Sylvan Valley N

Our County—Its Progress and Prosperity the First Duty of a Local Paper.

MINER & BREESE. BREVARD, TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY, N. C., FRIDAY, JANUARY 27, 1905.

Dunns Rock Lodge No. 267

A. F. & A. M.

Meets Friday on or before the full moon in each month, at 2 p. m. Visiting Masons are cordially invited to meet with us.

sptly WM. MAXWELL, Sec'y.

Conestee Lodge No. 237,

I. O. O. F.

Meets every Monday night at 8 o'clock. Visiting brothers are cordially invited to visit us.

T. D. ENGLAND, N. G.

Transylvania Lodge No. 143,

Knights of Pythias

Regular convention every Tuesday night in Masonic Hall. Visiting Knights are cordially invited to attend. W. E. BREESE Jr., C. C.

Brevard Telephone Exchange.

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Sunday—8 to 10 a. m., 4 to 6 p. m.
Central Office—McMinn Block.

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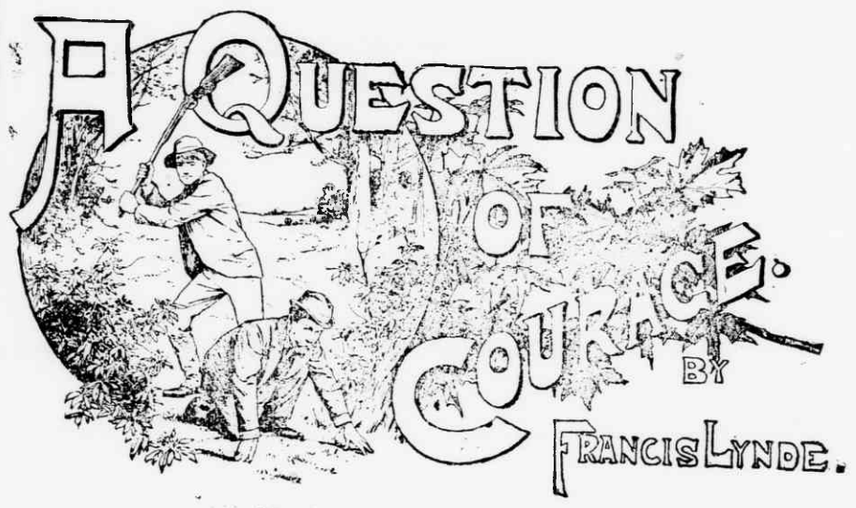

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[Continued from last week.]

Up to the moment when the completion of the arrangements for the capture of the conspirators had begun to cancel the factor of excitement, Ringbrand had not reflected upon the peculiarly trying nature of the test he had proposed for himself. When the plan had suggested itself, he had welcomed it gladly, hurrying forward to its culmination with the eager impatience of one who imagines he sees the turning-point of his life in the perspective and runs impetuously to double it. After he had taken his position under the oak, however, the suspense, and the darkness and silence of the night, began to dampen the fire of enthusiasm: the flood-tide of excitement turned and ebbed slowly away; and the heroic requirements of the part he had volunteered to take in the approaching drama stood out in vivid and disconcerting relief. Common sense awoke and demanded a reason for the hazardous plan, pointing the finger of ridicule at the melodramatic stage setting, and suggesting that nothing had been omitted save a calcium light to be flashed upon the scene at the critical moment. He saw the absurdity of it all, and how much more sensible it would have been to take Ludlow's suggestion, surrounding the house with a posse of armed men whose numbers would have made resistance on the part of the mountaineers useless and hence improbable.

And what was there to be urged against such a safe and practical plan of procedure? Nothing, or less than nothing: merely the demonstration of an abstruse metaphysical problem within himself; the application of a heroic test which had no place outside the realm of fiction. And with this thought it occurred to him that he had unconsciously planned the whole thing upon the lines that would have made it most effective in a story! And then the suggestion of the calcium light and the alarmed young woman looking down upon the theatrical tableau from her window came again, making him sick with disgust.

Looking at it from any point of view, the romantic project, which was more than likely to cost him his life in the executing, was merely a fantastic idea of proving himself in some way a knight without fear—a modern type of grotesque mediaeval personage who went about slaying impossible dragons and disemboweling mythological giants. It was absurd—ridiculous—preposterous! and from this point in the argument the descent to the Avernus of terror was easy. At the end of a half-hour he felt the premonitory spinal chill heralding a return of the well-known symptoms; in five minutes more the paroxysm was upon him, and he was struggling furiously in the grasp of his familiar demon, blind, deaf and helpless, with every fiber of his being straining itself for flight in an impulse so real that he turned and grasped at the rough bark of the tree to keep himself from being carried bodily away by the whirlwind of terror.

The attack did not last long, and about the time the blood began to tingle in his veins again he heard the muffled trampling of horses approaching along the dusty road. At the signal the very recollection of his late discomposure seemed somehow to vanish into the limbo of a remote past; his pulses quickened and his muscles thrilled with the vibrations of an accumulating energy that sang joyously as it leaped through the tense nerves and the throbbing arteries. His sharpened senses were unnaturally acute; he heard the woody clink of the rails as the men made a breach in the zigzag fence, then the smothered hoof-beats of the horses coming across the soft turf of the lawn; a moment later, in an interval of silence, he fancied he could almost hear the whispered instructions given to Jed. When the two men emerged from the deeper shadows of the grove he saw them quite distinctly in the starlight; they came directly toward his hiding place, and when they paused within a few feet of the trees he could scarcely restrain the eager ferocity that prompted him to rush out upon them. In the instant of hesitation he had time to note that one of them carried an armful of kindling wood; the man gathered it into a firmer hold while they paused, and there was a smothered tinkle of breaking glass, and the pungent odor of kerosene filled the air.

"What was that thar noise?" asked the other.

"Hit's that thar blame' bottle o' coal-oil, that's what hit is; hit's done bu'sted an' run all down into my boots," replied the first; and they moved forward and disappeared behind the corner of the house.

Ringbrand kept them in sight as long as he could, and then ran across to the clump of laurels, going down on his hands and knees and staring intently into the gloom until he found them again, two darker blots of shadow crouching in the angle formed by the bay window in the parlor. While he was straining his eyes to catch the gleam of the match which would be the signal for their return, he did not hear the stealthy steps of a man who was approached him from behind, nor did he know of its presence when the gliding figure came quite close and stood with clubbed gun waiting for him to rise.

The appearance of the third brother upon the scene was due to the fact that Ludlow had chosen his position unfortunately and so was unable to see the men when they dismounted. For this reason, he waited until he was sure that the two incendiaries had started for the house, and the delay gave the holder of horses time to yield to a sudden impulse born of a desire to know if his warning to Hester had accomplished its purpose. Looping the horses' bridles together and throwing them over the branch of a tree, he followed noiselessly in the footsteps of his brothers; and coming out on the open lawn in time to catch a glimpse of Ringbrand as he ran across to the laurels, he crept forward until he stood with uplifted gun behind the unsuspecting sentinel. When Ringbrand rose at the flash of the match, the poised rifle cut a quick circle in the air and descended with a blow that sent him back to his knees with a thousand scintillating motes dancing before his eyes; for a single confused instant he thought the end had come, and then he felt the revivifying breath of the spirit of battle which seemed to inspire him with the reckless and invincible courage of his warlike ancestors. Leaping to his feet, he fell upon his assailant with irresistible fury; there was a sharp, breathless struggle, a fierce clutching for under-holds, and then Ringbrand swung the slight form of his antagonist over his head and dashed it, limp and helpless, against the bole of the oak.

While this bit of by-play was going on behind the laurels, another incident occured which further disarranged Ringbrand's plans and left Col. Latimer and Henry in doubt as to what they should do. When the elder Bynum stooped to light the pile of kindlings, Bud started back toward the ambush alone; and as the first match went out, the younger brother had time to reach the clump of laurels before Jeff could find and light another. Seeing but one of the men appear, the colonel and his son both hesitated, and Bud confronted Ringbrand just as the latter recovered himself from the grapple with Jed. There was no time for deliberation, and, realizing that the mountaineer could not use his rifle at close quarters, he flung himself upon the newcomer, taking him unawares and throwing him heavily just as a bright blaze sprang up beside the house and a howl of agony rang out on the still air of the night. A single glance revealed the cause of both. There was a terrible picture of a man wrapped in a winding sheet of flame and running toward him—a yelling human torch blazing from head to foot and swinging its fiery arms frantically as it ran.

At such a crisis, thought and action are one. Shaking himself loose from the grasp of the struggling young brother, Ringbrand quieted him with a single deliberate blow with the butt of the pistol; the next instant he had tripped the shrieking firebrand and was rolling it over and over in the dam grass when the colonel and Henry ra up. It was all over quickly, and th were binding Jed and Bud when Lud joined them. The colonel sent He to arouse the negro servants, wit ders to get the horses and the wagon ready at once, and then a little group gathered around the man while Ludlow examined juries by the light of the lante

"I guess he's past help," he sa ly. "How did it happen?"

Ringbrand answered: "It sene. He had a bottle in and broke it just as they He was carrying an arm

Ludlow glanced at t "I missed my man, bu him. How did you m

"I didn't manage it for me," replied Ringbra his voice at the sound of a slight n at one of the upper windows of the mansion. "When I got upon my feet behind the laurels there, some one knocked me down with a clubbed gun; I tried it again, and threw the fellow just as the other came up. I closed with that one to keep him from using his rifle; and as we fell, I saw the third man in a blaze."

Henry's post had been nearest to the bay window, and he told how Jeff had tried twice to light the kindlings, and how the blaze had enveloped him as he was making the third attempt. While he was telling about it, the front door of the house was opened from within, and the colonel left the group and stood for some minutes talking with some one in the hall. Presently he called out: "You-all didn't get hurt, did you, Mr. Ringbrand?"

"Not worth mentioning," was the reply, and Ringbrand was sufficiently human to give place to the hope that Hester had seen something of the struggle, and to rejoice in the thought that her anxiety had prompted the inquiry.

The door closed again when the wagon was driven up, and the colonel helped the others to lift the injured man to the bed of straw in the deep box. When he had been made as comfortable as possible, the two others were swung up behind and tied securely; and the colonel, Ludlow and Ringbrand drove down to Tregarthen with their prisoners.

The colonel said little until the wagon stopped on its return to "The Laurels" to set the two younger men down at Ludlow's gate; then he rose and held out his hand to Ringbrand. "I reckon you 'preciate how I feel, Mr. Ringbrand, an' I'm mighty proud to acknowledge my obligations, an' the obligations of the whole fam'ly, to you, seh. We-all ain't gwine to fo'get this heah night the longes' day thah's a Latimer livin'," the colonel's idiom grew stronger under the influence of emotion—"an' I want to say right heah afore Tom Ludlow, seh, that as long as thah is a Latimer livin', he'll be proud to tell his child'en an' his grandchild'en that we-all are beholden to you, seh, for ouh lives an' for ouh property."

Ringbrand saw through the thin mask of grandiloquence, and hastened to assure the colonel that he was only too glad to have been in time. "Only don't call it an obligation, colonel," he added; "the motive was purely selfish—in a way that you'd hardly understand if I tried to explain it."

The colonel said much more to the same purpose, and would not leave them until he had extracted a promise from Ringbrand to extend his visit. When they had finally bidden him good-night, and Ludlow was opening the house door with his latch-key, Ringbrand said: "If you love me, Tom, let me sleep all day to-morrow if I can: I'm about dead on my feet."

XIII.

ANSWERS VARIOUS.

Ringbrand slept next day until after noon, coming down to a very late dinner feeling as if he had circumnavigated the globe in the wrong direction and so lost a day out of the calendar. Mrs. Ludlow, having slaked the imperative thirst of her curiosity at the well of her husband's information, spared him the task of recounting his adventures at length; but she managed to make him give a very fair description of the battle at "The Laurels" from the point of

"Thank yo
go back to Ne
"Perhaps yo
world came to
think one is abo
other."
"Oh! then you
reason why I shoul
"Yes, the best of
able to travel, yet."
Ringbrand laugh
hat. "Just watch me
and then you may repent at leis
said.

An hour later he was comfortably established upon the veranda of the colonel's home, lounging invalid-wise in the library easy-chair which Hester had insisted upon dragging out for him. They had been talking about the feud, his imprisonment in the cave, and all the exciting events of the past few days; and Ringbrand had been trying with a palpable effort at ingenuousness to bring the conversation around by easy and graduated approaches to the subject nearest his heart. On the long walk up the mountain he had forecast the manner of these approaches with such strict fidelity to details that he now found it impossible to break away from the entanglement of set speeches and supposed answers, and every fresh endeavor seemed to involve him more hopelessly. Even the perversity of inanimate objects added to his helplessness. How could one talk upon serious subjects from the lazy rostrum of an easy-chair whose high back took away the last vestige of one's dignity?—and when he sat up the comfortable hollow of the low seat brought his knees and his chin together in an attitude that was pathetically inadequate to the requirements of the case. Once or twice he had tried to rise, but Hester had protested playfully, saying that he must consider himself an invalid, if only for that afternoon. To add to his embarrassment, she left her own chair and began to saunter up and down the veranda in front of him, snipping dead leaves from the ivy on the railing as she talked.

He watched her furtively while the car of idle talk ran smoothly over endless stretches of track wherein there were no crossings or switches, until the subtle intoxication of her beauty began to make his replies irrelevant. At last she stopped just opposite his chair and leaned over the railing to recover a wandering spray of ivy; while she stood there with her back toward him, he broke off in the middle of a sentence and said abruptly: "Miss Hester, I love you very much."

[Continued on Page 8]

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