

Old Tim

by Newel K. Young

When I first saw them, Old Tim and Bounce, they were engaged in a bloody battle with five border-ruffians. The two partners had rescued a poor Mexican lass from the hands of these marauding "gringos," and the bullies, being more than two to one, were protesting this interference with their "personal liberty" in vigorous style.

Failing to beat their opponents by fair play, one of the brutes, knife in hand, was striking a foul blow at Old Tim's back, when Bounce caught him burying his teeth in the fellow's fore-arm. The knife fell to the ground and the man howled with pain. Just then the ruffians heard and saw a crowd of angry Mexicans running toward them from the village nearby; so the cowards took to their heels.

"Well, Bounce, old boy," said Tim in friendly voice, as he picked up the knife that his would-be assassin had dropped, "you got I'm just in time." Old Tim's junior partner seemed as modest and undisturbed by what had happened as the old man himself.

Seeing me laying on the grass the old prospector said, "Hello, what have we here?" After looking me over he continued, "Why, man you'd die in this hole. You must go with us to the hills."

And either because I could be genuinely glad with the death grip upon me, or because I loved the hills, they adopted me. And so I kept these two companies for four years, tramping over the hills and plains of northern Mexico, while I made my fight against the great white plague.

During these years the old prospector sold mining claims for more than 100,000 pesos; and it would be difficult for that much money to give more good cheer and timely help than Old Tim's use of it gave.

When I protested his giving away all he had, the old man laughingly said, "Me and Karnegy are goin to do our best not to die disgraced by wealth."

How these two loved this wild life among the hills! And they really loved, yes, adored each other. For eight years they were never separated for a whole day and night. Bounce's mother had been as devoted and true to the old prospector as her son was; yet, she was not so dearly beloved by their master; for the old man mellowed with the passing of the years. Then Bounce was a warrior; and Old Tim was a fighter, albeit he was not one whit a bully. So they journeyed and camped among the gulches and hills of Chihuahua and Sonora prospecting for the hidden treasures of the Sierra Madres. And I was given a place and a welcome with them, sharing their life and fare.

The shadow first fell on us at our camp at the foot of the Sierras in the state of Chihuahua. A mad coyote rushed wildly into our camp. Old Tim was stooped over our boiling coffee. The crazed creature, frothing at the mouth and gnashing his teeth, hit

straight for the old man's throat. Bounce, quick as a flash -- still barely in time -- caught the coyote by the nape of the neck hurling the brute to the ground. And before the intruder could rise, the dog had him by the throat, and there he held and chewed until the beast was dead. But our old warrior came from the fray with an ugly gash in his jaw.

Old Tim nursed and doctored and watched the dog with a tender devotion. For nine days the man worried-in silence mind you-during the day and tossed and murmured in his sleep during the night. But after the ninth day had passed and his comrade was still safe Old Tim was himself again.

Thirteen days after our adventure with the coyote we stopped at an Indian village among the very tops of the Sierra Madre mountains to water our horses. We crossed the creek before stopping. It must have been the village wash-day, for the banks of the ponded stream were lined with Indian women washing their clothes. And the babies, naked or half-naked, fairly swarmed about the water's edge and in the sand. There were babies and chickens, and dogs and babies, and babies and pigs everywhere.

As Bounce stepped into the water he was taken with a hydrophobia fit. His eyes glared wildly, and he frothed at the mouth as he rolled and tumbled in the dust of the road or dashed madly about. What a scattering as these barbarous mothers caught up their babes and rushed to our side of the stream leaving the creek between them and the dog.

Poor Old Tim! he went ashen white, and the sweat stood on his brow in great beads as he muttered, "Bounce! Poor old Bounce! Yer done for, old feller!" Then clutching my arm he said, "Empy, you tend to him!" I started for my gun.

"My God!" cried Old Tim in answer to a wild, terrified scream from one of the Indian mothers. Before I could interfere to stop him the old man was through the creek and out of reach. Just as Bounce sprang upon a little Indian girl coming from the hill, his master caught him with one hand as he snatched the child from the dog's frothing jaws with the other. The dirty, half-savage child was saved; but Old Tim's hand was torn and bleeding.

The child's mother would have worshiped the man in her gratitude but he would have none of it. He laughed alike at my praises for his heroism and my fears for his wound. I cared for the dog; and by Old Tim's directions buried the old warrior in a spot selected by his master among a grove of beautiful pines in an out-of-the-way nook of the mountains.

A week later, in the same temper that he would have disposed of a mining claim or swapped horses, Old Tim said, "The jig's about up for me, Emphy. In my old leather satchel you will find directions about what to do with my junk. We'll quit work for a day or two and just roam over the hills." Then he told me where and how to bury him when he died.

The next morning the old man seemed more like himself. For two days we roamed the hills, climbing the highest peaks in sight. Little was said. But the old prospector was enraptured with the beauties and music of his mountains and woods. Each day's jaunt

ended near the spot where Bounce was buried. After the old prospector had sat there in silence for a long time, we returned to camp. And on these two evenings Old Tim talked to me of his past. He had never talked of himself before.

The second night after the old man had talked of his youth and family and his boyhood home, and of his later life among the wild hills of Mexico, he fairly took my breath by saying, "It won't do for me to be left loose any longer." And by virtue of his earnestness and his superior will Old Tim had me bind him according to his directions. He slept soundly all that night; and the next day he seemed well except that he was even more silent than usual. But soon after night-fall the madness came upon him.

For three days and nights he -- I can't talk, talk of that. But during all these hours I tried in vain to relieve him. On the fourth morning after several hours of peaceful sleep the old man went to his final rest and reward. Then I knew that I loved him as I had loved my own father. With a heavy and broken heart I laid Old Tim away to rest in that lonely grove of pines, as directed by him, near his partner and friend.

Improvement Era 1917, Vol. XX. August 1917. No. 10