

Duffield J. W.

Bert Wilson's Twin Cylinder Racer



J. Duffield

Bert Wilson's Twin Cylinder Racer

«Public Domain»

Duffield J.

Bert Wilson's Twin Cylinder Racer / J. Duffield — «Public Domain»,

© Duffield J.

© Public Domain

Содержание

CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	9
CHAPTER III	14
CHAPTER IV	18
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	22

Duffield J. W.

Bert Wilson's Twin Cylinder Racer

CHAPTER I

The Runaway Locomotive

“Stop her. Stop her. She’s running wild!”

The cry ended almost in a shriek that rang high above the murmur of voices at the railroad station.

It was a bright sunny morning early in June. The usual crowd of rustics had gathered at the depot to see the train come in and depart. A few commercial travelers were consulting time tables and attending to the disposition of their baggage. Gay laughter and hasty farewells arose from a bevy of girls and the young men who had assembled to see them off. The conductor, watch in hand, stood ready to give the signal, and the black porters were already gathering up the folding steps preparatory to boarding the train. The bells were ringing and the whistle had given its preliminary toot, when all were startled at the sight of the station agent, who issued wild-eyed from his office and ran on the track, frantically waving his hands and shouting at the top of his voice.

As the startled passengers and trainmen followed the direction of his look, they saw what had occasioned the wild commotion, and, for a moment, their hearts stood still.

A big Mogul engine that had been shunted to a side track was moving down the line, slowly at first but gathering speed with every passing second. Neither engineer nor fireman could be seen in the cab. It was evident that they had left before the power was completely shut off, or that some sudden jar had started the mechanism. Even while the frightened spectators watched as though under a spell, the pace grew swifter. Some of the men lounging about the roundhouse made a hurried rush for it, with a faint hope of getting aboard and shutting off steam. One of these made a desperate grab at the rear end of the tender, but was flung in a ditch alongside the track, where he rolled over and over. It was too late to stop her. Amid a tempest of yells and a tumult of excitement she gathered way and sped down the line.

The station master wrung his hands and tore his hair in desperation. For the moment he was crazed with fright.

A clear eyed young fellow, tall, stalwart, muscular, had been chatting with a party of friends on the road beside the platform. While he talked, his hand rested on the handle-bars of a motorcycle at which he glanced at intervals with a look of pride that was almost affection. It was a superb machine, evidently of the latest type, and in its graceful lines suggested in some vague way a resemblance to its owner. Both looked like thoroughbreds.

At the Babel of cries that rent the air the young motorcyclist looked up and his nostrils dilated with sudden purpose. At a glance he took in the situation – the running men, the panic cries, the runaway engine. Then he came plunging through the crowd and grasped the dazed agent by the shoulder.

“Come, wake up,” he cried. “Do something. Telegraph to the next station.”

The man looked up dully. Terror had benumbed his faculties. He was clearly not the man for a sudden emergency.

“No use,” he moaned. “The next station is thirteen miles away. And it’s a single track,” he wailed, “and No. 56 is due in twenty minutes. If she’s on time she’s already left there. They’ll meet head-on – O God!”

“Quick,” the newcomer commanded, as he fairly dragged him into the office. “There’s the key. Get busy. Call up the next station and see if you can stop 56.”

But as he saw the aimless, paralyzed way in which the agent fumbled at the key, he thrust him aside and took his place. He was an expert telegrapher, and his fingers fairly flew as he called up the operator at Corridon.

“Engine running wild,” he called. “Stop 56 and sidetrack the runaway.”

A moment of breathless suspense and the answer came in sharp, staccato clicks that betrayed the agitation of the man at the other end.

“56 just left. Rounding the curve half a mile away. Making up time, too. For heaven’s sake, do something.”

“Do something.” What bitter irony! What could be done? Death was at the throttle of that mad runaway rushing down the line.

But the young fellow was of the never say die kind, and always at his best when danger threatened. He thought with the rapidity of lightning. Then he clutched the station agent, who sat with his head bowed on his hands, a picture of abject misery.

“Is there a switch between here and Corridon?” he demanded fiercely.

“N-no,” muttered the stupefied man. “That is, there is one at the old stone quarry, but – ”

The remainder of the sentence fell on empty air. Like a flash, the youth who had so cavalierly taken matters in his own hands was out of the room. He ploughed through the huddled group of passengers and trainmen, and flung himself into the saddle of the waiting motorcycle. A roar as he threw in the clutch, a quick scattering of those in front, and the machine, like a living thing, darted down the road that lay beside the track.

The wind sang in his ears and the path fell away behind him as he crouched low over the fork so that his body might offer as little resistance as possible. And, as he rushed along, his active mind was thinking – thinking —

He knew the surrounding country like an open book. There was scarcely a lane that he had not threaded, and as for the highways, he had gone over them again and again. Now, as in a panorama, he saw every turn and bend, every height and hollow of the road that lay before him. In sheer delight of living he had ridden it before; now he must do it to keep others from dying.

The old stone quarry was a familiar landmark. More than once, he and other fellows from the College interested in geology had come over there to hunt fossils. At an earlier date, it had been a buzzing hive of activity, and a side track had been laid by the railroad company in order to load the stone more easily. But of late it had proved unprofitable to work the quarry, and nothing now remained but the abandoned shacks of the workmen and some broken tools and machinery, rusting in the grass that had grown up around them. He remembered that the siding ran for about twenty rods and ended at bumpers set within a few feet of the wall of rock.

For two or three miles, the road he was traveling ran almost parallel to the railroad. At times, a shoulder of the path hid the rails from sight, and at one place he had to make quite a wide detour before he again came close to the right of way. The switch at the quarry was seven miles from the town, and, though he hoped to make it in less than that many minutes, it seemed as though he would never reach it. To his agonized mind he appeared to be merely crawling. In reality he was flying.

For he was riding now as he had never ridden before. Human life was at stake – perhaps hundreds of lives. He pictured the long line of cars full of passengers – for 56 was the road’s finest train, and almost always filled to capacity – coming toward him without a thought of danger. Some would be reading, others gazing out of the windows, still others laughing and talking. But everywhere would be confidence, ease of mind, an eager looking for the journey’s end without the slightest apprehension. And all this time, death was grimly bearing down upon them in one of his most fearful forms.

He shuddered as in his mind's eye he saw the two monster locomotives leaping at each other like enraged giants. He had seen a wreck once and had fervently prayed that he might never see another. And as that scene now came before him, he bent lower over the bars and let out every ounce of speed that the machine possessed.

It was leaping now, only touching the high places. Had he been a less skilful rider he would have been hurled from the saddle. Discretion was thrown to the winds. It was no time to measure possibilities or look out for his personal safety. He had to take chances. His siren warned all comers to give him the road. A team was hauled up on its haunches by the frightened driver; an automobile drew so hastily to one side that two wheels went into the ditch. He caught a glimpse of startled faces at doors and windows as he passed. Like a meteor he flashed by, all his heart and soul wrapped up in the thought of rescue.

Now he had overtaken the locomotive and was running parallel to it. The Mogul swayed and lurched as it tore along with all steam up on its mission of destruction. Steadily the rider drew up on even terms, with less than twenty feet separating the tracks from the high road. Then the motorcycle swept into the lead and increased it with every bound.

Only two miles more to the quarry! His heart exulted as he realized that he would get there first. But the margin would be fearfully close. The switch might prove rusty and refuse to work. Some part of it might be out of gear. For years it had been utterly abandoned. What a bitter jest of fate if, after reaching it ahead of the locomotive, he should have to stand helplessly by and see it dash past on its errand of slaughter.

Then, too, a third factor entered into the problem. There was No. 56. She was a limited express and famous for her speed. The operator at Corridon had said that on this stretch of road, supposed to be clear, she would make up time. If she reached and passed the switch before the runaway, no power on earth could prevent a frightful disaster. And just then, while this fear was tugging at his heart, a faint whistle in the distance drove all the color from his face. 56 was coming!

He dared not take his eyes from the road in front, but he knew from the lessened noise behind him that he was increasing his lead. And then as he swept around a slight curve in the road, the abandoned quarry came into view. There were the empty shacks, the deserted platform and, a few rods further on, the switch.

He raced to the tracks and threw himself from the machine, almost falling headlong from the momentum, although he had turned off the power. Then he grasped the lever and tried to throw the switch.

It groaned and creaked, but, although it protested, it yielded to the powerful young muscles that would not be denied. But, when it had moved two-thirds of the way it balked, and, despite his frenzied attempts, refused to budge another inch. And now the runaway engine was coming close, rumbling and roaring hideously, while round the curve, a scant quarter of a mile away, appeared the smokestack of No. 56.

Looking wildly about for the obstacle, he saw that a stone had been wedged into the frog. He tried to remove it, but the turning of the switch had jammed it against the rail. Straightening up, he swung the lever far enough back to release the stone. He worked as if in a nightmare. Fifty feet away, the Mogul was bearing down like a fire-breathing demon. With one swift movement he threw the stone aside; with the next he bowed his back over the lever until it felt as though it would break. Then the rusted rails groaned into place; with an infernal din and uproar the runaway took the switch. Scarcely had it cleared the track when 56 thundered past, its wheels sending out streams of sparks as the brakes ground against them.

The Mogul struck the bumpers with terrific force, tore them away and leaped headlong against the wall of the quarry. There was a crash that could be heard for miles, and the wrecked locomotive reared into the air and then rolled over on its side, enveloped in smoke and hissing steam.

As soon as the long train of 56 could be stopped, the throttle was reversed and it came gliding back to the switch. The engineer and fireman sprang from their cab, conductor and trainmen came running up, and the passengers swarmed from the cars.

There was a tumult of excited questionings, as they gathered round the young fellow who stood there, panting with the strain of his tremendous efforts. Now that he had succeeded in the forlorn hope that he had undertaken, he was beginning to feel the reaction. He responded briefly and modestly to the questions that were showered upon him, and, as the full meaning of their narrow escape from death burst upon them, passengers and trainmen alike were loud in their praise of his presence of mind and thanks for their deliverance. They were for making him a hero, but he shrank from this and would have none of it.

"Don't thank me," he laughed. "It was this that made it possible;" and he patted the handlebars of the motorcycle. "She certainly did herself proud this day."

"She surely is a dandy," smiled the conductor, "but you must admit that you had a *little* to do with it. We'll never forget what you have done for us to-day. But now we must be starting. We'll put the machine in the baggage car, and you come in here with me."

A blast of the whistle and No. 56 had resumed its interrupted journey.

A ringing cheer burst from the anxious crowds that surged about the platform as the great train, puffing and snorting, came into the station. The agent, white as a ghost, could not believe his eyes.

"Thank God," he cried. "I thought it was all over. I've telegraphed for the wrecking crew, and all the doctors in town have been called to go along. How on earth did you escape? Where is the Mogul?"

"You'll find that down in the quarry smashed to bits," answered the conductor. "You'll need the wrecking train for that, all right, but you can call off the doctors. We would have needed plenty of them – and undertakers too – if it hadn't been for this young man. He threw the switch without a second to spare."

The station agent grasped the rider's hand and stammered and stuttered, as he tried to pour out his thanks. But just then a flying wedge of college boys came through the crowd and, grabbing the reluctant hero, hoisted him to their shoulders.

"Wilson." "Bert Wilson." "O, you Bert." "O, you speed boy," they yelled. The enthusiastic lookers on took up the shout and it was a long time before Bert, blushing and embarrassed, could free himself from his boisterous admirers.

"O, cut it out, fellows," he protested. "It was all in the day's work."

"Sure," assented Tom Henderson, "but *such* a day's work."

"And such a worker," added Dick Trent.

"Three times three and a tiger for Bert Wilson," roared a stentorian voice. The answer came in a tempest of cheers, and, as the train pulled out, the last sound that came to the waving passengers was the lusty chorus:

"For he's a jolly good fellow,
Which nobody can deny."

CHAPTER II

The “Blue Streak”

“Isn’t it a beauty?” exclaimed Bert, as, a few days later, he swept up to a waiting group of friends and leaped from the saddle.

There was a unanimous assent as the boys crowded around the motorcycle, looking at it almost with the rapt intentness of worshippers at a shrine.

“It’s a dandy, all right,” declared Dick, with an enthusiasm equal to Bert’s own. “You skimmed along that last stretch of road like a bird.”

“It’s about the speediest and niftiest thing on the planet,” chimed in Tom. “You’d give an airship all it wanted to do to keep up with you.”

“Easy, easy there,” laughed Bert. “I wouldn’t go as far as that. But on ‘terra cotta,’ as Mrs. Partington calls it, there are mighty few things that will make me take their dust.” And he patted the machine with as much affection as if it could feel and respond to the touch.

“About how fast can that streak of greased lightning travel, any way?” asked Drake. “What’s the record for a motorcycle?”

“The best so far is a mile in thirty-six and four-fifths seconds,” was the answer. “That’s at the rate of ninety-eight miles an hour.”

“Some traveling,” murmured Dick.

“Of course,” went on Bert, “that was for a sprint. But even over long distances some great records have been hung up. In England last year a motorcycle made 300 miles in 280 minutes. I don’t think the fastest express train in the world has ever beaten that.”

“Gee,” said Tom, “I’d hate to be in the path of a cannon ball like that. It would be the ‘sweet by and by’ for yours truly.”

“It might possibly muss you up some,” grinned Bert. “It’s a case of ‘the quick or the dead’ when you amble across the path of a twin-cylinder.”

“I should think,” remarked Drake, “that it would shake the daylights out of you to travel at the speed you were going just now along that last bit of road.”

“A few years ago it would have,” admitted Bert. “The way they bumped along was a sure cure for dyspepsia. But with this saddle I could ride all day and scarcely feel a jar. Why, look at this cradle spring frame,” he went on enthusiastically; “it has the same flat leaf springs that they use in the finest kind of automobiles. You wouldn’t believe that there are over 250 inches of supple, highly tempered springs between the saddle and the road. It’s as elastic and flexible as a bamboo cane. Each spring has double scrolls that come into action one after another whenever you have a jolt. Then, too, there are rubber bumpers to take the recoil. Why, it’s like a parlor car on a limited express. No fellow sitting back in a Pullman has anything on me.”

“You’re a pampered son of luxury, all right,” mocked Tom. “We children of toil take off our hats to you.”

Bert made a playful pass at him and went on:

“As to power, it would take the strength of seven horses to match it. The engine has a piston displacement of 61 inches. And yet you can control that tremendous power so far as to slow down to three miles an hour. Not that I often get down to that, though. Fifty or sixty suit me better.”

“You ought to name it ‘Pegasus,’ after the flying horse,” suggested Hinsdale.

“Old Pegasus would have his work cut out for him if he tried to show me the way,” smiled Bert. “Still I don’t claim to beat anything that goes through the air. But when you get down to solid earth, I’d back this daisy of mine to hold its own.”

“The old Red Scout might make you hustle some,” suggested Tom.

"Yes," admitted Bert, "she certainly was a hummer. Do you remember the time she ran away from the Gray Ghost? Speed was her middle name that day."

"It was, for fair," agreed Dick, "but perhaps she went still faster when we scudded up the track that day, with the express thundering behind."

"Our hearts went faster, anyway," declared Tom. "Gee, but that was a narrow squeak. It makes me shiver now when I think of it."

"Same here," echoed Bert, little dreaming that before long, on the splendid machine whose handlebars he held, he would graze the very garments of death.

Happily, however, the future was hidden, and for the moment the little group were absorbed in the mechanical wonders of the motorcycle that loomed large in the road before them. It stood for the last word in up-to-date construction. The inventive genius of the twentieth century had spent itself on every contrivance that would add to its speed, strength and beauty. It was a poem in bronze and steel and rubber. From the extremity of the handlebars in front to the rim of its rear wheel, not the tiniest thing had been overlooked or left undone that could add to its perfection. Fork and cams and springs and valves and carburetor – all were of the finest material and the most careful workmanship.

"It seemed an awful lot to pay, when I heard that it cost you over three hundred bucks," said Tom, "but after looking it over, I guess you got your money's worth."

"The value's there, all right," asserted Bert confidently. "I wouldn't take that amount of money for the fun I've had already. And what I'm going to have" – he made a comprehensive wave of the hand – "it simply can't be reckoned in cold coin."

"It's getting to be a mighty popular way of traveling," said Dick. "I saw it stated somewhere that a quarter of a million are in use and that the output is increasing all the time."

"Yes," added Drake, "they certainly cover a wide field. Ministers, doctors, rural mail carriers, gas, electric and telephone companies are using them more and more. In the great pastures of the West, the herders use them in making their rounds and looking after the sheep. All the police departments in the big cities employ a lot of them, and in about every foreign army there is a motorcycle corps. You've surely got lots of company, old man."

"Yes, and we're only the vanguard. The time is coming when they'll be used as widely as the bicycle in its palmiest days."

"A bicycle wouldn't have done you much good the other day, in that wild ride down to the switch," grinned Drake. "By the way, Bert, the press associations got hold of that, and now the whole country's humming with it."

"Well," said Bert, anxious to change the subject, "if she'll only do as well in the race from coast to coast, I won't have any kick coming."

"How about that contest anyway?" queried Hinsdale. "Have you really decided to go into it?"

"Sure thing," answered Bert. "I don't see why I shouldn't. Commencement will be over by the eighth, and the race doesn't start until the tenth. That will give me plenty of time to get into shape. As a matter of fact, I'm almost fit now, and Reddy is training me for two hours every afternoon. I've almost got down to my best weight already, and I'm going to take the rest off so slowly that I'll be in the pink of condition when the race begins. Reddy knows me like a book and he says he never saw me in better form."

"Of course," he went on thoughtfully, "the game is new to me and I'm not at all sure of winning. But I think I have a chance. I'd like to win for the honor of it and because I hate to lose. And then, too, that purse of ten thousand dollars looks awfully good to me."

The race to which the boys referred had been for some time past a subject of eager interest, and had provoked much discussion in sporting and college circles. The idea had been developing since the preceding winter from a chance remark as to the time it would take a motorcycle to go from the Atlantic to the Pacific. A guess had been hazarded that it could be done in twenty days. This had been disputed, and, as an outcome of the discussion, a general race had been projected to settle

the question. The Good Roads Association of America, in conjunction with a number of motorcycle manufacturers, had offered a purse of five thousand dollars for the competitor who made the journey in the shortest time. If that time came within twenty days, an additional two thousand dollars was to be given to the winner.

One other element entered into the problem. The San Francisco Exposition, designed to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal, would be in full swing at the time the survivors of the race reached the coast. One of the great features of the Fair was to be an international carnival of sports. There were to be contests in cavalry riding, in fencing, in auto racing, and the pick of the world were expected to compete. But of special interest to Bert was the international motorcycle race, which for the first time was to be held in America. Two years before, it had taken place in Paris and, a year later, in London. But this year it was America's turn, and because of the immense crowds expected at the Exposition, San Francisco had been chosen as the city to stage the event. There was to be a first prize of three thousand dollars and lesser purses for those that came in second and third. If, by any chance, the winner of the long distance race should break the twenty day limit and also win the final race at the Fair, his total reward would amount to ten thousand dollars.

With such a possibility in prospect, it was not surprising that Bert should be strongly tempted to enter the race. He was a natural athlete, and in his college course so far had stood head and shoulders above his competitors. As pitcher on the 'Varsity team, he had cinched the pennant by his superb twirling in a most exciting series of diamond battles. He had been chosen as a contender on the American Olympic team, and had carried off the Marathon after a heart-breaking race, in which every ounce of speed and stamina had been tried to the utmost. In an auto race between rival campers, his hand at the wheel had guided the Red Scout to victory over the Gray Ghost, its redoubtable antagonist. He was a splendid physical machine of brawn and sinew and nerve and muscle. Outdoor life, vigorous exercise and clean living, combined with his natural gifts, made him a competitor to be feared and respected in any contest that he chose to enter.

But his lithe, supple body was not his only, or indeed, his chief asset. What made him preëminent was his quick mind and indomitable will, of which his body was only the servant. His courage and audacity were superb. Again and again he had been confronted with accidents and discouragements that would have caused a weaker fellow to quit and blame the result on fate. He had won the deciding game in the baseball race, after his comrades had virtually thrown it away. In the Marathon, it was with bruised and bleeding feet that he overtook his antagonist at the very tape. The harder bad luck tried to down him, the more fiercely he rose in rebellion. And it was this bulldog grip, this unshaken tenacity, this "never know when you are beaten" spirit that put him in a class by himself and made him the idol of his comrades. They had seen him so often snatch victory from the very jaws of defeat, that they were prepared to back him to the limit. Win or lose, they knew that he would do his best, and, if defeated, go down fighting.

With such a character and record back of him, his enthusiastic friends were inclined to think that it was "all over but the shouting." Bert, however, had no such delusion. If it had been simply a matter of muscle or swiftness or courage, he would have felt more confident of the outcome. But here the "human equation" was not the only thing involved. The quality and strength of the machine he rode would be a very prominent and perhaps a deciding factor. He felt sure that he was in such prime physical condition that he could endure the gruelling grind. But would his machine be equal to the task? The most dashing horseman would have to halt, if his steed foundered beneath him. The most daring aviator would have to descend to earth, if his motor stopped. So Bert, no matter how strong and plucky, must fail, if his machine should go back on him.

For there could be no substitute. This was one of the conditions of the race. He must finish, if at all, on the same machine with which he started. The contestants were permitted to make repairs to any extent. Tires, forks, springs and any other parts could be replaced, and, at intervals along the route, supplies could be held in readiness, in addition to those that the rider carried. But essentially

the identical machine must be used throughout the race. In the event of a hopeless smashup, the luckless rider was, of course, out for good. The racer and the machine were thus indispensable to each other. Neither could win if the other balked. They were like the two blades of a shears – strong when together but useless when separated.

To guard as much as possible against defects, Bert had been especially careful in selecting his motorcycle. He had the eye for a machine that a gipsy has for a horse. Among a host of others, he had chosen one that appealed to him as the acme of what a motorcycle should be. It was a seven horse power, twin cylinder racer, with every appliance and improvement known at the time it left the factory.

The brakes, for instance, were more powerful than those fitted to any previous type. It could be operated by a foot lever on the right side of the machine and also by a grip lever in the left handlebar. The double action was caused by the expansion and contraction of two bands inside and outside a brake drum.

Then, too, there was a foot-starting device that was a marvel of simplicity. A single downward pressure of the foot, and the racer started off at once.

An improved rear hub also aroused Bert's enthusiasm, because of its extra large size and the fact that it ran on ball bearings that were absolutely frictionless. In both the front and rear hubs there was a knock-out axle, so that the wheels could be removed without interfering with the adjustment of the bearings.

In fact, the more Bert studied what had become his most precious possession the more convinced he grew that he had secured a "gem of the first water." And now that the first stiffness had worn off, the machine was "running like a watch."

The ignition was perfect, the transmission left nothing to be desired, and the most critical inspection could find no fault with any detail of the steel charger that was to carry him and his fortunes to victory or defeat.

"What are you going to christen it, Bert?" asked Tom. "Cut out the Pegasus stuff and tell it to us straight."

"On the level, I think I'll call it the 'Blue Streak,'" answered Bert. "That's the way it covers the ground, as a rule, and I hope it will be prophetic. Besides, blue is our college color and it ought to bring me luck. That's the color I wore when we took the Grays and Maroons into camp, and I had it at my belt when I collared Dorner in the Stadium. Everything goes in threes, you know, and this will be the third time I'm out to win since I was a Freshie."

"Bully for you, old top," exclaimed Drake, with a rousing thump on the shoulder. "The fellows will be tickled to death to know that the good old blue is showing the way across country. And when we hear that you've come in first, there'll be a yell that you'll hear way off in Frisco."

"Don't count your chickens too soon, my boy," cautioned Bert; but his heart was warmed and elated by the confidence his comrades had in him, and he vowed to himself that he would justify it, if it were humanly possible.

"To judge from the names already entered, it's going to be a weird color scheme," laughed Dick. "There's the Yellow Dragon and the Red Devil and the Brown Antelope and the White Cloud and the Black Knight; and there'll probably be others before the list is full."

"Gee," chortled Tom, "if a hobo should see them coming all at once, he'd think that he had them again, sure."

"Yes," agreed Bert, "it would certainly be a crazy quilt effect, if they should all come along together. But there are so many different routes that, ten to one, we won't catch sight of each other after the bunch scatters at the start."

"How about the route?" asked Martin. "I should think that would be one of the most important things to take into account."

“So it would, if it were left to me. But it isn’t. You see, one of the great objects of the Good Roads Association is to plan a great national highway from coast to coast. They want to get all the facts about every possible route, so that they’ll have something to go on, when they put it up to the different States to get legislation on their pet hobby. This race they think will be of great importance for this purpose, because it won’t be based on theory but on actual experience. So they have mapped out a large number of possible lines to be followed – northern, central and southern, – and when they’ve got them all marked out, lots will be drawn and the fellows will have to follow the route that chance gives them. Of course, they can’t be exactly alike in the matter of distance. But it will be as fair for one as the other, and, all things considered, they’ll average up about alike. I expect to get a letter any day now, giving the special trip that luck has picked out for me.

“Of course,” he went on, “it isn’t all absolutely cut and dried. They don’t mark out every highway and byway that you must travel, on pain of being disqualified. But you’re given a chain of important towns and great centers that you must hit one after the other on your trip across the continent. As long as you do that, you are left to your own judgment as to the best and quickest way of getting there.”

“How about any crooked work?” put in Axtell. “Is there any chance of that?”

“I’m not worrying much about that,” answered Bert. “To be sure, where so much is at stake, there’s always a chance of some one trying to turn a trick. But I don’t see where they could ‘put it over.’ At every important place there’ll be timers and checkers to keep tally on the riders. The machines are all registered and numbered and so carefully described that, in case of a smashup, a fellow couldn’t slip in another one without being found out at the next stopping place. Then, too, if they tried to get a lift on a train, there would have to be too many in the secret. Besides, in all the names I’ve seen so far of the racers, there’s only one that might possibly stoop to anything of that kind. His name is Hayward, and from what I’ve heard he’s been mixed up with one or two shady deals. There have only been whispers and suspicions, however, and they’ve never been able actually to prove anything against him. So he is still nominally in good standing and eligible to ride. It may be all conjecture anyway. He probably wouldn’t cheat if he could, and couldn’t if he would.”

“No,” said Dick, “it certainly seems as though the best man and the best machine ought to win.”

“I understand that the race is to start from New York,” remarked Drake.

“Yes,” answered Bert, preparing to mount the machine, “from one of the beaches near the city. It’s to be actually from ocean to ocean. The rear wheel is to be wet in the Atlantic. Then the fight is on in earnest and only ends when the front wheel is dipped in the Pacific.”

“Twill be some race,” remarked Martin.

“You’ll have to travel like the wind,” warned Hinsdale.

“Yes,” laughed Bert, as he threw in the clutch, “to make it in twenty days, I’ll have to go like a blue streak.”

CHAPTER III

From Coast to Coast

The next few days flew by with magical swiftness. There were a thousand things to be done, and Bert found himself wishing that each day had a hundred hours instead of twenty-four. The term examinations were on, and he buckled down to them manfully. He had never neglected his class work in favor of athletic sports and his standing had always been high. He worked as hard as he played, and in both study and games was up in the front rank.

But when these ordeals were over and he had passed triumphantly, every spare moment was devoted to the coming race. He put into his preparation all his heart and soul. And in this, he was ably aided and abetted by Reddy, the college trainer.

"Reddy," as he was called from the flaming mop of hair that adorned his far from classic brow, was a character. For many years he had been in complete control of the football, baseball and general track teams of the college. He had formerly been a crack second baseman in a major league, but an injured ankle had forced his withdrawal from the active playing ranks. He had a shrewd, though uneducated, mind, and his knowledge of sports and ability as a trainer had made him famous in the athletic world. His dry wit and genial disposition made him a great favorite with the boys, though he ruled with an iron hand when discipline was needed.

He was especially proud and fond of Bert for two reasons. In the first place, his trainers' soul rejoiced in having such a superb physical specimen to develop into a winner. He had so often been called upon to "make bricks without straw," that he exulted in this splendid material ready to his hand. And when his faith had been justified by the great victories that Bert had won, Reddy felt that it was, in part, his own personal triumph.

Then, too, Bert had never shirked or broken training. His sense of honor was high and fine, and he kept as rigidly to his work in the trainer's absence as in his presence. Reddy had never had to put detectives on his track or search him out in the poolrooms and saloons of the town. He was true to himself, true to his team, true to his college, and could always be counted on to be in first-class condition.

So that, although this was not a college event, Reddy took a keen personal interest in the coming contest. Every afternoon, he held the watch while Bert circled the track, and he personally superintended the bath and rubdown, after the test was over. He knew the exact weight at which his charge was most effective, and he took off the superfluous flesh just fast enough not to weaken him. And his Irish blue eyes twinkled with satisfaction, as he noted that just now he had never seen him in better shape for the task that lay before him.

"Ye'll do," he said, with an air of finality, two days before the race, as he snapped his split-second chronometer, after a whirlwind sprint. "I'll not tell ye jist the time ye made for that last five miles, as I don't want ye to get the swelled head. But, my word for it, ye're on edge, and I don't want ye to touch that machine again until ye face the starter. Ye're down fine enough and I don't want ye to go stale before the race begins. I've left jist enough beef on ye to give ye a wee bit of a margin to work off. The rest is solid bone and muscle, and, if the machine is as good as yerself, ye'll get to the coast first with something to spare."

"Well," said Bert warmly, "it will be your victory as well as mine if I do. You're my 'one best bet' when it comes to getting into form. I wouldn't have had half a chance to pull off any of the stunts I have, if it hadn't been for you."

But Reddy tossed this lightly aside.

"Not a bit of it," he protested, "'tis yersilf has done the work, and yersilf should get the credit. And ye've done it too in the face of accident and hard luck. This time I'm hoping that luck will be

on yer side. And to make sure,” he grinned, “I’m going to give yer a sprig of four-leaved shamrock that came to me from the folks at home, last seventeenth of March. ’Twill not be hurting ye any to have it along with yer.”

“Sure thing,” laughed Bert. “I’ll slip it in the tool box and carry it every foot of the way.”

And as Reddy had groomed Bert, so Bert groomed his machine. Every nut and bolt, valve and spring was gone over again and again, until even his critical judgment was satisfied. It was to carry not only his fortune but perhaps his life, and he did not rest until he was convinced that nothing could add to its perfection. It had become almost a part of himself, and it was with a feeling of reluctance that at last he had it carefully crated and sent on to the starting point, to await his coming forty-eight hours later.

That evening, as he returned from the post office, he met Tom and Dick at the foot of the steps leading to their dormitory. He waved at them an open letter that he had been reading.

“It’s from the Committee,” he explained. “It gives the route and final instructions. Come up to the rooms and we’ll go over it together.”

A bond of friendship, far from common, united these three comrades – the “Three Guardsmen,” as they were jokingly called, because they were so constantly together. They had first met at a summer camp, some years before, and a strong similarity of character and tastes had drawn them to each other at once. From that time on, it had been “one for three and three for one.”

Full to the brim as they were of high spirits and love of adventure, they often got into scrapes from which it required all their nerve and ingenuity to emerge with a whole skin. Their supreme confidence in themselves often led them to take chances from which older and wiser heads would have shrunk. And the various exploits in which they had indulged had taught each how fully and absolutely he might rely on the others. On more than one occasion, death itself had been among the possibilities, but even that supreme test had been met without flinching.

Only a few months before, when, on their journey through Mexico, Dick had fallen into the hands of El Tigre, the dreaded leader of guerillas, Bert and Tom had taken the trail at once, and after a most exciting chase, had rescued him from the bandit’s clutches. During a trip to the Adirondacks, Tom had been bitten by a rattler and would have perished, had it not been for Bert’s quickness of mind and swiftness of foot. And Bert himself never expected to come closer to death than that day on the San Francisco wharf, when Dick had grasped the knife hand of the Malay running amuck, just as it was upraised to strike.

Any man or any danger that threatened one would have to count on tackling three. Each knew that in a pinch the others would stick at nothing in the effort to back him up. And this conviction, growing stronger with every new experience, had cemented their friendship beyond all possibility of breaking.

Their early ties had ripened and broadened under the influence of their college life. Dick had entered a year before the other two, and it was this that had moved them to choose the same Alma Mater. Dick and Tom were studying to be civil engineers, while Bert was more strongly drawn toward the field of electricity and wireless telegraphy. Their keen intelligence had won them high honors in scholarship, and their brawn and muscle had achieved an enviable distinction in athletics. On the pennant winning team of the year before, Bert’s brilliant pitching had been ably supported by the star work of Tom at third, while Dick, beside being the champion slugger of the team, had held down first base like a veteran. All were immensely popular with the student body in general, not only for their prowess, but because of the qualities of mind and heart that would have singled them out anywhere as splendid specimens of young American manhood.

Bert and Dick roomed together, while Tom’s quarters were on the floor below. Now, as it was nearer, they all piled into Tom’s sitting-room, eager to discuss the contents of the official letter.

“Here it is,” said Bert, as he tossed it over to the others. “You see, I have the southern route.”

“O, thunder,” groaned Tom, “the toughest of the lot. You’ll fairly melt down there at this time of year.”

“It *is* rough,” said Dick. “The roads there are something fierce. The northern or central route would have been ten times better.”

“Yes,” agreed Bert, “it certainly is a handicap. If I’d been left to choose, myself, I wouldn’t have dreamed of going that way. Still, it’s all a matter of lot, and I’ve got no kick coming. Somebody would have had to draw it, and I might as well be the victim as any one else.”

“Spoken like a sport, all right,” grumbled Tom. “But it makes me sore at fate. You’ll need something more than Reddy’s shamrock to make up for it.”

“You might hunt me up the hind foot of a rabbit, shot by a cross-eyed coon in a graveyard, in the ‘dark of the moon,’ if you want to make sure of my winning,” jested Bert. “But, seriously, fellows, I’m not going to let that rattle me a little bit. It may be harder, but if I do come in first, there’ll be all the more credit in winning. As for the heat, I’ll make my own breeze as I go along, and I’ll take my chances on the roads.”

“Well, I suppose there’s no use growling,” admitted Tom, grudgingly. “At any rate, we’ll see a section of the country we’ve never seen before.”

“We,” cried Bert. “What do you mean by that?”

“Just what I say,” answered Tom, looking a little guiltily at Dick.

“What,” yelled Bert, leaping to his feet. “Are you two rascals going along?”

“Surest thing you know,” said Dick, calmly. “Did you think for a minute that Tom and I would miss the fun of seeing you scoot across the continent and win that ten thousand dollars? Not on your life. We were going to surprise you, but since this dub has let the cat out of the bag, we might as well own up. There’s nothing to do, now that we know the route but to go out and get the tickets.”

“Well, you’re a pair of bricks,” gasped Bert. “The finest pals a fellow ever had. That’s the best news I’ve had ‘since Hector was a pup.’ I didn’t know that I’d see a friend’s face from the start to the finish. Talk about shamrocks and rabbit’s feet! This news has got them skinned to death. It won’t be any trick at all to toss off a few hundred miles, if I can figure on seeing you fellows when I turn in for the night. Say, fellows, I can’t put it into words, but you know how I feel.”

“Pure selfishness on our part,” said Dick, airily, to mask his own deep feeling. “We want to see the San Francisco Fair, and figured that we’d never have a better chance.”

“Yes,” mocked Bert, delightedly, “I size up that selfishness all right. But now let’s study the route and figure out the schedule. Then you gay deceivers can get through tickets with stopover privileges, and I’ll know just where to find you along the way.”

“You see,” explained Tom, “we figured that we could get into the big towns ahead of you and act as a sort of base of supplies. You can keep tab on the way the ‘Blue Streak’ is running, and if anything goes wrong – if a tire bursts or a fork breaks or you have engine trouble – you can wire ahead and we’ll have everything ready for you to make a lightning change the minute you heave in sight. Of course, you may have to do some temporary patching and tinkering along the way, but in really big things we may come in handy. But now let’s cut out the hallelujahs and get down to brass tacks.”

Which they did to such good effect that before they turned in for the night, they had outlined a plan that covered every probable contingency. Of course there was no such precision possible as in the case of a railroad schedule. A hundred things might happen to cause a change here, a delay there, but, between certain elastic limits, the route and time were carefully worked out. If they should have to revise it, as they doubtless would, the telegraph and long distance telephone could be depended on to help them out.

Starting from New York, Bert figured that the first leg of the journey would take him as far as Philadelphia. This, of course, would not be typical of the regular distance he would have to cover each day, in order to beat the time record. But the race was not to start until noon, so that a half day was all that would be left the riders. And that half day would be slower than the average, because they would

have to thread the streets of the greater city with all its hindrances and speed regulations, and would have bridges and ferries to cross before they could fairly let themselves out. Of course this would not count for a day in the timing, as they would be allowed a half day at the end of the journey to make up for it. In other words, the day ran from noon to noon, instead of from midnight to midnight.

From Philadelphia the route would lead to Baltimore and Washington. Then he proposed to strike down through West Virginia and into the famous Blue Grass region of Kentucky and thence swing down toward Little Rock, Arkansas, which would mark the extreme southern point of the journey. After that, he would be going almost directly west, with a slight trend to the north. He would cut through Oklahoma on a direct horizontal, and then for a short time traverse the upper part of Texas. Leaving the Lone Star State, he would strike in succession Santa Fé, New Mexico, and Flagstaff, Arizona. Then, at last, he would be in California, getting a glimpse of the sea at Santa Barbara, and then sweeping up the valley to San Francisco.

The record he had to beat was twenty days. He planned to do it in fifteen. That is, he was confident that as far as mere time were concerned, he could reel off enough miles every day to take him over the route within that limit. But that was assuming that everything went smoothly, and, in a trip of this length, he knew that such an assumption was absurd. He gave himself three days for accidents and delays. This, added to the fifteen of actual running time, would still give him a comfortable margin of forty-eight hours. But, on the average, despite accident or breakdown, wind or rain, sickness or health, mistaken roads or dangerous spills, flood or freshet or tempest, he must make from two to three hundred miles every day. Not only he must be in shape to do it, but the “Blue Streak” also. There were two machines that had to take all the chances of wear and tear and mishap – the physical machine above the saddle, and the steel and rubber machine below it.

He wanted to make the most of the good roads that he would have at the very beginning of the trip. The first three days would be the best ones, as far as this feature was concerned. The Eastern and Northern States were far ahead of the rest of the country in this respect. Their wealth and population, as well as the vastly greater number of motor vehicles in use, had early turned their attention to the value and necessity of the best kind of roads that money could buy and science invent. After he left Louisville, the going would be harder. While, at places, there would be magnificent turnpikes along the main arteries of travel, these would be more than counterbalanced by roads where clay and sand predominated. But, to make up for this, would be the fact that for long distances the roads would be clearer and the speed regulations less stringent. And, on these stretches, Bert promised himself to “hit it up” hard enough to compensate for the inferior quality of the road. It was “all in the game,” and, in the long run, things would about even up.

“It’s a good deal of a lottery, when all is said and done,” was the way he summed it up, as they rose from the maps and papers spread out before them; “I may get knocked out on the first day, and then again I may turn up smiling at the finish.”

“Of course,” assented Tom, “there’s no telling what may happen before the race is over. But I have a hunch that in this lottery you are going to draw the capital prize.”

“Well,” laughed Bert, “if you’re as good a prophet as you are a pal, I’d be sure of it.”

CHAPTER IV

A Flying Start

The day of the race dawned bright and clear. There was just enough breeze to temper the heat of the sun, but not enough to interfere with the riders. There had been no rain since three days before, and the roads, while a little dusty, were firm and fast. Everything bespoke ideal conditions for the event that, it was hoped, would hang up new records in one of the most modern of sports.

The three friends had left college the day before, and had taken up their quarters at one of the hotels near the beach. They were full of health and hope and enthusiasm. The work of the college year was over, and they felt like colts kicking up their heels in a pasture. Dick and Tom were looking forward to the trip across the continent and the wonders of the great Exposition. This of itself would have been enough to account for their exuberance, but there was the added excitement of watching the progress of the great race, and, in a sense, taking part in it. And, with all the optimism of youth, they did not let themselves feel the shadow of a doubt that their comrade would come in triumphant.

And Bert, although somewhat sobered by the weight of responsibility that rested upon him, was almost as jubilant as they. He was a born fighter, and his spirits always rose on the eve of a contest. He was "tuned to the hour." The muscles of his arms and legs glided like snakes beneath the white skin, his color was good, his eyes shone, and he had never in all his many contests felt in better physical trim.

Early in the morning, he had hurried to the garage to which the "Blue Streak" had been consigned, and was delighted to find that it had made the journey without a scratch. No one but himself was permitted to give it the final grooming. He personally filled the tank, looked to the oil, and went over every nut and bolt and valve. Then he sprang into the saddle and took a five-mile spin around the neighboring race track. And even his exacting criticism could find no shadow of defect. The "Blue Streak," like its master, was in perfect condition.

"Well, old boy," said Bert, as he patted the beautiful machine, after the test, "we're going to be pretty close companions for the next few weeks, and you've got a big job cut out for you. But I believe you're game for it, and if your rider is as good as you are, I won't have anything left to ask."

As the hour drew near, a great crowd assembled to see the start. The contest had stirred up a vast amount of interest among motor enthusiasts, and many of the motorcycle clubs were represented by big delegations. One or two of the entries had dropped out at the last moment, and there were ten contestants who faced the starter. Each had his coterie of friends and well wishers who had gathered to give him a rousing send off. But none were greeted so uproariously as Bert, who had a reception that "warmed the cockles of his heart." Undergraduates of the old college flocked around him, and these were reinforced by hundreds of alumni, living in or near the city, who scented one more victory for the blue colors that they loved so dearly. They swarmed about him, grasped his hand and thumped him on the back, until if he had been in poorer condition, he would have been black and blue. It was with difficulty that he could tear himself away from the multitude whose enthusiasm outran their discretion. But many a day thereafter, in loneliness and peril and the shadow of death, the memory of that boisterous farewell was an inspiration. The last hands he clasped were those of Tom and Dick and Reddy, whose face was as red as his hair from excitement.

"Good luck, me bye," he called. Then in a whisper, "Ye haven't forgot the shamrock?"

"You bet I haven't," laughed Bert, and lifting the cover of his tool box, he showed it lying on top. Whereat, Reddy heaved a sigh of relief, and fell back satisfied.

And now everything was ready for the start. The wheels had been dipped in the Atlantic, whose surf curled up to meet them, as though to whisper a message to its sister ocean. Then all the riders, standing by their machines, were drawn up in line on the boulevard that came down almost to the

beach. The conditions of the race were read aloud and all of the racers with uplifted hand swore to observe them. A letter from the Mayor of New York to the Mayor of San Francisco was delivered to each contestant. Only the one who reached there first was to deliver his. The others would be of value as souvenirs of perhaps a gallant but unsuccessful struggle.

Then there was a moment's silence, while the excitement grew tense. The starter lifted his pistol and glanced along the waiting line. There came a flash, a sharp report, and before the echoes died away the riders were in the saddle. A tremendous roar from the exhausts made the crowd shrink back, and it scattered as the great machines leaped forward. It was like the bursting of a rainbow. Blue and red and black and white darted forward in flying streaks of color, spreading out like the sticks of a gigantic fan. Before the startled spectators could catch their breath, the racers were vanishing from sight up the boulevard. The dash from coast to coast had begun.

For the five mile ride along the parkway there was no need of observing the speed regulations. The road had been kept clear of all other vehicles, and policemen placed along the route kept the crowds to the paths on either side. The "motor cops," who were personally interested in that race, that involved their own pet machine, waved greetings as they passed.

In a few minutes they had left this atmosphere of friendliness and enthusiasm, and were getting into the stream of the city's traffic. From now on, there was need of constant vigilance. The riders began to separate, each steering through the street that they figured would bring them most quickly and easily to the bridges that spanned the river. By the time Bert had crossed the old Brooklyn Bridge, he had lost sight of all his competitors. By different roads, from now on, they would fly toward the common goal, so many thousand miles distant. The spectacular features were in the past. Now each one, alone and unaided, was to "work out his own salvation."

But there was no sinking of the heart, as Bert, after crossing the bridge and winding through the packed streets of lower New York, stood on the ferry boat and watched the irregular sky line of the great city. What would happen to him before he saw it again, it was fortunate that he could not guess. But just now, his heart beat high with the delight of struggle and achievement. He had his chance. And he was determined to make that chance a certainty.

He was the first one off the boat when it swung into its slip, and as soon as he got beyond the business quarter of Jersey City, he began to "eat up" the space across the meadows. He was flying when he reached Newark, where he again had to let up in his pace for a few minutes. But luck was with him and gave him an unexpected pace maker, just as he drew into the open spaces beyond the city limits.

The broad road ran right alongside the railroad track, and just as Bert let out a link and got into his stride, a limited express came thundering along at a high rate of speed. The racing instinct woke in Bert and he let his machine out until it was traveling like the wind. For a mile or two they went along like a team, neither seeming able to lose the other.

The passengers, gazing listlessly out of the windows, gradually woke up to the fact that this tiny machine was actually racing with their train. At first they were amused at the seeming impudence, but as mile after mile passed, with the "Blue Streak" holding its own, they became excited. The sportsman spirit that seems characteristic of America was aroused, and all the windows on that side of the train were filled with crowding faces. It was like a pygmy daring a giant, a tugboat challenging the *Imperator*.

The engineer, at first looking languidly at the impertinent racer, made no special effort to increase his speed. But when Bert hung to his flank and refused to be shaken off, he turned and said something to his fireman. The latter shoveled desperately, the engineer let out his throttle, and the great train lunged forward.

But Bert, too, had something "up his sleeve." He had been keeping well within his limit, and he knew the speed of which his gallant mount was capable. A mile ahead he could see where the road crossed the track. With a quick twist of the wrist, he threw in the highest speed and had to grip his

handlebars hard to keep his seat as his iron steed responded. He flashed on ahead, fairly scorching up the road, and dashed across the track fifty feet ahead of the onrushing locomotive. Then, as the passengers rushed over to the other side of the cars, he waved his cap to them, shook it defiantly at the discomfited engineer and fireman, and disappeared around the bend of the road. Then he gradually slackened his pace, though still maintaining a high rate of speed.

Bert was hilarious. It was his first race, so far, and he had come out ahead. He took it as an omen.

“Some race, old scout,” he confided joyously to his mount. “You certainly lived up to your name that time.” And he laughed aloud, as he remembered the look on the faces in the cab.

The race had been a capital thing, not only for the many miles he had covered, but because of the added confidence that had been infused into his veins by the successful outcome. He had “ridden rings” around his redoubtable opponent, and his heart was full of elation.

As he neared Trenton, he stopped at a garage to replenish his gasoline. He had plenty left to finish out the stretch that he had mapped out for that day’s work, but he was taking no chances, and always felt better when he knew that his tank was full.

A tall young fellow had preceded him on the same errand, and was just about to mount his wheel when Bert entered. There was something familiar about him and Bert cudgelled his brains to remember where he had met him. The stranger seemed equally puzzled. Then a sudden gleam of memory lighted up his face, and he came toward Bert with outstretched hand.

“Beg pardon,” he said. “But isn’t your name Wilson – Bert Wilson, the college pitcher?”

“Yes,” answered Bert, taking the hand held out to him, “and you – sure I know,” he exclaimed, as recognition flashed upon him – “you’re Gunther of the Maroons. I couldn’t place you for a minute.”

“You placed me all right in that last game, when you struck me out in the ninth inning,” grinned Gunther. “Do you remember?”

Did Bert remember? Could he ever forget? Again the scene came before him as though it were yesterday. He saw the diamond gleaming in the afternoon sun, the stands packed with twenty-five thousand howling maniacs. It was the final game of the season, and the pennant hung upon the outcome. Two men were out when Gunther came to the bat. He was the heaviest slugger of the league, and the home crowd was begging him to “kill the ball.” Bert had outguessed him on the first strike, and snapped one over by surprise on the second. Then, on the third, he had cut loose that mighty “fadeaway” of his. For forty feet it had gone on a line – hesitated – swerved sharply down and in, and, evading Gunther’s despairing swing, plumped into the catcher’s mitt. And the howl that went up – and the mighty swoop of the fellows on the field – and the wild enthusiasm over Bert – and the bonfires – and the snake dances! Did he remember?

“You certainly had me buffaloes that day, all right,” went on Gunther. “It isn’t often that I hit a foot above a ball, but that fadeaway of yours had me going. I simply couldn’t gauge it. It’s a teaser, for fair. You were the whole team that day.”

“We had the luck, that’s all,” protested Bert. “The breaks of the game were with us.”

“It wasn’t luck,” said Gunther, generously; “you simply outplayed us. But we did make you work to win,” he added, with a reminiscent smile.

By this time, the tank had been replenished, and he was recalled from his “fanning bee” by the necessity of resuming his trip. Gunther had heard of the contest and had seen Bert’s name among the competitors, but had not associated it with the Wilson of baseball fame.

“You can’t get away from the game,” he joked, referring to the ten contestants. “I see that you are still playing against a ‘nine.’ If that pun isn’t bad enough, I’ll go you one better – or worse – and bet that you’ll bowl them over like ninepins.”

“Thanks, old man,” responded Bert. “I hope I’ll make a ‘strike.’ But now I’ll have to skip and cut out the merry jesting. Jump on your wheel and set the pace for me for the next ten miles or so.”

“Swell chance of my making pace for that crackerjack you have there,” said Gunther, looking admiringly at the “Blue Streak,” “but I’ll try to keep alongside, anyway.”

He had a surprisingly good machine and doubled Bert’s dare by riding twenty miles or more, before he finally hauled up and, with a warm handgrip, said goodbye.

“Two pleasant things to-day,” mused Bert, as he sped on, referring to the popular theory that events, good or bad, come in threes. “I guess the third will be in meeting good old Tom and Dick, when I swing into the City of Brotherly Love.”

And pleasant it certainly was, when, after reporting to the checkers and timers at the club headquarters, and putting up his motorcycle, he turned toward the hotel where his chums awaited him with a royal welcome.

“You’ve surely got off to a flying start, old top,” said Tom. “I hadn’t any idea that you’d hit this burg so soon. We’ve just fairly got in ourselves. But before anything else, let’s wrap ourselves about some eats. Are you hungry?”

“Am I hungry?” echoed Bert. “Is a wolf hungry? Is a hawk hungry? Is a cormorant – say, lead me to it.”

And at the bountiful table to which they straightway adjourned, Bert proved that none of the natural history specimens he had mentioned “had anything on him.” Nor did his friends lag far behind, and it is doubtful if three happier and fuller young fellows could have been found in Philadelphia, as, afterward, they discussed the events of the day. They were especially interested in Bert’s meeting with Gunther, as they themselves had taken part in that famous game. Dick’s mighty work with the stick on that occasion and Tom’s great steal home from third were matters of baseball history.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.