

**CAPTAIN CLOSE, AND  
SERGEANT CROESUS;  
TWO NOVELS**

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Captain Close, and Sergeant Croesus; two novels by Charles King

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**CHARLES KING**

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SERGEANT CROESUS;  
TWO NOVELS**



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CAPTAIN CLOSE  
AND  
SERGEANT CROESUS

*TWO NOVELS*

BY  
CAPTAIN CHARLES KING  
U. S. ARMY

AUTHOR OF "THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER," "MARION'S FAITH,"  
"UNDER FIRE," ETC.



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CAPTAIN CLOSE.





## CAPTAIN CLOSE.

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### I.

THE conductor had eyed Lambert curiously as he punched his ticket. He held it a moment and edged his lantern around so that its feeble light could reinforce the glimmer from the bleared and smoky globe above Lambert's curly head. The train had started from the junction with that quick series of back-wrenching jerks which all veteran travellers remember as characteristic of American railways before the introduction of "coupler buffers." It was a shabby, old-fashioned train,—one whose cars had "seen service," and not a little of it, during the long and eventful war so recently closed. It had a baggage-car behind the wheezy old wood-burner that drew the rickety procession out into the dim, starlit aisle through the eastward forest, and, for the first time in a week, that baggage-car contained a trunk. It had a "smoker," in which three or four negroes were soundly sleeping on the worn cushions at the forward end, and three or four lank, shabbily-dressed whites were consuming tobacco and killing time under the single lamp at the other. It had a "ladies' car,"—so called,—in which no ladies were visible, and which differed in appointments from the smoker only in the facts that its seats were upholstered in dingy red plush instead of blackened canvas, and that both its lamps could be induced to burn, however feebly, instead of only one. It was a forlorn, hangdog, shamefaced sort of train, that seemed oppressed with sense of its own disrepute,—a train that kept in hiding during the broad light of day and ventured to slink forth only after nightfall, like some impoverished debtor, not loving the darkness better than light because of evil deeds, but hating it as it hated its own shabbiness, and accepting it as only one plane above total decrepitude, the junk-shop and the poor-house. Starting at dusk from a populous station on a north-and-south "trunk" line, it turned and twisted through red clay

cuttings, jolted over mud-covered ties and moss-grown trestles, whistling shrill to wake the watchers at 'cross-country stations on the way, and finally, after midnight, rested an hour at a prominent point, a "State centre," where, sometimes at one o'clock but generally long after, the night express came glaring up from the South along the glistening rails of another "great northern" route, and three nights in the week, perhaps, gave it a sleepy passenger or two to trundle away westward towards the big river town it managed to reach by sunrise, once more to slink out of sight until dark, when again it crept forth and stole away on the return trip over its clanking road, unresentful of comment on its loneliness and poverty, and proud, if anything, of the fact that this way, at least, it ran "right end foremost," according to the American idea, with the baggage- instead of the ladies' car next the struggling engine.

It was a clear, starlit night, sharply cold, and the planks of the platform at the junction had snapped and creaked under their glistening white coat of frosty rime. The up train came in even later than usual,—so much so that the station-master had more than once asked his friend the conductor of the waiting "Owl" whether he really thought he could "make it" over to Quitman in time for the down express at dawn. "You'd better pull out the minute she gits hyuh," was his final injunction when at last her whistle was heard.

A lithe, active young fellow in a trim suit of tweed had sprung from the sleeper before the incoming train had fairly stopped, and, hailing the first man he saw, asked, "Train for Tugaloo gone yet?" which so astonished the party addressed that he simply stared for a minute without reply. A voice crying in the wilderness, apparently, was heard above the hissing of steam and the loud mouthings of the negro porters of the two rival hotels. "All aboard for Quitman," it said, and, abandoning his apparent purpose of repeating the question in sharper tone, the young fellow turned and ran nimbly across the dimly-lighted platform in the direction of the hail.

"Quitman train?—Tugaloo?" he asked of a dark form standing above the tail light of the car.

"Quitman it is. Anybody else thar?" And the interrogative went off in a shout. No answer.

"Aw, Hank! Anybody else?" Still no answer. Two or three dim figures were by this time clustered around the flaring torch of a