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## THE MARBLE MOUNTAINS

(2 of 15 pages)

By Edwin B. Child

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"GOIN' to shoot in there. Got about twenty or thirty holes we've got to fire." It was a tall, gaunt Yankee overseer in a mountain marble quarry, and I was asking what the unusual look of things meant. I had hung around this and other quarries for days at a time, and this day was different. The noisy clank of cutters and drills was stilled, and a number of machines had been loaded on cars where the skewy track came elbowing out of the quarry pit, giving somewhat the look of a May moving.

"You ain't goin' to touch 'em all, air ye, Ed?" queried the Blacksmith, who, like all native Yankee quarrymen, always calls the foreman familiarly by his first name, abbreviated. "Got eighteen filled, and I can touch nine. If the other feller's as good as I be, we'll git 'em."

"Guess the fust 'll come pretty near bein' warm before you git round," said the Blacksmith with a grin.

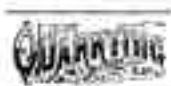
"Ed" looked at him dryly. "Once I touched twenty-two and a 'cotton' alone." A grim twinkle came into a corner of his near eye, and he spit with precision at a chunk of marble. "The fust one was pretty nigh burnt when I touched the last, and I wa'n't a hell of a ways out of the quarry when they begun to pop." And he stalked away around a pile of refuse marble—"refuge," Sim Jenkins called it—to another part of the quarry.

So I learned that they were about to blast away a layer of stone that covered a lower pocket of marble in a part of the pit hidden by the buttressed entrance. Before I got in sight of the men who were tamping

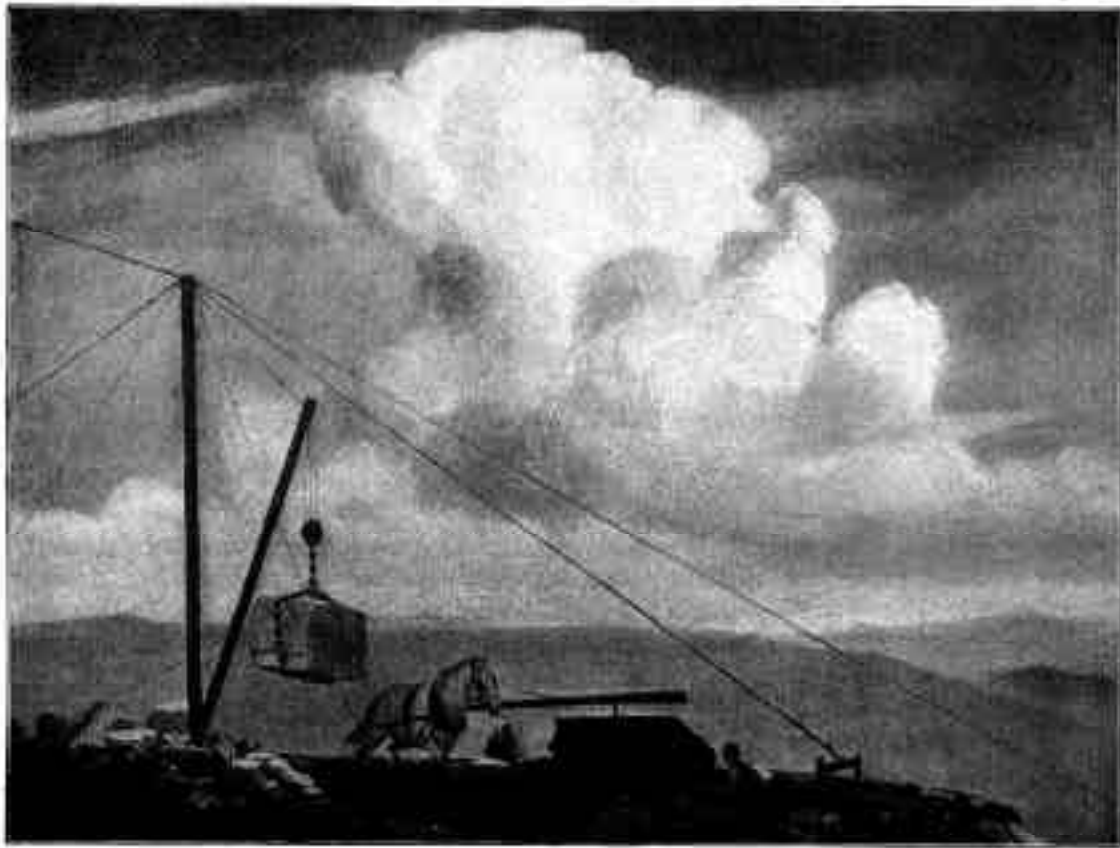
in the charges there came a sudden sharp explosion, followed by somewhat involved diaconal oaths that belong to Vermonters, and back around the turn came the overseer, running with ashy face, followed by other men, fearful of a premature explosion. Luckily no harm was done, though it had been a close call for young Abe Slocum, lately graduated from water-boy to helper. The scare made "Ed" reminiscent.

"No, nobody ever got hurt blastin' in my time. Once when we was gettin' out a slice up there jest below where you see that derrick"—and he pointed to where a flying buttress of marble seemed to bolster up the mountain at one side of the entrance, a striking piece of natural architecture left by the accident of cutting away the marble each side—"you know we had a way of strippin' back the cotton an inch or so, an' then shakin' out the black paowder. We had about a dozen holes to bust up there, and jest as I had touched two or three, I heard a kind of a 'siss' behind me, an' I sez, 'Gosh, boys, she's in the paowder!' We had to git up about ten or a dozen feet of ladder to git out of that hole, and we didn't stop long. We'd jest got over the edge when the place was pretty well filled with pieces of rock. You can bet I give that feller a combin' thet stripped that cotton. He said they was just goin' down in to find us. They'd heared the blow and didn't see us in the smoke. I told him he'd better git his mind on strippin' his cotton ruther'n goin' down in holes pickin' up pieces of humans. Then we went back and fired the other nine."

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Here again our gray is harnessed to a sweep.—Page 217.

In a short time everything was ready. The men were gathered in groups well out of danger, a great shoulder of the mountain protruding itself between us and the charges. The foreman and his helper, Bill Crandall, had gone in with red-hot irons that the blacksmith had been keeping ready, and had come out again on a run, he having touched his nine and one more; for Bill had made but eight. It was a bit thrilling, the explosions following each other irregularly, tearing, wrenching, rending the ledges, filling the pit with booming, echoing thunder and flying rock, some pieces going sky-high and landing far up the mountain in the woods. Dense clouds of smoke and dust followed, against which were silhouetted the foreman's lank figure as he stood with his stocky helper, keeping count, well in advance of the men. As he counted he noted by "That was a good poke" or "Somethin' lifted then" the blasts that were doing what was wanted. "Yes, I kin tell pretty much whether they're liftin' the rock right or jest shootin' off for show. And I caount 'cause it's jest as well to know if all the holes has blowed," he continued. "I

wouldn't want to set down where one was hangin' fire, and it's pretty hard to tell, when two or three go off together, jest how many they be."

"No, 'taint dynamite. We use black paowder; it breaks the rock up better. Dynamite is so sort of sudden: it's apt to crumble everything up into dust in a little hole, and then it's so powerful it strains the hull maountain. It might run a crack right through a good vein of marble, and besides in this quarry we have to look out for the roof of our tunnel."

This quarry of which "Ed" Hooker was the overseer is perched high up on the side of a steep mountain, and reached by a rough road that zigzags its way laboriously through side-hill pastures and sugar-maple woods, past a dingy line of quarrymen's houses, adhering with apparent uncertainty to the steep slope, their front-yard flower-gardens nearly bumping the eaves, and the pig-pens and chicken-yards almost hanging from the cellar walls; then the road curves itself up to where the quarry rears its white cliffs. The open cut is a pit only in part. The marble mountain has been sliced down