FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN;
OR, THE YOUNG INVENTOR'S TRIP TO THE FAR WEST.

By "NONAME."
Frank Reade Jr., and His New Steam Man;

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Author of “Frank Reade Jr.’s Electric Cyclone; or, Thrilling Adventures in No Man’s Land,” etc.

CHAPTER I.

A GREAT WRONG.

FRANK READE was noted the world over as a wonderful and distinguished inventor of marvelous machines in the line of steam and electricity. But he had grown old and unable to knock about the world, as he had been wont once to do.

So it happened that his young and talented young man, ascended his father as a great inventor, even excelling him in variety and complexity of invention. The son soon surpassed the old master.

The great machine shops in Readestown were enlarged by young Frank, and new flying machines, electric wonders, and so forth, were brought to being.

But the older Frank would maintain that, unaided by electricity at the time, there was an undeveloped factor, his invention of the Steam Man was really the most wonderful of all.

"It cannot be impressed upon me, he declared positively. "Not if steam is used as a motive power."

Frank, Jr., laughed softly, and patted his father on the back.

"Dad," he said, with an affectionate, though wasted air, "what would you think if I should produce a most remarkable improvement upon your Steam Man?"

"You can’t do it," declared the senior Reade.

Frank, Jr., said no more, but smiled in a significant manner. One day later, the doors of the secret drafting-room of design were tightly locked and young Frank came forth only to his meals.

For three months this matter of closed doors continued. In the machine shop department, where the parts of machinery were secretly put together, the ring of hammers might have been heard, and a big sign was upon the door.

No admittance.

Thus matters were when one evening Frank left his arduous duties to spend a few hours with his wife and little boy. But just as he was passing out of the yard, a dark, short in stature and of gentle features, rushed excitedly up to him.

"Oh, Marce Frank," cried the able servant, "just wait one moment!"

"Well, Pomp," said Frank, pleasantly, "what can I do for you?"

The darkly clad woman was a faithful servant of the Reades, and had accompanied both on their tours in foreign lands, dined with them, and given them a name that was respected.

"You’d better want yo’, Marse Frank, jest as quick as ever yo’ kin come!"

"My father," exclaimed Frank, quickly. "What is it?"

"I don’t know," replied Tom, "but Marce Frank. He jes’ say fo’ me to tell yo’ what he want yo’ to see yo’.

"Where is he?"

"In his library, right.

"All right, Pomp. Tell him I will come at once."

The darkly clad woman was sent. Frank saw that the doors to the secret workrooms were locked. This was a wise precaution for hosts of cranks and denounced inventors were always loitering about the place and would quickly have stolen the designs if they could have got at them.

Not ten minutes later Frank entered the library where his father was waiting.

The elder Reade was pacing up and down in great excitement.

"Well, my son, you have come at last!" he cried. "I have much wanted to see you."

"I am at your service, father," replied Frank. "What is it?"

"I want you to tell me what kind of a machine you have been getting up."

"Come now, that’s no fair," said Frank Jr. with twinkling eyes.

"Well, it is any kind of a machine that can travel over the prairies tell me so," cried the elder Reade, excitedly.

Frank, Jr., was at a loss to exactly understand what his father was driving at. However, he replied:

"Well, I may safely say that it is. Now explain yourself."

"I will," replied the senior Reade. "I have a matter of great importance to give you, Frank, my boy. If your invention is as good as my steam man even, and does not improve upon it, it will yet perform the work which I wanted it to do."

A light broke across Frank, Jr.’s face.

"Ah!" he cried. "I see what you are driving at. You have an undertaking for me and my new machine."

Frank, Sr., looked steady at Frank, Jr., and replied:

"You have hit the nail upon the head."

"What is it?"

"First, I must tell you a story."

"Well?"

"I will take you some time to go into the details, so I will not attempt to do that but give you a simple statement of facts: in short, the outline of the story."

"Well, let’s hear it."

The senior Reade cleared his throat and continued:

"Many years ago when I was traveling in Australia I was set upon by bushmen and would have been killed but for the sudden arrival upon the scene of a countryman of mine, a man of about my own age and as plucky as a lion."

"His name was Jim Travers, and I had known him in New York as the son of a wealthy family. He was a roving temperament, however, and this is what had brought him to Australia."

"Well, Travers saved my life. He beat off my assailants, and nursed my wounds brought me back to life."

"I have felt ever since that I owed him a debt which could not be fully repaid. At that time I could make no return for the service."

"I drifted through the gold fields together. Then I lost track of him, and until the other day I have not seen or heard from him."

"But I now find that it is in my power to give him assistance, in fact to partly pay the debt I owe him. This brings us to the matter in hand."

"How?"

"Six months ago it seems that Jim who is now a man of great wealth, still a bachelor and for a few years past living at a fashionable hotel in New York went to his club. When he returned in the evening he found a note written like this: Mr. Reade laid a note upon the table, Frank read it:

"DEAR TRAVERS: I would like to see you to-night upon an important matter. Will you meet me in twenty minutes at the café on your corner. I must see you, so be sure and come.

A FRIEND."

"Of course Jim wondered at the note, but he did not know of an enemy in the world, so he felt perfectly safe in keeping the appointment. He started for the café."

"The night was dark and misty. Jim walked along and had got near the café when somebody stepped out of a dark alleyway and grasped his arm."

"Come in here," a sharp voice said, we can talk better here than is it?"

"Before Jim could make any resistance he was pulled into a dark alleyway. Two men had hold of him and something wet was dashed upon his face and over his hands, then he felt some liquid poured over his clothes and some object thrust into his pocket."

"Then the door opened again and he was flung out into the street. Jim was unhurt, but amazed at each treatment. He had not been hurt and was at a loss to understand what it all meant."

"The incident had taken but a few moments in its course. At first a thought of foul play had flashed across Jim. Then it occurred to him to look at his hands which were wet with some substance."

"He gave a great cry of horror as he did so. There was blood upon them."

FINIS.
FRANK READ JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW STEAM MAN.

Then the young inventor, passed before his father, and in a deeply impressed manner said:

"Then an innocent man stands convicted of murder!"

"Yes." "For murder!" "If that is the day of every philanthropist to try and save the innocent.

"If it is.

"We must do it.

"I am glad to hear you say that.

"That is very strange. Of course there must have been a motive.

That motive would seem to be to get Travers out of the way.

"Yes.

"And he has no enemies."

"None that he knew of."

"Ah, but what would any one gain by putting him out of the way?"

Frank Read, Jr. paused. He gazed steadily at his father. Much passed between them in that glance.

"His fortune is a large one," put in the senior Read, "the rights to inherit would furnish the best motive. There is but one heir, and he is a nephew, Artemas Cliff, who is a stockman, somewhere in the Far West. It could not be the father.

"Could not?" Frank Read, Jr., sat down and dropped into a brown study. After a time he resumed. "And my Steam Man is at the disposal of justice at any time. But you spoke of the prairies. Is there a claw in the West?"

"The only claw possible to obtain at present," declared Mr. Read, Jr. "You see detectives tracked two suspicious men to Kansas. There they lost track of them. Everybody believes that they were the men who burned the ranch in the Flat.

"Well, I believe it," cried Frank Read, Jr., with impulsion. "I can see but one logical explanation of the matter. Either Artemas Cliff has been made men and put in this set in order for the sake of Travers' money, or—the case is one not possible to solve with ease."

Frank Read, Jr., did not display surprise at this statement of his son.

"Now you have the whole thing in a nutshell, my boy," he said.

"Of course, you can do as you please, but if you wish to take any kind of a journey with your new invention, here is a chance, and a noble object in view. That object should be to track down the men, and clear Jim Travers. It may be that the nephew, Artemas Cliff, is the really guilty one. But in any case, I believe that it is in the West you will find the solution of the mystery."

"That is my belief," agreed Frank Read, Jr., "but now that this matter is settled let me show you the plans of my steam man."

Frank Read Jr. drew a roll of papers from his pocket and spread them upon the table.

Upon them were the blue print plans and drawings of the mechanism of the Steam Man.

Frank Read, Senior, examined them carefully and critically. From one to another he went and after some time drew a deep breath saying:

"Well, young blood is best after all. I must say, Frank, that I am surprised. There is no doubt about what you have improved upon my Steam Man. I congratulate you."

"Thank you," said Frank Read, Jr., with gratification.

"You shall," replied the young inventor. "Tomorrow the Steam Man will go out of the shop upon his trial trip."

A few minutes later Frank Read, Jr., was on the way to his own home.

He was in a particularly happy frame of mind. He had achieved great results in his new invention, and here, as by design, was a chance afforded him to use the Steam Man to a philanthropic and heroic purpose.

The idea of traveling through the wilds of the West was a thrilling one to Frank. He could already picture the effect of the Steam Man upon the wild savages of the plains and the outlaws of Western Kansas and Colorado.

Also the level floor-level plains of that region would afford excellent traveling for the new invention. FrankRead, Jr., was a lover of adventure. It was an inborn love. The prospect before him fired his very soul. It was just what he desired. The evening he unfolded all his plans to his wife. Of course Mrs. Read was averse to her husband undertaking such a dangerous trip. But after a while she overcame her scruples and consented herself to it.

The next morning at an early hour, Frank was at the engine house of the steel works. The wide doors were thrown open and a wonderful sight revealed.

"Here stood the Steam Man."

Frank Read, Sr., and a great number of friends were present. pomp, the negro, was also there, as well as a queer-looking little Irishman with a genuine Irishman with a genuine and winking eye, which bespoke a nature brimming over with fun. This was Barney O'Shaun. Barney and pomp had long been faithful servants of the Reads. In all of their travels with their inventions they had accompanied them. Of these two characters we will say no more, but permit the reader to become acquainted with them in the course of the story.

Senior Read examined the mechanism of the new Steam Man with deepest interest.

"Upon my word, Frank," he cried, "you have beaten me out and out. I can hardly believe my eyes."

Frank Read, Jr., laughed good humoredly.

Then he went about showing a party of friends the mechanism of the new Steam Man.

The man himself was a structure of iron plates joined in sections with rivets, hinges or bars as the needs required.

The form and form the machine was a good imitation of a man done in steel.

In no wise did he look ponderous or untrusty, though his stature was fully nine feet.

The man stood erect hiding the shafts of a wagon at his hips. The wagon itself was light but roomy with four wheels and a top covering of fine steel network. This was impenetrable to a bullet while anyone inside could see quite well about them.

There were loop-holes in this netting to put the rifle barrels through in case of a fight.

A part of the wagon was used as a coal bunker. Other small compartments held a baled amount of stores, ammunition and weapons.

Upon the fenders in front was a brake to regulate the wagon on a steep grade, and a skid in the rear to be used in the event of the passage of the rains, two long lines connecting with the throttle and whistle valves. A word as to the mechanism of the man.

Here was really the finest part of the invention.

Steam was the motive power.

The hollow logs and arms of the man made the reservoir or boilers. In the broad chest was a mass of hundreds pounds of coal could be here be placed, keeping up a fire sufficient to generate steam for a long time.

The steam chest was upon the man's back, and here were a number of valves. The tail was worn by the man formed the smoke stack.

The driving rod, in sections, extended down the man's legs, and could be set in motion with a treadle. There that a tremendous stride was attained, and a speed far beyond belief.

This was the new steam man. The improvements were many and manifest.

The whole mechanism was more nicely balanced, the parts more strongly joined, and the steam of finer quality. Greater speed was the certainty.
Fire was burning in the furnace; steam was hissing from the retort, and smoke was curling from the funnel, bath of the man.

Frank Reade, Jr., suddenly sprang in the wagon.

He closed the screen door behind him. Pomp was engaged in some work on the railroad.

Frank took up the reins and pulled them. The throttle was opened and the whistle valve closed.

The smoke from the new Steam Man gave then and there was his way on the trip to the yard.

Out of the yard he went and cut through the road. Everything was in the gate, and the other ones went up.

Down the high street the Steam Man was a terrific sight.

His air was long and powerful. So rapidly were they made that a long line of smoke was visible in the air.

It was a good smooth road.

Just ahead was a man riding a horse. Near him was a bicyclist who was as fast as the other.

Both had heard that the Steam Man would make their trip run that morning.

Both had been made by both that they could beat the man.

Pomp guessed the truth at once.

"I'll dar, Mars Frank," cried Pomp, "with a chuckle and a shake of his woolly head. "Dem two charlies got a piles of galls. Jed yo' show dem dat day ain't in it. Won't yo?"

Pomp had more than one reason for beating the horse and bicycle.

He was also making a small bet of his own on the result.

It was evident that the parties ahead were ready for the fun.

Frank Reade, Jr., smiled grimly, and opened the throttle a little wider.

The next moment the Steam Man, the bicycle rider and the trotter were all flying neck and neck down the road.

Could there be anything that would slow them down?

Down the road they flew as a whirlwind. The dust flew up behind them in a cloud.

But the Steam Man just trotted by his competitors and seemingly no exertion at all. Frank turned with a laugh to see how easily they were distanced.

About a quarter of a mile out of the town, the horse came up and grasped his hand in an ecstasy of delight.

"Braa, my son," he cried. "You have crippled my invention with your luck, and I know that you will succeed in getting Jim Travers.

"I shall take only Barney and Pomp with me," said Frank Reade, Jr.

"There will be no room in the wagon for more."

"Well, they will be useful companions," said the Senior Reade.

"My son; may God be with you in your enterprises."

Frank Reade, Jr., at once proceeded to make preparations for his western trip.

He visited Travers in prison and talked with him.

"I know that you are a good man, and that you have been treated with kindness and respect."

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Chapter III

On the Plains

The scene of our story now undergoes a great change.

We will transfer the reader from Redcliff to the plains of the Far West. Fully five hundred miles of civilization, and right in the heart of the region of the hostile Sioux.

Frank Reade, Jr., had transported the Steam Man as far as possible by rail.

From thence he had journeyed the rest of the way on horseback.

Nothing of thrilling sort had as yet marked their journey. But they were upon the verge of the most exciting adventures as the reader will hereafter agree, possible to be experienced by man.

With the broad expanse of rolling plain upon every hand, one morning in June the Steam Man might have been seen making its way along at a moderate gait.

Frank Reade, Jr., with Barney and Pomp were in the wagon.

Frank held the reins and his keen gaze swept the prairie in every direction.

As far as the eye could reach there remained the same broad expanse. There was little to break the monotony.

Barney and Pomp had taken advantage of a fall in their duties and indulged in the perpetration of practical jokes.

"Bejibonas, I'll go yer ten betther on that, yer black ape," cried Barney, brushing down a handful of chips. "I'll take me wronnd it's a big bluff yez are playin'. You can't fool me."
rapidity. But quick as it had succeeded, the savages had just succeeded in making Pomp a prisoner and getting away with him. He raised his hands to the sky and exclaimed, "Don't let them have me, I am a slave." His captors, they were the naygar tribe, seized him and carried him to their camp. They had a white horse that they thought was worth something and they intended to make Pomp a slave to work for them. He knew they were planning something and he fought back, but his efforts were in vain. He was taken to a village and kept prisoner. He was later taken to a place where he was forced to work in the fields. He was badly treated and he was never able to escape. He died in captivity, never able to return to his home.
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"Yes,"

"Pardon, senor, but I cannot see in what manner I can serve you."

"Oh, senor, señor, a colored man—hasfall into the hands of the Indians. They have made him prisoner and have just escaped with him into these hills. I ask your assistance in effecting his rescue."

"A peculiar smile played about the cowboy's lips."

"For the one you call Pomp!" he asked.

"Yes."

"And that man with you in your cage there is called Barney?"

"Yes."

"Ah, I see—Barney and Pomp. Well, Senor Reade, pray accept my compliments and the wish that you may see civilization again alive, which I do not believe will be the case. Ha—ha! You have blundered into a dangerous position."

Something like a correct comprehension of affairs now began to dawn upon Frank.

"What do you mean?" gasped Frank Reade, Jr., "the man I am looking for—"

"The same," replied Cliff, mockingly. "You have undertaken quite a daring deed, my fine inventor, but you will find that you have bitten off a very much larger slice than you can manage."

"We will see," retorted Frank.

"You see these men?" continued Cliff. "They are my followers, tried and true. What is it to you whether my uncle, Jim Travis, should hang for murder? You can never prove him innocent—at least, never will, for you will never go from here alive."

"Scoundrel!" cried Frank. "You are the real murderer!"

"Ha, ha! Prove it if you can!" laughed the cowboy, derisively.

"I will prove it, if I have to drag the confession from your lips!" cried Frank, resolutely.

"Fainah! Talk is cheap. Attention, men! Grab the throttle rein of the Steam Man and you can destroy him! Forward! Charge!"

Frank Reade, Jr., heard the command and knew well the danger. He was at a loss to account for Cliff's knowledge of him and his invention.

The young inventor was not aware of the fact that for weeks previous to the starting forth of the Steam Man spies had been busy in Rendezvous. But such was the truth. Artemas Cliff had covered his tracks well. He knew that Frank Reade, the young inventor's father, was a friend of Travises and would see him through, if possible.

Therefore he had provided well for giving Frank Reade, Jr., and the new Steam Man a hot reception on the plains.

With howls the cowboys descended upon the Steam Man, three of them rushing forward at a full gallop. Frank Reade, Jr., knew well that it was possible for them to greatly injure his invention if he made a quick attack to defeat their plans.

He shouted to Barney: "Give it to them, Barney. Shoot every man you can!"

Then Frank opened the throttle, and let the Steam Man out for all he was worth.

It was an easy matter to overstrip the horses, and the Steam Man kept always a couple of cowboys crouching near on the side, while Frank steered him with ease.

Then Frank slackened speed so as to keep up a uniform distance between the Man and the horses.

While Barney poured in shot after shot into the midst of the gang of pursuers.

The cowboys began to drop from their saddles one by one. It was a destructive and telling fire.

And they strained every nerve in vain to reach the Steam Man. Frank kept the Man just far enough ahead to ensure safety and enable Barney to pick off the cowboys with ease.

It took Cliff some time to tumble to this little game.

When he did, and realized that he was simply decimating numbers without gaining ground, he called a halt.

The cowboys were now near the banks of a wide river which was really the Planta. Frank Reade, Jr., saw his advantage and brought the Steam Man to a stop. Then he hoisted a rifle and joined Barney.

CHAPTER V.

POMP'S RESCUE.

But it was hardly likely that the cowboys would stand their ground long under such a fire.

As fast as they could Frank and Barney worked the repeaters.

And the result was that quite a number of the foe lay dead upon the prairie.

But Artemas Cliff knew the fatality of remaining there. Being unable to catch the man, he knew that their only hope now was in rescue.

All of the cowboys fired at the Steam Man. The bullets rattled harmlessly against the steel cage.

Frank turned to the reins and the brake and started the Steam Man in pursuit. It was quite a turning of tables.

The pursuers were now the pursued.

So continued until suddenly, by the orders of Cliff, the cowboys turned their horses into the river and forced it.

Once on the other side they were soon beyond the reach of the rifle balls.

The Steam Man could not follow.

The encounter with the cowboys was at an end.

They did not return to the attack, somewhat singularly, but kept on avoiding the rolling plains hid then from view.

Cliff's direful threat against the Steam Man and its inventor, had not been carried out. But Frank did not, by any means, delude himself with the belief that the villain would relinquish the attempt so easily.

"Well, Barney," he cried, cheerfully, when satisfied that the scrimmage was over. "We could have shot that scamp a little better if it.""So it does. We must plan to capture the villain, and bring a reward from him."

"Be jolly, that's true. If I only had an opportunity I'd pretty quick wing his loon neck for him."

"But that does not settle the question of Pomp's fate," declared Frank. "He must be saved."

"Share, Misher Frank. But how can we do it?"

This was yet a conundrum. Frank and the faithful Irishman stood looking at each other. It was a long time before either spoke.

Finally Frank said:

"There's only one way, Barney."

"Small's what that?"

"We've got to get into those hills in some way. I don't like to leave the Steam Man, but to save Pomp I——"

The young inventor ceased speaking. A strange medley of sounds caused the direction of the scene.

There were wild yells and pistol shots, and then, out upon the plain, the two astonished travelers saw a motley crew of horses and armed men.

The savages were fighting furiously. Frank knew enough of the Indians of that region to know what it all meant.

A band of Sioux and Pawnees, the deadliest of enemies, were engaged in a terrible battle.

Frank took in the scene at a glance.

Bells were heard, and a strange odor pervaded the air.

The band which had captured Pomp was undoubtedly the one engaged in this conflict. They had very likely met the Pawnees in the midst part of the pass.

When the Pawnees and Sioux met a fight always followed. Generally the latter came off victorious.

As Frank now, however, the Pawnees had the best of it.

They were wounding the Sioux in good fashion. Frank and Barney watched the scene a moment until suddenly a sharp cry burst from Barney.

"Begorra, Misher Frank, if there ain't the nagyar, he cried, wildly."

Barney was right. Frank glanced in the direction indicated and saw a dying act.

In the midst of the Sioux was Pomp bound to the back of a mustang.

Suddenly in the midst of the melee the horse was seen to bolt from the rest and dash out upon the plains.

Of course, Pomp had no control over the beast, having his hands tied behind him.

The mustang took his own course and ran like the wind.

The Sioux did not dare to any of them attempt pursuit. The foe in their front claimed their attention.

"Begishes, the horse is runnin' way wid the nagyar," cried Barney.

"'Pawat we will do, Misher Frank?"

"Catch him if we can," cried Frank, seizing the throttle rein.

He opened the throttle and let the Steam Man go ahead; with long strides the machine began to gain upon the mustang.

Pomp was vainly endeavoring to free his hands.

If he could have done so, and could have got hold of the reins once, he could easily have stopped the horse.

But this he was unable to do.

As a result, the animal carried him along swiftly, and along the base of the hills.

Suddenly the mustang swerved and darted into a narrow pass.

Barney, at the loop-holes of the wagon with rifle in hand, had been sorely tempted to fire at the runaway.

But the fear of hitting Pomp had restrained him.

Now, however, the horse was out of range. But Frank headed the Steam Man for the pass.

Fortunately, it was unobstructed by bowlders, and had a good level floor for the Steam Man to go long along with safety.

But the mustang and his black rider had gone from sight. However the pursuers kept on.

And they came upon a broad plateau with steep descent upon all other sides. This extended among the hills for a distance of several miles.

A story of horror now went up from Frank and Barney.

The mustang was seen racing along the edge of a mighty chasm. In a few seconds he would be almost sure to take an impossible leap over a deep gorge.
FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

The precipitation of the huge howdah upon the Instant。The instant should have destroyed the invention and the lives of these on board.

A red-hot Tongue pomp had been the danger. Another moment and it would have been too late."

"If you don't go, Mr. Frank," cried pomp, wildly.

"I will," replied Frank, in thrilled tones. "My God! that is a narrow shave. We would have been crushed to atoms in another moment as I live."

"It's too late! Give the gaspens a good bit at cold lead!" shouted Barney, rushing to one of the loopholes with his rifle.

"That's right!" cried Frank, doing the same.

"Got you, you in haw we got you!" chimed in Pomp.

The two cowboys, seeing that their game was exposed, sprang up with wild shouts of defiance.

As they did so they were exposed to shots from below. The three rifles spoke sharply in chorus.

The two would-be destroyers tumbled in a heap. Their full was followed by a wild choral of yells from the thickets and bowler piles above.

A volley of bullets came from there and rattled harmlessly against the steel walls, showing that the cowboys were there located in great force.

How they had chanced to be there at that critical moment our adventurers could only guess.

But Frank mentally concluded that at best they were but a division of Cliff's gang, and they had happened upon the spot by chance.

Seeing the Steam Man they had seized what seemed to them a fine opportunity to destroy it.

How far short they came of it we have already seen.

A red-hot contest now began between the cowboys and those in the steel wagon.

Of course our three friends had a vast advantage inasmuch as they were protected from the shots of their foes.

Of course the cowboys outnumbered them, but it was not at all a different matter to pick them off occasionally with a rifle bullet.

The cowboys harried after volley the cowboys in the wagon.

When at length it became patent to them that their shots were futile, they made the air ring with yells of baffled rage.

Then they ceased firing and silence ensued. Every cowboy had disappeared seemingly from the canyon wall.

But this did not deter Frank Reade, Jr.

He knew that this was only a game of the foe and that it would yet be unsafe to try the pass.

"Bejabbers, ain't there some other way at gettin' out at this place?" cried Barney, giving the plateam a sweeping glance.

But the chain of hills surrounding it did not lend color to such a possibility.

"It don't look like it," said Frank, dubiously.

"I jes' think it ain't no way out of dis place," said Pomp.

"We are in a kind of trap," declared Frank Reade, Jr. "We were not sharp or we would have avoided this scrape."

As it was, however, the best they could do was to watch for an opportunity to run the gankelet through the Pass.

But they had not long to wait for new and thrilling developments. Suddenly Pomp gave a startled cry.

"For mercy sake, Mr. Frank, jes' you look out yonder. What's that you see up to there?"

Over the edge of the plateau there was visible a line of men advancing rapidly toward the Steam Man.

They were deploying right and left as if to surround him. This was certainly their purpose.

"They're churning to surround us!" cried Barney.

Frank watched the maneuver with deep interest.

He smiled grimly.

This was certainly the purpose of the foe. But the young inventor saw in the move a blemish of his own chances.

"They will not gain what they hope to," he said, resolutely.

Then he saw that a line of armed men had deployed across the mouth of the Pass to prevent the Steam Man from escaping in that direction.

In Frank's judgment there were fully two hundred cowboys in the party. This was tremendous odds, but the young inventor did not fear the result.

With a wild cheer the cowboys began to close their line in about the Steam Man.

Frank Reade, Jr., opened the whistle valve and let out several defiant shrieks.

It he started the Steam Man in a straight line for the pass. Pomp and Barney with their repeaters began to fire upon the line of men there.

The repeaters did deadly work.

It was a constant fusillade, and the cowboys dropped like sheep.

The error of their plan could now be seen.

In driving their forces before them they had weakened themselves. Frank had seen this.

If they had been merely content with holding the pass, it would have been extremely doubtful if the Steam Man could so easily have escaped.

Just as fast as they could work the sixteen-shot Winchester's Barney and Pomp moved down the opposing line of cowboys.

The line was thin, and it would require a very solid corpse to have withstood that scathing fire.

Down went the Steam Man toward the Pass with fearful speed.

Heaps of the dead and wounded cowboys lay upon the ground. As
The steam man reached the pass, a number of the cowboys tried to grasp the throttle reins and stop the machine. But the ponderous body of the machine knuckled them aside like flies and the wheels of the heavy wagon churned them into death or insensibility. The steam man literally forged his way through the pass like a rocket.

Barney and Pomp cheered wildly and fired parting shots at the discomfited band. In a few moments the steam man ran out upon the prairie. Frank did not waste time but set his course at once to the southwest.

He was anxious to locate Ranch Y. This he believed was his first and most important duty.

He was satisfied that nothing was to be gained by remaining in the hills.

He was confident that Cliff had gone to the Ranch Y, wherever it was. More than all else, he was powerfully interested in the mysterious young lady as described by Pomp.

He was determined to know who she was, and what Frank held her in captivity for.

The day was rapidly drawing to a close. After a short while the hills faded out of sight, and the rolling prairie was visible upon every hand. Then, as the steam man took his long strides across the even plain, Frank suddenly caught sight of a beaten path or trail. It was plainly a trail much used and here a little east of south. Frank brought the man to a stop.

"I would like to know where that trail goes to?" he declared. "I am sure but it is the route to Runyon!"

"Golly, Mr. Frank!" cried Pomp, craning his neck and looking to the southward a little ways. "What am I to do "other data roll in" is a phrase which means everything was over called.

Frank gazed in the direction indicated and saw a tall, black-looking timber seeming to rise out of the roll in the prairie. But he knew that it was beyond anything.

Frank let the steam man go along for a quarter of a mile, and topping the rise a startling sight was revealed. There was scattered over several acres of land were blackened ruins and charred timbers of some buildings. It was easy to see that these buildings had constituted a large ranch with stables, cattle pens and yards, and had once stood upon this spot. Frank allowed the steam man to pass through the ruins.

Thrilling sights were accorded our adventurers. There were heaps of ashes, the bones of animals, and several charred skeletons of human beings.

There was very evident that a fire had occurred at the place, and that the ranch had been burned by either Indans or rival cowboys.

As chance had it the sign which, painted in black letters, and had once hung high over the yard gate, had not been destroyed, and lay upon the ground near. Our explorers were enabled to read it plainly.

"Rodman Ranch."

Barney and Pomp descended from the wagon, and spent some time in exploring the ruins.

"I bet the legend burns up this same place," averred Pomp.

"It's true, Mr. Frank, it's the devil's own job they met at," declared Barney.

But Frank said, with conviction:

"We don't mean the work of Cliff and his gang. They are outlaws at best, and if Rodman Ranch was a respectable place, they would be sure to want it destroyed!"

Barney and Pomp re-ensouled the wagon now, and once more the quest for Ranch Y began.

But night came on, and they had obtained no clue.

A good place was found to camp, and it was decided to wait until morning before pursuing the journey farther.

Accordingly everything was made comfortable with this end in view.

No camp fires were made, for this was not deemed necessary. At night they always slept in the wagon, and Barney and Pomp served turns in watching.

The fires in the furnace were banked, and the steam man was given a rest, just the same as the others.

The road was as good as another in camping out thus, save that it was necessary to be near a body of water, so that the boilers could be filled with ease the next morning. The steam man was thus enabled for, the fire banked, and everything made shipshape when, after Barney had been on watch not more than two hours, the first of a series of thrilling incidents occurred.

This lightning flash as Erebus, not a star twindled in the ether, for heavy black clouds overhanging all. Suddenly Barney saw a light glimmering far out on the prairie.

It increased to quite a respectable size and continued to blaze for a long time.

The Colt watched it for a long while. Then his curiosity got the better of him.

"Seems, that's queer," he muttered. "I'll make sure there's something wrong about that now."

Barney, acting upon impulse, leaped over and grasped Frank's shoulder. The young inventor awoke with a start.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VIGILANTS.

"What's the matter?" gasped Frank, sleepily arousing himself.

"What now, Mr. Frank? There's a queer light out yonder on the prairie. Do I thought I'd just call your attention to the same, sir."

"A light!" muttered Frank, halfly awake.

"It is upon his feet, and rubbing his eyes, stared at the distant blaze.

"That is odd," he muttered. "It will do to investigate that."

"It may be a camp fire," ventured Barney.

"If so, then we must find out who the campers are," declared Frank.

It was but an instant's work to arouse Pomp. Then the fires in the furnace were started, a line of hose was run to a creek near, and the boiler was filled.

In an incredible short space of time steam was got up, and the steam man moved ahead.

Frank held the throttle reins and directed the steam man's course toward the distant camp-fire. For such it was, as became evident as they drew near.

At first no movement was made by the camp party, and Frank fancied that they had nobody on guard.

But as the steam man with chinking tread came within one hundred yards of the camp, a wild shout went up and a gun was discharged at the steam man.

"Frank was now able to see the circle of the camp as revealed by the firelight. Men had been rolled in blankets upon the ground to the number of a score.

But these were now upon their feet. Just beyond it could be seen that most of the men were dressed equally.

"We're human beings the same as you. Have no fear. We're human beings the same as you. Have no fear."

The words had an astounding effect upon the campers. After a moment of stupified silence the answer came back.

"Who the d——k are you?"

"I am Frank Reade, Jr., and this is my new invention, the steam man," replied Frank. "You have nothing to fear."

The campers now saw the three men in the wagon as Barney turned on the light of the calcium and illuminated the vicinity. At once their fear fled and a comprehension of all dawned upon them.

"A steam Man, by thunder, and built all of iron!"

"Well, that's结算!"

"What'll come next?"

"That beats the iron hose all hollow!"

The campers now came thronging about the wagon. As the number was limited, Frank did not feel particularly uneasy, though he held the inuino ready and Barney and Pomp had their revolvers at hand.

But the fears of our three adventurers were quickly allayed. One of the men, a tall, powerful framed man, came forward and saluting Frank:

"Wall, cap'n, we're glad to meet you an' yer Steam Man. My name is Jim Harmon, and I'm captain of this band, who are all Vigilants from Poker Gulch. We've been out on the trail of a gang of rustlers."

"Vigilants!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., with joy. "Then you are all members of the Artemisian gang?"

"We was Cliff's circle. He's the chap we want. If we can lay hands on him we'll wring his neck, you bet. Dyer know what we kin find him?"

"I am on his trail myself."

"The deuce we are!"

"It's the truth."

"Why for?"

Frank opened the door of the wagon, and descending shook hands with the Vigilant captain. He told him explicitly of the mysterious murder of which Jim Trav
CHAPTER VIII
ON TO RANGE V.

Plans were quickly made. It was decided to work upon strategic grounds, as their force was seen as a threat to Cllf's ranch.

"You see, if we can strike Range V. at a time when Cllf and the majority of his men are in the hills we can capture the place," declared Frank shrewdly.

"That's business," agreed Harmon, "but yet the boys. I kin see that we've got a better place now I have, Mister Ralston."

"We will not admit that," said Frank, modestly, "but rather let us work together, Mr. Ralston."

"All right, cap'n. I'll go with ya."

Further plans were elaborated, and as only a few hours yet intervened until dawn, it was decided to snatch a few brief hours of sleep.

With the early dawn all were astir. The Vigilants rustled their saddles and all was seen for miles.

The Steam Man was an object of great wonder to the plainsmen.

"By Jinks!" exclaimed one of them, "the sight of that queer-looking critter oughter scare the life out of any number of Indians."

"I think the Steam Man will aid us much in accomplishing our ends," said Frank, modestly.

The start was made just after daybreak. The Vigilants rode alongside the Steam Man on their respective horses.

Of course Frank was compelled to go more slowly on this account.

But the Vigilants knew the way to Range V. and this was, after all, the most important thing of all.

Frank considered it a great piece of luck in having fallen in with the Vigilantes.

He now understood exactly how matters stood all around.

It was near noon when a halt was called in a small basin near a lake of water.

Here camp was briefly made, and also at the same time an important discovery came to hand.

A broad trail made by a caravane of men and horses was discovered.

It pointed to the north.

Harmon examined it carefully and finally, with great exasperation, cried:

"It's good luck, friends. That trail I believe was made by the cowboys an' it leads to the hills. It's over three days old, an' they haven't come back this way. I should think that the most of their men must be up there, in which case Range V. will be almost deserted."

Out on, boys, let's capture the bull place.

With a cheer the Vigilants prepared to saddle up.

Soon they were once more galloping over the prairie.

Not two hours later, or in the middle of the afternoon, Harmon drew his horse alongside the Steam Man and pointing north to the south cried:

"Look yonder, Mr. Ralston. Do ye see them lines of high ground? Well, just this side there Range V."

"At last," exclaimed Frank.

"Begorra, it's Range Ours all be, if weiver we get there," declared Barneys.

"Golly, won't we be a big uprise party fo' dat vigilant Cllf," cried Pom.

Frank Reade, Jr., held the Steam Man at a steady stride, and very soon the ranch came in sight.

It was truly a most extensive establishment.

The stockade and buildings covered acres of ground. A great herd of cattle were feeding on the open plains.

The main ranch itself was surrounded by a high stockade, which would resist most any ordinary attack with small arms.

As the Vigilants and the Steam Man came swiftly rushing down upon the place, a great commotion was seen to take place.

Men rushed out into the yards, horsemen went scattering about, and down came the stockade gate.

But Harmon and his men rode boldly down to the gate, and began to assault it with axes.

While Frank Reade, Jr., kept the Steam Man on an elevation near, from which he with Barneys and Pom pulled the work of invasion by a hot fire with their Winchesters.

The boys could not get upon the stockade to fire at the assaulters.

Harmon's men therefore worked with perfect immunity.

No more favorable time for an attack could have been chosen.

There were but few of the cowboys in the ranch, and these were picked off by the fire from the Steam Man as fast as they appeared on the stockade.

With only cries the vigilants chopped through the timbers of the gate.

In a remarkably brief time a hole was cut through and the gate opened.

The Steam Man rushed into the yard, and in less than ten minu-
Then he came to a halt.

It seemed as if they must feel safe here. Accordingly, arrangements were made for passing the night in comfort. A comfortable tent was arranged for Beissie Rodman and, much exhausted by the fatigue of her experiences, she quickly fell asleep.

But tears had well red her eyes, and troubled on her eyelids. Frank had to report her father's death.

"Oh, I fear it is more that I can bear," she declared, in agony of spirit. "My dear, dear father. Oh, if I were a man, how I would avow him!"

"There are plenty to do that," replied Frank, cheerfully. "The villain shall surely pay for his evil deeds."

"Hope it may come to pass," she said, sincerely.

Then she dropped off to sleep. But even as she slept, deathly peril hung over her young and beautiful head.

CHAPTER IX

POMP'S MISADVENTURES

FRANK READE, Jr., felt comparatively safe as he rolled himself up in a blanket and went to sleep. He did not believe that the villains would attempt anything that night.

It was Barney's first watch.

The Hibernian, until midnight, kept a good lookout in the cage. Then he called Pomp to succeed him.

The darky kept a good lookout until the early morning hours.

The darkness was most intense.

At about this time Pomp experienced a deadly faintness at the pit of his stomach and a great longing for water.

His thirst became most consuming, and it seemed as if he must, at any cost, gratify it.

He was found, upon looking in the tank, that it was empty.

There was not a gill of cold water in the wagon. Pomp grew ashen with this damming reflection.

"I wish I had a little water," he muttered; "but how am I able niggard gwine to get it, don't what I like to know!"

Pomp got to the steel screen and tried to penetrate the darkness. He knew that not ten yards distant were the waters of a small creek. He could hear them rippling now.

It was directly at variance with his orders to open the cage door.

Yet is seemed to Pomp as if he must do so.

The risk did not seem great.

But there seemed little likely of the proximity of a foe.

Pomp felt certain that he could reach the creek, get his drink, and get back safely to the wagon.

His sole temptation was the desire most powerful.

"Golly!" he muttered, with a wary face. "What am I gwine to do? I don't believe dar's any danger ob going out dar. But if Massa Frank knew he'd ax me pappy quick. Sakees allah, but what am I gwine to do? I am mos' dyin' for a drink ob watah!"

Pomp thought of awakening Barney and enlisting his aid.

But he reflected that the Oot would be certain to disagree with his scheme.

There was no other way but to assume the responsibility himself.

Pomp drew a deep breath; Frank was right.

Then he fell to listening.

All was silent as the grave.

"Well," he muttered, "Dar ain't no danger at all. I'll just lay dat watah up dar awhile as I'm bonny quick. He quickly slid back the bolt in the door and opened it.

Then he stepped out of the wagon. In another moment he gided down to the water's edge.

Pomp flung himself flat and began to drink of the creek water.

But he had not taken one drink when he became aware of an appallingly sensation. He turned his head and glanced back at the Steamer Man.

The lantern hanging in the cage showed the open door and all as plain as day. But, great heavens! What did he see?

Dark forms were swarming about the machine. One was already in the wagon.

Pomp saw much, and then his attention was claimed by another matter. He suddenly felt a heavy body descend upon him and took fingers clutching his throat.

In that flash of time Pomp had turned partly over.

He was just in time to see the flash of a knife blade. He made a convulsive upward blow, and grabbed the wrist of his unwonted assailant.

By the merest chance the death blow had been averted.

But it was a close call.

Then with a herculean effort Pomp rolled over the edge of the bank, and the next moment, with a powerful swing, he had brought himself and assailant into the water of the creek.

The problem both of Pomp's adversary to relax his grip.

The darky had no further motives for continuing the struggle, and striking out away for the opposite bank.

He lumbered out of the water, and crawled into a thicket.

There he lay shivering, and witnessed a thrilling scene upon the other bank of the creek.

The occupants of the wagon had all been aroused, and were every one prisoners, in the power of Cliff and his cowboys.

The outlaw had managed to cover the twenty miles skillfully following the trail by means of a dark lantern.

He had been hovering with his minions about the Steamer Man, just as Pomp committed the indiscretion of leaving the door open.
Of course it was an easy matter for the cowboys to board the wagon and make the job appear all right.

The glee of Cliff was beyond expression. He danced and clapped his hands with fiendish joy. He pinched Bony's arm until she screamed with agony, and with brutal laughter cackled-

"Oh, I'll make ye all dance. Ye thought ye'd git away from me, did ye, gull! I'll show ye that ye can't get away from Artemas Cliff. Ha, ha, ha! What a good joke."

He laughed uproariously.

"All mine," he continued. "And this Steam Man, this wonderful invention, I can travel around in great style! Oh, Mr. Frank Reade, Jr., I'll dance on your grave yet."

"Monster!" cried Frank, writhing in his bonds. "You'll never succeed. A righteous God will not allow it."

The villain gave his men carte blanche to make camp and indulge in a carnival.

They did so until daybreak, and then Cliff stated that it was his purpose to go back to Ranch V.

It did not take him long to understand the mechanism of the Steam Man.

He quickly found out how to use the throttle reins. He was aided by the fact that he had once been a locomotive engineer.

With the early morning light the start for Ranch V was made.

Pomp, was as usual and terrifically horrified, crouched in the thicket upon the bank of the creek, saw the Steam Man and his friends, all in the power of the foe, take departure.

What's the matter, came out of his hiding-place.

"Golly," he muttered, with distended eyeballs, "I jest think dig nigger has done be devils awfulest thing erer known. Dar am only one way to fix that fellow, and I'm fixing to some way to rescue Mare Frank an' all ob de others, an' I'll do it if I can."

Pomp was very much in earnest.

He was brave and generous fellow, and willing at any time to sacrifice his life for his master.

In some manner he must certainly vindicate himself. He crossed the creek again and stood upon the spot where the Steam Man had been.

Of course the machine was out of sight by this time, but nevertheless, Pomp took the trail and proceeded to follow it.

For some hours he trudged on over the prairie. All the while the darky was revolving in his mind some plan for the relief of his friends.

He was bound to admit that it was a puzzle. Yet he did not lose hope.

The hills were every moment becoming plainer. Already Pomp had covered one of the twenty miles.

The darkness was a good walker, and no distance was too great for his trained muscles.

The sun was beginning to rain in the heavens, and a brisk breeze blew across the prairie.

Pomp kept on steadily.

The trail kept on toward the hills, and the sagacious darky reflected that Cliff was likely going to join the main body of the men.

What think I am this day race up to mudder, muttered Pomp.

"He am just too scared to let de game slip him once he git his clutchers on it. He am just gone fo' to take de Steam Man to his Ranch V, and dar am what you must go an' try fo' to work some little trick fo' to rescue Frank Reade, Jr., an' de others. Dat am a fact."

With this logical conclusion Pomp trudged on.

At the end of five miles of his journey to the hills, the sun was just past the noon hour when Pomp, by dint of rapid walking, had made the hills.

There was no sign of life of the Steam Man or of the cowboys. But Pomp saw that the trail continued around the base of the hills. This puzzled the darky a moment.

He paused and scratched his head in deep thought.

"Dat am a dreeny queer thing," he muttered. "Dat ain't de way to go to Ranch V, if it's right in mah conjecckshun."

Then he paused, and a light of comprehension broke across his face. A distant sound reached his ear. It was the faint rattle of fire-arms far up in the hills.

Golly, how startled. "I see de tricks ob dat berry sharp fox. Artemas Cliff. He got de white folks fo' to gib de Vigilants a good lickin' afore he goes to Ranch V. Dat am just my best way fo' to jine Mare Harmon an' his men, an' help dem trash da cowboys."

Pomp's mind was made up.

He would join the vigilants and do his best to give the cowboys a good drubbing. He was already struck into the hills.

But alas for Pomp!

Luck seemed against the darky for the time being. He had not more than fairly entered a narrow pass when an appalling incident occurred.

The air was suddenly broken by wild yells, and in an instant he was surrounded by half a hundred painted savages, who burst from naldes深深的 undergrowth.

They pounced upon him, and before Pomp had even time to think of resistance he was a prisoner.

The whooping aroused all about him like bees. Words cannot express Pomp's dismay at this turn.

His eyes bulged, and his knees shook as with the ague.

"Fe de good Law!" he gasped, "I am done for."

"Tie down fo' de time, an' dar am nobody to rescue Mare Frank!"

It was truly a dubious outlook. The savages were of Black Buffalo's gang, and they seemed much elated at getting the prisoner once more into their clutches.

They chattered and gesticulated like a flock of magpies, and some of them approached Pomp with their tomahawks as though they would make an end of him then and there.

But the others held them back and an excited wrangle followed.

All this while Pomp was writhing in his bonds. In vain he tried to make an escape.

For some while the savages wrangled. Then a compromise was made and Pomp was picked up bodily, and carried through the pass and on a small glade among the hills.

Here he was tied to a tree and a great heep of sagots were piled at his feet.

With a chill of horror, the darky saw that the savages meant to take his life in a horrible manner.

He was to suffer death in the Barnes, Pomp felt sick and faint.

But this in that moment he thought not of himself, brave tatter, but of Frank Reade, Jr., and the others.

"Golly, sakes, whole am gwine fo' to save Mare Frank, now?" he growled.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE ENEMY'S POWER.

Artemus Cliff shouted in evil glee and triumph as he manipulation the Steam Man and let him out for a wild run across the prairie.

He amused himself by racism with his followers who were on horseback.

"By jingo!" he roared, "this is more fun than I've had before. With the Steam car the steam-cars all to сравнение. And it's all mine. When I can travel like a prince now. Ha ha ha! I'm the luckiest man on earth.

He turned and fixed a glowing gaze upon Bessee Rodman.

"And ye're mine too," he cried, "the chili of the prairie, the happy life companion of Artemas Cliff. When I got my hands onto Uncle Jims' millions, with this I can run the world over."

Bessee did not appear to feel his words, though her face increased a trifle in its pallor.

"Monster!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., with intensity. "You will never succeed. Heaven will not permit it."

"Heaven don't have much to do with me," cried the villain, with a sly chuckle. "The devils was been a good friend of mine, and I ain't afraid of his place either."

"Regorms, they wasn't here yet even them," cried Barney, "Ye a awfully wicked, for acts that you done to my daisy."

"Oh, ho, Irish, you've got your tongue, eh?" cried Cliff, with a vicious laugh. "So ye think I'm too bad, eh?"

"Me no so, that can't be a place too bad for you!

"I'll have a nice little nudes fixed for yer right on this earth an' I'll give ye a fair taste of it in advance, too," said the villain, vengefully.

"Arrah, ye can't scare me at all, at all," he retorted. "Yer threats are jest the same as a puppy dog's bark."

"You'll find that I'm the kind of a dog that bites," snarled the villain.

"That's not me that cares fer yer bytes."

"We'll see about that. Don't blow your horn too soon."

"The horn, that's good and true. But what a blatherer! Av I only had me two hands to see now I'd taste the rascality out of my yer an' I'd make a good job fer ther undertaker."

"Talk is cheap," sneered the villain. "You better save yer wind."

"It's yerself as makes it most," said Barney, boiler to have the last word.

Cliff evidently found Barney's tongue equal to his own, for he abandoned the conversation in a sullen fashion.

Bessee Rodman made no attempt at speech. She sat silently in one corner of the wagon.

Frank Reade, Jr., also remained silent.

The twenty miles were quickly covered by the Steam Man. It was yet far from the noon hour when they arrived at the camp of the previous night.

The cowboys in full force were there, and as Cliff appeared with the Steam Man, they made the welkin ring with yells of delight and satisfaction.

All crowded around to examine the steam wender and inspect its mechanism.

The prisoners looked upon a sea of faces. They were not kindly regarded by the cowboys.

"Take 'em out and shoot 'em, Cliff!" cried a voice in the crowd.

"Give 'em twenty paces and a grave seven feet deep."

But Cliff refused to do this.

"Leave it to me if they choose, sir, I've got a better plan."

"What is it?" was the cry.

"I went ye all to be ready in half an hour to go into the hills an' capture Harmon an' his gang. There must not one of the vigilants go out of here alive."

"Hurrath!" yelled the cowboys.

"We can give them the worst thrashing they ever had."

"In course we can."

"In regard to these prisoners, the gall is going to be my wife. The others I'm going to have some fun with down to the ranch. We'll have a rabbit chase with 'em, or something of the kind."
FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

"Good!" yelled the mob, carried away with the plan. Thus the fate of the prisoners was decided by their captors. But the question of attack upon the Vigilants was now one of the first consideration. Preparations were at once made for conveying Harmon and his brother down into the little hovel. A party of cowboys was dispatched to head off any possible attempt at escape from the cliffs. Harmon's men were certainly hemmed in on all sides, and it was a most dubious outlook for them.

The exclamation was beyond expression. "We've got 'em dead sure," cried Cliff, triumphantly. "Not a one 'on 'em can possibly escape." The cowboys now made a rush to close the line in about their prey. The door of the little hovel through which the Steam Man was taken, and to a point within easy range of the position held by the Vigilants. Harmon had chosen an elevated position on a kind of small table, with a book on it. Here behind bowlders he had concentrated his forces. The position was not a bad one to defend.

To charge upon the cowboys would have to ascend a height of fifty feet or more, in the face of a strong fire. But this sacrifice of men Cliff did not insist on, at least not at once.

There were other points of vantage about, which the cowboys quickly took possession of. From these a defilatory fire was kept up with the Vigilants with some loss upon both sides. But Harmon's men could not very well withstand any losses at all, as the cowboys could stand better. The Steam Man, however, could advance to very close proximity with the Vigilants, and those on board were safe from all shots of retaliation. This made it hard for Harmon for no had way of checking this most destructive fire. It was a man using a thing for Frank Reade, Jr., to remain idle and see his invention used in such a manner. He groaned aloud with horror and dismay. Barney did the same. "Oh, if I only had just time to be free myself," declared the young inventor.

"Regorge, I wish I could do that same," muttered Barney. Cliff and the three cowboys with him in the cage were doing their best to throw every Vigilant who exposed himself. They were thus so deeply engrossed that they paid no special heed to the prisoners for the time.

Harmon, the restless Irishman, noted this fact. At a favorable moment he leaned over and whispered to Frank:

"Bejibars, Mister Frank, I think I know a way to turn the tables on these rascals." The deuce gasped Frank. "What is it, Barney?"

"Well, now 'er work quiet, me gossepin' whipped Barney. "I'll lay down for the side here an' ye kin turn yer wrists toward me mouth an' me teeth are no good as I don't cut them in two before very long."

Frank experienced a thrill.

"Can you do it, Barney?"

"Av course.

"But if they see—"

"They'll never do that. Be nasy now, me gossepin', m'righ't on the shelf there's a knowle an' yez kin cut your bonds at the same time. Then you take care av' the four av' them. I'll take two mesilf."

"And I'm good for the other two or I'll die" muttered Frank.

"All right, Barney, do your best."

"I will,"

But at this moment Bessie Rodman leaned forward, and in a soft whisper said:

"Wait! There is a quicker way."

Frank and Barney were astonished.

"What?" exclaimed the young inventor.

By way of reply Bessie drew both hands from behind her. They were free. There were livid lines upon the fair wrists, where the cruel thongs had cut in. But the shapely hands were so small that Bessie had been enabled to slip them through the bonds and free them. Up to this moment neither Frank nor Barney had looked upon the young girl as more than the ordinary weak woman. That is to say, they had not given her credit for the amount of nerve she possessed. But they were given ample evidence of it now.

Quick as a flash, and with commendable resolution, she reached over and seized the knife and dropped the scabbard. It was but a moment's work for her to cut Frank's bonds. As they snapped, the young inventor took the knife and quickly cut Barney's. Then they both turned toward the door of the hovel, and had not yet seen this move.

Nothing could have worked better. They seized the knife, and Barney an iron bar. Nobody can handle a weapon of the sort better than a Irishman. "Wharroul!" cried Barney, diving through the breach blazing blow on the head before one could think, the iron bar came down upon the head of another. Both sank senseless to the floor of the wagon.

Frank cut the latest clasp one of the foz was left, and he was quickly knocked out. In a twinkling, as it were, the tables were turned.

Barney and Frank Reade, Jr., were now masters of the Steam Man once more. The irrepressible Irishman pulled the whistle valve and sent up a shriek of defeat and triumph. "The Steam Band, swung open the wagon door.

"Throw them out!" cried; "all but Cliff."

Barney obeyed the command. The three cowboys were quickly dispatched upon the ground below. But Cliff was allowed to remain. The villain lay senseless in the bottom of the wagon. Barney was about to blind him, when an imminent peril claiming his immediate attention prevented him.

The cowboys were aware of the turning of the tables in the wagon. The fire had yells they were driving forward in a body to surround the Steam Man. Unless immediate action was made they would succeed.

Frank knew well the danger of this move. It would be an easy matter for the cowboys to ruin the invention by a single blow. There was but one way, and that was to beat a retreat.

Barney seized his repeater and began firing into the crowd of cowboys. Frank opened the throttle and sent the Steam Man up the incline toward the stronghold of the vigilants. Of course the latter had seen and understood all. They embraced the opportunity to pour a flank fire into the ranks of the Barons. It was a moment of thrilling sort, but the Steam Man seemed to have the best of it when a thrilling incident happened.

CHAPTER XL. WITH THE VISITANDS.

In another moment the Steam Man would have been in the ranks of the vigilants. It would have been a great point scored, for Cliff would then be a prisoner and the way to save Jim Travers from the gallows would have been paved.

But it was not to be.

The villain had come to in the meanwhile, but cunning rascal as he was, had laid determination to the bottom of his plan. The part would save him now.

Accordingly while Frank and Barney were occupied at their posts, he made a sudden lightning leap for the door in the cage. Unfortunately Barney had not fastened it. A little scream of warning came from Bessie, but it was too late. The villain flung open the door and sprang out. He tumbled heels over head down the declivity. This was partly done on purpose to avoid any bullets sent after him. But none struck him, and he was the next moment in the ranks of his men.

Frank turned just in time to see the daring escape. The young inventor's disappointment was so great that he came near leaving the wagon to pursue the villain.

"Regorge, av thee die'd j'ant come away entirely!" cried Barney in dismay.

"I'm sorry," returned Frank. "But take the precaution now, Barney, to bolt that door,

Barney complied with alacrity. Then he was obliged to return to his post, for the enemy were thick in the rear. But the next moment the Steam Man topped the rise.

A volley from the Vigilants drove the cowboys back for the time. Then Frank Reade, Jr., brought the machine to a halt upon the plateau.

The Vigilants were wild with delight, and crowded about the Steam Man. Frank Reade, Jr., opened the door and descended among them. In an instant Harmon was by his side and had gripped his hand. "God bless ye, Mr. Reade!" cried the whole-souled plainman. "It's like takin' the paw of one brought back from the dead. Bog-dast it, but I'd given ye up entirely when I see that your Steam Man was in the hands of that coyote. It's all like a kind of miracle."

"Well, we think we may congratulate ourselves," said Frank. "But do you know that we are in a tight box?"

"Nobody knows it better," declared Harmon.

"If doubts if we pull out of it."

"What kin we do?"

"Is there no avenue open for retreat?" asked Frank.

"Then we can only stay here and fight to the last. Of course I might be able to elude them with the Steam Man, but I'd never try that while any of your band are left."

"Praps it would be their best way," said Harmon, generously.

"At least you could save the gal. It don't matter so much about us. We're only rough men, and not a one of us alarmed to die."

"You are heroes," cried Frank, with terror. "And if I should desert you, I would forsake my honor as a man. No, the Steam Man will be a match and fight for you until the last; depend on it."

"In course we need your help," replied Harmon. "Moleh we'll whip their skunks yet."

"Regorge, that we will," cried Barney. "Wharroul! as I only had a good, whack at that baste av' a Cliff now I'd show his beauty face!"

Walter Barrows and Bessie had been holding a joyful conference. But now the order went up.
FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

"Every man to his post. The enemy are coming."

There were no delinquents. Not one in that heroic little band hung back.

It was true that the foe were coming again to the attack.

With Cliff leading them they were charging furiously up the hill.

But the Vigilants stood firm and gave them a raking volley.

For a time they wavered. Then once more they came on.

Cliff's voice could be heard as he rallied them.

"Cease you, go on up thar and kill the hull crew of 'em!" he yelled. "Tell 'em they can't alive! Kill 'em, every one, and don't give any quarter!"

"We'll see about that," muttered Frank Reade, Jr. "It may be too late to save you, Mr. Cliff."

Frank and Barney, from their position aboard the Steam Man, could pour a terrible fire into the ranks of the foe.

It was a terrible battle!

The cowboys were moved down like top of the breeze; yet they did not waver, but came on faster.

But even in flight they threatened the top of the hill. If they surrounded it the sequel would be brief.

Overpowering masses would quickly tell the story, and the little band of Vigilants would be wiped out, and with somber yells about the pile.

The Vigilants were now fighting for their lives. As well die facing the monster as fight the monster.

Every man was resolved to live.

But the tremendous body of men swept over the rise and gained the plains. In a twinkling the Vigilants were surrounded, and it seemed as if no power would intervene to save them from sure and total annihilation.

Frank Reade, Jr., took in the situation at a glance, and cried desperately:

"Burner, we are lost! Our end has come, and we are good as dead men already!"

Poor Pomp saw no way out of the awful situation in which he was placed.

Death in its most awful form was upon him.

A worse fate could not be imagined.

He saw the brushwood about him, and danced with demonic yells about the pile.

If Pomp could have turned pale, he would have been whiter than chalk.

But for all this, the darkey's fear was even more now for his friends than for himself.

"What shall I do?" he muttered, shivering like one with the ague.

"Whate'er we do shall be dead and done all. Yer las' gin ole to be burned to death, and Marie Frank in de dirt us out raschel Cliff, an' nobody to rescue him. Oh, good Lord! it am dreadful."

It was indeed a dreadful thing.

But Pomp was certainly powerless. Higher the brushwood was leaped, and then one of the savages advanced with a torch.

In a moment he had applied it to the pile.

The dry wood burned like tinder. In an instant great flames sprang up.

But they were at the edge of the pile.

However, Pomp felt their heat and they would soon reach him.

The poor darkey was nearly insane with a frenzy of desperation.

He began a skillful dance about the pile. They leaped and ran, and swung their tomahawks and made hideous faces at their victim.

But fate had not ordained that this was to be Pomp's end.

Even while death seemed certain, rescue was close at hand.

Suddenly there smote upon the air the ring of hooves' hoofs, and a quick snap-order, followed by the crash of carbines.

Indians fell in heaps before the volley. A panic resulted and the next moment through the smoke Pomp saw the gleam of uniforms, and knew that a body of United States cavalry had happened upon the spot in the nick of time.

The darkey was beside himself, with the realization that he could not escape.

"Sabe me, sigers—sabe Pomp! He am gone fo' suah to turn to death of yo' bos'n' sabe him!"

But the call was not necessary.

Through the smoke sprang two dismounted soldiers. In a twinkling the burning brush was kicked aside, and Pomp's bonds were cut.

The darkey was face to face with a tall, handsome young officer.

"The Indians had been dispersed and the fight was over.

I am Mr. Frank Reade, United States Seventh Cavalry," said the young officer. "What are you?"

"I am Pomp," was the darkey's prompt reply.

"Tell me who you belong to?"

"I belong to Mr. Frank Reade, Jr.," replied Pomp, with emotion. "He is a free nigger, but I goes wherever Marie Frank goes jest de same."

"Oh, I see," replied the officer; "well, where is your master just now?"

"Golly, for goodness!" cried Pomp, excitedly. "He am in a heap ob trouble, an' yo' kin help him out of it."

With this Pomp told Clark all about the Steam Man and their mission in the West.

The young colonel listened with deep interest, and then when apprised of the fact that the Steam Man and its passengers were in the hands of Cliff, he cried, excitedly:

"Do you supposit that man at all is just the chap I am after? Word was brought to the fort some time ago of a den of thieves up here with a rendezvous called Ranch V. Do you know of it?"

"Goin' t' Ranch V, Marie Frank come t' Pomp, excitedly, "yo' kin jest bet I does. Jed y'or find de cowboys and rescus Marie Frank and he done show y'or de place at Ranch V, are."

"It shall be done if we are the Steam Man and Colonel Clark."

He turned to his men who were scattered about the vicinity, having been engaged in driving the savages out of the valley.

But the bugle quickly recalled them.

A spare horse was brought forward for Pomp and to the cavalrymen in solid body rode out of the valley.

As they struck the prairie below, the distant sounds of firing came to their ears.

It was the din of the conflict between the Vigilants and the cowboys. Aided by the sounds Colonel Clark was able to gallop straight to the scene.

Through a pass in the hills they reached the plateau. They burst upon the cowboys in the rear just at the critical moment when it seemed as if Harrow's heroic little band was doomed.

It required but a glance for Clark to take in the situation.

Whirling his sabre he spurred his horse forward with the thrilling command:

"Forward! Charge!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE FORTUNES OF WAR.

Just at that moment when utter destruction threatened the brave but bound of Vigilants the first volley struck upon the scene.

Nothing could have been more opportune.

It was the saving of the day. The emotions of all at sight of the glittering uniforms may be imagined.

A great shout of triumph went up. A yell of dismay came from the cowboys.

Then followed the rout of steel and the flash of sabre blades. Before that charge what force could stand?

Backward the followers of Artemus Cliff were forced.

In vain the villains tried to rally their men. They could not respond.

The odds were too great and they broke and fled in wild confusion. The next moment Pomp dashed up the incline and dropped from the horse almost at Frank Reade, Jr.'s, feet.

"Bress de Lor', Marie Frank," he cried ecstatically. "Yo' am abe' un' well, an' dis nigger hab brought yo' a rescue afah all. Yo' forgie me fo' losh de Steam Man when I hasn't ought."

"You are forgiven, Pomp," cried Frank, lightly. "I might have done the same thing myself. I am glad no harm came to you. I had given you up."

"Ced no, Marie Frank!" cried the delighted darkey. "I is too bad fo' to die. Hi dar, Pish, I is glad to see you."

"Well, if it ain't the nigger," cried Barney, with a wild rush at Pomp. "Whurroo, my glad I am to see you, once more alive an' well! Sebjaras thar's so!"

The two friends embraced warmly. Then Colonel Clark rode up and saluted all.

"It seems that you've been having a bit of a squall here," he declared, "but at any rate you've washed the place clean."

"With your timely assistance," replied Frank. "But I believe we are not strangers, colonel."

Frank Reade, Jr., the general," cried Clark, springing from the saddle, saluting Frank's hand. "Well, now, I'm glad to see you. But come to think of it your colored man mentioned the name of Frank Reade, but I never dreamed that it was you."

"It is nobody else," replied Frank with a laugh. "And I well remember you."

"And I do you," replied Clark. "I was once one of an army commission to visit you and make you an offer for one of your inventions on a gun."

"You are right."

"You would not sell it."

"No," replied Frank. "I do not care to sell any of my inventions. They are for my own use. I will always, however, put them at the disposal of the weak and oppressed."

"Truly a noble sentiment," agreed the colonel, "but I am anxious to capture this man Cliff. What have you there? A giant in your crew. One of your new inventions is it? Well, that beats all."

With this Clark proceeded to make an inspection of the Steam Man. A great crowd of the newcomers were doing the same.

It was an object of great interest, and Frank showed its working to the entertainment of all.

But Cliff's men had not been so easily beaten by the savages.

They had dispersed into the pine woods and were somewhat scattered, but here they made a stand and resisted stubbornly.

It was necessary to dislodge them as quickly as possible.

At any moment they might avail themselves of the fortresses of war and turn victory into defeat.

So Clark quickly called his men together.

One lighted crew was all that was necessary.

The bugles sounded "bells and saddles," and every man was quickly mounted.

A plan was quickly outlined between Frank Reade, Jr., and Col. Clark.
This was that the cavalry should pursue and thoroughly rout the cowboys, even going down to Ranch V to effect its destruction.

The vigilants were back in town, and the cavalry would have to meet the punishment of Vigilant Clift.

But the Steam Man was to remain at a point below until the return of the cavalry.

If possible Clift was to be captured alive and a confession wrung from his lips.

This plan had been agreed upon.

The vigilants were not wholly satisfied; yet did not demur.

Clift and his command dashed away into the hills.

The vigilants and the Steam Man started for the open prairie.

This division of forces very soon proved to be an unwise and unfortunate thing.

The vigilants of war are proverbial for changes.

Strongly intrenched in the hills, Clift's gang gave the soldiers a disastrous battle.

In vain the plucky young colonel tried to dislodge them.

They fought like tigers, and having the advantage of location, actually decimated the cavalry one half in number.

Until nightfall, Col. Clark kept persistently waging the battle.

Then he began to think of retreat.

But, to his horror, he found that this was by no means as easy a matter as he had fancied.

"I don't care for myself," he muttered, in deep surprise; "this is not very good generalship on my part."

"What was to be done?"

It was plainly impossible to dislodge the foe.

The little band of cavalrymen were now hardly adequate to cope with the foe in their front.

As if Clift had received reinforcements. The number of his band had in some mysterious manner been increased.

Darkness was coming on rapidly.

Something must be done, and at once. Col. Clark racked his brain for an expedient.

Certainly they must extricate themselves from this position, and what they must do was falling every moment upon them, and the enemy's line, like a cordon of death, was every moment drawing tighter about them.

Could a stealthy approach on the intented colonel's brow."

"My God!" he muttered. "What is to be done?"

It was a terrible question. They were literally in a trap of death.

Clift was aware of this, and his men made the air hideous with their yells. They crowded the lines.

This extremity Clark regretted having separated himself from the vigilants and the Steam Man and told them to come to our aid. He had thought they were in a trap, but the Steam Man was not.

But this error had been made, and it was too late to correct it.

But the brave colonel was not long without an expedient.

He called out one of his pluckiest privates, and said:

"Jas. Roy, you want to undertake a difficult job."

"I'm ready, sir," replied the private, with a salute.

"You know we are in a tight box?"

"Yes, sir."

"We must have reinforcements or the enemy will surely get the best of us."

"It looks that way, sir."

"Now, I want you to try to get through the enemy's line. Look for the vigilants and the Steam Man and tell them to come to our aid.

"And if you can, sir, you can for a fresh squad. Tell the officer in charge to send two hundred mounted men."

"Very well, sir."

"Do you think you can do this?"

"I will do it if I will not come back."

Clark knew that Jasont meant just what he said.

A few moments later the courier for relief slithered carefully into the shadows and was gone.

A prayer trembled on Clark's lips.

Darkness now thickly settled down. Of course fighting could be done until the break of day, but the cavalrymen were not in a position to guarantee them much rest.

Few of them dared to sleep, and then it was upon their arms.

And as dawn broke, they were sent to meet the onrushing troops of cavalry.

But if the cavalry division was reinforced by the vigilants and the Steam Man they might be able to keep the foe at bay until the fresh squad should arrive.

Thus the plucky young colonel clung to hope.

Time passed. It seemed an age to Clark before a silent shadow form slipped out of the camp and into the camp.

As it drew nearer he recognized the courier Jasont.

"Well, my lad," he said, sharply. "You are back."

Jasont said glibly, "Where are the reinforcements?"

"I did not find them."

"But—did you tell you to find them?" began the colonel, angrily.

"Easy, colonel," said Jason, respectfully. "I think I have done a better job, sir."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a good way to the fort. You might be cut to pieces before I could return. I have found an avenue by which I think we can escape."

Clark's manner changed instantly.

"You don't mean that," he exclaimed, excitedly. "What is it?"

Jason drew near and lowered his voice in a mysterious manner.

"Just over that pile of bowlders," he whispered, "I found a narrow passage through the mountain side. It is almost a secret."

For the horses, but I think we can all get through and out upon the prairie before daybreak.

Col. Clark was intensely excited.

"Good for you, Jasont!" he cried, in a joyful manner. "Across the camp, but do it quietly. Put every man in his saddle within ten minutes. You have solved our salvation, and you shall be promoted."

Jason hurried away to do the bidding of the colonel.

In less space of time the camp was crossed.

The weary soldiers, worn out with fighting, were only too glad to learn of the possibility of an escape.

At once preparations were made to steal a march upon the enemy.

The passage described by Jason was found. It was necessary to first pry aside a huge bowlder before passage could be made.

And passage of the little band went, and one by one they filed into the valley beyond.

So skillfully was the move executed that the foe never dreamed of Daybreak came, and Col. Clark was furious to find that his intended victims and given him the slip during the night.

The vigilants had reached the prairie in safety, and galloped away from the hills.

Clark knew that his only and best move now was to return to the fort for reinforcements.

He did not hope to do anything with the foe with such a mere handful of men.

Accordingly, just as the sun appeared above the horizon, the little column, with its stricken members, started across the plain.

So was made it difficult to sacrifice for the vigilants.

Clark knew that even with their aid it would not be possible to fight battle to the cowboys.

It was necessary to have at our hundred men.

The colonel set his lips tenaciously.

"I will teach that desperado a lesson," he muttered. "He shall be sworn to existence together with his rascal crew, and before another week."

On over the prairie they galloped toward the fort.

As they rode, thrilling adventures were the lot of Frank Reade, Jr. and his friends on board the Steam Man.

Let us, therefore, for a time, deviate here and follow their fortunes.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ABDUCTION.

Chief Harmon of the vigilants was not wholly content to abandon the trail of the cowboys, just here.

He indulged in quite an argument with Frank Reade, Jr.

He remarks were not to his liking.

"Why, only look at the sense of the thing," he declared. "It is but the means possible that the soldiers are going to have an easy time now, and turn his men, and turn the tables on them yet. But you it was a premature thing for that colonel to do, to set us adrift so quickly."

"Yet he ought to know his own strength," said Frank.

"I don't believe he does."

"I cannot but feel that he is doing the right thing."

"I don't feel that way."

"Well, in case of defeat the stigma will not fall upon you."

"Ah, but that is the idea. We must not let Clift defeat them."

"What do you propose?"

"I am not going back home yet. We will make a camp down here on Willow Creek. Then we learn for a fact that Clift has been done up, then we will go home."

Frank saw that Harmon was right. He extended his hand and said:

"I agree with you."

"I knew you would," replied the vigilant leader. We can do this upon our own responsibility. You are to wait for Clark at a point below here. I believe?"

"Yes."

"Then good. That point is on Willow Creek. We will accompany you there."

It was nightfall before Willow Creek was reached.

In a convenient spot camp was made. The darkness became most intense in the vicinity.

Camp-fires were made and guards posted.

The fires in the furnace of the Steam Man were banked, and the occupants descended and talked with the vigilant.

The men gathered around the fire, and told stories and cracked jokes.

Walter Barrows, the young vigilant who was so deeply in love with Beatie Rodman, had waited upon her at the wagon stop, and together they took a lover-like walk down the bank of the creek.
FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

Nobody saw them go, and it is doubtful if any one would have sought to restrain them.

But they were committing unwittingly an act of great risk and folly.

They were on their way to an encampment of a party of savages, and the trail led through the tall prairie grass.

Barney and Pomp were entertaining the camp with some of their pow Wow stories.

The plainsmen roared with laughter until their sides ached.

Both were comical mokes and were continually playing root upon root upon each other. Barney had just started upon a gag upon Pomp when suddenly the distant crack of a pistol was heard.

Instantly every man in the camp was upon his feet.

The most serious of excitement ensued. All was confusion.

Then one of the guards came rushing in.

"There's a hull lot of Apaches down yonder," he cried, "the grass is all gone, I reckon they've surrounded the camp."

"Ready all!" thundered Harmon, the chief of the Vigilantes.

"Who fired that pistol shot?"

"I don't know," replied the guard.

"Is anybody outside the line?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"Walter Barrows and the young lady passed me not an hour ago."

They went down on the creek.

"Mr. Roundhead," gasped Harmon, with a face white, "that was Barrows without doubt. He and the gallant have certainly fallen into the grip of that Injun. We must make lively work to save him." 

Frank Reade, Jr., had listened to this report with a sensation of horror.

Barney and Pomp had at once desisted in their fun-making, and Barney proceeded to start the Vigilante's furnance.

The creek of rifles now sounded all around the camp.

The savages, without doubt, were drawing their line closer, and starting from the steamer's open furnace.

But a line of defense was then thrown out, and the skulking savages were held in bay.

The battle was a terrible and unsatisfactory species of warfare was kept up in the darkness.

It was impossible to tell how to move or where.

The shots were answered with back and forth, and practically at random.

Many of the Vigilantes were wounded, and Captain Harmon was angry.

"Confound an Injun!" he muttered, in disgust. "They have picked a steamin' way of fighting. They almost dozen after dark, ain't done the trick to come out in the open air."

Everybody was bound to acknowledge the logic of this.

But the savages were up to the same mode of attack until Frank Reade, Jr., made a diversion.

Barney had succeeded in getting up steam once more in the Steam Man, and now Frank Reade, Jr., approached Harmon.

"Give me five men," he declared, "and I will whip the foe for you."

"Five men!" gasped Harmon. "Why, they're ten to one out there."

"I don't care if they are."

"But, sir,"

"Will you give me the men?"

"Oh, yes, but--"

"There's no time for questions, Captain Harmon. Leave it all to me."

"All right, Mr. Reade."

By Harmon's orders five of the Vigilantes joined Frank Reade.

He led them aboard the steam wagon. Then he closed the door and seized the reins which connected with the throttle.

The Steam Man gave a shriek loud enough to perforate the ear drums of any one in the vicinity.

Then it dashed out upon the prairie.

The effect may be imagined.

The monster with fiery eyes and all flame and smoke, with clanking tremendous thunders groaning into the midst of the foe, was an apparition well to be feared.

Right into the midst of the savages the Steam Man ran.

While the armed men in the screened wagon poured destructive volleys into the midst of the red foe.

All cannot adequately describe the situation.

For a moment the Apaches held their ground. Then, with will, baffled reeds they fled before the conqueror.

In less than twenty minutes the victory had been practically cleared of savages.

They retreated to a point below where their ponies were corralled.

Morning, they dashed away to the westward. The Steam Man pursued until finding a creek, they escaped for good.

Then Frank Reade, Jr., returned to the camp.

But although the foe had been repulsed, matters were still bad enough.

Walter Barrows and Bessie Rodman were missing.

That they were captives was a forlorn hope. That they had been murdered was a dreadful fear.

Dusk was almost fatal in this case. Without loss of time a good trailer was put upon the trail of the lovers.

Daylight was breaking in the east, and this enabled him to easily follow the trail.

Along the banks of the creek it ran for nearly a fifth of a mile.

Then the trailer paused.

Here without doubt was the spot where Barrows had been attacked by the Apaches.

There were footprints and marks of a struggle. A rifle, with broken stock, was picked up.

"It is Barrows' gun," said one of the Vigilantes.

Blood was found upon the ground, but no trace of the bodies.

"They have been taken by the Injuns," declared Harmon, positively.

"There is no doubt of that."

"Or thrown into the creek," suggested one of the Vigilantes.

Investigation for a moment gave the pursuers a thrill of horror.

There were footprints down to the water's edge, and the marks of some heavy body dragged thither.

In the stilly water, protected by reeds, was a body.

For a moment all expected to recognize Barrows. But all drew a breath of relief.

It was not him.

The body was that of one of the Apaches. Doubtless it was one shot by Barrows, and his body had been thrown into this place to escape the notice of the white people.

"That's an Injun trick," declared Harmon, positively. "I'm mighty well satisfied that the captives are alive."

"Then you are right," said one man.

"Ditto!" said another.

"Then let us take the trail," cried Frank Reade, Jr. "If possible, we must rescue them."

The question was settled at once. All sprang to saddle, and the trail, which was quite plain, was followed.

Across the prairies went the Steam Man, with the Vigilantes behind.

Of course their horses could not keep pace with the Steam Man, on a level stretch, but Frank did not try to run away from them.

The Indians bore away to a south-westwardly course, and soon a range of hills became visible above the horizon.

Harmon made them out as the Black Bear range.

If they got into these hills with the captives, he declared, "we'll have mighty hard work without the steam man."

"Why?" asked one of his men.

"Because, there's more holes and out of the way dens there than you could shake a stick at."

Barney and Pomp crouched down in the wagon, and kept their rifles in readiness for business.

Frank Reade, Jr., watched the plain ahead with eager eye, but though the trail was plain there was yet no signs of overtaking the red foe.

As they drew nearer the hills it became almost a certainty that the savages had sought refuge there.

A long stretch of plain intervened to the hills.

This was easily to be crossed by glass, and Frank did so.

There was no sign whatever of the Indians.

All hope was thus given up of overtaking the red foe before reaching the hills.

It seemed a certainty that they had reached their caves, and the only alternative left was to scour them thoroughly.

But when quite near an entrance between high hills, suddenly the pursuers topped a rise in the prairie and were rewarded with a startling sight.

Just below, in a depression, was the band of savages, seemingly engaged in making camp.

A small creek ran through this depression.

As well known, Indians were always on the lookout upon the banks of a stream. Yet it was a surprise to the pursuers that they should venture to camp in this open spot.

At sight of their foes the astonished redskins were thrown into a tumult.

Instantly a mad retreat was begun for the mountains.

A wild cheer pulsed from the lips of the vigilantes.

Harmon settled himself in his saddle and shouted:

"Forward, all! Charged!"

With a yell the Vigilantes put spurs to their horses and made for the Indian encampment.

Frank Reade, Jr., started the Steam Man on a circuit to head off the savages.

But as did so Pomp detached his arm.

"H! dar, Marce Frank!" cried the darky. "Does yo' see dat little party dar making fo' de hills?"

Frank did see them.

"Yes," he replied.

"Well, dar, am Mas' Bessie an' her lover jest as such as yo' am, Marce Frank, an' dar am half a dozen Injuns jest holding onto de red hosses. I makes it out, sah, dat dey fixa dey kin reach de hills afro de Steam Man, sah."

"By Jupiter, you're right, Pomp!" cried Frank, with inspiration.

"But we'll try and spot that little game."

"Dat's right, Marce Frank!" cried the darky. "I jes' jink de Steam Man kin obterate dem hosses sah enuff."

Frank seized the reins and pulled open the throttle.

As the Steam Man roared furiously with his mighty stride Frank opened the whistle valve and let out a mighty shriek of such loudness that the echoes were repeated a hundred fold in the recesses of the hills.

CHAPTER XIV.

I AM NOT PURSUED.

The party of savages with the two captives in their midst, evi-
dently intended to reach the hills, if possible, before being overtaken by the Steam Man.

At first Frank fancied it easy to cut them off.

But there were several depressions in the prairie which the Man had to circumvent, and the distance was greater than Frank had really dreamed of.

The railway locomotive the Steam Man raced over the plain.

The vigilantes were having a running fight with the savages.

But Frank Read Jr., was doomed to disappointment.

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On the other hand it was a problem as to which direction to pursue or which party to follow. Harmen drew a slight rein upon his horse and waivered a moment. The vigilants naturally inclined to go to the rescue of their compatriots, but Frank Read, Jr., comprehending the folly of this, cried:

"The girl first. We can rescue the man later."

"Ye gods!" cried Harmen in a voice of despair, "that is our duty! The girl first, boys; then we will try and save Barrows."

The vigilants cleared, and away thundered the troop toward the dell.

A few moments later they reached it and entered it. High walls of black, forbidding rock arose on either side to a mighty height. The trail of the Indians was covered by deep snow. It was harder for the horses of the vigilants to pick their way through here than the foot-lobed ponies of the savages.

Trodden practically the Indians had trod quite a lead, and after a quarter of a mile of the defile had been traversed the vigilants were brought to a halt in an unceremonious manner. The defile seemed suddenly to take an upward trend here, and high piles of boulders made a barrier of some height.

Suddenly from behind this barrier there came the flash of rifle muskets, and a volley of bullets came rattling down through the defile.

Two of the vigilants were wounded, and Harmen instantly called a halt.

Cover was quickly sought behind rocks and corners near. It was evident that the Indians had here made a stand. The Vigilant leader was puzzled.

But suddenly Frank Read, Jr., gave a sharp cry:

"Listen!"

His acute ear had caught the sound of horses' hooves coming up the defile in their rear.

"By thunder!" ejaculated Harmen, with sudden terrible comprehension, "we are trapped!"

The men gazedblankly at each other.

Nothing was more uppermost in the minds of the Apaches under the shrewd Red Bear had certainly very cleverly outmaneuvered them.

Led into the defile by one division of the Apaches, the other had proceeded to block up the outlet, and thus literally the Vigilants were in a trap.

There was not the advantage in facing a foe in this manner that there was in having him wholly in the front. To an attacked body the foe would decimate even the bravest and bravest of armies. Harmen was completely taken aback.

"Walt, I swear!" he exclaimed, with earnestness, "I never believed an Indian could beat us in any such way as this. But we are in it, boys, and no mistake. We've got to fight hard."

The savages in front were keeping up a raking fire.

Those in the rear had now drawn near enough to also open fire.

The fun had begun.

But the brave band of white men had no thought of fear or retreat.

They at once, by Harmen's direction, sought safe places of cover and proceeded to return the fire.

Every time an Indian's leg-top showed above the fringe of rocks, it was made a target of.

Thus, the battle was kept up for over an hour.

Then it was occurred to Frank Read, Jr., that he had carefully examined the face of the pass. In doing so it had been discovered a feasible foot-path over the cliff. At this the called Harmen aside and explained a plan to him.

"I think we can defeat the savages easily in this manner," he declared. "Give me five men and I will guarantee a surprise for them."

"Go, Red Bear," said the chief, "you will take it to them."

"I have full confidence in your ability to do as you say. May you succeed!"

Frank at once selected five men from the troop.

Then with Harmen led the way cautiously up the path. Fortunately, it was overhanging with foliage to a large extent, so that they were hidden from the view of those in their rear.

In a few moments a position near the brow of the cliff had been reached. Then Frank's surprise was verified.

The little party could look down upon the heads of the savages. It was an easy matter to pour a volley amongst them with most demoralizing effect.

Frank sent one of the men back down the cliff, to give Harmen the word when to make a charge.

Then at a favorable moment Frank gave the order to fire.

Six repeating rifles were turned upon the savages, and as fast as they could be worked, they were engaged in firing a volley down upon the heads of the exposed savages.

The effect was startling.

The savages were never the one to stand in open field and fire. At once a panic seized them.

It was the moment for the charge, and Harmen's men rushed forward.

They plunged over the rocks they went. In a twinkling the savages were driven from their entrenchments and utterly routed, and completely dispersed.

Frank Read, Jr., and Barrows saw their opportunity, and rushed upon two of the savages who had Bussie Rodman in charge.

In a moment the girl captive was free once more and among friends. The two gauntars felt for their lives.
CHAPTER XV

POMP MAKES ACTION.

Now let us return to Pomp and the Steam Man, whom in the detail of the thrilling adventure just chronicled we have neglected.

The darkness entertained nothing like fear at being left alone on board the manne.

Instead, he rather enjoyed the responsibility thus put upon him.

He could occasionally hear rifle shots from the hills, which assured him that the money was making it hot for him.

"Golly!" he muttered. "I jes' reckon dey iz gwine to make de worst o' me.

But not for him.

He opened the throttle and started the Steam Man along the base of the hill.

With keen eye he studied the possibility of entering.

As the Steam Man was provided with power to climb any height of the sort, Pomp at once set his course up the hill.

Up went the Steam Man with prodigious strides.

Nearer the top he drew.

Pomp had no means of knowing whether it would be possible to go further or not.

But his keen eyes were now doing their good work.

Down a gentle incline the Steam Man went, and through a scattered grove of trees, and came out into a valley deep in the hills.

The sound of firing was not near.

Indeed, as Pomp guided the Man down into the valley, he saw the powder smoke of the conflict in the pass, just a short way up the valley.

"By golly!" muttered the darky, joyfully, "I reckon dat dey iz gwine to do de b'est.

Won't Marse Frank be glad fo' to see me!"

But at that moment a startling thing occurred.

Pomp was traveling at a good speed and the bottom of the incline was reached, two powerful savages sprang out of the grass and seized the throttle reins.

Pomp was taken by surprise that for a moment he could not act.

The pulling of the reins closed the throttle, and the Man came to a halt.

Pomp could not use the rein to open it again, and had there been more of the red fire, the Steam Man would have been at their mercy.

But there were only two of them, and while one held the rein the other seized to buck his way into the wagon with his tomahawk.

Pomp acted with the rapidity of thought.

"G'way from dar y'ro' red imp!" he yelled, picking up a revolver.

"If you don't, I'll jes' bore you y'ro' go!"

But the red man did not desist, and Pomp, springing to a loop-hole first at him.

The bullet went true to its aim, and the Indian fell dead.

The other savage seeing the fate of his companion let out a bellowing yell, and relaxing his grip on the valve rein fled precipitately.

Pomp did not follow the man with Armona Cliff at their head. They were following directly upon the Steam Man.

They were just coming from the scene of their victory over Clark. Pomp's eyes stuck out like the eyes of a sleepy man.

"Golly for goodness' sake," he gasped. "Dat am Cliff and his debils.

I jes' reckon I let out dere way.

Up in a moment he opened the throttle and let the Steam Man race out upon the prairie.

The cowboys gave a wild yell, and attempted pursuit.

But they could not keep pace with the Man, and finally abandoned it.

With baffled yells they returned and disappeared in the pass.

"Golly, dat am a berry bad fing for Marse Frank an' de others," muttered Pomp.

"Boy! I jes' wish dey iz gwine to make dem despicable.

Den, dat'll make tings bery bad, indeed."

The darky at once began to wax anxious as to the fate of his friends.

He began to feel as if it was very much his duty to enter the hills and render what assistance he could.

But what was to be done with his Steam Man?

Pomp reflected that he might take it with him if he could only find some way of doing so.

But to attempt to traverse the rocky pass was out of the question.

The darky was in a quandary as to what to do.

Soon he heard the sounds of firing. The battle was on, and at a great distance, either.

Pomp could hardly contain himself.

He walked up and down in the cage like a prisoner in his cell.

"Oh, co' biscuit, I wish Marse Frank's orldals to stay yere," he muttered.

"I'm afraid dat Marse Frank's iz gwine to do all de help dat he can get.

What eber I kin do, I jes' know dat he will."

The darky sat down and began sober reflection.

The key to the mystery was not long in forming.

Beneath him he closed the throttle and started the Steam Man along the base of the hill.

With keen eye he studied the possibility of entering.

As the Steam Man was provided with power to climb any height of the sort, Pomp at once set his course up the hill.

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Pomp did not follow the man with Armona Cliff at their head. They were following directly upon the Steam Man.

When he came upon the scene he found a thrilling and magnetic conflict in progress.

As sight of the Steam Man a cheer went up from the Victorians.

In a moment Frank and Barney were aboard and shaking hands with Pomp.

The situation was quickly explained.

"I thought most'ly yo' would want do Steam Man, Marse Frank," said the faithful darky.

"So I jes' fetched him over to ya."

"You have done well, Pomp," said Frank, joyfully. "Of course,
FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

It was an opportune moment, too. Just as the last cartridge of the vigilantes was used up, the cavalry started for the rear of the cowboy gang. Instantly a panic seized Cliff's men. They made a brief stand, and then they were driven up a side valley, and then into the hills. Here they made a stubborn stand.

The cavalry literally cleared the pass, and riding through came into the midst of the vigilantes. The scene which followed baffles description. Without comment Clark and big Harmon were shaking hands with the deepest emotion.

"Te came just in the nick of time, Clark," declared the vigilante chief, as the ten minutes seemed we might have been dead men. "Then we are in luck," cried the colonel, "for which I am very glad." Mr. Reade, I shall see you.

The same," replied Frank. "I can be quite plain-handed with the colonel. Then Clark rode away up the defile to see what was going on there in connection with the ranch.

He found the fiercest kind of a battle in progress. The cowboys had entrenched themselves once more and were making a bold stand. The cavalry outnumbered them, but they were in a very advantageous position. The best efforts of Clark's men would not suffice to dislodge them. For a long while the sanguine battle went on.

In vain Clark tried to eject them from their position. His bravest efforts met with failure. The intrepid colonel knew that if he could get the foe into the open he could hope to whip them.

But as it was looked certainly as if his plucky little band would be badly beaten in the second instance of the desired end. In this quandary Frank Reade, Jr., appeared upon the scene. A young inventor had been driven by one of the vigilantes and rode up to see how the fight was going on.

Well, colonel," he said, grinning Clark, "how are you making out?

Not as well as I could desire," replied the colonel in a dejected manner.

"What is the matter?"

"Why, I can't drive the rascals.""

"How do you make out?"

"They have a position up there in the hills which is unsâssable.

"I disagree with you," said Frank, quickly. "I am not a military engineer, but I am a land surveyor and I tell you their position on that hill is not the best."

Clark was staggered.

"Why, it is the best position about here," he declared.

"No," said Frank, gravely. "Yonder is a much better position."

He pointed to a hill to the right, and which the one upon which the cowboys were seemed to be in a inferior position.

"What—try to command the foe from that hill?" cried Clark, scornfully. "We would only expose ourselves, and they would sweep us off our feet before the wind.

"No, they wouldn't.

"Now, Mr. Reade, what is the use for you to talk on the way? The hill upon which you are is higher than this one.

"It may be higher in the number of feet," replied Frank, "but not in advantage of position.

"How do you make out?"

"It is easy enough too see. The top of this hill is smooth, is it not?"

"Yes."

"The top of theirs is uneven and they cannot climb up it. Their position is far from the top. A position on the top of yonder hill we could look down into the valley."

Clark was surprised, but he saw the logic of Frank's remark.

"Yonder," he cried, "you are right."

"I think you will find that I am.

But I would have taken my oath that they had the highest position about here.

"Well, that would seem to be really so, for the hill itself is higher. Yet it is but an optical delusion."

Clark extended his hand to Frank.

"Mr. Reade," he cried warmly. "You are right. I acknowledge my mistake. Perhaps your opportune suggestion may enable us to whip the foe."

"If it is of any value, I am highly pleased," said Frank, modestly.

"I feel that it is, and I shall at once proceed to take the hill."

Clark at once proceeded to do this. By his command his men moved up the back side of the hill. This protected them from the bullets of the cowboys. Arrived at the top of the hill, he saw that Frank Reade, Jr., was right. They were enabled to look down upon the cowboys in their position.

"Hurray!" cried Clark, jubilantly. "That means victory."

The valley was given up a side defile by the cowboys. They returned with ill效果.

The tables were exactly turned upon them, and they were not slow to see the point.

A red-hot fire was kept up for some little time, but the cowboys no longer had the advantage. Indeed it began to look much as if they were to be driven from their position. Suddenly all firing ceased.

The cowboys gang were not in sight, nor did they fire another shot.

Clark feared a stratagem or some fatal device, and dared not at once return.

But finally he became convinced that the cowboys had evacuated their position and had made a retreat.

Flushed with victory Clark ordered his men to charge.

This insured our safety. With the Steam Man we would easily escape the cowboys. But it will never do to leave these brave vigilantes to mercy."

"Oh, no, not, Mr. Frank," cried Pomp, seizing his rifle. "Joe's y'aright, and t'wouldn't be a bad shot on dem. Hons. I'll show dem dat Pomp kin use a rifle."

The Vigilantes placed in the van of the line of battle. Protected as they were by the impervious screen, those on board could fire with advantage at the cowboys. The battle was a hot one, but every moment the cowboys slowly gained ground.

What was worse, the ammunition of the vigilantes seemed to be giving out.

With plenty of ammunition it was possible that the vigilantes could hold their own until help came. But, of course, when the ammunition should give out, the battle would be ended.

White-faced, but determined, the brave plainmen stood their ground.

A man of them thought of retreat. All were prepared to give up their lives like heroes.

There seemed no way of getting out of their present desperate situation.

To retreat was about equal to an impossibility, for it would be set upon the open plain where they would be shot down like sheep.

The situation was an awful one. "Don't blame Harmon for it," said bluff Harmon the vigilante leader, "but some of the boys have families dependent on 'em. Ah, that'll put a chill back size to answer for."

"You are right," agreed Frank Reade, Jr. "But there must be some way of getting out of this scrap."

"Ah, that's a slicker. There is no hope of reinforcements near!"

"The Steam Man could be sent for them in quick time, if such a thing were possible."

"But it is too far off. The nearest place is Ranch V, and that is Cliff's own dam. We know that."

"Certainly."

"The fort is too far off. There is just one forlorner hope."

"Ah!"

"The cavalry."

"But they may have been all wiped out."

"Very true. Well, we must die then like men. But, Mr. Reade, there is no reason why you should not take the girls in your Steam Man and make your escape."

Frank postured the vigilante captain's shoulder.

"Yes!" he said, briefly. "I could do that."

Then do it. We will hold the foe at bay until—"

Sighed Harmon looked his surprise.

"You do not know me," said Frank Reade, Jr., determinedly. "do you think I would desert you in this hour of need?"

"But—"

"Never! If you die so do we. Until the last the Steam Man will stand his ground.

With tears of emotion in his eyes Harmon gripped Frank's hand. "Don't blame me," he said, all he could say.

At this moment one of the vigilantes came up excitedly.

"Yes! Yes, that last cartridge," he declared. "What shall we do! Is it a retreat, Harmon?"

"Retreat!" cried the vigilante leader, clapping his rifle. "Now comes your chance."

The cowboys with their wild cheers were forcing the crippled vigilantes back.

But even in the moment of their victory a strange sound came from the rear and a mighty cry went up from the throats of the vigilantes.

"Hurray! We are saved! Rescue has come at last.

CHAPITR XVII.

ONCE MORE IN THE ENEMY'S POWER.

It had been Col. Clark's firm intention to return to the fort for reinforcements.

It was a long way, but he did not reckon this. He thought only of securing a sufficient body of men to cope successfully with the cowboys.

So on they rode the little remnant of the squad for the far distant fort.

But after a night had been spent in camp, just as the bugle called "boots and saddles," one of the guard sighted a body of horsemen just coming over the hill in the plain of the cowboys.

The alarm was given and Clark rode out to investigate.

One glance was enough and a cry of joy escaped his lips.

"Hurray!" he cried. "We are in luck. It is Romaine's company of one hundred men. Forward all.

With cheers the little band rode out to meet the reinforcements.

The command had been sent out under Captain Romaine to search for Clark and his men.

The two companies shook hands and explanations were made. You have come just in the nick of time, Romaine," declared Clark. "Now we are with you, colonel!"

"The boys are itching for some hot work."

"Well, we have seen that," said Frank, "and you have taken charge, as he took command.

Since the cavalry set out at full gallop for the hills.

It seemed like a strange fate that guided them almost to the very scene of the conflict.

The firing was heard long before the pass was reached, and Clark hurried his men forward.

He at once threw them into the pass in the rear of Cliff's gang.
FRANK READS, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

Up the slope went they, with fixed eyes. But when they cleared the top of the incline, hastily thrown up by the cowboys, it was a sight they had never beheld before. They had departed quite unceremoniously and completely. Not an eenie-miney was selected, nor a horse picked out which they might go in style. Indeed it also became a mystery as to the course taken by them.

Not a sign of a trail could be found.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Clark, in disgust, "how are you going to fight such a chase? even if they would only come out like the warhogs. It would be all right. But they don't dare do it." "You would whip them," said Frank Read, Jr., with a laugh, "if they brought anything up on us."

"I suppose so, but it makes it pretty hard for me. Suppose the best course now is to send out scouts and scout the hills." "Exactly." "All right. I will do it." "I will go, you understand." "Thank you. I will do it or die." "That is a good resolution." "Well, I mean the last word of it, too." This Clark ordered his men to horse, and the quest at once began.

Frank did not believe that he could be of further service just now, so he decided to return to the Steam Man. Mounting his horse he rode down through the defile. In a few moments he reached the spot where the remnant of the brave Vigil-ant band were.

There was the Steam Man intact, but Frank saw at a glance that something was wrong about the camp.

Everything seemed in disorder, no doubt raised by the conceit of Young Barrows. Barrows had raised his rifle quite enough to strike terror through the hearts of the weapons, but his mind was too purblind to understand the value of quick action.

In this trial the fate of Barrows, for half a dozen bullets came whistling down the mountain side the next moment. He had run unconscious upon his foes. He experienced a thrill of fear, but he did not return to the scene of the attack with Beesie Rodman in his charge.

"Heaven help me now!" he muttered fervently. "I must save her or die!"

From his position he could safely scrutinize the mountain side, but he saw that far up on its slope there was a rude cabin made of bark and logs. From this the storm of bullets had come. Nothing could be seen of those within the cabin, but Barrows believed that not only was the foe within, but also Beesie Rodman.

He was somewhat at a loss now to know just what move to make. The situation openly to the attack would have been an act of folly. He would certainly have met his death in a summary fashion. So while pondering on the subject he continued to watch the windows.

He held his rifle in readiness for instant use.

Suddenly a face appeared for an instant at one of the windows. It was quickly withdrawn, and Barrows had not time to fire. He recognized it, however, as the face of one of the outlaws.

The young plainsman's nerves were steel, and he watched his chance again with nervous anxiety.

Suddenly the opportunity came. Once more the face appeared. Barrows raised his rifle and fired. Barrows.

Crack!

Wild cry went up, the sound of a falling body was heard, and then the trampling of feet and bitter curses.

Barrows knew that his shot had taken effect.

The洛 (2) changed his position and a second time made his appearance from the mysterious cabin.

The man in the cabin was keeping mighty dark," he muttered. "They surely must be there, for I have not seen them come out as yet."

Fortunately the length of time had elapsed.

Certainly an hour and a half of waiting had passed, and Barrows felt that he must do something and at once.

"I shall die of worry if I stay here," he muttered. "Perhaps—"

He was raised. A thrilling thought had struck him.

It was more than likely that he had been waiting all this while for nothing.

It would have been both a difficulty and a matter for the foe to have slipped out by a rear exit, and by this time be far from the scene of action.

But how was he to determine this fact?

It could only be determined by approaching the building boldly and searching it.

To do this was to incur the risk of a bullet from the outlaws.

This might be only a clever trick of theirs to draw him from his covert.

All these thoughts passed hke alescope like through Barrow's brain. He was satisfied that the face could not be a half dozen in number. If he could have kept up a desultory battle with them in his present position he believed that he could have picked off a number of them, and thus reducing their numbers eventually bring the fight to a successful issue.

But the outlook now was by no means so promising.

If there were more than I felt great difficulty in cutting off the abductors before they should join the main body of the cowboys.

In that case it would be more difficult to rescue Beesie Rodman.

Barrows realized his folly in starting out single handed to rescue the abductors.

If he had now several of his companions with him the hurt could have been surrounded and there would have been little trouble in making the rescue.

But time was passing and something had got to be done at once.

Barrows proceeded to act.

He began to cautiously climb up the mountain side keeping in the cover of rocks and trees.

He was very careful not to expose himself to a shot and in this way had soon reached a point from which he believed he could see the rear end of the cabin.

There it stood lonely and silent.

Was it really deserted or were the foe yet within its walls? The appearances it was the latter.

Barrows hesitated a moment and then took the desperate chance. He emerged boldly from the woods and approached the cabin. On he went until within ten yards of the door. Yet there was no sign of life.

The next moment he reached the door.

It yielded to his touch and he entered. The place was deserted. There were evidences that the foe had been there.

Anchorage Barrows made a startling discovery. The soft dirt of the floor he discovered the footprints of Beesie Rodman. As it was safe to proceed further north here, for there was no likelihood that the region for many miles held another of her sex.

Eventually Barrows examined the trail and followed it out through a rear door of the cabin.

To a narrow gully ran up the mountain. It was quickly lost in the gravity soil, but Barrows kept on up the mountain.

He found several hiding out for acting with greater dis-
FRANK READE, JR., AND HIS NEW STEAM MAN.

have become aware sooner of the change of base of the abductors. This was undoubtedly true, but on the other hand there had been the threat of exposure to a danger.

On the whole the outcome felt that he had reason to be grateful for his success in following the trail of the foe. He kept on up the mountain with increasing hopes. If he could once more overtake the abductors, under more favorable circumstances, he could effect the rescue of Bessie Rodman. He kept on up the mountain. Then he suddenly halted at a point from which he had a good view of the country about. He looked down to the low plain below, some distance which was fringed with trees.

The verge of this timber line Barrows saw a number of moving figures. He was satisfied that they were the party of abductors and he even fancied he could see the face of Bessie Rodman. With deadly resolution Barrows started in pursuit. He kept on up the mountain he went and soon reached the level of the plain.

The party was now out of sight but Barrows believed that he could overtake them. So he set out at a rapid pace along the verge of the timber. Excitement experiences were in store for him.

CHAPTER XIX.

FRANK READE, JR.'S NARROW ESCAPE.

FRANK READE, JR., had decided to go at once in quest of the abductors of Bessie Rodman. He called Pomp and Barney aboard the Steam Man, and the start was made.

Of course they were not aware that Barrows had started out upon the same mission.

It was decided to proceed up the Death Gulch, for Frank fancied that the abductors would likely struck out over the mountain now and take the gulch. The gale could be traversed by the Steam Man easily, and Frank deemed it would be as good as up the gulch the Steam Man went.

For some distance all went well, and no incident worthy of note occurred.

But finally a branch of the canyon was reached, and here a halt was called.

This extended to the southward. Frank knew that the outlaws could not have crossed this without a wide detour.

The ground was high above the walls of the canyon, and the young inventor decided upon a different move. The Steam Man proceeded up this canyon for some ways, then Frank called a halt.

"We will stop here," he said.

"Shure, Misher Frank," cried Barney, "ph waver do yer want to go that far? 'Tis a clear course ahead.

"I am well aware of that, Barney," replied Frank, "but I am not sure that we are following the right course.

"Inde, sir.

"Golly, Marse Frank, amn't you gwine to let dis chile go wif y'?

"Begorra, not a bit at all," cried Barney. "Shure, yez may stay with de Steam Man, nugh.

"Yo' reckon, Marse Frank take me dis time,

Frank smiled and said: "Yes, it is a much fairer, Pomp, for you to go this time. You will remain with the Man, Barney.

Barney did not demur, for he knew that it was of no use. Frank had a fancy for it, and his fancy was more often right than wrong, and perhaps felt that it was no more than fair that Pomp should have this chance.

But now a short rest was observed. Armed with rifle and revolver, the two explorers left the Steam Man.

A good path up the canyon wall was selected, and after an arduous climb they finally reached the summit. From here a mighty view of the country about was obtained.

As far as the eye could reach to the eastward was the level expanse of plain.

In the other direction mountain peaks rose above them to a great altitude.

Frank had a powerful glass, and with this proceeded to scrutinize the country below.

But not a thing of the cowboys, nor was he able to tell in what direction Clark's men had gone.

He described the scene what he believed to be smoke ascending from behind distant trees, and fancied that this might be from the guns of the military and the cowboys.

But of this he was not sufficiently prepared to venture to go thither.

"Well, Pomp!" he said dubiously, as he closed the glass. "I don't know what we can locate the abductors of Bessie Rodman from here. I declare I don't know.

"I reckon dat dis cowboys hab gone back to dat ranch ober de hill.

"Don' git mad, Git. I go,

Frank gave a start.

But this did not occur to him that the abductors might have taken their captive to Ranch V.

Indeed, so strongly did he become impressed with the possibility that the cowboys had probably left his daughter from the hill. But however thought impelled him first to think of searching the hills.

If she could not be found then it would be time enough to think of paying Ranch V a visit.

An incident happened at this moment also that for some prevented any move of the sort.

Pomp had begun to seal a small peak near.

"Pomp, I kin get a betshah look from up yere, Marse Frank! cried the darky. "Jes' de same, I tries it fo' yo'."

Right, Pomp, replied Frank. "Tell me if you see anything of importance and I will come up."

"All rig'ht, sah.

Pomp went up the peak.

He reached the top and began to look over the country, when suddenly he beheld a thrilling sight below him.

Frank had gone to the edge of the canyon to look over and see what the Steam Man was about. He leant over the side of the deep gorge he did not see a giant form suddenly glide from a crevice in the cliff behind him. That giant, in reality, an immense boulder. The brute had caught sight of Frank, and being in an ugly mood, started for him.

The bear advanced so quickly and noiselessly that Frank was all unaware of his presence until the brute was upon him. Then a terrific howl from the bear's paw sent him reeling over the edge of the cliff.

Over the edge went the young inventor, and a yell of horror and pain went up from Pomp's mouth.

"Golly sakes, Marse Frank, hab yo' fallen down to yo' death!" cried the affrighted darky, as he came tumbling down the peak like a madman.

Frank had certainly gone over the edge.

The bear stood upon the peak of the precipice growing savagely. Pomp was in a frenzy of fear and horror. He could not see what was preventing his beloved master from going down to his death.

He would have rushed to the spot where Frank had stood but the bear was there.

At this moment the stillness of the gorge was broken by the shrill whistle of the Steam Man. This was enough for Pomp. In a moment he raised his rifle and fired at the bear.

Ordinarily, he would have been compelled to fire many times, but as it was he did it, this single shot proved fatal.

It struck the bear full in the eye and went crashing through his brain.

The big brute went over the edge of the precipice and crashed down into the gorge.

Pomp heard plainly the crash of the bear's body as it struck the bottom of the pass.

He rushed to the edge and looked over.

He saw the bottom of the gorge plainly enough. There lay the inanimate form of the bear.

The Steam Man stood at a distance of two hundred yards distant from this spot, and Pomp saw Barney far below, yelling and waving his hands, the darky answered, and then caught sight of something which thrilled him.

Clinging to a jutting bit of rock in the canyon wall he saw Frank Reade, Jr., hanging between heaven and earth.

The astonished darky fell upon his stomach and leaned far over the edge of the gorge.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" he cried, excitedly. "I done felt w'at yo' was a-goner fo' na'n! Hab yo' got a strong hold dar'!

"Pump!" cried Frank, in sharp tones. "I am nearly exhausted. I fear I shall lose my hold here soon.

"How's Hobbins's sake, Pomp, afore darky sakes, "do' yo' say dat, Marse Frank? If yo' fell down to de cornhab ob dat gorge yo' would be killed fo' na'n. Yo' jes' wait an' dis chile will help yo',

"You'll have to hurry, Pomp," cried Frank, in an exhausted manner.

"Yo' kin jest bet I will."

"Whoa, there naygur!" cried Barney from below. "Wud yez be after lettin' down a rope to Misher Frank. Quick, now, or yez won't have the time."

Pomp acted quickly.

The darky carried constantly a lariat at his waist. This he lowered over the edge and down to the point where Frank was hanging suspended between earth and sky.

Pomp had acted with great dispatch, but even as the rope went over the edge, a warning cry went up from Barney below.

"My God! I am failing!" cried Frank, with horror.

His hands were slipping over the edge of the jutting bit of rock to which he clung.

The next moment they released their grip entirely and down he went.

But, as good fortune had it, just below him was a stump growing out of the cliff.

Against this he fell and his clothing caught upon a jagged root.

It held him firmly, and there he hung safe and secure.

A cry of joy went up from Pomp and Barney.

"Jes' yo' hung rig'ht on, Marse Frank!" cried the darky, earnestly.

"Don' yo' glb way at all, an' dis chile he done pull you up a'right."

"All rig'ht, Pomp," cried Frank, regaining his calmness so habitual to him. "I think I am safe here.

"Fraise de Lor' dot" cried the elated darky. "Jes' hell rig'ht."

Down went the lariat.

In a moment more it settled over Frank's shoulders.

As Pomp drew on it, Frank made it secure under his arms.

Then the darky began to draw up on the rope. It required some exertion of strength, but after a moment Frank cleared the edge.

But at this moment a loud shout came up from the gorge below. It was Barney's voice raised in a note of alarm.

"My soul!" cried Frank, excitedly. "What can have happened?"

But rushed to the edge of the canyon and looked over.
CHAPTER XX.

THE FLOOD—COILING THE PEL.

It was a thrilling sight, when they came down from the upper canyon. They saw Barney leaping up and down and gesticulating wildly.

"What is the matter?" cried Frank.

But before the words had fairly left his lips he saw what was the trouble.

Along the bottom of the gorge a thin stream of water was flowing.

Every moment it was increasing.

"Is there much more water coming?" cried Barney. "Share if so, I'm thinkin' we'd better be after getting out of the way." "Right!" cried the young inventor, excitedly, "but where can it come from?"

He ran to an eminence near and from which a good view of the upper canyon could be had. And there Frank beheld a thrilling sight.

At the upper end of the canyon was a large lake made by an accumulation of logs and debris across the source of the stream. Here was a scene of men with axes and iron bars were engaged in breaking dam so as to let the whole lake down into the gorge.

It would mean a flood of awful sort if they succeeded.

It would surely sweep the canyon clear, and the position of Barney would be a perilous one.

"Frank saw this with horror. He knew at once that the workmen were of the cowboy gang. Already the dam could be seen to be giving way.

In a few moments the flood must come. No time must be lost.

Into the canyon the water would plunge and engulf everything in its path.

Frank wanted no longer.

He sprang to the edge of the canyon and shouted to Barney: "Go, Frank, go! Run for the plain. We will take care of ourselves."

"All right, sir!" Barney sprang into the cage and away went the Steam Man with a shriek down the canyon. But Barney made the turn all safely, and the Steam Man shot up the canyon far enough to avoid the back current of the flood.

"Help!" yelled the toiled-out Cull, jubilantly, as he opened the whistle valve.

The news of safety was heard by Frank and Pump with a sensation of great relief and joy.

They understood at once the move made by Barney.

"GO, Frank!" cried Pump, "GO!" Pump, declared Frank. "It is lucky that he did not keep on the plains. He would have been over now.

"I jes' reckon dat am a fact!" cried Pump. "Well, I flink we'd best go back to the Steam Man as quick as eber we can.

You right, Pump," declared Frank. "Our position here will be hardly a safe one now.

"You right, sah."

The flood in the canyon was now rapidly subsiding. The great lake had quickly emptied itself into the canyon. In a short while the bed of the canyon was once more visible.

Barney then ran the Steam Man back into the main canyon, and Frank and Pump hailed him.

"You did well, Barney," cried the young inventor, joyfully. "You made the best possible move."

"Begorra, I knew well enough that I had to get out of the way of the waters, &c.," replied Barney. "But share, are ye comin' down soon?"

"We are comin' right down," replied Frank.

Down the canyon wall they scrambled and safely reached the gorge.

Then they greeted Barney with joy and clambered aboard.

"Share, Cap'nt," said Frank, "we'll go ahead this time."

"Yes."

Barney took the reins and the Steam Man went on up the gorge. In a short time they had reached the dam which had held back the lake.

He found course was found for the torrent up a vast plain. Frank was about to direct the man who had suggestion for the moment.

A loud holler came from the cliff above.

"Hello, down there!"

The sound could not be seen. The Steam Man came to a halt.

"He'll fire Frank."

"We're Frank Reade, Jr., chuck!"

"That's my name," replied Frank.

"I am Artemas Cliff. I give you fair warning to surrender."

"You're in a death trap."

"Thank you for informing us," retorted Frank, "but I don't believe I'll surrender yet."

"Ye won't then?"

"No."

"Then take the consequences."

"I can do that."

A savage curse came down upon them. Then the crack of rifles was heard and bullets pattered against the steel netting.

Of course no harm was done, and Frank only smiled grimly.

He sent the Steam Man up the gorge, and in a few moments came back, the plain, which was deep among the hills and hemmed in with a line of timber.

The cowboys continued to pour volley after volley into the Steam Man. Frank waited until he had reached a favorable position, then he stopped the Steam Man, and picking up his rifle, said:

"Come, boys! Let's give them as good as they send." Of course Pump and Barney were ready and eager.

A destructive fire was sent into the covert of the cowboys. In a few moments it grew so hot that they could not remain there, and had to get out.

With bated yells they retreated deeper into the hills.

"Whurcoid!" yelled Barney jubilantly. "Share it's almo' easy to whip such second-classers as they be."

"Golly! don' ye' be so sure, fish," remonstrated Pump.

"What do ye' know about it, anywhay?"

"Suth, I know jest as much as the do, fish."

"G'long! Yess are a big stuff."

"I ain't so big a man as you am."

"Say that again, am I'll break the face av yeh."

"Ruh! Y' can't do it."

These cowboys would have had a friendly set-to then and there, but Frank interposed.

"None of that," he cried, sternly; "there is serious work before us."

This was a quietus upon the two rascals, and they ceased their skylarking.

The cowboys had been driven back, but now a thrilling sound came from the distant hills.

It was the heavy volleying of many rifles. There could be but one explanation.

Evidently the cavalry had come into conflict with the cowboys.

A good sized battle was in progress. An impulse seized Frank. He dashed off on the Slim with the intention of being near his friend.

There was no doubt that the Steam Man could do much to aid the cavalry.

So he started the Man across the plain, looking for an opening into the hills in the direction of the firing. This is, however, seemed not easy to find.

But as the Man was straining the line of timber, a thrilling scene was suddenly brought to view.

In a small clearing in the verge of the timber two men were striving to get down one. It was a terrible and death-strengthening. The simple fighter was holding his own well.

Near by, with arms tied behind him, was a young girl.

It was Bessie Rodman.

"My God!" cried Frank. "Quick, for your life, boys! We must put an end to that struggle. Don't you see it is young Bessie, and he is fighting to rescue the girl."

"Golly, dat am a fact!" cried Pump, excitedly. "Jes' give me a chance at dem rapsolleens."

Up to the spot the Steam Man swiftly ran.

A cry of wildest joy and hope welled up from Bessie Rodman's lips.

Young Barrows also saw that rescue was at hand and made extra exertions to overcome his foes.

The cowboys, however, seeing that success had come tried to break away.

As Barrows was too exhausted to restrain them they succeeded and dashed away at full speed.

Reaching their ponies they mounted and were out of sight in a twinkling.

The next moment Barrows had clasped Bessie in his arms, first cutting her bonds.

"Thank Heaven," he cried. "We are united once more, and this time let us hope never to part."

Those aboard the Steam Man pretended to be busy during the affecting meeting.

But soon the lovers came to the cage and a general welcome followed.

An explanation of all followed, and then plans for the future were quickly decided upon.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHICH IS THE END.

The sound of firing now came from the hills quite plainly. It was evident that Clark's men were having a hard battle.

Barrows detailed his experiences as we have recorded in a previous chapter.

This was decided at once if possible to join the cavalry.

"If I can place Miss Rodman in your charge, Mr. Reade," said young Barrows, gallantly, "I will gladly join the soldiers and aid in the rescue of the foe."

"You may do that," replied Frank, readily. "In fact, I think it safer for the lady to remain in the wagon hereafter."

"You are very kind."

"It is nothing."

Accordingly Bessie was given a seat in the wagon.

Then Barrows mounted one of the ponies left by the cowboys.

I will see you later," he said lifting his hat to Bessie.
Not a stick was left standing, and of the cowboys gang fully a hundred had rendered service before the others. Possibly twenty of the cavalrymen had been killed.

It had been a severe battle, but Frank Reade, Jr., his companions could not help wanting to make a confession and would rather than than the losses.

Pom and Barney had been taken to the victors, this time. And the news of the victory was by no means so the victors. The news was passed quietly. The next morning a surgeon came to the Steam Man and called for Frank.

Frank announced that he had been in the fight, and wanted to make a confession, which would be to nobody else.

The words of the victors, the news of the victors, all that was said, was by no means so the victors.

The news was passed quietly. The next morning a surgeon came to the Steam Man and called for Frank: the news of the victors, all that was said, was by no means so the victors.

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WHO IS FRANK READE, JR.?

ASK ANY BOY AND HE WILL TELL YOU THAT

FRANK READE AND FRANK READE, JR.

ARE THE GREATEST INVENTORS THAT EVER LIVED,

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