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Baldy of Nome

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Baldy of Nome

[Illustration]

Baldy of Nome

CHAPTER I

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

Baldy knew that something was wrong. His most diverting efforts had failed to gain the usual reward of a caress, or at least a word of understanding; and so, dog-like to express his sympathy, he came close beside his friend and licked his hand. Always, before, this had called attention to the fact that Baldy was ready to share any trouble with the boy---but to-day the rough and grimy little hand, stiff and blue from the cold, did not respond, and instead only brushed away the tears that rolled slowly down the pinched cheeks. Sometimes the slight body shook with sobs that the boy tried manfully to suppress; but when one is chilled, and tired and hungry, and in the shadow of a Great Tragedy, the emotions are not easy to control.

With unseeing eyes and dragging steps, the boy trudged along the snowy trail, dreading the arrival at Golconda Camp. For there was the House of Judgment, where all of the unfortunate events of that most unhappy day would be reviewed sternly, though with a certain harsh justice, that could result in nothing less than a sentence of final separation from Baldy. And so when the dog in his most subtle and delicate manner showed his deep love for the boy, it only made the thought of the inevitable parting harder to bear.

So completely was Ben lost in his own gloomy reflections that he did not hear the sound of bells behind him; and it was not until a cheery voice called out demanding the right of way that he stepped aside to let a rapidly approaching dog team pass. As it came closer he saw that it was the Allan and Darling team of Racers, and for the moment his eyes brightened with interest and admiration as he noticed with a true dog-lover's appreciation the perfect condition of the fleet-footed dogs, and the fine detail of sled and equipment.

Then his glance fell upon Baldy---thin, rough coated, and showing evidences of neglect; upon Baldy to whom he could not now even offer food and shelter, and a wave of bitterness swept over him.

"Come along, sonny, if you're going our way," and in the kindly little man at the handle-bars the boy recognized "Scotty" Allan, the most famous dog driver in Alaska. To the boy "Scotty" represented all that was most admirable in the whole North, and he stood speechless at the invitation to ride with him behind a team that had always seemed as wonderful as Cinderella's Fairy Coach. He hesitated, and then the Woman in the sled beckoned encouragingly. "Get in with me; and your dog may come too," she said as she rearranged the heavy fur robes to make room. The boy advanced with painful shyness, and awkwardly climbed into the place assigned him. The Woman laid her hand on Baldy's collar to draw him in also, but the boy exclaimed quickly, "No, ma'am, don't do that, please; he ain't really cross, but he won't ride in anythin' as long's he's got a leg to stand on; an' sometimes he growls if people he don't know touches him."

"Dogs and boys never growl at me, because I love them; and he does not look as if he really had a leg to stand on," she replied smilingly. But the boy nervously persisted. "Please let him go---his legs is all right. He looks kind o' run down jest now 'cause he"---the boy felt a tightening at his throat, and winked hard to keep the tears from starting again---"cause he ain't got much appetite. But when he's eatin' good his legs is jest great. Why, there ain't no other dog in Golconda that's got as strong legs as Baldy when he's---when he's eatin' good," he repeated hastily. "An' Golconda's

plumb full o' fine dogs."

"If that's so," said "Scotty," "I think I shall have to take a look at those Golconda wonders before the winter fairly sets in; and maybe you can give me a few pointers."

For a mile or so the boy sat spellbound, drinking in the casual comments of "Scotty" upon the dogs in the team, as if they were pearls of wisdom dropping from the lips of an Oracle. He was not so much interested in the Woman's replies, for they displayed a lack of technical information that contrasted unfavorably in the boy's mind with the keen and accurate insight that Allan showed in every word on that most vital subject.

Vaguely the boy remembered having once heard that she had become a partner in the racing team for mere amusement of the sport, instead of from a serious, high-minded interest, and that of course did not entitle her to the same respect you could feel for one to whom the care and culture of the dog assumed the dignity of a vocation. Then, too, she had spoken slightly of Baldy's legs. As a human being he could not but respond to her friendly overtures, but as a dog fancier she held no place in his esteem.

As they approached the divide where the trail for Golconda branched from the main road, an idea suddenly came to the boy. He had watched the harmony between Allan and his dogs; had noted their willingness, their affection for "Scotty," and his consideration for them. And as the pace became slower, and he realized that they were nearly at the end of this fate-given interview, he tremblingly gasped out the question that had been seething through his mind with such persistence. "Mr. Allan, would you like to buy Baldy?"

"Buy Baldy!" exclaimed the man in surprise. "Why, I thought you and Baldy were chums---I had no idea he was for sale."

"He wasn't till jest now, not till I saw how yer dogs love you; but I got t' git rid of him. It's been comin' fer a long time, an' I guess to-day's finished it."

The man leaned over and looked into the tear-stained face. "Are you in some trouble about him? Perhaps it's not so bad as you think, and maybe we can help you without taking Baldy."

But the boy went on determinedly. "No, sir, I want you to take him; it'd be the best thing fer him, an' I kin stan' it someway. A feller has ter stan' a lot o' things he don't like in this world, but I hope," feelingly, "all of 'em ain't as hard as givin' up his best friend."

As if to avoid the sympathy he felt was forthcoming, he plunged hastily into the details that had led to the unexpected offer. "I'm Ben Edwards. Maybe you knew my father; he was killed in the cave-in on the June Fraction. Baldy was only a little pup then, but Dad was awful fond of him."

"I remember," said the Woman thoughtfully; "and you have been in difficulties since, and need the money you could get for Baldy. Is that it?"

"It ain't only the money, but none o' the men at the Camp care much fer Baldy, an' they ain't kind to him. Only Moose Jones. When he was here he wouldn't let the men tease Baldy ner me, an' he made the cook give me scraps an' bones ter feed him. An' once he licked Black Mart fer throwin' hot water on Baldy when he went ter the door o' Mart's cabin lookin' fer me. I think Moose Jones is the best man in the world, an' about the strongest," volunteered the boy loyally.

"And where's Moose Jones now?" asked "Scotty." "I used to see him prospecting out near the Dexter Divide last winter."

"He was at Dexter first, an' then he was at Golconda fer a while; but in spring he went ter St. Michael, an' from there up ter the new strike at Marshall."

"And you miss him very much?" questioned the Woman.

"Yes, ma'am, I miss him a lot, an' so does Baldy. He was awful good ter animals an' kids. He had a pet ermine that 'ud come in ter see him every night in his cabin, an' he wouldn't let Mart an' some o' the fellers set a trap fer the red mother fox that was prowlin' round the place t' git somethin' fer her babies. Said he'd make trap-bait fer bears o' the first feller that tried t' git 'er."

"Excellent idea."

"Oh, he didn't really mean it serious. Why, Moose is so kind he hates ter kill anythin'---even fer food. Sometimes when he's been livin' on bacon an' beans fer months, he lets a flock o' young ptarmigan fly by him 'cause he says they look so soft an' pretty an' fluttery he don't like ter shoot 'em; an' Moose is a dead shot. He's mighty handy with his fists too, an' next ter Mr. Allan I guess Moose knows more about dogs than any man in Alaska; an' he said he'd bet some day there'd be a reg'lar stampede ter buy Baldy."

"A prophet," exclaimed the Woman. "You see we are the forerunners. But who is Black Mart?"

"Oh, he's a miner that's workin' the claim next ter Golconda. He's a friend o' the cook there, an' comes over ter eat pretty often. Him and Moose had some trouble once over some minin' ground, an' Mart kinda takes it out on all Moose's friends, even if they's only boys an' dogs, don't he, Baldy?" And Baldy wagged that he certainly did. "Now the cook says they've got work dogs enough belongin' ter the claim ter feed, without supportin' my mangy cur in idleness. Mr. Allan," earnestly, "he ain't mangy, an' he's the most willin' dog I ever seen fer any one that loves him. But he ain't sociable with every one, an' he don't like bein' handled rough."

"Scotty" looked at Baldy with a practiced and critical eye. "Those are all points in his favor," he remarked. "You can't do much with a dog that gives his affection and obedience indiscriminately."

"Besides, he ain't no cur---he's one o' them Bowen-Dalzene pups, an' you know there ain't a poor dog in the lot. They give him to me 'cause he wasn't like any o' the others in the litter, an' would 'a' spoiled the looks o' the team when they was old enough ter be hitched up," continued Ben breathlessly. "He was sort o' wild, too, an' he wouldn't pay attention t' any of 'em when I was round, an' they said I might as well take him fer keeps as t' have him runnin' away t' git t' me all the time."

"And your mother does not like him, and thinks it would be best not to keep him now?"

"She really does like him; but she does the washin' fer the Camp, an' helps with the dishes, an' sews when she kin git a job at it. But there ain't none of 'em reg'lar, an' sometimes there ain't more'n enough fer us two t' live on. Then she gits pretty tired an' discouraged like, an' says Baldy's a useless expense, an' keeps me from doin' my chores, 'cause I like t' play with him, an'---"

"Yes, yes, I see," broke in the Woman hastily, anxious to spare him any further revelations of a painful nature. "I know exactly how it is; but maybe we could make some arrangement with your mother about the dog. We will take a sort of an option on him; you can keep him with you, and we will pay a certain sum for the privilege of being permitted to buy him outright before the stampede actually begins."

The boy looked at her suspiciously, but there was no smile on her lips, and she rose a notch in his estimation. She evidently did realize, in a slight degree, what an unusual bargain was being offered in his heart-breaking sacrifice.

"An' it ain't 'cause his appetite's gone that makes him thin. I wasn't tellin' the truth about that," he stammered desperately; "he's jest *hungry*." The child's mouth quivered and he hesitated, yet he was determined to tell the whole of the sordid little tragedy now that he had begun. "But spendin' too much time with him when I should be workin' ain't the worst. To-day I done somethin' that mebbe she'll think ain't exac'ly square; an' my mother believes if you ain't square in this world you ain't much worth while."

"You're not, son," agreed "Scotty" heartily. "Your mother's right."

"My father was allers called Honest Ben Edwards out here on the Third Beach Line, an' Mother says she'd ruther have that mem'ry o' him than all the fortunes that's been made in Alaska by lyin' an' steal-in' an' jumpin' other people's claims."

"Right again, Ben. Nothing can take that from her, and a name like that is the best thing a man can leave his son."

"This mornin' she gave me some money fer a new pair o' mittens fer her, an' shoes fer me; an' the cook asked me t' buy a kitchen knife an' a few pans fer him. I walked inter town t' git 'em, an' Baldy come with me, though she said I was foolish t' be bothered with him. But I told her it was awful lonesome on the trail, an' she said I could take him this time." He paused for breath, visibly embarrassed.

"And you forgot all about your errands," hazarded the Woman.

"No, ma'am, I didn't exac'ly forgit, but when I was passin' the Court House an' I seen a big crowd inside, I went in, too, ter listen a minute.

"That lawyer Fink, that got up the Kennel Club, an' has the bully dog team, an' Daly, the feller with the smile that makes you feel like there's sunshine in the room, was a-talkin' agin each other; an' their fightin' was so excitin' an' so smooth an' perlite too, that everybody was a-settin' on the edges o' their chairs a-waitin' fer what was a-comin' next."

"So you were interested in what the lawyers had to say?"

"Yes, sir. Ever since my mother told me the story about President Lincoln a while ago, I been wantin' t' be a lawyer when I grow up. He didn't have no more book-learnin' than me at first, but he wouldn't let nothin' stop him, an' jest see what he done."

"Lincoln is to be your model, then? Well, you're right to aim high, Ben. You can practice his simple virtues of being honest and kind and industrious every day, and anywhere. And the education must be managed someway," added the Woman thoughtfully.

"After Mother read me that speech o' Mr. Lincoln's at Gettysburg, when all the people was jest dumb from their feelin's bein' so solemn an' deep; an' some o' his other speeches that was fine, I begun t' go t' town whenever there was t' be any good speakin', even when I had t' walk both ways."

"Shows your determination, as a starter," replied "Scotty" encouragingly. "And were you always repaid for your tramp?"

"Most allers, Mr. Allan. Last Fourth o' July I heerd Judge Tucker tell in his pleasant voice 'at sounds like he likes talkin' t' you all that Virginia's done fer our country, an' I wished I was from Virginia too. But mebbe some day I'll make some

boy wish he was from Alaska by bein' fine an' smart an' gentle like Judge Tucker."

"Virginia or Alaska, Ben---it's all the same, so long as you're proud of your state, and give your state a chance to be proud of you."

"Yes, ma'am; that's what Mother says. Then I heerd Tom Gaffney recitin' Robert Emmett's last speech, on St. Patrick's day, at Eagle Hall, an' I near cried at the end; an' I don't cry easy. It takes somethin' pretty bad t' make me cry," and he looked furtively toward Baldy.

"I'm sure it does, sonny; any one can see that you're game, all right; but that speech always makes me cry too."

The boy regarded "Scotty" appreciatively. Here was a typical Alaskan, a sturdy trailsman, touched by the tender, pitiful things of life, just like a little boy that hasn't had time to become hardened. Ben felt that they would be friends.

[Illustration: *Scotty and Baldy*]

"I like all kinds o' speakin', too; not jest the fiery sort that makes you want t' fight fer your country, an' mebbe die fer it like Robert Emmett; but the kind that jest makes you want t' be good ter folks an' dogs, an' do the best you kin when things is agin you, an' you don't see much ahead---"

The Woman nodded gravely. "Yes, I know. It's the most difficult sort of bravery---the sort without flags, and music, and cheers to keep you up to the firing line."

"That's the kind, ma'am. Mebbe you know Bishop Rowe. That's what he preaches---jest doin' your best all the time, like you was in some big race. When he's in Nome I allers go t' St. Mary's. He talks plain an' simple, an' cheers you up---I guess kinda the way Lincoln talked---jest like he knew all about people's troubles an' didn't blame 'em fer mistakes, but wanted t' help 'em t' do better. Sometimes his talks don't sound smooth, an' made up beforehand, but you never forgit 'em."

"Eloquence of the heart instead of the tongue," murmured the Woman.

"An' last August I went every night fer near a week, when Mr. Wickersham was talkin' men inter sendin' him t' Washington, no matter what they felt an' said agin his goin' when he wasn't before 'em."

"You have certainly had a variety of orators, and a wide range of subjects."

"You kin see I ain't missed a single chanct t' hear any of 'em since I made up my mind t' be a great man"---and then appalled by his lengthy burst of eloquence the child colored violently and concluded in confusion---"an' this mornin' I got so interested in them speeches o' Daly's an' Fink's, I must 'a' lost all track o' time, fer when I come out it was noon, an' Baldy was gone."

"You must indeed have been absorbed to forget Baldy. Where did you find him?"

"One o' the school kids told me the pound-man had got him, so I went over t' the pound on the Sand Spit as fast as I could run. I explained t' the man that Baldy wasn't a Nome dog; that we live five miles out at Golconda---but he said he was gittin' pretty sick o' that excuse. That no boy's dog ever really lived in Nome, so fur's he could find out; that all of 'em was residin' in the suburbs, an' only come in t' spend a day now an' then."

"It's a strange thing," mused the Woman, "that all pound-men are sarcastic and sceptical. It seems an inevitable part of their occupation. They never believed me when I was a little girl, either. Then what?"

"He said the only thing that concerned him was that Baldy was in town when he found him, and hadn't no license. Besides, he thought the dog was vicious 'cause he growled when the wire was around his neck. Pretty near any dog 'ud do that ef he had any spirit in him; an' Baldy's jest full o' spirit."

Both the Woman and "Scotty" looked involuntarily at Baldy who stood, dejected and uneasy; and then exchanged a glance in which amusement and pity struggled for expression.

"The pound-man said ef I didn't pay the \$2.50 t' git him out, an' another \$2.50 t' git him a license, he'd sell the dog along with a lot o' others he'd ketched durin' the week. I tuk Mother's money, an' what the cook give me, an' got Baldy out, an' bought him a license so's he'd be safe nex' time. Now," sadly, "there ain't goin' t' be any nex' time."

"There really did not seem to be any other way out of it for the moment," observed the Woman sympathetically.

"No, ma'am, but it wasn't very honest t' use the cook's money, ner Mother's; it'll take a long time t' pay 'em back, an' I guess Mother won't have much patience with Baldy after this. I wouldn't mind gittin' punished myself, but I don't want him blamed. He'd be a lot better off with you, Mr. Allan; an' mebbe ef you'd feed him up, an' give him a chanct, he'd be a racer some day. He'd never lay down on you, an'," almost defiantly, "he's got good legs."

"Scotty" felt the dog's legs, and noted the breadth of his chest. "What do you want for him, Ben?"

"Would ten dollars be too much?" asked the boy, eagerly.

"Ten dollars would be too little," quickly exclaimed the Woman. "You see we are getting ahead of all the others who do not know his fine points yet, and we should be willing to pay something extra for this opportunity. Do you think that twenty-five dollars would be fair, considering that we are in on the ground floor?"

"Yes, ma'am, that's lots more'n I expected. But it ain't so much the money I'm gittin' as the home he's gittin' an' the trainin' an' all."

"Well, that's a bargain, then; come to my husband's office---Darling and Dean, on Front Street, you know---the first time you are in town, and we will give you a check; and you can bring Baldy with you then."

"I guess," slowly, "you'd better take him now. It 'ud be easier fer me t' let him go while I'm kinda worked up to it. Mebbe ef I thought about it fer a few days I wouldn't be able t' do it, an' he mightn't have another chanct like this in his whole life."

He drew a frayed bit of rope from a torn pocket, and tied it to the old strap that served as Baldy's collar---handing the end to "Scotty."

In the deepening shadows of the chill November dusk the boy's face was ashen. He stooped over as if to see that the knot in the rope was secure at the dog's neck---but the Woman knew in that brief instant the trembling blue lips had been pressed in an agony of renunciation against Baldy's rough coat.

"Thank you both very much," he said in a tone that he tried to keep steady. "Thank you fer the ride and fer---fer everything."

He did not trust himself to look at the dog again, but stepped quickly into the Golconda Trail.

"You must come to see Baldy often," the Woman called to him.

"Yes, ma'am, I'll be glad to---after a while," he replied gratefully.

And then as "Scotty" gave the word to the impatient Racers, and the team swung round to return to Nome, there came to them out of the grayness a voice, faint and quavering like an echo---"Some day you'll be glad you've got Baldy."

[Illustration]

II

Where Every Dog Has His Day

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER II

WHERE EVERY DOG HAS HIS DAY

Baldy's entrance into the Allan and Darling Kennel had failed to attract the interest that the arrival of a new inmate usually created. He was an accident, not an acquisition, and the little comment upon his presence was generally unfavorable.

Even Matt, who took care of the dogs, and was a sort of godfather to them all, shook his head dubiously over Baldy. "He don't seem to belong here, someway," had been his mild criticism; while the Woman complained to "Scotty" that he was one of the most unresponsive dogs she had ever known.

"He's not exactly unresponsive," maintained "Scotty" justly; "but he's self-contained, and it's hard for him to adjust himself to these recent changes. It's all strange to him, and he misses the boy. You can't watch him with Ben and say that he's not affectionate; but he gives his affection slowly, and to but few people. One must earn it."

The Woman regarded Baldy with amused contempt. "So one must work hard for his affection, eh? Well, with all of the attractive dogs here willing to lavish their devotion upon us, I think it would hardly be worth while trying to coax Baldy's reluctant tolerance into something warmer."

"Scotty" admitted that Baldy could hardly be considered genial. "He's like some people whose natures are immobile---inexpressive. It's going to take a little while to find out if it's because there is nothing to express, or because he is undemonstrative, and has to show by his conduct rather than by his manners what there is to him."

It was true that Baldy was unmistakably ill at ease in his new quarters, and did not feel at home; for he was accustomed neither to the luxuries nor to the restrictions that surrounded him. His early experiences had been distinctly plebeian and uninteresting, but they had been quite free of control.

Born at one of the mining claims in the hills, of worthy hard-working parents, he had, with the various other members of the family, been raised to haul freight from town to the mine. But his attachment for Ben Edwards had intervened, and before he was really old enough to be thoroughly broken to harness, he had taken up his residence at Golconda.

Here his desultory training continued, but a lesson in sled pulling was almost invariably turned into a romp, so that he had only acquired the rudiments of an education when he came under "Scotty's" supervision.

His complete ignorance in matters of deportment, and possibly, too, his retiring disposition, made him feel an intruder in the exclusive coterie about him; and certainly there was a pronounced lack of cordiality on the part of most of the dogs toward him. This was especially true of Tom, Dick, and Harry, the famous Tolman brothers, who were the Veterans of Alaska Dog Racing, and so had a standing in the Kennel that none dared question. That is, none save Dubby, who recognized no standard other than his own; and that standard took no cognizance of Racers as Racers. They were all just dogs--good or bad--to Dubby.

The fact that Tom, Dick, and Harry had been in every one of those unique dashes across the snow-swept wastes of Seward Peninsula, from Bering Sea to the Arctic Ocean and return, and had never been "out of the money," did not count greatly in his rigid code. The same distance covered slowly by freighters in pursuance of their task of earning their daily living would seem to him far more worthy of respect and emulation. And so, when the Tolman brothers, who were apt to be quarrelsome with those "not in their class," showed a coldness toward Baldy that threatened to break into open hostility at the slightest excuse, Dubby promptly ranged himself on the side of the newcomer with a firmness that impressed even Tom, Dick, and Harry with a determination to be at least discreet if not courteous.

They had learned, with all of the others in the Kennel, to treat with a studied politeness---even deference---the wonderful old Huskie whose supremacy as a leader had become a Tradition of the North; and who was still in fighting trim should cause for trouble arise. He did not rely alone on his past achievements, which were many and brilliant, but he maintained a reputation for ever-ready power which is apt to give immunity from attack.

Dubby's attitude toward the Racers generally was galling in the extreme. Usually he ignored them completely, turning his back upon them when they were being harnessed, and apparently oblivious of their very existence; except as such times when he felt that they needed suggestions as to their behavior.

There was, in a way, a certain injustice in Dubby's contempt for what might be called the sporting element of the stable; for, like college athletes, they were only sports incidentally, and for the greater part of the year they were as ready and willing to do a hard day's work in carrying goods to the creeks as were the more commonplace dogs who had never won distinction on the Trail.

But Dubby was ultra-conservative; and while "Scotty" must have had some strange human reason for all of these silly dashes with an absolutely empty sled, in his opinion hauling a boiler up to Hobson Creek would be a far more efficacious means of exercise, and would be a practical accomplishment besides. Dubby was of a generation that knew not racing. Of noted McKenzie River parentage, he came from Dawson, where he was born, down the Yukon to Nome with "Scotty" Allan. He had led a team of his brothers and sisters, six in all, the entire distance of twelve hundred miles, early manifesting that definite acknowledged mastery over the others that is indispensable in a good leader. He had realized what it meant to be a Pioneer, had penetrated with daring men the waste places in search of fame, fortune and adventure; and had carried the heavy burdens of gold wrested from rock-ribbed mountain, and bouldered river bed. He had helped to take the United States Mail to remote and inaccessible districts, and had sped with the Doctor and Priest to the bedside of the sick or dying in distant, lonely cabins.

He and his kind have ever shared the toil of the development of that desolate country that stretches from the ice-bound Arctic to where the gray and sullen waters of Bering Sea break on a bleak and wind-swept shore. They figure but little in the forest-crowned Alaska of the South, with its enchanted isles, emerald green, in the sunlit, silver waves; but they are an indispensable factor in the very struggle for mere existence up beyond the chain of rugged Aleutians whose towering volcanoes are ever enveloped in a sinister shroud of smoke. Up in the eternal snows of the Alaska of the North, the unknown Alaska--the Alaska of Men and Dogs.

[Illustration: *The Alaska of men and dogs* June 1--The steamer Corwin at the edge of the ice, five miles from shore]

And so it is not strange that in such a land where the dog has ever played well his role of support to those who have faced its dangers and conquered its terrors, that his importance should be at last freely acknowledged, and the fact admitted that only the best possible dogs should be used for all arduous tasks.

Toward this end the Nome Kennel Club was organized. The object was not alone the improvement of the breeds used so extensively, but also, since the first President was a Kentuckian, of equal importance was the furnishing of a wholesome and characteristic sport for the community.

And Nome, once famed for her eager, reckless treasure-seekers in that great rush of 1900; famed once for being the "widest open" camp in all Alaska, now in her days of peace and quiet still claims recognition. Not only because of the millions taken out annually by her huge dredgers and hydraulics; not only because she is an important trading station that supplies whalers and explorers with all necessary equipment for their voyages in the Arctic; not only because of her picturesque history; but because she possesses the best sled dogs to be found, and originated and maintains the most thrilling and most difficult sport the world has ever known--Long Distance Dog Racing.

Previous to the advent of these races any dog that could stand on four legs, and had strength enough to pull, was apt to be pressed into service; but since they have become a recognized feature of the life there, a certain pride has manifested itself in the dog-drivers, and dog-owners, who aim now to use only the dogs really fitted for the work. Even the Eskimos, who were notorious for their indifferent handling of their ill-fed, overburdened beasts, have joined in the "better dog" movement, which is a popular and growing one.

According to Dubby's stern law, however, most of the Racers--the long-legged, supple-bodied Tolmans, the delicately built Irish Setters, Irish and Rover, and numberless others of the same type, would have been condemned to the ignominy of being mere pets; useless canine adjuncts to human beings--creatures that were allowed in the house, and were given strangely repulsive bits of food in return for degrading antics, such as sitting on one's hind legs or playing dead.

Occasionally there was, for some valid reason, an exception to his disapproval; as in the case, for instance, of Jack McMillan. For while he could not but deplore Jack's headstrong ways, and his intolerance of authority in the past, he nevertheless felt a certain admiration for the big tawny dog who moved with the lithe ease of the panther, and held himself with the imposing dignity of the lion. An admiration for the dog whose reputation for wickedness extended even to the point of being called a "man-eater," and was the source, far and near, of a respect largely tempered with fear.

There was always an air of repressed pride about Jack when he listened to the thrilling accounts of his crimes told with dramatic inspiration to horrified audiences; a pride which is not seemly save for great worth and good deeds. Yet in spite of these grave faults of character Dubby accorded McMillan the recognition due his wonderful strength and keen intelligence; for Dubby, while intolerant of mere speed, was ever alert to find the sterner and more rugged qualities in his associates.

Perhaps it was partly because Baldy possessed no trivial graces and manifested no disdain for the homely virtues of the work dogs whose faithfulness has won for them an honorable place in the community, that Dubby had soon given unmistakable signs of friendliness that helped to make Baldy's new home endurable.

While Dubby's championship was a great comfort, there were many things of every-day occurrence that surprised and annoyed Baldy. Out of the bewilderment that had at first overwhelmed him he had finally evolved two Great Rules of Conduct, which he observed implicitly--to Pull as Hard as he Could, and to Obey his Driver. This code of ethics is perfect for a trail dog of Alaska, but it was in the minor things that he was constantly perplexed--things in which it was difficult to distinguish between right and wrong, or at least between folly and wisdom. To tell where frankness of action became tactlessness, and the renunciation of passing pleasures a pose. It was particularly disconcerting to see that virtue often remained unnoticed, and that vice just as often escaped retribution; and what he saw might have undermined Baldy's whole moral nature, but for the simple sincerity that was the key-note to his character. As an artless dog of nature he was accustomed, when the world did not seem just and right to him, to show it plainly--an attitude not conducive to popularity; and it often made him seem surly when as a matter of fact he was only puzzled or depressed. He could not feign an amiability to hide hatred and vindictiveness as did the Tolmans, and it was a constant shock to him to note how the hypocrisy of Tom and his brothers deluded their friends into a deep-seated belief in their integrity. Even after such depravity as chasing the Allan girl's pet cat, stealing a neighbor's dog-salmon, or attacking an inoffensive Cocker Spaniel, he had seen Tom so meek and pensive that no one could suspect him of wrong-doing who had not actually witnessed it; and he had seen the Woman, when she *had* actually witnessed it, become a sort of accessory after the fact, and shield Tom from "Scotty's" just wrath, which was extraordinary and confusing.

The confinement of a Kennel, too, no matter how commodious, was most trying. Even the vigorous daily exercise was "personally conducted" by Matt; and Baldy longed for the freedom that had been his when alone, or preferably with the boy, he had roamed through the far stretches of rank grass, tender willows, and sweet-smelling herbs in summer, or over the wide, snowy plains in winter.

Then, later, the boy came to Baldy; and there were blissful periods when he would lie with his head on Ben's lap; when the repressed enmity of the haughty Tolmans, the cold indifference of the magnificent McMillan, and even Matt's eternal vigilance were forgotten. Periods when his companion's toil-hardened hands stroked the sleek sides and sinewy flanks that no longer hinted of insufficient nourishment; and caressing fingers lingered over the smooth and shining coat that had once been so rough and ragged.

To see Baldy receiving the same care and consideration as his stable-mates, who had won the plaudits of the world, justified the boy's sacrifice; and in spite of his loneliness he always left Baldy with a happy heart.

"We'll show 'em some day we was worth while, won't we, Baldy?" he would whisper confidently; and Baldy's reply was sure to be a satisfactory wag of his bobbed tail, signifying that he certainly intended to do his best.

[Illustration]

III

The First Step

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST STEP

With the boy's more frequent visits Baldy's horizon began to widen almost imperceptibly. He even looked forward to those moments when, with George Allan and his friend Danny Kelly, Ben stood beside him discussing his points and possibilities.

Up to the present his world had included but two friends---the boy and Moose Jones. Annoyed and sometimes abused at the Camp, he had felt that there was no real understanding between himself and most of those with whom he came into association, and it had made him gloomy and suspicious. Now he knew, with the intuition so often found in children and animals, that George and Danny, as well as Ben, comprehended, at least in part, the emotions he could not adequately express---gratitude for kindness and a desire to please; and in return he endeavored to show his appreciation of this understanding by shy overtures of friendliness. He even licked George's hand one day---a caress heretofore reserved exclusively for Ben Edwards---and he escorted Danny Kelly the full length of the town to his home in the East End, much as he dreaded the confines of the narrow city streets where he was brought into close contact with strange people and strange dogs.

At Golconda, in his absorbing affection for the boy, he had more or less ignored the others of his kind---they meant nothing to him. But now the advantages of plenty of food and excellent care were almost offset by his occasional contact with the quarrelsome dogs of the street, and his constant companionship with the distinguished company into which he had come reluctantly and in which he seemed so unwelcome.

In "Scotty" Baldy discerned a compelling personality to whom he rendered willing allegiance and respect, as well as a dawning affection. And it was with much gratification that he had heard occasionally after inspection comments in a tone that contained no trace of regret at his presence, even if it had as yet inspired no particular enthusiasm. To be sure Allan found some merit in the least promising dogs as a rule, and perhaps the faint praise he was beginning to bestow on Baldy had in it more or less of the impersonal approval he gave to all dogs who did not prove themselves hopelessly bad. But it seemed at least a step in the right direction when "Scotty" had said, replying to criticism of the Woman, "No, he is certainly not fierce, and by no means so morose as he looks. So far I must confess he's proving himself a pretty good sort."

Of course even the Woman, who admitted frankly that first impressions counted much with her, knew that it was not always wise to judge by appearances, for she had seen the successful development of the most unlikely material. There was the case of Tom, Dick, and Harry. No one would ever have supposed in seeing them, so alert and with the quickness and grace of a cat in their movements, that in their feeble mangy infancy they had only been saved from drowning by their excellent family connections, and their appealing charm of responsiveness. A responsiveness that in maturity made them favorites with every one who knew them, and prompted the tactful ways that convinced each admirer that his approval was the last seal to their satisfaction in the fame they had won. When Tom leaned against people confidingly, and put up his paw in cordial greeting; and Dick and Harry, so much alike that it was nearly impossible to tell them apart, stood waiting eagerly for the inevitable words of praise, it was hard indeed to realize that their perfect manners were a cloak for morals that rough, uncultured Baldy would condemn utterly.

With the departure of the last boats of the summer there is no connecting link with the great, unfrozen outside, except the wireless telegraph and the United States Government Dog Team Mail that is brought fifteen hundred miles, in relays, over the long white trail from Valdez. Then, with the early twilight of the long Arctic winter, which lasts until the dawn of the brilliant sunshine and pleasant warmth of May, there come the Dog Days of Nome. Days that are heralded by an increased activity in dog circles, a mysterious fascination that weaves itself about all prospective entries to the races, and

the introduction of a strange dialect called "Deep Dog Dope," which is the popular means of communication between all people regardless of age, sex or nationality---from the Federal Judge on the Bench to the tiniest tots in Kindergarten.

The town gives itself up completely to the gripping intensities and ardors of this period when all dog men assemble in appropriate places to talk over the prospects of the coming Racing Season. Accordingly George and Danny were in the habit of meeting in the Kennel, each afternoon, to consider the burning questions of the hour, with all of the certain knowledge and wide experience that belonged to their mature years---for George and Danny were seven and eight respectively.

Often Ben, whose mother had obtained work in town so that he might go to school regularly, joined in these important discussions; and while somewhat older than his companions, he greatly enjoyed being with them, for they were manly little fellows and had picked up much valuable dog lore from "Scotty" and Matt.

The Woman, too, for no apparent reason, was frequently at these serious conclaves, and was apt to voice rather trifling views on the weighty matters in debate. George felt that she was entitled only to the courteous toleration one accords the weaker sex in matters too deep for their inconsequent minds to grasp fully; for even if she was his father's racing partner, she had openly acknowledged that she considered dogs a pastime, and not a life study, which naturally proved her mental limitations.

[Illustration: The Woman]

One of the events already assured was a race for boys under nine years of age. "It's too bad you're too old for it, Ben," George had exclaimed sympathetically. "Father's told Danny and me we can use some of his dogs; and he'd 'a' been glad t' do the same for you. When I want t' drive fast dogs, and go t' the Moving Pictures at night, and drink coffee, I wish I was old too; but now I can see that gettin' old's pretty tough on a feller sometimes."

"Mebbe there'll be a race fer the older boys later," replied Ben hopefully. "I dunno as I could do much myself, but I sure would like t' try Baldy out. He minds so quick I think he'd be a fine leader; an' it looks like he'd be fast from the way he chases rabbits and squirrels out on the tundra."

"You can't allers tell about that," observed Dan pessimistically. "I got a dog that's a corker when he's just chasin' things; but when I put a harness on him he ain't fit for a High School Girl's Racin' Team, an' you know what girls is for gettin' speed out of a dog. 'You poor tired little doggie, you can stop right here an' rest if you want to; I don't care if they do get ahead of us,'" and Danny finished his remarks in the high falsetto and mincing inflection he attributed to the youthful members of a sex that in his opinion, as well as in George's, has no right to engage in the masculine occupation of Dog Mushing.

"Of course," said George, looking thoughtfully at Baldy, who was lying contentedly at Ben's feet, and giving voice to the wisdom of "Scotty" or Matt in such discussions, "of course, in a dog that's goin' in for the Big Race, you got t' have more'n speed. You can't depend on just that for four hundred and eight miles. There's got t' be lots of endurance an' the dogs had ought t' really enjoy racin' t' do their best. But for this race we're goin' in, Danny, I guess speed's the whole thing. Speed, an' the dog's mindin' you." George glanced involuntarily toward Jack McMillan, who sat with his head resting against the Woman's knee. "You can't do anythin' at all, no matter how fast dogs is, if they don't mind."

"I'm afraid, Mr. McMillan," commented the Woman seriously, "that these personalities are meant for you. Just because your first owner spoiled you, and the second paid the highest price ever given for a dog in the North, all accuse you of thinking yourself far too important to be classed with the common herd whose chief virtue is obedience. They say you lost a great race by being ungovernable. Guilty, or not guilty?" The brown eyes that had been wont to blaze so fiercely

now looked pleadingly into the Woman's face, and the sable muzzle was pressed more closely against her. "They started you off all wrong, Jack. They let you become headstrong, and then tried to force you arbitrarily into their ways, instead of persuading you. If you had been a human being, all this would have been considered Temperament, but being only a dog it was Temper, and was dealt with as such." McMillan gravely extended his paw in appreciation of her championship.

"Oh, I didn't only just mean Jack when I was talkin' about dogs not mindin'," explained George with embarrassed haste; for he knew of the Woman's fondness for the dog and did not wish to hurt her feelings, much as he condemned her judgment in selecting such a favorite.

Her preference had dated from the night when she had entered the Kennel after a long absence, and had seen the stranger in the half light of the June midnight. He had changed somewhat since the imperious days when he had threatened the life of his trainer, and she had not recognized the Incurable in the handsome dog who had greeted her with such flattering cordiality.

He soon manifested an abject devotion to her, and would barely listen even to "Scotty" when she was near---the moment he heard her footsteps howling insistently till she ignored all of the others and came directly to him. It became a matter of pride with her to take him into the streets where people would still look askance at the erstwhile "man-eater," and comment on her courage in handling the "brute." While she and the "brute" had the little joke between them, which she later confided to Ben, that Jack McMillan's misdemeanors were merely the result of an undisciplined nature handled unsympathetically, and that at heart he was the gentlest dog in Nome.

"Jack minds all right now," ventured Ben. "I seen him the other day with Mr. Allan, an' he minded as good as any of 'em---even Kid."

"Well, none of them could do better than that. 'Scotty' says that Kid has every admirable quality that a dog could possibly possess, and that without a doubt he is the most promising racing leader in Alaska. But of course Jack would have to mind or he would not be here. The first thing a new dog must realize is that 'Scotty' is the sole authority, and that obedience is the first law of the Kennel. Even with his first racing driver I believe it was more a case of misunderstanding on both sides than wilful disobedience. But it grew to a point where it became almost a matter of life or death for one or the other."

"Moose Jones said they had t' break his tusks t' use him at all, an' that it took three men t' hold him away from his driver sometimes; an' that 'Scotty' was the only man in the whole North that could git the best of him without breakin' his spirit. An' he seems terrible fond o' 'Scotty'---I mean Mr. Allan---now."

"You may call him 'Scotty,' Ben; he doesn't mind in the least. He's 'Scotty' to every Alaskan from Juneau to Barrow, Eskimos included---age no restraint. Yes, Jack is fond of 'Scotty,' but it took a battle royal to bring about this permanent peace."

"It's a wonder he wasn't killed before you an' 'Scotty' got him, if they was all so scared t' handle him."

"He would have been killed except that his enormous strength and unusual alertness made him too valuable. So in spite of their fears they kept him, but he was watched incessantly; and after his tusks were broken he became even more rebellious, and grew to distrust every one about him. Poor old fellow." She turned the handsome head toward the boy. "Look at him, Ben. Would you believe that they used to frighten naughty children by telling them that Jack was out looking for them?"

It was a fact that his name had once carried a suggestion of grim terror and impending disaster in Nome. And the dark hint that McMillan of the Broken Tusks was in the neighborhood struck consternation to the hearts of infant malefactors, and had been the source of much unwilling virtue, and many a politic repentance on the part of those offenders hitherto only impressed by the threatened arrival of the Policeman.

Ben regarded Jack with admiration and pity. He was sorry for even a dog that has been misunderstood.

"No, ma'am, he don't look vicious, but he sure does look powerful. If a man had a whole team like Jack there'd hardly be a chanct t' beat him, I s'pose."

"I'm not so sure of that, Ben. Of course the team counts for a great deal; so, too, does the skill of the driver. But there are many other things that enter into this contest that do not have to be considered usually. Given a mile of smooth track and horses in perfect condition, well mounted, the fastest one is apt to win. In a race that lasts for over three days and nights, however, through the roughest sort of country, in weather that may range from a thaw to a blizzard, and with fifteen or twenty dogs to manage, the Luck of the Trail is an enormous factor. One team may run into a storm, and be delayed for hours, that another may escape entirely; and a trivial accident may put the best team and driver entirely out of commission."

"That's so," agreed Danny. "That's what happened the year 'Scotty' lost the race to Seppala, an' came in second. Don't you know, George, your father told us it was near the end o' the run, an' the dogs was gettin' pretty tired, so he put a loose leader at the head t' give 'em new life---sort t' ginger 'em up. I guess that dog was as tired as the rest, an' nervous, 'cause he missed the trail in a terrible blow an' got separated from 'Scotty' an' went back t' the Road House they'd left last, like he'd been learned t' do. O' course 'Scotty' looked for him a while an' then went back for him. But it lost the race, all right, an' the cinch he had on breakin' the record. With them four hours lost, an' what he done later, he'd 'a' made the best time ever known in a dog race in Alaska. Gee, it was awful."

The Woman sighed. "Well, at least they can't blame the loss of *that* race on you, can they, Jack? It certainly was hard luck, but we will have to be good sports and try it again. Perhaps you'll develop a dog star of the first magnitude for us in your race, boys."

George and Danny looked serious. It was a difficult problem---this assembling of a racing team, and the responsibility weighed heavily upon them. Why, it meant the possibility of making a juvenile Record, and winning a Cup, and naturally required a critical consideration of even the smallest details.

"If I could only take some o' the Sweepstakes Dogs," mused George regretfully, "it 'ud be dead easy; but Father says it wouldn't be fair t' the fellers that hasn't a racin' stable t' pick from. We got t' use some o' the untried ones. I been thinkin' o' Spot for a leader. He seems sort o' awkward, 'cause he's raw-boned, an' ain't filled out yet; but all the other dogs like him, an' he'd ruther run than eat."

"Isn't he pretty young for that position?" hazarded the Woman. "Let me see, he can't be much more than a year old now."

She remembered when he had been a common little fellow, but a short time ago, sprawling in every mud-puddle, or wobbling uncertainly after the many strange alluring things in the streets. Matt, who seemed to have second sight in regard to the invisible, latent good points in all horses and dogs, had picked him up in the pound for a mere nothing; and to him there was granted the vision of a brilliant future for the vagrant puppy. "Mark my words," he had said decisively when Spot's fate hung in the balance, "you can't go wrong on him; he'll be a credit to us all some day." And so Spot was rescued from death, or at least from a life of poverty and obscurity, and given to George Allan to become his constant companion.

"You know," she persisted, "if a leader is too young he's apt to become over-zealous and important the way Irish did the day we loaned him to Charlie Thompson in the first Moose Handicap. Don't you remember he was disgusted at the way they were being managed by a rank novice, so he took his place in front of a rival team that was being well driven, and led them to victory, with the whole town cheering and yelling? You don't want that to happen to you, because your leader is inexperienced."

"It ain't the same thing at all," explained George patiently; for it is ever the man's part to try to be patient with the feminine ignorance of dogs and baseball and other essential things about which women seem to have no intuition. "You see, I ain't goin' to drive him loose. A dog shouldn't ever be a loose leader unless he's a wonder at managin' all the rest, an' young dogs ain't generally had the trainin' for it. After a dog has showed he can find the trail, an' keep it, an' set the pace, an' make the others mind him, bein' a loose leader's kind of an honor he's promoted to; like bein' a General in the army. He don't have t' be hitched up to the tow-line any more, an' pull; he just has t' think, an' keep the team out o' trouble."

"It's too bad that dogs aren't driven with lines instead of spoken orders---then there wouldn't be all of the bother about a leader every time." Both George and Danny looked at her for a moment with a contempt they barely succeeded in concealing. Even Ben Edwards was unpleasantly surprised, and he was not given to regarding her vagaries with unfriendly criticism.

Drive with lines! Bother about a leader! Why, if dogs were driven with lines there would be no more interest in driving a dog team than there is in driving a delivery wagon, or running an automobile. All of the fascination of having your dogs answer to your will, voluntarily and intelligently, would be lost in the mechanical response to the jerk and the pull of the reins.

She was utterly hopeless. There was no use of a further waste of words with her on such matters.

George turned to Danny and Ben. They were discerning, and capable of grasping a dog man's point of view. "Then there's Queen, for one wheeler. You know we're only allowed three dogs, an' we got t' be mighty careful."

"I expect it's pretty near 's important t' git the right wheel dogs as 'tis a leader, ain't it, George? Bein' next t' the sled an' so close t' the driver an' load, they allers seem t' kinda manage the business end o' things."

"That's right, Ben. That's why we got t' be sure o' gettin' good wheelers. In racin' there's no load, but it takes some managin' just the same t' keep the sled right on side hills an' goin' down steep slopes. O' course in a short race I wouldn't get into the sled at all, an' on the runners at the back I can get my feet on the brake easy. But Father an' Matt say that you want your wheelers t' know just what their duties is if the brake gets out o' order, or any thin' goes wrong."

"Wheelers have to be clever, and strong and tractable then---rather a big order," murmured the Woman somewhat meekly, as one seeking information.

"Yes, ma'am," replied Danny politely, "all o' that, an' I was just wonderin' if Queen 'ud do for the place."

Queen, another present of Matt's to George, was a Gordon Setter with a strong admixture of native blood, and was hopeless as a regular team dog because of her high-strung and irritable disposition. Naturally nervous, she had become, with the advent of her first family, so fierce that it was dangerous for any one to approach her except George, and for him she cheerfully left her puppies to be of service in sled pulling.

"Oh, I think she'll do; when you know Queen an' like her she ain't so bad; an' besides not bein' able t' take any o' the real racers don't leave us much choice."

"Do you---don't you think you could use Baldy?" suggested Ben eagerly. "He's no locomotive like McMillan, ner a flyin' machine like them Tolman dogs an' Irish an' Rover; but you've no idea how powerful an' willin' he is till you've tried him. Just give him a show, George. I'm 'most sure he'd make good. Moose Jones allers said he would."

There was a moment of serious consideration on the part of George, while Danny eyed Baldy critically, and remarked with discrimination, "Better take him; some o' these common lookin' dogs has the right stuff in 'em. If looks was everythin' I guess you an' me 'ud be scrappin' over Oolik Lomen or Margaret Winston, that new fox-hound Russ Downing just got from Kentucky. But you an' me know too much t' get took in by just good looks, George."

"All right, Ben. I'll take Baldy for the other wheel dog," said George as he ran his hand over Baldy's sturdy, muscular body. "He'll be able to show somethin' o' what's in him in this dash. Now we'd better see about Danny's team."

The Woman's observation that she thought Jemima, being black, would make a more artistic wheel-mate for Queen from the standpoint of color harmony, than would white-faced sable Baldy, was silently ignored, as was merited.

And so, in defiance of Art, and in spite of her evident prejudice against him, Baldy made one of George Allan's Racing Team.

Danny, after much discussion and deep thought, selected Judge for his leader, and Jimmie and Pete as wheelers. They were all steady and reliable, and made up a more dependable team than George's uncertain combination of youthful Spot, fiery Queen, and untried Baldy.

Ben was elated that the latter had been accepted by such experts as being worthy a place in the coming event. And as he left the Kennel to rush home to tell his mother the great news, he pictured Baldy in his coming role of wheeler in so distinguished a company. "I'm mighty glad I give him up when I did," he thought cheerfully. "Baldy is sure gettin' his chanct now."

[Illustration]

IV

The Plodder

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CHAPTER IV

THE PLODDER

The last two weeks before the Alaska Juvenile Race, as the Nome Kennel Club had announced it, were busy ones, not only for the boys who were to actually take part in it, but for all of their friends as well. For those who had not teams for the event had more than likely loaned a dog, a sled or a harness to one of the contestants, and consequently felt a deep personal interest in all incidents connected with the various entries.

To Ben Edwards the time was full of diversions, for every afternoon on his way home from school he stopped at the Kennel to curry and brush Baldy or help George and Danny in the care of the other dogs whose condition was of such moment now.

When George felt that he should give Spot special training to fit him for his new position as leader, or took Queen out under the strict discipline he knew would be necessary to prepare her for the ordeal, he would ask Ben to hitch Baldy to one of the small sleds and give him a run.

Baldy's nature had always expressed itself best in action, and Ben was delighted with the ease with which he adjusted himself to serious sled work. There were no more romps, no more games, but his pace became even and steady, and he required no threats and no inducements to make him do his best.

"There's one thing about Baldy," admitted George freely, "you don't have t' jolly him along all the time. Why, even with Spot I have to say 'Snowbirds' an' 'Rabbits' every little while when I want him to go faster, an' then you should see him mush. You know that's what Father says t' Tom, Dick 'an' Harry, an' Rover an' Irish. It's fine with any of 'em that's got bird-dog blood, an' you know Spot's part pointer. O' course they don't have t' really see snowbirds an' rabbits, but they just love t' hear about 'em, an' begin t' look ahead right away. An' if they do happen t' see 'em, they pretty nearly jump out o' their harness, they're so crazy for 'em."

"Baldy's part bird-dog, too," said Ben, "but I been watchin' him close, an' it ain't anythin' outside that makes him want t' go; it's more like he feels a sort o' duty about doin' the very best he kin fer any one that's usin' him. He's allers willin' t' do more'n his share; an' he's lots happier when he's workin' hard than when he's just lyin' idle in the stable, or bein' trotted out by Matt fer a walk."

"I wisht I was like that," muttered Danny gloomily. "That bein' happiest when you're workin' hard must be great; but I guess it's only dogs an' mebbe some men that's like that. I don't know o' any boys that's got such feelin's."

[Illustration: *Nome, Alaska, from Bering sea*]

When the day of the Boys' Race arrived, a day clear, and beautiful, and only a degree or two below zero, it seemed as if all of Nome had decided to celebrate the momentous occasion; going in crowds to the starting place, which was a broad, open thoroughfare on the outskirts of town. Those especially interested in the individual teams gathered at the various kennels to see the dogs harnessed and the young drivers prepared for their test as trailsmen in the coming struggle.

It was Saturday, and a general holiday, and Ben's mother had given him permission to go to the Kennel early; so that when George and Dan arrived they found their dogs smooth and shining from the energetic grooming that Ben had given them.

"It's awful good of you, Ben," said George appreciatively. "Danny an' me came in plenty o' time t' do it ourselves, an' Matt said he'd help us too; an' now you've got 'em lookin' finer'n silk. I'll bet even Father'll say they're as fine as a Sweepstakes Team, an' he's mighty partic'lar, I can tell you. But I don't see how you got Queen t' stand for it."

"I talked to 'er jest the way you do, an' then walked straight up to 'er so's she'd see I wasn't afeared. Moose Jones says it's no use tryin' t' do anything with a dog that knows you're scared. He told me the reason your father made a good dog out o' Jack McMillan was because he wasn't afeared of him, an' give the dog an even break in the terrible fight they had."

"Father always does that," responded George proudly. "He believes you got t' show a dog once for all that you're master of him at his very best. If you tie a dog o' McMillan's spirit, an' beat him t' make him obey, he always thinks he hadn't a

fair chance. But if you can show him that he can't down you, no matter how good a scrap he puts up, he'll respect you an' like you the way Jack does Dad."

"I don't believe me an' Queen'd ever have any trouble now," observed Ben thoughtfully. "Some way I guess we kinda understand each other better'n we did before."

"Well, it sure shows you got courage," exclaimed Dan admiringly. "I wouldn't touch that snarlin' brute o' George's, not if I could win this race by it, an' you know what I'd do fer that." He examined Judge, Jimmie, and Pete, with profound satisfaction. They were compactly built, of an even tan color, short haired, bob-tailed, and all about the same size, being brothers in one litter. Their sturdy legs suggested strength and their intelligent faces spoke of amiability as well as alertness. They were indeed worthy sons of the fleet hound mother---Mego---whose puppies rank so high in the racing world beyond the frozen sea. "They just glisten, Ben. You must 'a' worked hard t' get 'em lookin' as smooth an' shinin' as the fur neck-pieces the girls wear."

"O' course I wanted t' git Baldy ready fer his first race; an' doin' little things fer the other dogs is about the only way I kin pay everybody round here fer all they're doin' fer him."

Baldy was fast learning not to despise the detail that had made the new life so irksome before he realized how necessary it is in a large Kennel; and he now stood patiently waiting for his harness, while long discussions took place as to the adjustment of every strap, and the position of every buckle.

"Scotty" and Matt had come in to be ready with counsel and service, if necessary; then the Allan girls and many of the children from the neighborhood arrived, and later the Woman appeared with the Big Man whom Baldy some way associated invariably with her, and a yellow malamute whom Baldy invariably associated with him.

The Big Man always spoke pleasantly to the dogs, and had won Baldy's approval by not interfering---as did the Woman---in Kennel affairs; and the malamute---the Yellow Peril, as the Woman had named him---was plainly antagonistic to the Racers, at whom he growled with much enthusiasm. And so Baldy was glad to see the Big Man and the Peril amongst the acquaintances and strangers who were thronging into the place.

George brought out a miniature racing sled---his most prized possession---and a perfect reproduction of the one "Scotty" used in the Big Races, being built strongly, but on delicate lines. Danny pulled another, only a trifle less rakish, beside it. They were conversing in low tones. "We got pretty nearly half an hour t' wait, Dan, an' it's fierce t' have all these people that don't know a blame thing about racin' standin' round here givin' us fool advice. Why, if we was t' do what they're tellin', we'd be down an' out before we reached Powell's dredge on Bourbon Creek. Most of 'em don't know any more 'bout dogs 'n I do 'bout---'bout---"

"Rithmetic," suggested Danny promptly.

"Well, anyway, we got t' run our own race. Dad says there ain't any cut an' dried rules for dog racin' beyond knowin' your dogs, an' usin' common sense. Each time it's different, 'cordin' t' the dogs, the distance, the trail an' the weather. An' you have t' know just what it's best t' do whatever happens, even if it never happened before."

"Gee," sighed Danny heavily, "winnin' automobile races an' horse races is takin' candy from babies besides this here dog racin'. I hadn't any idea how much there was to it till we begun t' train the dogs, an' talk it over with your father. I was awful nervous last night, I don't believe I slept hardly any, worryin' about the things that can go wrong, no matter how careful you are."

"I didn't sleep any, either. I got t' thinkin' about Queen hatin' Eskimos, an' chasin' 'em every time she gets a chance. It 'ud be a terrible thing if she saw one out on the tundra, an' left the trail t' try and ketch him; or if she smelled some of 'em in the crowd an' made a break for 'em just when she ought t' be ready t' start. An' you know there's bound t' be loads of Eskimos, 'cause they'd rather see a dog race than eat a seal-blubber banquet."

"That's so; but Spot is good friends with all the natives 'round town, an' he's stronger'n Queen, an' wouldn't leave the trail for anything but snowbirds or rabbits, so he'd hold 'er down. An' I guess Baldy'd be kinda neutral, 'cause he don't pay attention t' Eskimos or anything when he's workin'. I never saw a dog mind his own business like Baldy. That's worth somethin' in a race." The inactivity was becoming unbearable. "George, if you and Ben'll get the dogs into harness, I'll go an' see what's doin' with some of the others. It'll sort o' fill in time."

Ben and George hitched the dogs to the respective sleds after Spot, in the exuberant joy of a prospective run, had dashed madly about, barking boisterously, a thing absolutely prohibited in that well-ordered household. "Scotty" and Matt refrained from all criticism of George's leader, knowing that both the boy and dog were unduly excited by the noisy, laughing groups surrounding them. Queen, while she waited with very scant patience for the strange situation, diverted herself by nipping viciously at any one who went past, and Baldy stood quiet and different save when Ben Edwards was near, or "Scotty" spoke kindly to him.

Mego's sons, as was natural with such a parent, and with Allan's training since they were born, behaved with perfect propriety; and there were many compliments for Dan's team, which manifested a polite interest in the development of affairs.

Shortly Dan returned with somewhat encouraging information about the rival teams.

"Bob's got three dogs better matched 'n yours as t' size," he remarked judicially, "but his leader, old Nero, 's most twelve, you remember, 'nd wants t' stop an' wag his tail, an' give his paw t' every kid that speaks to him. Bill's got some bully pups, but his sled's no good; it's his mother's kitchen chair nailed onto his skiis. Jimmie's team's a peach, an' so's his sled; but Jim drives like a---like a girl," finished Mr. Kelly scornfully, with the tone of one who disposes of that contestant effectively and finally. "For looks an' style, I can tell you, George, there ain't any of 'em that's a patch on my team. Some Pupmobile!"

He glanced proudly at the wide-awake dogs who showed their breeding and education at every turn, and then toward George's ill-assorted collection: Spot, rangy, raw-boned, and awkward, Queen fretful and mutinous, and Baldy so stolid that it was evident he was receiving no inspiration from the enthusiasm about him.

"Of course you can beat me drivin' without half tryin', George, an' if Spot's feet wasn't so big, an' Queen didn't have such a rotten disposition, an' Baldy knew he was alive, it 'ud be a regular cinch for you. But the way things is, believe me, I'm goin' t' give you a run for your money, with good old Mego's 'houn' dogs."

Both George and Dan had, of course, like all small boys in Nome, at one time or another, made swift and hazardous dashes of a few hundred yards, in huge chopping bowls purloined from their mothers' pantries; and drawn by any one dog that was available for the instant, and would tamely submit to the degradation. An infantile amusement, they felt now, in the face of this real Sporting Event that was engaging the attention of the entire town. And to complete the feeling that this was indeed no mere child's play, the Woman came to them with two cups of hot tea to warm them up, and steady their nerves on the trail. This they graciously accepted and drank, in spite of its very unpleasant taste; for "Scotty" always drank tea while giving Matt the last few necessary directions before a race.

"All ready, boys, time to leave," called the Big Man cheerily. "Peril and I will go ahead, and charge the multitudes so that you can get through."

The Allan girls pressed forward hurriedly to give George two treasured emblems of Good Luck---a four-leaf clover in a crumpled bit of silver paper, and a tiny Billiken in ivory, the cherished work of Happy Jack, the Eskimo Carver.

Equally potent charms in the form of a rabbit's foot, and a rusty horseshoe were tendered Danny by his staunch supporters.

At the big door of the Kennel the boys stopped for a final word. "We won't make a sound if we should have to pass on the trail," said George. "We'll be as silent as the dead," an expression recently acquired, and one which seemed in keeping with these solemn moments. "All the dogs know our voices, an' if we should speak they might stop just like they have when we've been exercisin' 'em, an' wanted t' talk things over. We'll pull the hoods of our parkas over our heads, an' turn our faces away so's not to attract 'em. Dan, I do want t' win this race awful bad, 'cause o' my father mostly, but you bet I hope you'll come in a close second."

"Same to you, George," and they made their way to the middle of the street, where they fell in behind the Big Man and the Peril, and were flanked by the Woman and "Scotty," Matt and Ben, with most of the others who had waited for this imposing departure.

The other entries had already arrived at the starting point, where there was much confusion and zeal in keeping the bewildered dogs in order. It was a new game, and they did not quite comprehend what was expected of them.

At last, however, the Timekeeper, and Starter, assisted by various members of the Kennel Club, had cleared a space into which the first entry was led with great ceremony. It was Bob, with the cordial, if ancient, Nero in the lead.

They were to leave three minutes apart; the time of each team being computed from the moment of its departure till its return, as is always done in the Great Races.

The Timekeeper stood with his watch in his hand, and the Starter beside him. Bob, eager for the word, spoke soothingly to the dogs to keep them quiet. He was devoutly hoping that Nero would not discover any intimate friend in the crowd and insist upon a formal greeting; for Nero's affability was a distinct disadvantage on such an occasion.

At last the moment came, and the Starter's "Go" was almost simultaneous with Bob's orders to his leader, whose usual dignified and leisurely movements were considerably hastened by the thunderous applause of the spectators.

It was a "bully get-away," George and Dan agreed, and only hoped that theirs would be as satisfactory.

Bill followed with equal ease, and equal approbation.

Jim, justifying Dan's earlier unfavorable report, lost over a minute by letting his dogs become tangled up in their harness, and then coaxing them to leave instead of commanding.

"Wouldn't that jar you?" whispered Dan disgustedly. "Why, your sister Helen does better'n that in those girly-girly races, even if she does say she'd rather get a beatin' herself than give one to a dog."

But the general public looked with more lenient eyes upon such mistakes, and Jim left amidst the same enthusiasm that had sped the others on their way.

When Dan and his dogs lined up there was much admiration openly expressed.

"Looks like a Sweepstakes team through the wrong end of the opry glasses, don't it?" exclaimed Matt with justifiable pride to Black Mart Barclay, who happened to be next him.

Mart scrutinized the entry closely. "Not so bad. Them Mego pups is allers fair lookers an' fair go-ers, so fur's I ever heered t' the contrary," he admitted grudgingly.

There was an air of repressed but pleasurable expectation about the little "houn' dogs," as they patiently waited for their signal to go. Their racing manners were absolutely above reproach. Unlike Nero, they quite properly ignored the merely social side of the event, and were evidently intent upon the serious struggle before them; and equally unlike Queen and Baldy, they showed neither the peevishness of the one, nor the apathy of the other.

By most people the race was practically conceded to Dan before the start.

It seemed an endless time to George before it was his turn; but when he finally stepped into place, the nervousness that had made the wait almost unbearable disappeared completely. The hood of his fur parka had dropped back, and his yellow hair, closely cropped that it should not curl and "make a sissy" of him, gleamed golden in the sunlight above a face that, usually rosy and smiling, was now pale and determined.

In that far world "outside," George Allan would have been at an age when ringlets and a nurse-maid are just beginning to chafe a proud man's spirit; but here in the North he was already "Some Musher,"^[1] and was eager to win the honors that would prove him a worthy son of the Greatest Dog Man in Alaska.

[Footnote 1: "Musher"---driver, trailsman.]

True to their several characteristics, Spot manifested an amiable and wide-awake interest in all about him, Queen repelled all advances with snaps and snarls, and Baldy quivered with a dread of the unknown, and was only reassured when he felt Ben Edwards' hand on his collar, and listened to the low, encouraging tones of the boy's voice.

[Illustration: *The start of an Alaskan dog team race*]

"Too bad, Matt," drawled Black Mart, "that the little Allan kid's usin' Baldy. He was allers an ornery beast, an' combin' his hair an' puttin' tassels an' fancy harness on him ain't goin' t' make a racer outen a cur."

Ben's face flushed hotly. "It ain't just beauty that counts, Baldy; it's what you got clear down in your heart that folks can't see," he thought, and clung the more lovingly to the trembling dog.

Matt carefully shook the ashes from his pipe. "It's a mighty good thing, Mart, that people an' dogs ain't judged entirely by looks. If they was, there's some dogs that's racin' that would be in the pound, an' some men that's criticizin' that would be in jail."

"Ready."

George, poised lightly on the runners at the back of the trim sled, firmly grasped the curved top, and repeated the word to Spot, who held himself motionless but in perfect readiness for the final signal.

"Go."

With unexpected buoyancy and ease, Spot darted ahead, and for once Queen forgot her grievances, and Baldy his fears; as in absolute harmony of action, the incongruous team sped quickly down the length of the street, and over the edge of the Dry Creek hill; to reappear shortly on the trail that led straight out to the Bessie Bench.

The Road House there was the turning point, where the teams would pass round a pole at which was stationed a guard; and the collection of buildings which marked the end of half of the course looked distant indeed to the five young mushers who with their teams had now become, to the watchers in Nome, merely small moving black specks against the whiteness of the snow.

George and Dan had discussed the matter fully in the preceding days, and had decided that, like "Scotty," they would do all of the real driving on the way home. So it was not at all disconcerting, some time before they reached the turn, to meet two of the teams coming back. The third, Jim's, had been diverted at the Road House by a large family of small pigs in an enclosure surrounded by wire netting; and Jim's most alluring promises and his direst threats were both unavailing against the charms of the squealing, grunting creatures, the like of which his spellbound chargers had never seen before.

Dan was several hundred feet ahead of George, and the latter could but look with some misgivings at the even pace of Judge, Jimmie and Pete; a pace that as yet showed no sign of weakening. Of course should Mego's pups prove faster than his own team, he would loyally give all credit due the driver and dogs; but it would be a bitter disappointment indeed if Spot did not manifest the wonderful speed that Matt had always predicted for him, and if there was no evidence in superior ability, of the long hours of careful attention that George had devoted to his education as a leader.

When Dan's team finally rounded the pole, and was headed toward him, George realized that the work of Mego's sons evinced not only mechanical precision, but the intelligence of their breeding, and the advantages of their early training by "Scotty." Dan would indeed, as he had boasted, "give them a run for their money."

"*Mush*, Spot, Queen, Baldy," and there was a slight increase in briskness, which was checked again as they swung by the guard.

"Now then, Spot," and George gave a peculiar shrill whistle that to the dog meant "Full Speed Ahead."

He watched the distance between himself and Dan decrease slowly at first; then more rapidly until they were abreast of one another. True to their compact they did not speak, and the inclination of Spot to stop for the usual visit beside his stable mates received no encouragement. Instead he got a stern command to "Hike, and hike *quick!*"

Beyond were the other teams, almost together, and to George it seemed as if he barely crept toward Bob and Bill; though there was a steady gain to the point where he could call out for the right of way to pass--a privilege the driver of the faster team can demand.

But just behind him came Dan, whose dogs now felt the inspiration of the stiff gait set them by their friends; and both boys knew that from now on the race was between them alone.

George was more experienced in handling dogs, but Dan's dogs were easier to handle. It was narrowing down to a question of the skill of the driver on one side, pitted against the excellence of the dogs on the other. Unless, indeed, Spot, Queen or Baldy should rise to the occasion in some unexpected manner; or the Luck of the Trail, that the Woman believed was so potent a factor, should enter into the contest.

They were approaching the last quarter of the course, where the road from Monroeville crossed the trail diagonally. George glanced back and saw that he would have to travel faster still to shake off Dan's tireless "Pupmobile."

For a moment he wondered despairingly why he had been so short-sighted as to choose three unknown quantities in such an important event, leaving to Dan those whose worth was a foregone conclusion. Then his sporting blood rose. If no one ever attempted anything new, it would be a pretty slow old world. And if he had not the courage to try Spot out, his pet might remain an ordinary, commonplace dog to the end of his days; a condition that would be intolerable to George. Then, too, it would have been a disappointment to Ben if Baldy could not have entered; and Ben's feelings were now of much consequence to George and Danny, as they had admitted him, a third member, to their exclusive secret society, "The Ancient and Honorable Order of Bow-Wow Wonder Workers." Better defeat than a fair chance not taken; and so, at such thoughts he was cheered and again whistled to Spot to "Speed Up."

But just at that instant there came, down the Monroeville Road, and around the base of a small rise of ground, a Native hunter over whose shoulder was hung a dozen or more ptarmigan, the grouse of the North. Spot paused instantly, and seemed petrified in an attitude which his distant grandsires, old in field work, might have envied for its perfect immobility. The fact that the birds were dead and on a string meant nothing to his untutored mind. They were birds, and as such were worthy of a close and careful inspection.

Simultaneously Queen's hatred of Eskimos received an impetus; and joined by the now aroused Spot, she started off the trail toward the unconscious cause of her deep-seated antipathy.

"A double-ender," groaned George; "dead birds, and an Eskimo. Spot and Queen won't show up till everything's over but the shoutin'. I'll just about tie for fourth place if Jim gets his pups away from the pigs about the time Queen finishes with the hunter."

But tug as desperately as they might, neither Spot nor Queen succeeded in pulling the sled more than a few feet; for added to George's weight on the brake, Baldy, calm and immovable, was braced against the efforts of the other two.

Spot's ungainly feet pawed the snow impatiently, as he strained in his collar stretching the tow-line so taut that George feared it might snap. Equally unavailing were Queen's sudden leaps and frantic plunges. The more they struggled, the more firmly Baldy held to the trail.

At last George's stern reproofs, and a certain reasonableness in Spot that prompted him to accept the inevitable gracefully, combined to end the disturbance. Besides, the birds did not run nor fly, so they were not much fun anyway.

Not for Queen, however, was any such placid acceptance of defeat. Balked of her expected prey, she turned fiercely against her wheel-mate, whom she rightly considered responsible for her inability to bolt; and after one or two efforts, she fastened her teeth in his ear, leaving a small wound from which the blood trickled, staining his collar and shoulder. George expected Baldy to retaliate, but instead the dog ignored the attack and still held his ground with a determination that even Queen recognized, and to which she finally submitted unwillingly.

But in the time it took to adjust their difficulties, Dan caught up with them, and together the two teams dashed down the trail, neck and neck.

Dan longed to shout some facetious criticisms of the behavior he had just witnessed, but a certain sympathy for his rival, who was also his friend, restrained him; as well as the desire to conserve every atom of energy he possessed, even to saving his breath.

For a few hundred yards there was no perceptible difference in their positions; then gradually the Mego Pups pulled away and took the lead by a small margin.

Nose to the back of Dan's sled came Spot, and so they sped on and on till the bridge and high bank of Dry Creek came into view, as well as the moving dark objects that the boys knew to be the crowds awaiting their return.

George, desperately anxious to try the signal that would urge his leader to his utmost, waited till they reached the top of a slight incline. Then the whistle sounded low, but clear. Spot leaped forward, and Queen and Baldy were no laggards in his wake.

Once more they were abreast of the "houn' dogs," and once more the tried and untried of the same Kennel raced side by side, with even chances of victory.

Then again came the Luck of the Trail; and Fate that had sent dead birds as a temptation now sent a live cat as an inspiration. It was black and sleek and swift, and fairly flew from a clump of willows by the wayside, up the trail toward a cabin on the edge of town; and after it flew Spot, all eagerness for the chase.

Dan's team, as indifferent to the fascination of swift, sleek cats as only dogs of "Scotty's" training could be, were pursuing the even tenor of their way in no wise excited by the episode.

When the cat darted out of sight to safety George's dogs were almost at the starting point and the crowds had hurried to meet them; keeping free only a narrow passage down which they dashed with unabated speed. For while they were tired, and home and rest were near, the cheers and applause of the people egged them on till they crossed the line, where George was greeted as Winner of the First Annual, Juvenile Race of Nome.

He had covered the course of seven miles in thirty minutes and six seconds, while two minutes behind came Dan, just in time to offer loyal homage on the altar of friendship and success. There was a warm clasp of the hand, and a sincere if brief tribute. "You are some swell racer, George," and, as one making a vow, "you can bet I'll never throw rocks at another black cat so long as I live."

Shortly Bob and Bill arrived, well pleased that they were so close to the Victor---but there was no sign of Jim; whereupon Mr. Kelly delivered himself of a scathing comment. "I guess next time Jim 'd better enter the High School Girls' Handicap; these real races ain't any place for him."

The presentation of the tiny Trophy Cup was a formal function. George, held up in the Judge's arms that he might be seen as he received it, was filled not only with present pride, but also with an inward determination to devote the rest of his existence to the high calling of dog racing; with perhaps an occasional descent into the lower realms of school affairs and business, as a concession to the wishes of his parents and in deference to their age and old-fashioned ideas.

His happiness in the accomplishment of his dogs was complete. His hard work in their training had been fully repaid; for Spot had not only proved his cleverness as a leader, but Queen had been no worse than he had anticipated, and Baldy had faithfully performed his duty as a wheeler in keeping the trail when it was most necessary.

It was a triumph worth while for the boy and the team.

That night at a full meeting of the "Bow-Wow Wonder Workers," the exciting affairs of the day were discussed at length.

Dan announced that he could recommend the Mego Pups to "Scotty" without a single unfavorable criticism. If there had been any weakness, it was, he admitted freely, in his driving. "I don't seem to put the ginger into 'em the way George does at the finish. But I guess he takes it from his father; and my dad," regretfully, "never drove anything better 'n horses in his whole life. Then there was that black cat, too."

Ben Edwards, with his arm around Baldy's neck, listened with delight as the minute details of the race were given by those who knew whereof they spoke. He was proud indeed when George told how Baldy had steadfastly held out against the efforts of Spot and Queen to bolt; and of the dog's stoical indifference to the bitten ear, which was, fortunately, only slightly torn.

"I guess, Ben, that Baldy'll be somethin' like old Dubby. You can count on him doin' the right thing every time. He'll pull 'most as strong as McMillan, and he sure was good not to chew Queen up, the way she tackled him. But I don't know," judicially, "that we can make a real racer of him. He don't seem to have just the racin' spirit. He ain't keen for it, like Spot. But he's a bully all 'round dog, just the same."

"Mebbe it's cause he don't understand the game," answered Ben loyally. "Moose Jones allers said that Baldy had plenty o' spirit; an' I kinda think he's like the ship she was tellin' us about the other day. He ain't really found himself yet."

The Woman, perfectly unconscious that she was penetrating into a serious and secret Conclave of an Ancient and Honorable Order, came into the Kennel with the evening paper.

It contained an article complimenting George upon his skill in managing a difficult team, and upon introducing Spot, an infant prodigy, to the racing world of the North. Then it announced, in a delicate vein of sarcasm, that one of the wheel dogs had been the most recent notable addition to the Allan and Darling Kennel---Baldy, late of Golconda, now of Nome, "a likely Sweepstakes Winner." At which the Woman had sniffed audibly, and "Scotty" had chuckled amiably. But Ben Edwards crept that night into his hard cot with the paper tightly clasped in his grimy hand, to dream of Baldy's future triumphs.

[Illustration]

V

The Woman, The Racers, and Others

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER V

THE WOMAN, THE RACERS, AND OTHERS

Even after the boys' race, when George and Dan often singled him out for special use, and the joy of a run with Ben Edwards was almost an inevitable part of the day's program, there were still a number of matters that were distinctly trying to Baldy.

He could not, for one thing, quite figure out the Woman, nor reconcile himself to her constant presence and aimless wanderings about the place.

When "Scotty" and Matt, or even Danny and George came in, it was for some evident purpose; when the boy appeared, it was to see him exclusively, but it was different with her.

She apparently loved all of the dogs, but she had no idea of discipline, and casually suggested all sorts of foolish and revolutionary privileges for them that would have meant ruin in no time.

She held the tiniest puppies in her lap when she should have known it was not good for them, spent hours playing with the young dogs with no attempt at training; and he could not forget that she had tried, the first day he had ever met her, to drag him ignominiously into her sled.

Even Ben's evident friendliness toward her did not overcome Baldy's disapproval, though he frequently went with them for long walks which would have been far more agreeable could he have been with the boy alone. She quite monopolized his chum, talking so earnestly that the dog was almost ignored, and could only trot along with the consolation that Ben shared was better than Ben absent.

Then, too, she was not in the least discriminating, and told Tom, who perhaps had as many faults as any member of the team, that he had an "angel face"; spoke of Dick and Harry, clever imitators of their brother's misdeeds, as "The Heavenly Twins"; and alluded to Irish and Rover, gentle Irish Setters, as "Red Devils," which was so rankly unjust that Baldy, who knew not automobiles, was amazed at her stupidity. To Baldy the word "Devil" had an evil sound, for when he had heard it at Golconda it was generally associated with a kick or a blow. She even ostentatiously walked past the chained dogs sometimes, carrying fluffy Jimmie Gibson, the baby blue fox from the Kobuk, which was tantalizing to a degree. But when she let Jack McMillan put his paws on her shoulders, and lay his big head against her cheek, calling him a "perfect lamb" or a "poor dear martyr," in a tone that betrayed affectionate sympathy, Baldy turned away in disgust.

As a matter of fact these attentions and endearments were exceedingly unwise, for they were invariably directed toward the very dogs who were most apt to over-value physical charm and ingratiating tricks of manner.

But there was one thing more objectionable still that could be laid at her door---she was constantly lowering the general tone of the Kennel.

The stables where the Racers were kept gave shelter, also, to a few others whose merits warranted their sharing in the special care bestowed upon the fleet-footed Sweepstakes Winners. The latter all carried themselves with a conscious dignity that befitted their fame and aspirations; but gradually Baldy noticed that through the Woman there were being introduced a number of ordinary strangers who made use of the place, and were housed and fed, till it began to look like a transient dog hotel.

She brought them because they were tired and hungry, lame, halt or blind; or worse still, just because they "seemed to like her." No reason was too trivial, no dog too worthless. Matt shamelessly upheld her, "Scotty" submitted, while Baldy sulkily glowered at these encumbrances who were more fit for the pound than the Allan and Darling Racing Stables. For Baldy had but one criterion; that of efficiency as the result of honest endeavor. And it was indeed a trial for a conscientious plodder to see the ease with which idle canines possessed themselves of the comforts and privileges that by right belong alone to those whose industry has earned them.

Had Baldy been a French Poodle, with little tufts of hair cut in circles round his ankles, and a kinky lock tied with a splashing bow over his eyes, he would probably, with delicate disdain, have thought of her as lacking in "esprit de corps." As it was, being but a blunt Alaskan, he growled rather sullenly when she came too near, and considered that she had no more dog-pride than an Eskimo; and Baldy's contempt for her could suggest no more scathing comparison.

There was no jealousy in his objections, for he now fairly gloried in the sensation that Kid, Irish or McMillan created when they were in the lead; and as the two latter at least were dogs that were coldly indifferent to him, this was surely a test of his unselfishness.

He was perfectly willing, also, to welcome "classy" dogs, as George and Dan called them, like Stefansson, Lipton, or dainty Margaret Winston, from Kentucky. He even understood there were dogs, neither Workers nor Racers, who had gained a kind of popular distinction that was recognized by both the human and canine population of the City; and while it was impossible for him to comprehend the *reason*, he accepted the *fact* philosophically.

There was, for instance, Oolik Lomen, who was born on Amundsen's ship the "Gjoa" when on the voyage that resulted in the discovery of the Northwest Passage. Possibly on account of his celebrated birthplace, or because of his unusual appearance, Oolik was haughty to the verge of insolence; and to Baldy he represented the culmination of all the charming but useless graces of the idle rich. He did nothing but lie on the Lomen porch on a soft rug, or wander about with a doll in his mouth, much as a certain type of woman lolls through life carrying a lap dog.

Then there was the tramp Nomie, the pet of the Miners' Union, and the Fire Department. This fox terrier was a constant attendant at all important affairs of the town---social or political---at parades, christenings, weddings, and even funerals. At concerts or at the theatre he walked out upon the stage, and waited quietly near the wings till the program was finished. He went to church quite regularly, but was non-sectarian, and was just as apt to appear at the Eskimo Mission Chapel as at St. Mary's when the Bishop preached.

Rarely did he fail to be at all Council Meetings, informal receptions, and formal balls. At these he was untiring, and would select a couple for each dance and follow them through the mazes of the waltz and one-step with great dexterity; visiting between times with his many acquaintances.

The knowledge that Nomie assisted at every fire, and at all of the drills of the Life Saving Crew on the beach made Baldy feel that these social diversions were only an outlet for abundant vitality, since there were not fires and wrecks enough to keep him busy; and a poor little fox terrier, no matter *how* ambitious, is debarred by his size from the noble sport of racing, or the more prosaic business career of freighting.

So it really seemed, on the whole, that Baldy was exceedingly liberal in his estimate of dogs in general. And it was only his desire for a high standard in his own Kennel that prompted his aversion to those waifs and strays that she collected; who, of no possible use, were neither professional beauties like Oolik, nor society favorites like Nomie, and so really had no claim to any sort of recognition.

Neither did Baldy, because of his new associations and ambitions, gauge his opinions of all dogs by racing tests alone. He still believed implicitly in the dignity of labor; and his early residence amongst freighters had enabled him to recognize the fact that endurance and good common dog-sense are often of more value, even in a racing team, than speed and mere pride of carriage.

In the occasional intervals when no feminine presence upset the calm and system of his surroundings, there were periods when Baldy watched intently the habits and characteristics of the other dogs, and tried to fit himself to become a candidate for the Racing Team.

In this he was assisted by the boy, who was just as carefully studying Allan's methods with his dogs, and putting them in practice every time he took Baldy out for exercise. One was as eager for improvement as the other, and "Scotty" and the Woman often remarked the unflinching energy both displayed toward that end.

"Too bad that Ben's efforts are wasted on a dog that will never be much to boast of, at best. He has strength and patience, but that is about all. I believe, like George, that he lacks spirit."

Of course there had been no dramatic incidents in his life like those of Jack McMillan's; he was no paragon like Kid; nor had he manifested the marvelous intelligence of old Dubby. But on the other hand, there was really nothing tangible so far in his career to make her feel that he was incapable of development.

"You're wrong about Baldy," said "Scotty" thoughtfully. "I have been watching him ever since the Juvenile Race; and he has certain latent qualities that will make a good general utility dog of him for even a racing team. He may not prove a leader, but he's dependable, not apt to lose his head and stampede, as do some of the more spirited ones. He'll do his modest part yet, in a big event."

"Well, you'll have to show me," exclaimed the Woman, whose speech was now and then tinged unconsciously by her close fellowship with the Wonder Workers.

Even Dubby's favorable notice was now frequently attracted toward Baldy; and the fact that he was aspiring to belong to the Racing Team was mitigated to a certain extent in the venerable huskie's sight by a puppy-hood spent amongst the working classes. He was not born to an exalted position, a natural aristocrat, like Tom, Dick or Harry; and would not, as did they, glory in it ostentatiously. But if it came, he would accept it with a solemn sense of obligation to do his best anywhere it pleased his master to place him.

Unlike the Tolman brothers, McMillan, Irish and Rover, he did not curry favor by the happy accident of birth, beauty, or personal magnetism; and so Dubby began to bestow upon Baldy, for his modesty and industry, an approbation not accorded by him to many of the others in the Kennel. And Dubby's opinion of a new dog was worth much, for "Scotty" Allan himself respected the experience and sagacity that governed it.

Possessed of the colorings and markings of his wolf forbears, as well as their keen instinct in trail emergencies, Dubby combined with this the faithful, loving nature of the dog branch of the family.

In his merest infancy he had given promise of unusual ability--a promise more than fulfilled.

When hardly more than three months old he had learned the orders "Gee," "Haw," "Mush" and "Whoa" perfectly. And he was beginning to think a little for himself when the rest of the litter were still undecided whether "Gee" meant to turn to the right paw side, or the left paw side; and were hardly convinced that "Mush" was "Go on" and not a terse invitation to breakfast.

His later accomplishments were many. He could pick up an uncertain trail when concealed by three feet of soft, freshly fallen snow; he could tell if ice was thick enough to carry the weight of a loaded sled, when the most seasoned trailsman was deceived, and he could scent a camp for four or five miles with the wind in the right direction. Never but once in his life had he been known to take the wrong route to a given point. Then he mistook the faint glimmer of Venus, as she dimly showed above the dark horizon, for the lantern on the ridge-pole of a road house; which was poetic, but misleading, and proves that even dogs can come to grief through too much star gazing.

He was always driven "loose" on the rare and gala occasions when, at his own plainly expressed desire, he was placed again in temporary service. With that liberty he made it his business to see that no dog was shirking. A glance at a slack strap was enough to betray the idler; and an admonishing nip on the culprit's ear or flank was the cause of a reformation that was sudden and abject for a while at least.

The only punishment that had ever been meted out to Dubby for some indiscretion, or an act of insubordination, was to hitch him up with the rest of the team. There were no depths of humiliation greater, no shame more poignant, and for days after such an ordeal he would show a brooding melancholy that almost made the Woman weep in sympathy.

Now, pensioned and retired, with a record of over thirty thousand miles in harness to his credit, he lived a delightful and exclusive existence in his own apartments over the barn.

As he had taken Baldy into his favor, so too he included Ben in his rather limited list of favorites; and the boy never wearied of hearing from "Scotty" and the Woman their many tales of the huskie's remarkable achievements.

"Even if he ain't a Racer," was the child's admiring assertion, "everybody in the whole North knows Dub, and what he's done. I hope," wistfully, "that some day people'll speak o' Baldy jest like that."

"You can hardly expect that, Ben! Think of the hundreds and hundreds of good dogs that are never known outside of their own kennels. Baldy is obedient and willing, but it takes something extraordinary, really brilliant, or dramatic, to give a dog more than a local reputation. Of course there are a few, but very few, who have won such distinction. John Johnson's Blue Eyed Kolma was a wonder for his docile disposition and staying qualities. You can't match our Kid for all round good work, nor Irish for speed. And Jack McMillan---"

"I don't believe I'd specify McMillan's claims to fame, or shall we say notoriety," observed "Scotty," with a twinkle in his eye. "Then," he resumed, "there were Morte Atkinson's Blue Leaders, that Percy Blatchford drove in the second big race. When we met at Last Chance on the way back, Blatchford nearly cried when he told me how those setters had saved his hands from freezing. He had turned them loose to rest and run behind at will, knowing they would catch up at the next stop. In some way he had dropped the fur gloves he wore over his mittens, when he took them off to adjust a sled pack, and did not miss them for some time, until he ran into a fierce blizzard. Of course he could not go back for them, and he feared his hands would become useless from the cold. He was in a pretty bad fix, when up came the Blue Leaders, almost exhausted, but each with a glove in his mouth."

"Oh, that was fine," murmured Ben.

"Give me bird-dog stock every time," continued Allan, "with a native strain for strength and trail instincts. It's a combination that makes our Alaskans just about right, to my idea."

"Naturally I feel that our half-breeds are best, too. But I do wish," regretfully, "that they could all be the same sort of half-breeds---to make them more uniform as to size and style. With Kid and Spot part pointer, Irish and Rover part setter, Jack McMillan verging on the mastiff, and all the rest of them part something else, don't you think it looks the least little bit as if we had picked them up at a remnant sale?"

She caught sight of "Scotty's" face, full of shocked surprise.

"Don't say it," she exclaimed quickly; "both Ben and I know perfectly well that 'handsome is as handsome does.' I learned it in my copy-book, ages and ages ago. And it's true that they are the greatest dogs in all the world, but they don't quite look it. Of course the year you won with Berger's 'Brutes,' with that awkward, high-shouldered native, Mukluk, in the lead, I learned that looks do not go very far in Arctic racing. But certainly Fink's 'Prides' in their gay trappings of scarlet and gold did seem more to suit the role of Winners when Hegness came in victorious with them in the first race."

"At that, the 'Brutes' were the best dogs, and if it had not been for our delay of eighteen hours at Brown's Road House, where all of the teams had to lay up because of a howling gale, I am not at all sure that the 'Prides' would not have lost

out to the 'Brutes' in that race too."

"That must have been a strange night. I know after that every one called Brown's 'The House of a Thousand Bow Wows.' How many were there?"

"Let me see; there were fifty-four racing dogs, thirty-five freighters, twenty-six belonging to the mail carriers, ten or twelve to casual mushers, and I think about the same number to Eskimo trappers. And all---men and dogs---in the one room, which, fortunately, was of pretty good size."

"Scotty" laughed heartily at the remembrance. "We, who were driving the Racing Teams, had put our leaders to bed in the few bunks there were; for we could not afford to take any chances of our leaders scrapping in such close quarters, and possibly being put out of commission. But an Outsider, a government official, I think, who was on his way to Nome as a passenger with the Mail Team, was pretty sore about it. Said 'it was a deuce of a country where the dogs slept in beds and the men on the floor.'"

"How perfectly ridiculous," said the Woman indignantly. "You might know he was not an Alaskan. He was as bad as that squaw who wouldn't give you her mukluks."

"What was that, Mr. Allan?" questioned the boy, eagerly.

"I'm afraid, Ben, that some of these incidents look a little high-handed, as though everything was allowable in a race, regardless of other people's rights; but they really don't happen often. This time I tore one of my water boots on a stump going through the trees by Council. At a near-by cabin I tried to buy a pair of mukluks a native woman had on, as I saw they were about the size I needed. She refused to sell, though I offered her three times their value. There was no time to argue, nor persuade, so finally in desperation her Eskimo husband and I took them off her feet, though she kicked vigorously. It saved the day for me, but it seemed a bit ungallant."

"It served her right for not being as good a sport as most of the Eskimos. And anyway, every one on Seward Peninsula, of any nationality, is supposed to know that whatever a driver or his dogs need, in the All Alaska Sweepstakes, should be his without a dissenting voice or a rebellious foot."

"Moose Jones used to say," quoted Ben rather timidly, "that most Malamutes are stubborn. Was the leader you spoke of, Mukluk, stubborn too, in the race you won with him?"

"Yes, he was stubborn, all right. Do you recall," turning to the Woman, "the night I made him go 'round one corner for half an hour because he refused to take the order the first time, and I was afraid of that trait in him. It did not take long, however, to show him that I could spend just as much time making him obey as he could spend defying me. There's no use in whipping a dog like that. And with all his obstinacy, he was, next to old Dubby, more capable of keeping a trail in a storm than any dog I've ever handled. He had pads^[2] of leather, and sinews of steel. He was surely shy on beauty, though."

[Footnote 2: Feet.]

"Of course," her voice dropping to almost a whisper, "I would not admit this anywhere but right here, in the privacy of the Kennel, and I wouldn't say it here if the dogs could understand; but when it comes to actual good looks, 'Scotty,'" the Woman confessed, "we are really not in it with Bobby Brown's big, imposing Loping Malamutes, or Captain Crimin's cunning little Siberians, with their pointed noses, prick ears, and fluffy tails curled up over their backs like plumes."

"Yes, they do make a most attractive team," admitted Allan justly; "and they're mighty good dogs too. But somehow they seem to lack the pride and responsiveness that I find in those with bird-dog ancestry. Of course each man prefers his own type, the one he has deliberately chosen; and Fox Ramsay, and John or Charlie Johnson are convinced that the tireless gait of their 'Russian Rats' in racing more than offsets the sudden bursts of great speed of our 'Daddy Long Legs.'"

[Illustration: *A team of Siberians*]

The Woman shrugged her shoulders. "Let us hope for the sake of the sport that the matter will not be definitely decided for some time to come. If, as Mark Twain says, 'it is a difference of opinion that makes horse racing,' it seems to me it's about the widest possible difference of opinion that makes dog racing; and each year's races have made the difference more hopelessly pronounced."

"Well, there'll always be disagreements as to the merits of the various racing dogs; but for a good all around intelligent and faithful worker, I have never found a dog that could outdo Dubby here," and "Scotty" affectionately caressed the old huskie who had come into the Kennel with his friend Texas Allan, the cat, to find out what was interfering with an expected walk.

"Sometimes Dub and I used to have disputes about a choice of roads, the thickness of ice, or other details of traveling; but I will say that he always listened tolerantly to all I had to offer in the way of suggestions, and wagged his tail courteously to show there was no ill feeling, even if he did get his way in the end. And, frankly, he was generally right."

Which was, of course, only natural; for "Scotty" was, after all, only human, while Dubby had the eyes, ears, and nose of his wolf forbears.

Dubby was a licensed character indeed, but Baldy realized, as did the others, that his freedom was a reward of merit.

That he might not feel that his days of usefulness were over, he had been given the honorary position of Keeper of the Kennel Meat; and much of his life was now spent dozing peacefully before the meat-room door, though he was ever ready to resent a covetous glance from unduly curious dogs.

To be sure, there were besides the dignity and responsibility of his high office certain perquisites that he thoroughly enjoyed--one of which was the hospitality that was his to dispense.

He often invited old team-mates, or pitifully hungry puppies into his quarters, where he would treat them to dog biscuit, dried fish, or a drink of fresh water; but he never abused his privileges, and it was only the worthy or helpless that appealed successfully to his charity.

His ample leisure now permitted also the cultivation of certain refined tastes which had been dormant in his busy youth. He taught Fritz, the house dog, whose only method of expression heretofore had been an ear-piercing bark, to howl in a clear, high tenor, with wonderfully sustained notes; so that together they would sit on the stable runway and wail duets happily for hours at a time.

For his many virtues and great ability, as well as for these lighter accomplishments, Baldy conceived an admiration for Dubby that would have been boundless but for one weakness that was absolutely incomprehensible--the huskie's devotion to the cat, Texas.

It was a strange friendship in a place where a cat's right to live at all is contested every hour of the day, and where nine times nine lives would not cover a span of more than a few months at the most, as a rule. It had begun when Texas was little more than a kitten, and had wandered away one day from the warm kitchen fire, out into the shed, and from there into the street.

Delighted with her unaccustomed freedom, she chased a bit of whirling, eddying paper across a strip of snow, into the angle of a cabin; then turning, gazed into the face of a big, ferocious dog who was already licking his chops suggestively.

Since the prey was safely cornered, he generously decided to share the anticipated excitement with some boon companions. And so, giving three short, sharp cries and repeating the call several times, he was joined by two other malamutes who, eager for the fun of killing a cat, drew in close beside him.

It had all happened in a moment; but in that moment Dubby, out for exercise, came upon the scene. He was no lover of cats, be it understood; and he had often been guilty of making short work of one if it chanced to cross his path when he was in quest of adventure. But this was the Allan cat. He had often seen the girls carry it about in their arms; and while it seemed a strange perversion to caress a kitten when there were puppies about, or even babies, still the peculiarities of your Master's Family must be respected. Even, if necessary, to the extreme limit of defending their pet cats.

Then, too, there was something that had appealed to him in the plucky stand of the terrified little creature. Eyes dilated with fear, every hair on end, sputtering and spitting, she had unsheathed her tiny claws and was prepared to make a brave fight for her life. The chances were hopelessly against her---the dogs did not intend to let her run---and Dubby felt that it was butchery, not sport.

Also, if Texas was hurt, the girls would be sad, and cry, and not play for a long time. He knew, because that happened when their terrier Tige was run over. And so, with one bound, he jumped upon the instigator of the trouble, and caught him by the shoulder with his still strong, sharp teeth. The other dogs wheeled in surprise; and in an instant there was a battle as bloody as it was short and decisive. Dubby was a marvelous tactician---the others only novices, and in a very brief period there were three well-minced malamutes who limped disconsolately in different directions; leaving a conquering hero on the field, with the spoils of war---a ruffled gray kitten in a shivering state of uncertainty as to her ultimate fate, but too weak to make any further defense.

Dubby picked her up in his mouth, and carried her back to the house, where he carefully deposited her inside the shed, and waited until some one answered his scratches on the door.

It marked the beginning of a companionship that lasted for years. Every fine afternoon Dubby would take Texas out for a stroll; and even after she was a huge seventeen pound cat, well able to hold her own, it was a reckless dog indeed that showed any hostility toward Texas when Dub was her body-guard.

One readily comprehends that he might graciously accept her gratitude; but, as the French Poodle's People say, "Noblesse Oblige," and it certainly seemed unnecessary that a dog of his achievement should flaunt his affection for a mere cat in the eyes of the whole world.

While this caused strong disapproval in all canine circles, strangely enough it apparently made no difference in his standing with men and women. Mr. Fink, in his exalted position as President of the Nome Kennel Club, and one of the most brilliant lawyers in Alaska besides, always raised his hat to Dubby when they met, as a greeting from one keen mind to another; for the man had watched the skill of the dog on the trail, and knew that it was unsurpassed in the whole North. "Scotty" Allan never failed to give every evidence of his sincere regard, and the Woman had even perpetuated the undesirable association by having Dubby's picture taken with Texas when they were out on one of their daily

promenades.

And so, admired by men and feared by dogs, the faithful huskie was singularly exempt from the tragedies of a neglected, forlorn old age.

Ben regarded Dubby with admiring interest; and pondering for a while on all that he had heard said, finally, "Do you think, Mr. Allan, you'll ever find any one dog that kin race like Kid and be as smart on the trail as Dub?" In his eagerness he did not wait for the reply. "Don't you s'pose if a dog's really good t' begin with, an' some one that loves him lots learns him all the things a' racin' dog's got t' know, that he'd turn out so wonderful that everybody in Alaska 'ud know how great he was---mebbe everybody in the world?"

The Woman smiled. "Have you any one in mind, Ben?"

"Yes, ma'am, no, ma'am; I was only thinkin'," he stammered as he earnestly listened for "Scotty's" answer.

"I would not be surprised if such a thing *could* happen, Sonny. You know pretty nearly all good things are possible to good dogs---and good boys."

And deep in his heart the boy vowed that he and Baldy would begin the very next day to show what can be accomplished by those who, loving much, serve faithfully. [Illustration]

VI

To Visit Those in Affliction

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER VI

TO VISIT THOSE IN AFFLICTION

"We got t' change these rules someway, George. There ain't a thing in 'em 'bout visitin' the sick an' dyin'. There's somethin' 'bout not usin' sick dogs, I remember, but that's all there is 'bout sickness; and that won't hardly do."

George considered the matter carefully as he read over the "Rules and Regerlations of the Anshent and Honroble Order of Bow-Wow Wonder Workers" in his hand. They were rather blotted, and decidedly grimy; but it was perfectly clear, as Dan had announced, there was nothing in them that suggested the duty of ministering to those in distress.

The Order had met that afternoon to decide upon the proper thing to be done in the case of Ben Edwards, who had been ill for two days with a severe cold, and absent from school.

With a sincere desire to emulate other Orders more Ancient than theirs, if not more Honorable, they felt that a fraternal call upon their suffering member was necessary.

"We ought t' take him somethin' to eat an' read," remarked George; "like Dad always does when he goes t' the Hospital t' see Masons, or Elks, or any of 'em that's broke their legs or arms in shafts, or fallin' off dredges an' things."

"It's all right t' take him eatables; but don't let's take him any stuff to read. It might make him worse. It's bad enough bein' sick, without havin' some readin' shoved onto you, too."

Dan, who was the Treasurer of the Wonder Workers, as well as holding other important offices, brought forth a can from under the hay in the corner of Spot's stall.

"We better see how much money we got before we talk 'bout what we'll take him."

"If there's enough, Dan, don't you think an ice-cream cone 'ud be fine; or do you think he'd ruther have some peanuts an' pop-corn?"

"Peanuts an' pop-corn's all right, or maybe some candy an' gum. You see if he can't eat the ice-cream it 'ud melt right away an' wouldn't be any good t' anybody. But the other stuff 'ud last, an' if he's too bad t' eat it, he could always give it to his mother, or some of his friends."

They carefully counted the thirty-five cents in the Treasury, and were deep in a financial debate when the Woman's voice broke in upon their important discussion.

"Hello, boys, where are you?"

"We never seem to be able to get any place that some one don't butt in on us," groaned Dan. "I'll bet if we went out on an ice hummock on Bering Sea that some Eskimo tom-cod fisher 'ud show up beside us t' fish through a hole in the ice. What do you s'pose she wants now?"

"I don't know, Dan. But let's tell her about Ben, and maybe she'll want t' take him the things t' eat, an' we can keep the thirty-five cents till he's well an' can help spend it some way he'd like better. P'raps on somethin' for the dogs."

"I was just coming to ask for him," she said when informed of Ben's illness. "I have missed him the last day or so, and wondered what was the matter."

Then, "Let's give him a party," she exclaimed quickly. "A cold isn't serious, and a party would cheer him up. Besides, I have been wanting to see Mrs. Edwards for a long time, and this is a good chance for a chat about the boy. And we'll invite Baldy too." She took some money out of her purse, and handed it to George. "You can both run downtown and get whatever boys like, and I'll go for a cake I have at home, and meet you here in fifteen minutes."

When they at last started for the Edwards house the boys felt that their modest mission of mercy had developed into quite a festive occasion. Their purchases ranged from dill pickles through ginger snaps to chocolate creams; while the Woman carried jellies and preserves and all sorts of dainties that inspired Dan with a sudden belief, confided to George, that invalidism, unmixed with literature, was not so much to be dreaded as he had always fancied.

"Depends on whether you get castor-oil or cake," was the pessimistic reply of one who had gone through bitter experiences along those lines. "This just shows what belongin' t' orders does for you, Dan. If Ben wasn't a member o' the Bow Wows, I'll bet he could 'a' died an' hardly any one would 'a' known it but his mother. An' now he's havin' a party give to him 'cause our Society kinda hinted to her what we was plannin' when she showed up." And for once an approving glance was cast toward the Woman.

"When I'm old enough," decided Dan, "I'm goin' t' belong t' everything. You can wear feathers an' gold braid in processions, an' have stuff like this when you're sick, an' bully funerals with brass bands when you're dead."

"Me too," agreed George heartily.

As they turned the corner into Second Avenue, a short distance from the Edwards cabin, an adventure befell them which was fully covered by Rule Seven of the "Rules and Regerlations" of their Order: "To help thoes in Trubble." It came at the very end, just next the important one which forbade any hint of sharp practice in dog trading; and had been added after they had listened to the Woman's story about King Arthur and his Knights.

"Just 'cause it's a dog man's order we needn't stop tryin' t' do things for people," George had announced when Rule Seven was being considered. And the others had felt, too, that their association with good dogs should make them more tolerant of human weakness and imperfection.

Down the street came a tiny Mother with a cherished doll-baby in its go-cart, out for an airing; and down the street, too, came Oolik Lomen, who had wandered away from his rug on the porch in search of diversion. He had mislaid his rubber doll, there was nothing to play with, and he was decidedly bored; when his covetous eyes fell upon the golden-haired infant, whose waxen beauty was most tempting.

The piratical instinct that was, perhaps, an inheritance, took possession of him completely; and with a rush he overturned the carriage, grabbing its occupant, and dashing away full speed toward the Lomen home.

The shocked parent, seeing her child snatched from her loving care so ruthlessly, broke into cries of distress. And the Wonder Workers, who were so solemnly pledged "To help thoes in Trubble," unceremoniously bestowed their various bundles upon the Woman, and started in pursuit.

Baldy, who had been quietly following, also joined in the chase---for he had watched the entire proceeding with disapproving eyes, and was only waiting for a little encouragement to help administer the punishment that Oolik so richly merited.

But that proud descendant of Viking Dogs, once behind his own fence, ostentatiously dragged the stolen one by a leg into a corner; and, seated in front of his victim, growled defiance in the very faces of the brave Knights who were attempting the rescue.

"George, you take the doll when I sic Baldy onto Oolik, and give it to the kid, an' come back quick. Believe me, it's goin' t' be a scrap worth seem' when those two dogs really get woke up to' it. I'll bet Baldy is pretty keen in a row if he thinks he's right; an' even if Oolik is too good lookin', you know Amundsen said his mother was the best dog he ever had, an' that's goin' some for a man like him."

Before the plans for the combat could be completed, however, Helen Lomen came out, overcome with regret for the tragedy, to lead Oolik into the house in disgrace. She was anxious to make restitution for any damage; but a close examination revealed the fact that there was no wound that a bit of glue would not easily cure, and the only real hurt was that given to the feelings of insulted motherhood.

The Woman was visibly relieved at the turn affairs had taken; for she had a purely feminine dread of dog fights, and had frequently stopped some that would have been of most thrilling interest in deciding certain important questions.

In an undertone the boys spoke of the vagaries of the gentler sex, and frankly admitted "they were sure hard t' understand," while the Woman tried unsuccessfully to make Baldy carry a small package.

"Do you think she'll ever learn," asked George rather hopelessly, "that a sled dog's got no use for little stunts like that? His mind's got t' be on bigger things."

"Here we are," called Dan, as they stopped before a tiny cabin almost snowed in, with a deep cut leading up to the front door.

A thin, pale-faced woman, with a pleasant manner, answered the knock.

"Mrs. Edwards, we've come to surprise Ben. May we see him?"

Ben's mother ushered them all, Baldy included, into a room plainly furnished, but neat and home-like.

"This must be Ben's day for surprises, for this morning Mr. Jones arrived from St. Michael."

"Here's Moose, that I've bin tellin' you about so much," and Ben, from a couch, nodded happily toward the large man who rose from a chair beside the boy, and shook hands cordially with them all.

"Yes, I come over by dog team. I leased my ground up at Marshall, an' thought I'd drop into Nome t' see if my friend Ben here was still aimin' t' be a lawyer, an' the very first thing I hear is that he's gone inter dog racin' with you an' 'Scotty' Allan. That is, that Baldy's in the racin' stable, which is pretty near the same thing."

"Oh, I haven't give up the idea of bein' a lawyer, Moose. She," nodding toward the Woman, "talks to me about it all the time; and 'Scotty's' goin' t' speak t' Mr. Fink the very next time they meet. 'Scotty' says he thinks Mr. Fink'll listen, 'cause he was so interested in Baldy after the boys' race, an' asked all about him. He said," in a tone in which triumph was plainly noticeable, "that he didn't know *when* he'd seen a dog with legs an' a chest like Baldy."

"I know a good dog is about the best introduction you can have to Mr. Fink; but if for any reason that fails, I'll have a talk with Mr. Daly and tell him that you want to be another Lincoln, as nearly as possible, and that will appeal to him," confidently remarked the Woman.

"You got the right system in this here case," chuckled Moose Jones. "Ef you was t' tell one o' them lawyers that you jest couldn't git the other one interested in the boy, it's a dead cinch he'd git inter one office or t'other; an' it don't make much difference which. They're both mighty smart men, even ef they don't go at things the same way. Well, anyway, Ben, I'm glad I kin depend on retainin' you when my claims begin t' show up rich, as I kinda think some of 'em's bound t' do, one place or another. On my way back t' Nome, I stopped at them new diggin's at Dime Creek, an' staked some ground; an' it's a likely lookin' country, I kin tell you."

From the first instant he had heard the sound of the man's voice, Baldy had remained motionless, but intent, trying to recall their past association; then with a bark he rushed up to Moose Jones, showing every possible sign of recognition and joy.

"Well, well," exclaimed Moose, "ef this ain't Baldy o' Golconda! Why, I didn't know him right away, he's so sorta perky an' high-toned; all along of gettin' in with a speedy bunch, I expect," and the man stroked the dog affectionately.

"Isn't he fine?" cried Ben eagerly. "I just wish you could 'a' seen him the day o' the race; but George'll tell you all about it---how he wouldn't let Spot an' Queen bolt, an' how willin' he was an' all."

"Yes, indeed, the boys must tell you all about that famous event, Mr. Jones, while I talk to Mrs. Edwards about something else."

Before going into the details of the race, which never palled upon Ben, they described with much gusto the defeat of Oolik Lomen in the first Great Adventure the Wonder Workers had undertaken; and Ben bitterly regretted that he could not also have been one of the brave knights who had so valorously risen in defense of the weak and distressed against the strong and unprincipled.

But Dan consoled him somewhat by the information that the incident had been almost spoiled by interference; and that the next time they performed deeds of chivalry he hoped it would be when no female was about, unless, indeed, it might be a victim to be rescued from a terrible plight.

In the brief chat the Woman had with Mrs. Edwards she learned a little of the hardships that had fallen to the lot of the boy and his mother, and realized in spite of their courage and reticence that they had endured a hard struggle for almost a mere existence.

"Don't you think it would be easier for you outside, where there are not so many physical discomforts to be considered?"

"Perhaps. But my husband left a little mining ground that may, in time, prove worth while if developed; and I have remained where I could look after it, and see that the assessment work was properly done. As it is, a man named Barclay---Black Mart Barclay, they call him---jumped the claim next to his, and if it had not been for Mr. Jones I should have lost it. He loaned me the money to take the matter into the courts, where I won out."

"And the boy?"

"He is my one thought," responded Mrs. Edwards. "As a young child he was rather delicate, and we could not send him to school because of the distance. Since then his association with the men at Golconda has done much to offset what I have tried to do for him. Before my marriage I taught school in a village in New Hampshire, though you would hardly suspect it to hear Ben speak. I wanted to get a position in the school here; but nowadays there is so much special training required that I found I was not fitted for the work; and I have just had to take what I could get from time to time. At any rate," with a cheerful smile, "we are still alive and have kept our property."

"It was brave," murmured the Woman, whose eyes were misty; "very brave."

"Now that Ben is going to school regularly," the other continued, "he will, I think, soon lose this roughness of speech; and you can see that he is anxious to learn, and is ambitious."

"Yes, indeed; I have found him really unusual."

"Mr. Jones told us this morning that if his mining ventures turn out well, and they certainly look as if they might, that he will send Ben to college. He was my husband's partner at one time, and has always taken a great interest in the boy."

"I am so glad," was the response. "I have felt all along that some way should be found to make such a thing possible. The child deserves it. Some day soon, if you will let me come again, we will make some wonderful plans for his future. But I came to-day to ask you if you will let Ben go on a trip to the Hot Springs with us next week? I am sure it would do him a lot of good to be in the open air, and perhaps he would enjoy the outing."

"I should be glad to have him go; as to his enjoyment---just see what he says."

Ben listened breathlessly while the Woman told of the prospective outing. "I am to go with 'Scotty' and nine or ten of the racing dogs, and Pete Bernard, with twelve big huskies, is to take my husband. As Pete will have a sled load of freight for Shelton and the Springs, we thought you had better go with 'Scotty' and me; that is, of course, if you would like to make the trip. I believe that 'Scotty' intends driving Baldy, if that is any inducement."

Ben could hardly reply for excitement and happiness.

"Well then," and the Woman rose, "it is quite decided that you are to go. I dare say George and Dan---and Baldy---will want to remain a while. We have talked so much and so fast that I had really forgotten the 'party' we came to give you, and it is time for me to leave if I keep another engagement. If you are able to get out to-morrow, Ben, bring your mother and Mr. Jones over to the Kennel, and we will introduce them to some of our distinguished dog friends."

Mrs. Edwards and Moose Jones followed her to the door. The former, with a warm hand-clasp, faltered a few words of thanks; and Moose, with some embarrassment, said in an undertone, "I'm much obliged, ma'am, fer what you and 'Scotty's done fer the kid an' the dog. Ben used t' come t' my cabin when I was kinda lonely an' discouraged at Golconda; an' havin' him 'round learnt me that you got t' have some one that you love, t' work fer, if you want t' git the best out o' things an' people. Now Mrs. Edwards says I kin give Ben his eddication, which'll pay back somethin' o' what his father done fer me once when I was considerable down on my luck. And," with enthusiasm, "believe me, you kin bet it'll be some eddication, ef I have my way, an' them claims pan out the way they look now."

So potent a cure was the delight of the coming excursion that Ben was over not only the next day with Moose Jones, but every day after, until the time for the departure arrived; for there were many interesting matters to be settled. The most absorbing was, naturally, the selection of dogs for the journey; and there were long discussions by all concerned before the team was finally chosen.

The Woman's suggestions were, as usual, well meant; but were almost invariably influenced by personal preferences rather than sound judgment. And "Scotty" had to firmly repress her desire to thrust the greatness of a Trail Career upon some of those for whom he had other achievements in mind.

[Illustration: "*She had been A member of one of the mail teams*"]

Eric Johnson, U. S. Mail Carrier on the Nome-Unalakleet Route]

"I do wish you would take Mego," she urged. "The dear old thing simply loves sled work, and you never give her anything to do nowadays but bring up families."

"And why not?" demanded "Scotty." "There is not another dog-mother in all Nome who can so intelligently care for a family." Which was true; for added to her natural fondness for those dependent upon her, she had wide experience in the ways of dogs and people, and was thoroughly familiar with the dangers that beset the path of puppy-hood.

When young she had been a member of one of the Mail Teams and had worked hard for her living. The run of over two hundred and thirty miles between Nome and Unalakleet was covered many times during the winter; and the Mail Carrier, who has the chance to observe carefully the individual behavior of the dogs he uses, was much attracted to Mego. Her patient industry was a happy contrast to the actions of some of the others, who were unruly and quarrelsome, or disinclined to do their share of the necessary labor; and it was with such a high recommendation that "Scotty" had bought her.

"If she only had to care for her own puppies it would not be so bad," the Woman complained; "but every once in a while some light-minded gad-about roams around at will, or runs away, and leaves her offspring for Mego to raise. Why, sometimes you would think she was the matron of a Puppies' Day Home."

To her credit it may be said that whether the puppies were hers or another's, Mego was untiring in her gentle supervision of their minds and manners. She taught them to be respectful and wag their tails prettily when addressed; not to jump and place muddy paws on those who came to see them, and not to wander away alone, nor associate with strangers. And the task was often difficult, for there were many alluring temptations and many bad examples.

"But she positively enjoys it," insisted "Scotty." "When her own little ones outgrow her care, she is always watching for a chance to annex at least one member of any new litter in her neighborhood. Only last week she heard the faint squeaks and squeals of Nellie Silk's malamute pups, and I caught her tunneling under the manger to try to get to them. Mego's kidnapping is the one scandal in the Kennel."

"I suppose they were siren calls, not to be resisted. And anyway, that is the only blot on her otherwise spotless character. She possibly does it for the excitement; and if you will let her go in the Hot Springs team she will have something else to think about. If you don't give her a new interest," was the sinister and gloomy prophecy, "stealing puppies will very likely become an obsession with her."

But Allan was not to be persuaded. "She gets all of the exercise and pleasure that she needs here about the place. If she went away only think of the things that might happen to her youngest family. You know how careless Birdie is with them."

"That's so," with a sigh. "I had quite forgotten Birdie," and she recalled with regret the habit of that half grown stag-hound of dropping bits of food into the corral, between the wires, to make friends of the little ones; and then after working at the fastening of the gate till it could be opened, enticing them out for a frolic.

Mego knew, as well as did the Woman and "Scotty," that Birdie meant no harm. On the contrary, she had excellent qualities, and deserved much credit for the valuable assistance she rendered as a self-constituted Secret Service Agent, and an ardent Advocate of Universal Peace.

When there was a quarrel in the Nursery, and the puppies became violent, she gently separated them and gave the defeated one a cherished if somewhat ancient bone that she had buried for such occasions; occasions when material consolation is needed to forget material ills.

In case of serious trouble she would rush for help, whining anxiously, and frequently her prompt action in bringing Matt prevented fatal terminations to neighborhood feuds, race riots, or affairs of honor between dogs with irreconcilable differences of opinion on important subjects.

But when Birdie was not doing detective work, or holding Peace Conferences, she was lonely and craved the companionship of the frisky pups. And while Mego was certain that her character was above reproach, as well as her motives, she realized also that the stag-hound was heedless. And the wise mother had always in mind the perils that lurk in the hoofs of horses, the wheels of wagons, and the hovering Pound-man; and never relaxed her vigilance in guarding her family against such dangers.

"Well then, leaving out Mego, what dogs shall you use besides Kid, Tom, Dick, Harry, Spot, and McMillan? I told Ben that you would take Baldy."

"Yes, Baldy, and probably Rex. I have been considering Fisher and Wolf, too. Fisher has been rather indolent and indifferent, and I have never given Wolf a good run since I bought him of that native boy, Illayuk."

"Why not Jemima? You have never given her a really good run either, and she is no more inexperienced for the trip than is Wolf. As a matter of fact, I have been training her quite a bit myself lately, and I find that she is enthusiastic and good-tempered."

"Scotty" repressed a smile with difficulty. "Of course if you've been training her that's different."

He had seen her several times trying to make Jemima jump over a stick, beg for a bone, and stand on her hind legs---quite useless accomplishments, as George and Dan had agreed, for a sled dog. And he had also heard her words of advice to the progressive little dog, who did indeed seem to be anxious to create a place for herself amongst the best in the Kennel.

"Jemima," the Woman would warn her solemnly, "there are lots of things the Females of the Species have to learn early, if they would avoid trouble in this world. The very first of all is to let yourself be well groomed, make the most of the gay pompoms on your harness, and cultivate tact above all things. Never make a public nuisance of yourself. Be steadfast, but not militant; and do not snarl and snap, tear children's clothing, nor upset the puppies' food dish, even though you are dissatisfied with existing conditions. But instead, never forget there are wonderful opportunities even in a dog's life, and be ever ready and waiting to use them when they come. Now shake hands."

As a concession to the Woman's fondness for Jemima, rather than to her training, "Scotty" decided to let her go with them; and to her great delight, and to Baldy's unbarkable dismay, for Baldy had but little regard for ambitious females, she was placed in the wheel with him.

And so, with Kid in the lead, Baldy and Jemima in the wheel, Tom, Dick, Harry and the others arranged to the best advantage; with the Woman covered to the eyes in furs, and surrounded by bags, rugs, and carriage heaters, and Ben comfortably tucked away in the midst; and with "Scotty" Allan at the handle-bars, they were finally ready for the start to the Springs.

Mrs. Edwards and Moose Jones had joined the Allan girls, George, Dan and Matt at the Kennel, to wish the travelers a pleasant journey; and as he waved a last farewell to them before the team dropped over the brow of the hill, Ben observed gaily, "Well, I guess Ben Hur and all o' them old chariot racers didn't have nothing much on Alaska racin' dog teams when it comes t' style an' speed an' excitement."

[Illustration]

VII

The Dawn of a To-morrow

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER VII

THE DAWN OF A TO-MORROW

Once out of the streets where there is danger of upsetting the unwary or absent-minded pedestrian, the Allan and Darling Team headed down the trail with real pleasure in the prospect of a long run.

They almost seemed to feel that this jaunt might be in the nature of a "try-out" for racing material; or at the very least it might offer something worth while in the way of adventure.

As a matter of fact it did, in the end, prove an eventful trip. Particularly for Baldy, who gained recognition in an unexpected manner; for the Woman, whose experiences nearly quenched her ardor for exploration; and for Jemima, who learned that masculine human nature respects feminine ambition up to a certain point only, and then considers it a form of mania to be restrained.

Just behind was Pete Bernard, a sturdy French Canadian, trying to hold his uncontrollable, half-wild huskies, who were jumping and making sudden lunges toward any stranger---man or dog---that wandered near; and especially toward the Yellow Peril, who was a free lance in the expedition, and as such was particularly irritating to those in harness. They were a perfect contrast to "Scotty's" dogs, who had been taught to step into place, each as his name was called, standing quietly until all were in position, and the traces were snapped to the tow-line; and then, as the signal was given, to dart ahead with the ease and precision of machinery started by electricity. Pete's sled was piled high with freight and luggage, and astride of this was the Big Man, also in furs.

It was a cloudless day in January---a marvelous combination of white and blue. Snowy plains rose almost imperceptibly into softly curved hills, and ended in rugged mountains that were outlined in sharp, silvery peaks against the dazzling sky.

The air was crisp and keen, the jingle of the sled-bells merry, and Baldy even forgot, in the very joy of living, and in the nearness of Ben, that Jemima was his team-mate.

[Illustration: *The air was crisp and keen*]

They could faintly hear Pete's voice giving strange directions to his dogs; for Pete was Captain of a coasting schooner in summer, and freighted with a dog team in winter, and used the same terms in both occupations. He steered his ship "Gee" and "Haw," admonished his dogs "not to get tangled up in their riggin'," and cautioned them against "runnin' afoul of other craft." Of course no well raised dog could be expected to know that his harness was "riggin'," nor that a sled could possibly come under the head of "craft "; and he would be quite at a loss to grasp Pete's meaning generally. But as Pete's team never obeyed anyway, except by the exercise of sheer bodily force, it made but small difference how he spoke to them.

On they came, "passenger" and "cargo" safely aboard, some distance behind the Racers, who passed before long the famous Paystreak Diggings, which had yielded their many millions, and were soon beyond the groups of miners' cabins on the Third Beach Line.

It was a very different Baldy---this Baldy of Nome---from the one who had so often in the days gone by traveled the Golconda Trail with his friend, the boy. The days when he was hungry and foot-sore and heart-sick, and now---Baldy straightened up proudly, and nearly pulled Jemima off her feet in his desire to render good service for favors received. While Ben's eyes sparkled as he glanced at the dog in his responsible position of right wheeler in the Allan and Darling Team of Racers.

There the way led up a gentle slope, then down to the bed of Nome River, where they kept on the ice for several miles. It was here that Jemima's unfitness for work with experts began to manifest itself; as well as the unusual tenacity of

purpose that seemed either perseverance or perversity---depending upon whether you looked at the matter from Baldy's standpoint or from hers.

"Scotty" watched with some amusement her efforts to keep up with the others on the slippery ice, and when he thought she was becoming tired he stopped her, and let her run free. When she realized that she was out of the team her amazement and chagrin were plainly manifest. She sat down in the snow while she figured out a plan of campaign for the restoration of her rights; and then was off immediately in pursuit. "Scotty" had brought Fisher back into the wheel with Baldy; and Jemima, without pausing, jumped over Fisher's back between him and Baldy, to the growling disgust of the latter. Of course all three became "tangled in the riggin'," and the sled slipped up and over them.

The Woman, thinking the dogs were hurt, gave a frightened scream, Ben was nearly thrown out by the sudden jolt, and "Scotty" ---yes, "Scotty" said something short and forceful, which was most rare; though swearing much or little seems almost as invariable a part of dog mushing as it is of mule driving. Jemima was lifted out, the tow-line straightened, and another start was made; but after trotting along steadily for a time she gave a second sudden leap, and was between the two dogs just in front of the wheelers. Once more things were badly mixed, and the untangling process had to be repeated. "Scotty" was annoyed, but interested; for the usual rebukes had no effect on Jemima who was still agreeably but firmly bent upon being an active member of the team.

Again and again she tried the same move till she had been ousted from every position she had endeavored to fill. And then, more in sorrow than in anger, she abandoned the unsuccessful tactics, stepped up beside Kid, and, keeping pace with him, ran at the head of the team until they drew up before the door of the Nugget Road House, where they were to spend the night. Jemima believed in preserving appearances.

When they were settled, the Woman with "Scotty" and Ben went into the barn to see the dogs fed, and said if Jemima showed any inclination, because of her frustrated plans, to destroy Road House property, or refuse food, her name should be changed to Emmeline. But Jemima, at least to her own satisfaction, had demonstrated her ability, as well as her unswerving determination, so she ate dried salmon and corn meal porridge with zest, and slept soundly, content to leave the rest to Allan's sense of justice. Baldy looked distrustfully at the sleeping Jemima, and thought approvingly of the absent Mego---for Baldy was somewhat primitive in his ideas of the hitherto gentle sex.

Shortly afterward the other team came---and then followed the excitement and confusion that was the inevitable accompaniment of the arrival of Pete Bernard and his howling huskies.

What an untrained lot they were---fierce and unapproachable---for no one ever handled them but Pete, and he had no time to give to their higher education. If they had the strength to pull, he would see that they did it; he never used a dog physically unfit, and was perfectly willing to go through with them any of the severe hardships they were forced to endure. Did he not, without hesitation, drive them mercilessly through black night and raging blizzard to bring a freezing stranger to the hospital---a man whose one chance lay in skilled care?

It was no great thing in Pete's sight---a simple episode of the North. The man was in dire need, he himself was strong, and his dogs would go through anything with Pete "at the steerin' gear"---and so a life was saved.

When the Bernard team was also stabled, Baldy was overcome with that delicious drowsiness that follows a busy day in the open. From the house came those strange noises that people seem to so much enjoy---else why do they remain within reach of them instead of running far away, as did Baldy at first? But he, like the rest of the Allan and Darling family, had eventually become used to the phonograph; and their perfect self-control now enabled them to lie quietly through the "Sextette from Lucia" or the latest rag time at least with composure, if not with pleasure.

Not so, however, Pete's uncultured brutes; such strains were melancholy and painful to them in the extreme; and they did not hesitate to let it be known. One by one they began to howl, till all twelve were wailing dolefully and continuously. The Nugget dogs joined them, and Baldy noticed with stern condemnation that Fisher and Wolf, who had not yet acquired the repose of manner that comes of rigid discipline, were also guilty of this breach of Road House decorum. Allan and Pete rushed out to quell the disturbance, but the Big Man said not to interfere; that many a dollar he had paid for an evening of Strauss or Debussy when the clamor was just as loud, and to him no more melodious--and he was for letting them finish their "number" in peace.

At last the music-machine ceased from troubling, the rival canine concert was ended, and laughter and song were hushed. The stillness of the Arctic night fell upon the Nugget Road House, lying in the somber shadow of the Sawtooth Mountains. And to Baldy and all the others came rest and forgetfulness of such trials as nerve-racking sounds that destroy well-earned sleep, and the enforced companionship of advanced females that insist upon having a paw in the management of affairs that should not concern them.

The next morning both teams were ready to continue the journey. The Big Man with Pete Bernard and his huskies were to take the long route through the Lowlands; while "Scotty" decided upon the short cut by the Golden Gate Pass, because the Woman wanted to go the most picturesque way.

It had been cold but clear when they left Nugget, and was still fair, though somewhat colder, when they stopped for lunch at Slisco's; but later, as they went up through the steep divide, the chill wind became almost unbearable.

The trail had grown exceedingly rough, and for many miles there were, at close intervals, a succession of jagged windrows rising like the crests of huge waves frozen as they curled to break. Once when the sled hit a crag, in spite of every effort to steer clear of it, "Scotty" heard an ominous crack. He was obliged to stop, and with Ben's aid wound the broken place with a stout cord. Then they tied the Woman in with ropes, for there was constant fear that she might be hurled out when the sled swerved unavoidably.

[Illustration: *The trail had grown exceedingly rough*]

It did not take them ten minutes to do it all, but Allan was obliged to remove his gloves, and one of his hands became frost-bitten, and almost useless for a time. He put Jemima, who had gone slightly lame, into the sled with her friend, and tucked the warm rugs about them both; while the boy insisted upon perching lightly on the side that he might be ready to give instant assistance if necessary. The dog was resentful against the enforced ease, however, for she was not at all ready, in spite of pain, to give up her work.

In answer to the solicitous questions as to how she was standing it all, there came from the numb and bleeding lips of the Woman, through an ice encrusted veil, a reply that was something between a groan and a sob. In faltering tones she declared herself "perfectly comfortable; found the scenery glorious, and simply loved traveling by dog team." Had Baldy understood this assurance of a "delightful ride," and had he seen Jemima's strenuous resistance against what was necessary for her well-being, it might have seemed to him proof positive of the existence of certain traits characteristically feminine.

Kid, who was no respecter of the elements, much less of people, and whose one rule of life appeared to be "Get There, and Get There First," dashed up those slippery barriers to find a sheer drop of five feet or more on the other side, down which he would take team and sled.

The cold had become still more intense, and the thermometer they carried registered thirty degrees below zero, with the summit far beyond. The situation was serious, and "Scotty" felt that their best chance for safety lay in the speed with

which they could cross the Divide, and reach the open country; for there the trail led over the flats, and there were not the menacing precipices, that could not now be seen through a dense fall of eddying snow.

The way had been completely obliterated, and even Kid had paused, confused, and for once uncertain of the next move. "Scotty" called the boy to the handle-bars. "Stand on the brake, Ben, and shout to Kid if he should start after me. He may hear you even above the storm. I'll have to go on to see if I cannot locate some sort of a trail." He lowered his voice. "This is the worst place in the Sawtooth Range to be caught, and I'll have to depend upon you to do a man's work. Losing the way now would be a desperate matter, but of course we must not let her know how desperate," with a gesture toward the sled.

When Allan forged ahead into the thickness of the whirling snow, and disappeared completely, the boy felt a strange dread of the unknown. There was something appalling in the mighty force of the Arctic blizzard that had fallen full upon them. Something ghostly in the silent, motionless figure of the Woman, covered as with a pall, by the drifting snow, and in the shadowy string of dogs faintly seen, from time to time, when a rare lull cleared the air to a dim and misty grayness. Something terrifying in the cruel sting of the bitter wind that cut into the flesh like whip-lashes, and shrieked and howled in its unspent rage over that lonely and desolate mountain fastness.

It seemed ages before "Scotty" returned to report that there was no sign of a trail. "I used to know this country fairly well, and I think I'd better go on before the team for a while to try to keep at least in the right direction. But I'll have to put another dog in the lead with Kid. It's almost impossible to make any headway, and two of the strongest dogs will barely be able to hold up against this blow."

He thought deeply for a moment. Life or death might hinge upon his selection of dogs that would follow him through danger and disaster unfalteringly, unflinchingly. And, too, he must decide at once.

As in a flash there came to him the memory of Baldy's steadfast strength in the boys' race, his calm determination; and after an instant's hesitation he hooked Baldy up beside Kid. With a few words of direction to Ben, "Scotty" turned once more into the teeth of the gale; and at his heels, patient and obedient, came his stanch team with Kid and Baldy in the lead.

Ben felt, even in the midst of the distress and danger, a thrill of joy; while Baldy was filled with pride. He had supposed that Tom, Dick, Harry or McMillan would share that honor and responsibility with Kid, and now, unexpectedly, it had come to him. "Scotty" was trusting him; safety for them all might rest on his strength and faithfulness, and he was grateful indeed for this opportunity to prove that he was both strong and faithful.

He did not care though the glittering frost whitened his short hair, and pierced his sinewy flanks like a knife thrust; he hardly realized that the driving snow froze his eyelids together, and caked between his toes, making his feet so tender that they bled. Straining and breathless he plunged forward, knowing only that behind him was his friend the boy, with a helpless human being; and that somewhere beyond was his master, calling to them from out the cold and the dark. So, blindly, willingly, they followed the intrepid man who staggered on, and on, till at last the fury of the storm was over. Then the chill mist seemed to rise, as a curtain, and the peaceful Valley of the Kruzgamapa lay before them, bathed in the glow of the early winter sunset.

Far across the white plains, surrounded by willows and alders, leafless and outlined skeleton-like against the rosy sky, lay the Hot Springs Road House. Its shining windows and smoking chimney brought hopeful interest and renewed courage, even to those already "perfectly comfortable"; and gave to the dogs that zest and eagerness that marks the sighted end of a hard day's run.

In another half hour they had arrived at their destination, and were all warmly housed. Jemima, stiff, and a bit inclined to be sulky, had been lifted out of the sled and was now resting cozily on some furs in the corner. The Woman, almost rigid, had also been lifted out, and after thawing a little, was busily engaged in applying soothing remedies to a badly scarred cheek and chin; for the Big Man was due at any moment, and his facetious comments on the unpleasant results of her "pleasure trips" had become time-honored, if unwelcome, family jokes.

Ben was vastly contented in the knowledge that he had been of real service, and accepted the appreciation that was warmly expressed with modest joy.

As for Baldy, there was the dawn of a glorious future in that day's work. When, in his turn, Allan came to him and rubbed cooling ointment into his swollen and bleeding feet, there was much more than just the customary kindly stroke. Something Baldy could not fathom, that made his heart beat happily. There was born, of a touch and tone, the wonderful ambition to be classed with Dubby and Kid in his master's affections; as with his hand still resting gently on Baldy, "Scotty" turned to the boy. "Ben, we're glad *now* that we have Baldy."

[Illustration]

VIII

A Tragedy without a Moral---and a Comedy with One

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER VIII

A TRAGEDY WITHOUT A MORAL---AND A COMEDY WITH ONE

Life at the Kruzgamapa Hot Springs offered a pleasant relaxation from the business cares and social duties of Nome. There was very little driving for the dogs, but they were allowed to chase every big beautiful white hare they could find, pursue a red fox if they were so lucky as to start one, and watch the flocks of ptarmigan that fluttered near enough to be a constant lure.

They were out by day with the Big Man and Ben to look for game, and once nearly went wild with excitement when they saw an Eskimo take a large gray lynx from his trap. That was the sort of a cat that would be worth while as a friend or foe; and Baldy remembered Texas Allan with added disdain.

Occasionally natives with their sleds drawn by reindeer would pass that way. And if they could elude "Scotty's" vigilance it was great fun to dash after the awkward, stubborn beasts who so disliked them; and who somewhat threatened, in the more remote interior, to break up the monopoly of the Northern Dog Transportation Company, Unlimited.

At night they were taken for long walks by the Woman and Ben. Out over the snow that crackled sharply in the clear, crisp air; out where the stars seemed strangely close, the moon strangely bright---and where across the heavens waved the luminous, ghostly banners of the Northern Lights.

Time now meant nothing. It was the Land of Day After To-morrow, where the obligation of definite hours for definite duties did not exist.

And because there was a vacation freedom in the very atmosphere, sometimes they stole into the big living-room of the Road House, two or three at a time; and lying in the shadowy twilight they would listen, in drowsy content, to the cheery snap of the wood in the huge ruddy stove, and to the voices of their friends as they talked of the North, its hardships, its happiness, its hopes.

[Illustration: KRUZAMAPA HOT SPRINGS]

The great world "Outside," and its troubles, seemed far away.

International difficulties, the Fall of a Monarchy? Interesting of course, but on the last Holiday, Charles Johnson, with his marvelous Siberians, supplemented the previous Siberian triumph of John Johnson by winning the Solomon Derby of that year; making the course of sixty-five miles in but little more than five hours. That was something to worry one.

Suffrage? Desirable for many places, naturally. Though in Nome a woman could be a member of the Kennel Club, enter a racing team, and vote on school matters, long before the franchise was given her by the Legislature in Juneau. And surely that, all agreed, had been as liberal a policy as any reasonable female should have demanded from any community.

The Tariff, Panama Canal news, and graft prosecutions? Well, of course, one discussed such affairs casually; but after all, the Dog Question in all its phases was of far more immediate importance to Alaskans. And so they spent many an hour in reminiscences and prophecies; and were thrilled over and over again with the excitement of the great contests they had witnessed---lost and won; basing predictions for the future on the achievements of the past.

Then the dogs would be roused by the entrance of the Eskimo hunters, who stopped in the dusk of the evening on the way back to their settlement at Mary's Igloo, to barter for their day's bag. And later they sniffed with keen pleasure the wonderful smells from the adjoining kitchen; smells of broiled trout, reindeer steaks, and Arctic grouse---and fainter, but more delicious still, the odor of their own meal being cooked in the tent beside the cabin door.

They remained at the Springs a couple of weeks; and delightful weeks they were, too, but for one unfortunate incident, which was precipitated because of Tom's aristocratic race prejudice.

He had always hated Eskimo dogs; choosing either to ignore his own huskie blood, or feeling that it was superior to the native strain in the malamutes of the coast---just as some people boast of being descended from Pocahontas, but would shudder at the mere idea of a Siwash Squaw ancestress.

At all events, Tom had resented the entrance of the Eskimo, Wolf, into the Kennel; and never failed, when "Scotty" was not about, to manifest an enmity that would have told a civilized dog not to attempt any liberties with him. But Wolf was only an ignorant puppy, taken from a native igloo, where all of the dogs and all of the family lived in happy harmony; and so, one day when he was particularly joyous, he nipped, in a spirit of mischief, the end of Tom's wagging stump of a tail. Tom wheeled instantly, his hair bristling and his jaws apart, but the timely arrival of Matt made further demonstration impossible; and Tom's instinctive dislike for Wolf grew into an obsession after that direct and personal insult.

In their well-appointed quarters in Nome, with each dog in his own stall, revenge was out of the question; and when in harness, or out with Matt for exercise, there was as little chance for settling a grievance as there would be with soldiers on parade. But at the Springs Tom's opportunity came.

The small stables were overcrowded, there being seventy dogs in camp belonging to storm-bound travelers. It was necessary to chain them closer together than "Scotty" felt was wise, though he was not prepared for the tragedy that greeted him when he went out one morning to see that all was well with the team.

Every dog rose to greet him, as he came in with the Woman and Ben, except Wolf, who lay dead, strangled with his own collar.

The muscular body, so supple and vigorous but a short time before, was stiffening fast; and there were signs of a struggle desperate but ineffectual.

"Oh, 'Scotty,' can't you do something for poor Wolf?" and the tears came to the Woman's eyes as she laid a pitying hand on the handsome head of the tawny malamute.

"It's too late," said Allan regretfully. "He was a good dog, too; and would have made a strong addition to the team, properly handled."

A careful examination showed that on the left hind foot were traces of blood and marks of teeth; and there were but two dogs who could have reached Wolf to stretch him till he choked---Baldy and Tom.

The Woman looked accusingly toward Baldy. "I suppose he did it. He probably does not realize how wicked it was, he has had so little discipline as yet."

Anxious to defend the dog, Ben answered impulsively, "I'm quite sure Baldy wouldn't do a thing like that. He's been friends with Wolf; I saw them playing together only yesterday. And it really ain't a bit like Baldy t' be cruel an' sneakin'---t' lay fer a dog that didn't have a chance agin him."

"But surely Tom, after all of his years of training, would not have attacked one of his own stable-mates. Such a thing has never occurred before in our Kennel. I fear, Ben, it must have been Baldy."

But "Scotty" was not so confident. "I agree with Ben; it's not like Baldy. I have never found him quarrelsome, nor vindictive. And I hate, too, to believe Tom guilty. You know I never punish a dog on circumstantial evidence; so I am afraid this cold-blooded murder will have to be passed over, unless we can be certain of the criminal. There is always the possibility that a stray dog may have been responsible."

"Well, don't saddle it onto the Yellow Peril," exclaimed the Big Man, who came in to see what was the matter. "He is popularly supposed to start every dog fight in Nome; but this time he can prove a clear alibi, for he slept at the foot of my bed all night." Thus exonerated, the Peril passed by the line of chained dogs, bumping into them in a perfectly unnecessary manner, and emitting supercilious growls that in themselves would have been sufficient grounds for instant death if Pete Bernard's huskies could have acted upon their unanimous opinion.

"It's a terrible thing," sighed the Woman, "to have a murderer in our midst and not know who it is. It makes me feel positively creepy." And again, almost unconsciously, her glance fell upon Baldy.

And so the affair was ended officially. But Baldy could not forget the sickening suspicion that had rested upon him. In her heart the Woman felt that he was the culprit; and even "Scotty" had not been absolutely certain of his innocence. There was only Ben who *knew*.

Forlornly the boy and the dog wandered about throughout that dismal day, which seemed interminable. Nothing interested them, even the very things that had made the other days pass so quickly and so happily. Nothing except gloomily watching Tom, whose actions would have plainly proved his guilt to "Scotty" had the man not been too absorbed in an improvement for his sled to take much notice of anything else.

For a brief period the wily criminal had shown a humility as deep as it was unusual; he had sat on a pile of wood alone, not even romping with Dick and Harry till he felt the Hour of Judgment had passed. And then, deciding that there was no punishment forthcoming, he had leaped and frisked, and seemed so guileless that Baldy's contempt for his own kind made life hardly worth while.

One might look for such actions from inferior animals---from a cat that has killed a bird for instance; for cats are only soft-footed, purring bundles of deceit, with no standard of trail morals. But for a dog, a racing dog, and one belonging to the Allan and Darling Team, it was almost incredible. One would expect him at least to have the courage of his convictions, and be willing to take the consequences of what he regarded as a legitimate feud.

Tom's escape from all blame in this deplorable matter rankled. It made Baldy realize the indifference or casual injustice of a world that seldom delves below the surface of things; and while at times it plunged him into periods of depression, more often it spurred him on in his dogged determination to attain the goal of his recently aroused ambitions.

Fortunately he had a forgiving nature, and realized they could not know how deeply he had been wounded by their lack of faith. Also he was too busy to brood very much, for when they exercised at all, the new dogs were being tried out, and the older ones were in demand as "trainers." Most recruits are as eager for the honor of making the team as a freshman is to get into college football; but occasionally it was thrust upon an unwilling candidate.

"I should not be at all surprised if I have some trouble with Fisher," remarked "Scotty," as he turned the dogs out one day for their usual run. "He has a certain malamute stubbornness that might cause me a lot of annoyance just when I could least afford the time to correct him."

"Well, after your famous victory over Jack McMillan I do not anticipate seeing any real difficulty with Fisher," was the Big Man's confident reply. "I think you would be eligible to the position of wild beast tamer in a menagerie as the result of your tussle with Jack; for his strong wolf strain and his enormous strength certainly made him a formidable opponent. Yet you never tied nor whipped him."

"That had been tried constantly, with no success, and some danger. You see, with McMillan's disposition, such treatment only made him more defiant, without in the least breaking his spirit. I knew of course that he would have to be conquered, and conquered completely, or become an outlaw against whom every one would turn; but the punishment would have to be more vital and less humiliating than a beating. It won't do to embitter an animal any more than it will a person. You have to leave a certain self-respect and give him a fair chance."

And more than a fair chance Jack had received in that thrilling moment when the wiry little Scotchman, cool and determined, had faced the huge brute whose nature, harking back to the wild, threw off the shackles of generations of suppression and training, and rose to meet his hereditary enemy---opposing fierce resentment to all efforts of control.

For an instant the man and dog had paused, each seeming to gauge the strength of the other---then the instinct to kill, that heritage from the past, when the timber wolf gave no quarter, rose supreme; and the dog sprang forward, the wide open jaws revealing his sharp, white teeth and cruelly broken tusks. Suddenly the weight of Allan's body was hurled against him; strong supple fingers closed upon his neck, and with an unexpected wrench Jack McMillan's head was buried in a drift of soft, deep snow. He struggled violently to wrest himself from the iron grasp; madly he fought for

freedom; but always there was that slow, deadly tightening at the throat. Panting and choking, he had made one last desperate attempt to break the grip that pinned him down; and then lay spent and inert except for an occasional hoarse gasp, or convulsive movement of his massive frame.

At length the man had risen, and the dog, feeling himself loosed, and able to get his breath, staggered uncertainly to his feet, turned, and stood bravely facing his foe. There was, for a brief period, the suggestion of a renewed conflict in the dog's attitude. With the foam dripping from his mouth, quivering in every muscle; but still erect, exhausted but not cowed, he waited for the next move---and when it came McMillan had met his master. Not because of the force in the vise-like fingers, not because of the dominating mind that controlled them, but because of the generous spirit that treats a conquered enemy---even a dog---as an honorable antagonist, not an abject slave.

There had seemed to be a sudden comprehension on the part of the dog, like the clearing of a distorting mist. He realized in the tone of the man's voice the recognition and appreciation of qualities which stand not alone for unquenchable hatred, but for undying fidelity as well; and when "Scotty's" hand fell upon his head, and gently stroked the soft sable muzzle, Jack McMillan had not only met a master, but he had made a friend.

"But Fisher is quite different from Jack. There was never anything petty about him. Even his hatred had something impressive about it, for he fought to kill, and was never snarling and underhanded. You always knew where you stood with him. While Fisher is not at all dangerous, he has many undesirable traits that are difficult to overcome. He shirked all the way up from town. That may have been the fault of his training, or possibly he is naturally lazy; that is what I want to find out. At any rate nagging does not seem to worry him in the least."

The Woman came out of the house pulling on her fur gloves. "What do you say," she asked Allan, "to a spin over to Mary's Igloo? Father Bernard has all sorts of native curios there that I should like to see, and the day is right for a drive."

"Fine idea," agreed the Big Man. "And Ben and I will follow with as many of Pete's huskies as we think we can manage without being slated for the hospital. We might try the Yellow Peril in the lead."

"In that case," the Woman responded rather grimly, "you will probably be slated for the cemetery instead. Why don't you get a couple of reindeer from the camp just below? They may not be so fast, but they are surely safe, and one feels so picturesque behind them, with all their gay felt collars and trappings."

"Scotty" whistled for the dogs, but Fisher was not to be seen. He had gone back into the stable to doze on the hay, his favorite pastime. Again and again the whistle failed to gain any response. The other dogs had all stepped into place before the sled; when at last Fisher, reluctant in coming, meditated a moment, and then, in open rebellion, darted down the steep banks into the overflow of the Springs. The water, a strange freak of nature in the Arctic, was very warm, and deep enough so that he had to swim; and he felt that he had selected an ideal place for his Declaration of Independence.

But "Scotty," shouting directions to have the other dogs unhitched, immediately started in pursuit of the rebel.

Fisher left the hard, well-beaten track, and struck out for some small willows and alders where the snow had drifted in feathery masses. He broke through the crust frequently, but knew that a man would have more difficulty still in making any headway. Finally Allan turned back to the house, and Fisher sat down to think over his little victory. He was tired and panting, but he felt he had scored a point; when to his amazement he saw the man coming toward him, and now on snow-shoes. He plunged forward, and relentlessly "Scotty" followed. Hour after hour the chase continued, until Fisher realized, at length, the futility of it all; and thoroughly exhausted, crouched shivering in the snow, waiting for the punishment that lay in the coils of the long black whip in the man's hand.

When some little distance from him, Allan paused and called to Fisher.

The dog listened. There was something compelling in the tone, something he could not resist; and so in spite of the temptation to make one more wild dash for liberty, the dog crawled to "Scotty's" feet in fear and trembling. And instead of the sting of the lash he had expected, a kindly touch fell upon him, and a friendly voice said, "It's a good thing, old fellow, you decided to come to me of your own free will.

"It means a bone instead of a beating---remember that always," and a delicious greasy bone was taken from a capacious pocket and given him.

So Fisher went back to the stable with "Scotty "; where Jack McMillan and other ex-rebels, but now loyal subjects, ignored, with a politeness born of similar experiences, the little episode that taught Fisher once for all that respect for authority eliminates the necessity for a whipping. Which is, perhaps, the canine version of Virtue being its own Reward.

The drive back to town was pleasant but uneventful. Ben, perfectly well again, was eager to begin his school work and lay a foundation for the wonderful education that Moose Jones had in mind for him, while Baldy was glad to be at home once more where he could settle down to his regular duties. It was with a contentment quite new to him, for in "Scotty" Allan there was evident a growing recognition of his earnest desire to be of real use. And with that certainty he ceased to worry over the short-sightedness of a world which, till now, had appeared to him unable to grasp the idea that while beauty is only fur deep, ability goes to the bone.

Tom, Dick and Harry might attract the notice of strangers by their persuasive ways; Jack McMillan compel admiration by his magnificence; Irish and Rover win caresses by their affectionate demonstrations. But after all, in storm and stress, with perhaps a life at stake, it was to him, to Baldy the obscure, to Baldy "formerly of Golconda, now of Nome," that his master had turned in his hour of greatest need.

[Illustration:]

IX

With the Flight of Time

[Illustration:]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER IX

WITH THE FLIGHT OF TIME

The town of Nome, extending along the shore of Bering Sea for nearly two miles, is not built back to any extent on the tundra, which stretches away, a bog in summer, to the low-lying hills in the distance. In winter this is, however, a wide sweep of spotless snow crossed by well-defined trails---and it was here that the dogs were given their exercise.

There were many pleasant diversions in this daily training; visits to the outlying camps, where they were lauded and petted by the miners, and surreptitiously banqueted by the camp cooks.

Then there were impromptu races into town if by chance they encountered other teams coming back after the day's work; when the leaders, eying one another critically, even scornfully, would, without so much as a bark by way of discussion, start headlong for Nome, which was visible in the shadowy gray twilight only by its curling smoke and twinkling lights.

On they would come, over the Bridge, and up the steep banks of Dry Creek, turning into Front Street, and dashing down that main thoroughfare at a pace that took little heed of city speed limits.

It was an hour when baby-sleds and small children were not in evidence; and so they were always urged on to a spirited finish by the eager voices of bystanders, to whom sport is more important than home and dinner.

The unmarked days have slipped into the fast-flying weeks, and they into the months; till, suddenly, as from a lethargy, the North arouses itself to greet the first unflinching herald of spring---the Dog Races of Nome. And about the second week in February the serious work that is the forerunner of these spring races is begun; and Baldy found his time full to overflowing with the duties that had long since become joys.

Many luxuries were added to their usual comforts, and all sorts of improvements made in equipment. There were beautiful patent leather collars stuffed with caribou hair and faced with rattan, so there should be no chafing of the neck; they were as "fine and becoming," the Woman said, "as feather boas." All extra weight was eliminated. The harness was of thin linen webbing; snaps and buckles gave place to ivory toggles; wooden whiffletrees were replaced by those made of aluminum, and the tow-line, light and flexible, and of incredible strength, was of walrus hide.

Most wonderful of all, it seemed to Ben, George and Dan, was the racing sled, built on delicate lines, but of tough, almost unbreakable hickory, and lashed with reindeer sinew. It weighed but little more than thirty pounds---"as trim a bark as ever sailed the uncharted trails," according to Pete Bernard; and surely a sight to gladden the eyes of a Dog Musher of the North.

To the front of this was attached a delicately adjusted combination of scales and springs, by which Allan could tell when the draft of the team equaled a pound to the dog; and if more was indicated he was always behind pushing and adding all of the strength he possessed to that of those steel-muscled animals each of whom can start, on runners, several hundred pounds on level snow.

The Kennel was at all times delightful and spotless from its frequent coats of whitewash. It was airy in summer, and protected in winter; and the mangers used for beds and stuffed with clean, dry straw, were far enough off the floor so that there could be no dampness. Electric lights in the long dark months made it possible to keep the place easily in perfect order; but with increased activity came increased conveniences such as hooks in the stalls to hold each dog's harness, which was marked with the wearer's name, and many other trouble-saving devices that would prevent confusion when they were preparing for their frequent runs.

Of course the Allan and Darling dogs were all docked. That it was correct, and gave them a trim appearance, would not have impressed Baldy in the least; but that it kept their tails from freezing when going through overflows in icy streams, which causes much personal agony, and injury to the eyes of the dog in the rear, was a matter of signal importance.

Always well-groomed, the care of the Kennel inmates now became the sole task of Matt, who examined them thoroughly twice a day; cutting and filing their nails when necessary, that they might not split, and currying and brushing their hair till the Big Man observed that these elaborate preparations suggested a beauty contest rather than a dog race.

Ben Edwards was about constantly, when not in school, to assist Matt; and under his unremitting attention Baldy was fast becoming, if not handsome, at least far from unsightly.

Then, too, Ben would often help "Scotty" by taking Baldy and several of the steady dogs out, to give the former as much experience in the wheel as possible; for Baldy was being seriously considered as a permanent wheeler in the Racing Team. His qualifications were not brilliant, but he had proved in the Juvenile Race that he possessed the power to enforce his authority on flighty and reckless dogs; and on the trip to the Hot Springs that his courage was equal to his energy.

Many of the dogs had been in several of the Sweepstakes teams and they realized that these short, snappy spins were for speed and not endurance, which is the main feature of the great race.

Baldy watched with much anxiety the lack of intelligent interest on the part of a few of the recruits, and tried to infuse the proper zest into them by the force of a good example. That not proving entirely satisfactory, he had been known, when really necessary, to use the prerogative of a loose leader, and bite the dog in front of him when he wished to suggest more readiness, or a closer attention to business. But that was contrary to Baldy's peace policy, and was always a last resort.

The old guard were naturally the mentors, and it was a pleasure to watch the skill with which they performed their tasks. It was a stupid or unwilling dog indeed who could not learn much from the agile Tolmans, or the gentle Irish Setters, in whom the fierce strong blood of some huskie grandparent would never be suspected except for a certain toughness that manifested itself in trail work alone.

As for Kid, capable from the first, he was fast developing a justifiable confidence in himself, and a perfect control over the rest of the team, and "Scotty" was jubilant over such a leader.

"We have a good team," he said to the Woman as they stood watching the dogs at play out in the corral with Ben, George and Dan. "And we need it. Matt tells me that Seward Peninsula has been scoured quietly, from one end to the other, to add finer dogs to last year's seasoned entries. And all of the drivers will be men who know the game." Which meant a severe struggle; for strength and speed in the dogs, and real generalship and a masterly comprehension of all phases of the trail, in the driver, are the chief requisites in this wonderful contest.

"They're in great form," observed the Woman with pride and admiration. "I don't think I have ever seen them looking better."

"True," agreed "Scotty." "But don't count too much on that, for the year we had that strange epidemic in the Kennel, something like distemper, they seemed perfectly well till almost the day of the race. And that was the race," grimly, "when the dear little Fuzzy-wuzzy Lap Dogs, as you call them, made the record time, and we came in third."

"Well," ruefully, "they had a true Siberian trail all the way; it was clear and cold, and there was not a single blizzard. And the whole North knows that our rangy half-breeds are at their best when there are storms, and the route is rough and broken. The luck of the trail," sighing, "but at that, they were marvels."

Without cavil, and with due praise from friend and antagonist alike, the success of the Siberians that year had been phenomenal and well deserved. And so, when the "Iron Man" John Johnson, driving a team entered by Colonel Charles Ramsay of London, and Fox Ramsay driving his own team of the same type, were first and second, the Ramsay Tartan fluttered beside the flag of Finland in triumph. It made no difference that one driver was the son of a Scotch Earl and one of a Scandinavian Peasant---they were both men in the eyes of all Alaska; and they were both, with their sturdy dogs, saluted as victors in this classic of the snows. And John Johnson's record of four hundred and eight miles in seventy-four hours, fourteen minutes, and twenty-two seconds had made history in the North.

[Illustration: The Ramsay Siberians]

"I did not feel half so bad, did you, 'Scotty,' when Fay Dalzene beat us with that great team of his and Russ Bowen's? For after all they were our type of dog, and justified our faith in the Alaskans."

But no one year's result, nor the accumulated result of several years, could settle the question of supremacy between the two breeds; and so the smouldering rivalry continued and was fanned into a hot flame each season just before the Solomon Derby.

"You'll have a lot of able rivals, if the immense number of speedy teams I see in the streets means anything," was the Big Man's comment one evening when the Woman, after a fast drive, was boasting of the marked improvement in the team work of their entry.

"'Scotty' says he's glad of it; the more teams that go into racing the higher the standard in Nome. There has never been a time since the camp started when there have been so many efficient dogs as now; and it's just because the people are learning that the only way you can have good dogs is to give them good care. When an Eskimo gets together a racing team, and an excellent one at that, it begins to look like a general reform. Don't you remember when practically all of the natives used to force puppies, who were far too young to be driven at all, to draw the entire family in a sled that was already overflowing with household goods?"

"Yes, at one time you could certainly tell an Eskimo team as far as you could see it by the gait of the wretched, mangy beasts, that always appeared to be in the last stages of exhaustion."

"And there's really a vast improvement in the freighting teams as well; for so many dogs that do not quite make the racing teams become freighters and show the results of their breeding and training there. In fact," enthusiastically, "I am sure that dog racing has been an enormous benefit to Nome in every way. Stefansson told me himself that never in his experience, and it has been wide, had he found such dogs as those 'Scotty' bought for their Canadian Arctic Expedition. And I believe," with conviction, "it is because Nome dogs, through the races, are acknowledged to be the best in all the North---for both sport and work."

The Big Man smiled, and suggested, banteringly, that she embody those views into form for the benefit of Congress.

The Woman looked rather puzzled. "Congress?" she demanded; "and why Congress?"

"Because," he continued with some amusement, "there are people who venture to differ with you materially in your view-point. I understand that very recently the Kennel Club has received communications from various high officials of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, threatening to place the matter of dog racing in Nome before Congress, with the hope of having these cruel racing contests stopped.

"That is, of course, if those concerned cannot be made to see the error of their ways by some less drastic method."

For a moment the Woman was quite speechless with surprise and dismay.

"Well," she finally exclaimed, "if that isn't human nature for you---beams and motes and all that sort of thing.

"Good people with the very best intentions in the world, trying to interfere in affairs about which they know nothing, thousands of miles away; when probably around the very next corner are things about which they should know everything, needing their attention constantly."

"They say, in one letter, that there are many Alaskans, as well as Outsiders, who have made these complaints."

"Oh, I dare say," scornfully, "even in Alaska there are persons whose only idea of a dog is that of a fat, wheezy house-dog who crunches bones under the dining table, and sleeps on a crocheted shawl in a Morris chair. But *real* Alaskans know that pity for the dogs of the North should be felt, not for the Racers, but for the poor work dogs who haul their burdens of lumber and machinery and all kinds of supplies out to the distant mines.

"And that, too, over rough and splintered ties in the glare of the fierce summer sun that shines for nearly twenty-four hours at a stretch. I'll wager," defiantly, "that if Alaska dogs have one supreme ambition, like that of every loyal small American boy to become President of the United States, it is to become a member of a racing team."

"Undoubtedly," agreed the Big Man soothingly. "But Congress, I believe, is ignorant of such ambitions as yet."

"Congress is ignorant of a good many things concerning Alaska and the Alaskans," contemptuously.

"It was because for years Congress imposed a prohibitive tax on railways through this wilderness, a tax only just now removed, that innumerable freighters, day after day, have crawled into town unnoticed, with feet cut and bruised and bleeding, and with no one to herald their suffering to a sympathetic world. It's because their labors were not spectacular, and the dogs were too obscure to attract more than a passing pity---never national interest, or interference."

"But they assert, if I may go on," ventured the Big Man with an assumption of fear, "that the condition of the dogs, at the finish of these four hundred and eight mile races, is deplorable."

"They're tired; naturally very tired; though the necessity of fairly forcing their steps through the crushing, cheering, frantic mob often gives them an effect of utter exhaustion that belies their actual condition.

"You know how often we have gone down to the Kennel within an hour or so after their arrival, and have found them comfortably resting and showing little, if any, signs of the ordeal. Many and many a prospector's team is in far worse condition after a severe winter's trip, made just for ordinary business purposes, while all of the Kennel Club's rules for racing are aimed against cruelty.

"Why, you know that the very first one says you must bring back every dog with which you started, dead or alive, and--"

The Big Man laughed heartily. "Dare I mention that the 'Dead or Alive' rule is the one that seems to have caused the most unfavorable comment Outside.

"They seem to think it has rather a desperate 'win at any hazard' sound that needs toning down a bit."

"It means," remarked the Woman severely, "that even if a dog becomes lame or useless, and a detriment to the rest, he must not be abandoned, but brought back just the same. And as a team is only as strong as its weakest member, surely they can realize that it is a matter of policy, even if not prompted by his love for them, for every driver to keep his dogs in the best possible condition---that he may not be forced to carry one that is disabled upon his sled. That would seriously handicap any team."

"Of course, my dear, all will admit, even Congress, that this is no country for weaklings---men or dogs---and that is no contest for those who cannot brave the elements and survive the dangers of a desperately hard trail.

"And I will maintain, freely, that no athletes in the Olympic Games of Greece, nor college men in training for the field, are more carefully and considerately treated than are the dogs in the All Alaska Sweepstakes. But, you see, these Outsiders don't know that."

"I only wish," said the Woman earnestly, "that the Officers of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and Congress, and everybody, might hear the way Dalzene, Holmsen, Hegness, Fred Ayers, and the Johnsons speak of their dogs, just as one speaks of cherished friends, not dumb brutes. If they had seen the 'Iron Man' with the tears rolling down his furrowed cheeks as he tenderly caressed the dead body of one of his little Siberians; or had watched 'Scotty' Allan breast the icy waters of a surging flood the night of the great storm, to save an injured dog not even his own, I am sure there would be no further talk of cruelty amongst dog racers. And to think," she concluded indignantly, "that these protests come from congested centers in civilized communities, where pampered poodles die from lack of exercise and over-feeding, and little children from overwork and starvation!"

"There is no occasion for immediate worry," was the Big Man's consolation. "I rather think Congress has troubles enough of its own just at present, without mixing up in dog racing in Nome. There won't be much excitement about it in Washington this session."

Early in the day before the coming event, the Woman sauntered down toward the Kennel slowly, her mind filled with agreeable memories and happy anticipations.

At this last try-out the team had shown more speed than ever, and a certain delight in their work that spoke well for the final selection that had been made; while Kid, as a leader, had been manifesting such extraordinary talent that even Allan had been loud in his praise. Which was rare, for his approval of his dogs was more often expressed in deeds than in words.

At the door of the Kennel she paused---struck instantly by an unmistakable air of depression that pervaded the place. Even McMillan did not howl his usual noisy welcome.

"Any one here?" and out into the semi-dusk of the Arctic morning came Ben, his face plainly showing grief and consternation.

"Oh, Ben, what is it, what is the matter?" exclaimed the Woman tremulously. "Has something dreadful happened to 'Scotty'---the dogs; what is wrong---do tell me!"

"It's poor Kid," sobbed the boy. "We found him dead a little while ago, when 'Scotty' and Matt and me come in t' fix the harness an' sled fer to-morrer. I went back t' see Baldy, an' you know Kid was next to him, an' after I'd spoke t' Baldy, Kid 'ud allers put his paw out t' shake hands and kinda whimper soft an' joyful, like he was sayin' nice things t' you. But this time there wasn't a sound from him; an' when I looked, there he was, dead, a-hangin' by a strap that was caught up high someway so's he couldn't pull it loose. 'Scotty' said he must 'a' been tryin' fer some reason t' git over the boards that divided him from the next stall.

"But it was somethin' he'd never done before---one o' them accidents you can't count on, unless you tie 'em so short they ain't comfortable. Anyway, he was stiff an' cold when we got to him. The poor feller never had a chance after he was caught."

The boy wiped away the fast-flowing tears. "There wasn't," he said regretfully, "another dog in the Kennel I liked so much as him---after Baldy. And 'Scotty' feels awful bad, too. He can't hardly talk about it. He's gone into the house now, but he says he'll be back pretty soon."

When Allan reappeared there was a look of sadness in his eyes, and a husky tone to his voice. It was plain to see that he mourned not only a wonderful leader, but a loving companion as well; and when he moved silently and sorrowfully amongst the other dogs, they knew that something was very wrong and gave him as little trouble as they could.

And so the entire Kennel was plunged into gloom by this unhappy occurrence, for Kid had been a genial stable-mate and a general favorite. All the dogs seemed to share in the grief of their masters.

"Will you withdraw the entry?" asked the Woman, who realized perfectly that Kid had been the mainstay and inspiration, as a great leader must be, of the whole Derby Team.

"No," was "Scotty's" prompt reply. "We'll run just the same.

"There has never been a race in Nome yet in which I have not driven a team; and leader or no leader, I'll not back out now. Don't be discouraged. We'll win this race yet!"

[Illustration]

X

The Solomon Derby

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER X

THE SOLOMON DERBY

The morning of the Solomon Derby dawned clear and cold. It was twenty degrees below zero, but was ideal racing weather, as there was no wind; and the course was reported in excellent condition.

"This is the first time I ever prepared for a race," remarked Allan as he examined the different dogs carefully, "that I have not been looking forward to it with the keenest pleasure. I was mighty fond of Kid, and had trained him with more care than any other dog I have handled except old Dubby. And Kid was perfectly adapted to lead this particular team, for the dogs were so willing to defer to him without any ill-feeling. His loss is a severe handicap now, I can tell you. Somehow he was so young and vigorous that the possibility of anything serious happening to him did not occur to me; he had never been ailing a day in his life. Generally I have at least one other dog fairly well prepared to lead if necessary; but I was so determined to make a marvel of Kid that I did not take that precaution, and at present there is not a single one that I consider up to the mark for such a race as this."

"Why not try Tom?" suggested the Woman. "The Tolman dogs are all intelligent, and these have never known anything but racing all their lives, and must have absorbed a lot of knowledge about it, even if they have not been leaders. Besides, you have had Tom in the lead a few times, have you not?"

"Yes, once or twice lately to rest Kid, and," ruefully, "the result was not one that fills me with any confidence in him for a really important event like this. The Tolmans, you know, never fall below the necessary standard in anything, neither do they ever rise above it. They are all right in the rank and file where their thinking is done for them; but as for

leading---" the man shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Well, if Tom wouldn't do, there's no use talkin' 'bout Dick and Harry; fer Tom is the smartest o' that bunch. But he ain't popular with the rest o' the team, like Kid was. Them Tolmans has a high-handed way to 'em that some won't stand fer," remarked Matt as he began to remove the racing harness from the hooks and place it on the floor beside the tow-line, which was stretched out in the middle of the Kennel.

Dan, Ben and George had been considering the predicament gravely as George bestowed even more than his usual attention upon Spot's appearance.

"Spot," he observed with repressed pride, "ain't had much 'sperience, but he won a great race just the same. Don't forget that, Dad."

"He's a trifle young," replied "Scotty," "and besides," slyly, "we might meet an Eskimo hunter somewhere on the way."

Dan claimed recognition for the Mego "houn" pups, especially Judge, and the Woman, with some hesitation, spoke of McMillan; but Allan gave valid reasons why they were not eligible.

"Not much time left," announced the Big Man as he, with the Peril, paced restlessly up and down in front of the Kennel.

"Scotty" pondered anxiously, for his decision must be made immediately. He walked over to Rex, regarding him intently.

"Do you believe," said a low, faltering voice beside him, "that---that Baldy could lead? Him and Kid took us safe over the Golden Gate Divide in that terrible blizzard, an' mebbe he learnt somethin' about leadin' from Kid that night. He's mighty willin' an' strong, an'---"

"True, Ben; that idea had just come to me, too. I am absolutely sure I can depend upon him to do his level best. Whether he is fast enough is the question." With a sigh he added, "Well, fast or slow, there's not much choice. I'll have to fall back upon Baldy to-day. Matt," he called, "you may put Baldy in the lead."

"Baldy in the lead!" exclaimed Matt in astonishment. "Why, except fer a time or so that we've drove him that way t'kinda fill out, he's never been in the lead since we got him. If we're as shy on leaders as all that, I'd hook up Mego; she's still good, if she is old. But Baldy!"

"Surely, surely, 'Scotty,'" pleaded the Woman, "you'll not use an untried dog to-day of all days. Baldy has never shown anything more than just ordinary speed, and you know a leader has to set the pace for them all. If he hasn't the pride in his work, the spirit, he's a failure; and Baldy," desperately, "is just a plodder."

But "Scotty" was firm. "He's more than that; you couldn't see what he did in the storm on the Hot Springs Trail. He's our best chance." Then, "Baldy in the lead, Matt, and be quick; we're almost due now at the post." And so it was Baldy who led the Allan and Darling entry in the Solomon Derby.

It took the strongest self-control and the keenest desire not to shake "Scotty's" faith in him, to keep Baldy from bolting when he moved through those throngs whose nearness roused in him such unaccountable fear.

Most of the dogs, now more or less accustomed to these gatherings, stood quietly indifferent to the clamor and confusion.

Jack McMillan was distinctly annoyed by it all; he did not wish to have strangers pushing against him, stroking his back, and even taking liberties with his velvety ears. What was the use of a Black Past, if it did not protect one from such unwelcome familiarities?

Tom, Dick and Harry, as usual, were charmed with the situation; for they dearly loved any sort of a demonstration in which they could figure conspicuously. Tom, ever anxious to be in the public eye, glanced about and, seeing the United States Marshal, who was known to be an ardent admirer of the Allan and Darling team, jumped upon him, demanding recognition, which was cordially granted.

Baldy, to whom the whole episode was trying in the extreme, did not even resent this little play for favor in official circles, so anxious was he to be over the ordeal, and out in the open speeding away toward the dark and frowning cliffs of Cape Nome, in the dim distance.

Two teams at intervals of ten minutes had started before them, and there were three others to follow.

As it was only sixty-five miles to Solomon and back, Allan decided to try to pass the teams in front, even if he acted as trail-breaker and pace-maker; for there was no necessity in so short a race for generalship in the matter of feeding and resting.

Shortly after they left Fort Davis, four miles down the coast, they could see John Johnson ahead, and still beyond him a rapidly moving dot which Allan knew to be Fred Ayer with his "Ayeroplanes," as the Woman had dubbed them; facetiously, but with a certain trepidation. For that splendid team had been successful in many of the shorter races, and bade fair to develop into dangerous antagonists in the longer ones.

But the Allan and Darling dogs, urged on constantly by "Scotty," went forward at an even gait that soon lessened the space between themselves and the Siberians; when, having passed them, they gained perceptibly upon the others.

The "Ayeroplanes" seemed almost to float along the surface of the snow, so light and smooth was their pace, so harmonious their team action.

But as if impelled by a hidden force he had never felt before, Baldy sturdily forged on and on, till they, too, were left behind. A new fervor thrilled him as he determined to show that he was more than "just dog." No understudy on the stage, given an unexpected opportunity, ever desired more ardently to eclipse the star than did Baldy to fill poor Kid's place.

How they flew over the ground; how exhilarating the air; how light the sled. And then it suddenly dawned upon Baldy that the sled was too light. When Allan was not running behind with a tight grasp on the handle-bars, he was usually perched at the back on the projecting runners; and for some time the dog had not noticed this additional weight. Then, too, he was beginning to miss his master's voice---"Hi, there, Tom, Dick, Harry, snowbirds in sight; rabbits, Spot; road house, Barney." Of course all of the dogs knew perfectly well that it was only a joke; that snowbirds, rabbits and road houses are things that do not concern you at all when you are being driven in a race. But they enjoyed the little pleasantry, nevertheless, and it gave them delightful subjects to think about that might become possibilities when they were not in harness.

If "Scotty" was not addressing them personally, he was often singing bits of Scotch ballads, or whistling scraps of rag-time, which was wonderfully cheering, and gave them a sense of companionship with him.

At last the instinct that all was not right was too strong for Baldy. Stopping suddenly, he looked back and discovered that they were driverless.

He realized that such halts were most unwise; but the team without Allan was as a ship without a Captain and to Baldy there was but one thing to do---to find "Scotty" at all hazards.

For an instant there was danger of a mutiny amongst the dogs. Tom, Dick and Harry tacitly agreed that it was a marvelous chance to make that snowbird joke a charming reality; there was a stirring of McMillan's fiery blood, for he still admitted but one source of control; a plump fluffy hare, scurrying by within range of Spot's young eyes inspired him with a desire to give chase, as once again he quite forgot the grave importance of filling a position in a racing team.

But Baldy, knowing that the time for action had come, that his supremacy as a leader must be acknowledged, and at once, firmly held his ground. Turning, he faced them fearlessly. There was a low ominous growl, a smouldering light in his strange, somber eyes, a baring of his sharp white fangs. Yet it was something else, a something in the very nature of the dog, in his steadfast spirit, his indomitable will, that made the others feel in some subtle, final way that they must obey him. So when he swung round they followed him as unswervingly as they would have followed Kid.

Far away in the whiteness, Baldy saw a black spot toward which he sped with mad impatience. It grew more and more distinct, till, beside it, he saw that it was his master, lying pale, motionless and blood-stained in the trail. From a deep gash on his head a crimson stream oozed and froze, matting his hair and the fur on his parka.

Baldy stopped short, quivering with an unknown dread. There was something terrifying in the tense body, so still, so mute. He licked the pallid face, the cold hands, and placed a gentle paw upon the man's breast, scratching softly to see if he could not gain some response. There was no answer to his loving appeal; and throwing back his head, there broke from him the weird, wild wail of the Malamute, his inheritance from some wolf ancestor. The other dogs joined the mournful chorus, and then, as it died away, he tried again and again to rouse his silent master.

Moment after moment passed, the time seemed endless; but finally the warm tongue and the insistent paw did their work; for there was a slight movement, a flicker of the eyelids, and then "Scotty" lifted himself upon his elbow and spoke to them.

He was hopelessly confused. What was he doing in the snow, in the bitter cold, soaked in blood, and with his team beside him? Where was Kid?

Then it all came back to him; he remembered he was in a race---the Solomon Derby, and Kid was dead. That with Baldy in the lead they had gone ahead of the other teams at a terrific speed, when he heard something snap. Thinking it might be a runner, he had leaned over the side of the sled to look; there was a crushing blow, and he recalled no more until he felt Baldy's hot breath, and an agonizing pain in his temple.

Gazing about, he saw the cause of the mishap---an iron trail stake half concealed by a drift, now red with his blood. All around, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the vast snowy plains that merged into the purple shadows of the distant mountains, outlined in dazzling beauty against the azure sky. There was no sign of the other teams. He could not tell how long he had been unconscious---whether minutes or hours; he only realized that he had never entered Solomon.

Weakly he stumbled to his feet and fell helplessly into the sled. At a word Baldy darted ahead, and Allan, wiping the blood from his eyes, saw they were traveling in the wrong direction, toward the wireless tower at Port Safety. In some way he dimly realized that the dogs had turned on the trail. Given the order, Baldy wheeled instantly, and dashed forward with no slackening of his former speed, though "Scotty" was lying inert and useless, an unusual and unexpected

burden.

But, wounded and shaken, "Scotty's" spirit was still undaunted; and uncertain of anything save that you are never beaten till the race is over, Allan inspired Baldy to do his willing best.

The bitter disappointment of Kid's death was fast yielding to amazement at Baldy's unsuspected fleetness. Trustworthy he had always been, and obedient and faithful---but his pace now was a revelation. There was yet a chance.

"On, Baldy; on boys." And away they flew till the roofs of Solomon loomed on the horizon, directly ahead.

Solomon at last. At the end of the one short street was a group of Kennel Club officials, and the entire population of the place, ready to welcome the coming and speed the parting racers.

To his intense surprise Allan learned that his was the first team in, his delay having evidently been but a brief one. He resisted all entreaties that he should have medical attention. "There's no trouble at all," he maintained stoutly, "so long as my cap is frozen to the wound. Of course I am a little faint, and dizzy, but that will pass in the fresh air. Just water the dogs and see that they're all right, will you?" And resting only the five minutes that are obligatory for the signing of papers, he was again on his way, as Fred Ayer came into view, closely followed by Johnson.

Returning, it seemed as if Kid himself could not have excelled Baldy in the management of the team---all of his latent powers developing to meet the great demands made upon him. He was proving himself indeed a leader.

The news of the mishap had been telephoned to Nome; and the usual enthusiasm over the first arrival was turned into an ovation for the plucky and popular little Scotchman.

With the loss of the best dog in the Kennel, on the eve of the race, and an obscure, untried dog in the lead; with a stunning blow that had left him alone and senseless on the trail he was still victorious, to the admiration of all Nome.

The excitement was intense as the cheering throngs closed in upon the dogs and their driver, ready and eager to give their hearty greetings and unstinted applause.

[Illustration: AN OVATION FOR THE PLUCKY LITTLE SCOTCHMAN]

Moose Jones and Ben hurried toward the winners, both overjoyed at the success of Allan and their favorite, Baldy.

"Some dog, Baldy o' Golconda, ain't he, Mart?" was Jones's exultant comment as they passed Barclay, who stood regarding the heroes with ill-concealed contempt.

"Some accident!" retorted Mart. "There'll be a fine day," belligerently, "when 'Scotty' Allan'll find out that there dog's a fake, a reg'lar quitter. Jest now he's bluffed you all inter thinkin' him a wonder; but you wait an' he'll give himself away yet. He was ornery as a pup, an' he's ornery as a dog. You can't make a silk purse outen a sow's ear, an' I tell you straight you can't make a Sweepstakes Winner out o' Baldy o' Golconda, no matter what he done in this here measly Solomon hike."

"Well, we'll see, Mart."

"You've won a great race," exclaimed the Woman as she came forward with the Big Man, and grasped "Scotty's" hand warmly; "a great race, and against heavy odds."

But "Scotty," looking down on Baldy with gratitude and pride, replied simply:

"No, the credit all belongs to good old Baldy here; it is his race, not mine."

Then the Woman, kneeling in the snow beside the leader, with her arms about him, said softly, "It was wonderful, Baldy, simply wonderful, the way you saved the day."

And so the Solomon Derby was over, and Baldy had made good.

[Illustration]

XI

One Summer

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER XI

ONE SUMMER

The winning of the Solomon Derby marked a new era in Baldy's life. His home-coming had been made both joyous and miserable by the various attentions he had received. With his sensitive, shrinking nature, it was a sore trial to be the center of attraction, and the object of constant discussion. "Scotty" had warmly commended his record to Ben Edwards, which was compensation even for the Woman's newly awakened and frankly expressed admiration. She had almost wept on his neck, which was embarrassing for an undemonstrative dog, and said he deserved a Carnegie Medal---whatever that was---though she suggested, practically, a large juicy beefsteak as an immediate compromise.

The neighbors conceded generously that it was more than they had expected of an "old grouch." George Allan and Danny Kelly, from out their superior wisdom in dog affairs, agreed that while improbable, it had never been impossible for a freighter to develop into a racer under favorable conditions. While most gratifying of all, Dubby came in to express, with strenuous waggings of his stubby but eloquent tail, his surprise and satisfaction that a member of a purely sporting fraternity had distinguished himself so highly; had acted, in fact, in a manner worthy of a dependable huskie. And Baldy, knowing that Dubby had himself and his unblemished career in mind, felt that this was indeed the climax of approval.

Gradually he was coming to realize that through his unremitting efforts to be of service, and because of real worth, there was an attitude of kindly interest manifested toward him that had taken the place of the covert criticism and careless indifference that had once caused him so much sorrow.

"Now that he's led once," confided Ben to George and Dan, "I don't believe Baldy'll ever be satisfied again t' stay in the wheel. It seems t' me that every minute he's awake he's tryin' t' do better in his work. That race kinda roused him in every way."

"He'll never have to stay in the wheel," observed "Scotty." "The Derby was a revelation to me in regard to Baldy. I confess frankly I didn't think he was capable of the ability he showed that day and," with a smiling glance toward the

Woman, "there were those of less faith than mine who were completely won over."

"If you mean me," she rejoined, "you are quite right. I've apologized to Ben and Baldy every day since the Derby. I have even admitted that Baldy's legs are as good as Jack McMillan's, if not better. Could humility go further in making amends?"

And Baldy, who now saw the world through different and more friendly eyes, learned that even the Woman was not wholly lacking in a certain sense of discrimination as she had proved when she had felt the muscles of his sturdy body and spanned the width of his broad chest with unqualified approval.

After a complete rest of a week or more, the training began again; for there was yet to be held the most important event of the year---the All Alaska Sweepstakes, which takes place early in April.

The runs were much longer and harder than the preliminary dashes for the Solomon Race; and sometimes they went back even to the Mountains which rose, rugged and majestic, from the endless white wastes to a sky brilliantly blue in the dazzling Arctic sunshine, or sodden and gray in a storm.

Totally different in temperament and methods from Kid and Dubby, Baldy manifested, nevertheless, many of the fundamental qualities that had so distinguished those wonderful leaders. And in communion with "Scotty" in their long hours of exercise, he not only began to understand the speech and the touch of his hand, but also his unexpressed moods. He knew when Allan was care-free, and satisfied with the team, or was discouraged by some unexpected act of stupidity or disobedience, though no syllable was spoken.

Not long before the Big Race, several unfortunate things happened in the Kennel to make Allan believe it was, as the "Wonder Workers" solemnly declared it, a "Hoodoo" year for the dogs. Rover wrenched his shoulder in a friendly tussle with one of the Mego pups, Tom cut his foot badly on a bit of broken glass, and Baldy developed a severe cold that made him feverish and short of breath.

It seemed at first as if they might not be able to enter a team at all, so many accidents combined against them; but the lure of the contest was too much for "Scotty." "We'll do our best. Lots of teams go in that are no stronger than ours at its weakest, and every entry that drops out makes it less interesting. Then don't forget the luck of the trail, in which you believe so thoroughly. Remember the Solomon Derby."

"I don't believe in working luck over time," she answered. "However, if you really think it would make any difference in the sport, of course we'll go in. I know you can do better," confidently, "with a poor team than most men with a good one."

But "Scotty" shook his head decidedly. "Don't think it. Our antagonists are all that they should be---men and dogs---and the most careful driving will not always overcome the weakness of the team."

Since the driver may use his own discretion as to the length and frequency of the stops to be made, he must have the ability to realize exactly how much rest he may take himself and give his dogs without the unnecessary loss of a moment. He must know what the other teams have done, and are capable of doing; he must drive his own race, and he must know how the other men are driving theirs. He must decide wisely how many dogs it is well to use---that matter also being optional with him. For it is an important point to select enough dogs to keep up to the required standard, yet not too many for good team work, in which individual peculiarities have been merged in general harmony of action.

No precaution is neglected to insure the comfort of the contestants. Commissary teams sent out by the Kennel Club leave supplies at all of the Road Houses and camps that are to be used as rest stations---drugs for emergencies, and all sorts of luxuries that would be too bulky to be carried in the racing sleds, but which are shared impartially at the different stops.

Each man must be certain of the best food for his dogs, and the length of time it takes to digest it. The usual diet of the Allan and Darling Racers, rolled oats, dried salmon, and the oily nutritious flesh of the white whale, with a proper amount of bone, now was changed to chopped beef and mutton, cooked with eggs. This was put up in hermetically sealed tins, with enough in each for a feeding; and every dog's allowance wrapped separately in muslin so that there might be no loss of time in dividing it into portions.

And in all of these things "Scotty" Allan was a past master. Yet in spite of his efforts and skill, they came in not first, but second; which was, according to George and Dan, "not so worse for a scrub team," and according to Ben, "mighty good considerin' they didn't have Baldy."

These days of ceaseless striving and untiring patience had been of great benefit to Baldy. He no longer experienced despair over such a Kennel misfortune; but cheerfully resolved that each failure must be a stepping-stone, not a stumbling-block, in the march toward success.

There was one real sorrow that came to him that spring---a sorrow shared by many---which swept away the passing regret for the lost race. Dubby, full of years and honors, was dead, mourned by all. His obituary in the newspapers not only testified that he was generally beloved, but was one that many a man might be proud to deserve. "Alaska's Most Famous Leader Passes Away." What untold stories of marvelous intelligence, of unfaltering allegiance, of loving service lay in those simple words.

Baldy missed Dubby sorely, for there had grown a firm bond of sympathy between them. The old huskie had learned that a character may dignify a calling, and that a true heart often beats beneath a racing harness; while Baldy had long since discovered that Dubby's aloofness was but the inevitable loneliness of a Dog that has had his Day.

To divert his mind from sad memories, Baldy would go to look at Mego's twelve, beautiful, fat new puppies, and then would dream of a comfortable serene old age when he would be given the tutoring of such promising youngsters, and help to make them winners of future All Alaska Sweepstakes.

Then came the summer, and with it the play-time for the Kennel; a summer filled with ever changing interests and pleasures.

"I'll be glad, 'Scotty,'" said Moose Jones, "t' keep till fall as many dogs as you don't want in Nome. It's kinda hard t' have 'em tied up in the fine weather, an' dogs like yours can't run 'round the streets loose. Ben an' me's goin' t' be out t' Golconda, where I've got a crew o' men at work. You may 'a' heerd I bought Golconda a few weeks ago, an' I'm goin' t' mine there this season. Sold my ground over t' Marshall t' a New York Syndicate that was nosin' round pretty sharp before I left; and it's give me money enough t' take up this here property. Then I leased my Dime Creek holdin's on royalties, an' that'll put me on my feet even ef this Golconda claim ain't all I think. But I done a lot o' prospectin' there once, an' it sure looks promisin'; an' besides it's right next t' the Midas, an' fer the last couple years or more Barclay has been takin' out wonderful pay there."

"I'd be glad to have you keep Baldy, Irish and Rover for us if you will," replied Allan cordially. "George and Spot are inseparable in vacation times, and McMillan," with a nod toward the Woman's house, "seems to be under the impression, now that he is not in training, that he is a lap dog, and rarely comes to the Kennel at all. Matt will take the rest of them

up to his cabin on Penny River, where they will have all the exercise they want, and great fun hunting. You know I never have a moment for them in summer, as it is our busy season in the office," and Allan, who was Secretary in the Big Man's Company, gave a sigh as he realized that not until autumn would come again the happy Dog Days.

To Baldy it was a period of perfect joy---to be with Ben Edwards and Moose Jones in the glorious freedom of the open country in the far hills. Here the dogs did what their fancies dictated. They swam, unmolested, in the ditch; ran for miles with their chum, the dappled gray horse; gave chase to saucy, chattering squirrels, and even fished so successfully that they were the admiration of all the camps about.

Irish and Baldy would stand in the riffles of a stream, and Rover, leaping into the pools and quiet waters, would drive the fish up into the shallows, where they were seized by his two companions, taken ashore and dropped on the bank. Then they returned for more, keeping up the sport till a bird in flight or some other fascinating moving creature lured them away in a spirited pursuit through thick willows and across green marsh-lands.

At night they slept, if they chose, in the Bunk House; and ate without restriction such mysterious delicacies as cake and pastries.

No longer was Baldy ignored by the men, nor did it now take the threats of Moose Jones to prevent the petty annoyances to which he had been subjected formerly; for in winning the Solomon Derby he had proved his worth and they were glad to give him well-earned praise.

Occasionally there would be a dissenter from the general admiration of the dog. Black Mart, who sometimes came over from the Midas, never failed to belittle the record he had made. "It's no test, that short mush t' Solomon, an' it don't prove nothin'. Why, I've seen teams that could do wonders in that there run that couldn't git as fur as Council in the Big Race without goin' t' pieces. It takes somethin' more'n a slinkin' half-breed like him t' lead a winnin' team in the Sweepstakes."

And Moose would retort sarcastically, "Mart, ef you was as good a judge o' dogs as dogs is o' you---stop growlin' at him, Baldy---you'd have a winnin' team in yourself, instead o' just jawin' about it."

One man's enmity mattered but little, however, in the general friendliness Baldy experienced; and there were so many glorious things to offset those infrequent encounters with the one person he instinctively regarded with aversion.

Encouraging news had come from Dime Creek, and Golconda was proving rich beyond the highest expectations of Jones; and many happy hours did he and Ben spend in plans for the boy's future; a future that now seemed near and bright.

"Even without Golconda, Ben," Moose would exclaim confidently, "I've got enough salted away from them other deals to put you through all the book learnin' you'll need t' make a reg'lar spell-bindin' lawyer o' you like Fink, er a way up Judge, mebbe in Washington. An' with Golconda,---well, Sonny, that there Arabian Nights chap that she was tellin' you about wouldn't have nothin' on us fer adventure, an' doin' good turns to folks unbeknownst, an' all that kind o' stuff," and Moose Jones would pat the boy's shoulder affectionately.

Every week or so Baldy, with Irish and Rover and some of the Wild Goose dogs from the Grand Central Ditch House near, would be hitched to a flat car belonging to the place, and would have a trip into town with Moose to take the gold dust from the "clean-ups" to the bank.

The car coasted down all the hills, for there was a strong brake to keep it safe. And the dogs were either invited to ride with Jones, or were permitted to get to the bottom as best pleased them with Ben, which meant a scamper through fields

of blue forget-me-nots and purple lupine, over damp and mossy dells, and along the slopes where tiny birds were hidden in cozy nests about which the frightened parents fluttered divertingly.

[Illustration: THE CAR COASTED DOWN ALL THE HILLS]

It was indeed a treat; for always at the end of the jaunt there was an interview with "Scotty" Allan, who was sure to look Baldy over carefully and say fondly, "Well, how's my Derby hero to-day?" and give the expected hearty greetings to Irish and Rover. Or possibly there would be a brief visit to the Woman, who, whatever her faults, never failed to produce a tid-bit of some sort for her canine callers.

She and Ben would dwell with keen delight upon his prospects of attaining his ambitions. "And besides all Moose will do for you," she announced one day, "Mr. Daly tells me he will be only too glad to be of any assistance possible. He thinks a boy with your ideal--Lincoln--should have all the help it is in his power to give."

Of course, surfeited at last with luxury and idleness, the dogs would finally be eager to return to the duties of the winter; glad of the season that brings the cheery sound of bells, the joyous barks of recognition from passing friends, the snarl of challenge from passing enemies, and all of the wholesome pleasures that belong to a busy, useful life. But now they were quite care-free, and content, and the responsibilities of the winter seemed far away indeed.

But the most treasured moments of all to Baldy were those spent with Ben when, waiting for Moose to finish his evening's tasks, he and the boy wandered along the winding banks of the ditch. Far away across the sedgy tundra lay the sea, a line of molten gold in the last rays of the belated June sunset. Behind them rose the snow-crested peaks of the Sawtooth Mountains, like frosted spires against an amber sky. Soon the amber would change to amethyst and deepen to purple--fading at last to a shadowy gray; and all the world seemed steeped in the mystic calm of those twilight hours before the early Northern dawn.

And in those hours the brooding stillness of nature was broken only by the voice of man; for it was then, in that vast solitude, that from the lips of Ben Edwards came ringing words, sonorous sentences, impassioned appeals.

Baldy did not know it, but he was at such times a learned Judge moved strangely by unexpected eloquence; a jury melted to tears by a touching plea for clemency; a Populace swayed to great deeds by a silver-tongued Orator. Even, on rare occasions, he was the Loyal Throng that stood, silent and uncovered, before the White House steps, thrilled by the fiery patriotism of Mr. Edwards, the President of the United States of America.

Then, he was just Baldy, a faithful loving dog that trotted happily at the heels of the ragged little boy whose unselfishness had given him the great chance of his life.

There was no faltering in the devotion of boy or dog. They believed in each other.

[Illustration]

XII

The Great Race

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER XII

THE GREAT RACE

Another winter had come and gone, and again it was the day of the Great Race.

Never had the time passed so quickly to Baldy, for he had now become a distinguished member of The Team, for whom every one, even the Woman, entertained a real respect, and to whom all of the dogs turned readily as to their acknowledged leader.

The Allan and Darling Racers were ready for the event.

There was an early stir in the Kennel, and all was hurry and bustle. The Woman came in with the Big Man, the Allan girls, and Ben Edwards, who helped her tie knots of white and gold on the front of the sled, on the collars of the racing dogs, and on other members of the family, about forty in all, who were old enough to appreciate the attention. Even the Yellow Peril apparently considered it an honor, for which he waited with unaccustomed patience.

The preparations were almost complete; and "Scotty" was everywhere, superintending the minute details, upon the completeness of which so much might depend.

Birdie was, in the confusion, about to borrow Mego's puppies and take them out for an airing. Fisher, delighted that he was not of the elect, basked in a warm and secluded corner; while Jemima, frantic to be a part of the team, was restrained forcibly by Matt, and placed in solitary confinement.

Even Texas, for whom the Kennel had lost its charm---and safety---since the death of old Dubby, followed the Allan girls, and was treated to a becoming bow of the racing colors.

Matt brought out the long tow-line, and placed it carefully on the floor.

"Rex and McMillan in the wheel, like we've been usin' 'em, I suppose?" and at a nod he released them.

"Wheel, Jack; wheel, Rex," and they took their accustomed places next the sled, and remained motionless, yet keenly alert. "Tom and Dick, Harry and Tracy, Irish and Rover"---name after name was called, and each dog stepped into position with joyful alacrity. They were, one and all, sturdy, intelligent, and spirited; with the stamina of their wild forebears, and the devoted nature of those dogs who have for generations been trained to willing service and have been faithful friends to their masters.

"Scotty's" eyes rested upon them with justifiable pride. "I think," he announced happily, "that in all my years of racing I have never had so fine a team; so many dogs I can count upon in every way." And then came the expected order, "Baldy in the lead, Matt."

There was an imperceptible pause--- just long enough for him to brush softly against Ben Edwards, and look up lovingly into a beaming face---and then Baldy stood at the head of the Allan and Darling Racing Team, a "likely Sweepstakes Winner," as the Daily Dog News had once ironically predicted.

Baldy felt that now, if ever, had come his Day; the Day of which he had dreamed in his despised puppy-hood; the Day in which he could prove that the great dog man's confidence was not misplaced, and that the boy's belief was well founded.

At last they stood, every detail of equipment perfect, while "Scotty" glanced once more over his small kit in the sled; green veils for the dog's eyes should the glare of the sun prove too troublesome, little blankets, cotton flannel moccasins for their feet in case of sharp ice, and extra bits of harness---all stowed safely away, including his own fur parka and water-tight boots.

Matt regarded the team critically, and while filled with a sober satisfaction, was much relieved to hear that it had the unqualified approval of the experts, George and Dan. "Of course Spot 'ud make a classier leader, Dan, but I'm the only one that can really handle him yet, so I guess Baldy's best for Dad."

The Woman waited to give each dog a parting caress and a word of encouragement. "Tom, Dick and Harry, remember you're the Veterans, and have an honorable record to maintain; Irish and Rover, never forget that you *are* Irish, and live up to all that it means; McMillan, it's your chance to wipe out the past; and Baldy---well, Baldy, 'Scotty,' we all, trust you." And then she turned and pinned the last knot of white and gold on Allan's breast, and her voice trembled as she said, "Success to our colors."

Through the narrow streets, gay with the fluttering streamers of the Kennel Club gold and green, they went. Banners and pennants shone resplendent under the cloudless blue of the April sky; and the crowds in high spirits and gala attire, eager and laughing, closed in upon them till Baldy longed to howl in sheer fright, though howling in harness is strictly forbidden by "Scotty," and would have been quite out of keeping with the august dignity of his position. He was appalled by such a solid mass of human beings---for of course the courts, schools, and business houses were all closed in honor of this important occasion; and probably the only people in all of Nome not bending their steps toward the starting place were those unavoidably detained in the hospital or jail.

Women who would not have been out of place on Fifth Avenue or Bond Street, women to whom even the French Poodle would have given his approval; men of the West in flannel shirts and cowboy hats; miners from the Creeks, gathered from all corners of the Earth; Eskimos in their furs with tiny babies strapped on their backs; rosy-cheeked children---all hurried to the point where the long journey was to begin.

Nomie was everywhere, barking delightedly, and giving each team an impartial greeting.

Oolik Lomen with his latest doll, acquired that very morning from some careless mother more intent upon sporting affairs than domestic duties, paraded superciliously up and down, plainly bored by the proceedings; but attending because it was the correct thing to do.

What a relief it was to reach the open space on the ice of Bering Sea, in front of the town, where the fast gathering multitudes were being held back by ropes, and kept in line by Marshals in trappings of the club colors.

Presently the merry jingle of bells, and loud shouts, announced the approach of the Royal Sled. Covered with magnificent wolf robes, and drawn by twelve young men, fur-clad from head to foot---her "human huskies"---the Queen of the North dashed up to the Royal Box, where, surrounded by her ten pretty maids of honor, like her clad in rare furs of Arctic design and fashioning, she was given an imposing reception by the judges and directors of the Kennel Club.

In one hand the Queen carried a quaintly carved scepter of ivory, made from a huge walrus tusk, and in the other the American Flag at whose dip would begin once more the struggle for the supremacy of the trail. A supremacy which is not merely the winning of the purse and cup, but is the conquering of the obstacles and terrors that beset the trackless wastes---a defiance of the elements, a triumph of human nature over nature.

There was the sound of many voices; small boys, scarcely out of pinafores, discussed with a surprising amount of knowledge the merits of the individual dogs and the capabilities of their drivers; little girls donned ribbons with a sportsman-like disregard of their "becomingness" to show a preference which might be based either on a personal fondness for a driver or owner, or a loving interest in some particular dog. While men and women, who on the Outside would be regarded as far beyond an age when such an event would have an intense interest for them, here manifest an allegiance so loyal that at times it threatens to disrupt friendships, if not families.

The babble increased in volume, for the first team had drawn up between the stands to wait for the final moment, and Charles Johnson stood ready, with his noted Siberians, to begin the contest. They made a charming appearance, and their admirers were many and enthusiastic.

"Ten seconds," was called; unconsciously all voices were hushed. "Five seconds!" The silence was broken only by the restless moving of the people and the barking of the excited dogs.

Then the clock struck ten, and simultaneously the stirring strains of the trumpet ended the spell that held the crowd in breathless attention. The men released the dogs, the flag in the hand of the Queen fluttered, then fell, and the first team in the greatest race in the world had "hit the Trail for Candle," while cheer after cheer followed its swift flight between the long lines of eager faces and waving colors.

In the pause that ensued an impatient voice rose in insistent demand. "What are you waiting for? Bring on your Fidos," and then as "Scotty" Allan appeared and stood with difficulty holding the spirited Allan and Darling dogs, the same voice asked in tones of utter disdain, "Whose mangy Fidos are these?" He was evidently a stranger, and in favor of the trim Siberians, scorning the rangy "Lop-ears," as they are sometimes called in derision.

[Illustration: SCOTTY ALLAN ON THE TRAIL]

But whatever type may please their fancy, the faithfulness of all, and the skill of each driver appeals to these Northerners, most of whom know well the hardships of this ultimate frontier. So that their wild enthusiasm seems not so much a question of personality as a spontaneous tribute to the energy and courage of the men, and the patient willingness of the dogs.

Allan's selection of dogs had caused much adverse criticism, but Matt warmly defended his choice. "You can't tell me that Tom, Dick and Harry's stale from too much trainin' an' bein' in too many races. I know better; an' you can be certain that 'Scotty' wouldn't have taken 'em if they was goin' t' be a drag on such wonders as Irish, Rover and Spot. Take my word for it, them old Pioneers is goin' t' be the back-bone o' the hull team when the youngsters has wore themselves out."

A few who did not believe in the sincerity or stability of Jack McMillan's reformation predicted trouble because of his presence. As a leader he had twice utterly demoralized teams in previous races, and it was "not unlikely," declared the prophets of evil, "that he would blow up on the Trail out of pure cussedness."

"Well, it ain't McMillan, ner Tom, Dick ner Harry that's goin' t' lose this here race fer the Allan an' Darling team," exclaimed Mart Barclay with vicious conviction. "It's that there cur leader they got---Baldy. There's enough Scotch stubbornness in Allan t' try to make a leader outen a cur jest becus folks said he couldn't. Up in Dawson I heered once he trained a timber wolf t' lead a team o' McKenzie huskies; but he'd find that a heap easier 'n puttin' the racin' spirit inter that low-down Golconda hound; an' I'll bet he'll git all that's comin' t' him this time fer his pains."

"Ef you're bettin' on that, Mart," quickly interposed Moose Jones, "I've got some dust from my Golconda claim that's lyin' round loose at the Miners and Merchants Bank, an' five hundred of it says that you're---well, seem' as there's ladies

present, it says you're *mistaken* about Baldy's sperit. You see my friend, Ben Edwards here, is kinda figgerin' on college some day after a while, an' a little loose change wouldn't hurt none. It might come in right handy fer all the extry things boys wants, like fancy clothes an' flat-faced bulldogs. I guess Ben wouldn't want one o' them, though, after he's owned a dog like Baldy. But he could use a thousand in lots o' ways easy---my money an' yourn."

"Double it," sneered Mart.

"Done," and those surrounding them witnessed the wager with much applause; while the boy, clinging to the rough hand of his companion, whispered tremulously, "Oh, Moose, I won't want any extras when I go to college. It's enough to just go. But I do want Baldy t' win, though."

"Ten seconds; five seconds." The dogs were mad to be off, but Allan's warning command, "Steady, boys, steady," kept them quiet, though they were quivering with eagerness; all except Baldy, who again seemed plainly panic-stricken, and wildly glanced from side to side as if searching for some loophole of escape.

Five minutes past ten. Once more the flag dipped, the signal for them to start was given, and "Scotty's"

"All right, boys, go," was music to their listening ears; as leaping forward with one accord, amidst renewed cries of encouragement and admiration, the defenders of the White and Gold sped far out over the frozen sea, where they, too, were headed for the Arctic.

[Illustration]

XIII

For the Supremacy of the Trail

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER XIII

FOR THE SUPREMACY OF THE TRAIL

Slowly the people returned to town after every team had received an ovation; for none was too partisan to give a hearty "God Speed" to all of the men and all of the dogs in the race---and favorites were, for the moment, forgotten.

Each day had brought word from the Outside that the Great Race was not forgotten by the Alaskans in sunnier lands; and because of this the excitement, as well as the purse, had grown apace.

No one, of course, settled down to anything serious, for business is practically suspended during the entire progress of the event, and a spirit of revelry is abroad. Formal and informal gatherings serve to pass the hours, while telephone reports from each village and road house are announced in all public places, and bulletins are posted at convenient points for men, women and children, who await the news with keen expectation. The messages come continuously, keeping up the intense excitement from start to finish.

Soon on the Official Bulletin Board at the corner of Lane's way appeared the first, telling that all of the teams had arrived in Solomon, practically together, and had left shortly in the bitter wind that blows in fierce gusts across the icy lagoons and sleet-swept beach.

Then in the low foot-hills had come milder weather; and the route was fairly good, though it lay buried under freshly fallen snow through which Baldy led, picking his way with unerring precision across the trackless tundra. Now that he was in the open, away from noise and people, he had settled down to a steady gait that promised much for his endurance.

Sometimes in the glory of the April sunshine they passed other teams, or other teams passed them; and sometimes there were hours when two teams and possibly more met at the same relay camp.

There was never a hint here that the men were pitted against one another in the fiercest rivalry of the North; for they were ever ready to help their opponents to patch a broken harness, mend a sled, or care for the dogs---just as, on the way, they give fair warning of overflows or other obstacles. It is no race for those of weak bodies, mean minds or small souls.

The dogs, however, carried the idea of rivalry to the point of personal enmity, and watched ceaselessly for the opportunity to engage in a diverting row. A row in which they might leave as many wounded on the scene as would be caninely possible before human intervention. But this was a vain aspiration; for every precaution was taken to guard against fighting, and every leader slept with his driver to insure safety. Dogs, like Death, love a shining mark, and the leaders are usually the real victims of the fray.

Then came Candle, the end of the first half of the race, where the dogs, after being cordially welcomed by the whole town, were checked off by the appointed Judges, and their identification papers signed.

"Open those tins of dog feed, will you, Rydeen? This is to be their first big banquet, where they get as much as they can eat," said "Scotty" to one of the friends in the group about him. "Then if Humber and some of the rest will help me, we'll give them a fine alcohol rub in no time."

"You'd better do some resting yourself, 'Scotty,'" they urged, but he would not consider that till he had thoroughly examined the team.

Then, "McMillan's feet are bruised," he exclaimed ruefully. There were many offers of assistance in caring for the dog, which, however, Allan gratefully declined. "He doesn't like having strangers work over him; and when he's nervous he becomes headstrong; so I'd better attend to him myself."

From Candle came the news---"All teams have left on return trip except Allan and Darling." And as hour after hour passed and "Scotty" had not yet started, there was exasperation in the hearts of his backers in Nome. Exasperation, but not despair; for all remembered when Allan had driven Berger's Brutes to success after a wait so long that all of Nome was in a ferment over the fact that "Scotty" had "slept the race away." But he had planned that campaign well; he had figured the possibilities of his rivals, and knew that they had exhausted their strength too early in the game. And so he had come in first with every other team at least six hours behind; and the cry "'Scotty's' sleeping the race away at Candle" became the derisive slogan of the Allan clan.

"Jack McMillan's feet are giving trouble," was the response of "Central" to the frantic inquiries over the long distance telephone as to the delay, "and 'Scotty's' massaging them with menthalatum."

To the repeated request, and then the demand, that McMillan be put back into the wheel to get along as best he could, there was a moment's hesitation and a sweet, but firm, feminine voice replied, "'Scotty' says"---a gasp and a pause---"he

says he'll not ruin a faithful dog if every man, woman and child in all Alaska has bet on him. And I think he's just right, too; Jack is a perfect dear," and the receiver was hung up with a click that admitted of no further argument.

At last they were off again, five hours behind the others; but when they did leave, the North knew that the sport was on in earnest---for Allan's policy had ever been to do his real driving on the "home stretch."

Soon the languor from the rest, and the heaviness from the food were forgotten; and there existed but one dominating, resistless impulse in dog and man---the impulse to win.

Even the least responsive dog must then have felt the thrill of the famous race, for never a whip---hardly a word---was necessary to spur them on.

Frequently the trails were sodden, and often obliterated; soft snow piling up like drifts of feathers into fleecy barriers through which the dogs, with the aid and encouragement of their Master, fought their way, inch by inch. Beyond them lay Death Valley, a dread waste where the dead silence is broken only by the wailing and shrieking of the wind as it sweeps down in sudden fury from the sentinel peaks that guard it. Across this Baldy led unswervingly, never hesitating, and hardly relaxing his steady pace, though the sudden gusts from the mountainside often curved the team into a half circle; and he was forced to keep his nose well into the air and brace himself firmly to keep from being carried off his feet.

Further on came the Glacier Grade, on either side of which rose overhanging cliffs. Here the bitter wind of Death Valley became a veritable hurricane. Time and again the dogs tried to climb the icy slopes and time and again they were hurled back by the fearful buffeting of the elements.

"Scotty" finally halted them, and with the greatest difficulty succeeded in fastening spiked "creepers" to his mukluks. Then he tied Baldy to the back of his belt by a strong leash. "Baldy, it's up to us now to get this team through safely---and quickly---" and bowing his head to the storm he toiled step by step, slipping and sliding, up the perilous heights, ten miles to the summit of the range, with the dogs following and aiding where they could.

Then came the descent, fraught with more danger still; for the gale bore down upon them so relentlessly that all resistance was useless, and the dogs lay flat and were swept along with the sled; while "Scotty" stood clinging to the brake, and dragging one spiked foot behind in the desperate attempt to act as a human anchor.

And at the bottom, quite without warning, they found themselves breaking through the snow into an overflow of a stream, where the water had just come through cracks in the ice to the surface. As they landed on it with great force it sprayed over them like a fountain; and almost instantly was frozen by the chill of the air.

Allan unhooked them. "Now, boys, roll and get rid of that ice you've been making. You're racing dogs, not ice plants." They pawed the ice from their eyes, and thawed it out from between their toes with their warm tongues. And "Scotty," too, was obliged to remove the ice from his lashes before he could be sure of his bearings.

"Now then," as they had divested themselves of their glistening coats, "the worst is over, and off we go."

At times the hard smooth trail wound like a silver ribbon under the pale glow of the Aurora. Then, with flying feet, they sped along the edge of deep gorges, up steep slopes, and over the glare ice of rivers and lakes.

But the distance between them and the other teams was now gradually lessening, and at Timber Road House they had made up half of the time lost in Candle. Here they had the next "big sleep," lying on clean straw on the floor beside

Allan, whose closeness calmed their nerves. It was a great comfort to be able to place a paw on him, or sociably lick his hand--for they felt that all was well if they were but within reach of their master's touch.

They awoke full of renewed energy. "Scotty" was harnessing them for the last long run, with the help of his brother Bill, and Paul Kegsted, who had charge of that relay station for the Kennel Club.

"Boys," he gasped in amazement, "Baldy's gone lame. He's so stiff he can scarcely move. I can't understand it, for he was all right when I turned in." At the slightest touch the dog winced, and Allan was appalled at the situation.

He had trained nearly all of the dogs so that they could lead under most circumstances; but this final struggle would require far more than ordinary ability.

Wise old Tom, Dick and Harry, reluctant in the start, had saved themselves until they were most needed; and were now steady and reliable, as had been predicted--but they were not leaders for such a trial as this. Irish and Rover were too inexperienced for so much responsibility, Spot was too young, and McMillan too headstrong.

"Scotty" was without a leader.

Allan's consternation was echoed in Nome when the report of the mishap was given out--"Allan practically no hope. Baldy down and out; no other leader available. All other teams well ahead in good condition."

There was much diverse, and some heated, comment on the situation. But above the general clamor rose the strident tones of Black Mart, alluding with manifest satisfaction to the fact that Baldy was certainly proving himself a "quitter" now.

"Baldy may be lame, but he is not a quitter," denied the Woman wrathfully. "Besides, this race is never won--nor lost--till the first team is in," and she turned to comfort Ben Edwards.

He had been suddenly roused from happy thoughts by this disconcerting news. From his eyes there faded the glorious vision of the great University beside the Golden Gate; of the rose-covered cottage where his mother would have only pleasant things to do; of Moose Jones in a shiny hat and tailed coat receiving the plaudits of a whole State for his princely gifts to its chosen seat of learning--the vision of his own success laid upon the altar of love and gratitude. And instead he saw only the distant cabin at Timber, with poor Baldy crippled and suffering, bringing bitter disappointment to his friends; and his heart was filled with grief and longing for the dog.

Black Mart edged through the throng toward Jones. "I told you how it 'ud be, Moose; that pet o' yourn ain't comin' through as good as you thought he would when you was so willin' an' anxious t' bet your hard-earned dust on him. An' I reckon 'Scotty' Allan ain't so pleased with himself fer goin' agin what most ev'rybody said about his usin' that cur fer a leader."

"Speakin' o' bets, *an' curs*, Mart, ef you want t' do any more bettin', I'm willin't' accommodate you. I'm ready t' back my opinion that 'Scotty' kin come in first, without a leader, ef you think any ways diff'rent."

Black Mart glanced again at the Bulletin and read slowly--"Rubbing tried without success. Baldy on sled. Irish and Rover probably in lead. McMillan's feet still tender. Another storm coming up. Outlook bad."

"Seems kinda onsportsman like, like bettin' on a sure thing; but ef you really insist, Moose, in the face o' this yere message, why you kin go as fur's you like. Mebbe a dollar 'ud suit you better, the way things is goin' now, than a

thousand;" and the people laughed at the covert allusion to their previous wager. Moose Jones whitened visibly under his thick coat of tan at the insulting manner of his enemy. All of his hatred culminated in his desire to show his contempt for Mart and his predictions.

"Well then, let's make it somethin' worth while this time. Let's say your claim agin mine---the Midas agin the Golconda---that the Allan an' Darlin' dogs win the race."

A thrill of wild excitement ran through the crowd---two of the richest claims in the whole of Alaska staked on the success or failure of one dog team, and the leader of that "down and out" at Timber.

"Oh, Moose, if our team don't come in you'll lose a terrible lot, an' you've worked so hard t' git it."

"Even losin' Golconda won't break me now, Sonny; not by a long shot. An' even ef it did, I got what I allers did have left; two hands t' work with, the hull country t' work in, an' a kid that likes me," with an affectionate glance at the boy, "t' work fer. With all that, an' a good dog er two, I wouldn't call a Queen my aunt. An' ef we should win, Ben,---well, it's porterhouse fer Baldy the rest of his life at Mart Barclay's expense."

At Timber the time was passing with discouraging rapidity. Nothing they could do seemed to have any beneficial effect on Baldy's legs---the legs that had been such a matter of pride to the boy in the old Golconda days.

In the races it is the custom to carry, at intervals, any dogs who need to recuperate, but Baldy had always manifested a certain scorn of these "passengers"; and "Scotty" knew that it would only be by force that he could be kept off his feet.

"Bill, you hold the dog; and Paul, if you'll keep the mouth of the sleeping bag open, I'll try to get Baldy into it."

Poor Baldy resisted, but he was in the hands of his friends, so that his resistance was of necessity less violent than he could have wished; and in spite of his opposition he was tied in the bag, and gently lifted upon the sled.

After thoughtful consideration, "Scotty" placed Irish and Rover at the head of the team. "They're good dogs; mighty good dogs, but they're not used to the grind like Baldy."

He took his place at the handle-bars. "I'll try my hardest, boys, but every chance is against me now."

Before he could give the word to the new leaders, there was the sound of gnawing, and the quick rending of cloth. He turned to see Baldy's head emerge from the bag, his eyes blazing with determination and his sharp fangs tearing the fastenings apart, and the hide to shreds.

"Baldy," he called; but Baldy threw himself from the sled with evident pain, but in a frenzy of haste.

With intense amazement they watched him drag himself, with the utmost difficulty, out of the sled, and up to the front of the team.

He paused a moment, and then by a supreme effort started off, expecting the others to follow. There was no response to his desperate appeal---for they were not used to Baldy as a loose leader. Again he came back, and again endeavored to induce his team-mates to go with him down the trail, but in vain; they waited a word from their master.

The men stood speechless; and the dog, whimpering pitifully, crept close to Allan and looking up into his face reproachfully seemed to beg to be restored to his rightful place, and tried to show him that just so long as there was life in

Baldy's body, "Scotty" would have a leader.

Paul Kegsted and Bill Allan hastily disappeared around opposite corners of the building to meet on the other side with eyes suspiciously wet.

"Bill, did you ever see anything like that," demanded Kegsted tremulously, "for grit and spirit and---"

"And brave and loving service," added Bill, swallowing hard.

While "Scotty's" voice broke as, leaning down to stroke the dog tenderly, he said, "I know you're game, Baldy, game to the end; but it can't be done, and I'll hook you up to prove it."

To his astonishment Baldy moved forward; very, very slowly at first, then slightly faster and with less and less stiffness, until in an hour or so of moderate speed he was himself once more.

The exercise had done more than the liniment, and finally he was swinging along at a rate that showed no sign of his recent incapacity. They were off again in their usual form, and Nome waited impatiently for word of the belated team.

In the next few hours the messages that reached the expectant city were full of thrills---of hopes and fears. Groups of excited people met to discuss again all phases of the contest; the freshness of the dogs, the stamina of the men, the possibility of accidents; for a broken harness, a refractory leader, an error in judgment, may mean overwhelming defeat at the eleventh hour.

Never in the annals of the Sweepstakes had the result been so doubtful, the chances so even. The two Johnsons, Holmsen, Dalzene, Allan---all men noted for their ability and fortitude---men who would be picked out of the whole North to represent the best type of trailsmen, were nearly neck and neck, less than fifty miles from Nome, ready for the final dash. And what a dash it was!

[Illustration: AN ALAKAN SWEEPSTAKES TEAM

Fay Dalzene, Driver]

Like phantom teams they silently sped far out over the frozen waters of Bering Sea, threading their way between huge ice hummocks that rose, grotesque and ghostly, in the misty grayness of the Arctic twilight. Through the chill dusk they toiled up the steep slopes of Topkok Hill, through treacherous defiles, over perilous hidden glaciers, toward Solomon and safety.

It was any one's race.

The telephone brought news that varied from moment to moment. John Johnson was steady as to pace, and slightly in the lead; later Holmsen had passed him, then Dalzene. Allan had dropped behind. The excitement grew more intense each instant. Side by side drove Dalzene and Charlie Johnson, with Holmsen at their heels---dogs and men on their mettle, magnificent in endurance and spirit; but closing in upon them was "Finn John" with his Blue Eyed Leader, and Nome well knew what they could do, and had done twice.

Then, too, there was always "Scotty" to be feared; always his marvelous generalship to be reckoned with; his perfect mastery of the dogs, and their devotion to him to be considered.

"Seals on the ice ahead, Spot," had been a suggestion that had fired not only Spot, but Tom, Dick and Harry also with a new interest that almost banished fatigue.

Then at intervals there were broken bars, alternately whistled and sung, of Home Sweet Home; and the dogs knew, somehow, that this strange noise always signified that their journey was nearly at an end. And once, in readjusting his harness, "Scotty" had caressed Baldy so affectionately that the dog forgot the struggle he had passed through, remembering the happy fact that he had not failed in his trust.

All of this encouragement resulted in an increased activity that began to tell in the fast decreasing distance between their team and the others.

"On, Baldy; on, boys," and on they came out of the long reaches of utter desolation, of dreary monotony, of lifeless calm, with a rush that soon brought Johnson in view. "Gee"---they whirled to the right and by him with unexpected ease; then on and on still, till they could see the others. Baldy, spurred by that to yet stronger efforts, plunged forward with renewed vigor until he seemed, with his team-mates, to touch the drifted snows as lightly as a gull skims the crested waves.

When nearly abreast of those who had been setting so fast a pace, Allan, in a low voice, tense with the excitement of the moment, called again to the dogs. "Speed up, Baldy; speed up, boys. Don't let the Siberian Fuzzy-Wuzzies beat you again. Show them what your long legs are good for---Alaskans to the front," and Baldy, with an almost incredible burst of speed, shot past them, and was at last in the lead in that mad, headlong drive for Nome.

There was no hint of the laggard now in Tom, Dick and Harry---no suspicion of "staleness" in their keen pride in their work; Irish and Rover, ever fleet and responsive, needed no urging; Jack McMillan gave his stupendous energy, his superb intelligence with loyal abandon; and Baldy, as well as "Scotty," felt that each dog in the entire team had proved the wisdom of his choice by a willing service now to the driver he loved.

Fort Davis! The thunderous boom of the guns heralded the approach of the first team. Nome, up the coast, was in a furor. Once more the people gathered quickly in the streets, and hurried toward the gaily illuminated stands to witness the finish of the great event.

Though it was ten o'clock at night, the full moon and the radiance of the snow made everything shimmer and glitter with wonderful brilliancy. High above the lights of the little town, which seemed but a continuation of the stars, flamed the Way-Farer's Cross on the spire of St. Joseph's; huge bonfires cast a flickering crimson glow upon the frosted pinnacles of ice, and rockets rose and fell like sparkling jewels in the clear sky.

Overhead fluttered a silken purse and the Trophy Cup, suspended by the Kennel Club colors from a wire that marked the end of the longest and most picturesque course in the racing world.

The wild wailing of many wolf dogs, shrill whistles, the merry peal of bells, added to the deafening clamor---as far away over the frozen sea a dim black shadow came---a swiftly moving shadow that soon was engulfed in the swaying mob that surged to meet it.

The Woman leaned from out the Judges' Stand, waving streamers of White and Gold in joyous welcome.

Ben Edwards, thrilling with pride and happiness, slipped through the jostling crowd, and saw coming to him, down the Silver Trail, an ugly, rough-coated, faithful dog---bringing in his triumph, a justification of the boy's unshaken faith, a reward for his unfaltering affection.

Again and again there were the stirring notes of the bugle, shouts of good will and praise, wild, incessant cheers, as the Allan and Darling Team, with every dog in harness, and "Scotty" Allan at the handle-bars, swept over the line---winners of the most hotly contested race the North has ever known, and led to victory by Baldy of Nome.

[Illustration]

XIV

Immortals of the Trail

[Illustration]

[Illustration]

CHAPTER XIV

IMMORTALS OF THE TRAIL

The brief summer was over. The flowers that had blossomed so freely and so brightly under fair skies and in ceaseless sunshine were gone; and in the air was the chill of the early Arctic winter.

The Woman shivered slightly in spite of her furs. There was excitement in the air.

Beside her, erect and soldierly, walked Captain Rene' Haas of the French Army, with a firm elastic tread that spoke of many marches.

He was talking earnestly with an enthusiasm that lighted up his keen dark eyes as with an inner fire.

"You see, there were many places last winter on the battle-front where horses, mules or motors could not be used; for the snow was too soft and deep, and the crust too thin. Many places where they needed just such a method of transportation as we of the North know so well,---dogs. I tried," modestly, "to show them a little of all that could be done, with a few that I trained casually. But I spoke much of the marvelous dogs of Alaska that I have learned to know and love so well in the past few years; of their intelligence, their endurance, and their almost incredible speed in the big races. My Government listened; and so I was sent to take back with me the pick of the whole North, though there will be many more from parts of Canada and Labrador."

"But not like ours of Nome," proudly replied the Woman.

"No, not like yours of Nome. That is why I am here. A hundred or more trained by Allan and other racing men will be worth a thousand ordinary recruits. Since he received my cable message telling my plans, 'Scotty' has assembled a splendid lot of team dogs for me, with a full equipment of sleds and harness; and even the dog salmon for the 'Commissary Department.'

"There is indeed but little left for me to do, as the outfit will be perfect now, with a few more experienced leaders."

"And you think," questioned the Woman with lips that quivered and eyes that were dim, "that they will be treated well, that---" Her voice was unsteady and she hesitated.

The young Captain seemed to divine all the unspoken fears.

"There is very little danger in the work," he assured her readily. "They will probably be used entirely in courier and carrier service in the passes of the French Alps.

"I belong to an Alpine Corps myself, and they will be under my direct supervision, so far as possible. Really," with honest conviction, "they will be far better off than if you sold them to freighters or prospectors for a life of toil, possibly of neglect even. All soldiers, irrespective of nationality, are good to the animals in their charge."

"I suppose it's true," sighed the Woman, "that we cannot go on accumulating dogs indefinitely; that some of them must be sold from time to time. And I, too, would rather see them go like this than to feel they might suffer worse hardships and abuses on the Trail."

"Scotty" met them at the door of the Kennel. "Come in, and we'll all go over the place together. It will not take long now to make up the rest of the required number," and he skimmed quickly over the paper in his hand.

Matt, hovering near, doing unnecessary things for the dogs, was plainly much disturbed. George and Dan, full of a war atmosphere produced by the French officer, and a kennel and corral guarded night and day, conversed eagerly of the important affairs that were happening about them; while Ben, listening apparently to their serious discussions of the European situation, as likely to be affected by this purchase, was in reality beset with a dread that drove all else from his mind.

"It's going to be a hard choice," the Woman mused as she glanced down the long line of stalls on either side, and one end, of the roomy stable.

"Scotty" paused before the Mego dogs that had fought so valiantly for first honors in the Juvenile Race.

[Illustration: CAPTAIN HAAS OF THE FRENCH ARMY, AND HIS ALASKAN SLEDGES]

"Excellent," observed Captain Haas, as he looked them over carefully. "Strong, intelligent, fleet," and "Scotty" wrote the names of Judge, Jimmie and Pete.

"I knew I was a pretty good judge o' dogs," announced Dan with pleased conviction; "but there's some class t' bein' a judge backed up by the French Government," and he regarded his former team with mingled feelings of regret and satisfaction.

On they went, adding name after name to the fast growing list.

"Not Tom, Dick and Harry," the Woman exclaimed as they came to the Tolmans. "These Veterans have served us too long and too loyally." And "Scotty" nodded silently.

"Irish and Rover?"

But before the question could be answered, the gentle Irish Setters gazed into her eyes beseechingly, and nosed her sleeve, confident of a caress.

"Impossible," she murmured hastily; "they are our dear comrades. And Spot," with an emphatic shake of the head, "belongs to George."

Finally they paused at the last two stalls and looked from Jack McMillan to Baldy. McMillan tugged violently at his chain, striving to reach the Woman; while Baldy, as though he understood it all, crept close to "Scotty's" side.

Captain Haas knew both of the dogs well. He had seen Jack turned from a career of rebellion and unrest to one of willing patient service; and Baldy, plodding, obscure, hard working Baldy, become the boast of the whole North.

"Here are the two," admiringly, "that please me most of all. McMillan's strength is superb---Baldy's endurance unparalleled. What War Dogs they would make! One I must have; it matters little which. The price---" he gave an eloquent gesture of complete indifference.

The Woman stroked Jack's sable muzzle gently. She thought of the old days when his name was once a symbol of all that was fierce and wolf-like and wicked in the annals of Nome; and then of his unbroken spirit and steadfast allegiance to her. "McMillan of the Broken Tusks," she said softly, "has no price."

Then, eagerly, "Baldy?"

"I cannot give Baldy up," was the firm reply. "He has led the team in three great victories; and he did not desert me when I lay freezing and helpless, alone in the snow." "Scotty's" hand rested lovingly on the ugly dark head pressed so tightly, so trustfully against him. "He's a wonderful leader and my faithful friend."

"I understand," the Captain said, and turned away. "The list is now complete."

And in the dusk of the Kennel, as once on the Golconda Trail, the boy's wet cheek was laid tenderly against the dog's rough coat; but the tears that fell now were tears of joy. "Oh, Baldy," he whispered happily, "some day you'll be with me Outside. We'll do things there some day."

[Illustration: BALDY OF NOME]

Then came the day, filled with excitement and thrills, when on a tow-line three hundred and fifty feet long, one hundred and six famous dogs passed through the streets of the far-away Arctic town, on their way to the battle-fields of France.

At their head was Spot, with George Allan trudging proudly by his side.

"I'll lend you Spot to get them down to the dock," was his offer to Captain Haas. "You know he is fine in a crowd," and the officer smilingly accepted the services of Spot.

And crowds there were, too, to go through; for as on the Sweepstakes Days all of Nome had gathered to bid a final God Speed to the greatest dogs of Alaska---a Foreign Legion indeed---bound for the front.

With no confusion, under the direction of Captain Haas and "Scotty" Allan, who was to go with them as far as Quebec, they had been placed on board the "Senator" lying out in the roadstead.

A silent little group stood on the dreary beach watching the twinkling lights of the distant ship as she sailed, phantom-like, out into the misty grayness of Bering Sea.

Only the dull pounding of the surf and the weird cry of the wolf dogs broke the stillness.

At last the Woman turned from the Big Man at her side toward the boy and Moose Jones.

"Some time, perhaps," she said half sadly, yet with pride, "the Captain may have great tales for us of the War Dogs of the North. But never, never, Ben, will there be greater tales than we can tell of the Old Guard, Baldy of Nome and the others---our Immortals of the Trail."

[Illustration]