

throw their own pontoons across, and gobble us up with the rest of the troops!"

Stevens nodded in grim sympathy.

"Down here," Cadman went on, "it only looks foolish and annoying, but up there, where good men are being shot to pieces because they haven't got lead to sling back—it's tragic."

"Want to get 'cross, don't ye?" inquired the drawing voice of Butters.

Cadman flopped limply over on to the earth, between laughter and tears at the words, and glanced up to find an expression of perfect seriousness on Ezra's face. His sense of humor stood off his natural resentment.

"No," he answered whimsically; "but I'm willing to take you over if you really want to go!"

Ezra scratched his chin. "Guess I'll do it," he announced finally. "I want some o' that feller's smokin'."

"Of course you'll take the rest of us?" inquired Stevens, checking an almost hysterical burst of laughter.

"Can't get them horses and waggons over," replied Butters, "but I might manage it with them blue boxes in the waggons."

Cadman's mouth dropped open. He got to his feet and grasped Ezra roughly by the shoulder.

"This is no time for fooling, my man," he reminded him.

"I ain't foolin'," insisted Butters.

The two officers looked at him intently. There was nothing in the lean figure, the hopelessly ordinary face, and the weak chin to arouse confidence, nor had the man ever given indication that he could do anything other than drive his team.

"All right, take 'em across," said Cadman suddenly, with an air of washing his hands of the whole matter.

Stevens stared at his superior in amazement, but Cadman turned his back and walked toward the bank of the river.

"Kin I boss them other chaps?" inquired Ezra, with a wave of the hand toward his fellow teamsters.

Cadman turned on his heel and made a wide, all-including gesture. "You can do anything," he sputtered angrily. "I can fight men, but I can't fight nature. If you can jump that ditch—and he jerked a gauntleted thumb toward the water—and take those boxes with you, go on and do it!"

Butters walked back to his own waggon, summoned two other teamsters, and commenced to unload the heavy, squat boxes. They piled them in a pyramid on the ground. Once in a while Cadman took his moody glance from the river long enough to glance at Butters' operations; the rest of the time he stared straight ahead of him, listening to the distant rattle of guns.

"Shucks!" exclaimed Ezra, working at the wheel of his waggon, with a wrench. "This ain't nothin'. We'll be across here in a jiffy. I got stuck once down at Three Rivers with a dray-load o' castings."

The cavalrymen, under Cadman's orders, were now attempting the construction of a raft. They had got an axe from one of the waggons and were pecking impotently at the gnarled trunk of a tree standing close to the water. Stevens was estimating the chances of taking waggons and all, trying a forced march to the nearest bridge—an indefinite distance to the north—and possibly becoming a first lieutenant, or even a captain.

"Here, you fellers!" exclaimed Butters. "Unload two more waggons and bust up the boxes—the waggon-boxes."

The teamsters looked at him in uncertainty.

"Go on—do it!" he commanded, with a sudden stiffening of his weak underjaw.

He saw them at work, then set two other men to splicing together all the halters to be found and piecing out the result with the tugs and lines from the different teams.

"Save the nails!" he shouted to the men, who were rapidly breaking two of the waggons to pieces.

The two officers and their men began to glance oftener in the direction of the busy throng about the waggons. Ezra, his empty pipe sticking straight out, was hopping about everywhere. Under his orders the boards from the dismantled waggon-boxes had been nailed to the box of his own waggon, which he had taken off the wheels and lowered to the ground.

"By George!" exclaimed Cadman, in astonishment. "A boat!"

He turned to his men, his face flushing, and began to give orders. In ten minutes the remodelled waggon, a clumsy and by no means seaworthy-looking craft, was at the edge of the water.

"Now," exclaimed Butters, as he stripped off his clothes, "somebody hold my pipe. 'I ain't goin' to lose that after all this bother!'"

He stood on the bank, knotting about his waist the long rope which he had constructed of harness and halters.

"Don't nobody go hauling me back till I give the word," he commanded. "I ain't near a bad swimmer as I look to be."

He walked along the shore to a point two hundred yards above the waggons. "When I'm across," he said, "tie that there rope to the wagon-box, and we'll see!"

He shivered slightly as he stood on the brink, his long, ungainly limbs twitching as he looked at the cold,

black water. "I don't like this here business none too much," he admitted, "but I can't stand watchin' that feller smokin' over there, an' me with an empty pipe."

With a mighty splash he struck the water. The first rush of the current caught him, and he rolled and tumbled down stream, awkwardly striving to get into position to breast the current. The men with the ropes started to haul him back.

"Let him go a bit further," commanded Cadman, without looking away from the spot where Ezra's black head bobbed in the current.

"They ought to haul him in," suggested Stevens presently, looking anxious. "There isn't a man of us could swim across there."

"I don't know," answered Cadman; "I'm getting my eyes open to a few things."

The teamster was swimming. The current beat him down swiftly, but he gained. Breathlessly the men watched his efforts. His progress was slow. Once they thought he had signalled them to pull back, but discovered their mistake when his angry shouts to "Let go!" came bubbling from the river.

"Stevens," commanded Cadman sharply, "signal that chap over there that they can have their ammunition as fast as they can send for it."

Stevens looked hard at his superior, and then began wigwagging busily to the other shore, where the signal-man woke into life at the first flutter of the handkerchief.

"The man's a fish!" exclaimed Stevens, as he watched Butters' head popping over the surface of the water twenty yards from the opposite shore line.

"I suppose," said Cadman, "that's what's called a hero!"

The trooper who had ridden in Butters' waggon suddenly spoke. "His name," he said thoughtfully, "is Ezra Butters. He used to drive a truck in Three Rivers, Michigan. His wife's name is Molly. He told me so. They have no children. He is very fond of the free lunches provided by a citizen of Three Rivers named Dolan."

Cadman glanced in surprise at the speaker, caught the expression on his face, and nodded his head slowly several times.

The men saw Butters reach shallow water, stagger a bit, then flounder somehow on to shore. In the excitement of tying the ropes to the bow and stern of his extemporized boat, they forgot to cheer him. He lay gasping like a fish on the other shore, the signal-man working over him anxiously. After a moment the latter rose to his knees and commenced signalling. Cadman watched the fluttering flag and then shouted:

"Butters wants his pipe sent over with the first load!" he cried.

Fifteen minutes later, the waggon-box pitched, tossed, and creaked across on its first trip. It reached the other shore half full of water, but the two blue boxes in it were uninjured, and Ezra's pipe bobbed on the surface of the water inside the boat. On the next trip Butters, stark naked but with his pipe going full blast, sat astride one of the boxes and bailed diligently with the nose-bag of one of his horses.

As the third load reached the shore with Cadman and Stevens on board, a dozen pack-mules, under escort of a little squad of cavalry, came clattering down to the shore of the river, where Butters was busy superintending the landing. Cadman stood near, watching the operations with an air of abstraction. Visions of a captaincy were dispelled by the visions of a weak-faced, long-limbed teamster, naked save for a flapping felt hat.

"What brand o' tobacco d'ye smoke, anyway?" Butters asked the signal-man, as he landed on the fifth trip. "I kind o' like it."

An hour later the infantrymen dotting a line of hills two miles beyond the river, where they had lain for hours holding back their ammunition—shooting only when to fire was to kill—heard rumors of cartridges. A few minutes later men began to spill the shining yellow objects out of the blue boxes on to the earth, and a yell went up that was heard at the river. The enemy, encountering a fire which in some unaccountable fashion trebled in volume within a few minutes, backed off after the fashion of a man who has received an unexpected blow in the solar plexus.

In the glow of sunset, the Brigadier walked his horse slowly down to the river, having won a battle that he had despaired of ever doing anything but lose. He approached the place where "The Ark," with its rope and harness-cable, was moored. Cadman rose and saluted.

"Lientenant," commenced the Brigadier, but Cadman raised a deferentially silencing hand.

"There's the man who brought it across, General," he explained with a gesture. "I didn't do it."

The Brigadier looked, arched his eyebrows, and got off his horse. He went to where Butters sat on an empty blue-box, puffing contentedly at his pipe.

"My man," he commenced, with an air befitting the occasion, "in the name of the army and of your country I wish to thank you publicly. It is due to your heroism that the battle has been won."

Ezra removed his pipe and stared at the Brigadier uncomprehendingly.

"Battle?" he asked blankly. "What battle?"—*Every-body's Magazine.*