Forest Fire Protection

An earnest fight against the forest fires which annually lay waste millions of dollars worth of timber, the greatest natural resource of the northwest, is being waged this year by the Washington Forest Fire Association, which has a force of patrolmen in the field to watch for incipient fires, and stop them before they grow beyond control. The Association is conducting a campaign of education among timber men and farmers, urging them to get their slashings burned before the dry season, when a burn is likely to start a fire that will lay waste millions of feet of timber. The Association intends to help in the enforcement of the new state law in Washington which makes it a misdemeanor to operate an engine or boiler without a spark arrester, where there is any danger of fire. Mr. D. P. Simons, Jr., the chief fire warden, believes that in the prevention of forest fires there lies a practical form of conservation that far surpasses all the talk and hubbub which that much discussed subject has given rise to. The lumber states of the northwest have already lost by forest fires a wealth of timber which will not be replaced for many years, and it is only by arousing the lumbermen and farmers to a sense of their responsibility that this annual destruction can be stopped. The State laws in most States provide very inadequately for forest protection. In Washington there is but one state warden in each county, and he has no chance to cover his territory and keep up his office work, issue burning permits, etc. The work of the Forest Fire Association is expected to help the State officials materially.

The protection in Oregon against forest fires has also been very limited, but the people are awakening to the fact that something must be done, and consequently associations are being organized in all the timber counties with this end in view of protecting the forests from fire. Coos county has such an organization, which was mentioned in last week's RECORDER, and every citizen in the county should assist in every way possible in the work.

Western Settlement Projects

Because eastern railway agents do more than any other set of men to direct new settlers into the western states, and because many of them possess only second hand information about the country which they describe many times each day to prospective home-seekers and tourists, the Great Northern railway has hit upon a plan of sending its eastern agents in pairs on visits to the northwest, and during the past week, S. Lounsberry, city passenger agent for the G. N. in New York City, and G. M. Orabell of Boston, have been visitors in Seattle. They will be followed this week by George Eighmy and L. D. Ketchell, the railroad's agents in Buffalo and Pittsburg, respectively. Other eastern agents will come later. W. A. Ross, assistant general passenger agent of the Great Northern, is seeing that the eastern men get a thorough knowledge of the western liners of the Great Northern, and of the country in general. When they return to their posts they will be primed with first hand data concerning the Northwest states and their opportunities for the home-seeker. Their conversation will no longer consist of glittering generalities, but they will know just how apples are grown in this section, and wheat in that, and whatever else the interested easterner wants to know. The western railroads are making every effort to attract new people into the country they serve, and in giving its agents a trip through the west, the Great Northern thinks it is making a profitable investment that will help draw many a new settler.

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To the RECORDER

THE SKELETON IN THE CLOSET.

A Rattling of Its Bones That Terrified Its Keepers.

By GEORGE ETHELBERT WALSH.

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Beverly Westlake drifted into Lakeville an obscure, poverty stricken man and by dint of hard work and shrewd business investments prospered until he was by common consent counted the leading citizen and merchant of that enterprising metropolis.

Jack Lecon entered Lakeville under a Pullman car. Jack was walking on Grand street when Beverly Westlake swung around the corner and walked toward him.

Jack's first impulse was to vanish, but on second thought he remained passive and motionless, staring in surprise and wonder at the approaching figure. His eyes were bulging, and his mouth stood agape. With the con-

THERE WAS A QUEER LIMPNESS TO THE NECK.

fident swing of the successful and well satisfied man, Beverly Westlake walked along, scarcely noticing the silent beggar on the street—not until the man's voice startled him violently from his mental repose.

"Hello, Peachy!" was the irreverent salute of Jack. "Why, you're some elegant! How'd ye get the lift?"

The leading merchant, philanthropist, financier and exponent of the higher success wheeled abruptly, stared at the questioner, turned red, then white, gripped his hands and moved forward as if to pass without a word, thought better of it, stopped and frowned and finally mopped his forehead with nervous agitation. Jack Lecon was all smiles and his manner as affable as a man who had called a bluff and knew he was stalking big game.

"Quite a bit of time since we met, Peachy," he continued, extending a hand, which Beverly ignored. "Some difference in us now, ain't there? You got the swell cut all right and the figger to carry it out, but I—why, I ain't good for much. I'm jest sick and down in luck."

The words trailed off into a whine. Then, with a sudden change of base, Jack added, with a little triumph in his voice:

"But I got my discharge all right, and you didn't."

There was a remarkable and pitiful transformation in Mr. Westlake. The skin wrinkled, and the complexion turned a sickly red, dotted with yellowish and purplish spots.

"I say, Jack—Mr. Lecon," he stammered when he could control his voice, "what do you want—money?"

"I ain't no bloated aristocrat that I refuses it," leered Jack, with an ingratiating grin.

Mr. Westlake fumbled in his coat pockets and produced a roll of bills that caused poor Jack to gasp.

"Take this," said the merchant, extending a generous wad of the freshly minted green, "and—and don't bother me again, Jack—Mr. Lecon, I mean—that is, if—if— Don't you want a ticket to the Pacific coast, where the climate is very agreeable at this season of the year? I'll furnish you with one."

But Jack Lecon was no quitter when on the easy trail of a victim. He was garrulous by turns and much addicted to the use of strong tonics. At such moments he tried to make love to Alice. Westlake's brave and devoted wife, and openly flouted his benefactor. The uneasy head which wore the crown of riches was bowed under the burden thus placed so suddenly upon his shoulders. But for Alice he would have quit and confessed all.

"I'll go away, my dear," he groaned in agony of spirit, "or I'll kill myself—no, kill him! He's the devil incarnate."

But Alice soothed and cautioned him against rashness. Imagine the mortification of having a low down brute installing himself in your home, insulting your wife and making free with your money and servants and always holding the threat of an awful exposure over your head—a veritable sword of Damocles, but ten times keener of edge and suspended not by a thread, but by a tiny spider's web.

"No; we cannot go away," Alice said in a soft voice. "We must stay and bear our burden for the present. You have lived down your early disgrace and proved yourself a repentant man."

"But the law doesn't recognize that," bitterly complained the broken down capitalist. "If I escaped from prison before my time expired I'm still a criminal in the eyes of the law. Oh, if I had been patient a little longer!"

Alice comforted him with words of caressing affection, but the iron had entered his soul, and he continued to cry out:

"To think this drunken brute should have his freedom without fear of capture or exposure! I'll kill the wretch if"—

"No, dear, you won't do any such thing—for my sake."

Jack's excesses became so disgusting in time that even sweet Alice's patience and endurance were sorely tried. Her faith in her sense of duty was showing signs of wavering when suddenly without warning Jack's skeleton kicked open the closet and fell sprawling on the floor.

The key was held by a quiet, thickset man of dark complexion, who called one evening to interview Mr. Westlake in the quiet of his study. Alice was there and hung over her husband as if to protect him.

"Mr. Westlake," announced the quiet stranger, "you have in your employ a man of the name of Jack Lecon, I believe?"

Beverly winced a little at the word "employ," and he was inclined to laugh at the irony of the thrust. Yes, he was in his employ, but a rather expensive employee. He nodded, with a smile, to indicate his comprehension.

"Well, sir," continued the stranger, "this man is a convict—escaped from the federal prison some months ago."

Beverly Westlake saw all kinds of pink and white spots, and he glanced up to see if the electric lights had changed their colors. Incidentally he felt the strangulating constriction of his wife's arms around his neck. He realized that he was pale and that his heart had almost ceased to beat.

"There is nothing to fear, Mr. Westlake. The house is surrounded, and we will capture him without any outcry. He is a desperate character—killed his guard when he escaped—and we have made special plans to capture him without danger to you or your household. I merely called on you to prepare your wife for any struggle that may follow. You understand?" Yes, Beverly understood, and Alice too.

"Alice," he said slowly, "you had better retire to your room. I will go with—with this man to find Jack."

Intuitively she caught his meaning. She hesitated but a moment and then kissed him as if to withdraw.

"I don't think we shall need your services," the officer said, with a confident air. "Our plans are all carefully laid, and by this time Jack Lecon should be a prisoner. I came here partly to engage your attention while my men secured him. I think now," consulting his watch, "the struggle must be over. We will go and see."

They passed through the great hall in solemn procession and then turned to mount the broad stairs to Jack's room. He lived in comfort and luxury away from the servants as a man set apart for special favors.

But they did not ascend the stairs. A swift figure glided down the polished marble and intercepted them—a figure that halted but an instant and then would have passed on with insistent purpose. The officer, startled by the movement, turned hurriedly and asked:

"What is it, Sheldon? Anything wrong?"

The gliding figure came to a reluctant halt and replied respectfully:

"Yes, sir; he escaped and jumped out of the window. But Jansen and Holden must have him. They were below."

There was a hurried exit from the house, and Alice forgot her dignity and scant footgear. The moon was at its zenith outside, and the crisp wintry air made the blood tingle. The frozen ground was as hard as rock, and little frost bulbs gathered on every tree and shrub.

A voice from out of the muffled silence of the night smote their ears as they turned a corner of the house.

"We have him, sir," it said calmly. "He jumped and fell on his head—hurt a little, I guess."

They gathered around a dark heap on the silver frosted ground where the twisted limbs of a man were sprawled like the four corners of a star. There was a queer limpness to the neck when the head was raised, and Alice covered her eyes and shuddered. If she divined the meaning of it she did not confess it even to herself. It was Jansen who pronounced the verdict.

"Neck broken, I guess," he said coolly. "Yes, sir, and dead as a doornail."

The leader of the men knelt over the prostrate form of Jack Lecon, and after a close examination he said, with finality in his voice:

"Yes, he's dead."

Turning toward the Westlakes, he said in way of explanation and apology: "I'm sorry we couldn't take him away without creating a scene. But I suppose now it must come out in the papers. The coroner must be summoned."

Alice drew a deep breath, and Beverly wiped the frost gathered on his mustache with a hand that trembled. His lips only mechanically muttered the commonplace words:

"You have only done your duty, officer—only your duty—and I thank you."

They turned slowly and walked up the steps of the spacious piazza and entered their palatial home. Their family skeleton was back in the closet and carefully nailed up and sealed. **Would it ever break out again?**

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