed men had been sworn in as deputy sheriffs for the purpose of arresting a large number of railroad employees who had been fighting—one party against another. That these deputy sheriffs in columns of fours had ridden out of town and would be heard from before night.

This news was brought by Columbus Redden, who had prudently refrained from joining his four brothers in the morning hunt for their father, but who now had his coat hitched in the front yard, where he wouldn't be in danger from the teeth or heels of the rapacious mares of Redden township that were making day hideous with their squealing and trampling in perpetual combat. Immediately after dinner Columbus was to take the road in person; and everybody believed that he, too, would be heard from.

In this state of active siege, with so many sorties in progress or contemplation; with hundreds of rumors coming and going, and the sight of little squads of men riding this way and that, becoming of less and less moment to Lizzy and her mother, the day went by.

Long before it had passed the hungry Hoosier mothers of Reelfoot Pond and vicinity had filled their good, strong, reliable stomachs to repletion; had smoked comfortable pipes of twist tobacco, and had talked in loud, strong voices all at once on the south porch and the north porch, and the back porch, from all of

which quarters a roar of "s's's" and "z's's" had gone up about the four corners of the Redden mansion unrestrained by any of the modern tricks of courtesy that throw plentiful dashes of cold water upon general conversation, with numerous "excuse me's" and "beg pardon's" interrupting, etc., etc. And having performed all these neighborly and patriotic offices, by far the larger number had led their refractory mares up beside convenient fences; had seated themselves on saddles of women's and saddles of men's, and even upon tanned sheepskins and folded horse blankets—single, double and sometimes treble—as to riders; had ridden away in various directions to "see to the house" or "milk," or "feed," or "git supper fur" "Jim" or "Bill," or "Jawn," according to the wording of the various apologies for not remaining longer.

Then, with the coming of night, there fell down upon all the length and breadth of the Overcoat road and its tributaries and purlieus, a supplanting of all the sounds of human life by the strange, lonely, incessant, stridulous discords of the multitudinous and multifarious insect life of the new country. The sharp, clear grating of the myriads of black and gray crickets, the loud humming of thousands of huge black beetles, the higher and finer shrillings of smaller unknown winged flies of the outer night, all welded together with the thin, resonant hum of the little creatures of the mosquito tribes—these, with the soft flutter of bats' wings and the frequent loud, hoarse, rubbing sound made by the half-closed wings of the bull-bat, falling from unseen heights of night air with mouth wide open in order to sweep myriads of flying insects into his rapacious maw, in this long and lightning-like dive through the thin lake of transparent, star-lit air—all these small, shrill, unceasing sounds of the night took oppressive possession of the world of sounds, leaving the human sense of sound upon tip-toe, and in breathless suspense.

CHAPTER XVII.

Far in the night the mother and daughter again lay down to sleep that came readily to the elder woman, and far more tardily to the younger. In Lizzy's central thought two opposite and irreconcilable solutions of one problem contended for sole recognition. Had Mr. Mason played parts in everything he had done, as she had charged him yesterday evening, and which he had not denied in so many words? She had charged him with this, and much more! She had charged him with studied and persistent eulogisms of an unknown man for the purpose of piquing her womanly curiosity, and thereby amusing himself. He had gone on with it day after day, week after week, and month upon month, until he had fully succeeded in bringing her to love him and to yearn for him.

How many and many anxious hours she had passed in doubts and fears for his safety! How eagerly she had pored over chance newspapers from the great city, and from remote parts of the country, hoping and fearing that she might see some mention of the beloved name. And how she had beamed with gladness at each return of the absent man, announced always by his assistant, and by no one else!

What a fool she had been! Even he said, last night, something about her suspicion reaching its zenith weeks ago instead of beginning to dawn only the day before, when she had seen him driving through the streets of Sandtown, and without his principal!

His principal, indeed! She had thrown that fraud at him hard enough, she hoped. She had given him to understand that there was no longer the slightest chance to continue that imposition upon her.

Mr. Huntley, the man of straw! The myth! The creation of the man who had palmed himself off on her as the assistant of his man of straw! A noble and a worthy work for a man of his attainments! All this merely to amuse himself, while he was living in an enforced exile from the city! She had hoped she had thrown that at him hard enough.

But again, there were many, many sincere looking and earnest-sounding things that he had done and said, all along. He had sought her company from the first day, and persistently and continuously kept it. His manner was not that of the languid and impatient man of the world, tired of his enforced seclusion. No. He had set himself about a laborious task of bringing her to see some glaring deficiencies in what she had thought was her all-sufficient self. He had gone further. He had shown his great liking for her. He had, in effect, sought to tell her what everybody had long before said again and again—that it was the plainest of all plain propositions, that he loved her! She had laughed at that! She had even confessed her love for his principal—Huntley, the man of straw; the myth; the creation of an idle fancy! Not only so, but she had told him plainly that she could not then tell whether she were not irrevocably bound, by a strangely romantic passion, to what she at last recognized as the mere creature of another man's idle fancy. That had gone home to him! That had hurt—if he could be hurt.

And here, upon this very point, were a few things that she could not help going over and over. And never did she, in reminiscence, approach the chief of these episodes that her heart did not leap and her ultimate fibrils tingle, with something closely akin to happiness.

First, that sudden and unexpected ap-

pearance in that cone of light that seemed to have been photographed upon her retina, so constant was the picture. How well he looked! How fittingly that half-military engineer's dress became him! And what a startling transformation was there in everything that had made the assistant geologist tame and commonplace. Even to the black, close-cut hair. She had forgotten that among her charges of duplicity. Perhaps the fact that she admired black hair had been taken as a silent condonation of the offense to having concealed it under a brown wig. Had he really loved her when he was playing his many parts on the little Sandtown stage? If she had been sure of that would she have arraigned him so bitterly?

Had she been shrewish? Had she shown an ugly temper? She didn't believe she had an ugly temper. But what had he thought of it? Certainly he had seen no display of it in all his former acquaintance with her. And in that intimate relation that must exist among people who gather in the same room every evening, and eat at the same table three times every day—not forgetting the Sundays in which he had hardly left her side half an hour for the whole day; if she had known this, what a splendid opportunity to have appeared at her very best. For really, she had not tried to appear well. She had tensed him unmercifully. She had taunted him with remaining contented with a subordinate place and a scant salary. She could see now how it was that he could bear such teasing as that with a smiling stoicism.

But, ah! the very last words he had said to her! And the very last thing he did! Her face crimsoned at the recollection, but always wreathed with her sweetest, softest smiles, too. He had looked even in that dim starlight, so eager, so earnest, so handsome. He had said almost in the manner of giving his irrevocable pledge—that he would see her soon again! Remember that, Lizzy! He would see her soon if it lay within his power. If it lay within his power!

And then he started away, up the dark road. And before he had gone ten steps, he turned and saw her still standing there and looking after him. Maybe that was how it came that he thought of running back. Very well! If she had done anything to bring him back for that supplemental parting, she was glad of it. He had held her a moment to his breast. His strong arms had been about her. Even now, at the reminiscence, she felt the tingling that had rippled along every little nerve from her crown to her soles, and to her finger ends. And then the pressure of his warm lips upon her own. Actually upon her lips! This bold, audacious semi-soldier that he was! She would punish him for that. How? By having him kiss her again? Well, the unusual and startling surroundings must be his good excuse. Only let him come soon!

CHAPTER XVIII.

In spite of the prediction that Judge Jim Skillet's extraordinary posse comitatus would "be heard from" and that, soon, it was no sooner enveloped in the dim and leaf-arched aisles of Wickly's Woods, than it passed as far beyond the ken of the Sandtown people as if it had freighted a Spanish galleon and sailed away down the Wabash with current and wind both favoring the voyage.

True, that certain adventurous spirits came back at intervals, riding down the already drying sands of the Overcoat road as if they brought tidings of stirring things. But they rode straight to the court room, where the Judge sat in the midst of his bar and four strange, city gentlemen, who were the clients of Billy Biler, our Congressman, and who represented the interests of the new Sandtown and Northwestern Railroad.

Having ridden straight to the door and dismounted, these messengers would run into the court room, advance straight to the judge, who, seeing them coming, would be upon his feet in an instant, and would lead the way to the grand jury room, where they would remain for some minutes free from intrusion or interruption of any sort.

Then they would all come out, wearing grave and determined faces, the judge coming back to his chair, and the couriers going back to their saddles, and away, up in the Overcoat road and into the mysterious fastness of Wickly's Woods.

To those who were bold enough to ask Judge Jim what it meant, he replied uniformly, that negotiations were in progress, but that he was by no means at liberty to say of what nature, or with what prospect of success.

But while this simple declaration was quite sufficient to persuade the Hoosier people of Sandtown and vicinity that the very best was being done for all concerned, it did not satisfy the four polished and well-dressed, easy-mannered gentlemen who represented the new S. & N. W. And they manifested their dissatisfaction through their attorney, Congressman Biler, in many motions with which he attempted to move the court to proceed then and there with the sales of land under mortgage, and assigned to the aforesaid S. & N. W. by the Farmers' Bank of Sandtown. To all of these motions Judge Jim, true to the long training he had received under the noted old Judge Barks, had repeatedly said:

"I am in some measure the custodian of the private interests of the parties to all the proceedings in my court. In these mortgage sales it has come to my knowledge that the property will bring a greatly enhanced price through another bidder, who will certainly be in town, as I am informed, before 5 in the afternoon." And although the sales had been lawfully advertised for that day at 10 a. m., he had advised the sheriff not to proceed with the sales until further notice. No question of the legality of the sale could be entertained in his court. And, happily, at that day it could be entertained nowhere else until it had first been entertained there.

(To be continued.)

The average depth of the Atlantic is estimated to be about 18,000 feet.

RUSSIA'S LAST STRONGHOLD.

Vladivostok, Against Which the Japanese Will Shortly Proceed.

It is announced authoritatively that Japan is planning a land and sea campaign against Vladivostok, Russia's remaining stronghold in the East. With the sickening fate of Port Arthur fresh in mind, this latest frank and direct avowal of the Japanese intention comes with a shock.

The impregnability of Port Arthur was for so long a matter of uncertainty and the claim to that distinction was disproved at such a fearful cost that the world will hesitate to believe that Russia has still in her possession a stronghold whose claim to impregnability is even more plausible than



POSTOFFICE AT VLADIVOSTOK.

was that of the fallen Gibraltar. Yet, according to the military wiseacres, especially those who have had the advantage of actual observation, Vladivostok is strong where Port Arthur was strong and strong also where that fortress was weak.

First and of great strategic importance is the fact that Vladivostok cannot be invested by a hostile force, either by land or sea, during the long and pitiless Siberian winter. It is as safe from all external molestation during its protracted hibernation as is the shrew in its burrow. This natural defense confers impregnability on the port for several months in every year.



VLADIVOSTOK, RUSSIA'S LAST EASTERN STRONGHOLD

The harbor, it appears, is not a whit less baffling in its natural configuration than is that of Port Arthur. Vladivostok is situated on the gulf of Peter the Great, an arm of the Japan Sea. The town is built on the slopes of a high ridge forming a tapering peninsula into an irregular landlocked bay. There are two narrow entrances to the harbor, both flanked by highlands which bristle with batteries and fortifications. The entrances are further guarded by forts erected on an island at their mouths and innumerable islets just outside on which are many defensive works of various kinds. Surrounding the crest of the headlands, which stretch for miles to the eastward and are known as the Golden Horn, are continuous chains of earthworks and other defenses. The lofty hills on the northwest protect the port from the land side, and in the deep water of the Golden Horn, which is at least four miles in length and a mile in width, the largest ships may ride safely at anchor, free from the menace of attack and beyond the reach of the weather.

Like Port Arthur, Vladivostok consists of three portions. That nearest the water is the military town, extending along the harbor and given up almost exclusively to storehouses, military quarters and officers' residences. On the extreme north of the harbor are the official buildings and the private dwellings of the government employees and private citizens. Beyond and higher still is the arsenal, strongly fortified. The population is about 15,000, excluding the military.

It is not likely that the town could be entered by an invading force from landward without a repetition of the hard fighting that took place at Port Arthur. The natural disposition of the hills at the rear of Vladivostok has made it possible to interpose many

powerful schemes of defense against the advance of an enemy, and the Russian engineers have been puzzling their brains for forty years to make approach from the rear practically impossible. There is nothing, however, to prevent the Japanese from completely investing the place. Once inclosed within the circle formed by the Japanese fleet and the land forces, there would be nothing to expect from outside. The Russians have no means of assembling or maintaining an army in that vicinity sufficient to suggest any prospect of relief, as was the case for awhile at Port Arthur. It would only be a simple question of endurance.

It is undoubtedly a fact that Vladivostok is even better provided to sustain a long blockade than was Port Arthur. When Russia decided to make it the terminus of the Transiberian road she began to build storehouses and military depots the like of which was unknown to Asia. This hoarding of stores has never ceased. To lose Vladivostok would be Russia's crowning humiliation.

THE CURVED BALL

It Is the Atmosphere Which Causes Its Eccentric Shoots.

Almost any ten-year-old youngster can curve a ball, even though he does not know why he can do so except that the leather must be held in a certain way. Possibly a half dozen of the major league twirlers know something about the science of the curve, but comparatively few understand why they can produce their "benders." The Scientific American gives the following as the scientific explanation of the matter:

"The pitcher in the field tells us that the ball curves because he gives it a twist, but scientifically this will not do. Why will the twist make the curve? If a ball were thrown in a certain direction and if the force of gravitation were not at work the ball would continue on in a straight line forever. Some force of resistance is then at work when a ball is made to deviate from a curve from its straight course. If a feather is dropped in a vacuum in an exhausted receiver of an air pump it will drop like a shot, but if it is dropped out in the air it will go down irregularly and slowly, shifting from side to side.

"It is the atmosphere which causes the ball to curve. Bearing in mind

that the atmosphere is a compressible, elastic gas, we find that when the ball leaves the hand of the pitcher with a rapid rotary motion it 'impinges upon a continuous elastic cushion,' and this moderate resistance, or friction, changes its course in the direction which is given to the rotary motion. Take an outshoot of a right handed pitcher, for instance. He impresses upon the ball a rapid centrifugal rotary motion to the left, and the ball goes to the left because the atmosphere, compressible and elastic, is packed into an elastic cushion just ahead of the ball by the swift forward and rotary motion, and the friction, which is very great in front of the ball, steers it in the direction it is turning."

Only Misplaced.

Mr. Bixby was on a visit to Mr. Rollins, his cousin, who resided in another part of the country, where manners and speech were different from those to which the visitor had been accustomed. Both eye and ear, therefore, were occupied with study and comparisons.

"There's one thing I notice about you people here," observed Mr. Bixby. "You don't seem to have much use for the letter 'r.' Back where I came from it has a sound, as other letters have, but here it is practically a silent letter. Why is that?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," replied Mr. Rollins, innocently.

"This is a gross case," said a Manchester magistrate to a prisoner, who was making his 144th appearance before him for drunkenness.

There is one thing, at least, that a man can't be blamed for: the company at the house.

There are lots of people like March; very annoying when they attempt to be playful.