

Gamblers of Great Mountain

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again and put my finger on the pulse of the big hill and tell you what's what in two shakes of a lamb's tail. And I don't mind saying to you that my experience is as big as that of a carload of the common run of engineers.

He went through the tunnel again, and the brothers followed. Once or twice he stopped and spoke to a laborer as well as the foreman.

"You wonder," he said to Bill Holdredge, "that I'd speak to these men and hear what they have to say. For I've learnt to trust the feelings, man, as well as a cold knowledge. And tell you that you may be a second engineer, but the books are across your eyes and heavy on your mind."

When they reached the far end, he invited them to sit on a fallen tree.

"And now you want my second thoughts?"

"Yes," said Keeley. And Gordon filled his pipe.

"If you can drop it, and if you have enough to start on something else, my advice is to do it. I'm not asking any thing and don't know how you and Ross fixed it up. But to go on to gamble."

"Against a certainty?" asked Bill. Gordon screwed up his mouth and shook his head slowly.

"I'll no say that, but it's long odds. 'Til no say that, but it's long odds. 'Til no say that, but it's long odds."

"Double timber her throughout and get some hard wood if you can. But my advice is to cut your losses and your labor. There's nothing in the world so profitable as honest labor wasted. Goodbye, boys, and good luck to you!"

He rode back to Lagan whistling. "They'll try it; they'll try it," he said. "And I've no doubt they'll bear the catastrophe like men—naw doot at all."

And that very night the second set of timber was ordered. What they could buy they bought. But suitable hard wood there was none within 3,000 miles, and to set that hill on oak poles was to buy \$10 with a golden eagle. As a makeshift new pine and fir fell on flat and mountain slope, and the trees of daylight were daily buried in the pit.

They found the western end, which was clay bottomed, hardest to deal with, and there they doubled the steps and struts first and drove some hard wood wedges in, and under such they blocked the inward, thrusting mud with heavy green planks, measuring 4 by 10, that came from a small lumbering near the summit. But that here the uprights showed no sign of buckling at first was the deadliest sign of all, for where the cement bottom was it was necessary to put in square blocks betwixt each huge standard. And even then the groaning was more hoarse, new strains were established, the mass of timbers became more organic and piped perpetually. Day by day the forests sent tribute to the devouring dragon of the underhill. They soon it was almost impossible to see the clay save upon the bottom. Yet here and there it squeezed out between close set

ribbons of deep pure blue, and sometimes it protruded through a knothole, hanging down like solid pouring water. And hour by hour, and night, Keeley or his brother patrolled the tunnel, which was now like a leaking ship. They doubled their redoubled care and watched the mazy framework perpetually. The roof was treble timbers, each 12 inches square. They were pinned it again and set angled struts in a complex latticework against the doubled walls. And the flat floor of the tunnel became convex.

They saw it, and for a day assured each other that it was not so. But at night they set a long straight edge across the floor and leveled it. It touched the middle, and nailing both ends to the side frame, they left it.

By the early dawn the middle of the straight edge was 1 1/2 inches sunk at mid. The foreman said this was the end of it. But Keeley sent for more stuff, and, leveling the floor again, he set in a solid bottom 14 inches thick and beat it down with sledges. Along the sides he set timbers lengthways, and on them three more struts against the roof. And he saw the floor was level.

But the roof was convex, bulging downward.

"We've done all we can," said the contractors. "If it holds now, we shall have made nothing. And if it doesn't hold!"

For in the contract the finished tunnel was to stand a month before acceptance.

They went to their tents and played poker to pass the time. But, though they were now as well as their men discharged, the hill was busy.

The next day cards were a weariness. They paced the groaning hole from dawn to eve. Men going east or west, who had heard of the mud tunnel, looked in, and the strange noises scared some of them. On Sunday half the men from the contractors next above them came to view it. The end of the track was now but five miles away, and some of the track layers came too. They offered bets against its standing. Ross came down and shook his head as he rode back.

"I give it a week," he said. But in less than a week Keeley Holdredge came up to him.

And by no trick of forcing the imagination could the eye behold a level floor. Little shakes and splinters rose on it, as when a man bends a lath to breaking. And every hour or so came a sound like a gunshot, when some driver, overwrought with heat, gave way utterly. Through its sound brought seeming silence in a moment more the cries of the strained wood were greater and more terrible.

I myself, who write this, was then at work for another contractor two miles up the pass, and one hot Sunday in August, when my mates were lying in their tents, I went to view the tunnel.

And, though I was afraid, I walked through its whole dark bowrow. It was not the first time I had done it, but it was the last.

There was something uncanny in the groaning of the wood, something awe inspiring. When half way through in the intense darkness, terror got hold of me, and my hair bristled. Wanting to run, I could not, and I sweated ice as I went. In the daylight at the west end I saw the hanging roof. It seemed to move; long splinters pointed more and more perceptibly, and the side standards bent like bows. I walked on a curve of floor timbers driven upward by the rising clay. Here and there were jagged points; beams split and opened, ragged with tough fiber. In the hands of the mountain the mightiest trees were made wood.

And outside by their tent I saw the Holdredges loading up a peck pony, while two other little cayuses stood ready saddled. I gave them good day, and they nodded, not cheerfully, as I thought. And when the pony's load was fixed up I followed them at a little distance as they took their last walk to the tunnel's mouth, which was now shapeless and distorted. Two great rafters had freed their ends and pointed northward and southward. The sill was fixed up I followed them at a little distance as they took their last walk to the tunnel's mouth, which was now shapeless and distorted.

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Sleeping and Waking. "The ability to wake at a given hour by forming a resolution to do so before going to sleep," said a physician at a after dinner discussion a few days ago, "involves a problem that scientists do not pretend to have definitely solved. Their theory, however, is certainly plausible. A great many acts of life, as we all know, are only half voluntary. A man will begin whittling a stick and continue while his mind is sugared upon something else. It is the same with walking. In other words, the action is started by volition and then keeps on going, like an engine.

"It is known also that the will persists to a certain extent in what we call unconsciousness, both from anaesthetics and during sleep. How far that persistence extends is an open question, but it is reasonable to assume that most of us can set an impulse on the principle that an alarm clock is set, and the half voluntary mechanism of the brain carries it along without further attention. But, as I said before, it is only a theory. To tell the truth, our real knowledge of such things is startlingly slight."—New Orleans Times-Democrat.

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