

"There Is a God"

By James Oliver
Curwood

Drawings by
George F. Kerr



The torture that I have undergone for so long will be ended, if you kill me now. But remember this, Tom—it is I—not science and progress—that have killed your God. It is such wrongs as I have done you that have killed God for these other thousands you speak of. I made you suffer terribly, and I repented long ago—when—when—” his voice choked him for a moment—“when she died,” he finished. “It is not because I fear death that I urge you not to kill me. It is not because I am a Christian, for I have sinned too deeply to be that. It is because I know that after you have killed me you will repent, as I have repented, and that you will suffer more than you

“Yes,” groaned the other; “you did. You were a brother to me then—and afterward.”

“Afterward,” sneered Gunnison. “Yes; after that I took you into the business which my father left to me. You got my confidence absolutely. You were as free in my home as a brother. My two little children loved you almost as much as they did me. I trusted you. And in return you robbed me. I knew that I was ruined as I came home that day, and yet even then I tried to find excuses for you, as I would have found excuses for a brother. No thought of arrest, of punishment, entered my mind. Temptation had led you into a colossal mistake. That was my defense of you. And when I reached home I found that you had ruined that, too. I have her letter still—the letter which told of your scheming and plotting together, a confession of the sins of both, a weak prayer for forgiveness. From that day I lost you both. You disappeared. I did not set the law upon your trail, but worked, worked like ten men, until I rose above my ruin, stronger, wealthier, more determined. I watched and hunted through the years, and at last I found you out here. I came, and found that she had died. You did not recognize me, because I bear no resemblance to what I was ten years ago. I inveigled you a hundred miles away to look at a mining claim which did not exist, and when I knew that you were in my clutches I came out here—alone—and planted this stake deep in the desert sand. I do not want to kill you outright. I shudder at that, for I am not in a passion, am not excited. I do not want to see you die, for such a sight would be distasteful to me. Yet I want you to die slowly, by inches, so that you may suffer a little as I have suffered during the past ten years. That is all. Do you see hope?”

THE other looked at him with unflinching steadiness.

“None,” he said. “But I, too, have suffered, and of all the suffering inflicted upon man none is so terrible as that of remorse.”

“You are guilty,” said Gunnison, “deliberately, devilishly guilty?”

“Yes.”

Gunnison bent over a small brown jug beside the rock, opened it and drew forth a dripping rawhide thong.

“This rawhide is thoroughly soaked in water,” he explained, as he wound it around the other’s neck and about the post. “I place it in a noose about your neck—like this—but not tight enough to

have ever suffered before. That is proof there is a God.”

Gunnison laughed harshly.

“It’s a pretty plea,” he said.

“It is not a plea,” retorted the other, wetting his lips. “That is, it’s not a plea for myself. And I am not preaching with a hope of saving my own soul. It is to save you. It is that a wrong already great enough shall not be made greater—by making you a murderer. Do you understand? If you kill me, it is because of my own sin. I will have made a murderer as well as—”

Gunnison sprang to his feet with a fierce cry.

“STOP!” he demanded. “It is for me to tell you what you have made—besides a murderer!” For the first time there was passion in his face, a livid, threatening fire back of the sunburn, a spasmodic clinching of his fingers as he stood before the man tied to the post. “I have heard enough of God,” he continued, making an effort to restrain himself. “I am going over the old story briefly. If you see a loophole—if you see anything that gives you a ray of hope—tell me—”

“I AM going to kill you,” said Gunnison, as coolly as though he were asking for a match. “I am going to kill you in a way which I would not employ if I were a Christian. But I am not a Christian. I am one of those increasing millions who believe that we live out our hell here upon earth, and that if there is anything at all for us in the hereafter it will be an improvement over this thing that we call life, no matter how wicked we have been according to the apostolic code. I believe that there is no God, no heavenly justice, no righting of wrong by a hand more powerful than that of man. Therefore I fear no punishment for what I am about to do. I am acting according to my own conscience. I will be happier when you are dead, and my happiness will be increased when I think of the manner in which you died.”

Gunnison spoke with a little passion in his voice as though he was in his office at home giving instructions to one of his clerks. He sat on the edge of a white rock, with the blistering desert sun glaring upon his head. His strong, still handsome face was burned red. His eyes were bloodshot. His lips

my own conscience. I will be happier when you are dead, and my happiness will be increased when I think of the manner in which you died."

Gunnison spoke with as little passion in his voice as though he was in his office at home giving instructions to one of his clerks. He sat on the edge of a white rock, with the blistering desert sun glaring upon his head. His strong, still handsome face was burned red. His eyes were bloodshot. His lips were cracked. There were lines of suffering about his mouth. The one to whom he spoke stood with his back against the post to which Gunnison had tied him. He was a younger man by half a dozen years, at least, and in his face was the same terrible coolness, the same bloodshot eyes, the torture of the sun. Miles to the south of them rose a bluish, hazy blur of mountains; to the east, the west and the north swept a thousand red-hot miles of desert. In all that could be seen of it there were but three things that pulsed with life—Gunnison on his rock, the man against the post and a buzzard circling like a black dot in the sky far over their heads.

"I AM not mad, Paul," went on Gunnison evenly, gently wiping his blistered face with a handkerchief. "I have ceased to be insane for vengeance, as I was once. I am doing this thing coolly, deliberately, with judgment, and if you have any arguments in your favor I will listen to them in all fairness and deal with you according to their merits. But I refuse to be moved by your attempt to hide yourself behind God. You say that you merit a great punishment at my hands, and yet in the same breath you say that God will punish me for what I am about to do, and you entreat me to take some other method of 'getting even,' as you call it. You will concede that I am a man of brains, and you must also concede that in this twentieth century there are many men of brains who are beginning to laugh at God as He has been pictured to us. I am one of these. There can be no God. Progress and science are proving it to us more every day. The miracles of nineteen centuries ago are but the simplest tricks of science to-day. We are but creatures of evolution, and I am not afraid of a God. Have you any more to say?"

The man at the post straightened himself and spoke in a parched, throat-swollen voice.

"There is a God, Tom," he said. "I was once a preacher. I have been devilishly wicked and I repeat that I deserve punishment. It is because I have done so much wrong that I urge you not to do the same. I have suffered more than you can make me suffer by killing me.

"S"TOOP," he demanded. "It is for me to tell you what you have made—besides a murderer!" For the first time there was passion in his face, a livid, threatening fire back of the sunburn, a spasmodic clenching of his fingers as he stood before the man tied to the post. "I have heard enough of God," he continued, making an effort to restrain himself. "I am going over the old story briefly. If you see a loophole—if you see anything that gives you a ray of hope—tell me. I will be fair."

They stood for a moment in silence, gazing into each other's heat-reddened eyes.

"First, it was college," said Gunnison. "I made it possible for you to go to college; I helped to teach you, because I liked you; I made you what you afterward became, in brains."

devilsnly guilty:

"Yes."

Gunnison bent over a small brown jug beside the rock, opened it and drew forth a dripping rawhide thong.

"This rawhide is thoroughly soaked in water," he explained, as he wound it around the other's neck and about the post. "I place it in a noose about your neck—like this—but not tight enough to stop your breath. The sun will cause it to shrink rapidly, and within a few hours it will choke you to death. Good-by!"

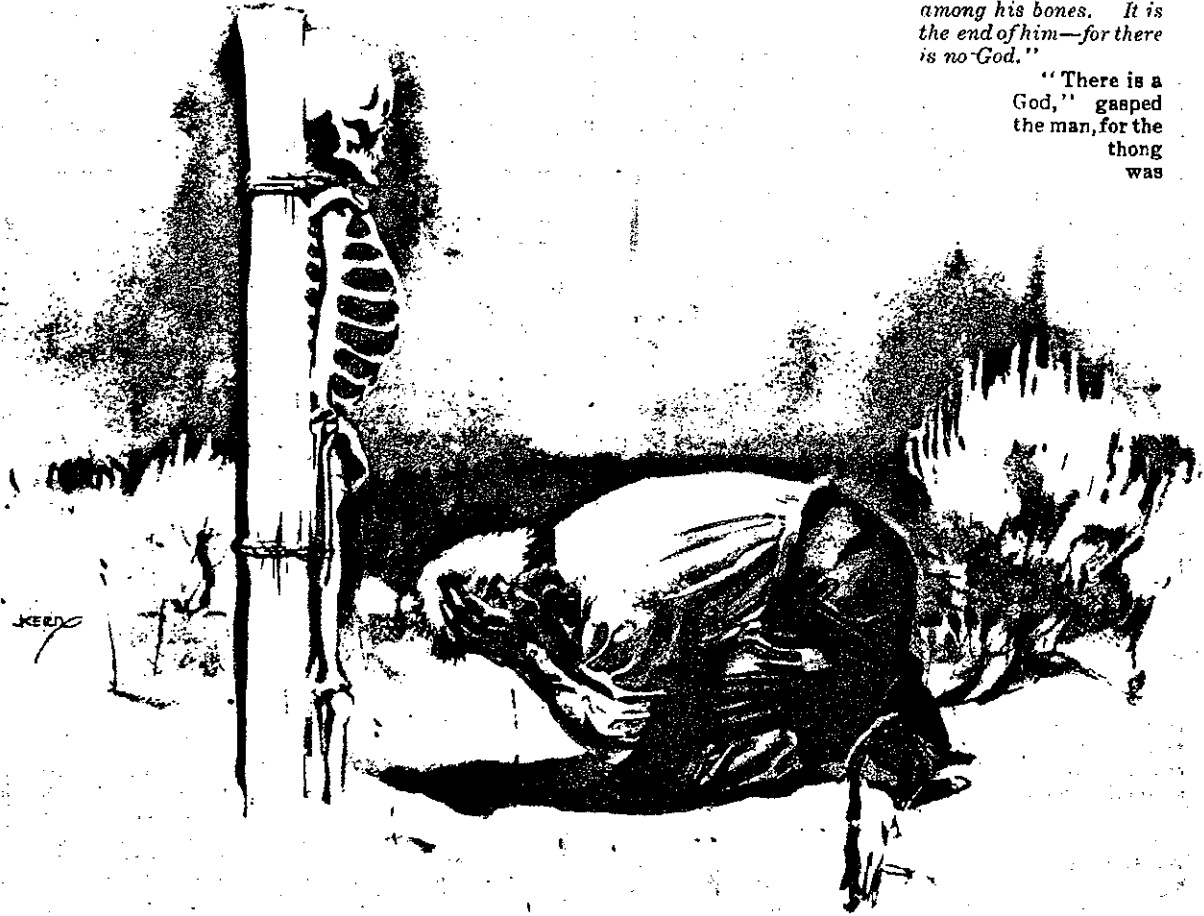
"Gunnison—great God!—won't you even shake hands—say that you forgive me—"

"No. But I will write your epitaph."

He drew a pencil from his pocket and scribbled in large letters on the post:

"This is the end of a man. Look at him. See if you can find a soul among his bones. It is the end of him—for there is no God."

"There is a God," gasped the man, for the thong was



"Paul—Paul—There is a God." He sank upon his face."

tight about his neck, almost to the point of strangling him.

"You are mistaken, Paul. There is no God," laughed Gunnison, as he turned and walked through the desert sands toward the blue haze of distant mountains. A mile away he came to a little clump of gnarled and dust-choked bushes. In them were two horses. One of them he shot. The other he mounted and rode from the bushes. Out on the desert he stopped for a moment to look back. He could see the post and the man and the black, circling dot in the sky. The dot was lower—much lower—and he shuddered as he turned again toward the blue haze of the mountains.

FIFTEEN miles to the south, sweltering in the hot breath of the desert, was the mine. The broken mountains rose about it, running in a thin, baked range east and west, and covered with seared vegetation and stifled trees. They were mountains buried in the desert—except on the east, where they ran into another and greater range, over which the first prospectors had come. It was a gold mine, with some placer and a great deal of rotten quartz, or men would not have worked a quarter of it. A century before, others had found it, and had died or lost its location; for when Quigley came along that range with his burro and his indomitable nerve, he found ancient workings and signs which he figured were that old at least. Quigley had always had faith in the desert range, and his strike passed that faith on to others; so that while he and a few companions were gathering a fortune out of the soft rock, a few score of others were feverishly prospecting the three or four thousand square miles of desert-baked mountains about them.

Not once in a year did a man strike foot in the desert. It remained for an old forty-niner, named Hodgson, to set a precedent. One day he set out due north into the purplish heat with a water-laden burro. He was gone four months. On a boiling afternoon he returned, followed by circling black dots in the sky. He was raving mad. Heat and thirst had baked his reason. He brought back a fortune in gold nuggets and dust, and amid his incoherent babble of sand and rock that was yellow with treasure he spoke of the whitened bones of a dead man hanging against a post. He died a little later.

The day of his return marked the first call of the desert. Thompson—"Big John," they called him—was the next to take a chance. He was heavy-footed, weighed two hundred, and it was no surprise that he never came back. But the trail had begun, and there were others to

take his place in pursuit of the golden ignis fatuus somewhere out in the mysterious depths of the desert.

It was late afternoon of a day when one of these adventurers, traveling across the hot sands ahead of his burro, came upon what Hodgson had raved about in his delirium—the bones of a man hanging to a post. The bones were fleshless and glistening white. Hot winds and hot suns had seared the articulations until the bones stood firm and rigid in their place. About the neck was a thong of dried rawhide, as hard as iron. The skeleton wrists were tied behind the post, and there were other things about the middle and the knees. A foot of drifted sand buried the thing's feet. On the post were written words, as legible as when they were first made, which sent a strange thrill of fear through the gold-seeker. He went to the bit of heat-stunted bush and camped for the night. In the morning he found the bones of a horse. Before he resumed his way he thought of others who might follow him, and wrote on the post

below the epitaph, "This is the way that Hodgson came home. The range must be due north of here."

Others followed. Some one found the range and came back to tell about it, so that a year after the adventurer had left his direction on the post and died as a consequence of following it, the word he had written were scratched out and these took their place: "Three days' journey northwest—a little more north than west—and you strike the range."

THE TRAIL was easy after that, and whoever set out to follow it struck first for what had come to be called the Skeleton Post. It entered no man's mind to molest the bones or to bury them. Time in the desert was too precious for sentiment. There was gold in the second range—so much of it that Hodgson's ravings were more than verified—and the Skeleton Post pointed the way to that gold. So the bones were taken seriously and with a certain degree of awe. There were no bullet holes in the post, for the boldest of the men who passed its way would not have dared to desecrate the thing against it. Strangely enough, the eyeless sockets of the bleached skull stared into the northwest—so that a line drawn at right angles from between those sockets would have hit the nearest point of the range. When this fact was discovered and made a memorandum of on the post, the skeleton held a still greater significance. One day two gold-seekers saw that one of the thigh bones was loosening, and they tied it securely in place. This set another precedent, and subsequent gold-seekers strengthened it in like manner when they perceived signs of dismemberment.

At last there came a lone prospector to the Skeleton Post who was different from the others. He was young, and even in the desert the joy of living—the love of life—leaped in his eyes and movement. The love of a true woman, for whom he was seeking fortune now, was every moment stirring all that was good and strong in his red blood. To him the purplish glare ahead was not the death heat of a desert, but a varicolored, glistening thing filled with visions of hope and anticipation. He read what was on the post, and then he drew an obliterating cross through the epitaph and wrote in strong, firm letters above it: "This is a mistake. There is a God."

A NEW route was found to the gold range. It led up from the north through a grass valley, with water and trees and grass, and all men took it. Through hot summers and dry winters the skeleton remained alone against

(Continued on page 235.)

Shoved to the Front



HERE'S lots o' men called leaders in the callin'
they have chose,
When ev'ry one his forgin' to some other feller
owes;
Some feller who's a-cheerin' him by singin' of
a song
An' backin' of him up the white fame's coaxin'
him along.
The world looks on approv'in' an' asserts 'at he
is great,
They're lectin' of him Senator or Governor o'
the State;

They say to nat'ral leadership by fate he's been inclined,
When a lot o' unknown fellers shoved him forward from behind.

A lot o' whole-souled fellers with the biggest kind o' hearts,
Whose lives are spent a-lovelin' loam or mixin' in the marts,
They stand behind the feller, with a faith in him confessed,
An' pat him on the shoulders till he's doin' of his best,
The feller forges onward, till the whole world takes him up,
An' with the sweets o' honor fame is fillin' of his cup;
They say he's won his leadership by force an' breadth o' mind,
When a lot o' unknown fellers shoved him forward from behind.

His name is in the papers linked with varied bits o' news,
His picture's in the magazines and quarterly reviews,
The world applauds his speeches, though it's jes' as like as not
If some one else had made 'em they'd be nothin' more'n rot!
Folks jes' go crazy o'er him, he's a leader born, o' course,
His onward sweep's attributed to perseverin' force.
He's made hisself, they say, an' forged with jes' his courage blind,
When a lot o' unknown fellers shoved him forward from behind.

ROY FARRELL GREENE.

rical offices will no doubt henceforth turn some of their attention to exploiting the escapades and to giving publicity to stolen diamonds, attacks of appendicitis, the romances and the favorite foods of the chorus man, whose light has here-

"No Frills"

JUST SENSIBLE FOOD CURED HIM.

Sometimes a good, healthy commercial traveler suffers from poorly selected food and is lucky if he learns that Grape-Nuts food will put him right.

A Cincinnati traveler says: "About a year ago my stomach got in a bad way. I had a headache most of the time and suffered misery. For several months I ran down until I lost about 70 pounds in weight, and finally had to give up a good position and go home. Any food that I might use seemed to nauseate me.

My wife, hardly knowing what to do, one day brought home a package of Grape-Nuts food and coaxed me to try it. I told her it was no use, but finally, to humor her, I tried a little and they just struck my taste. It was the first food that I had eaten in nearly a year that did not cause any suffering.

Well, to make a long story short, I began to improve and stuck to Grape-Nuts. I went up from 135 pounds in December to 194 pounds the following October.

My brain is clear, blood all right and appetite too much for any man's pocketbook. In fact, I am thoroughly made over and owe it all to Grape-Nuts. I talk so much about what Grape-Nuts will do that some of the men on the road have nicknamed me 'Grape-Nuts', but I stand to-day a healthy, rosy-checked man—a pretty good example of what the right kind of food will do.

You can publish this if you want to. It is a true statement, without any frills."

Read the little book, "The Road to Wellville," in packages. "There's a Reason."

Ever read the above letter? A new one appears from time to time. They are genuine, true, and full of human interest.

Pauline Chase,
The "Pink Pajama Girl," who is to star in
"Our Miss Gibbs."

sibly it is because blond men are more rare than brunettes. More likely it is because they have more 'flash' on the stage and seem more romantic than the brunette type. We have experimented several times by having six men with dark hair and eyes come on directly before a sextette of flaxen-haired chaps. The latter receive double the applause.

"There Is a God."

(Continued from page 232.)

its post. Many of those whom it had guided across the desert turned gray and died. Others forgot it. A few remembered it, but none went its way. The rawhide thongs became harder, until one could scarce have scratched them with a knife. The sand crept higher; the eyeless sockets filled with dust; day and night, summer and winter, year following year, it still blazed the way to the treasure-filled range for those who did not come.

It was in the hottest month of the summer that an old man came to Quigley's mine. He was a stranger. He was old, with a rank growth of unkempt beard, bent shoulders, twisted, talon-like fingers, and his shoes and his clothes were in tatters. Quigley took pity on him, fed him and gave him a bunk to sleep in. The morning after he came he had disappeared. No one saw him when he went out into the desert—nothing saw him, save a small, black, circling dot far up in the sky. He went through the sand, always seeking ahead with his bleared eyes and mumbling things that no one could have understood. He went on for hours, taking a sip now and then from a bottle of water which he carried. The circling dot in the sky multiplied into three, then four, and then five, and each time that he saw a new dot the old man stopped for a moment to look up into the fathomless blue sky above him. He was dragging his feet slowly when he saw ahead of him the bit of seared bush in the desert. His sunken eyes lit up and he urged himself on to it. For a few minutes he stood over a pile

in the audiences, particularly the younger women and matinee girls. I cannot account for the curious psychology of it. Possibly

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SAFETY CAP on each end to exclude dust, etc., with POWERFUL LENSES, scientifically ground and adjusted. GUARANTEED BY THE MAKER. Heretofore Telescopes of this size have been sold from \$5.00 to \$3.00. Every sojourner in the country or at seaside resorts should certainly secure one of these instruments; and no farmer should be without one. OBJECTS MILES AWAY are brought to view with astonishing clearness. Sent by express for \$1 safely packed; if by mail insured, \$1.50. Our new catalogue of Guns, etc., sent with each order. This is a grand offer, and you should not miss it. **WE GUARANTEE ABSOLUTE SATISFACTION or money refunded. BIGGEST OF WHAT CUSTOMERS SAY:** Write them, need not take our word. "Witnessed sun eclipse at Austrian Tyrol with it." L. S. Henry, The Saxon, N. Y. "Excelsior superior to a \$15.00 one." Fred. Walsh, Howe Island, Ontario. "Could count cattle 20 miles away." F. G. Patton, Arkansas City, Kans.—Over 1,000 readers of this paper are using one with perfect satisfaction. Sent by mail, insured, for \$1.20. **KIRTLAND BROS. & CO., Dept. L-W, 90 Chambers St., NEW YORK.**

of scattered bones and drank his last drop of water. Then he went on. He was so nearly blind now that he did not see the Skeleton Post until he was within a few paces of it. A cry burst from his lips as he flung himself upon his knees in the drift of sand at the skeleton's feet. Moaning, he looked up into the dirt-filled sockets staring into the northwest.

"Paul," he cried, stretching up his arms, "Paul, I've come back to you—I've come back to tell you that you were right. I was wrong, Paul. There is a God, and He has punished me terribly—terribly—as you said He would, Paul. I have suffered, every day, every hour. My children died. My fortune was swept away. I became a beggar—a tramp—an outcast. Paul—Paul—there is a God!"

He sank upon his face, and the black dots in the sky, multiplied to six now, circled lower.

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It was only a whim that took Quigley and one or two others on a last visit to the Skeleton Post a year later. What they found there astonished them. It was only a whim, too, that made them pick the thing up and tie it to the other side of the post, so that the eyeless sockets of the Skeleton Post gazed now in two directions, one pair into the southeast, and the other steadily and grimly toward the treasure range beyond the purplish haze in the northwest.

In answering advertisements please mention "LESLIE'S WEEKLY."