



“AIN’T figured none on making it a personal holiday,” says old Judge Steele, shifting his position on the sidewalk. “I’ve been thinking about taking myself plumb out of range of earthly things on said date. A man of my age has got to look out for his health.”

“The Lord giveth and, also and moreover, He taketh away in His own time,” states “Old Testament” Tilton pious-like.

“Gospel fact, Testament,” nods the judge. “But there ain’t no use of a fellow trying to force the issue. I know Piperock.”

“Needs tempering,” orates Mike Pelly. “Piperock is all right for a little town and she plumb exhibits energy beyond her capacity, and that is one of the reasons I’m trying to get you pelicans to see things my way. Paradise will act as an anchor. *Sabe?* You Piperockers would be lost in a place like Paradise.”

“Too true,” nods Magpie Simpkins, sheriff of Yaller Rock County, caressing his long mustache. “Great place to lose things, Mike. I had two horse-thieves stolen from me in that city.”

“Curlew is a comer,” proclaims “Hassayampa” Harris, who owns what there is of the town. “Why not come to Curlew? She stands to welcome you with open arms.”

“Any time she does I’ll hide my money in my boot,” squeaks “Scenery” Sims.

“Open ——! The only thing what is open in Curlew is the jail.”

“I fear me that this meeting will soon need legal or medical assistance,” announces Judge Steele, blowing his long nose apologetic-like. “There ain’t no use skating so near to air-holes, folks. There ain’t a danged one of you what ain’t moved your guns around to the front. What for kind of a way is this to arbitrate?”

“You unbuttoned your vest, judge,” reminds Magpie. “Don’t you wear a shoulder holster?”

“Patriotism, Magpie. It ain’t because I’m belligerent. Any old time these snake-hunters from foreign parts belittles our shining city I can only remain cool and collected up to a certain point. I hadn’t ought to wear a vest.”

Me and “Dirty Shirt” Jones listens to this elevating conversation in disgust. Me and Dirty are not with the meeting nor a part of it, except being as it’s pulled off out in the open we can’t help hearing it. Magpie represents Piperock, Mike orates Paradise’s opinions and Hassayampa is there to lay Curlew at our feet.

Old Judge Steele has to horn in to add dignity to the affair and little Scenery Sims adds his squeaky voice, which detracts from any dignity the judge might add.

“Now about the religious attractions—” begins Old Testament, but Magpie gives him a look and he sets down.

“This is a Fourth of July meeting, Testament,” states Magpie. “We may need you later on to proclaim ashes to ashes, but

right now you better pass the hand. *Sabe?* You're all the sky-pilot we've got around here, and for the good of our soul I asks you to keep out. You're all right for what you're intended."

"Come on, Ike," says Dirty. "These hombres will frame up something awful, you can gamble on that, and the less we has to do with it the more chance we has to get shot by accident and mourned by few."

Then we went over to Buck's place and leaned against the mahogany.

"Committee come to a understanding?" asks Buck.

"As usual," replies Dirty. "They'll mistreat each other for a while, stop by mutual consent and celebrate as they see fit. There ain't no sense in having a community celebration, Buck. Ain't it bad enough for each community to kill off of their own without joining up to make it a wholesale slaughter?"

"If Lincoln knowed what he started when he made the Fourth a holiday he'd wish he'd kept right on splitting corral poles, believe me," grinned Buck.

"Robert E. Lee," corrects old Sam Holt, looking up from his solitaire layout. "Lincoln didn't have no hand in it, Buck."

"Yeah?" grunts Pete Gonyer. "Is that so? Let me tell you both something: If General Grant hadn't hankered to march to the sea, where would your old Fourth of July be, I'd rise to inquire?"

"I said Lincoln," reproves Buck, dropping his hands below the level of the bar. "I can prove it."

Pete hitches forward in his chair and rubs the palms of his hands on his hips.

"I said Grant—U. S. Grant! *Sabe?*"

Old Sam Holt yawns and slips his hand unconcerned-like under the shoulder of his coat. Then he spits out into the middle of the room.

"Robert E. Lee!" he snaps mean-like.

"Hurrah for history!" yelps Dirty and we both went out and sat on the hitch-rack.

"Dirty," says I, "which one was right?"

"Ike, I'm — if I know. As soon as the convention is over I'll ask the judge. He ought to know."

Maybe he did. He comes walking a-long stiff-legged like a bear and Dirty accosts him thusly—

"Judge, who is responsible for the Fourth of July?"

The old pelican stops, peers at Dirty over his glasses and clears his throat.

"I'm surprized to find anybody so danged ignorant," says he, pained-like.

"Yeah? I didn't ask you to display oratory over my ignorance, judge. You might at least express an opinion. We won't dispute you."

"The Fourth of July was started—was started back in—let's see."

The judge scratches his chin and peers at the ground.

"Back in 1492—seems like that's the date. Anyway, it was along about that time—"

"I asked you who, judge, not when," reminds Dirty and just then Magpie strolls up.

"What's the argument?" he asks.

"Who started the Fourth of July, Magpie?"

"Which one, Dirty? This one, the last one or the one before? Be definite."

"There you are," grins the judge, "Magpie's a scholar. Your question was too general, Mister Jones."

Him and Magpie locks arms and goes into Buck's place, while me and Dirty sets there on the rack and registers disgust. Know what Dirty looks like when he shows disgust?

DIRTY is so cock-eyed in one eye that he has to shut it in order to see straight. His eyebrows grows so high up on his forehead that he looks plumb astonished at everything, and he walks

like somebody was prodding him in the back of the knees. When Dirty registers disgust on his face, he'd make a bee-stung grizzly stop scratching to laugh.

Pretty soon there comes a yelp from the saloon, a shot is fired, and Pete Gonyer comes out like a comet. He's looking back as he exits and he slams right into one of the porch posts, takes it along with him and acts mean-like over it, like it was alive. Then he sets up and looks around.

"Who started the Fourth of July, Pete?" asks Dirty.

"U. S.—" begins Pete and then glances up at the bunch crowding the door.

Buck has got a shotgun in his hands. Pete scratches his chin and says—

"Lincoln!"

"What Lincoln?" asks Buck sweet-like.

"Nebrasky," grunts Pete and Buck nods like he's satisfied.

Just then Chuck Warner, a freak from the Cross J, rides in. He's got a long, tired looking face and short legs. He comes over and leans against the rack.

"Chuck," says Dirty, "who started the Fourth of July?"

"Well, you might say it was George Washington and again you might say it was the Delaware River," replies Chuck, wise-like. "You see, Washington wanted to get across the river, which was full of ice, so they put him in a boat and rowed him across. *Sabe?* In honor of said voyage, which was on said day and date, they sets same aside as a holiday."

"Ice!" squeaks Scenery. "On the Fourth of July, Chuck?"

"Beyond the shadder of a doubt," replies old Judge Steele. "I've got a picture of it in my office."

"The Delaware River don't freeze in Summer," objects Buck. "She's sort of a south river, if I reminds myself correct."

"In spots," grins Chuck, wiggling his

ears. "Washington crossed her north end, Buck. She's a long river."

"Sure," agrees Pete. "River was too long to go around. I knowed that Lincoln didn't have no more to do with it than—than Grant did."

"Speaking of Fourth of July," states Sam Holt, "I'd admire to say a few words about Robert E. Lee."

"I'm going home," says Dirty Shirt. "I don't care a whoop who did start it. All I know is this: It might been a wise man who started it, but a lot of danged fools have monkeyed with it until she ain't no good for man nor beast.

"I may attend in a body, but I hereby states that I won't be part nor parcel of celebration and I won't act as pall-bearer on July fifth, nor the day after nor the next day. I won't do anything that might carve 'Died July Fourth' on my tombstone. *Adios.*"

Dirty Shirt rode out of town and I went up to our cabin. I say "our cabin" meaning the place where me and Magpie hangs out. We're pardners in everything, except when I declare myself out, when Magpie declares me in and I ain't long winded enough to argue it.

Magpie is sheriff of Yaller Rock County, which is something to be proud of—like being a target—and any time he feels that I ain't going fifty-fifty with his troubles he swears me in as a deputy. He comes home later on and sets down to our table, where he does a little work with a pencil.

After while he yawns and rolls a smoke.

"Ike, it is better so," says he.

"It always is, Magpie," I admits.

"Curlew won't go to Paradise," he states. "Paradise won't go to Curlew. Curlew won't come to Piperock and Piperock won't go to Curlew. Paradise won't come to Piperock and Piperock won't go to Paradise. See how it is?"

"Uh-huh," I admits "There ain't

nobody going no place. Good!”

“Wrong, Ike.”

Magpie hists his boots upon the table and twists his mustache.

“We’re going to have a community celebration. This is going to be a hum-dinger and entirely out of the ordinary. Paradise, Piperock and Curlew are going to have a three-corner celebration and we’ve picked Dancing Prairie as the celebration center. How does she strike you, Ike?”

“Ker-bump!” says I. “That sure is a fitting place, Magpie. Following an Injun precedent, we can dance the scalps. There’s an old Injun graveyard on the river bank which could be put in shape and would save the trouble of hauling the casualties home. Yes’m, you picked a grand spot.”

“Aw, this ain’t going to be no hip-hooray celebration, Ike. We’re getting civilized on celebrations, Ike. There ain’t no hot heads on the committee, so she’ll all come off cool and collected-like.”

“Said committee is?”

“‘Chuck’ Warner, ‘Hassayampa’ Harris, ‘Doughgod’ Smith and Mike Pelly.”

“Yeah?” says I. “Some class! A liar, a thief, a fool and a bartender. What are you going to be, Magpie?”

“Me? I’m going to be the boss of the whole works. I’m the *hombre* what sees that every thing is pulled off as per program. I may need an aid.”

“Then you’ll pick him from the rabble,” I states. “I will be far away and going farther on that day, Magpie. Three days from now I’m going to have a hundred miles between me and Dancing Prairie and the distance will grow farther as the day goes on.”

“Hold up your right hand, Ike,” he snaps. “Swear to do your duty as deputy sheriff, so help you Gawd? Huh! Now, dang your bow-legged soul, you stay hitched to the law for four days! You run out on me and I’ll get you thirty days for contempt of court.”

“Who do I have to have contempt for, Magpie?” I asks.

“Well, Judge Steele and—uh—me, I reckon.”

“Put me in,” says I. “Thirty days for one contempt, Magpie? Better hurry up, ’cause my contempts are growing so fast that one lifetime won’t begin to cover the case.” Magpie ain’t a man of his word, so I has to suffer freedom. I permits myself to be sworn in as a deputy to a sheriff but nothing nor nobody can swear me in as a deputy to a Yaller Rock celebration. I sets down in the office and lets nature take its course.

I SEES Hassayampa and Magpie waving their arms in arguments, which don’t never seem to be settled. Then I sees Mike and Magpie imitating windmills, as they thresh out the details. Delegates from Paradise and Curlew seem to mingle free like with the gentle folk of Piperock, but as yet there ain’t no great lot of gun-play. I feel that there is plenty to come, so I don’t deplore to inaction.

Lumber and all such needful things are hauled from Piperock, but I sets there in the office, with my feet on the table and sorrow in my heart, ’cause I know—man, I know there’s going to be sorrow somewhere.

Cometh to me “Sad” Samuels of Curlew, sets him down at my table and looks sorrowful-like.

“Ike,” says he, “can you give me a description of Custer?”

“Horse-thief?” I asks.

“Fit Injuns,” says Sad. “Remember him, don’t you?”

“Not from your description, Sad. Think you seen him?”

Sad rolls a cigaret and looks sad-like at me. He’d look sad if somebody left him a million. I seen him cry over a straight flush one night. He wets that cigaret and then drops it on the floor. Too sad to smoke.

“Ike, do I look like Custer?”

"Want me to say yes, Sad?"

"I've got to be Custer."

"Yes," says I. "It's all right with me, for Sad. If you must you must, but why has you got to be unnatural thataway?"

"Ike," Sad chaws his chin-strap and becomes melancholy, "Ike, who started the Fourth of July?"

I dropped my feet off the table and yanked out my gun. Sad lit on his feet and backed toward the door with his hands up.

"Sad Samuels, did you come here to start something?" I asks.

"Honest to Gawd, Ike, I never did! Hassayampa orates that General Custer did, *sabe?*"

"In such a case I'm ashamed of Hassayampa," says I. "Just because the Injuns didn't like Custer it ain't giving you and Hassayampa no right to try and turn the whites against him too."

"Don't blame me, Ike," wails Sad. "We can't all be educated. According to the opinions I've heard lately there's a lot of difference in histories. Ain't you got no opinions on the matter?"

"There's just one thing I do know, Sad," says I, "and that is this: The next *hombre* what asks me that question is going to get knocked so far into the Dark Ages that he'll be able to get his information first hand."

Sad nodded his head and went out. Sad makes me weary with that we're all-got-to-go-sometime expression on his face.

Then cometh Mike Pelly. We exchanges the peace sign.

"Tomorrow is the Fourth," states Mike. "Tomorrow morning."

"According to Hood's Sa'sparilly," says I.

"Yeah," admits Mike, drumming on the table with his fingers. "Seems queer how much ignorance a feller can uncover in this here cow-country, Ike. Any man with brains knows who started the Fourth."

"With brains," I admits.

"You know, don't you, Ike?"

"I do, Mike, but I promised not to tell."

"I ain't asking, Ike. Any man has a right to his opinions. Magpie's bull-headed and so is Hassayampa. I ain't saying that they ain't got a right to their opinions, Ike. So long as Magpie orates that Piperock is going to do the originator proud, and Curlew aims to do the same, ain't it O. K. and proper that Paradise should hold up their ideals and aims?"

"What do you wish me to do, Mike?"

"Me and Judge Steele ain't friends by about six years, Ike. There ain't another one in the county and I'm asking you as a friend if you will try and borrow the judge's stovepipe hat for me? See your way clear?"

I looks at Mike's head, which takes a number eight, and then I thinks of about six and seven-eighths for the judge. Every body is entitled to their own fancies, so Mike sits there while I gets the hat for him.

"Ask you if you was going to wear it, Ike?" he asks, tickled over it.

"Nope! Never asked a question," I replies, which was true, 'cause the judge wasn't in his office.

Magpie comes home happy that night. He poured beans in his coffee and put sugar in his soup. I don't mind, because I'm feeling loco myself.

"Ike," says he, puffing on his spoon, "what did Washington do after he crossed the Delaware?"

"Search me! What did he cross it for, Magpie?"

"That's the — of it. Reckon I better go up to the judge's office and take another look at the picture. He must 'a' had a reason."

"Yes," says I. "Maybe there was some danged fools from Piperock on his side of the river and he wanted to get away while the getting was good."

Magpie comes back after I'm in bed. I

reckon he thought I was asleep. He gets out in the middle of the floor, puts one foot on a soap-box, shoves his hand inside his vest like something itched him and throws back his head. He keeps rearing back and feeling inside his vest until I gets nervous.

“Mister Simpkins,” says I, “if you’d hang your shirt on an ant-hill they’d all leave. What’s the idea of the foot-rest?”

He glares at me and I ducks under the blankets. After while I peers out again and right then I elects him to the highest office in the loco lodge. He’s got my old blue overcoat on with both sides pinned back from the bottom, like two big lapels, and he’s got my old fedora hat on cross-ways. I peeks out after a while and sees him shining his boots with stove-polish. I hears him grunt—

“I’ll make ’em up and take notice.”

“All but you,” says I. “You won’t notice much, old trailer, ’cause you’ll be dead. Somebody will kill you too dead to skin and I’ll have to sew up the holes in that coat before cold weather sets in.”

Then I went to sleep with a six-gun in my hand.

Dirty Shirt shows up at our cabin the next morning just after Magpie left and sets down on the bunk.

“Happy Fourth of July, Ike,” says he by way of greeting. “We’re going down to the celebration?”

“Maybe you, Dirty—not us.”

“Aw, be patriotic, Ike.”

“I love my country, Dirty, but she ain’t going to mean nothing to me after I’m a memory.”

“The glorious Fourth was invented for patriotic folks, Ike,” says he. “Foreigners and shepherds are the only ones exempt. I feel it my duty to hold argument with you.”

“I defy anybody to make me go!” I yelps. “I mean it, too.”

Well, when we came in sight of the scene of conflict Dirty gave me back my gun

and asked my pardon. I told him to save his breath for running and then we went down to Buck’s tent, where we bought a demijohn and spent the morning welcoming folks to our celebration.

We welcomed a lot of folks that morning. When we ran out of folks we’d welcome each other.

LATER on we had trouble making the turns around the tents, being as we tangles plentiful in the guy-ropes. We emerges out of one tangle and are just about to celebrate our narrow escape, when I sort of reaches out and picks a man out of the air. That man sure is moving plenty and him and me went into the dirt. I set up and put on my hat, and along came a hunk of lead and took it right off my head.

Then I ducks and somebody steps on my head, the same of which drives my nose deep into Danceing Prairie. When I gets unearthed I finds Old Testament Tilton setting there with a pair of black eyes and a foolish expression on his face. Dirty is walking circles on his hands and knees, like a pup preparing for bed.

Old Testament feels of his eyes, squints at me and says:

“I said to him—‘Judge, we’ll open with a prayer,’ and he said— ‘We will not. We’ll open with a speech from me. I’ve got a whangdoodler of a speech all framed up.’ I says to him— ‘Judge, I takes exceptions——’”

Old Testament hauled out a paper and held it in front of me.

“Got a prayer all wrote out, Ike.”

I picked up my hat and looked her over. I shoved my finger through the bullet-hole in the crown and looks at Old Testament.

“Wonder where the other two went?” says he. “He shot three times.”

“Who?” asked Dirty.

“Ain’t I just got through telling you

that I wanted to open with a prayer and the judge wanted to open with a speech?" says he indignant-like.

"Neither one of you held openers, Testament," says I. "Next time anybody starts shooting at you, old-timer, you run away. *Sabe?* The judge ought to be ashamed for shooting at a preacher, Dirty."

"Yeah," agrees Dirty. "Very poor shooting. Missed three times. Awful!"

We left the old pelican setting there on the ground and pretty soon we bumps into Hassayampa. Hassayampa has got a gun in his hand and a tearful countenance. When he sees us he wipes the tears away with the muzzle of his gun and weaves up to us.

"Goin' to killum," says he, quavering-like. "Sure's ——!"

"Who's going to bite the dust?" asks Dirty.

"Knocked 'im down faster'n he can get up, and then shoot three times at 'im," states Hassayampa, wise as a owl. "Ol' Testyment's frien' of mine. No brains but sholid meat. Soon live as die. Tha's me."

Hassayampa rocks on his heels.

"Goin' to make speech, eh? Prayer's best. Got a idea, folks. Le's let Old Testyment make prayer for the judge. Thassa good idea. Kill two birds with one rock."

Hassayampa smiles through his tears and goes hunting for the judge.

"Well," says Dirty, "let's check off anybody but the judge, 'cause right now Hassayampa couldn't hit the supreme bench of Montana with a shotgun full of bird-shot."

Just then Magpie comes parading along and I accosts him.

"Just about to open up the show, gents," says he. "Go on up to the speaker's stand and get a good place. Things are working out better than I thought they would. Never seen the like."

"Same here," says I. "Casualties are too few—so far."

We finds the crowd milling around the front of a big tent. There ain't no sign of the speaker's stand, so we asks Doughgod Smith about it.

"This is it here," states Doughgod, pointing at the big tent. "The platform is built inside the tent or the tent is built over the top of the platform. Danged if I know which is correct!"

"Private speaking, eh?" grunts Dirty. "Good idea!"

Just then Magpie mounts a box in front of the tent and raises his hand in the peace sign.

"Friends and folks from Paradise and Curlew," says he, "we meet today to celebrate in a civilized way the——"

"I takes that first statement to heart, Magpie," interrupts Hassayampa. "I don't mind being unlisted as a friend but I do object to being put behind Paradise."

"Paradise is my happy home right now," squeaks Scenery Sims. "You snake-hunters from the great unwashed had better not let your hearts enter too much in the festivities. *Sabe?*"

"You trouble-hunters go crawl in a hole!" yells Magpie.

"Free country, ain't she?" asks "Telescope" Tolliver of the Cross J. "Ain't a man got a right to talk?"

"If that's the way you feels about it, cut your wolf loose!" yelps Magpie. "I got up here to open this show, which is supposed to be a heap carefree and joyous, but any time you fellers opine to take it serious I reckon there's enough mourners to go around."

"Aw, let Magpie open her up," urges somebody back in the crowd. "If we don't like it, there's plenty of daylight left to enable us to shoot straight."

The crowd seems to see the wisdom of the remark, so Magpie says—

"Friends and folks from Curlew and Paradise ——"

I heard that gun click and so did Magpie, 'cause he covers the crowd and looks us over serious-like.

“Scenery Sims,” says he, “you put that gun back in your holster or I’ll heat the muzzle and brand you with the double-doughnut! *Sabe?* I put Paradise in front of Curlew the first time.”

Magpie lowers his gun and faces the crowd.

“I don’t want no blame for what you’re going to see, folks. There’s a difference of opinion as to who is to blame for this glorious date, so in order to keep everlasting peace in the county we lets each and every participating city show their patriotism in their own way and according to their own beliefs. The sign will tell the tale. Let ’er go!”

The flaps of the tent swing open. I don’t know how she looks to anybody else but this is as she was viewed by Ike Harper.

There stands Mike Pelly in the middle of the platform. He’s got on Old Testament’s long black coat which fits him at no place except around the bottom, being as Old Testament is built like a lodge-pole and Mike is fashioned after the specifications of a hoghead. On his head balances Judge Steele’s stovepipe hat; in his hands is an ax, while he stands all spraddled out over a couple of poles.

The sign reads:

ABRAHAM LINCOLN ACCORDING TO
PARADISE
HE DONE IT

Bung!

A six-gun busts right by my ear, and I sees that tall hat hop off Mike’s head and sail back into the tent.

“Punch a preacher, will you?” whoops Hassayampa. He’s got a reserved space in the back of the crowd, and there he stands, rocking back and forth on his heels.

“Hey!” Old Judge Steele worms his

way to the front of the platform and scowls up at Paradise’s donation. “Where’d my hat come from?”

Mike scratches his head with the handle of the ax and stares down at the judge.

“Come from?” he asks. “You mean went to, don’t you?”

Bung! goes Hassayampa’s gun again.

“I wishes to call your attention,” explains Hassayampa belligerent-like. “Do I have to kill somebody to get noticed?”

Hassayampa’s bullet must have cut the rope, 'cause the flaps dropped down and saved Mike.

“That wasn’t the judge,” states Dirty to Hassayampa.

“Nobody else wears election hats,” mumbles Hassayampa. “I know that hat.”

Then Magpie’s head protrudes from between the flaps, and he yelps at me:

“Ike, you take that codfish from Curlew and stake him to a tree. He’s a trouble-breeder!”

“Will he?” yells Hassayampa. “Nobody but me to protect the ministry from a bunch of heathen hop-heads, is there? Who’s going to take me?”

Hassayampa’s voice wails with rage, and you can’t blame me for not taking him, can you? I swore to do my duty, but a man has got a right to define duty as he sees fit. I figured I’d be worth a lot more to posterity if I ignored Hassayampa.

I DIDN’T care for the statue of Lincoln. Mike looked about as much like Lincoln as a fish-pole looks like a bucket of water, and deep down in my heart I wished that Hassayampa hadn’t held so high. Of course Hassayampa has to get cocky about it. He yells—

“You bow-legged, star-wearing, grinnin’ faced son-of-a-duck, come and get me!”

“I don’t want you,” says I. “I ain’t collecting antique eggs today. I’m going to get me a drink.”

"I was just funning, Ike," says he. "I'll go peaceful, 'cause I'm dry, too."

Then me and Hassayampa runs into an argument. We finds Ricky Henderson, "Three Star" Thorndyke, Art Miller and "Coyote" Calkins arguing with Doughgod Smith. Doughgod holds-forth thusly:

"You've got to show a little becoming class, ain't you? I'm bossing the music end of the program, and she can't fall below the rest, can she?"

"She can't," agrees Ricky. "She sure can't, Doughgod." And the four of them walks away.

Doughgod looks at us and sort of grins.

"Them is the Paradise brass band," explains Doughgod. "Been tooting for two weeks for this celebration. Everything is sort of out of the ordinary, so I wishes my end to show up well. A band is just a band unless they rides horses, which makes 'em a mounted band. *Sabe?* Them *hombres* is going to dispense music from their broncs."

We looks back at the speaker's tent, and here comes an apparition which we deciphers to be Mike Pelly. Mike sure looks like the breaking up of a hard Winter. He's got the brim of that stovepipe hat around his neck and in his hand he carries one of them rails he was posing over. He's still got on portions of that tight coat. He's got a bump on his forehead, and in his face is memories of long ago. He weaves up in sort of waltz time and pauses to look back.

"Who done it, Mike?" I asks.

"Lincoln," says he sweet-like and weaves on.

"Lincoln was a great man," states Doughgod.

"Was?" grunts Hassayampa. "If he hung that bump on Mike I'd say he is, not was, Doughgod. Almost as great as Custer. My gosh, I done forgot all about my contentions, Ike. Let's go back and see

Custer."

"All right," says I. "Why stop at modern history, Hassayampa? Let's go further back and see Caesar or the last of the Mohicans."

We found a fairly peaceful bunch in front of the tent. Old Judge Steele wanders up to us. His face sure looks like something had tried to erase his nose, and in his hand is the remnants of that high hat. Just then I'm grabbed by the arm, and Magpie's voice grunts in my ear—

"Feller wants to see you, Ike."

I suffers him to lead me around back of the tent, where he lifts the canvas enough to let us both under. I was glad to get away from the judge right then, 'cause I don't know what Mike might have told him.

In there I meets the worst freak I've seen this day and date. It happens to be Sad Samuels, but he sure is disguised. I reckon he's dug up all the fringed buckskin in Yaller Rock County and hung it on his lanky carcass. He stands there, leaning against the platform, puffing away on an extinct cigaret.

"Ike, meet General Custer," says Magpie.

"Howdy, Cus," says I. "How's all your little Big Horns?"

"Poorly, Ike. You ain't sore at Curlew, are you?"

"Not at the town itself, Sad. The town ain't to blame."

"Let me explain it," says Magpie. "Curlew has ideas of her own as to who is to blame for the Fourth, Ike. Being a free country and peace on earth to all men we lets each city worship as they see fit. *Sabe?* Curlew opines that General Custer is the one."

"All right with me," says I. "Make it anybody you want, just so you keeps the name of Harper out of the list. I won't have my good name sullied, Magpie."

"We'll respect your wishes, Ike," says Magpie. "Now here's what Sad wants of you;

he's shy one actor for his living picture, and you're the only person he can depend upon. He honors you, Ike."

"Yeah?" says I. "Honor of that kind is like beauty—it don't get under my skin. I won't have a danged thing to do with it. Not a danged solitary thing! Rest in peace is my motto, and I don't care where the chips fall. I will not do it!"

Well, they got me into that disguise, and I'm betting that nobody ever looked like me.

"Not so danged bad at that," states a voice, and I turns around.

It looks like a cross between an Injun painted for the war-trail and an accident in a paint factory. It's wearing the headdress of the Sioux, the breast-plate of a Cheyenne and the pants of a Digger medicine-man, which consists of a pad at the knees and feathers at the ankle—nothing more. He's got a wooden knife about three feet long. His face is painted like the rainbow, one end of his mustache being pink and the other green.

"My ——!" says I. "That last drink broke the camel's back!"

It is "Mighty" Jones.

"Shake hands with your paw," says he. "I'm Rain-in-the-Face."

I looked at Magpie and the tears are flowing down his cheeks. Any man must be tender hearted to cry at a time like this.

"Who in the —— am I?" I asks.

"My daughter," says Rain-in-the-Face. "You're Pokyhontas."

All the history I ever knew stood on it's head and skidded out of the picture. I looks at General Custer and then at my paw.

"With a mustache?" I asks foolish-like.

"Your face don't show," says Magpie choking-like. "You assumes a bowed attitude over Custer, who is about to get carved by Rain-in-the-Face. Curlew may be wrong in the main facts, but that part is historical."

"It will be," I agrees. "I feel that this

celebration will be wrote up for posterity—if anybody is left to write it."

Just then somebody shows their impatience by shooting twice through the ridge-pole, so we wobbles up and takes our position.

Sad is on his hands and knees with his chin on a block of wood, and they places me on my knees, with my nose muffled in the back of his neck, and my hands are raised as in prayer. Over us stands Rain-in-the-Face, with his soft-pine sword raised aloft. I've got my head toward the audience and I gets a glimpse of the sign as the curtain goes up. It reads:

CUSTER DONE IT AFTER
POKYHONTAS SAVED HIM
FROM HER PAW. FROM CURLEW

I hears a slight stir in the audience.

Bang! goes a gun. I glances behind me. Mighty is standing there looking at his sword, which ain't nothing but a splinter now.

"Don't never try to split up no ladies around here, dog-gone your painted picture!" whoops Dirty Shirt's voice. "Don't you never do it!"

Dirty is right up against the platform and appears to be trying to get up with the living pictures.

"*Yo-o-o-o-ow!*" yelps a voice from the rear of the crowd. "Bust up my donation, will you!"

HASSAYAMPA has got a horse, and just as I glance up he sails a loop of rope to try and circle Dirty Shirt. He didn't. That was the second time he shoots high. I tries to move quick, but my costume was made more for show than for speed. That loop of rope settles right over the rear of me, tightens behind my knees and over the small of my back, and poor Pokyhontas got uplifted.

I reckon that Pokyhontas didn't want

to leave Custer there even if Rain-in-the-Face didn't have no more sword than a toothpick, 'cause when that rope hit me I got a strangle hold on Custer and we both moved away from there.

Me, I'm jack-knifed so that my toes are tickling my mustache and Sad is yelping like a trapped coyote pup. We turned over just once, swung in under the railing, where we seem to sort of hang up, and then, as far as I can see, the railing, platform, tent and all went with us.

Man, I'd say that the strain was great. I seemed to feel every muscle in my body stretch a foot and as we sailed into the air somebody reached up and took one of my moccasins off.

I lost Custer at an altitude of about forty feet and when I landed I picked a tub of lemonade to stop in, and then it seems that I took the tub along with me on a voyage of discovery. I'd say that Hassayampa and his bronc went regardless and nobody knows whither we might have wandered if that rope hadn't busted.

Anyway, I think it busted, 'cause all to once I gets relief from the cramps and the sandman visits Ike Harper.

Then along comes a million needles to penetrate my carcass and I feels my nervous system yank me to a sitting position.

I've got my back against a tent and right in front of me is Judge Steele and Old Testament. The sky pilot is kneeling in a prayerful attitude, while the old judge squats on his heels in an attitude of deep thought. The judge has got a piece of the busted platform in his hands and on his head, cocked over on one side, is a gallon tin bucket. A curl of lemon peel sticks out from under the edge and I opines that the judge must 'a' mixed with the retail end of the lemonade business.

"We—we will open with a pup-prayer," whispers Old Testament.

The old judge rocks on his heels and

fondles that club.

"We will open with a spup-speech by me," he whispers right back.

"Prayer!"

"Speech!"

"Dearly beloved, we——"

Bam!

The old judge surges forward and taps Testament on the head and our preacher shuddered deep-like and pokes his long nose into the dirt.

Judge Steele pokes his nose toward the sky, shoves one hand inside his torn vest and begins—

"Friends, Romans and feller——"

Clank!

I sees that lard bucket hop off the judge's head and the rock nestled right up against my shin.

"He-heathen!" stutters a voice and I turns to behold what is left of Hassayampa.

He's got his head through one of the arm-holes of his vest, which makes him look like he had a stiff neck. The belt of his chaps has busted, and the two halves of his leather panties are wrinkled down around his feet. His hat is gone, and if his mind ain't gone too his eyes sure lie to me. He's got another rock in his hand.

"Pup-pick on a preacher, will you?" he yelps.

The old judge sets there on the ground, looking sort of dazed-like, and then he seems to fuss around inside of his bosom. He hauls out a long six-shooter, cocks it deliberate-like and takes aim at Hassayampa. Hassayampa don't mind. He sways on his heels and grins at me.

"How's every little th-thing, Ike?" he asks hoarse-like.

Bung!

The old judge ain't got much grip in his hands, and I sees the gun hop plumb over his head when it exploded.

"*Woof!*" grasps Hassayampa, swaying

backward, and he sets down so hard that he bounced. He sets there making funny faces at me and hanging on to his equator.

The judge twists his neck and peers at his gun. Then he gets up and weaves away past a tent, talking to himself like a shepherd. I looks over at the suffering Hassayampa and says:

“Every little thing is all right, Hassayampa. How’s it with you?”

He shakes his head and hugs himself some more.

“Think you’re going to die?” I asks.

He takes a deep breath.

“*Hoo-o-o-off!* Hit me-uh-in the-uh-hoof! Belt-buckle. What do you know about that? *Hoo-o-o-off!*”

“Not much,” says I. “He can’t shoot no straighter than you can.”

“Lead us not into temptation,” states Old Testament, sitting up sort of jerky.

“Amen,” says I and then I got up, shook the hoops and staves from around my neck and limped away.

I’m a peaceful person and I don’t want to do anything to sully the atmosphere of this glorious celebration.

Then I runs in to Dirty Shirt—or rather I stumbles over his boots which are protruding out from under a tent. I hauls him out, and along with the haul comes Rain-in-the-Face. They’re locked in each other’s embrace, and from the looks of them I reckon it was a case of united we fell. I pries ’em apart and Dirty sets up. He looks at me and then at Rain-in-the-Face, who is sniffing at me with his swollen nose.

“Pokyhontas, you smell sour,” says Rain-in-the-Faco and then he scowls at Dirty Shirt.

“You here yet?” he asks.

“In spirit,” agrees Dirty Shirt. “Physically I’m dead from my boots to my dandruff. How do you feel, you cross between a polecat and a totem-pole?”

“Feel of me!” snaps Mighty Jones. “Ain’t you had enough yet? Maybe you’d like to bust up another historical group.”

“Go home and put on some pants,” advises Dirty. “You look like——! Come on, Ike. Let that delirium tremens Injun set there and make patent medicine if he wants to.”

DON’T ask me all that happened that day. I’m just telling you what happened in my immediate vicinity. Some day I hope to be an innocent bystander and be able to tell you everything, but as it is you’ve got to guess that the others didn’t come out unscathed.

Me and Dirty found the remains of General Custer sitting near the location of the defunct speaker’s stand. He looks up at us as we go past, but there ain’t no recognition in his eyes.

“How goeth the battle, Cus?” I asks.

He stares straight ahead and raises his voice in tuneless song—

“I am nobodee-e-e-e-e’s darling, nobodee-e-e-e ca-hares for me-e-e-e.”

“Knocked sensible,” declares Dirty, and we weaved along.

“Ike, you’re an awful looking thing,” states Dirty looking me over. “You better shuck that buckskin Mother Hubbard before somebody accuses me of being a squaw-man. I hate scandal.”

“By grab, I’ve been looking all over for you, Ike,” exclaims a voice, and Pete Gonyer takes me by the arm. “Magpie wants to see you right away.”

“What does he want?” I ask. “I’m all through being butchered to make a Dancing Prairie holiday, if anybody asks you. I’ll go home if he wants me to, but that’s all.”

We follered Pete down to the bank of the river where mostly everybody is collected. Across the river, which is about fifty yards wide at this point, is hung a wide piece of canvas. A scaffolding has been built out from around a tree, and the canvas stretched on that.

We stops at the edge and hears old Judge Steele proclaim:

"This here is authentic, I tell you. Ain't I got the picture of it in my office? I sure have. While I've got a lot of respect for Custer and Lincoln, it ain't no ways historically correct that they're to blame. Therefore it remains for the city of Piperock to hand honor where honor is due. I asks everybody to watch the great spectacle—the spectacle from which Fourth of July owes its being."

"Get on, Ike."

I turns and here is Pete Gonyer on a bronc. He's got one foot out of the stirrup, so I can get up, and like a darn fool I done it. I didn't know where we were going, but I do know that we went there.

Pete must 'a' picked a bronc what never carried double, 'cause it whirled around that multitude and we hit the water fifteen feet from the shore.

Man, I'd say that bronc could hop high and handsome, and them Pokyhontas clothes bellied out behind like a balloon.

Pete herded that animal straight for the bank and as soon as it got its feet on solid ground we changed ends so fast that I grabs Pete around the neck and my feet stood straight out. I made one complete turn, let loose, and when I hit the grass I glided about twenty feet on the seat of the pants I didn't have on—being as that costume consisted of hip-length leggin's which wouldn't go over my pants and a sort of a dress.

I got up sore. There is Magpie, "Tellurium" Woods, "Buck" Masterson and Pete looking at me. Tellurium and Buck are in their shirt-sleeves, with their pants rolled up, but Magpie is dressed in that same costume he put on that night in our cabin. That fedora hat don't fit sideways, so he ties it under his chin with a string. I looked down back of that canvas, and I seen a boat. Honest to grandma, that was the first boat I ever seen in Yaller Rock County. I caresses myself a few and then

I squints at the bunch.

"Welcome, Ike," says Magpie.

"You're not!" says I.

"Aw, Ike, we needed another oarsman, and you're from Piperock."

"Originally from Missouri," says I. "What are you sheep-herders trying to pull off over here anyway?"

"Washington is going to cross the Delaware," states Magpie.

"All right," says I. "Let him cross it. It ain't my river."

"I reckon we better start, boys," says Magpie. "Come in, Ike."

"Not me! Never and not any!"

"You helped Curlew, Ike," he reminds me chiding-like.

"Yes, and take a look at me! I won't help nobody no more. I won't even help myself. You can all go plumb to thunder!"

I don't know anything about boats. I might paddle my own canoe if I had one, but I don't know how to row. Buck can't row, and neither can Tellurium or Pete.

In the front end of the boat stands Magpie, with one foot histed up on the end, and his hand still searching inside his shirt. That fedora sets almost on his forehead. The multitude lets out a whoop as we emerges and hits the current, which is fairly fast.

"Swing her up-stream!" yelps Magpie.

I hears a couple of shots ahead of us, so I drops my oar and ducks. I reckon that Buck took the same precaution, 'cause the boat starts whirling, being as all the motive power is on one side.

I peeks over the edge and here comes old Judge Steele hopping across the rocks like a rabbit, and right behind him comes Hassayampa. The judge hits the edge of the bank, hops high into the air and comes right down among us.

I seen Hassayampa stub his toe at the brink and he lands in the water.

"Pull for the shore!" yelps Magpie and

just then the crowd splits.

I LOOKS up and for the first and last time in my life my eyes feast upon the Paradise Mounted Band.

They rides right up to our landing place and spreads out about five feet apart. The crowd has forgotten us. Here is something new. They crowds around and gawks up at the musicians. I seen “Coyote” Calkins slide out his slip-horn, place it to his lips, wiggle it a couple of times and then music cometh from the four of them at once. Just once.

Ta-a-a-a, ra-a-a-a-a, dum!

The feller who said that music hath charms to sooth the savage beast never tried to play a horn from the deck of a half-broke bronc. Our boat just drifted to the bank below them as the music broke forth, and we never had a chance to back up.

The crowd never had any chance to go back either. The bank was about three feet high at that spot, and St. Patrick never made a cleaner job of them Irish snakes than those four broncs of the merry-makers. I seen Rain-in-the-Face hop high to get away from Three Stars’ roan, but the bronc beat him to it, and Rain-in-the-Face got kicked half-way across the Delaware.

It ain’t human nature to run up-hill to get out of trouble, so they all follers the lines of least resistance, which in this case led to water, and Washington wasn’t the only one to cross the river.

I seen Coyote’s bronc hurdle some of the crowd and go into the air right over our craft, and believe me I didn’t wait for the crash. Ike Harper ain’t no mermaid, but he sure did take to the water. I got my eyes and ears full of the unaccustomed fluid and then something seems to come down and crown me.

A weight seems to press down upon my mind and, like all drowning men, I grasps at a straw—and got a handful of hair. I hung

on and I sure took a ride down the river. I remember I made a noise like a hardware store every time I hit a rock. After what seemed an hour I feels terry firma under my carcass. I looks up in time to see that I’ve got hold of—a bronc’s tail —and then comes one awful clank.

It is sundown when I awake. I’m sore in every joint and I feels that all of my bones have been busted and are sticking out of my skin. My collar-bone is sticking me in the chin and every time I move it grates on the gravel.

After a while I gets nerve enough to open my eyes. Sitting there on that gravel bar beside me is Judge Steele, Old Testament and Hassayampa. They hears me rattle to a sitting position and they stares at me sort of pessimistic-like.

I nods at them and nearly unjoints my remaining bones in trying to get loose from the hoarse-voiced horn which encircles my frame.

“We’ll open with a pup-prayer,” states Old Testament hoarse-like.

“Speech,” argues the judge, in a faraway voice.

“You let our preacher alone!” wails Hassayampa in a croaking whisper. “Doggone you, judge, I’ll run you ragged again. I’m getting peeved.”

I’m peeved, too. I got up on my feet and crowned Hassayampa with that horn. He sort of shudders deeper into the sand and murmurs—

“Hurrah for Custer!”

Then I tried to get back on the other side of the river. I’m bow-legged enough to let most of the river through, but I must ‘a’ slipped on a rock, ‘ ‘cause I soon found that I’m drifting. I never knew before that I could swim. Man, I tried to stop. I knowed that a few thousand miles away this river reaches the ocean, and I don’t like oceans.

Every time I got my feet on a rock the water

comes along and turns me a flip-flop and I drifts regardless. The last time I went under I got mad and said to myself—

“Well, stay under then!”

Just about then I feels myself bump into something and I gets hauled high and dry. I spat out a gallon of alkali water and looks around.

I'm in the boat. There sets Magpie, Mike Pelly and Sad Samuels, and I ain't got nothing on them for looks. The boat is half-full of water, and they're setting in it like a bunch of hell-divers. They looks me over and then Magpie says:

“We might let him decide. He never had an opinion in his life, but this is a mooted question.”

“Kinda mooted,” nods Sad, woeful-like, “kinda mooted.”

“Kinda——!” whines Mike and I notices that he's still wearing the brim of that

high hat.

“Will you decide to the best of your ability, Ike?” asks Magpie, wringing water out of his mustache, “Without fear or favor will you speak from your heart?”

“I'll speak but I won't act,” says I. “Ask me what thou wilt.”

“The question is this, Ike: Paradise says Lincoln, Curlew says Custer and Piperock says Washington is the party responsible for this glorious day and date. Being a disinterested party we asks your opinion. Who do you think started it?”

I looks around at them bedraggled idiots and then at the water.

“I ain't no history hound,” says I, “but if you leave it to me I'd cast my vote for Jonah. We've whale of a time to-day.”

“Which is common sense and beats history,” states Magpie and we all shook hands.