THE UNDOING OF A DOUBLE

BY HUGO ST FINISTERRE, M.D.
AUTHOR OF "WHO'S WHO," ETC., ETC.

Continued from first page.

waste their strength in shouting.

I thrashed ahead, sometimes catching my feet in the wirelike vines, with the branches switching my face and a larger limb occasionally compelling me to change my course, but all the time I was plunging deeper into the swamp which had served more than one runaway slave in the past.

The terrifying danger, leaving out of account the dog, was from the men at his heels. It had been announced by Jim Dungan, leader of the mob, that I was to be shot down if I tried to escape from my captors, and I had not only made the attempt, but had well nigh succeeded. Consequently they would make short work of me, and Cy Walters would not hesitate to give me a variation of the "witch's parole," as he had done in the case of more than one miserable wretch in wartime.

I had run barely 200 yards when I heard the bloodhound thrashing behind me. He was on my trail and emitted a bay which I fancied contained a note of exultation in its horrible discord. Certainly it was warranted.

To my surprise, the ground suddenly sloped upward, and before I suspected anything of the kind I debouched into a small clearing less than half an acre in extent, in the middle of which was a pile of logs, evidently the ruins of some cabin that had tumbled to pieces through the lapse of time and the wear of weather.

With that instinctive longing to defer the final calamity I ran swiftly across the open space to the pile of logs, where I paused, revolver in hand, and looked back. Since a meeting with the dog was inevitable there could be no better place than the logs in the middle of the clearing.

"The men must be some distance behind him—ah!"

Matters went with a rush. I had not stood more than three minutes, panting, at bay when the hound burst into sight on the edge of the clearing and charged straight for me like a meteor.

The true bloodhound is not of large size, but satan himself could not possess a more hideous front, while his strength is prodigious. A dusky Hercules cornered by one of those black demons has brained him with a club when he made his leap or he has slitted his throat with a knife at close quarters, but the chances are always the other way. None knew better than I that in a hand to hand struggle I would be as helpless as against the assault of a panther. But my revolver contained three charges.

In the clear starlight the dog caught sight of me at the same instant that I saw him. He emitted a peculiar cry and rushed across the open space as if shot from a catapult.

I stood as rigid as iron. My panic had vanished, and I never was cooler in my life. Before the hound was half way to me I leveled my weapon and held my finger on the trigger until he was hardly five yards distant. Then I let fly.

I made the statement at the opening of this story that I was an expert with the revolver, as my numerous friends of the Seventh regiment will testify, but I never made a prettier bullseye than on that October night in a Mississippi swamp, when I sent a bullet into the brain of the bloodhound that was charging for my throat. It entered his skull between the eyes, and, ranging downward, must have plowed through his heart, my theory being based upon the consequences of the shot.

The dog uttered a rasping howl, and leaping straight up in the air for six or eight feet dropped on his side, rolled over, furiously clawing the ground and air, and then lay motionless, as dead as Julius Cæsar.

My fear was that he had companions of his own species. If so, there could be no better place than the present to have it out with them. If I could maintain my marksmanship, I was good for two more.

But intense listening for two or three minutes failed to bring another sound of the nature dreaded. It was evident that only a single hound had been used at this stage of the business. A few hours would doubtless bring a change.

But I heard something else that was to be dreaded with an equal dread. It was the sound made by at least two men as they hurried through the swamp toward the spot whence sounded the shot of the revolver and the death cry of the dog. One at least had a Winchester, against which my smaller weapon was useless. I had no wish to meet Cy Walters, and, leaping down from the log on which I had been standing, I darted for the opposite side of the clearing, with the knowledge that not a moment was to be lost.

Great as was my haste it was within a second of being too late, for the men who were pursuing me hot footed were closer than I suspected. Being from under the protecting shadow of the trees, I was in plain sight as I reached the other side of the clearing at the moment the leading pursuer emerged from the wood. An unexpected complication saved me from being winged before I could plunge into shelter.

There were three men after me, Cy Walters, Archie Hunter and the owner of the bloodhound that had just finished his last hunt for a flying fugitive. It so happened that the bereaved dog owner was in the lead, he probably being better acquainted with the peculiarities of his animal, but the others were only a short distance behind.

The sight of the motionless form on the ground filled the man with irrestrainable rage. With an imprecation, he bounded forward and paused over the carcass, as if to make sure of the truth. A glance was sufficient. Then, Winchester in hand, he glared around for sight of the one who had done the deed.

He was in time to catch sight of my vanishing form, as he brought his gun to his shoulder, while Walters and Hunter had just dashed into the clearing. Casting one glance over my shoulder, I leaped among the trees and dodged to one side with my head bent low, as the bullet whistled over me.

But I had not yet shaken off my pursuers, and the chase was on once more with redoubled vigor.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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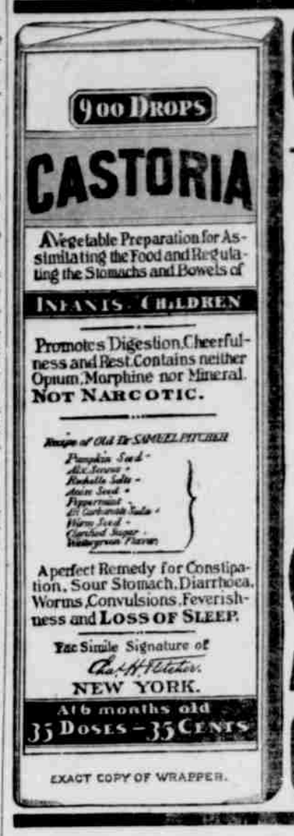

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