

Obstinate Uncle Otis

Otis Morks was terrible stubborn, prob'ly the most mule-headed man in Vermont. Fact, he was so cantankerous, he almost done away with the universe one time—the whole danged cosmos. Here's how it happened

By Robert Arthur

Author of "Just a Dreamer," "The Devil's Garden," etc.

"**H**ERE'S an item about a man who was so obstinate"—Fowler, who sells life insurance, lowered the club's copy of the *Times* to chuckle—"so obstinate that rather than pay a twelve-dollar fine, he stayed in jail sixteen years!"

"My Uncle Otis," Morks said in a thoughtful tone, "was far more obstinate than that."

Fowler gave him an impatient glance. For Murchison Morks, who was waiting to read the *Times* himself—Morks does all his reading at the club, where it is free—has always seen something stranger, been some place more inaccessible, or known someone more extraordinary than any of the other members. This has gained him a certain unpopularity in the club, though he does not seem to be aware of it.

"This fellow," Fowler said harshly, "not only stayed in jail sixteen years rather than pay the twelve-dollar fine, but when they wanted to set him free, he was so obstinate he wouldn't go!"

Morks stared moodily at the copy of the *Times* in Fowler's hands. "My uncle," he sighed, "was so obstinate he was dangerous."

Fowler laid the *Times* across his knee and scowled. "Dangerous how?" he demanded. "To himself or to others?"

"Both," Morks told him. "Dangerous to himself, and dangerous to the whole town in which he lived. He was dangerous to the entire United States. He was dangerous to the whole world. In fact I'm not sure, I really am not sure, but what he was so obstinate that he constituted a menace to the entire universe."

Fowler clenched the *Times* in a manner that threatened to pulp it. Fowler was a large man. And his face was turning purple with anger.

"Exactly how," he demanded through clenched teeth, "could your Uncle Otis be so obstinate that he was dangerous to the whole universe?"

Morks brightened. "Well, if you'd really like to have me tell you—" And before anyone could possibly have stopped him, he began.



Otis tried to ignore that lightning, but it hit the tree and knocked him twenty feet

MY UNCLE'S name was Morks (he said), the same as mine. His full name was Otis Morks. He lived on a small farm in Vermont, and I hadn't seen him for several years. So the first hint I had of the startling change that took place in him shortly after his fifty-seventh birthday was an unexpected telegram from my Aunt Edith, his sister.

It reached me one morning just as I was sitting down to breakfast, and after reading it I wired that I was coming on the first train. For it said:

Otis struck by lightning. Situation serious. Please come at once.

By "situation serious" I assumed that Aunt Edith meant Uncle Otis' condition was serious, as any man's might well be after he had been struck by lightning. But beyond my concern for Uncle Otis, there was an undertone of unexplained urgency in those ten commonplace words that impelled me to haste. So forty minutes later I was pulling out of Grand Central for Vermont.

Late that afternoon I descended in Hillport, Vermont, where my Uncle Otis lived.

There was only one taxi at the station, an ancient tour-

ing car driven by a village character named Jud Perkins. Jud, who had tobacco-stained whiskers, was also constable, and as I climbed into his decrepit vehicle I saw that he had a gun strapped around his waist.

I also noticed, across the square, a group of people standing around staring at something. Then I realized they were gazing at an empty granite pedestal that had formerly held a large bronze statue of a local statesman named Ogilby—an individual Uncle Otis had always held in utmost contempt.

Uncle Otis obstinately would never believe that anybody would erect a statue to Ogilby, and had never admitted that the deed had been done—that there actually was such a statue in the village square. But there had been, and it had been a massive thing. Nonetheless it was gone now.

The old car got under way with a lurch and a groan. I leaned forward and asked Jud Perkins where the statue had gone. He turned and squinted at me sidewise.

"Stole," he informed me, in a tone of deep knowingness. "Stole yestidday afternoon, 'bout five. In plain view. Yessir, took between two winks of an eye. We was all in Simpkins' store, talkin' about it—me 'n' Simpkins 'n' your Uncle Otis Morks 'n' your Aunt Edith 'n' some others. Somebody said as how the town ought to clean it. Your Uncle Otis stuck out his chin like he does when he's gonna be obstinate.

"'What statue' he wanted to know, his eyebrows bristlin'. 'There ain't no such thing as a statue to a blubbery-mouthed nincompoop like Ogilby in this town!'

"So, though I knowed it wasn't any use, he wouldn't believe in th' statue if he walked right into it an' broke a leg—never met as obstinate a man as Otis Morks for not believing in a thing he don't like—anyway I turned around to point at it. And dad blast if it weren't gone. Minute before it'd been there. Now it wasn't. Stole between one look and the next, it had been!"

Jud Perkins spat over the side of the car, and turned to look at me in an authoritative manner.

"An' if you want to know who did it," he said confidentially, "these here Fifth Columnists, that's who. Spies! They took Ogilby 'cause he was bronze, see? Over there they need all th' copper an' bronze they c'n get for makin' shells. So they're stealin' it an' shippin' it over by submarine. When we catch 'em, we'll find out how. And I got my eyes skinned for 'em. I got me my pistol, an' I'm on th' watch."

WE BUMPED and banged through town, toward Uncle Otis' farm, and Jud Perkins, turning once in a while to look at the road, continued to bring me up to date on local affairs. He told me how Uncle Otis had come to be struck by lightning—out of his own obstinacy, as I had suspected.

"He takes a walk every afternoon, your Uncle Otis does," Jud told me, between expectorations of tobacco juice. "Day 'fore yestidday he went out anyway, though it was blowing up a whopper of a thunder storm, an' your Aunt Edith begged him not to go. Storm came up while he was out in th' fields, an' he got in under a big oak. Told him myself a thousand times that trees draw lightning, but he's too obstinate to listen.

"Maybe he thought he c'd ignore that lightning, same way he does Willoughby's barn across the road, that he pretends ain't there; or Marble Hill, that his cousin Seth

lawed away from him so that now he won't admit there is any such hill! Or th' new dam th' state put in to make a water reservoir, an' flooded some grazing land he always used, so that now your Uncle Otis acts 's if you're crazy when you talk about there bein' a dam there. Ignoringest man ever lived, your Uncle Otis.

"But 's I was saying, maybe he tried to ignore that lightning, and it didn't work. Lightning's mighty hard to ignore. So it hit that oak, and your Uncle Otis' own blamed obstinacy might 've killed him then 'n' there.

"Only reason it didn't, I guess, is because he's always had such prime good health. Ain't been sick a day in his life, 's far as I know, 'cept that week twenty years ago when he fell off a horse an' had his amnesia, an' thought he was a farm machinery salesman named Eustace Lingham, from Cleveland, Ohio.

"Where was I? Oh, yeah, th' lightning splintered that old oak 'n' knocked your Uncle Otis twenty feet. Your Aunt Edith seen it 'n' run out to drag him in. She put him to bed an' called Doc Perkins. Doc said it was just shock, he'd come to pretty soon, but keep him in bed two 'r three days to be sure.

"Sure enough, your Uncle Otis come to, 'bout supper, but he wouldn't stay in bed. Said he felt fine, never felt better, and by dad, yestidday in Simpkins' store I never seen him lookin' more fit. Talked brisk like a youngster, walked like he was on springs, and seemed to give out electricity from every pore. 'S if the lightning did him good, like these here galvanic treatments for the rheumatism."

I inquired if increasing age had softened Uncle Otis' natural obstinacy any. Jud Perkins sighed and spat with extra copiousness.

"Made it worse," he stated flatly. "Most obstinate man in Vermont, your Uncle Otis. Maybe in the whole world. Dad blast it, when he says a thing ain't, even though it's right there in front of you, blamed if he don't say it so positive you almost believe him 'n' not your own eyes.

"Sat on his front stoop myself, only last week, with that old barn o' Willoughby's spang in the way of the view, an' your Uncle Otis lookin' at it as if it weren't there.

"'Fine view,' I said, 'iff'n only that barn wasn't there,' an' your Uncle Otis looked at me like I was crazy.

"'Barn?' he said. 'What barn? No barn there, and never has been. Finest view in Vermont. See for ten miles.'

"Blamed if I don't think your Uncle Otis believed it. He's hated that barn so much, he's put it right out of his mind, an' now he can't even see it when he looks at it. Same way with Ogilby's statue, the dam, Marble Hill, th' new WPA bridge, an' I dunno how many other things. People, too."

Jud Perkins chuckled, and just missed running down a yellow dog and a boy on a bicycle.

"There's people got so much faith they can believe in what ain't," he said. "But your Uncle Otis is th' only man I ever met so obstinate he c'n disbelieve in things that is."

UNCLE OTIS' obstinacy had not changed any, then. His ability to dismiss from existence, as far as he was concerned anyway, things he didn't like or didn't believe in had always been well developed. Psychologists have a term for that, though offhand I can't remember the word. I dare say no psychologist ever met such a well developed

ability as Uncle Otis', though. It's a pity none ever had a chance to study him. They'd have gotten material enough for a whole shelf of books.

There was a whole host of things Uncle Otis had put out of his mind with such obstinate completeness that they no longer existed for him. They ranged from an expensive cream separator that had never worked and had been a constant exasperation to him, to Marble Hill, which Jud Perkins had mentioned.

Marble Hill had marble beneath its surface and might some day be worth something. Uncle Otis' second cousin, discovering a flaw in Otis' title, had won it away in a long legal battle. After that Uncle Otis had decided to ignore its existence in his own particular fashion, and had. Since it was a hundred and eighty feet high, covered three hundred acres, and loomed up only a quarter of a mile away behind the house, his ability along those lines was obviously no mean thing.

There was a whole host of other things that Uncle Otis obstinately refused to believe in, too, though they were of a more distant nature. Being a Republican, Hoover's defeat annoyed him. In fact, he never acknowledged it, and as far as he was concerned, Hoover was still president. He did not admit the existence of President Roosevelt.

Also, Uncle Otis had a deep-rooted suspicion of far-off places with curious names, like Madagascar, Guatemala, Zanzibar, Polynesia. He had flatly stated numerous times that no such places existed. That they had been invented by unscrupulous fiction writers who pretended to visit them, then wrote lucrative travel books about them.

I was wondering how such a little man as Uncle Otis could be so obstinate when Jud Perkins, with a chuckle, pointed out a long steel bridge spanning the river that ran through Hillport. We didn't cross the bridge, but we could see it plainly; a new, substantial structure.

"Your Uncle Otis plain hates that bridge," Jud Perkins told me. "It goes across a corner of land condemned away from him. He was mighty peeved at losing the land, even if he was paid for it. So he won't admit there is any bridge. He says—"

He stopped talking, his mouth still open, and jerked so convulsively that the car headed into a ditch. At the last minute he managed to yank the wheel around, and we climbed back onto the road, but his face was pale and dewed with sweat, and he was shaken.

"Jeepers!" he gasped. "Creepers! They're at work again! We gotta do something!"

He stepped on the gas. I turned, to take another look at the bridge, wondering what he meant.

And I daresay I turned a little pale myself. For the bridge was no longer there. The road leading up to it was as before. The island in mid-river holding a concrete support pier was still there. The road on the other side of the river was still there.

But the steel bridge I had seen just before was gone.

I WAS in a thoughtful mood when Jud Perkins dropped me at Uncle Otis' gate and thundered back to town to spread the news. Uncle Otis wasn't in sight, but I headed around to the rear of the house and Aunt Edith came hurrying out of the kitchen, her apron, skirts, hair, and hands all fluttering.

"Oh, Murchison!" she exclaimed. "I'm so glad you're here. I don't know what to do. I simply don't. The most dreadful thing has happened to Otis, and—"

Then I saw Otis himself, going down the front walk to get the evening paper from a tin receptacle at the gate. His small, spare figure upright and a stubborn jaw out-thrust, his bushy white eyebrows bristling, he looked unaltered to me. But Aunt Edith only wrung her hand when I said so.

"I know," she sighed. "If you didn't know the truth, you'd think it actually did him good to be hit by lightning. But here he comes. I can't tell you any more now. After supper! He mustn't be allowed to guess— Oh, I do hope nothing dreadful happens before we can stop it!"

And then, as Uncle Otis approached with his paper, she fled back into the kitchen.

Uncle Otis certainly did not seem changed, unless for the better. As Jud Perkins had remarked, he seemed younger. He shook my hand heartily, and my arm tingled, as if from an electric shock. His eyes sparkled. His whole being seemed keyed up and bouyant with mysterious energy.

We strolled toward the front porch and stood facing the rotting old barn across the road that had spoiled the view. Grasping for a conversational topic as I studied Uncle Otis to try to discover what Aunt Edith meant, I suggested it was too bad the storm two days before hadn't blown it down and finished it.

Uncle Otis stared at me.

"Barn?" he demanded, scowling. "What barn? No barn there, boy! Nothing but the view—finest in Vermont. If you c'n see a barn there, you better get to a doctor's fast 's you can hike."

As Jud Perkins had remarked, he spoke so convincingly that in spite of myself I had to turn for another look at the structure. I remained staring for quite some time, I expect, and probably I blinked.

Because Uncle Otis was telling the truth.

There wasn't any barn—now.

ALL through supper a suspicion of the incredible truth grew on me, especially when I turned to peer through the window and see that the barn was indeed gone, only an area of littered hay remaining to tell it had ever existed. And after supper, while Uncle Otis read his paper in the parlor, I followed Aunt Edith into the kitchen.

She only sighed when I told her about the barn, and looked at me with haunted eyes.

"Tell me, Murchison," she asked fearfully, "was—was the new bridge there when you came by?"

I told her, and she went a little paler.

"I was afraid of that," she murmured. "Otis was reading yesterday's paper just before you came, and he came to a piece about how much traffic goes across the bridge, and that made him snort."

"Bridge!" I heard him say. "What bridge they talking about? No new bridge around here!" And—and—now it's gone, too," she finished. "Like the Ogilby statue, and the cream separator that was down cellar, and Willoughby's barn."

"You mean—" I began, and Aunt Edith nodded unhappily.

"Yes," she whispered. "It's Otis. I knew when the statue—went—yesterday when we were in Simpkins' store. I was looking right at it when Otis said what he did and it—it just was gone, right from under my eyes."

"First it was the cream separator. That was night before last, right after Otis got out of bed and said he felt

fine. I wanted to store some preserves down cellar, and I asked him if he'd move it to the barn. He said I was crazy, wasn't any cream separator down cellar and never had been. And—and when I went down later, it was gone! I didn't understand, then. But when the statue went I—I knew."

"You mean," I asked thoughtfully, "that since Uncle Otis was struck by lightning, his obstinateness has taken a new turn. That he used to think things he didn't like didn't exist, and that was all. But now when he thinks it, due to some peculiar heightening of his tremendously obstinate will power, the things *don't* exist? He just *disbelieves* them into not being."

Aunt Edith nodded. "They just *go*," she cried, almost wildly. "When he says a thing's not, now it's *not*."

I reflected on this curious new turn that Uncle Otis' obstinacy had taken, and I confess I felt slightly uneasy. There were a number of distinctly unpleasant possibilities that occurred to me, and I knew Aunt Edith had thought of them too.

"What," I asked presently, "do you suppose the limit is? A statue, a barn, a bridge—where do you suppose it stops?"

"I don't know," she told me. "Maybe there isn't any limit to it. Otis is an *awfully* obstinate man, and now—suppose something reminds him about the dam? Suppose he says there isn't any dam? It's a hundred feet high, and all that water behind it—"

She did not have to finish. If Uncle Otis suddenly disbelieved the Hillport dam out of existence, the impounded water that would be set free would wipe away the village, and might easily kill the whole five hundred inhabitants. And that was by no means the most disastrous possibility that occurred to me.

"And then, of course, there's whole countries he never has believed were real," Aunt Edith whispered, echoing my thoughts. "Like Zanzibar and Martinique."

"And Guatemala and Polynesia," I agreed, frowning slightly. "If he were reminded of one of those by something he read, and took it into his head to declare they didn't exist, there's no telling what might happen. The sudden disappearance of any one of them—why, tidal waves and earthquakes would be the least we could expect."

"But what can we do to stop him?" Aunt Edith wanted to know, desperately. "We can't tell him that—"

She was interrupted by a snort from Uncle Otis himself as he marched into the kitchen with the evening paper.

"Listen to this!" he commanded, and read us a short item, the gist of which was that Seth Youngman, the second cousin who had lawsuited his hill away from him, was planning to sell Marble Hill to a New York company that would quarry it. Then Uncle Otis threw the paper down on the kitchen table in disgust.

"What they talking about?" he barked, his eyebrows bristling. "Marble Hill? No hill around here by that name, and never has been. And Seth Youngman never owned a hill in his life. What kind of idiots get this paper out, I want to know?"

He glowered at us. And in the silence, a faint distant rumbling, as of displaced stones rolling, could be heard. Aunt Edith and I turned as one. It was still faintly light, and from the kitchen window he could see to the northwest, where Marble Hill stood up against the horizon like a battered derby hat—or where it had stood. For when we turned, it was no longer there.

The ancient prophets may have had faith strong enough to move mountains. But Uncle Otis was possessed of something far more remarkable, it seemed—a lack of faith which could unmove them.

UNCLE OTIS himself, unaware of anything unusual, picked up the paper again, grumbling.

"Everybody's crazy these days," he declared. "Piece here about President Roosevelt. Not Teddy Roosevelt, but somebody called Franklin. Everybody knows perfectly well there's on such a president as Franklin Roo—"

"Uncle Otis!" I cried out wildly. "Look, there's a mouse!"

Uncle Otis stopped and turned. There *was* a mouse, crouched under the stove, and it was the only thing I could think of to distract Uncle Otis' attention before he expressed his disbelief in Franklin D. Roosevelt. As it was, I was just barely in time. I dabbed at my brow. Uncle Otis was scowling.

"Where?" he demanded. "No mouse I can see!"

"Th—" I started to point. Then I checked myself. As soon as he had spoken, of course, the mouse was gone. I said instead that I must have been mistaken. Uncle Otis snorted and strode back toward the parlor. Aunt Edith and I looked at each other.

"If he'd said—" she began, "if he'd finished saying that there isn't any President Roosevelt—"

She never completed her own sentence. Uncle Otis, going through the doorway, at that instant caught his foot in a hole worn through the linoleum and fell full length into the hall. As he went down, his head struck a small table, and he was unconscious when we reached him.

This new emergency occupied our attention for some minutes. I carried Uncle Otis into the parlor and laid him on the old horsehair sofa. Aunt Edith brought a cold compress and spirits of ammonia. Together we worked over Uncle Otis' limp form, and presently he opened his eyes, blinking at us without recognition.

"Who're you?" he demanded. "What happened to me?"

"Otis!" Aunt Edith cried. "I'm your sister. You fell and hit your head. You've been unconscious."

Uncle Otis glowered at us with deep suspicion. "Otis?" he repeated. "My name's not Otis. Who you think I am, anyway?"

"But it *is* Otis!" Aunt Edith wailed. "You're Otis Morks, my brother, and you live in Hillport, Vermont. You've lived here all your life!"

Uncle Otis' lower lip stuck out obstinately.

"My name's *not* Otis Morks!" he declared, getting up. "I'm Eustace Lingham, of Cleveland, Ohio. I sell farm machinery. I'm not your brother. I've never seen you before, either of you. I've got a headache, and I'm tired of talking. I'm going out and get some fresh air. Maybe it'll make my head feel better."

DUMBLY Aunt Edith stood to one side. Uncle Otis marched out into the hall and through the front door. Aunt Edith, peering out the window, reported that he was standing on the front steps, looking at the stars.

"It's happened again," she said despairingly. "His amnesia's come back. Just like the time twenty years ago when he fell off a horse and thought he was this Eustace Lingham from Cleveland for a whole week. Nothing anybody could say would make him believe different."

"Oh, Murchison, now we've got to call the doctor. But

if the doctor finds out about the other, he'll want to shut him up. Only, if anybody tries to shut Otis up, he'll just disbelieve in them, and the place they want to shut him up in, too. Then they—they—"

"But if something isn't done," I pointed out, "there's no telling what may happen. He's bound to read President Roosevelt's name again. You can't miss it these days, even in Vermont. Or else he'll come across a mention of Madagascar or Guatemala."

"Or get into a fuss with the income tax people," Aunt Edith put in. "He keeps getting letters from them about why he's never paid any income tax. The last letter, they said they were going to send somebody to call on him in person. But he says there isn't any such thing as an income tax, so there can't be any income tax collectors. So if a man comes here saying he's an income tax collector, Uncle Otis will just not believe him. Then—"

Helpless, we looked at each other. Then Aunt Edith grabbed my arm.

"Murchison!" she gasped. "Quick! Go out with him! We mustn't leave him alone. Only last week he decided that *there aren't any such things as stars!*"

I did not hesitate an instant. A moment later I was on the porch beside Uncle Otis, who was breathing in the cool, fresh evening air and staring upward at the spangled heavens, a look of deepest disbelief on his face.

"Stars!" he barked, stabbing a skinny forefinger toward the star-dotted sky. "A hundred million billion trillion dillion miles away, every last one of 'em! And every one of 'em a hundred times bigger'n the sun! That's what the book said. You know what I say? I say bah! Nothing's that big, or that far off. You know what those things they look at through telescopes and call stars are? They're not stars at all. Fact is, there's no such things as st—"

"Uncle Otis!" I cried loudly. "Look out, a mosquito!"

And I brought my hand down on the top of his head with solid force.

I had to distract him. I had to keep him from saying it. The universe is a big thing, of course, and probably was too big even for Uncle Otis to disbelieve it into not being. But I couldn't take any chances. I didn't dare. So I yelled and slapped him.

I'd forgotten, though, about the return of his ancient amnesia, and his belief that he was Eustace Lingham of Cleveland. When he had recovered, he stared at me coldly.

"I'm not your Uncle Otis!" he stated. "I'm nobody's Uncle Otis! I'm nobody's brother, either. I'm Eustace Lingham, and I've got a headache! I'm going to have my cigar, and I'm going to bed, and in the morning I'm going back to Cleveland, where I come from!"

And he turned, stamped inside, and went up the stairs.

I trailed after him, unable for once to think of a helpful plan, and Aunt Edith followed us both up the stairs. She and I came to a stop at the top. Together we watched Uncle Otis stride into his room, close the door, and heard him slide the bolt to.

After that we heard the bedsprings squeak, as he sat down upon the bed. This was followed by the scratching of a match, and in a moment we smelled cigar smoke. Uncle Otis always allowed himself one cigar, just before going to bed.

"Otis Morks!" we heard him mutter to himself, and one shoe dropped to the floor. "Nobody's got such a name. It's a trick of some kind. Don't believe there is any such person."

Then he was silent. Aunt Edith gripped my arm. "Perhaps," she said hopefully, "perhaps tomorrow it will have worn off."

But we both knew she didn't really believe it. Uncle Otis' strange obstinacy wouldn't wear off tomorrow, or next week. It was permanent. And the reason we couldn't think of anything to do was because there wasn't anything to do. Nothing could help matters, short of outright murder. And that, of course, we couldn't bring ourselves to. All we could do was to wait. And the next day, or the day after that, or the day after that at the latest, disaster in some form was bound to strike. And we were helpless to prevent it. Utterly helpless.

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"HAAH!" At this point in Morks' narration Fowler interrupted with a triumphant snort. "But nothing did happen!" he exclaimed. "Explain that, if you can! And don't try to say that your Uncle Otis conveniently died before his obstinacy could bring about any disasters."

Morks shook his head. "No, he didn't die," he said.

"Then he's still alive?" Fowler demanded.

Morks shook his head again. "No," he said sadly, "I don't think you could say he's still alive either. As to the reason why no disaster did occur . . . Well, you see, Aunt Edith and I were standing there, in despair, when all of a sudden we both realized we hadn't heard Uncle Otis drop his other shoe. And in that moment we knew what had happened.

"Together we rushed to Uncle Otis' door. It was bolted, but we forced it open, and caught ourselves just inside the room.

"Aunt Edith and I stared around then. The window was closed and locked. A cigar in an ash tray on a table by Uncle Otis' bed was sending a feather of smoke upward. There was a hollow in the bed covers, where someone might have been sitting a second or two earlier. A single one of Uncle Otis' shoes lay on the floor beside the bed.

"But Uncle Otis' last words—we could hear them ringing clearly in our ears still—had been to the effect that he didn't really believe there *was* any such person as Otis Morks. And Uncle Otis"—Morks stared away through the windows, upon his face an expression of deep melancholy—"Uncle Otis was gone."

He sighed, gently. Then he lifted the copy of the *Times*, which somehow had become transferred from Fowler to himself during the narrative, and began to read.



Men for the Flag



The prisoners furiously charged the British officers

There was only a handful of them, gaunt, ragged men; but they had a ship and a homemade banner, and they had heard the Liberty Bell's first ringing. And one of them was filled with magic strength from Odin's Cup

By Philip Ketchum

Author of "Rendezvous for Rogues," "Gallows Clan," etc.

I

AT TIMES the wound in his side was so painful that it seemed to engulf his whole body and paralyze his mind. Usually, on those occasions, he finally slipped away into the oblivion of unconsciousness, and awoke weaker than he had been before.

All of his mother's cheerfulness and her carefully thought up falsehoods couldn't deceive him on that score. He was dying and he knew it and the only thing that he couldn't understand was why dying should take so long and why it had to be so painful. It would have been much better, he felt, if the bullet that had struck him down on the Gowanus Road had finished him. He then would have been spared not only this physical torture, but the bitter knowledge of defeat, as well.

The door to his room opened and Mary Carver came in. She flashed him a swift, guarded glance, and seemed

startled to find him awake. For just an instant she hesitated, then she nodded to him and said: "I—I thought I'd close your window, Captain Macdougall. It's going to be quite chilly tonight."

John Macdougall watched her cross the room and close the window. She was a tall girl and slender, and didn't look overly strong, yet when he had stumbled back here after the rout of Washington's army, it had been Mary Carver who had carried him up to this room.

She was an indentured servant to his father and Macdougall suddenly wondered what her status would be now, since the British had taken New York City and since his father was a well-known rebel.

Mary turned from the window and crossed over to the bed. Her eyes were a sober gray; she had a nice mouth and chin, and it struck Macdougall quite suddenly that he had never noticed these things before. But it wasn't so strange at that. He hadn't been home much during the past year. Until only a few months ago his command had been near Boston where they had held Lord Howe hemmed in and unable to take any action against the rebellious thirteen colonies.

"Can I get you anything, Captain Macdougall?" Mary asked. "A cool drink of water or—"

Macdougall shook his head. "What of Washington and