## A BICYCLE EPISODE.

A STORY OF THE PALISADES.

BY ALFRED R. CALHOUN.

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PART I.

Mr. Van Cortland-Brown was rich, addle-aged, and a widower. In addition to these great advantages, Mr. Van Cortland-Brown had other qualificadons, which, if not particular to himself, he firmly believed had given him a great lead in life's race over ordinary ortals. He was convinced that there was not a man in the United States who had such very blue Knickerbocker blood in his veins as himself. His intelligence was not of the highest order, nor his information the most extensive, yet he had sufficient of both to know that the name Brown was English. If it had been plain Brown, so great was his dislike of common things, he would have had it changed by act of the legislature, but the final "e" redeemed it. and induced him to believe it was of Norman origin and that there was a Browne who taught with William the Conqueror at Hastings, and whose name was inscribed high on the Battle Abbey role.

One of Mr. Van Cortland-Browne's most precious possessions-for apart from his interst he believed that he had a permanent chattel mortgage on



MUSICAL VOICE OF MRS. FLOYD-FLOYD JONES,

the girl-was his beautiful and accomplished daughter. Florence, at this time just twenty-one, and legally her

Miss Florence Van Cortland-Browne presided over her father's beautiful ummer home, at Eagle's Nest on the Palisades, overlooking what some one has called the "Lordly Hudson."

Eagle's Nest was the center of hospitality. Its doors were always open to the blue-blooded friends of Mr. Van Cortland-Browne and his daughter. The most frequent visitor during the summer of 895, was Commodore Blakeley Horton-Smith, a prosperous, fine looking young broker whose title was given him by the nearly unanimous vote of the St. George Cance club. Mr. Van Cortland-Browne's only objections to Commodore Blakely Horton-Smith were his last name and the well-known fact that his father had made his for

tune in lard. As became a man of his antecedents and position, Mr. Van Cortland-Browne was gallant to the ladies, as he himself expressed it "cap a pled." nearest pelghbor was Mrs. Maj. Floyd-Floyd Jones, a widow lady of independent fortune, fine presence, and if rumor were to be credited, engaged to Mr. Van Cortland-Browne

A few miles above Eagle's Nest lived Col. Washington Johnson, a southerner, a bachelor of fifty, of doubtful fortune but of positively brilliant antecedents, and, like most men hailing from his section, he was ready to fight, if anyone doubted that his family was not only the first in the state but in the

If Col. Washington Johnson had announced his purpose to go back to the south and never to return, or if he had been called away by what coroners' juries used to describe as "a special act of Providence," Mr. Van Cortland-Browne would not have regarded either event as an irreparable misfortune.

It must be acknowledged that while Mrs. Maj. Floyd-Floyd Jones was a lady of the highest character she was not indifferent to the attentions of the othr sex, even after her engagement to Mr. Van Cortland-Browne. And as Coll Washington Johnson, who was a

tall, athletic man, was evidently determined to win his way to the widow's heart, if he had to destroy all rivals, the master of Eagle's Nest was not so happy as his blue blood and wealth would warrant.

Mr. Van Cortland-Browne considered himself a handsome man, an opinion shared by Miss Florence, who, in this matter at least, he believed, voiced the opinion of the great world. But, unfortunately, Mr. Van Cortland-Browne had taken on more adipose tissue in the last few years than was consistent with manly grace and physical activity. He consulted the family physician, Dr. Thompson, about this, and Dr. Thompson said:

"You don't want medicine, my dear fellow. Go and get yourself measured for a bike. Practice at some school here in the city till you get ready to go to the country, and my word for it, few months' wheeling about Eagle's Nest will make you as strong as Sandow and as healthy and graceful as Apollo."

Mr. Van Cortland-Browne took this advice. Having but little else to do during the months of February, March and April, he practiced with a persistency that would have honored a nobler purpose, and, unheeding headers and bruises, he had become an expert, at least in his own opinion, by the middle of May, when he moved with Miss Florence and the servants to Eagle's Nest.

There was only one thing that tended to detract from his self-satisfaction in this accomplishment, and that was that Col. Washington Johnson sat a wheel quite as gracefully as himself, and, having longer legs, sent it ahead with more rapidity.

Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones was a most accomplished bicyclist, and though she delighted in setting a rapid pace for Mr Van Cortland-Browne, he was, on such occasions, more than compensated for the effort by her precious com-

As a matter of form, rather than because his interests required it, Mr. Van Cortland-Browne went into the city every day, and returned home in time for luncheon in the early afternoon.

It was the 1d of July, and Mr. Van

Cortland-Browne called his daughter up on the telephone to tell her not to wait lunch, as he would not be home till three o'clock. It had been raining, and the wires along the Palisade must have been crossed; but he, be that as it may, Mr. Van Cortland-Browne, instead of hearing from Miss Florence, recognized the musical voice of Mrs. Maj. Floyd-Floyd Jones, demanding:

"Is that you, Col. Johnson?" Before Mr. Van Courtland-Brown could reply, he heard the colonel say-

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Jones, I want to talk with you."
"Oh, I shall be delighted! came the

widow's exclamation over the wire. Mr. Van Cortland-Browne's face grew purple, and he stood as if paralyzed with the receiver to his ear, while this conversation took place:

Col. Johnson-Are you aware, my dear Mrs. Jones, that tomorrow is the Fourth of July-Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones-The explosion of firecrackers has kept me aware

of that fact for a week. Col. Johnson-Have you an engagement for about sunset tomorrow even-

Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones (sweetly)-I

Col. Johnson-Then will you meet me on your wheel at the Lookout, and we an come home by the palisade road? Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones-With pleas-Col. Johnson-Then it's a bargain? Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones-Yes; good-

Col. Johnson-Good-by. Mr. Van Cortland-Browne dropped he receiver by the phone, and dropped

himself into a chair. He reached home by three o'clock and, contrary to his custom, remained in the house for the rest of the day, 'nursing his wrath to keep it warm.' Miss Florence thought her father was ill, and sought by some means to cheer him up, but without effect.

During the next twenty-four hours, Mr. Van Cortland-Browne did the most persistent thinking of his life, the conclusion of which was that he would take his wheel and surprise the perfidlous widow and her hated gallant at the appointed trysting place.

Unheeding the threatening storm, Mr. Browne mounted his wheel and started up the road, which, at points, runs dangerously close to the giddy edge of the towering palisades.

If the man could have forgotten himself and his troubles, real or imagined, he would have been struck with the west, in the direction of the Hackensack river and the Ramapo mountains, heavy, black storm clouds rolled towards him. The glory from the upper flery crests was reflected down on forest and field, till it seemed to glorify the beautiful villas and the carefullykept gardens by which they were sur-

A glance to the south would have revealed the upper bay and the watertles by which it is surrounded. To his right the verdant hills / Westchester wept down till they knelt by the waters of the Hudson

Yonkers, Irvington and Tarrytown, with the splendid clusters of villas on the heights above, looked more like cities of the mirage than centers of human habitation.

Mr. Van Cortland-Browne saw the tiny row-boat of the fishermen, like animated specks on the broad breast of the mighty river. He saw yachts and other sailing craft, the sails glowing like luminous opals in the storm light; and he saw the beflagged excursio steamers hastening southward from the picnic grounds up the river.

These things did not impress Mr. Van Cortland-Browne strongly, for he had een them often before, but he was impressed by the fact that the lightning was flashing overhead, that it was growing rapidly dark, and that a few of the palisades, dropping in sheer de-

seent down to the water's edge. Mr. Browne was on the point of disnounting from his wheel, and seeking the protection of a tree from the now falling rain, when to his indescribable horror, the wheel, like a wild horse, resisted his control and leaped over the awful, red bank.

Had it not been that at that moment the lightning flashed and the thunder



HOW FAR HEDROPPED HE COULD NOT TELL.

frums of heaven echoed along the palsades, Mr. Browne's agonized cry would have been heard by the villa residents a quarter of a mile away.

The instinct of self-preservation led the man to reach out his arms in the effort to stop his downward flight; he was so stunned that he could not think, that it was folly to prolong the effort intil he found himself astride a stunted cedar tree, whose groaning roots threatened to give way every moment.

The rain increased and pourned down the wall of the palisades in torrents. he decided to change his position. In-The darkness became absolutely stygian. Away to the south he could see the coppery glow of the city's lights on | neath it and cling to it with his hands the lowering clouds, and had he the courage to look down, he would have seen the flashing lights of steamers, light of day and with a stronger tree whose signal whistles came like torture

o his ears. Hitherto the earth had been a happy and an easy place for Mr. Van Cortand-Browne, but now that he found himself face to face with a horrible death, he tried to pierce the black

clouds and to think of the great be-

sky along the palisades, as soon as the rain had ceased; and the horror of his awful position was intensified by the knowledge that not far away thousands of happy people were enjoying the holiday, all unmindful of the danger and the terible anxiety to which a neighbor was being subjected.

Mr. Van Cortland-Browne had been a very proud man, proud of his family, proud of his wealth and proud of what he considered his own superior personality; but clinging to that frail cedar with his soft, white hands grasping at the wet rocks, the meanest creature on earth would not have envied him his position. The darkness that shut out the awful depths below but intensified the danger to his excited imagination.

As he clung there, feeling that the roots of the tree must give way at any moment and send him crashing to the bottom, he heard on the heights above the voice of a negro, blithely singing a plantation melody. Mr. Browne recognized the voice as that of his own stableman, evidently on his way to



THE CEDAR TREE HAD BEEN TORN FROM ITS MOORINGS.

isit his sweetheart at Mrs. Major Floyd-Floyd Jones' villa; and the mas-ter envied the man. Indeed, so far had Mr. Van Cortland-Browne's pride vanished that at that instant he would gladly have exchanged fortune, family

and complexion with his servant.

Mr. Browne braced himself to shout to the black man on the cliff in the hope of attracting his attention, but, as he inflated his lungs for the effort he heard, or imagined he heard, the roaning of the cedar tree's roots, and, thinking that his cry would add to the strain and so precipitate the catastrophe, he desisted.

Still on the heights above, and even from the vessels on the river, and particularly from the direction of the great city to the left, he saw rockets cutting through the black night and bursting into a rain of many-colored fires. Now beauty and sublimity of the scene, of and then the sound of music came to which he was the center. Away to the his ears, blending with the cheers and delighted cries of small boys who are never so happy as when playing with

Resembling the lines of quick, pallid lights that penciled their course on the clouds, there shot across Mr. Browne's mind green flashes of jealousy as he gave sudden and momentary thought to Col. Johnson and the beautiful widow whom he imagined riding hastily home through the storm on their wheels and now enjoying a tete-a-tetein the drawing-room of the latter.

If Mr. Browne had not strengthened his muscles by months of bicycle effort he could not have retained his position astride the stunted cedar for twenty minutes, but he was in no mood for congratulating himself on his ability to defer for a few black hours what seemed to him inevitable death.

Now and then Mr. Browne gave thought to his daughter, and he felt a pang of remorse as he recalled his opposition to the attentions of Commodore Blakely Horton-Smith, and he promised himself that if by any chance he should survive long enough to see the young people he would give them his consent and his blessing.

How long the minutes seemed! Each hour was an eternity of indescribable suffering. Although his position astride the cedar tree was much like that in the saddle of a bicycle, there was no correspondence in the comfort. By midfeet away were the precipitous cliffs | night he began to feel that if the tree did not give way and send him to the bottom he would soon split in two and the halves would go crashing down the jagged sides of the palisades.

Mr. Browne came at length to think that the sun had gone down for the last time, or at least that the earth had ceased to revolve on its axis, which amounted to the same thing; and, strange to say, this gave him a spark of comfort, for it meant that the people cheering and setting off fireworks in the upper world could not long sur-

vive him in the eternal darkness. The wretched man's hands were unfitted for the work to which they were now subjected; white, soft and shapely, they were torn by his efforts to cling to the rocks on either side and above his head.

At length the rockets ceased, the glow of roman candles died out, the shrill yell of the small boy was no longer heard, and the tooting of the steamboat whistles ceased to come up from the river.

An appalling silence came to the heights above, but the wind coming down the river and the murmur of the water in the black depths beneath struck his strained ears like the saddest dirge ever heard by mortal. It was like the dead march played in advance to the condemned soldier as he is carried blindfolded to the place of execution.

We are told that when the box of Pandora was opened all the evils that now afflict mankind flew out, and that only hope remained behind. As the interminable hours of horror and darkness were away, even hope ceased to give strength to the doomed man, and there came to his heart hope's black shadow, despair, and he began to feel

At length the man's physical torture dominated his mental anguish, and in his desperation to be freed from pain, cedar tree, he determined to drop be-This would have been a dilicate and difficult undertaking even in the full for support, but the abstacles were increased a thousand fold by the darkness, by the slippery rocks down which the water still poured, and by his own

physical weakness. Driven to desperation and with barely a fragment of presence of mind left. Mr. Browne began to dismount, taking care to cling, as a drowning man

position, and he enjoyed a few seconds of indescribable relief; but the weight of his body on his arms, which were not those of a trained athlete, soon brought an equally keen pain to his hands and shoulders. He made up his mind that the position astride the tree was better, as a permanent thing than

to cling suspended. Even if Mr. Browne had not been exhausted by his efforts so far, he could not have performed successfully the turn-verein act of pulling himself up to a horiontal bar and sitting astride the same, and this was practically what he had now to do. In his wild struggle he drove his toes into the crevices, but make a visit on their wheels to the scene could gain no foothold.

He heard the groaning of the roots catastrophe. above him, and he felt the cedar bending down under his weight and efforts. At length there came a crash. The cedar tree had been torn from its moorings in the crevice of the Pallisades wall, and the unfortunate man fell.

Nature may seem cruel at times, but when she brings death she is ever kindly. She closes the eyes to surrounding dangers, and deadens the brain with an oblivion that blots out the past and makes us indifferent to the future. Mr. Van Cortland-Browne knew no

with a rosier light came over the Westchester hills beyond the Hudson. A the river, and the few white clouds in of the rising sun, gave promise of a beautiful day, when Mr. Van Cortland-Browne regained consciousness and looked about him. His first impression was that he was at the bottom of the Palisades and that every bone in his body must have been broken. When he had gained sufficient presnce of mind he began to take an inventory of his anatomy. He moved and felt his arms, and rejoiced to find them unbroken, though decidedly stiff. He investigated his legs in the same way, and despair gave place to hope in his heart when he found them practically uninjured.

Mr. Van Cortland-Browne rose and looked about him. He was on a little the wind ceases and to prevent them plateau just six feet below the point dry before. He could not have fallen more than eighteen inches, so that his unconsciousness was due to mental

shock rather than physical injury. The plateau had an area of about ten by twenty feet, and below this was a sheer wall of three hundred feet dropping down to the waters of the Hud-son. Although there was no danger, Mr. Van Cortland-Browne in his nervousness drew away from the edge. He was about to shout for help, when, to his surprise and horror, he discov ered that his voice had deserted him and that what he intended for a cry for aid died away in a gurgle in his throat.

Again despair rose in the ascendency, for he saw that if he could not raise his voice, to indicate to searchers his whereabouts, that he must die in this horrible place of hunger and thirst.

The sun rose higher and higher, and the Ill-starred man's throat and lips were so parched that he would have given half his fortune for a drink o water. Gradually he began to think that he was not of so much importance to the people of the upper world as h had imagined, for though his voice was gone his hearing was intensified, and, strain his ears as he would, he detect ed no sound of searchers or rescuers. It was high noon when a thrill of joy stirred his heart at hearing voices or



WHEN MR. VAN CORTLAND-BROWN REACHED TERRA FIRMA

the cliff above. The loudest of these was that of Commodore Blakely Horton-Smith, who shouted to people, evidently some distance away:

"I have found his wheel! My God, he has fallen over the Palisades!" Shrieks and cries of agony came nearer and nearer, and he heard some one saying:

"Take care of Miss Van Cortland-Browne. She has fainted." The speechless man on the plateau, it night have been thought, was in no position to give way to anger, yet he

soon became so angry as to forgt his thirst, the loss of his voice, the tortures of the past night, and the dangers that environed him; this was caused by hearing Col. Washington Johnson saying to Mrs. Major Floyd-Floyd Jones in soothing accents: "My dear Mrs. Jones, pray calm yourself. Death comes to all sooner or later.

It is the one thing we have to meet, and we should be prepared for it-particularly in the cose of our friends." "Go away go away!" shrieked Mrs.

Floyd-Floyd Jones; "you are a heartless

"But I assure you, I mean to be kind," protested Col. Washington Johnson. "Oh, Mr. Van Cortland-Browne was so grand, so noble, so everything that was manly and good! I shall never be myself again! This terrible calamity will shadow my life till 1 join him in the grave!" Then, in a voice indicative of anger and impatience, Mrs. Jones continued: "Why do you stand there, Col. Johnson, with your hands in your pockets? Why don't you make a search? Why do you not go down the cliffs and find the remains?"

"Well, madam," replied the colonel. gazing over the edge of the precipice, "if I were to go down the cliffs I should soon be a remains myself." The widow's words brought an indescribable comfort to the heart of

the unhappy man on the plateau be-With the suddenness of its departure, his voice came back to him, and, raising to its loudest, he called out: "My dear Mrs. Floyd-Floyd Jones! am down here pretty badly wrecked, out if you send me ropes to get me up I think I can ride home with you on my

wheel. Well, ropes were sent down to Mr. Van Cortland-Browne, and the young commodore descended the ropes hand over hand and fastened them securely about the man, who, within six months, was to become his father-in-law.

Strong arms on the top hauled away at a signal from the commodore, and, when Mr. Van Cortland-Browne reach-He saw the rockets shooting into the slings to a spar, to the frail cedar tree, ed terra firms, he found the arms of WILLIAM TAYLOR AND SON

Mr. Browne succeeded in changing his two women about him, and with cries of delight they were kissing his cheeks and wetting them with their tears.

The commodore came up the ropes hald over hand without assistance, and Miss Florence, regarding him as her father's deliverer, threatened to swoon again in his arms.

It is a little more that a year since Mr. Van Cortland-Browne's adventure, and if anyone thinks that this episode had been in any way exaggerated he can find that it has really been subdued and toned down from the reality by visiting Eagle's Nest on the palisades and hearing it from his lips of Mr. and Mrs. Van Cortland-Browne, who daily of what threatened to be an awful

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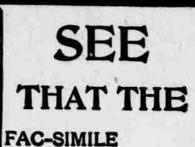
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