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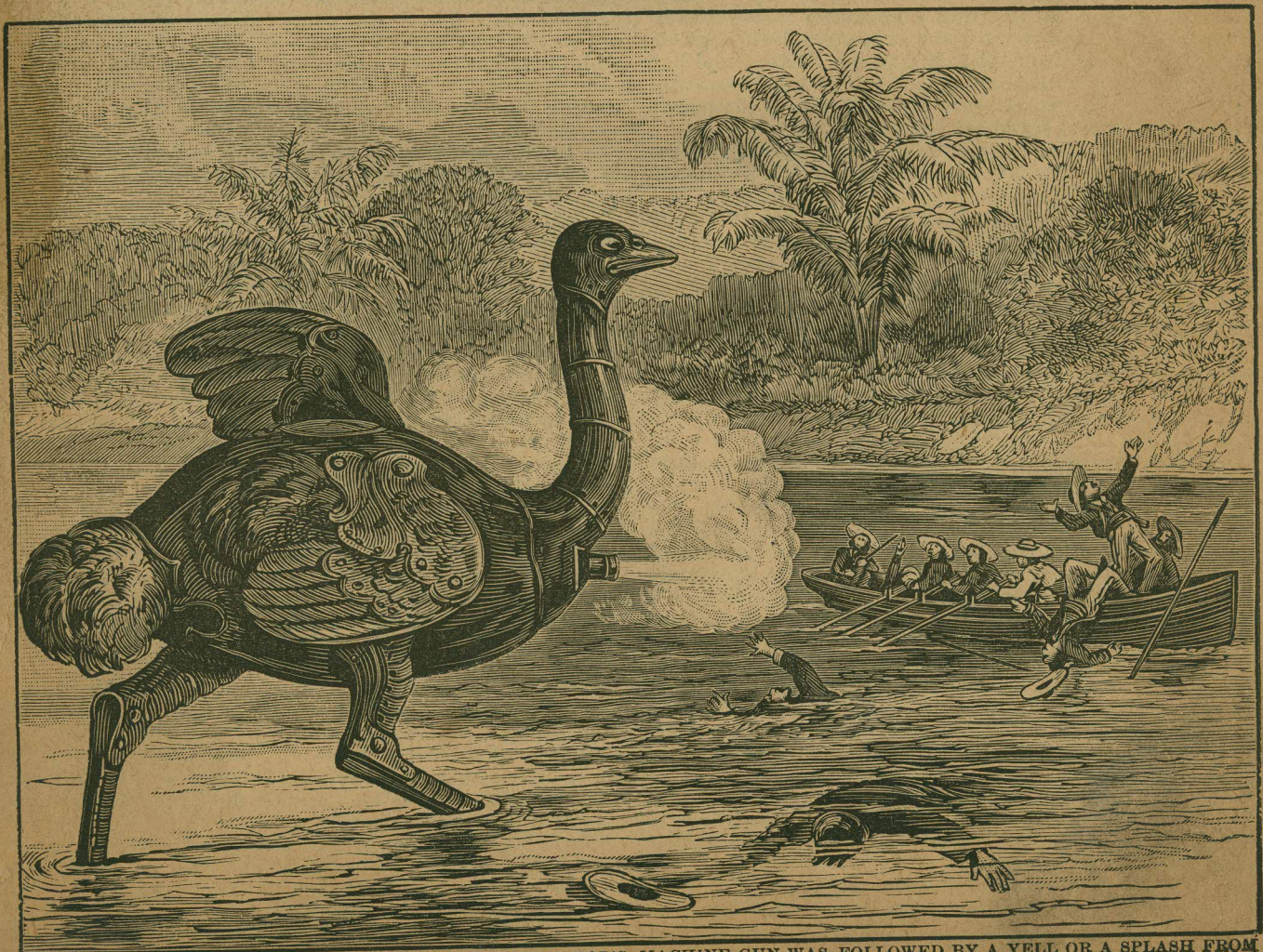
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Electric Bob's Big Black Ostrich; Or, LOST ON THE DESERT.

By the Author of "ELECTRIC BOB."



BANG! BANG! BANG! EVERY REPORT FROM ELECTRIC BOB'S MACHINE GUN WAS FOLLOWED BY A YELL OR A SPLASH FROM THE ENEMY.

Electric Bob's Big Black Ostrich;

OR,
LOST ON THE DESERT.

By the Author of "ELECTRIC BOB."

CHAPTER I.

THE THREE HILLS OF GOLD.

"If I could just rig up some sort of a contrivance to cross the desert in between San Diego and the mouth of the Colorado River—or maybe go a little farther south, down into old Mexico—I could come back here in a month and buy this whole town at the rate of twelve hundred dollars per front foot."

It was a midsummer evening in San Diego, California.

All the patrons of Mrs. Hobbs' boarding-house were sitting about under some trees at the rear of the house enjoying the ocean breezes, talking, smoking—and listening.

One miner was speaking to another.

They were both old fellows who had come to the Land of Gold forty years ago, and knew all the old stories and legends of lost mines in mountains and deserts, and the one who was speaking believed them all implicitly.

Most of his hearers laughed at the words of the enthusiastic old fellow, but he only drew the harder on his pipe, nodded, and said:

"I could do it!"

Among the listeners was a young man who did not laugh. Readers have met him before.

It was Electric Bob.

After a season of exciting adventures in the South, during which he had recovered a million dollars of Confederate treasure from the Mississippi River, and had triumphed in some desperate encounters with the dreaded Mafia of New Orleans, Electric Bob had sought the balmy Southern California sea-shore for his health.

He wanted to rest a while, but stirring adventures came crowding too thickly into his life to allow him to remain quiet long at a time.

"How would you do it, Inyo?" the old miner's companion asked, removing his pipe and drawing nearer in a confidential manner.

Electric Bob listened intently.

"Find the Pegleg——"

"Oh, thunder!"

The two words were uttered in an indescribable tone of wearied disgust, and the speaker got up and walked away.

"Hold up, Shasta," cried the first speaker. "I can explain! I have a map, and all the facts——"

"Humph!"

A snort of contempt coming back through the orange trees was all the reply Inyo received.

Electric Bob noted the look of pain that settled on the old man's face after his friend had gone away. The young fellow had no confidence in the many stories of lost mines heard everywhere on the lips of the old-timers in the West, but his heart was touched by the old man's sad eyes, and he went over and took the chair the miner had vacated.

"I would like to talk with you about the Pegleg," said Bob, pleasantly. "I have heard a great deal about it since I have been West."

The old man gazed into the young man's face for a few seconds, and then held out his hand with a friendly smile, as he said:

"I like your looks, stranger."

"Thank you," Bob replied. "Your remark, a while ago, interests me, and I hope you will tell me all about that hidden treasure in the desert——"

"You're going too fast, stranger," said the old man. "The secret is too big to toss out to every one who asks for it. But, as I said, I like your face, and if you can show clean papers maybe we'll talk."

"I like that," said Electric Bob, "for it is no more than business. Where can I see you to-morrow?"

"Right here, any time you say."

The following afternoon was spent by the two friends—the old gray-haired miner and the celebrated young inventor—in the shade of the orange trees planning a strange journey.

Electric Bob's "papers" had satisfied the old adventurer, and when Bob had learned William Inyo's wonderful story he became convinced that it was based on facts.

They would find the Pegleg.

But how were they to get to it?

Many strong men had tried it and failed.

The great desert was sprinkled with the bones of those who had sought the three mountains of gold far down to the southward.

This mine was discovered by a miner named Smith in the year 1830, as Inyo explained to Electric Bob. Smith had a wooden limb, so the mine, named in his honor, was called "The Pegleg."

Smith found bright, yellow nuggets lying about on three hills in great profusion. It was before the days of gold discovery, however, and Smith did not know the incalculable value of his find until he reached Los Angeles.

The nuggets that he brought in were solid gold, covered with dirt and the rust of ages of exposure.

The discovery set the town wild, and a party was at once made up to return to the mine, but were met on the desert by Indians and almost exterminated.

Several subsequent expeditions met with the same fate, and it was then discovered that the Indians were guarding the three hills of gold in great force.

Twenty years later a miner was brought into San Bernardino almost dead from privations in the desert. He had over ten thousand dollars in nuggets which he had found on three little hills which, from his description, was recognized as the Pegleg Smith mine. He arranged to lead a party to the mine when sufficiently recovered, but suddenly sickened and died—and the secret was lost with him. Before dying he made a rough map of the desert, locating the mine accurately, but this map had strangely disappeared.

As the Indians passed away, many expeditions started out to search for the mysterious mine, but death and disaster in every case overtook them.

"Flesh and blood can't hoof it across that desert, my boy," said the old miner to his young partner. "The country is barren and rough, and it is hotter than hades. The heat literally dries up the moisture in a man's body. Water either evaporates in the jugs or becomes so hot that to drink it but adds to one's torture.

"No wheeled vehicle can make the journey, for in places every foot of the way is among big rocks, and when you move a rock a big rattlesnake strikes you. Death lurks everywhere—on the earth and in the air—around the mysterious mine. I almost believe what the Indians say sometimes, that death guards their sacred gold mine."

"We must make something in which we can cross the desert," said Electric Bob. "An air-ship could easily——"

"No, sir!" cried old William Inyo, or Inyo Bill, as he was known among his miner friends, and as he had requested Bob to call him. "No flying machine for me! Not for all the gold between here and the day of judgment."

Electric Bob sighed.

"Now, if we could only ride one of *them*," said old Inyo Bill, pointing with his pipe toward a number of ostriches on an adjoining farm which the two men were passing in their walk. "A big ostrich could carry us among the rocks, and across the sand at the rate of twelve or fifteen miles an hour and not mind the snakes, or lack of water, and——"

"Good!" cried Electric Bob, slapping his old friend on the shoulder. "You have solved the problem, Inyo. We will have an ostrich big enough to carry us both to the Pegleg mine. It is just the thing!"

"There ain't an ostrich alive could do it," said the old man, with a puzzled look.

"Well, we will build one that will run by electric power," said Bob, smiling.

"Can you do it, my boy?" asked the old miner, his eyes dancing with old-time enthusiasm.

"It shall be done within six weeks," replied Electric Bob, confidently. "We will turn the Pegleg inside out within two months."

The old miner grasped his hand.

"Now, come, let us study ostrich anatomy a while," said Bob, "so that I may be able to make all my drawings and calculations from life."

CHAPTER II.

ELECTRIC BOB'S WONDERFUL OSTRICH.

During the next two days the old miner and the young inventor made a thorough study of the large male ostrich which they had selected as the model of their new invention.

The overseer of the farm kindly allowed them every opportunity to study the birds, and put the entire flock at the service of his visitors.

Electric Bob made careful note of the positions of the legs, wings, and head under all conditions—and was greatly surprised at many discoveries he made.

The strength, speed, and endurance of the big birds were wonderful. Their stride, too, when going at full speed was astounding. The big fellow chosen as their model was a little over eight feet high, with legs a trifle more than three feet long, and yet when running his best he easily covered from twelve to fifteen feet between tracks.

Having made careful sketches of the birds, Electric Bob set about preparing his working drawings, plans, and specifications to be sent to the factory in Chicago that had turned out his White Alligator which had performed so satisfactorily.

This required careful study, as it was necessary that everything should be done exactly right, or the various parts would not work properly when put together, and it would not do to have the great bird break down with them out on the desert.

"We had just as well have a boat sink under us a thousand miles at sea—and the sea boiling hot," said old Inyo Bill.

The drawings were all completed at the end of three days. The old miner carefully inspected them, with Electric Bob's explanations, and after he had suggested a few minor changes to make the ostrich conform to the character of the country they would have to traverse, the drawings with full and minute instructions were sent on to the Chicago factory.

A few days later a telegram came informing Electric Bob that his wonderful machine was being constructed as rapidly as possible, and asking that he come on and superintend its completion personally.

"I guess I had better go, Inyo," he said to his partner on showing him the message. "Those fellows are not used to building such things, and I may be able to improve it if I am on the spot."

"All right, my boy," said Inyo, cheerfully, "but don't let 'em be any longer about it than is absolutely necessary."

The next month was a long and dreary season of waiting to the old Californian. A party of local adventurers, hearing of Electric Bob's contemplated trip, hastily set out in search of the Pegleg, and Inyo was terribly worked up lest they should accidentally stumble upon the mine. This apprehension became positive agony when, after three weeks' absence, the party failed to return.

He could no longer find comfort in his pipe.

All day he walked up and down the sea shore, and all night in feverish dreams he could see men turning great loads of golden nuggets out of the hearts of the three golden hills which he had come to look upon as his own property.

At last his heart was gladdened by a dispatch from Electric Bob, saying he was on the way West with the electric ostrich.

Three days later the old man met his young friend at

San Bernardino, they having decided to start from that point.

The boxes containing the wonderful invention were unloaded carefully, Inyo Bill jealously watching every motion of the workmen.

A secluded spot in a large orange grove, well shielded from observation, was then selected in which to put the great ostrich together.

This was done by Electric Bob, assisted by three experienced machinists from the Southern Pacific Railway shops, located at that point.

The ostrich towered thirty feet in the air to the top of his great head. The center of the body was twenty feet from the ground, the neck was about eight feet long.

The black male taken as a model had been faithfully copied, in appearance and proportions, and when completed the gigantic machine standing there in the orange grove was to all outward appearance a mammoth ostrich.

"It will cause great excitement wherever we go," said Inyo. "People will think it a real old rooster."

"That will be great," said Bob.

"Not if they get to shooting at us," suggested Inyo.

"They can't hurt us with anything but a cannon," said Electric Bob, "and when it comes to shooting we will be ready."

"How?"

"I'll show you. Come up with me."

The ostrich stood securely on his broad feet, having a wide spread of toes with a long, supporting spur in the rear of each foot, and the men quickly ran up a wire ladder that hung down from under one wing.

This wing was really the door-way or entrance to the interior of the machine, and a window under the opposite wing gave good ventilation to the body of the bird, but both of these could be closed hermetically when desired.

"Tell me all about it," said Inyo, when they were inside.

"Well," said Bob, "to begin, you know the legs are of fine wrought steel and hollow, the body is of thin plate steel lined with hardwood to protect us from the heat out there, and the wings and tail are of aluminum, light, graceful, and bullet-proof.

"The power is furnished by powerful storage batteries placed in the body just between the thighs of the bird, and are capable of giving us a speed of from twenty to forty miles an hour—depending on the nature of the ground we travel over.

"Here are a water tank, storage places for provisions, ammunition, etc., and here is our machine gun. I thought of that after I got to Chicago. We may have trouble with Mexicans, or with others we meet in search of the mine. We will run when we can, but fight if we must."

"But where is the gun?" said Inyo, staring at a curious arrangement in the neck of the ostrich just where the real bird's gizzard is located.

"I will explain," said Bob smiling. "It consists of an enlarged revolver cylinder, holding twenty-five Winchester rifle cartridges, and a short, heavy barrel, and is fired by turning this crank—this way."

Clic—clic—clic! The machine gun was empty, but as Bob turned the handle its rapid clicking showed the old miner what it would do at work on an enemy.

"We will each carry a short, light rifle and revolvers, of course," continued Electric Bob, "but in case of an attack this machine gun will enable us to stand off quite a crowd. It can be raised or lowered, will kill at five hundred yards, and is very accurate."

"We may need it," said Inyo.

His words were prophetic. They did need it.

"Hello!" cried Inyo, starting back from an inverted reflection of his own face that came into view as he drew aside a sliding board just above the gun, in the ostrich's neck. "What is this?"

"That is the ground glass of a camera," said Bob. "We may want to make some portraits of our enemies, or take views of landscapes, you know. See this! The bird's neck is telescopic, to secure a correct focus, and the lens is in his mouth, which opens automatically when the slide is drawn to make the exposure—"

"Why," said old Inyo, "you can kill 'em with the gun

and photograph 'em with this machine at the same time, can't ye?"

"Yes," said Bob, smiling, "but I hadn't thought of it before."

"Well, my boy, when do we start?" said Inyo, anxiously.

"As soon as you like," Bob replied.

"Then we are off to-morrow morning."

"All right, Inyo."

"And to make sure everything goes all right," said Inyo, "suppose we take a little drive now."

"I was about to suggest the same thing," said Electric Bob. "Where will we go?"

"I would like to run out to Redlands and see my friend Scip Craig."

"Who is he?"

"A true native son of the golden West," said the old miner with enthusiasm. "He knows Southern California like a book, and can give us some useful information perhaps."

"What does he do?" asked Bob.

"Runs the *Citrograph*, and—"

"What is a *citrograph*?"

"I don't know," the old miner confessed.

"Then how does he run it?"

"Bang up."

"Oh, hang it!" cried Bob, vexed, but laughing, "what is it he runs?"

"Why, a newspaper—the *Citrograph*."

"Oh, all right. We'll give him a call," Bob agreed, and reaching forward he pulled one of a number of levers on a switchboard.

The lever was moved but slightly, and yet the great ostrich seemed to become suddenly endowed with life.

The head towered loftily among the branches of the tallest orange trees, and the strong feet were lifted from the ground, stepping off slowly at first, but more rapidly as the lever was pulled farther around on the switchboard.

"See him walk!" cried old Inyo Bill, grasping Electric Bob's hand. "He's all right!"

Bob's heart was throbbing happily.

"Time him from here to the creek," cried Inyo. "It is just four miles, and a splendid road."

"It is now exactly half-past three," said Bob looking at his watch, "and here goes!"

Full power was turned on the ostrich's legs, and the big black bird went skimming away. Bob kept his hand on the controlling lever while Inyo kept a sharp lookout along the road through a bull's-eye in front.

Numerous pedestrians hurriedly quitted the road as the ostrich came rushing on, and several carriages were passed, the swiftest trotters falling behind as if they had been standing still. Doors and windows were crowded with curious people gazing after the wonderful machine.

They could not understand it.

All were puzzled, and many were frightened.

"Here is the creek!" cried Inyo, and the next instant with a splash the ostrich had crossed it and was climbing the bank beyond.

"Four miles in just six minutes," said Bob, putting up his watch. "That isn't bad for the trial trip. We can do better with a little practice."

The pace was slackened down to a walk now, that a careful inspection might be made of the working of every part of the machine. It was found to be perfect in every respect.

Soon after Redlands was reached, and directed by the miner, Electric Bob drew up in front of the *Citrograph* office and asked for Mr. Craig.

Soon a big, red-whiskered, good-looking man came out, and on seeing the giant ostrich at once rushed forward to welcome the young inventor and his old friend.

"Come off your perch, Inyo," he cried. "I have been hearing for weeks that you were up to some game with a young crank from the East, and now I believe it."

They spent a pleasant hour with the editor, and Inyo told him of their proposed trip in search of the three hills of gold.

"I believe the mine really exists," declared Mr. Craig, "and I hope you may find it, but I doubt it. I would go with you if I could get away from here."

"We would be glad to have you," said Bob, politely, but he was wondering where he could stow the fat, jolly editor away in the machine in case he should decide to go.

"The fact is," continued Mr. Craig, "I tried to find that mine once, but—"

He paused, muttered something, and was silent.

"Tried but—failed, Scip?" asked Inyo Bill, anxiously.

"Yes, barred by Providence; headed off and turned back by divine interposition—"

"Oh, come now, Mr. Craig," said Electric Bob. "How could that be?"

"I will show you," said Mr. Craig, arising and going into another room, "excuse me a moment."

Soon he returned with a number of papers, among them a worn, torn, and faded map.

"Great heavens, Scip!" cried Inyo Bill. "That is Pegleg Smith's long lost map of the country in which that mine is to be found!"

"That is just what it is," said Mr. Craig, solemnly, "or a copy of it, and it bears traces of an unearthly hand that gives me the shivers every time I look upon it—"

"How is that?" asked Bob.

"I will show you," Craig replied. "Note how plainly distinct all the northern portion of this map now is, and then observe the faded condition of the bottom part—the very portion that covers the secret of that mysterious and fatal mine."

"How came it so?"

"That is just what I am about to tell you. The map was given to me by a man whom I found dying out on the Colorado desert. He was crazy and scratching in the sand for water, as they all do when dying of the desert thirst. I cared for him, gave him water, and tried to restore him, but he was too far gone. Just before he died—after he knew that recovery was impossible—he gave me the map and told me its history.

"He had found the three hills of gold, and was on his way back to civilization to obtain means to bring away the treasure which he said was lying about on the ground in immense nuggets and golden bowlders. But the inevitable fate of all who look upon that accursed spot was his. He died of the desert thirst.

"I then set out to find the three hills of gold, guided by that map, and the way seemed easy and clear before me, but no words can ever tell all that I suffered on the trip. Starting out well equipped and well armed, with a good map and compass, and several pack mules or burros, at the end of three weeks I lay ragged, torn and bleeding—dying, I verily believed—under a stunted bush in the desert. A miracle, or at least something that happens in the desert not once in a hundred years, saved me—it rained in midsummer. The rain revived me—that and a dream—"

"A dream revived you?" queried Inyo.

"Yes, a dream," Craig continued in a solemn tone. "In this dream the spirit of the man whose dying hour I had soothed, and who had given me this map, appeared before me.

"He came to me there under the stunted bush on the desert, and directly he came it began to rain, though it had been blue sky over me but a short time before. He was riding a great hairy beast—now known as the 'Red Devil of the Desert'—and a skeleton rode behind him. He urged me to give up the search for the three hills of gold, warning that death would be my fate if I persisted.

"When I refused, saying I was determined to find the mine at all hazards, he drew the map from my pocket and wetting it under the falling rain, rubbed off all that southern portion showing the way to the long-sought hills. 'Now,' he said on leaving me, 'if you go on my fate shall be yours.' And somehow I knew that the skeleton riding with him had also died searching for the mine—"

"I guess your head wasn't just right, Scip," said Inyo, calmly. "At any rate, my young friend here and I are determined to risk it. What did you do when the spooks left you?"

"I came home, and have never thought of the Pegleg mine but with a shudder and a nameless terror since that day. Here is the map. If my story warns you I am not

sorry. But if you want to go on in search of the fatal mine the map may prove of some use to you."

"We will take it with pleasure," said Electric Bob, "and will be back this way in a month or so and show you some rich samples from the three hills of gold."

"I hope so," said Craig, with a doubting shake of his big red head.

They were destined to go through some stirring adventures before they saw the big fat editor again.

At times they almost wished they had heeded his warning and remained at home in peace and safety.

CHAPTER III.

RACING WITH AN EXPRESS TRAIN.

"I know just what grubstake we will need," said Inyo Bill, on their return to San Bernardino, "and will stock our larder with everything necessary. You can look after the guns and scientific tackle."

Electric Bob did this.

The following morning while the dew was still sparkling on the prairie grasses, and the leaves of the orange trees about the great ostrich were wet and dripping, our friends were ready to start on their strange journey into the glaring wilderness.

"All right," said Inyo.

"All aboard," cried Bob.

The two men climbed the short wire ladder hanging from beneath the ostrich's wing, and a moment later Bob had pressed a lever on the switchboard.

The long legs suddenly became endowed with life, and swiftly the wonderful invention moved out of the orange grove and walked steadily away toward the south.

"Let's wake the people up over in Colton," said Inyo, "that is our route," and Bob steered the ostrich due south.

The road was broad and level, and a few moments later they rushed into the village of Colton at a twenty-mile gait. Early risers stared with wide-open eyes at the strange sight, and many people, fairly screaming with fright, rushed indoors as the mammoth bird dashed by them and swept onward with outspreading wings and flying feet onto the wide prairie to the south.

The Southern Pacific Flyer, as the fastest passenger train on that road is called, had just pulled in from Los Angeles as our friends passed the railway station. It left again in five minutes, as Inyo well knew.

"Let's wait and give 'em a race," he said. "Our course lies right along the railroad to Banning, and we might as well go on to the famous Salton Lake as not."

"All right," said Electric Bob, "but how is the road?"

"As level as a board."

Soon the Pacific Flyer came rushing out of the depot yards, and skimming the prairie like a sparrow, sped away toward the East. For one hundred and seventy miles the train had an easy down grade.

"A mile a minute," shouted old Inyo, "or they will beat us!"

Electric Bob smiled, and his hand was upon the switchboard.

The towering head of the ostrich was telescoped back until it rested upon its shoulders between the wings, which were outstretched until a fair view was obtained from either side of the body.

The long, slender legs flew back and forth like gleaming beams of light, and the air whistled past.

The train was slightly in advance at the start, as Bob was not sure of the road at the station.

Soon, however, the open prairie was reached and then the race was on in earnest. Passengers first saw the great bird rushing along beside the track, and crowded the windows to catch a glimpse of it.

Then the trainmen caught onto it.

At first they were puzzled.

One or two tried their revolvers upon it. Then Bob swung out the stars and stripes, and they recognized the flag, but continued to stare in open-mouthed wonder.

The engineer, hanging half out of his cab, watched the great bird until it had rushed past him. Then, as a derisive laugh floated back to his ears, he realized the fact

that the strange thing was daring him to a trial of speed. "More coal, Jack!" he cried. "Fill her up! I am going to run that darned thing down!"

The indicator on the steam-gauge crept slowly around as the roaring furnace grew hotter, but the magic key on the switchboard upon which Electric Bob kept his hand kept even pace. The gleaming legs of the ostrich were swifter than the whizzing wheels of the ponderous Mogul engine, and soon Bob and old Inyo were looking from the rear bull's-eye, just above the ostrich's tail, to catch a glimpse of the flying train.

"A mile a minute easy," cried Bob. "Over eighty-one miles an hour there for a few moments."

"Great Jehoshaphat!" shouted old Inyo, "we can prance across Mexico any pretty day at that gait!"

"Yes, if all goes well. But where are we now?"

"Blessed if I know! How long have we been running?"

"Forty-five minutes."

"Then that was Banning we passed through last—where we ran over the cog, and broke down the clothes line—"

"And the fellow shot at us with his quail gun?"

"Yes. We must keep this old fellow's wings down when we rush through these towns, or we may get some bird shot in our eyes. Hello! Here comes the train!"

It was true. The Southern Pacific Flyer was coming rapidly down, overtaking them, the windows full of waving handkerchiefs and swinging hats.

"Let's give 'em a parting salute," suggested Inyo.

"All right," said Electric Bob.

The machine gun was quickly charged, and then, as if turning a grindstone, old Inyo swung the crank around. Bang—bang—bang!

Like a bunch of lighted fire-crackers—only ten times louder—the reports rang out. A cloud of dust a quarter of a mile away marked the place where the shots struck.

There came an answering shout from the train, and the flyer disappeared in a cloud of desert dust.

"Now which way?" asked Electric Bob. "You are the guide, you know."

"I think we had better follow the railroad to Salton where the strange lake is forming in the desert, and then turn south from that point," said Inyo.

"How far is it?"

"About ninety miles."

"Then we will walk it by supper time and look about us at the country as we go along."

There was but little to see—or at least every succeeding mile was exactly like the last one passed over. A drear, dull, monotonous waste. Presently Electric Bob uttered a cry of delight, as he gazed from the rear bull's-eye, just over the "Pope's nose" of the ostrich.

"Inyo, Inyo," he cried, "what city is this? Surely we barely missed that as we came!"

The old miner's eye was quickly applied to the peep-hole and he gazed long and steadily upon a lovely picture—a bright and beautiful city with pretty residences, towering steeples, and crowded streets that hung just above the desert horizon.

"That is Los Angeles," he said, with a queer smile, as he turned to face his young friend.

"That cannot be," said Electric Bob. "We are at least one hundred and fifty miles from the place."

"It is a mirage," said old Inyo.

Again Bob looked long and earnestly at the pictured city.

"You are right," he agreed at length. "And yet I would have sworn it was a real city. It is like being at sea, out here."

"We are at sea," said old Inyo. "I have seen men die on this desert quicker than a strong swimmer would die at sea if thrown overboard. The heat maddens them. They go crazy, their bodies dry out, and they die scratching with bleeding fingers in the sand for water."

They met a number of incoming trains during the afternoon, and from the greetings given them knew that the flyer had carried their fame to the far East. Waving handkerchiefs and hats fluttered from every window. The ostrich returned a salute from his machine gun and stalked onward into the desert.

Occasionally a jack rabbit would flit past and disap-

pear in the scrub; a horned owl would flutter away to a prairie dog hole or a bat would skip past the windows under the ostrich's wings.

"Let's have fried rabbit for supper," said old Inyo. "It will save our canned meats for use in the desert."

"That's a good idea," said Bob, "where is your rabbit? They say nothing on legs can catch a scared jack rabbit. I want to try him with our Desert Flyer."

"The Desert Flyer—that's a good name, and the old bird has earned it," said Inyo. "I will—there he goes! There he goes!" he suddenly cried.

Fifty yards away three big jack rabbits were speeding away directly in the course of the ostrich.

"They are our meat, Inyo," said Bob, his hand flying to the keyboard.

The ostrich broke into a sharp run, and in an instant was fairly flying across the sands.

The rabbits, with straight bodies that apparently never touched the earth, were shooting onward like three brown streaks directly ahead.

Their speed was marvelous.

It was almost equal to that of the pursuer.

But the ostrich steadily gained on them.

The distance between the rabbits and the ostrich gradually grew less and less. Flesh and blood could not hold out against the machine.

Soon the big bird was upon them.

"You wanted to know why I put that 'spur' on the ostrich's heel, Inyo," said Electric Bob. "Look at that rear rabbit and you will see."

A moment later the ostrich, with a dextrous kick, impaled the flying animal named by Bob on the long, keen spur. Then, touching another key on the board, Bob drew the foot bearing the rabbit up to the window and removed the game.

"Now for another," he said, and the chase was resumed.

Soon the two remaining rabbits were overtaken and killed.

"That is more than enough for supper," said Inyo. "The spur is a great idea. It would pierce the daylight of a Yuma or Hualapai Indian just as easy as these rabbits."

"I was thinking of Indians or rascally whites when I made it," said Electric Bob. "Now let us find a good place and camp for the night."

"Salton Lake is just over there a few miles," said Inyo.

Half an hour later they reached it.

"Three months ago," said Inyo, "the ground now covered by that lake was as dry as where we are now camping."

"Where does the water come from?" asked Bob.

"Some of it from the Colorado River," Inyo replied, "and some of it from below. This valley is below the ocean level, you know, and it comes in from the sea, I think."

"Then the lake is here to stay," suggested Electric Bob.

"You can never tell in this mysterious land. Everything is so different. Now how would you like to have a nice fish for supper?"

"Fine!" cried Bob. "But you don't mean to say there are fish in this new lake already!"

"No; no fish in the lake, but let me have the pick out of the Flyer and I will get you a fresh trout in a little while."

"Do you want to dig bait? Why not try—"

"No," said Inyo, with a smile. "I want to dig fish."

Electric Bob said no more, but handed the strange old fellow the pick. Inyo walked away up a narrow canon where some green rushes were growing luxuriantly, showing that water was to be found not far below the surface.

Here he selected a marshy spot and began to dig.

He turned the ground up rapidly and Bob looked on in silence.

Presently he brought up a large dark-colored fish that floundered about lively on the grass.

"Where on earth did that come from?" asked Electric Bob, rushing forward. "It is a fine trout!"

Old Inyo laughed, but kept on digging until he had turned out two more splendid fellows.

"Never fished for trout with a miners' pick before, eh?" he exclaimed. "This is a strange land, as I told you."

Electric Bob felt as if he was in a dream, but the fish proved very real when he tried them at supper, and he was satisfied.

"Shall we take turn about watching to-night?" asked Inyo, as bedtime approached.

"No," replied Bob. "We will sleep upon the Flyer. No harm can come to us there."

"Some prowling varmint may monkey with the machine."

"I'll attend to that," said Bob, "and will guarantee any meddler a surprise that he will not soon forget."

Soon a duet of heavy snoring from under the ostrich's wings showed that the travelers were enjoying sweet repose.

And a prowling Mojave Indian was creeping slowly upon the big ostrich that he had been trailing all day.

He was armed with a rifle and lasso.

CHAPTER IV.

INDIANS ATTACK THE OSTRICH.

Slowly and silently the Mojave trailer crept upon the giant ostrich, standing gleaming in the twilight of the desert.

The great bird's body was black as is the African ostrich in real life, and his wings and tail were made to imitate the costly white plumes of fashion.

Behind the Mojave trailer came others of his tribe.

They but awaited the word from their leader, when an united attack would be made. Closer and closer came the Indian blood-hound, and all the while Electric Bob and Inyo Bill snored in peaceful slumber up in the body of the Desert Flyer.

At length the Indian came out upon the sands of the lake shore quite near the ostrich, which stood silent and still, while from its interior came a strange nasal rumbling that puzzled the night prowler.

No Indian ever snores.

Their sleepers never make the slightest noise.

The Mojave trailer, therefore, never dreamt that the noise coming from the body of the great bird could be made by any human agency.

Nor could he believe a sleeping bird could make such a queer sound. It made him wary and afraid. He hung back and crept around to view his prey on every side.

His followers in the meantime were closing in.

About the same time Inyo grew restless, turned over, and stretched himself out. He gradually grew awake and lay there with wide-open eyes, looking out across the desert.

It was as looking across the boundless sea.

Presently a moving object caught his eye—then another and yet another. He rubbed his eyes—first having felt for his revolver—and stared hard out into the twilight.

The stolid faces and raven heads of half a dozen Mojave Indians gradually came distinctly into his vision.

In an instant the truth flashed clearly upon him.

They were stalking the great bird that had passed them some time during the day. Their guns and lassos showed that they meant to capture him—alive, if possible, but they were determined to capture him.

Softly he awoke Electric Bob, and in a whisper informed him of the danger that menaced them.

"Oh, drop the guns down so they cannot shoot inside and let 'em take the ostrich captive—if they can," said Bob, almost ready to drop off to sleep again.

"I'll let 'em think we're awake, anyway," muttered Inyo, as he lowered the wings and pulled a cord which reared the great head to its natural position.

This caused the Indians to hesitate. They thought they had roused the ostrich from slumber. They hung back, but only for a moment. Then the lassos were hurled forward, some of them settling about the towering head, while others fell short.

While those who had caught the ostrich stood firm, others rushed forward to grapple with it. Half a dozen caught the great legs in a firm grasp at once. Then a

chorus of wild and unearthly yells broke out upon the desert midnight.

Big Mojave warriors with flying hair and staring eyes danced frantically about the ostrich's legs, letting out screams of mortal agony, yet unable to turn loose the thing that was torturing them.

Others, coming to their relief, but grasped hands to receive an awful shock and join in the dance and cries.

Soon the entire band was holding onto the Desert Flyer in a wild ghost dance that would have shamed the spirit of old Geronimo himself.

"Great heavens, boy, what is the matter with them?" old Inyo Bill asked Electric Bob, who was looking out upon the wonderful scene with a smiling face. "Is this some of your scientific deviltry, or is it something to keep us away from that devil-guarded mine?"

"It's all right, Inyo," said Bob. "I expected something of the kind, and when we went to sleep I turned a strong current of electricity into the legs of the Flyer. Those fellows are getting the benefit of it. That is all."

"Then, for mercy's sake, turn it off and watch 'em run."

Electric Bob pressed one of the keys upon the switch-board, shutting off the electric current, and a dozen big, greasy Mojave warriors were for an instant piled one upon another.

Then they scrambled apart, and broke wildly in every direction across the prairie. They left everything behind them in their mad flight—guns, lassos, blankets, everything—and disappeared in the gloom of the sands.

Our travelers then turned over on their blankets and slept peacefully until sunrise.

Old Inyo turned out early, and, as he said, "grubbed up a mess of trout for breakfast," fried the rest of the rabbits, and made some excellent coffee. The lake breeze gave them a good appetite, and soon they were on the journey again.

"Straight on, due south-east," said Inyo. "We will get down about the mouth of the Colorado this afternoon, and then—then—we'll look about us, of course."

As they journeyed on during the day they studied the map given them by Scipio Craig pretty closely, but could make nothing of it. The portion they needed was all torn off. It simply led them into the heart of the desert and left them there.

"I'll bet it's one of Scip's jokes," said old Inyo in disgust, after poring over the map for an hour. "It would be just like him. He kept me digging iron pyrites for a month once for gold up in Tuolumne, and—Hello, what is this?"

The ponderous feet of the Desert Flyer had stirred a heap of glistening bones from the sand.

The travelers were soon upon the ground examining the grewsome find. In some instances clothing yet hung to the skeletons, showing by the dress that they had been Americans.

"Seekers for that mine," said old Inyo, gloomily.

"They were coming from it, then," said Electric Bob. "See this!"

From the pocket of a skeleton he drew forth a heavy nugget of pure gold.

"Great heavens, so they were!" cried Inyo, as he scratched about in the sands with his hands. "See here—and here—and here—"

With each exclamation he tossed heavy gold rocks over toward Electric Bob.

Bob in the meantime was carefully gathering up the bones and getting them together in heaps—each individual as far as possible to himself.

By the time he had accomplished this, Inyo had gathered all the gold.

The bones were then reverently buried in little heaps, the mounds heavily covered with stones, and the travelers loaded the gold into the ostrich.

"How much will he carry besides our own weight?" asked Inyo, as they resumed their places in the Desert Flyer.

"I tested it with two thousand pounds in the factory," said Electric Bob, "and think we can safely count on fifteen hundred pounds here on the desert, exclusive of ourselves."

For half an hour Inyo was busy with a pencil, then with a sigh, he said:

"I wish we could carry more. Half a million ain't load enough to pay for crossing this scorching country twice."

"You're counting on our walking back, if we—"

"Of course we'll walk back, and tote a load of nuggets, too—besides what the Flyer carries."

"Not much," said Bob, with a smile.

They soon left the graves of the lost miners far behind them, and as evening drew on they sighted the Colorado River.

"We had better camp now, I think," said Inyo, "and to-morrow begin our real search for the three hills of gold. I have kept a sharp lookout all day, but saw nothing approaching the description of the three little mountains."

"It may take months of travel back and forth over these sands to find the hills," said Electric Bob. "The Colorado desert is a big affair and we cannot expect to drop onto the mine in a day."

"Well, I hope we may find it," said old Inyo, gloomily, "but I must confess them bones discourages me."

While they were talking the river was reached, and as Inyo concluded, the ostrich stood beside the yellow stream.

It was broad, and to all appearances, deep. The Mexican village of Santa Catalina stood on its western bank, and a small island called La Boca, the mouth, divided the current a short distance below the town.

"That island would be a nice place to camp," said Inyo, "if we only had some way of getting over to it. No Indians nor sneaking Mexicans could creep up on us there. I wish we had a boat—"

"How deep is the river?" asked Electric Bob.

"It can't be very deep," was the reply. "None of these Western streams are, but—"

"Let's wade out and try it," said Bob. "We can climb out on top of the Flyer, if necessary, you know."

As he spoke, Bob started the big bird slowly out into the river. The bottom of yellow sand was visible for a time, then gradually faded as the water rose higher and higher about the ostrich.

At last it was up to the windows, and then the travelers, closing the wings down tight, climbed upon the back of the machine. Deeper and deeper into the current they plunged until, as the water encircled the Flyer's neck, and they were clinging on with drenched bodies, the ostrich began to climb into shallower water, and soon the island was reached.

"Ugh!" cried Inyo, as he threw himself upon the sand. "I will risk Indians next time before I try such a caper as this."

"It's all right now," said Electric Bob, pleasantly. "We must now look out for supper. Shall it be quail, rabbit, or some desert trout?"

"I'll take the fishing tackle, and try for a fish out of the river. Heat a bit of meat over the lamp and I'll use it for bait."

"Broiled meat is excellent bait for most any kind of fish," said Bob, as he scorched a bit of shoulder pork in the focus of the lamp. "I will join you in a short while."

Inyo Bill took the bait and walked down to the river bank, while Electric Bob found a secure place for the ostrich among the shrubbery on the island.

Having stowed the Flyer away, he took his own fishing rod and went to join the old miner.

As he drew near he heard first a torrent of Spanish profanity, then some sturdy American oaths, followed, as such "cuss words" generally are in the West, by a pistol-shot.

Then came a wild medley of yells, more revolver chorus, and old Inyo's cry:

"Bob! Oh Bob! For God's sake come! And come a-runnin', or you needn't come at all!"

Electric Bob knew that the emergency must be great to call forth such an appeal from the brave old miner. This being the case, he thought he could best serve his friend by bringing the Flyer into action.

So he ran quickly back to get the ostrich.

A few moments later he reappeared on the river bank.

But he was too late.

Gazing from the window under the ostrich's wing, he saw a boat containing his old friend and three Mexicans rapidly disappearing down the river.

"They have got him," said Electric Bob. "There is no telling how deep this stream is farther down, and I may not be able to follow them with the ostrich, but I will rescue the old man or die."

Pressing a lever on the keyboard, Bob closed the window as the ostrich plunged into the river and struck out rapidly down stream.

Soon the middle of the current was reached, and to Bob's delight it was barely up to the Flyer's thighs, and did not at all interfere with the working of the machinery.

The great bird split the water rapidly, and soon Bob caught sight of the boat again.

The Mexicans saw him at the same moment and bent desperately to the oars. Again Electric Bob's hand sought the keyboard and the Flyer dashed onward at full speed.

No rowboat could hope to escape the ostrich!

"I'll soon come up with them," said Bob, as with a grim smile he got the magazine gun ready for action. "Then I'll make a sieve of that boat."

On rushed the Flyer.

Faster and faster through the water flew the gleaming steel legs, until Bob could hear the voice of his old friend urging him on, and swearing in brilliant English at his captors.

Electric Bob was almost upon the enemy's boat, and had called out encouragingly to his old friend, when a most thrilling thing happened.

With a mighty splashing of water the Flyer stopped in midstream. The great wings beat the air, and one ponderous foot pounded the water vigorously, but the great machine stood still.

But it stood so only for a moment.

Then slowly, and with a great commotion in the water, the Flyer began to back up stream.

"My God!" cried Bob, "what can be the matter!"

He peered cautiously from a window, and saw a mighty bubbling in the water about the feet of the ostrich.

Then as he gazed, a dark object broke the surface of the water a dozen feet away, and he at once knew what caused the trouble.

A monster crocodile had seized one leg of the Flyer in his mouth, and was backing up stream.

With the power of a locomotive the huge saurian was dragging the ostrich against the full power of the electric batteries as well as the river current.

"I will fix him," said Electric Bob, grimly, turning to the machine gun.

The muzzle of the gun was deflected downward and trained accurately against the big black back of the crocodile where it appeared above the yellow water of the river, and then the firing crank was turned rapidly.

There came a prolonged roar.

Twenty-five heavy rifle balls went crashing against the dark shell of the crocodile.

There was an awful splashing in the water about the ostrich for a few moments, then all was still. A dark body floated away down stream, and the Flyer was free.

But where was old Inyo Bill?

When Electric Bob resumed his search the Mexicans' boat had disappeared.

"Poor old chap," sighed Electric Bob. "I cannot find him to-night. First I must land and look after the Flyer. It is not working right since that alligator bit it. But to-morrow I will rescue Inyo Bill or die a-trying."

And Bob meant exactly what he said, too.

CHAPTER V.

ELECTRIC BOB'S BATTLE WITH MEXICAN OUTLAWS.

It was a long, lonesome night to Electric Bob, there on the desert, with the coyotes howling around him, and the cries of other savage animals echoing in the distance. Occasionally the scream of a Mexican lion—the fiercest of all the denizens of the desert—would pierce the awful

silence that fell between the howls of the coyotes, and cause the young inventor to shudder in spite of himself.

But he did not know what fear was.

He knew the ostrich was impregnable, and with the machine gun he could beat off a thousand wolves, should they attack him, but he was uneasy about his old friend.

With the first light of day that came streaking across the sands from the east, Electric Bob was moving along the river bank, his spyglass in hand, keeping a close lookout for old Inyo.

He could discover no trace of his old friend.

He kept steadily on, however, knowing they must have gone down the river in the boat. At last his perseverance was rewarded by the sight of a small boat tied to the east bank of the river. He quickly dismounted to examine it.

To his delight he saw a scrap of paper lying in the bottom of the boat. Some lines, hurriedly written in pencil, were on the paper.

Electric Bob caught up the paper scrap and hurriedly read the following:

"They have got a bigger boat, and a crowd of the rascals are carrying me down to San Felipe to try me for coming onto Mexican territory bearing arms. I guess I am a goner. Some of the crew remain behind to get up a company to capture you. Come on and rescue me if you can, but be mighty careful, my boy, or the Greasers will get you. Destroy this boat.
INYO BILL."

"I'll rescue you, old partner," cried Electric Bob, as he quickly climbed up one leg of the ostrich and crawled into the door under his wing.

Hastily examining the batteries, which he had re-stored during the night in anticipation of a possible long day's journey, Bob found everything in perfect order, and then his hand sought the switchboard.

The starting lever was drawn far around and the big Desert Flyer, with outspread wings and head resting back on his shoulders, sped away along the level river shore toward the south.

"It's more than a hundred miles to San Felipe, but I could easily make it in two hours if necessary," thought Bob, as he flew onward, scanning the river closely all the while.

For an hour nothing was visible upon the broad, yellow surface of the Gulf of California, which he had now reached. Then suddenly a rowboat, pulled by half a dozen oars, came in sight.

Electric Bob fired a shot, and an answering yell told him that old Inyo was aboard the craft.

But how was Bob to reach it?

The boat was at least two hundred yards from the shore, and while his machine gun would easily carry that distance with fatal effect, Electric Bob was afraid to fire lest he should strike Inyo as well as the enemy.

In the meantime the Mexicans' oars were working rapidly, and the boat was making good speed down stream.

"I'll risk a few shots, anyway," muttered Bob. "The old man had as well die by my hand as theirs—and I know he would advise me to shoot, and take his chances."

The machine gun began to play upon the Mexican's boat.

Every shot, almost, told with deadly effect.

Electric Bob had aimed first at the rowers.

Soon two thirds of the seats on the side toward him were empty. The oarsmen, tumbling into the water as they were struck, in nearly every instance carried their oars with them.

This left the boat for a time at the mercy of the tide. It spun almost entirely around, until the rowers on the farther side, who had remained untouched by Electric Bob's deadly fire, saw the trouble, and dividing their forces, half of them crossed over, and thus kept the prow of the craft down stream.

Bob kept up a galling fire.

Old Inyo, left to himself, stood up in the stern of the boat, waving his hat and yelling like a Comanche Indian. This encouraged Bob to keep up the fight, and also enabled him to so direct his shots as to avoid striking his friend.

The Mexicans soon caught onto this trick of their pris-

oner, and crowding close together, kept him in their midst.

This for a time disconcerted Electric Bob.

He ceased firing, and keeping the ostrich close along the gulf shore even with the boat studied over the situation.

All the time they were drawing nearer and nearer to San Felipe, where a superior force would capture and kill him beyond a doubt.

Something must be done at once.

Old Inyo was making violent gestures, but Electric Bob could not understand what he meant.

He studied the old man's motions closely.

"Ah," he cried at length. "He wants me to wade. Well, I will try it."

Letting down the wings, which closed hermetically, and opening a trap in the roof, something like that in the top of a hansom cab, Bob steered the ostrich down a gently sloping bank into the water.

It was deep from the very brink.

"I'll never make it," thought Bob, as the water bubbled around him. "It will be too deep for the gun to work, anyway, and I would soon get picked off if I should try to fight that crew outside from the back of the Flyer with my Winchester magazine rifle."

Still he kept on.

The long, bright legs of the ostrich cut the yellow water of the gulf like two steel knives, and gradually the daring young inventor found himself drawing nearer the Mexicans' boat.

Presently the jolting motion of the ostrich ceased, the big machine settled down cosily, like a cork on the thick, murky water and Bob scarcely realized that he was moving.

Indeed, for a moment his heart throbbed with apprehension as he thought the machinery had stopped.

Soon he realized what had happened.

The ostrich was floating.

A few drops of water leaked in under the wings, but not enough to hurt anything.

"I'll save the old man yet," cried Electric Bob. "This machine is a greater invention than I ever dreamed. Who would have thought of builing a boat to navigate the Colorado desert!"

The drooping ostrich's tail acted as a splendid rudder, and rapidly the Desert Flyer bore down on the flying boat.

Old Inyo was wild with delight.

The muzzle of the machine gun was safely above the water, and Bob kept it accurately trained on the enemy as he drew alongside.

Safely shielded himself, through the barred grating just above the machine gun, he could see and converse with the enemy without danger, while at the same time, now at close range, he was able to pick them off one at a time, without risk of hurting Inyo.

The heavy smooth-bore muskets of the Mexicans rained harmless leaden hail upon the ostrich as Electric Bob drew alongside the boat. The daring young fellow paid no attention to this, but in firm tones demanded instant surrender.

A derisive shout was the only reply given him.

The Greasers evidently believed he could not fire upon them while his strange invention was floating in the water, or thought his ammunition had given out.

They continued to pull away from him.

"Stop!" cried Bob. "Surrender, or I shall sweep your deck!"

Still the swarthy desperadoes bent at the oars, and in intense anger, old Inyo called out:

"Give it to 'em, my boy. Let 'em have it to kill. It is no use to try to show mercy to the yaller dogs."

"All right, old boy," cried Electric Bob. "Drop on our face—for here she comes!"

Old Inyo fell flat upon the bottom of the boat.

With an oath and a grunt a Mexican kicked him.

It was his last kick in this world, for an instant later he was a dead man.

The machine gun was loaded with twenty-five rifle cartridges, and commanded the deck of the Mexicans' boat.

Bob saw the big Greaser kick old Inyo, and so gave

him the first shot. The big yellow fellow tumbled overboard without a cry. Then another report from the ostrich and another Greaser splashed in the water.

Bang—bang—bang—bang—

Every report from the machine was followed by a yell or a splash from the enemy.

Slowly Electric Bob turned the crank around and every click cost his enemies a life.

His very heart grew sick at the slaughter.

He paused, his hand on the firing lever, to ask again:

"Do you surrender?"

"Give the poor devils a chance, my boy," cried old Inyo. "I know they haven't treated me white, but I hate to see 'em ground up this way. Say, Greasers, do ye quit?"

"Si, Senor," groaned the captain, who lay writhing in the bottom of the boat with a shattered leg.

"They've got a belly full, my boy," cried the old Californian, delightedly.

"Then let them row you ashore," said Electric Bob. "The Desert Flyer will not bear us both. You know it failed to float last night when we were both aboard."

"All right, my boy," cried the miner, and he repeated Bob's words in the Spanish language to the boat's crew.

With savage curses on the young American who had so completely beaten them at their own game, the Mexicans turned the prow of their boat toward the western shore, and Electric Bob followed close behind, his deadly gun bearing upon the treacherous foe.

The old miner was soon landed in safety.

The Mexicans then stood awaiting further orders.

The machine gun had thoroughly intimidated them.

"Go!" cried Electric Bob, "and hereafter remember to let Americans alone when they are not troubling you!"

"Adios, Senor," the Greasers cried, pushing out into the stream and floating away toward the south.

Electric Bob alighted and shook his old friend warmly by the hand, saying:

"That was a close shave, Inyo."

"Yes," said the old fellow, sadly, "and I feel there's worse to come. The curse is on us. How much gold have we got already in the ostrich?"

"About twenty thousand dollars, I guess."

"Tain't enough or I'd say, let's go home! We must find that mine, but my heart misgives me. I can't get them bones out of my mind, and everything seems working against us."

"Don't lose your nerve, Inyo," said Bob, encouragingly. "We will now go into camp, rest up, and to-morrow start north-west and survey the New River country. I have great hopes for what we may discover in that section, and—"

"What are you talking about, Bob?" said Inyo.

"Why, a syndicate in San Diego is being formed to work some tin mines out here—when they find 'em. They are also talking about copper and borax. Gold float has also been found in several places. So, you see, if we don't find that mysterious desert mine, we may sell our discoveries to this speculating syndicate for more than enough to pay for our trouble—"

"Great Dinah," cried old Inyo, "there ain't gold enough between San Diego and judgment day to pay me for the scare them Mexicans gave me last night—not to say how I felt when you opened on the boat with that improved Gatling gun."

"Well, you ain't hurt," laughed Bob.

"That's true," assented old Inyo, "but it ain't no sign I won't get killed before this trip is over."

It was not.

For death lurked about them on every side.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD MAN INYO HAS SOME GREAT SPORT.

"You found my note in the boat, Bob?" asked Inyo, as the ostrich trotted away toward the north after leaving the Mexicans on the shore of the gulf.

"Yes; that encouraged me to go ahead in search of you."

"I wrote it with my hands under my hat and in an awful hurry, while the pirates were changing from one boat

into another. They cursed me for coming armed onto Mexican soil. I soon found out they were returning from an unsuccessful trip in search of a mysterious gold mine—on three little hills—up here somewhere in the Colorado desert. They were in bad humor. What do you think of that?"

"It seems there must be something in that mine story," said Bob, "or everybody wouldn't be looking for it."

"Well, that is just what discourages me," said old Inyo. "Somebody ought to have found it, if it really exists, and the whole world has been looking for it this way."

"You forget that a great many people have probably found it. Don't you remember the bones back on the desert?"

"That is true!" cried old Inyo with a shudder. "I wonder if everybody who has found it is dead?"

"We will know, perhaps, in a few days," said Bob.

The sun was yet high when they came to a small stream of clear water running swiftly northward. The course of the stream seemed strange. Nearly all the rivers in that section flow to the south.

"It empties into the new Salton lake," said Electric Bob. "That mysterious reservoir is now drawing all the water of the desert to itself."

"We had better camp here," suggested Inyo.

"So I think," Bob agreed. "Can you dig us up some of those excellent desert trout for supper?"

"I think so," said Inyo, glancing about. "Yonder bunch of tall green weeds looks like good fishing grounds."

"Then I will take the rifle and try to knock over a jack rabbit or a 'fool hen' and we can have a variety. I am as hungry as a coyote."

"You may find some game among those boulders over yonder," said old man Inyo, pointing toward the west where a number of great stones were lying scattered about on the desert.

Electric Bob walked out that way, while Inyo went up the narrow ravine, with a pick in his hand, whistling.

Bob was soon among the boulders, and a few moments later his friend heard the report of his rifle.

Inyo dug deep down among the flags and water bushes, and soon turned out a couple of big fishes, which he took back to the camp and prepared for supper. Then putting the coffee kettle to boil over a brisk fire of cotton-wood twigs, he lighted his pipe and sat down to wait for Electric Bob's return.

He waited a long while, occasionally hearing the report of the Winchester in the distance, but as it kept getting farther and farther away, Inyo grew impatient.

"The boy must be lost," he cried in vexation, "and I will take the ostrich and go after him."

Inyo had learned to run the machine under Bob's tuition for just such an emergency as this.

He quickly shinned up one leg of the ostrich and entered the door under the big aluminum wing.

He was not yet safely inside when a perfect shower of bullets pattered against the side of the ostrich, some of them scraping Inyo's legs as he hastily drew them inside.

"Great Dinah!" he exclaimed, "what does that mean?"

At first he supposed the shooters had mistaken the character of the ostrich, but a moment's reflection convinced him that the shots had been intended more for him than for the machine.

Closing the door and starting the ostrich slowly, Inyo steered the machine around so that he could see his enemies from the front bull's-eye.

A large, mixed crowd of Americans and Mexicans were galloping around the ostrich, rapidly firing their revolvers and rifles at the big bird.

They evidently hoped to find a vulnerable point for their bullets in some part of the machine.

Old Inyo did not want to kill the strangers if he could avoid it, and so drove the ostrich along slowly in the direction from which Bob's last shots had come. He hoped to be able to join the young inventor, when, together, they could run away from the foe.

The enemy seemed to think he was afraid and trying

to escape, and began to close in upon him, firing in a desultory sort of way as they advanced. Soon they were so pressed around the ostrich that it was impossible to proceed any farther.

Several of the horsemen dismounted to examine the big bird closely. They handled his feet and legs carefully, and called to the "man inside to come out and have a talk."

Inyo remained discreetly silent.

"Great Dinah," he thought, "if I just knowed which one of these thingumbobs the youngster turned to make them Indians dance I'd give that gang Saint Vitus in two seconds. Let me see," he mused, toying with the keys. "I believe it was this one. I'll risk it anyway, and give 'em a full dose," and he swung one of the levers clear around.

An awful yell from below assured him he had at last struck the lever he sought.

A horrible medley of Spanish and American profanity greeted the old man's ears. Peering from the grating above the gun he saw a wild dervish dance being executed by the fellows who had chanced to be touching the ostrich's legs when he turned on the current.

Great bolts of lightning were thrilling through their bodies. Some held the legs with one hand and some with both, as with distorted faces they jumped and screamed and tore up the sand in frantic endeavors to get loose. The others rushed quickly to the aid of their friends, but as soon as they clasped them the electricity rushed on into them and soon the entire company was hanging together and dancing, helpless prisoners, about the ostrich. Inyo was enjoying the strange sight.

But after a while, as Bob did not appear, the old man grew tired of it, and turned off the electricity, thereby releasing the men.

"Now, you fellows below there," he cried, "get away from here, and get a-runnin', or I will turn loose my Gatling gun on you."

The desperadoes made a rush for their horses and soon began firing upon the ostrich from a distance. Old Inyo again called to them:

"Go away and leave me in peace, or I will exterminate you. March straight to the east, and I will let you go unharmed."

They paid no attention to his warnings, but continued to dash around the ostrich and pour in a continuous fire, from rifles and revolvers.

"Well, then," said the old miner at last, losing all patience, "if you will have it, take it!"

He sighted the machine gun carefully upon the thickest crowd of the outlaws, and turned the firing lever. A stream of fire shot from the breast of the ostrich, a cloud of smoke curled about the great bird's head, and the desert was strewn with dead men and horses.

Turning the ostrich around slowly, Inyo continued to fire wherever he could discover an enemy, until not a moving object was in sight.

"Well, I told you how it would be," said the old man; gazing out over the field, "and I rather suspect that next time you will take your Uncle William's word. But," he continued, gazing anxiously over the plains, "where can that boy be all this time?"

He walked the ostrich over the desert, now cool and quite pleasant as the sun was setting, occasionally firing his revolver to guide Bob should he be in hearing.

Presently he came upon the boy's hat lying beside a boulder, and just beyond he found the body of a big mountain lion. A little farther on were signs of a struggle, and Electric Bob's rifle lying broken on the ground.

The sand was stained with trailing blood, fragments of clothing hung upon rocks and scrubs, but Bob could not be found.

CHAPTER VII.

ALMOST A FATAL ACCIDENT.

Old Inyo followed the bloodstains, carefully steering the ostrich in and out among the big boulders, until presently, to his intense surprise and delight, he saw Electric Bob sitting on the ground a short distance ahead.

The young man's face was deathly pale, his clothing torn, and numerous scratches marked his face and hands; but he greeted his old friend with a smile.

"Great Dinah, boy," cried Inyo, "what have you been doing?"

"Killing mountain lions," said Bob. "See this fellow, and I left another one back there somewhere. What have you been doing?"

"Exterminating outlaws. I have got the desert fairly sowed broadcast with 'em—most a hundred, I reckon. Didn't you hear the firing?"

"No," said Electric Bob, "I didn't. In fact, Inyo," he went on, "I have not been in a condition to hear anything for an hour or two, and a most thrilling thing happened to me. But for it this lion would have had me eaten up by this time."

"What do you mean, Bob?"

"I will tell you; but get down and take a rest."

The old miner dismounted and took a seat beside Bob.

"After leaving you at the camp," continued the young fellow, "I came out this way, and soon struck the trail of a mountain lion among those boulders. After following it a short distance I got a good shot and killed it dead at the first fire.

"Well, I was feeling pretty good over my luck when the lion's mate came charging down on me. I fired and missed, and getting rattled, I missed twice again, and then she had me. My gun was knocked out of my hands, and I was knocked senseless, I guess, for the next thing I knew the lioness was dragging me away, and two whelps were whining hungrily along behind.

"I had not been seriously hurt, but I dared not move, so feigning death, I let the brute drag me on, hoping something might happen to enable me to escape.

"Just as we got to this boulder the beast laid me down and the whelps rushed up, begging for the meal to begin. After a moment's pause the lioness began by biting me fiercely in the shoulder—you can see the wound here—and I half fainted with pain—and then the most extraordinary thing happened.

"A great red animal that looked like a camel, with a skeleton on its back—"

"My God!" cried Inyo, "that was the 'Red Devil.' We are done for, now."

"Well, it did the business for that lion," said Bob. "As it rushed by its heavy feet struck and crushed the life out of the brute and saved me. But what is the matter? What is the Red Devil?"

"You know as much about what it is as anybody," said Inyo. "It is something awful that inhabits this desert and has a dead man for a rider. It brings bad luck to any one who gazes upon it. More often than not it brings death—"

"Well, it saved my life," said Electric Bob, "and I am not going to feel badly over that. But what is it? It sounded like thunder as it rushed by, and see how it crushed in this poor brute's side. And look at its tracks. Inyo, look here," Bob cried, in amazement, as he examined the "Red Devil's" tracks, "it is iron shod!"

"The devil may be, too, for all we know," said Inyo, gloomily. "Leave its tracks alone, lad, and let us hunt a place to camp. We will never see the Pegleg mine—mind what I tell you. That 'Red Devil' has hoodooed us!"

After he had dressed Bob's wound, Inyo prepared another pot of coffee, the travelers ate a cold supper, and turned in for the night.

They were tired, and worn out with the day's exertion and excitement, and slept heavily all night, and until the morning sun was flooding the desert.

"Now, Inyo," said Electric Bob, the next morning after breakfast, "let us take a good look at Craig's map and see if we cannot make it help us somewhat."

The yellow, time-worn scrap of paper was studied closely by the two men for a long while.

"It seems there are two roads leading to the mine from San Bernardino, according to this map," said Bob, after examining it attentively. "One of these goes east via Salton Lake, then turns to the west, and the rest of it is erased. The other road goes almost due south—a trifle west of south—and then, just as it reaches the heart of the desert and turns toward the east, it, too, is defaced.

The mine must be up there in the north-eastern or central-eastern part of the desert, if it is anywhere. Both these trails, when they give out, are pointing in that direction, and would inevitably cross about here—about half-way—and a little north—between San Diego and Yuma."

"I believe you are right, my boy, but that 'Red Devil' has taken away all my desire to find the three hills of gold. I think we had better go home as quick as we can."

"No, sir," said Electric Bob, firmly. "We came down here to find that mysterious mine, and I am going to settle the question as to whether it is a myth or a reality. I started out believing it to be a desert fable—now I really believe I shall find it. It must be right about where we have located it on the map. It is not over east, we know. That part of the desert is too accessible. Come, let us travel westward."

Both wings of the ostrich were raised, giving on either side a splendid view of the desert for miles. Inyo swept the country to the north with a field glass, while Electric Bob kept a close lookout to the southward in search of the three hills.

They were crossing a wide, deep valley that swept far away to the south-east. It was terribly hot, the thermometer in the ostrich showing one hundred and eighteen degrees. They were below the ocean level.

"This is what geology teaches was once the headwaters of the Gulf of California," said Bob. "A bar formed at the mouth of the river, and as they didn't know how to build jetties in those days it soon crowded the sea out, the river dried up—and here is the desert."

"Well, the sea is just under the ground, all the same," said Inyo. "You can catch sea fish out of any of these water holes by using a long line, and you have seen me dig trout out of the wet places—"

"How did they get there, Inyo?" Bob asked, but he did not wait for an answer to his question. Something caught his eye down the valley. It looked like the mast of an old-fashioned sailing vessel.

"What is that?" he cried.

"Looks like a ship's mainmast," said Inyo, carelessly.

"How did it get away up here in the desert?"

"Who knows? This is a strange land."

"Well, I am going to investigate it," said Bob. "Drive the ostrich down that way, please."

A marsh surrounded the tall mast for hundreds of yards in every direction, and it was impossible to drive the ostrich near the mystery. Bob, however, was not to be beaten so easily. Leaving Inyo on board the ostrich, he took a rifle and set out to make his way over the quagmire.

After a two-hour struggle the two hundred yards were crossed, and Electric Bob stood beside the strange mast that had first attracted his attention. He was right. It had long, long ago been the mast to a gallant ship, whose great hull now lay deep in the quagmire below.

"Some day," thought Electric Bob, as he made his way back to the ostrich, "I will come down here and dig that ship from the mire. Perhaps great riches may lie hidden in the rotting hull. It may have been a richly laden vessel coming to the gold coast, or a pirate weighted down with treasure."

But there was no means of knowing, and the young traveler was compelled to go on and leave his great find in the mud. Blown up the Gulf of California years and years ago by a hurricane, the vessel had gone ashore, and as the sea receded year by year it had been left farther and farther inland, until now it lay a veritable ship of the desert, a hundred miles from the ocean upon which it had once so proudly sailed.

All day long the great ostrich stalked about the desert while the mariners of the sands kept a close lookout for the three hills of gold. But nothing met their weary eyes except the glittering waste, the ever-varying waves of sand that each wind-storm piles in long, undulating ridges across the vast desert.

It would seem impossible that a human foe could surprise the adventurers on that open expanse.

And yet suddenly the very sand seemed to become alive with whooping, painted Apache warriors, who

with demoniac yells and rapid rifle-shots, came charging upon the Desert Flyer.

"My God," cried Electric Bob, in dismay, "where did they come from so suddenly?"

He closed down the ostrich's wings as he spoke, and made ready for a battle.

"They were buried in the sand," replied old man Inyo. "They sink themselves to the lips in that awful heat, then pull their long, black hair down over their faces until no one can distinguish them from a boulder or a scrub at ten paces. It is an old trick of theirs, and always a successful one."

In the meantime the savages were bombarding the ostrich with arrows and rifle-balls, all the while keeping up a noise that made one's blood run cold.

Slowly the great bird was turned about until the machine gun was brought to bear on the main body of the enemy. A big, black Indian, towering a full head above all the others, seemed to be in command, as he was gesticulating violently, and his fellows rushed about quickly at his orders.

"Take that nigger giant first," suggested Inyo.

Bang!

A single report rang out, but on that wide barren it gave back no echo.

The big Indian ducked his head slightly, and looked about him, but to the great surprise of those in the ostrich, did not fall. For the first time Electric Bob had missed.

He gave the firing lever another turn.

Click—click—click.

"The gun is broken," said Bob.

"That comes of seeing that 'Red Devil' yesterday," said Inyo. "I knowed bad luck would surely follow."

"More likely you overworked the gun killing outlaws," said Electric Bob, with a smile. "You used up over three hundred cartridges."

"Well, I didn't waste a single one," said the old man. "I never missed a good shot at short range."

Old Inyo nodded with a sarcastic smile out toward the big Indian chief as he spoke.

"Well, get me the screw-driver out of that box," said Bob, calmly, "and one of those coiled springs. I will try that shot again, presently."

Electric Bob soon had the base plate off the machine gun, and with a groan of disappointment he turned to his old friend, saying:

"It will take at least two hours to repair this break. They will never give us that much time."

"Then we had better run for it?"

"Yes," Bob replied. "Keep up as rapid a fire as possible with your rifle from a loop-hole, and I will send the Flyer through them like lightning."

Electric Bob pressed the key that started the machine as he spoke, and then another terrible disappointment came upon them.

The ostrich trembled, walked a few steps slowly, and then stopped, one foot raised in the air.

"What is the matter?" cried old Inyo.

"I cannot tell," answered Bob, "unless the batteries are exhausted."

"Can't you recharge them?"

"Yes; in about six hours."

"That comes of seeing the 'Red Devil,'" groaned Inyo.

"I told you so, Bob!"

The Indians quickly realized that something was wrong with their strange enemy, and with wilder shrieks than ever renewed the attack.

"Great Dinah," cried Inyo, "but we are done for now!" It really looked so.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE "RED DEVIL" AGAIN APPEARS.

There were at least a hundred painted, fierce and yelling Apache warriors about the Desert Flyer. The majority of them had rifles, while a few were armed with bows and arrows.

They could easily have overturned the ostrich, or have borne it away on their shoulders had they but known how completely it was in their power for the moment.

But they hung back, suspecting a trap.

In the meantime Electric Bob had taken up the floor of the interior and was examining the mechanism below.

He soon discovered the cause of the trouble. One of the electric wires had become overheated and was melted entirely apart.

It required half an hour to repair this, and he was still at work upon it when the big black warrior decided to risk a charge on the devil-bird, as the Indians believed the strange machine to be.

The Indian chief had given his order, and the whooping warriors were clinging about the helpless legs of the Desert Flyer, which trembled and rocked as if any moment it would tumble over into the sand.

Old Inyo's rifle cracked incessantly, but he made no appreciable effect upon the crowding, struggling, yelling demons who, dragging the dying men aside as they fell, quickly replaced them with live and lusty warriors.

"We're gone, my boy," said old Inyo, with a groan.

"I told you so when we saw that——"

"The wire is all right now, old man," said Electric Bob, cheerfully. "I will soon get the gun—hello, they are shaking us up pretty lively, ain't they?" he cried, as the ostrich was dragged several yards along the sand.

The Indians, indeed, seemed to have decided to carry the ostrich away, and started laboriously tugging it toward the south.

"They are taking us to the mysterious mine," whispered Bob. "If we keep quiet they will save us the trouble of finding it for ourselves——"

"My God, Bob," cried old Inyo at this instant. "Look! Look, away to the north-east! Don't you see it coming this way? It is the 'Red Devil!' We are doomed! Good-by, my friend——"

"Don't tear your clothes, old man," cried Bob, as he drove home the last screw in the base plate of the machine gun. "You just take a pull at that brandy bottle in the locker, and then take a rest while I try some target practice on those Apaches out there."

He was loading the machine gun as he spoke.

Twenty-five long rifle cartridges were pressed into the magazine. Then Bob looked for his big black Indian.

"See the big nigger, Inyo," he called out, and at the same instant another echoless report rang out across the desert.

Again the big, black warrior dodged and looked about him, but he did not fall.

"He belongs to that devil-guarded mine," said old Inyo, gloomily. "You can't hit him."

It really seemed that way. But Electric Bob tried him again. Again the big warrior shrank back from the whizzing bullet, but that was all.

Electric Bob felt a queer, superstitious shiver pass over him.

"They ain't human," old Inyo moaned. "You can't kill 'em with forty-four Winchesters at point-blank range. They're red devils, and yonder comes the boss 'Red Devil' to help 'em——"

Even as he spoke the Indians also caught sight of the strange apparition coming down upon them.

They stared at it a moment as if paralyzed with fright. They did not even heed the deadly fire from Inyo's magazine Winchester or from the machine gun, for the time.

With glassy eyes the warriors received the heavy bullets in their bodies and sank on the sands that drank their blood, with their gaze riveted upon the strange red vision coming out of the north.

The big, black warrior paused in the middle of an order and with uplifted hand stood silent, his eyes fixed upon the on-coming demon. Then his voice, harsh, cracked and trembling, broke forth as in a death wail.

The reckless, death-defying warriors of a moment before became as whipped children and rushed shrieking with fear, across the plains. Dropping his spear and rifle, the big, black warrior followed his people. Falling on their faces in the sand, they covered their heads until the awful 'Red Devil' had passed.

Then they tried to slink away into the gathering twilight.

But it was now Electric Bob's turn to triumph.

The young inventor had been watching the big chief

and comparing him with others of the Indians closely. He noted that the machine gun never failed to knock over anything else he fired at and he became assured that all his bullets had struck the big black chief.

"Inyo," said Bob, "that big fellow has got on a coat of mail. See how awkwardly he gets around. My shot have struck him on the body every time, now I am going to try his head!"

As he spoke, he was carefully sighting the gun, and as he concluded took deliberate aim and turned the lever for two shots.

The result was startling.

The big black chief jumped several feet into the air and then fell back upon the hot sand, kicking and throwing his arms and legs about and struggling as a partridge does when its neck is broken.

Then he lay still upon the ground, his toes buried in the sand and his hands clutching as they stiffened in death, the gravel and stunted grass.

"By thunder, Bob, you were right," cried Inyo, a moment later, as the ostrich stopped close beside the dead chief whose head had been literally blown from his shoulders by the terrible bullets from the machine gun.

"I thought so," said the young inventor, coolly. "I did not think I had turned so poor a marksman all at once."

The great "Red Devil" came prancing across the plains, his skeleton rider's bones gleaming ghastly red and white in the rays of the western sun that shown between them.

With long, unbroken strides he swept by, trampling upon the groveling, writhing Indians, and passed on toward the south. Bones crunched beneath his iron tread, and sparks flew from the hoofs that struck the obstructing bowlders, but nothing stopped the "Red Devil of the desert."

Old Inyo's rifle became mute, and Electric Bob's hand rested idly upon the firing lever of the now repaired machine gun.

He could easily have sent a dozen heavy balls crashing into the body of the strange visitant, but he dared not fire.

"I—I—I—just couldn't shoot," cried Inyo, at length, gazing after the lessening form of the "Devil" on the southern horizon.

"That's just the way I felt," said Bob. "I didn't want to hurt the thing."

"What do you think it is, Bob?" asked Inyo, with a strange quaver in his voice.

"I—I—don't know," replied Bob, solemnly. "It gives one the shivers, that's all I can say."

The Apache warriors were recovering from their fright and softly stealing away.

"We are all right now, Inyo," said Bob. "What do you think we had better do?"

"I leave it to you," said the old miner, feebly. "If I had my way I would go home a-runnin'."

"Then, as you leave it to me, we will follow that 'Red Devil,'" said Electric Bob, coolly, turning the ostrich's head toward the south.

Soon the great red thing loomed huge against the horizon, and seemed to step from hill to hill in the distorting sunset atmosphere.

The country became more broken down that way, an occasional cactus bush was seen, big bowlders cumbered the ground, and here and there at wide intervals sharp peaks ran up hundreds of feet, like factory chimneys.

"Look out for the three hills of gold, Inyo," cried Bob, gayly. "The land is getting full of hills now."

The "Red Devil" kept swiftly on. In and out among the peaks the ostrich followed it, often losing sight of the strange thing for minutes at a time only to come out upon it again closer than before.

They were gaining on it.

The white bones of the ghostly rider became visible, as they drew nearer, clinging about a great hump on the animal's back. But for its immense size and marvelous speed, Electric Bob would have decided the "Red Devil" to be a camel, without hesitation.

But he was puzzled.

Still he did not falter, but drove the ostrich steadily forward.

The sun had set, and a hazy, golden glow was upon the wide barren waste when suddenly, as if the sands had swallowed it, the "Red Devil" dropped out of sight.

One moment it was swinging rapidly onward, the next it was gone.

Electric Bob rubbed his eyes and stared at the spot where the strange thing was last seen, hoping it might reappear.

But it was gone.

Then came a cry from old Inyo, who had been looking from the opposite window, but also keeping the "Red Devil" in sight.

"The accursed thing is gone," he cried. "And there is the Pegleg, by Heaven!"

Three high, precipitous hills, standing close together, loomed up before them.

"The three hills of gold! The three hills of gold!" cried Inyo, grasping Electric Bob's hand, and fairly dancing with mad delight.

Electric Bob gazed upon them in silence.

He was thinking, "Had the 'Red Devil' really led them to the long sought mine?"

It appeared so.

"I hope it has not brought us into bad luck," thought Bob, as the ostrich drew up to the base of the mysterious hills.

CHAPTER IX.

THEY FIND THE MYSTERIOUS MINE.

Old Inyo was mad with the strange gold fever that had possessed him for years and made him a wanderer over the Western mountains in search of the elusive yellow metal.

As soon as the ostrich stopped he sprang to the ground and began to climb about the hills.

"This is the place," he shouted. "We have found it! We will load the ostrich down with gold nuggets and start home at daybreak to-morrow!"

"Come, Inyo," said Electric Bob, calmly. "Let us have supper and a good night's rest. There will be time enough to look for the gold to-morrow."

Inyo paid no attention whatever, but kept rambling about the hills. Presently he gave a cry that would have startled the "Red Devil" himself, and began to gather up fragments of something in his arms. Bob could not see what it was the old miner was loading himself with.

The young inventor began to make ready for supper, seeing that he could depend on no help in that way from his old friend.

"See here, Bob!" cried the old Californian, staggering into the fire-light with an armful of nuggets. "They are pure gold—test 'em with your acids."

Electric Bob brought several bottles, and one or two glass vessels from the ostrich, and for a time bent closely over several of the nuggets Inyo had thrown down. Then with a flushed face he raised his head and spoke:

"Yes," he said. "They are gold—almost pure metal."

With a wild hurrah the old miner was back upon the hills gathering more of the precious rocks. In vain Bob called him to supper. The old man neither ate nor slept that night, and when morning came, wild, haggard, with blood-shot eyes, and bleeding fingers, he was still heaping up the nuggets about the feet of the ostrich.

"We must cram the body of the machine full, my boy," he said to Bob, "and walk ourselves. It is not far."

"No," said Bob firmly. "We will put a thousand pounds into the machine, and no more. We can easily make a trip a day between here and San Bernardino, and—"

"But somebody will find the mine. Somebody will be sure to find it," wailed the old miner.

Electric Bob at length prevailed on the old man to eat breakfast, then having loaded up the ostrich, he set out to examine the three hills carefully.

As he was walking about the western base of one of the hills he was startled as the "Red Devil" came rushing from the mouth of a cavern and broke wildly away across the desert.

The strange thing evidently made its lair in the cave.

Bob walked into it for a great distance, and soon discovered that it was a vast vault or burial place.

In hundreds of niches cut in the rocky walls lay crumbling bones. In many instances there were but heaps of dust; in others the fleshless skeletons were yet almost entire.

It was simply an Indian mound. That explained why they had so long guarded it from the despoiling hands of white men.

A great deal of gold jewelry was found among the bones. Ear-rings, nose-rings, anklets and bracelets were found in almost every grave, while the great nuggets were scattered about everywhere.

Electric Bob and Inyo spent the forenoon gathering up nuggets and carrying them into the cavern.

Then taking the pick and spade from the ostrich they dug a deep well in one corner of the cave and buried the gold. At least ten thousand pounds were hidden, and yet they had made no appreciable decrease in the wealth lying about on the three hills.

"Well," said Bob, "there are buried over five tons of solid gold which we may count on remaining here until called for. Now let us start for San Bernardino. We can reach there to-morrow without straining the machine."

The ostrich was turned with its head to the north and the travelers rode away. Their hearts were throbbing with triumph at their success, but they received a dreadful shock, while not yet a mile from the mine.

The machine walked upon a number of dead bodies half-buried in the drifting sand. A wagon, falling apart from the heat, stood near by, and two horses lay dead in the harness. Inyo dismounted and examined these new victims of the desert.

"It is the party that started out from San Diego several weeks ago in search of the Pegleg mine," he said. "I knew them all intimately."

"Let us place the bodies in the wagon," said Electric Bob, "to protect them from the coyotes, or—"

"No coyotes nor anything else, except that 'Red Devil,' can live in this region," said Inyo. "But we will place them there out of the sand. It never rains here, you know, so only time and the sand ever affect anything."

Having removed the bodies of the lost gold hunters to the wagon, where they would remain until the ostrich could bear them back to their friends, Electric Bob drove the machine on toward the north. He would have carried the dead bodies in to their friends at once, but Inyo protested that they must do nothing else until they had garnered their golden harvest.

The old miner was sad and silent for a time after finding the bodies of the gold hunters, but soon recovered his spirits, and began to plan for a happy future.

He would liberally stake his old pard, Shasta, and provide for a number of old friends and relatives in the East from whom he had not heard for years. He would build a great factory at San Diego in which his young friend could exercise his inventive genius to his fullest desire; and then with a tender echo in his voice he said:

"I never told anybody about it, my boy, because I was always waiting until I got things fixed and got a good stake ahead, but the fact is, there's a little woman back in the East—a smart little school teacher—who will come out here and brighten up my cabin just as soon as I write for her. I ought to have written long before now, but I wanted to get fixed—"

"We will write her a good long letter to-night as soon as we get to San Bernardino," said Bob. "No, we can do better than that," he continued smiling. "You shall wire her that you are coming East for her. You are a rich man, now, Inyo, and can stand even the high telegraph rates."

"All right, my boy," cried the old miner, grasping Bob's hand, while his face brightened up until he really looked as if he had grown many years younger. "I'll go East with you, and when everything is fixed you shall be my best man—Mary will want you, I know, when I tell her all that you have done. We will come back here to live of course, and you shall come to see me often. And maybe sometime you will build another machine to bring away our buried treasure."

"It shall all be just as you say, Inyo," declared Electric Bob, returning the firm clasp of his old friend's hand.

They were still a long way south of San Bernardino when signs of water began to appear at intervals, and Electric Bob, feeling hungry, looked out for a good place to prepare supper. He wanted a cup of black coffee.

About mid-afternoon he drove the ostrich into a clump of palms and stopped beside a stream of running water. How sweet and cool it looked after the days in the torrid, waterless desert!

They gathered an armful each of fallen cotton-wood limbs and cactus stalks and heaping them crosswise in Indian fashion lighted a fire. Then while it was burning down to a heap of coals the weary adventurers plunged into a cool deep pool for a swim.

It seemed they could stay in the water all day, and almost sleep in it, so delightful was it after the hot sun and sand of the past few days.

After a while, however, they crept out upon the bank where they rolled like schoolboys on the grass and dried in the evening sunshine.

"I feel like a new man," said old Inyo, shaking himself, "and oh what an appetite I have got. I think I can eat—"

Bang! bang!

Electric Bob's gun interrupted his speech, and looking around he saw the boy, rifle in hand, standing on the bank just as he had come from the water, and glancing up in the way Bob was looking toward the spring under the trees, he saw a dappled young deer lying kicking in the green grass at the edge of the water.

"Do you think you can eat some venison steaks for supper, Inyo?" laughed the young inventor. "That deer came for a cool drink, and will stay to supper with us. Come, let us have a feast!"

"I'll get the deer hams," said Inyo, "while you bring what things we need from the ostrich."

"All right," said Bob, cheerfully.

The cotton-wood branches were now reduced to a heap of glowing coals, and bringing the coffee-pot and broiler from the ostrich the young inventor—who was an excellent cook—set about getting a good supper.

Oh, what an appetite these two strange friends carried to the supper table that night on the desert. Bob brought out the bottle of brandy that they had along for medicine, the coffee was clear and strong, the toast crisp as it could be, and the venison steaks seemed fairly to melt in the mouth.

"I could eat a whole deer myself this evening," Inyo declared, as he pushed back his plate and rolling on the grass began to fill his pipe.

"Come, come, that won't do," Electric Bob said, gayly, shaking his finger at the old man, "you are getting lazy just as soon as you get rich. You want to throw that empty brandy bottle into the creek and jump around here and help me get ready to continue our journey. We must—"

"Sit down and rest a bit," said Inyo. "Let's have a talk until our supper digests."

It was so pleasant they spent fully an hour on the grass. The supper fire turned to ashes and blew away on the evening breeze, desert birds and beasts thronged about the spring, and the big black ostrich loomed up a perfect giant of a bird among the palms.

Then something happened that swept away all their hopes of wealth and happiness.

They were startled by the sound of heavy-falling hoofs back on the desert that grew louder every moment, and both glanced apprehensively toward the precious treasure-laden ostrich.

Their hearts bounded with terror when they saw the "Red Devil" standing close beside the machine, his head thrust up under the great aluminum wing that had been left raised for the purpose of ventilation.

"My God" cried Inyo. "Can he start the ostrich?"

"Yes," said Bob, "if he should rub his nose against the right lever."

"Shoot him, Bob!" cried Inyo, in an agony of fear. "Shoot the awful thing before he takes all our gold back to the three hills. He is the devil, I believe, and has come after the gold!"

But Electric Bob stood silent as if unable to move or cry out. He seemed as one in a dream.

"My God, there it goes!" cried the old miner, and then Bob seemed to wake up.

But it was then too late.

The big black ostrich began to walk slowly away.

It was going with the "Red Devil" back toward the heart of the desert.

The machine bird moved off slowly at first, but soon acquired a terrific speed and disappeared behind the palms.

Old Inyo fell on the grass and covered his face with his hands, but Electric Bob dashed madly through the palms along the tracks of the ostrich.

Inyo soon heard him calling far down the stream. The old miner sprang quickly to his feet, for there was a ring in Bob's tones that gave the old fellow renewed hope.

"Something has pleased the boy," he said quickly, making his way through the palm grove, and running in the direction of the call.

Ten minutes later he came in sight of Bob who was standing on the back of the ostrich and waving his hands. Then Inyo broke into a rapid run and soon joined his friend.

"How on earth did you ever manage to catch the Flyer?" he asked.

"It ran into this palm tree," Electric Bob replied, "and the jar of the collision broke its neck and shut off the power."

"Oh, Lord, how I was frightened," said the old man, sitting down on a stone.

"Well, now that we have got our bird in hand again we won't give it another chance to escape," said Bob. "Get aboard, Inyo, and we will run into San Bernardino before we stop again."

"Great Dinah, look yonder!" cried Inyo as soon as he had joined Bob aboard the ostrich.

The "Red Devil" was walking slowly back toward them.

"That thing means mischief," said Inyo.

Bob gazed thoughtfully at the strange animal for a while and then said:

"I don't think so. Now that I have a good look at it I can see it is a camel, just as I believed all along. It is sick, too, I believe, and doubtless remembers its old days of captivity, and thinks to find relief among its old friends."

"Who were its friends?" asked Inyo.

"The soldiers stationed out here at Fort Yuma and San Diego. These camels—there was a number of them—were brought to this country for military use on the desert, but they all died except this one."

The "Red Devil" drew nearer as they were talking, and presently came within a few yards of the ostrich.

"What is that on its back?" said Inyo.

"Get out one of the lassoes we captured from those Mojave Indians," said Bob, "and throw it over the camel's neck. We can then examine it at our leisure."

Inyo was a skillful hand with a lasso and soon had the rope securely around the strange animal's neck. The "Red Devil" seemed perfectly willing to go along with its captors and made no resistance whatever.

They led it up close to the window of the ostrich and to their surprise and horror discovered that the thing on its back had been a United States soldier. The skeleton was held together by a sort of chain armor that had no doubt been worn as a protection against Indian arrows.

Fragments of a blue uniform clung to the bones and in a pocket at his breast was a bundle of papers. An arrow shaft that stuck clear through the body from between the hips to the abdomen showed how the man had died.

He had probably been shot, the travelers thought, while carrying dispatches across the desert from San Diego to Fort Yuma. While dying he had bound himself to the camel's back, hoping the animal would make its way back to the fort. Instead, however, the beast had gone wild and for years roamed over the desert, an object of terror to all who met it.

"Let us read the papers in that packet," suggested Inyo. "Maybe we can discover who the poor fellow was, and how he met his fate."

The worn, weather-stained packet was torn open, and to their surprise the adventurers read as follows:

"I have just been shot by an Indian and feel that I am dying. It will make my last hour easier to have this chance of revealing my secret to the world, hoping in time it may do some good to a better man than I have ever been. I am a deserter from the United States Army. My company is stationed at Fort Yuma. While bearing dispatches from the fort to San Diego I chanced upon a rich mine on three small hills in the desert. Since that day I have been a fugitive, riding this camel back and forth carrying loads of gold to a hiding spot whence I hoped to convey it to the railway and then back East. My gold must now amount to a million, and is hidden in the hold of an old ship that lies half buried in the sand and mire of the valley at the head of the Gulf of California. The ship is——"

The writing ceased here.

"Why, that is the sunken ship which you visited," said Inyo, when Electric Bob had refolded the paper.

"Yes, and we can visit it again and get the dead soldier's gold," replied Bob.

Camping places were frequent and pleasant, and two days later the adventurers struck the Southern Pacific railway, but they did not race the flying express as before.

A few hours later the spires and tall buildings of San Bernardino rose above the green orange groves and soon the black ostrich leading the captured "Red Devil of the Desert" was walking along the thronged streets.

The travelers were besieged by hundreds of people who wanted to ask questions and learn whether they had discovered the mysterious mine, but they refused to be interviewed, simply saying that the big ostrich had broken down in the desert and they had barely been able to reach home.

Then they rode on to Redlands and drew rein at the office of the *Citrograph*. Mr. Craig was overjoyed to see them back safe and listened with interest to their strange story.

When Inyo had told of their adventures in the desert Electric Bob drew Mr. Craig to one side and told him of the old miner's love story and said that he intended to insist that his old friend should accept the entire amount of gold brought in on the ostrich.

"You are a noble, generous-hearted young man," cried Mr. Craig, "but you must first reimburse yourself to the full amount of the cost of the ostrich and your expenses. Then we will see that William Inyo is happily established in life."

A long telegram was at once prepared and sent to Miss Mary Shaw, the little school teacher in the East who had waited so long for Inyo to get a stake and build a nice cabin for her to come to.

An answer was received the following morning that fairly set the old miner wild with joy. Mary was still waiting, and bade him come to her at once. He had in the meantime made every preparation to start, and leaving the "Red Devil" in the care of Mr. Craig and expressing the black ostrich and the gold, Inyo and Electric Bob started East on the afternoon train.

A week later the old miner was back at the home of his youth, and after a short delay Bob acted as best man at his old friend's wedding. Then Bob bade his friends goodbye and started to return to his own home.

"I am going to keep my word," said Inyo, as he shook hands in parting with the young inventor, "and return to San Diego and buy up half the town. You shall have a site for a manufactory down on the beach back of Mrs. Hobbs' boarding-house where we first met, and spend your days inventing wonderful machines to travel on the sea and land and in the sky. Come and see us just as soon as you can get around."

Mrs. Inyo joined her husband in this earnest invitation, and promising to visit them as soon as possible, Electric Bob took his leave.

He was destined to encounter many strange adventures, however, before he again looked upon his old miner friend's face and to undergo many dangers and come through many narrow escapes, as an early number of this library will show.

[THE END.]

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