

VALIANT DUST

by Percival Christopher Wren

SYNOPSIS: Otho Bellime, English gentleman, member of the Foreign Legion, has been accused of entry duty by an Arab he recognizes as a Colonel of the Secret Service. He orders Otho to take a message to Major Riccoli, commander of this Foreign Legion post near Mekazen. Riccoli entertains grandiose ambitions for himself as Sultan of a Sahara empire. His ambitions get him cashiered from the French Army years before when discovered by Col. Le Sage of the Secret Service. Otho sees something mysterious behind the advances of Bombelli who first offers to desert with Otho, and then invites him to share the favor of Riccoli and his suite on a mission Otho cannot stomach.

aid—provided your Excellency is convinced that I am what I appear to be, the secret messenger and ambassador of my master, the Kaid. And to discuss these proposals that give my master, the Kaid, the great gratification—as well as to assure your Excellency of my master's absolute good faith.

"One thing at a time," replied Major Riccoli, again endeavoring to out-stare the Moor. "First of all, as to your being what you pretend to be."

Riccoli moved toward the Arab, whispered a few sentences and then leaned back with a satisfied smile as the visitor gave prompt replies. "So far so good," observed the French officer. "My messenger evidently reached your master. Now as to your being the Kaid, and I, can come face to face and talk, I can lay bare my mind to him and speak with single tongue. I can promise him such things as he has not dreamed of—such power, such wealth, such greatness, such munitions of war and, and..."

Words appeared to fall the speaker as he contemplated the picture that he drew.

"Promise," he continued, "promise and perform—and give him proof and guarantee of my good faith."

"Ah! Proof and guarantee of good faith, Sid! What proof? And what guarantee?"

"Of that I will talk with the Kaid, your master, as I said in my letter, and as I bade my messenger tell him."

"Doubtless, Sid. You must meet the Kaid, my master, face to face, and talk with him. But I also have to face him and talk with him on my return. What can I say of proofs and guarantees that promises can, and will, be performed?"

"Say that I will bring him what most he needs—men and munitions. Every man worth a hundred as a fighting-man; worth a thousand as a trainer of fighting-men. Proof and guarantee? Did I not offer in my letter to put myself completely in his power—to walk into the lion's den? What further proof of good faith could your master have or want? Is it not rather I, who need proof and guarantee of the Kaid's good faith?"

The Moor smiled with a flash of white teeth.

"You will not enter the lion's den unarmed, Sid," he said.

"And has the lion, neither teeth nor claws?" was the reply. "Let us speak plainly. I will visit the Kaid of Mekazen accompanied by a handful of men, a mere escort, a bodyguard. How many men could the Kaid have in the citadel of Mekazen? How many in the city? How many encamped on the plains about it? Is the Kaid afraid? Who would be in danger from treachery, the Kaid or I?"

"And when you have spoken with the Kaid, my master, with single hand and simple speech, pure, clear and limpid as the waters of the rivers of Paradise, and you and the Kaid, my master, understand each the mind of the other, see eye to eye, and clasp hands of friendship—what then, Sid?"

"Then I will bring more men, and yet more, until the whole of my command—men and munitions—foot, horse and guns are at the Kaid's disposal under my command. Then indeed may he hope for victory over the Sultan. Hope, do I say? Nay, he is certain of victory as the Faithful are certain of Paradise."

Again the Moor smiled.

"And you can answer for your men, Sid? They will fight beneath that banner?"

"Are they not soldiers? Have they any duty—or desire—but to obey?" asked Riccoli, spreading eloquent hands, with a shrug of mobile shoulders. "Where I lead they will follow."

"And your Government, Sid? Will they not also 'follow'?"

"Ah!" replied Riccoli, "it is concerning what will happen then, that I must talk with the Kaid, your master. Not another word will I say now, not one."

The Moor rose to his feet.

"I will carry you, words to the Kaid, Sid," he said, touching his heart and head as he bowed. Meanwhile, speak not of me and say visit to any one's mess for no man knoweth the mind of the Kaid. He will be, that his right hand shall not know what his left hand doeth; and his spies spy upon all his spies."

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And tomorrow Bombelli gives the Post something to gossip about.

Chapter 2 RICCOLI'S MESSAGE

SUDDENLY, at a clank of hoofs, a jingle of steel, and a creak of leather, Otho sprang to attention, presented arms and returned to the position of attention, and then held out the paper to Major Riccoli as that officer, followed by his orderly, Bombelli, rode out of the gate and, glancing at the sentry, returned his salute by raising two fingers to his cap.

"What's this?" he asked, reining up.

"A letter for you, mon Commandant. That Arab just brought it. I told him to wait there until I was relieved."

"Good!"

Having frowned his way through the document, Major Riccoli, his handsome face otherwise devoid of expression, again read it, and again thoughtfully regarded the messenger.

"Hi, you," he called, and beckoning to the Arab, wheeled about and rode back into the little fort.

Dismounting and giving his reins to the orderly:

"See that I am not disturbed and that no one comes near here," he said.

Then, bidding the Arab follow him, he entered the little stone room that was at once his office and his quarters, and shut the door.

Having closed the door, Major Riccoli seated himself at the rough wooden table, placed his revolver upon it and, with a wave of his hand, gave his visitor permission to be seated.

The Moor, respectfully touching his head and his chest, bowed and, squatting, cross-legged on the floor of the hut, drew his feet beneath his cloak.

The French officer, head on hand, for some moments silently regarded the dusky, bearded and somewhat dirty face of the man who, from beneath overhanging bushy eyebrows, watched him intently with unwinking gaze.

Yes, a typical Moor. A fat-faced, bushy-bearded hill-man who might be own cousin to Abd-el-Krim, Raisuli, or any other Moorish chieftain—robber, brigand, rebel, patriot, or whatever one liked to call him.

Why didn't the fellow speak? One loses prestige and takes the lower ground if, in dealing with these people, one pays the first visit or makes the first remark.

In silence, Major Riccoli endeavored to out-stare the Moor. To his great annoyance he found himself compelled, at length, to blink, and almost to withdraw his gaze from that of the visitor, as a fencer disengages his sword.

"Well!" he said sharply and replied in reply another bow and salutation, respectful if not humble.

"Why have you come here?" he asked in his all but perfect Moorish Arabic.

"To bring that letter, Sid!"

"Do you know what's in it?"

"I do, Sid!"

"You know that it is an answer to my message to the Kaid?"

"I do, Sid!"

"Why didn't you go when you had given the letter to the sentry?"

"I have to take an answer, Sid!"

"Why could not my messenger to the Kaid have brought this letter and taken back my answer?"

"My master, the Kaid, is the most trusting of men, but only in the Faithful has he any faith—and not much in them. He once trusted the word of the Sultan, publicly pledged on the K'ra's."

"So he sent you to find out whether the messenger and the message were genuine, and incidentally to find out anything else that you could, and generally to spy out the land?"

The Moor smiled.

"The Kaid, my master, on whom be peace, sent me to find out whether the messenger and the message were genuine," he replied. "And also to be his ear into which your Excellency might whisper any further words that may now be

LARGE DIVIDEND FOR POLICY HOLDERS IN METROPOLITAN LIFE

The Metropolitan Life Insurance company will distribute this year its earnings during 1932 the second largest aggregate dividend in the company's history, Frederick H. Ecker, president of the Metropolitan, has announced. The total amount reserved for dividends to policyholders, payable in 1933, is \$101,988,958, or only \$714,808 less than the record amount of \$102,400,764 declared in 1932. At the same time, the company added \$20,500,000 to its contingency reserves, and increased its unassigned or surplus funds by \$13,541,502, bringing the latter item of its balance sheet up to nearly a quarter of a billion dollars—\$240,811,739. Decreased expenses and savings due to favorable mortality, Mr. Ecker explained, made it possible for the Metropolitan to distribute more than one hundred million dollars to its policyholders for the second successive year.

To the company's industrial policyholders, who constitute the greater number, \$50,648,419 of the total dividend will be apportioned.

The ordinary dividend totals \$48,759,772, as against \$52,608,630 paid in 1932. This decrease, it was explained, is due to the adoption of a somewhat lower ordinary dividend scale, and in large part reflects the reduced distribution on those policies containing the disability annuity provision.

Accident and health dividends declared for 1933 amount to \$2,290,765. Including the declaration for 1932, the Metropolitan has paid or credited to its policyholders since its organization a total of \$623,137,178 in the form of dividends or bonuses.

According to the financial statement presented to the board of directors today, the company's assets were increased by \$179,268,772 during 1932, and stood at \$3,769,372,425 on December 31st last, thereby continuing the Metropolitan in its long-held position as the largest financial institution in the world. Income for the year, totaling \$921,933,101, was the largest in the company's history. Payments to policyholders also reached a record figure in 1932, being well over half a billion dollars—\$562,904,651. Of this total, \$151,292,286 was paid in death benefits, while more than two and one-half times

that amount, or over \$400,000,000 was paid to living policyholders in the form of matured endowments, annuities, disability benefits, dividends, cash surrender values, etc. Payments to policyholders averaged \$3,856.94 a minute for each business day of eight hours throughout the year, the company reported.

Fender and body repairing. Prices right. Brill Sheet Metal Works.

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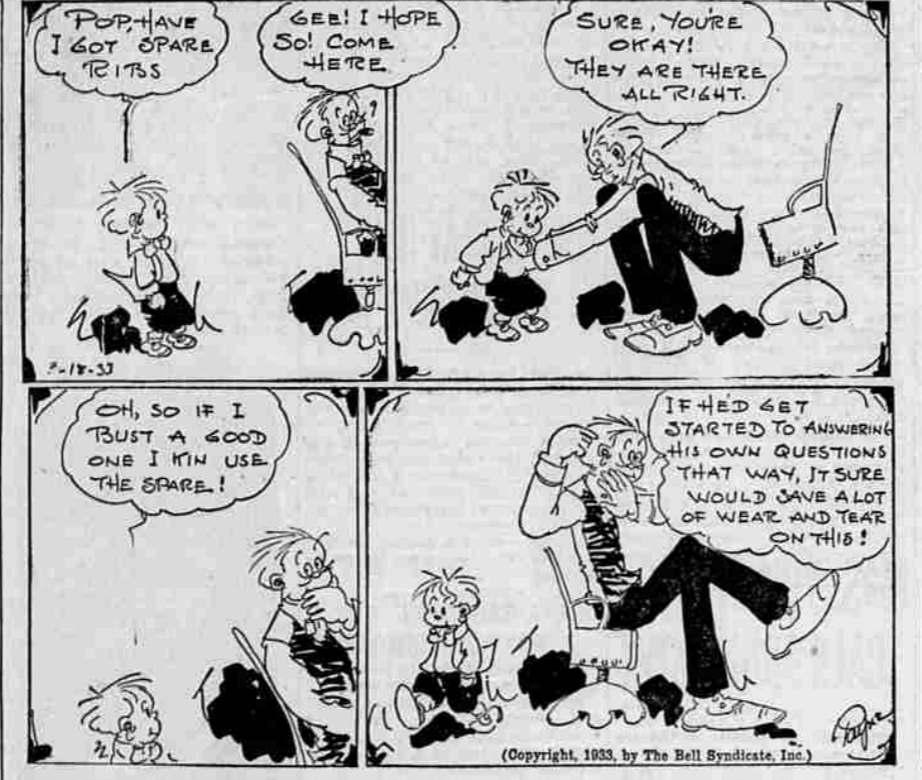
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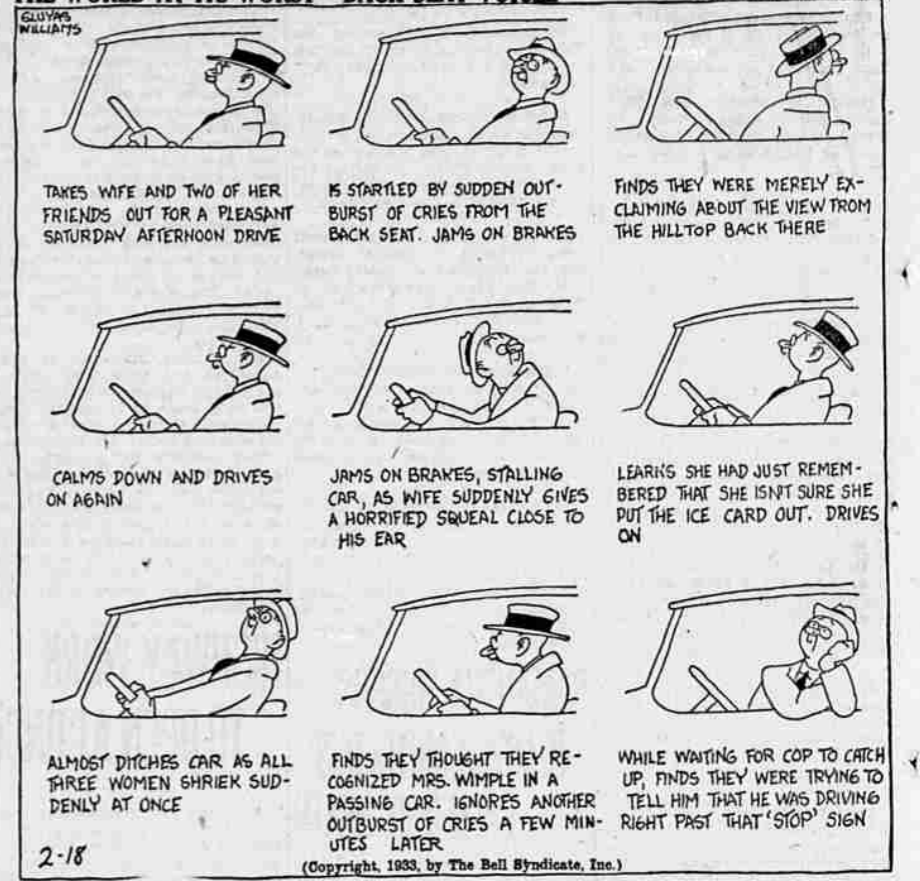
S'MATTER POP—

By C. M. PAYNE



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By EDWIN ALGER



THE NEBBS—Good-Bye, Boys—I'm Through

By SOL HESS



BRINGING UP FATHER

By George McManus



APPLE GROWERS' LOAN ARRANGED

SPokane, Wash., Feb. 18.—(AP)—The federal intermediate credit bank of Spokane today revealed it had arranged to advance \$1,000,000 toward financing production of the 1933 apple crop in the Yakima and Hood River valleys of Washington and Oregon.

Commitments were made to the Apple Growers' association of Hood River and the horticultural union of Yakima after conferences with representatives of the two associations. E. M. Ehrhardt, president of the bank, said it was estimated that \$18,000,000 more credit will be required of commercial banks and federal agencies to produce and market the Pacific northwest apple crop this year.

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