

Mountaineer Justice

By JAMES McNITT



Y MAIN reason for penetrating into the heart of the Kentucky mountains was to gather realism and local color for my forthcoming novel, "Mountaineer." But there was another, a more ulterior reason. The four months offered the chance of tranquillity, the chance to study the psychology of simple minds, primeval passions of joy and sorrow, love and hate. Psychology has long been my avocation. And for such a study, one can find no better university than the Kentucky mountains.

Take, for example, the case of Silas Merritt. Tolerance and bigotry, intrepidity and pusillanimity, barbarian cruelty and motherly kindness were thrown together in a great pi of the printers of men's souls. One of his chief emotions was his sullen hatred of the Irwins. This, he shared with his brother Ralph. A truce from the Irwin-Merritt feud had been declared more than a decade ago, but it had failed to quench the sparks of ill feeling, as occasional outbursts vividly demonstrated.

I had early made the acquaintance of Silas and his brother, and for the better part of two weeks had been living with them in their crude delapidated dwelling which was so typical of the true mountaineer.

On the particular night to which my mind so frequently turns, I was sitting on the porch with Silas, who was indolently smoking an old corncob and airing his views on religion, politics, and the total lack of necessity of such people as the Irwins cluttering up the earth. Ralph had gone down to the village to purchase a few necessities. Night had

enveloped the earth, and only the dim, gargantuan shapes of the neighboring mountains could be seen. Nocturnal birds made their way through the still night air and an occasional chipmunk or squirrel scurried through the underbrush; but aside from these sounds, silence prevailed.

It was natural, therefore, that when the bark of a rifle rang from the distance, it should make us jump to our feet.

"That's one of them new-fangled German rifles they just got in down at Clem's store." The rich nasal voice of the mountaineer was harsh, perturbed. "Just two of them were sold. Doc Wilson's got one. He's down in Tennessee. Milt Irwin's got the other." His voice rose angrily. "If he's teched a hair on Ralph's head, ah reckon he'll pay heavy for it." The threat in his tone was emphasized by slamming his huge paw down on the heavy oaken table until the building shook at its foundations. He entered the house, picked up his lantern and his gun and went out. I followed him, entreating him to go slowly; but to no avail. Going in the general direction of the shot, he entered the grazing pasture. Directly in front of us was the inert form of Satan, the huge black bull.

Merritt bent down, his long, supple fingers probing a bloody patch on the skull of the dead bull. With a stick he dislodged a small object which he inspected closely. When the mountaineer straightened up, his face was blazing with rage. Satan had been his pride, his jewel, a magnificent beast capable of winning the blue ribbon at the state fair. "Ah reckoned so. It's a German bullet like Milt Irwin's gun shoots. Ah reckon—" here he broke off abruptly

Continued on Page 23

THE GILBERT AND SULLIVAN MYSTERY

Continued from Page 9

"It is very strange," agreed the barrister. "Sir John Brandonbury puzzles me. My second sense tells me that he is perfectly trustworthy, yet his actions and manners indicate the opposite."

Hazely nodded. "It also seems strange that Lady Reynolds says no more. Besides showing a natural grief at the accident, she has done nothing."

"If Brandonbury would only join you," remarked Baker, "your chances would have a much brighter chance." He paused as Hazely nodded his assent. "I should think," he continued, "that his actions should place him in a shadowy spot."

"Exactly what I thought at first," returned Hazely. "But why should he, assuming that he plotted the accidental death, become drunk? There was enough liquor in him to knock a horse over, so Hollock told me. Even then, there is not the slightest evidence of robbery, plunder, jealousy or of anything else. In all my interviewing, I only reached one important clew."

"From Howard Statlesey?"

"Right. He declared that he passed Brandonbury's private room just before the second act commenced. He said that there seemed to be an argument going on, though what it was about, he said he could not understand. He heard Reynolds' loud voice and the sound of his cane hitting something. Then Statlesey passed on."

They both reflected silently a moment. Then they rose from the table and made their way out into the street. Hazely hailed a taxi in which they whizzed over to the Savoy Theatre. Before entering Sir John's private office, Hazely motioned for Baker to follow him. They entered by the regular door to Balcony E. The balcony was entirely refurnished. There was no evidence to show that any crime had been committed.

"Looks like Brandonbury is taking great pains to hide any casual clew," commented Baker.

Hazely nodded. He turned to go out the small, private door leading to Sir John's office. Just before he reached it, he stubbed his toe in a provoking manner. Uttering an exclamation, Hazely glanced down, and then uncovered the rug. A small piece of wire lay exposed to view. Hazely picked it up carefully with his handkerchief.

"At any rate it is suggestive," he smiled at Baker, and then led the way to the private office. He rapped sharply on the door. Sir John's voice was heard bidding them to come in. Upon entering the room, the two were surprised to find Sir John very much engrossed by a rather elderly and shabbily dressed woman. Sir John motioned for them to sit down.

"You are just a little late for evidence, gentlemen," he remarked coolly. "This woman has just informed me that the theatre is haunted!"

"Yes!" cried the old woman, standing up in her agitation. "Haunted by the departed spirits of Gilbert and Sullivan!"

(to be continued)

MOUNTAINER JUSTICE

Continued from Page 11

and strode into the darkness, his lantern bobbing at his side.

I had only to return to the cabin, meditating on the rage which would cause a man to seek revenge on a night so totally devoid of illumination.

When I reached the dwelling, I perceived that Ralph had returned. Entering, I found him white and shaken.

"What's the matter, Ralph?"

"Satan charged at me when ah took a short-cut through the field. Ah had to shoot him."

"With that?" I pointed to a rifle, evidently of foreign make, which lay on the table.

"Yes. Clem let me take it to try it out. It's one of them German rifles."

Slowly, it dawned on me that fate had played a trick on Silas Merritt.

"Quick, Ralph, quick!" My voice was tense, strained. "Silas has gone to kill Milt Irwin for murdering his bull!"

(*"Mountaineer Justice" cont. from p. 23*)

Ralph started up, then stopped. "Listen!"

From the distance, came an agonized scream, a sound as of boulders plunging. Ralph turned. "No use. The mountain's got Si. We couldn't get down without the lantern, and Si had that."

I knew he spoke the truth. To descend the mountain in daytime was a task of extreme difficulty; at night it was suicide. To ascend it was hard enough; one could only creep up it at his slowest speed because of the degree of inclination of the slope.

We did not go to bed that night. Ralph sat staring out into the darkness; I distracted my thoughts as well as possible with the aid of a greasy pack of cards.

But despite our efforts, the wiles of Morpheus overcame us both toward morning. When I awoke, the sun was streaming through the window. Ralph lay sprawled in his chair. I awakened him and together we started down the mountain. We scoured it high and low—but found no sign of Silas.

Suddenly we came upon a small boy playing in the dirt. He gazed at us curiously. "Air you-all Ralph Merritt?" he asked. Ralph replied in the affirmative. "Mah pappy wants to see you-all." We followed him, rather fearful of a trap, for we had recognized him as an Irwin boy. He led us directly to the Irwin cabin, which we entered. Upon a crude cot lay Silas Merritt, swathed in bandages.

The doctor was talking to him. "You're not seriously hurt, Silas, but you would have been if you had laid and bled all night. And I want to tell you that if it hadn't been for Milt Irwin you'd have been a goner. You ought to make up and apologize for what you said about him when you were delirious."

Silas hesitated, then stretched forth his hand to Milt.

"You win, doc, Milt's all right. But"—his voice hardened—"he's the only Irwin that is."

Queer people, those mountaineers.

That Bible Test!

Where did you stand?

These are the highest scores for the respective grades:

| Grade | Highest Score |
|-----------|---------------|
| 12th..... | 90 |
| 11-2..... | 88 |
| 11-1..... | 96 |
| 10-2..... | 98 |
| 10-1..... | 96 |
| 9-2..... | 90 |
| 9-1..... | 90 |
| 8-1..... | 82 |
| 8-2..... | 82 |
| 7-2..... | 64 |
| 7-1..... | 78 |

And This Is How They Answered

How did Absalom die?

He got shot in the woods.

Name the first book in the Bible.

Adam and Eve. Jennies. Genius.

Name the last book in the Bible.

Reverlations. Revolutions.

Who built the ark?

Nora. Joan of Arc.

Who was Ruth?

She was a good girl.

Locate Palestine.

It is at the tale end of the Mediterranean.

What is meant by the Passover?

The time God died.

Who was Isaac?

He was a profit.

And How They Spelled

Moses—Mosses, Mosers.

Christ—Crist.

Esther—Easter.

Cain—Kane.

Abel—Able.

Maketh—Maket.

Hymns—Himis, Hymes.

Bernice Ratering, 126, was hostess at a lovely bridge party given on Wednesday, September 25, at her home on Jefferson Avenue. The guests included members of The Tribe. They were Margaret English, Jessie Weiner, Gertrude DeVries, Florence Johnson, Margaret Shopmeyer, Eglantine Marsh, Virginia Anderson and Margaret Nicholson.