THE EDGE OF THINGS

ELIA W. PEATTIE

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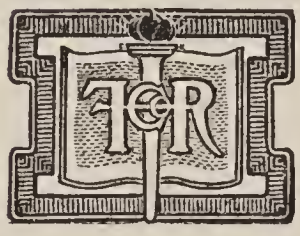
By

Elia W. Peattie

Author of "The Beleaguered Forest," "A Mountain Woman," and "The Shape of Fear"



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TO

MADELINE YALE WYNNE

WHO HAS PASSED NO ART WITHOUT A SALUTATION
AND NO FRIEND WITHOUT A WORD
OF CHEER

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The Man at the Edge of Things

The Commencement exercises were over. Nothing remained—except everything. In that bewildered frame of mind which accompanies the passing away of college days, and the beginning of a new heaven and a new earth, Dilling Brown had shown his aunt, Miss Elizabeth Brown—his aunt who was also his guardian—over the historic halls and around the campus, had introduced her to professors, and told her yarns till she protested.

"You're just like one of those tiresome books of short stories, Dilling," she said. "Can't you be a little more consecutive? You chop up my emotions so!"

Dilling shook back his too abundant hair—it was a perfect hay color—and laughed with huge appreciation. Then he took his aunt over to drink tea with some friends while he went to look up a man.

The man, known to his associates as Tommy Letlow, was up in his room packing his best silk hat.

"You darned dude!" cried Brown.

"La la la la la la," was Letlow's lyric greeting. He spun round on one nimble heel and sparred at Brown.

"Shut up!" said Brown, reaching under his guard. "Where are you going, you sweep, when you leave these hacademic 'alls?"

Letlow looked glum. "I don't know," he admitted. "At least my ticket reads to New York. Any one can *go* to New York."

Brown forced his little companion back into a chair.

"But I want to rest easy nights."

"Rest in peace, son."

"I can't, unless you tell me more. How are you going to stay in New York after you get there? Who've you got to look to—or after?"

"Just my bloomin' self."

"And you haven't a million left out of your patrimony, eh?"

"Patrimony! What a pretty word, Dil! Mighty pretty word, that. Begins with a *p* and sounds so pleasant. No, there aren't millions. But there is enough to buy a ticket to New York."

"Going to try a newspaper?"

"All fools walk the same road." Letlow got at his packing and his singing again.

"But my aunt says," broke in Brown, "that she wants you to come up home with us for a time. She wants you to help eat the fatted capon. We go up to New York, too, and take a two-hour run down Long Island, you know. Aunt lives in a rotten little town there, and raises boxwood. At least that is the impression to be gathered from a casual glance at her front yard. Her object in life is to keep Nettie from breaking the china which my grandfather brought from Canton fifty years ago, when he was in the trade. Nettie is a careless young thing who has been in the family forty-three years. Come along and see Nettie and the china and the cat and the boxwood; it would give me more pleasure than anything I could think of. Aunt Betty's a brick—you won't find many like her. She has only one weakness—and that's me. But we're the last of our kind, and very rare and precious, so we attach a good deal of importance to each other. Come on, Tommy. Do it, eh?"

"Of course I will, you beggar! Going

to-night? Five sharp? I'll be there. Ladies' waiting-room! All right, Dil, my duck. And *please*, Dil, give my compliments to your aunt.''

So the three settled down in the old house beyond the boxwood, and the young men put in a good deal of time laughing about nothing in particular, and got themselves up in white flannel and played tennis afternoons with Anice Comstock and Dorcas Pilsbury, nice girls, whom Dilling had known since he knew anything. Aunt Betty sat in the shade of the elms with Mrs. Pilsbury, and there were lemonade and seed-cakes served—and nothing else happened. No one made love to any one else. No one did anything remarkable. The girls were quiet girls, who did not play tennis any too well, and who made their own frocks. They both thought the young men laughed too much, and wondered what they meant by their frivolous view of things. Miss Dorcas asked Tommy Letlow one evening if he had any religious convictions. Poor Tommy, who was very fair, with soft, black curls on the top of his head, and innocent, deep, blue eyes, looked like a little boy who has been scolded and is going to cry. But Miss

Dorcas kept her eyes fixed on him, and he had to answer.

"Upon my soul, Miss Dorcas, I—really, Miss Dorcas, I can't say. I'd stick out the day's work, whatever it was, and keep alongside anybody who expected me to, you know, and I wouldn't be surprised at anything that might happen on—on either side of the grave, you know, Miss Dorcas. What I have seen of the world already has been so surprising and so—so incomprehensible, that there are no—no miracles, you understand, Miss Dorcas, in my estimation. Everything is a miracle, you see. Only it was some one else who said that, wasn't it?"

"It was Walt Whitman," said Miss Dorcas, quite severely.

"Was it, Miss Dorcas? I'm glad to have quoted him, even if I didn't know I was doing it. It isn't my fault, you know, that I haven't been better taught than I have about —what you were speaking of, you know, a minute ago. If my mother had lived, I suppose I should have been different. But everybody is dead who took any interest in me, except Dil over there."

He looked quite wistful, and the girl

rubbed the toe of her tennis shoe back and forth in the dust, with an air of wishing to say something comforting, but she only remarked: "Mr. Brown is a very pleasant young man," looking over to where Dilling and Miss Anice were tossing balls languidly about the tennis-court, "but he seems to lack earnestness."

Tommy went for lemonade just then—the maid was bringing it out to the table under the elms—and so he attempted no answer. He wondered so much over the meaning of Miss Dorcas's complaint about the lack of earnestness in Dil and himself that he spilled half a dozen drops of the lemonade on that young lady's lilac-sprigged gown, with instant obliteration of the lilac sprigs. That evening he had a temporary hope that Dil, at least, had some latent earnestness in him, by which he might be justified to his gentle critics, for he heard him saying:

"Well, Aunt Betty, dear, I must get out of this. Tommy and I are going to seek our fortunes. We are going to walk down the road till we meet a man, and we are going to say, 'Please, good man, give us some straw, that we may build us a house.' And the good man—"

"Dil, what nonsense! Sit up, sir." Dil got off the sofa and placed himself with undue solemnity in one of his aunt's gothic-backed chairs. Tommy had fears that this earnestness was not yet of the quality to recommend itself to the young lady with the sprigged lawn. Miss Elizabeth Brown continued to address her nephew: "I want to say to you, Dilling, what I have not said before—that I was mightily pleased with you Commencement Day. I was pleased with what you said, and with the way you bore yourself, and with the reports I got of you."

"Oh come, Aunt Betty, dear, this is too bad! What have I done to deserve this at your hands?"

"Don't laugh, Dil. If your father could have lived to hear and see you, my satisfaction would have been complete. Of course I am not going around crowing over you. This is all between ourselves and Mr. Letlow. Didn't you notice how offhand and deprecating I was the other day? But in fact, Dil, and quite seriously, I was and am so pleased that it gives me grace to make a great sacrifice."

"You have never done anything else but make sacrifices."

"Many of the things you may have called by that name were refined forms of self-indulgence, my dear."

"Oh, ho!" he laughed, with flattering irony.

"But now I *am* going to make a sacrifice. I'm going to give you what's coming to you out of the property, Dilling, and let you choose for yourself what you will do with it. I've got a little annuity fixed up for myself, and with the old home and the garden and all, I shall live like a queen—a queen with economical tendencies. The over and above goes to you, and I have decided that it would better be yours now instead of several years from now. It's all arranged for, and Mr. Effingwell—our solicitor, Mr. Letlow—is coming in the morning. Mr. Letlow's presence in the library at ten o'clock would be a favor. There's the house and the plate and the mahogany and my laces to settle about. They may not mean much to you, Dilling, but some day you may have a wife who will appreciate them. Now, the worst of it is that the sum I can offer you is not sufficient to permit you to settle down among old friends in this part of the country and make any showing, but it is enough to take you away to

some new—and probably disagreeable—part of the world, to accumulate experience and, I hope, property.''

The young man murmured something inarticulate. His bold eyes were a trifle moist, and his lips looked unnatural, as though he were trying to be superior to human emotion with very poor success. He was a strapping fellow, with shoulders a degree too high, a large head, a thick neck, and an obstinate chin; but his brow showed ideality and imagination, and his smile would have won a hangman to friendliness. His aunt went on:

''I'm gratified, too, to see that you do not become sentimental over every girl you meet.'' Letlow, who sat apart, feeling rather remote from his kind, grinned at this. ''It gives me confidence in you. Incidentally, it reminds me of certain air-castles which I have been building in weak moments. I could not deny myself the pleasure of picturing a summer vacation with you down at Martha's Vineyard, or some place where we were sure to meet a lot of people we knew. I indulged in fancies of the pretty triumphs you would have, of a nature which it is not now necessary to enlarge upon, and how I should rejoice in the

light of reflected popularity. I tried to persuade myself that this would be the best thing for you, and that I should be almost certain to run across some old friend who would help me to place you just right—something in the wholesale line, you know, or something journalistic or scientific.''

Letlow choked on some unknown substance, and the muscles of Dilling's face worked slightly. There was a break in the lady's voice as she continued:

''But I know all that was cowardly, Dil, and that you'd want to face the issue—I mean the—the exigency. You're just like your father about that. He always felt moved to face a situation, particularly if it was very disagreeable. Now, you think the matter over, decide what you want to do, and go and do it.'' The tone became quite brisk and businesslike at this point.

''You'll go out and make discoveries—countries and men and women, or a woman—and Heaven knows what of sorrow and joy. But as for me, there are no discoveries that I care to make in this world. I never did attach so much importance to knowledge as some do. There's only time to acquire an

infinitesimal bit at the best, and it doesn't answer the questions a woman is really interested in, when you get it. No one is wise enough to answer the important questions. One must take everything that is really important on faith. I'm sending you away in faith, Dilling. I expect good things of you; not necessarily great things. Great things are disturbing and very pronounced, Dil. I don't care for you to be pronounced.''

The young man laughed through a lump in his throat, lifted the slender old hand to his lips, and left the room. Letlow, who remained behind, wondered why he had not been fortunate enough to have some one incoherent over *him*. He arose, with his hands in his pockets, and walked up and down the floor once or twice. Then he stopped beside Miss Betty. The tears were rolling down her cheeks. He stood a moment regarding them, then stooped very tenderly and wiped them away. Miss Betty glanced up, and perceived the look in his face.

''My dear son!'' she exclaimed, instinctively using the word he needed. He sank almost unconsciously on his knees. ''God bless you and keep you in the ways of right-

eousness,'' she said, her hands on his head. Then he, too, went out of the room.

Miss Betty sat for several minutes, letting the tears fall without checking them. Then she arose and looked about the room as if she had never seen it before. She observed its quaint orderliness, its odd, beautiful old furnishings, its noncommittal tones. She looked at herself, undersized, quaint, and plain, too, like her environment, as she was reflected in the gilt-framed mirror between the windows. She noted the thinness of her hair about the temples, saw the loose yellow folds of flesh about the neck, smiled at the inconsistency of the pearls upon her hand—they had been given her long ago by a man who went to India, and who, going once with a promise on his lips, never returned, because of a tidal wave on some forgotten shore—and then she wound the old clock, standing on a stool to do it, closed the windows, closed the door, lighted a candle, and blew out the lamps.

''I shall be more lonely than I have ever been before,'' she said to the clock.

She climbed the stairs slowly, very slowly, and half-way up she stopped. ''It must be,'' she murmured, ''that I have forgotten some-

thing—the windows or the clock.'' So she went back, picking her way on the polished stairs. But she had neglected nothing, and she crept up the stairs again, scolding herself with impatient ''tut tut tuts.''

An hour later she lay in bed, still with wide-open eyes. The door of her room was pushed back softly, and she saw Dilling creeping in. She made a feint of sleeping. In another moment he was gone, and a soft perfume saluted her. She put out her hand, and there was a bunch of mignonette on her pillow.

''He has great perception,'' she commented to herself. ''He understands women. When he makes up his mind to win a woman, he will win her. But I'm glad he doesn't fall in love with every foolish child he meets.''

Up in Letlow's room the young men were debating the affairs of life gravely, and canvassing various occupations and chances for investment.

''Well, anyhow,'' said Dilling in conclusion—a conclusion at which no conclusions had been reached—''I'm glad I let dear Aunt Bet take the lead. I've been fuming to be in the harness ever since we got home, and a good while before, for the matter of that.

But I bethought me that the least I could do was to let Aunt Betty enjoy the idea of having set me in motion. She likes authority, and I didn't want to deprive her of the exercise of the least particle of it, you see.''

''I see, Dil. I see you're a shade too adroit. Now I should never think of that—not in ten thousand years. If you ever start out to win a woman, Dil, you will win her all right enough.'' Which inference, it will be remembered, had once before been drawn under that roof, that evening.

''I hope so—devoutly! If I ever do see a woman I want, Tommy, heaven have mercy on her. But why speak of women? You are better than many women, Tommy.''

A Touch of the Real Thing

A Touch of the Real Thing

"Coo-ee! Coo-ee! Coo-ee!"

Dilling Brown sent out the long, wavering sheep-call in unaccustomed tones. He had ridden five days beside the sheep, and slept four nights in the midst of them. With him were two blond men, long-haired, blue-eyed, dressed in khaki ponchos, corduroy trousers, buff leather leggins, sombreros, and spurs—above all, spurs. Each carried two pistols in his belt and a rifle slung across his saddle. Also there followed twelve good dogs and true —shepherds every one. Finally came one sallow heathen, Li Lung, commissariat, driving the mules of the supply wagon.

They were bound for the Edge of Things, where the free grass grew—past the ranches in the foothills of the Sierra Nevadas, past the leased land of the big sheep ranges, out to the "common" thoughtfully provided by the legislature of California.

"And now," asked the government, "what earthly objection can there be to free

wool? Isn't it time we got over being provincial, we provincials? See, we give you a chance for clear profit. Go, my sons, and become very rich."

Dilling Brown was pleased at the suggestion, and adopted it. That was why he was driving with Big Hank—otherwise Henry Nettle — and Cross-Eyed Kit — otherwise Christopher Huggins—along the trackless waste of the California desert. He had entered upon his venture with intelligence, so he congratulated himself. He might have picked his sheep on the western slopes of the Sierras, but hearing of a lot across the range, he preferred to take his chances with them, rather than run the risks attendant upon crossing the pass. The sheep were a good lot, all Cotswolds; a little thin and jaded from removal, but capable of being put in prime condition. So Cross-Eyed Kit opined; and when it came to a pronunciamento upon sheep from Cross-Eyed Kit there were none to gainsay.

At the last ranch Brown was urged to stay over night, and he consented.

"I'm eager to see what's before me," he said, "but not so eager that I'll not be glad to accept your hospitality."

A Touch of the Real Thing

Papin, the overseer at the Esmeralda ranch —you can tell the Esmeralda sheep by two notches in the left ear—smiled enigmatically, and looked Brown straight in the eyes.

"There's plenty of time," protested he.

"Time!" cried Brown, with the smile that won men's hearts. "There's nothing but time and sheep. That's all they have out in this country, isn't it?"

"And these." Papin passed the cigars. Brown fingered one and sniffed it. "Ah!" said he, "it is difficult to escape civilization."

"I'm glad you like the brand. We manage to make ourselves rather comfortable here. This ranch belongs to Leonard and Filbin of San Francisco. They're in everything pretty much—mines and mills and sheep and what not. I've been managing for them for three years now, and we've eight thousand merinos out at grass, and a force of fifty men, first and last."

Dilling smoked and looked about him. The house was adobe, and it rambled over an unconscionable amount of ground. An array of fantastic cacti writhed and twisted about the little compound in front, and as they showed symmetry in their arrangement, it

was safe to infer that this was some one's idea of a flower garden.

"It's the sort of a flower garden I should expect the Devil to have," thought Dilling.

The overseer had his rooms on one side of the house, the office in the center, and beyond the quarters for the men, between whom and the overseer, as the newcomer already fully appreciated, discipline and custom fixed a deep gulf. This amused him. That the wilderness should have an aristocracy and an etiquette he considered to be "worth the price of admission," as he had confided to one man. But the man had not laughed, and then Brown came to a realizing sense that it does not do to be amused at a country till you are out of it.

His present host was a tall, firmly knit American, with a hint of something French about him. Dilling admired the type, remembering what the men who belonged to it had done in America. It stood for much daring and adventure. The man had perception, too—enough to persuade him to silence while his guest took cognizance of things about him. After a time a Chinaman appeared at the door, and with a single blow on a tiny tom-tom, announced supper.

"BY JOVE! THAT'S FINE."

A Touch of the Real Thing

"Wait ten minutes longer, Sam," said Papin. "I hear the men coming, and I want this gentleman to see them."

The Chinaman grinned, and held up the tom-tom knowingly for silence. Brown had been conscious for several seconds that something unusual was happening to his eardrum. Now he discovered that this persistent concussion was the even and rhythmical hammering of the plain by a body of advancing horse. The east was golden, catching its splendor from the burnished west, and out of the lesser glory rode the herders, four abreast, on their broncos, without swerve.

"By Jove!" cried Brown, standing up, "that's fine!"

As the men came nearer the spectacle grew more imposing. The little beasts under the men flung their legs with a strange outreaching motion, and every animal went without a check, his nose groundward. The men were a trifle above the average height, and their hair, long and much cared for, floated in the breeze made by their riding. They looked very handsome, helped out as they were by the background of illumined space.

"Good boys! Good boys!" said Papin,

proudly. "They're quite a body of men, Mr. Brown, and easy to manage, though they have their peculiarities like the rest of us. A small guard of men does with the sheep at night, and most of the dogs stay with the herd, though some of them come home each night. And they're as anxious as the men to get their turn off."

The herders were running their horses into the corral, and Louis Papin took his guest out to the dining-room. There was a good meal, well served—a meal with salad and wine—and under its influence the ranchman became sympathetic.

"It isn't just what I would choose for a young man," he said, speaking of Brown's venture, "but of course, now you're in for a spell of ranching, the only thing you can do is to get all you can out of the experience."

"What's the seamy side?"

"Oh, what you might expect: loneliness, and no women, and no news, and no coming and going of your kind. The sheep wear on you, after a time. They're not like cattle—haven't got the movement nor the brains. You've seen the Sargasso Sea? No? Well, you've seen moving masses of seaweed. The

sheep remind me of them at times—a writhing, restless, half-alive, wholly unintelligent body. I don't know as the men feel that way about it. Besides, it's not so hard on them —this life. They have good times together. It's different when a man's placed as I am. Some of the owners settle on their ranches and bring their families out. There's Herrick, impresario for Stebbins of Los Angeles, who has his family with him. But I've no family to bring, so I make up my accounts, and look after the men, and ride about among the sheep, and attend to a thousand and one details. Sometimes the men get sick and have to be taken care of. Once in a while an epidemic of homesickness breaks out, and that's harder to deal with than the fever. Now and then they quarrel, but I keep out of their fights. And, on the whole, they regulate themselves very well.''

So he rambled on cheerfully, giving Brown an idea of the life. Dilling ventured some confidences on his own account, and the older man received them almost in silence, regarding his guest with a look which, had he been in any sort of hard luck, Dilling would have interpreted as pitying. They went out to the

quarters, later, passing down the long room where the men bunked, to the eating-room. They were all smoking there together, and two Chinamen were clearing away the remains of the meal. Dilling stopped on the threshold and looked about him with unfeigned enjoyment of a new scene.

The long, low room, crowded with muscular fellows, blond almost to the last man of them, with streaming, delicate hair, faces the color of their saddles, and a manner born of breaking their horses, managing their sheep, and fearlessly looking the wilderness in the face, was a thing to see and to remember. The smile with which Dilling made visible record of his interest, won, as it invariably did, friends for him at the minute. The men smiled back, and they frankly took cognizance of him, and liked the way he was "put up," and the bold and amiable eyes with which he returned their glances.

"Well," said Papin, in a patriarchal tone, "I've quite a family, Mr. Brown."

Brown let out his characteristic roar of laughter at this, and the men found it infectious. So there was good feeling established.

A Touch of the Real Thing

"They are always pleased when my visitors talk with them," murmured Louis Papin, under his breath, to his guest. "It's a dull life they lead, poor boys, and a new story pleases them to the core."

Brown nodded, still keeping his eyes on the men.

"So these are what you call shepherds!" he cried, gayly. "I thought shepherds dressed in pink and white china, and always went with little blue and white shepherdesses, and played on reeds, like this," and he made a mimic piping with his lips—a trick he had learned from an English boy.

"Go on!" shouted the men. "Go on! Give us some more music. *You* don't need no cornet. Keep 'er up."

"Not till I have seen the shepherdesses!" persisted Brown. "Where are the shepherdesses?"

The men chuckled, pleased as schoolboys.

"Now, how the dickens did the fellow know they were like children?" Papin was wondering to himself. "He's adroit—but I saw that from the first. He could manage anybody. He ought to be somewhere else—not down here among the cactus. Poor cuss, it's

a sorry fate for him. What a waste the girls must think it—him among the cactus!'' When he emerged from his reflections, Brown was singing Little Bo-Peep according to a college version.

''That's positively the only song I know which refers to your—your profession,'' he bowed, as the men applauded him.

''Goin' to try ranchin' it, sir?'' asked one of the men, respectful but curious.

Brown seated himself on the edge of the table, the better to look over his audience.

''I'll explain myself,'' he said, frankly. ''I'm just out of college, and in the soup. That's why I came here to raise sheep.''

''That's right! Here's the place t' be, under them circumstances.''

''And if you're wanting some stories—''

''Put it thar, pard!''

''—why, the only sort of yarns I know are college yarns, and I can sing college songs, if you want those—'' There was wild encouragement with whistlings and caterwauls, and it was almost midnight when he left.

''You've made yourself solid,'' declared Papin, as he shook hands with his guest at the chamber door that night. ''If you ever

get in trouble let my men know it, and they'll be with you.''

As the men rolled in their bunks that night, laughing and repeating snatches of the ringing nonsensical songs that Brown had given them, they remarked with freedom, and sometimes with unnecessary emphasis, ''That there coot's a gentleman. No up-in-the-balloon-boys about him. He's right on your own level, he is. He's the real thing!'' All of which was an involved way of saying that Brown's manners were what they ought to be.

Breakfast was served at dawn at the Esmeralda, and the east was ''blossomed in purple and red'' when Brown stood before the door with his host, watching the men get up their ponies.

''How far do you intend to ride beyond this?'' asked the manager.

''God knows,'' said Brown. ''I ride till I come to grass which is no other man's, but mine by the courtesy of the state of California.''

Papin called up a genial-looking fellow with saddle-bowed legs.

''Where's that empty adobe you were tell-

ing me of the other day, Bob? The one young Cusack and his sister had.''

''Going with the sheep, sir, it would be a day's ride east,'' responded the man, touching the edge of his sombrero, ''and half a day's ride south. It can't be missed, for to reach it you turn at the chaparral beyond the Salita arroyo, and follow that due south.''

''Can you remember that, Mr. Brown?'' asked Papin, with a smile.

''Of course. It's a house that I might feel at liberty to occupy? It would save me a good deal of bother if I could.''

''It's yours when you hang up your hat. Fred Cusack and his sister were there for a time.''

''What made them leave?''

The herder started to speak, but Papin frowned and shook his head at him.

''Cusack lost his health,'' he said, shortly. ''That will do, Bob. Tell the boys to mount. I want Mr. Brown to see you ride off.''

A minute later there was a sound that made the blood rush to Brown's face—a long, wavering, fierce cry, the war cry of the Apaches. But it was not the Apaches who made it. It was forty long-locked men, rid-

ing four abreast into the incarnadined east; and they went madly, fast as equine legs could take them, over the dusty plain, and as they went they yelled. Brown stood fascinated till the dust hid the men; and even then the wild, wavering cry came back.

"My powers!" said he, dropping into a chair and taking a cup of coffee from the smiling Chinaman, "it's good to be alive and to have seen that!"

Louis Papin looked at the boy and flushed a little. Then he glanced down half-humorously at his own beard, and carefully drawing out a white hair from the midst of it, he laid it on the palm of his hand and regarded it sentimentally.

"It certainly is good to be young—as you are, Mr. Brown."

"Why, as you are, too, Mr. Papin! What can you mean, sir, by thinking yourself anything else but young?" He looked in unfeigned astonishment at the strong, firm, keen man before him.

"I have a malady," confessed Papin, "and it has aged me."

"Ah!"

"Shall I tell you the name of it?"

"Why, if you please, Mr. Papin."

"It is a fatal thing. Eventually it causes ossification of the—of the heart."

"Eh?"

"Yes, there is such a thing. It is an inextinguishable ennui."

He spoke with such solemnity that Brown was forced to look sympathetic, though when he heard the nature of Papin's alleged disorder, he could with difficulty keep from smiling.

"But why have you not married, sir, and surrounded yourself with a family? Or brought some man out here to rough it with you? There are young fellows who would thank their stars for a chance to be with a man like you, and to get blooded to this life."

Papin smiled sadly. "I'm not so egotistical," he said, "as to suppose that I could console any one—*any one*, no matter what our relations might be—for the loss of the whole world."

His head dropped a little, and he and Brown sat in silence, drinking their coffee and smoking.

"It must be that he has had some confounded tragedy," thought Brown, pityingly.

"A woman, no doubt. Jove, but some men do get awfully cut up! May my day be long a-coming!"

An hour later, with his sheep, his men, and his dogs, he rode into the east. It was all a mist of dull golden dustiness, and the sky above was a pale and half-obscured blue. It was the air and the sky of the Californian desert in the dry season. Brown was to become very well acquainted with it.

"A day east to the chaparral," called Papin, "then half a day south to the adobe, going at the pace the sheep set. Good by, Brown! Good by and good luck!"

"Good by, sir. I'll not forget the savor of your bread and salt."

As he went out, riding slowly beside the trotting sheep, one of the dogs came up and leaped about him, barking.

"What is it, girl?" he said, absently. "What do you want?" The dog had a benevolent face, with a pleasing breadth between the eyes, a delicate tapering of the nose, a well-rounded brow, and an arrow-shaped spot of white at the base of the brain. Her feet and belly were a bright tan. Brown scrutinized her for several seconds.

"Your face reminds me of Aunt Betty's," he said, aloud, and his soliloquy was the first token that he was amid the solitudes of earth, and that his sub-consciousness appreciated it, "though I don't know whether or not the dear old lady would feel complimented to hear me say so. But I'm going to name you Bet. Hear that? Bet! Bet! Yes, that's you, girl. Why, you're a pleasant creature. What is it that you want, anyway? You flirt, I believe you're trying to make up to me. You want to be my dog, eh? My favorite? Well, well, that's a good doggie. That's all right. So, so, Bet. That's what you want, is it?"

He had brought his pony to a stop to rub the dog's head; but when she had submitted to the caressing for a moment, she ran on to inform her friends, vociferously, of the event. Some of the dogs looked back curiously, but others went haughtily on, as if they would have nothing to do with toadies. Then Bet snapped at a ram who, with his long fleece hanging about him, looked as benevolent as a patriarch, meaning to show by this exhibition of authority that she was the special dog of the master.

A Touch of the Real Thing

"This seems to be pretty good society that I'm moving in," thought Brown. "Here, Bet, come here!"

Bet fairly leaped with pride at this imperative summons, and came back to run along by his side.

Then the sheep got to wandering, and Bet's sharp bark aroused Brown once more to a sense of his duties. He flanked the restless body of animals, and putting his hand to his mouth, recalled the stragglers.

"Coo-ee! Coo-ee! Coo-ee!"

Dilling Brown Hangs Up His Hat

Dilling Brown Hangs Up His Hat

Within a week Dilling Brown was settled in his new home. At least he had settled all save one room in it. The house was of adobe, built on three sides of a square. The open side of the square stood toward the west, and within the court was one stunted and dusty gum-tree. A quarter of a mile to the east ran a belt of chaparral, composed of pine scrub, and most fatally a trap for the Cotswolds, whose long hair became easily entangled. To keep the sheep out of this snare was the task of dogs and men; and as the sheep could never learn a lesson, though they lived to be older than any crocodile of the Ganges, their shepherds had a hard time of it. Brown had too small a force, as a matter of fact, considering his twelve hundred sheep, but it was all he could afford, and he did a common herder's work himself to help make up the deficiency. The dogs proved to be as fine a pack as man could wish. Brown could stand upon a hillock and whistle, and in two

seconds every soft canine eye would be turned in his direction. Then he had only to indicate by a gesture to the right or the left what sheep needed recalling, and they were recalled. If any dog was lax in his duty, Bet saw to his instant punishment.

It was evident that the house which Brown had taken possession of had been vacated suddenly. The furniture still stood in the rooms, though indeed it was such poor stuff that it would have been worth the while of no one to cart it back to civilization. But many personal effects remained which would certainly have been taken away, had not the occupants departed in haste and confusion which rendered them indifferent to their belongings.

The room which Dilling had left undisturbed, and into which he had put nothing of his own, was at the northwest corner of the house, and it was a bedroom. One window, sunk deep in the adobe wall, looked toward the north over miles upon miles of undulating, broad-leafed grass. On the window-ledge was a dusty wicker work-basket, and in it thread and other accessories of such a convenience, including a thimble. It was a com-

mon little thimble of blue celluloid, worth, in the coin of the commonwealth, about three cents. Dilling tried it on his smallest finger, and it would not cap it. The narrow iron bed was thick with dust, and the young man stood before it several seconds trying to realize that it had once been dainty and fresh. There was a dressing-table made of a packing-box, draped, like the bed, with sheer white stuff; but the articles which once designated its use were gone, save a folding mirror which hung above it, suspended by a blue ribbon. A low chair stood before the table, and by the window was a rocker. Some rude but shapely jugs were on a shelf above the small fireplace, and it was evident that the former occupant of the room had experimented in elemental ceramics. There were no pictures. Two things more remained to suggest the personality of her who had used the room. One was a little riding glove which lay forlornly under the bed, and which Brown rescued from its plight, placing it on the dusty dressing-table. The other was an inscription in rambling letters upon the wall above the fireplace. It was well done—the lettering—with a bold hand:

"He, watching over Israel, slumbereth not nor sleeps."

"A curious thing for a young girl to write," mused Brown, regarding it; "but perhaps she needed to be reminded of that fact out here. It might be easy to forget most things, I should think, even the religion of one's fathers. I suppose she put it there for a sort of stationary sermon."

He sat down in the rocker and looked across space—dusty green beneath, dusty blue above—to the place where the blue came down and touched the green, all in a blur of dustiness.

"But I wonder," he reflected at the end of ten minutes, "if she *was* a young girl. And I wonder if it is possible that Papin could tell me."

The fourth day of his residence in his new home, Brown fastened the rear door of this room, so that no one could enter it. The other doorway led into the room which had obviously been used for a sitting-room, and which Brown employed for the same purpose. There was no door in the opening, so he made a portière of gunny-sacking and hung it up. He regarded this with satisfaction for two

evenings. Then it occurred to him that it was severely plain. So he took some dull red paint and smudged lizards on it—conventionalized lizards.

"My uncle, but that looks decorative!" said Brown, with pride. "I fancy that would have pleased her immensely. She seems to have had a decided feeling for the picturesque." He smoked and regarded his work at leisure. "I really think she'd feel pleased, if she could see it," he remarked again.

He got some letters from home a month later. There was a large package of them, with papers and magazines. Papin was responsible for this boon, for he had arranged to send mail across the desert in relays, each man forwarding it from his ranch to the next, till the outposts were reached. It was he who had thought to add to the list of the exiled the name of the man at the Edge of Things. The letters from Aunt Betty were very beautiful to him, though full of half-concealed jealousy of his new interests, and a patient wonder why he could not manage to reach the mail at least every other day. She was well pleased, however, at the work he had chosen for himself, and she imagined soft

green pastures with running brooks, and a pretty painted farmhouse with muslin curtains at the windows. Dilling got some grim amusement out of the idea. He was sitting on a bench in the court at the time, for it was noon, and by the side of the eastern wall was to be found the only inch of shade. The Chinaman had done the best he could to make the place clean, but the dust drifted in everywhere, and as Dilling looked about him, and then re-read his aunt's letters, and thought of the difference between the mental picture entertained by the dear lady and the sweltering and desolate reality, a wave of homesickness came along, and being unexpected, it nearly swept him off his feet, figuratively speaking. He came very near doing something which he had not done since he was a boy, and to save himself he had to be violent, so he said, "Blast that gum-tree!" and he darted a glance at it which carried yet more fervent maledictions. It was certainly a miserable gum-tree, shriveled and begrimed with dust, and out of place in a land which endeavored conscientiously to devote itself to scrub pine and grass.

"I'd even play tennis with those lemonade

girls, and be glad to do it,'' thought poor Dilling, laughing at his own discomfiture.

Li Lung, he of the kitchen, put out his old ivory head to see what the gentleman meant by talking when there was no one with whom to speak. Then he nodded sagely, and made a cool drink with water and claret, and set it in the inner room, to coax the gentleman out of the sun.

But Dilling was a long, long way from discouragement. He thought he saw a bright future for himself. The sheep were prospering. The men with him proved to be faithful, and to understand their business. The dogs were a good lot, and Bet was all that a friend could be. So, if time dragged a trifle, it did not matter. If the dawns were somewhat too vivid, the days too monotonous with their pale gold dustiness, the land breezes of the night a hint too oppressive, and the stars somewhat too silent and slow in their rising and setting, it was all an incident. He had come to secure for himself an independency, and in an ancient and honorable fashion—a fashion that was ancient and honorable when David of the hills of Bethlehem was young. Dilling looked about him, made up his mind

that he had done well, set his shoulders a degree nearer the square, and remarked to Bet that he was all right.

"Though I do wish, Bet," he said, "that the music of the spheres would make itself audible. I wouldn't care if they buzzed like sawmills, old doggie, so they broke up this silence. Bark, Bet, bark—yap, you miserable girl! Make a noise, I say!" And Bet obediently insulted the moon with opprobrious remarks, as the blood-red planet showed her head above the chaparral.

Letlow wrote that he was doing a reporter's work on a New York daily, and making a fool of himself generally. He had an idea of going up to see Aunt Betty before autumn was over. He promised to play tennis, too, for old time's sake. "Though I find," he supplemented, "that there are girls even in New York. There is, for example, one named—" But after all, it is not necessary to betray Letlow's secrets. Dilling got to thinking, of course, of the foolish days of the tennis-court, and he wondered why he had laughed so much. No wonder Dorcas Pilsbury had asked Tommy if he had any religious convictions! "No doubt she'd think me serious

enough now, if she could see me,'' he reflected. *She* was serious, and so was Anice Comstock, with her kind, gray eyes. What a brisk frou-frou her skirts used to make when she ran about the tennis-ground, and what adorable little feet she had, as they showed in her white tennis shoes! Anice Comstock was certainly much nicer than Dorcas Pilsbury. But there were many pleasant things back in ''the rotten old town''—Aunt Betty's fragrant tea at five of the afternoon, and Aunt Betty pouring it, and smiling and chatting, and the piping of bluebirds without in the elms, and Sundays at the old church, and—and Anice Comstock. He fell into a reverie which lasted a long time, and at the conclusion of it he was conscious of a definite idea. It was that Anice Comstock would not have written, ''He, watching over Israel, slumbereth not nor sleeps,'' in an adobe house in a sun-cursed desert. Not but that Anice was good enough to have written it. She was, indeed, a sort of angel, with starched drapery (Dilling could not get that frou-frou out of his memory); but she wasn't an angel with a knowledge of the desert, or what was needed for comfort in the desert, and that happened to be just the sort

of woman that he was pleased to think about then.

It so chanced that Louis Papin came up, three weeks after this, to see how Brown was getting on. They spent two days together, and enjoyed themselves. Papin had his tattered Shakespeare with him—but hasn't that been mentioned before? That rag of a book was always with him. The two read from that; and they smoked; and there is always poker wherever there is civilized man. But from first to last, Brown bided his chance. At last it came.

"The Cusacks were very obliging to leave this snug house for you, eh, Brown?"

"Very. I'd like to thank them. Do you know where they are?"

"No-o—not exactly."

"And the girl—was she young? Miss Cusack, I mean."

"Katherine Cusack? O yes, she was young—quite young. A fine, brave girl. Had the spirit of a man in her."

"That's your arrogance. It was probably the spirit of a woman, if it was brave."

"Very likely. She was beautiful, too, in a way; small, but strong, and exceedingly

active, and always saying the unexpected thing. I saw her twice: once when she went past my place coming out here, and—and when she came back.''

''Why didn't you see her more?'' questioned Brown; with something like asperity.

''Why, to tell the truth, man, I thought—I thought I'd better mind my own business. Not that I wanted to.''

There were a hundred more questions that Brown meant to ask, but Papin got off on another lead, and Brown could not get him back again.

Brown Has an Obsession

Brown Has an Obsession

As the weeks went on, trailing along as slowly as wounded snakes, as the wool lengthened on the sheep, and the hair hung lower on the shoulders of the herders, and the peculiarities of every animal became known, and all the papers and magazines were read over and over again, the propriety of that sentence in the room behind the gunny-sacking portière became more and more apparent.

When Dilling rode up from the sheep, sun-blinded, foul with dust and sweat, and weary from the saddle, he got into the way of going to that room before supper, because he derived a warm sense of companionship from the thought of the girl who had once been there, and from the atmosphere that still made of it an oasis in a barren land. The excellent and cleanly heathen had restored the muslins of the little northwest room to their native state, for which Dilling was disproportionately grateful; for now the room looked as if it might, at any hour, welcome its mistress. Dilling

would look about, seem to salute an invisible presence, and then lift his eyes to the message on the wall, which, in the course of long and yet longer days, began to have the deepest of meanings for him, so that the soul of him, there in the wilderness, submitted itself, and was at peace with its Maker.

Then the days for shearing came on, and actively hard work served as a diversion, and aroused the young ranchman's drooping hope. The results of his deprivations and toil were almost apparent, he told himself. He would presently know the satisfaction that arises from accumulating herds. He would hold honestly acquired money in his hands, and the bitterness of the solitude would be partly compensated for. As, day by day, the shearlings multiplied in number, and the clad sheep grew fewer, this feeling of contentment increased. The long clipped wool was a goodly thing to behold, and Dilling felt a simple pride in it; and in the evenings he sang songs for the benefit of Bet and the kindly heathen in the kitchen. He had arranged for the transportation of the wool with Papin, who was sending it on to Philadelphia that year. So the supply wagon went back and forth between the Esmeralda

Ranch and the Edge of Things, and the last time out Cross-Eyed Kit went with it, with instructions to go on to the foothills for provisions.

The next three weeks passed more quickly. Dilling had double work because Kit was away, and every other night he slept in the open with the dogs beside the sheep. Things appeared to be moving, and he grew loquacious with elation, and wrote voluminous letters which he intended to send to Letlow some time, using the leaves of his memorandum book for the purpose. Almost every day he made additions to another letter—a very long one—which he never intended to send to any one; but it was addressed to Miss Katherine Cusack.

"I reckon yeh never heard what happened t' young Cusack, who was here before yeh, sir?" asked Big Hank of Brown one morning, as they skirted the chaparral together, after driving back the stragglers.

"No, I don't know the particulars. I heard he lost his health."

"Went off his nut, sir—clean off. It wuz queer, too, him havin' his sister with him, and enj'ing th' pleasures of society, s' t' speak.

He worked pretty hard, I reckon, an' wuz out with th' sheep alone most of th' time—he wuz short-handed, same ez you, sir. They say he got s' used t' keepin' his tongue in his head that he wouldn't speak even when he got th' chanct. Well, I'll be 'ternal damned if he didn't drop down 'longside th' sheep one day, an' take t' eatin' grass! His man found him thar, eatin' it, when he come out t' take th' watch. He didn't know what t' do, an' he rode back like blazes to th' ranch, an' Cusack's sister, she got on her pony, an' streaked out—it was five miles she had to go. An' thar he was, a-eatin' grass! She got down by him, an' called him, an' petted him, an' cried over him, an' all he said was, 'Baa! baa!' One of th' men at th' Esmeralda tol' me.''

''Great God! And then what did his sister do?''

''She had him lifted in th' saddle, an' she walked an' held him thar, all the way to th' house. Then she treated him fur fever, an' kep' coolin' things to his head. She thought it might h' bin th' sun. But 't were more'n sun. Then she took him in th' supply wagon back across th' trail, her Chinee a-drivin', and they say she went up to her ol' home in San

Francisco. Howsome that may be, th' railroad authorities, they wouldn't let him in a passenger-coach, an' she went off ridin' in th' baggage-car, a-holdin' of his head an' comfortin' him. They said he never thanked her none. He jus' said, 'Baa! baa!' an' cried 'cause they wouldn't let him out t' th' grass.''

''But where are they now?''

''I hain't heard, sir.''

''Why have you never told me this story before, Hank?''

''Well, Mr. Papin he give it out col' *an'* flat that you wa'n't to be tol'. But yer so steady now, sir, I know it don't cut no ice.''

''No,'' said Brown, and he set spur to his pony and rode on.

But he was not able, either by day or by night, to banish the vision of the man who had dropped on all fours beside his sheep and given tongue with them.

Some time before Brown had tamed a pretty wether to run about the doorstep; he and Bet made great friends of it, feeding it and teasing it, and teaching it to curl up nights on a bed of hay in the court. But now the little creature became offensive to him, and he resented its intimacy. When it

came to him, where he sat smoking evenings before his door, and rubbed its head against his leg, he had trouble to keep from an outbreak of anger. In the grotesque twilight, when the cacti looked like hobgoblins, and Bet's eyes grew phosphorescent, and Lung crooned an awful song in a heathen tongue, Brown got fanciful, and it seemed as if Dickie Bird—the little wether—were inviting him to drop down on all fours with him and say, "baa," as any sociable creature ought to do, looking at the matter, of course, from Dickie Bird's point of view. But, as a matter of fact, at this hour Dickie was on his bed, and only awoke to bleat now and then, out of the perfect contentment of his—stomach. Brown roared over his twilight nonsense the next morning, when the sun got up. The only trouble was that he came near laughing too long. It appeared as if, with a trifle of carelessness on the part of Brown, the laugh might become the master.

Kit got back with the supply wagon and a few letters, but there was no word from Philadelphia among them.

"Pshaw!" said Dilling, "I'm no boy, to be so impatient over my first earnings."

Brown Has an Obsession

Several weeks more passed, while a sort of dullness settled down upon the ranch. Even Bet seemed to think that things were not quite worth while. Then the mail came from Papin's, and with it a letter from Dilling's agent at Philadelphia. He regretted to inform Mr. Brown that his consignment had reached Philadelphia at a time when wool was selling at bottom prices, owing to the extensive introduction of foreign product, and also that there had been an unfortunate delay in the placing of the wool, thus causing considerable expense for storage. He had the honor, however, to remit to Mr. Brown the inclosed amount, as per check, and in the hope of serving him on future occasions, to remain his very truly.

Dilling looked at the amount of the check, mentally deducted the sum he had paid for the freight, and then made a confidence to the wether, who was sweetly chewing at the doormat.

"Dickie Bird," said he, "I am exactly seventeen dollars and eighty-five cents out of pocket. Figures are a great thing, Dickie Bird, and by studying them you may learn a great many things which you would not learn if you did not study figures."

There was a good curry that night for supper, and some native claret which Kit had brought back with him, but Dilling could only make a pretense of eating. Moreover, he could not sleep except by fits, and then he awoke with a cold sweat breaking out over him, for he saw a man falling down beside his sheep and eating grass.

He had a determined aversion to taking any one into his confidence. Papin, of course, was in the same boat. But Papin was only the manager of the Esmeralda, and he had a rich firm behind him. The fluctuations of trade did not greatly disturb the serenity of his soul, and they in no way detracted from the pleasure to be derived from a perusal of the pages of Shakespeare of Stratford. But Aunt Betty and Letlow should not know. Besides, if Anice Comstock found it out, she would lay it to his frivolity. Snug, comfortable, unknowing lives they lived, those people back East! It would do them good to get out of their oiled grooves, and find how the world is made to move and how much pushing it takes to move it. The man at the Edge of Things was accumulating some bitterness. He incidentally

tore up the letter he had written to Letlow, and he did not write to Aunt Betty. Yet to the letter which he did not mean to send—which he never could send—he made passionate additions, and the woman who did not know him, but who knew so many of the sorrows that he knew, was made the recipient of all the secrets of his soul. The drawback to that was that she did not know it.

Papin said there was hope for better fortune in the spring, and Dilling comforted himself with belief in this. He had no intention of weakening. He had the responsibility of the investment, and he meant to justify his judgment in his aunt's eyes. Moreover, he could think of nothing else to which he could turn his hand. So he strengthened himself with the inscription on the wall, daily augmented the size of the letter which would never be sent, and went about his tasks.

But all his resolution could not keep the dead heat of autumn from weighing on him like a curse, nor his eyes from aching at the distance about him, the absolute vacuity of outreaching space. A brawl of street ruffians would have been a desired drama, since it would have furnished a scene of action and

an evidence of human passion. Even Kit and Hank got to wearing on each other; but they were old herders, and they knew the cause of their irritability, and so regarded it as impersonally as possible. Then the mild and meaningless winter came on, the winter of the southern plain, and the rains fell. The men lit fires at night to fight the damp. Everything mildewed—cutlery, clothes, and books. The sheep were sullen and obstinate, and there was nothing, as Dilling had said to Louis Papin a few months before, *but* time and sheep.

And in the midst of all this a genuine sorrow came to Brown. Aunt Betty passed beyond the knowledge of the world—the knowledge which she had not held in high esteem—to make such discoveries as futurity holds. Letlow wrote about it, and how Anice Comstock and he had done all that Dilling would have done had he been there, and how Elder Urwin celebrated her virtues in an address three-quarters of an hour long, and how she was laid with her fathers in the old cemetery.

"The beautiful old house is closed, and is waiting for you," Letlow wrote. "And

Nettie bids me tell you that she will come back to care for it when you want her to do so. Meantime, she is living near, and is keeping an eye upon dear Aunt Betty's treasures. It grieves me to say it, Dil, but you might have cheered her last days more than you did. She was forever sending poor old Nettie to the post-office, and you know yourself how seldom she got what she wanted. As for me, you never write to me now. It is strange of you, Dil. Of course, if you do not want to have anything more to do with me, you may go to the bow-wows. But I cannot think this is the case. Do not try to live without your old friends. They find it hard, believe me, to live without you.''

After that, of course, poor Dilling wrote; and then to his other sorrows was added the pang of unavailing regret. It is a pang which almost every one must know, but it was new to Dilling, and it roweled him like a sharp spur. Dear Aunt Betty! Was it possible she could have thought him ungrateful? He was only waiting to write till he could justify himself in her eyes. But she did not know—she did not know! She waited for letters that did not come, and suspected—what? In

the loneliness of the rains, Dilling sent his soul in search for hers, praying for pardon. But he had no sense of forgiveness. The dead did not come back to comfort him.

By the time for the spring shearing his funds were almost exhausted, and he confided to his men, that unless he realized something on his wool the experiment might be considered a failure.

It was just before the day set for the shearing that the Mexicans made their first raid on him and cut out two hundred sheep. The episode was singularly tame. It happened at night, and when Big Hank was on duty. The sheep were two miles to the south of the house, and the night was a clear and starlit one. Hank was awake and at his post, and he saw the whole thing, which was small enough satisfaction. He emptied the contents of his revolvers and his rifle, and he had a dead horse to show that he had been in action, but none of the Mexican bullets hit him. That was the only adventure of the year.

There was some profit from the wool that spring. "Just enough," Brown remarked to Papin, "to make me feel that it would be

wrong to give up the business. I'll stick it out, Mr. Papin. I ought to be able to stand it, if you can."

"Why, there's some difference between your situation and mine, Brown. You know I saw a little of life before I came. I had my day. It happened to end for me rather suddenly, you know—and that's why I came."

"No," said the younger man, "I didn't know, Mr. Papin."

"So you see it doesn't make very much difference to me where I am. I suppose Paris would seem as lonesome as the free grass country, eh, Brown?"

"I don't know, sir. I'd like to have an opportunity for comparison."

And then Papin read to him the things that Jaques said in the forest of Arden.

The summer came, hot as the mouth of the pit. Nothing happened. Oh, yes, Bet had puppies, and brought them in, one at a time, for Dilling to see, and he made a bed for them in his waste-paper basket. And Cross-Eyed Kit had the fever, and Brown nursed him through it, and hired another man to substitute. When Kit got well, it was decided to keep the other man, and the bringing of a

new personality into the company had a good effect, particularly as the new man could sing. Wool was looking up a little by fall, and Brown began once more to feel that there might be some return for the investment.

All the poetry of the life had gone for him by this time. He could have enjoyed adventure, he said to himself, even when accompanied by great hardship and danger, but this endless stretch of nothingness was as wearing as life in a mephitic dungeon. The wind of the morning could no longer elate him, nor the stars of the night speak to his soul. A nostalgia for his kind seized upon him, and he made up conversations, pretending that his chosen friends participated in them with him. One friend was there whom he had never seen, but he always gave her the best things to say; and when there was something peculiarly sensible and dull in the way of a remark, he accorded it to Anice Comstock. Letlow said some gay things, some irresistible things, and Brown roared over them; and then the Chinaman peeped in at the door, shaking his old ivory head, and slipping away like a rat. One day he ventured on some advice in that peculiar English which he affected—an Eng-

lish picked up principally on the ranch, and converted into a liquescent lipogram.

"Mislie Blown," said he, as he served Dilling with some canned salmon, into which he had introduced a most unchristian quantity of red pepper, "loo go see Mislie Papin. It good fo' loo."

"Think I need it, Lung?" asked Brown, wistfully.

"Loo need it. Go, Mislie Blown." He nodded his head an incalculable number of times, and he did not grin.

"Lung," said Brown, slowly, "I believe you are serious—and I am sure you are a kind creature. I think I'll go at once. You explain to the men," and to Lung's unspeakable astonishment, he saddled on the minute and made off, Bet following.

So that night, when the men rode up for supper, they found the "boss" off for a junket.

"It do him good," explained Lung.

Hank regarded his boots with a pensive expression. Suddenly he broke into a yell.

"Lung," he shouted, "you heathen, let's holler! Whoop'er up, Kit! Dance, you devils! Hi, dance to this!" And he sang,

in a terrible voice and a little off-key, some words to a silly tune.

The Chinaman obeyed orders—he was wise, and knew how to obey—and now and then he broke into the song with a discordant croak.

"I feel better," said Hank, decorating his remark in a manner peculiar to himself. "It done me good. I had to do it or bust. I wish th' boss could h' bin in th' party."

"It done him good," supplemented Lung.

"It would, my friend—it would. Now make th' cakes."

In Pursuit of the Chimera

In Pursuit of the Chimera

The rain was over all the plain, and the night shut down dismally. Dilling had been trailing all day toward the Esmeralda Ranch, but as the darkness began to fall he was seized with a distaste for his visit. A sodden languor pervaded his soul. He marveled that the day had gone so soon, and that he was not at the end of his journey. But still, what did it matter? And why see Papin anyway —Papin, who had the "inextinguishable ennui," and who read Shakespeare and waited for time to roll by. Papin had actually learned to let it roll by without taking any of the responsibility. He had found out that it had been rolling before he was born; that he was, personally, an immaterial accident; and that the rolling would keep on after the worms had banqueted upon him. In short, Papin was too philosophic, though a fine fellow. Moreover, it was not to be forgotten that he had once performed a signal service for the listless wanderer there in the rain. He had

told him the name of Katherine Cusack, a thing which had done more to mitigate the womanless solitude at the Edge of Things than any other event. If Papin had really known her well, it is not unlikely that Dilling would have had some motive for pushing on, but the subject was one which Papin had exhausted long since. So the pony was allowed to straggle at will, and it was midnight when the ranch was reached.

Lights shone from the windows of Papin's rooms.

"He sits late," said the wanderer. "He sits as late as I do. Perhaps for the same reason. He sits late to converse with shadows—with shadows!" He shuddered a little and dropped wearily from his pony. As he walked toward the door, he involuntarily glanced in through the window. Papin was not alone. A young man sat with him. The two were in earnest conversation. The cigars in their fingers had gone out. Dilling turned away sullenly.

"Papin is very well entertained," he said. "He hasn't the least need of me. It serves me right for coming. I'll kick that fool Lung some day." But Bet announced her arrival

"BY ALL THAT'S MYSTERIOUS; IF HERE ISN'T HIS DOG NOW."

vociferously, and Papin threw open the door.

"By all that's mysterious," Brown heard him cry, "if here isn't his dog now!"

Dilling slunk back from the window, and had an instinct to run. Something about the shape of the head of the other man who sat within the room filled him with such a frantic longing, such a torment of memory of glad and foolish days, that he felt he could not speak to any one. But Bet led the party of investigation, and Papin discovered Brown skulking, and dragged him in to the light, where he stood blinking and looking away from the other men, like a child overcome with shyness. Papin and his companion, however, were using their eyes with purpose, and what they saw was a creature with haggard eyes and a drawn face. About him hung his soaking clothes, and his hair was long on his neck, faded to something lighter than hay color by the sun of the desert.

"My soul!" half-whispered Papin. "You're not a ghost, are you, Brown?"

The man whom Brown had seen through the window had gone deadly pale. The clustering black curls stood damp upon his

forehead. His comely face was twitching with nervousness. Brown laughed rather foolishly in reply to Papin's question, and the guest came forward and put his arms about Brown's shoulders, and looked him in the face. Then he hugged him very hard, and Brown trembled. His eyes closed. A few drops of saliva trickled from his mouth.

"Is he going to faint?" whispered the guest to Papin.

The ranchman got some brandy and poured it down Brown's throat. Then Dil found speech.

"I knew it was you all the time, Tommy," he said. "I knew it was you, you darned dude!"

He sank beside the table and buried his face in his arms. Tom Letlow dropped beside him, threw an arm over his heaving shoulders, and waited. Papin lit a cigar, picked up his tattered Shakespeare, and also waited. After a time Brown looked up.

"Don't lay it up against me," he pleaded. "I know I'm an ass, but I've just emerged from—"

There was a very long silence.

"Well, from what, Dil?"

"From—I can hardly tell you what—from a place peopled with shadows who talked. I was afraid of you at first, because I could not tell whether you were one of the shadows or not."

"Close call," muttered Papin. Letlow gritted his teeth. Papin went to the quarters to send a man to look after the horse, and Letlow took Brown into his chamber for dry clothing. Half an hour later, the three men sat down together more calmly in Papin's comfortable sitting-room. Brown looked about him with a smile of incredulity, something like that a man might wear who had just got accustomed to purgatorial flames, when he opened his eyes to behold paradise. Brown said something of the sort.

"I was getting used to it, you know, Tommy—getting used to the Robinson Crusoe business, and to having a sore-eyed wether for my especial confidant. And now I suppose I'll be all upset again. But you will stay with me a little while, Tommy? You'll do that much for—for the advancement of the race, so to speak." His old trick of raillery returned at the mere sight of Letlow, and with each light-hearted word that he spoke

something tight and terrible within his brain seemed to loosen into comfort.

"No, I won't," replied Letlow, emphatically. "I don't want to know any more than I do about what you've gone through, old man. I've come to take you away with me."

"O, I can't leave, Tommy; the sheep—"

"Damn the sheep! Tell your men to divide the spoils any way they please. Are you much in arrears?"

"Not at all, really; only for wages since last shearing, as is customary."

"Then let the men divide the spoils, as I said."

"I've told him the—situation, Mr. Brown. I hope you don't think it a liberty," Papin interposed.

Brown smiled, and the smile had a hint of the glory of other days, when the general gorgeousness of that smile was celebrated in a class song at college.

"Mr. Papin is so good a friend," he said, "that he can say anything he pleases about me. He once did me a tremendous service and never knew it. Pretty much all the happiness I have had since I left home has been connected with the service he did for me."

"What are you talking about?" cried the man with the tattered Shakespeare. His amazement was unfeigned.

"I said he didn't know," explained Brown. "O, Tommy, Tommy, what a wonder to see you! And your plans—what are they?"

"To get you away from here."

"But furthermore?"

"Well, as to myself, I've got a mission from my paper to go up to the Klondike. I may say I've caught on very well, Dil. They like me all right, and I like the work. I've done some things out of the usual, and it's attracted attention. Excuse this infantile candor, but there's no one else to tell you, so I must; for of course I insist on your finding it out. I've contracted to go up to the Klondike, and after that I have a roving commission for an illustrated weekly, and I'm to go and see anything I like and tell what I think about it. Likewise, I am to take pictures of it "

Brown's face spoke silent congratulations.

"Then I have an anchor to windward. At least that may not be the right metaphor, and upon reflection, I don't think it is." He colored distinctly.

"Call it a sweetheart, and let it go at that," suggested Papin.

"All right," assented Letlow, "why not? Call it a sweetheart, for argument's sake."

"It's Anice Comstock!" cried Brown, his intuitions sharpened by his sufferings. "She's a dear girl, Tommy. I've thought of her a good deal at times, and of how her pretty summer gowns used to rustle about the tennis-court, and of how sensible she was."

"O, we didn't half know her that summer, Dil! She was shy and not used to such fools as we were. So we couldn't bring out the best in her. But she's a lovely woman if ever there was one. And she's anxious about you, too, Dil, and so is Miss Pilsbury."

"That is kind of them."

"You don't seem interested," Letlow said, smiling.

"I am very truly grateful, Tommy." He thought of the bulky letter in his pocket, which he did not mean to send—which he never *could* send—and smiled.

"This may be a good time to tell you that within the last ninety days it has transpired that Aunt Betty was a richer woman than she knew herself to be. A lot of land to which

she attached no importance has come to have a value. It's wanted for summer hotels and cottages, and such iniquity. I have the proposals with me. That's a big part of my business here. You can close all that up, go back to the old house, revel in its refinement, and marry any girl you please—when you get your hair cut.''

Brown sat and half-drowsed over this suggestion. His eyes were narrowed like those of one accustomed to turning thought and speech within.

''I'll go if Mr. Papin will go with me,'' he declared at last.

But the ranchman shook his head. ''I have become wedded to my solitude,'' he said. ''And I couldn't play tennis!'' He looked so foreign to this occupation that the young men shouted with merriment.

Then Letlow went on. ''I stopped in San Francisco on the way down, and fixed it up with a man there about the Klondike. He told me a volume. He's acquainted with the country—he's been over the Skaguay once himself. He has a store at Juneau, and takes the supplies up there in his own vessel. Now he's put a house up for his family, and he's

taking his wife and niece with him this trip. I've arranged conditionally for you, too, Dil.''

''I don't know that I have the appetite for adventure that I used to have,'' said Brown, sadly. The Klondike did not appeal to him. He had a vision of a solitude as complete as that of the sun-baked desert, and more unkind. But then neither did the idea of returning to the East and the dull, formal old town appeal to him. He regarded his state of mind with disgust. He appeared to be inert. ''I wonder if my springs are all broken,'' he thought, ''and if I shall never go again.''

''If it was for good and all,'' broke in Letlow, ''I shouldn't care about the Klondike myself. But it's an experience, merely. After I'm through with that I may go to Hawaii. Things are looking up for us over there, you know. O I'm out to see things now, Dil, and incidentally I want to find a way to make a fortune if I can. And I think I can. I can almost smell my ship a-coming in.''

He sniffed the air expectantly. ''Then I'll send back for Anice—or go back for her.''

''She's a dear girl,'' admitted Brown, still

unenthusiastically. "I congratulate you, Tommy. How did you ever tame yourself sufficiently to win the approval of such a modest, honest, starchy, altogether desirable sort of girl? Everything will go just right when you have married her. Your life will run in oiled grooves forevermore."

Letlow took a photograph out of his pocket and laid it on the table. "Look," he said, with pride.

Dilling beheld the goodly face of Anice Comstock. "My powers," he cried, "what a little lady! What a civilized, Christian creature! I had forgotten that a woman could look like that. You *are* fortunate, Tommy!"

Papin came and looked over Brown's shoulder, and he sighed, and then swore softly—almost tenderly—under his breath.

"That's what we miss," said he.

"Doesn't that make you want to see Miss Pilsbury, Dil? She is sincerely concerned about you. You've known her always, and you have liked each other. Once she thought you weren't serious enough—"

"Ah! She'd have changed her mind if she could have seen me lately. But no, Tommy, it doesn't make me want to see her,

because—'' He did not finish the sentence, but left it raw-edged.

Papin suddenly strode to the table and pounded it with his fist. ''Brown,'' he exclaimed, ''you look as if you had a secret! You haven't got a sweetheart out there in the wilderness, have you? My heaven, Brown, if you've found a woman out there, you're—'' Papin stopped because his guest did not laugh at all. On the contrary, he grew solemn. ''I beg your pardon, Brown. I have said something stupid?''

''No, indeed—something perspicacious. I haven't found a woman out there, Mr. Papin, but—but I have found the soul of a woman.''

The men stared and were uncomfortable. Men do not like confidences as a general thing.

The rain beat down harder than ever, and they could hear it pouring off the roof; but in spite of that, there was a lightening in the Far East. The dawn was coming over the desert. No one encouraged Dilling, but he had made up his mind to go on. He drew the great folio from his pocket, and slowly unwrapped the silken oilcloth which enveloped it.

"I was afraid it would mildew," he explained.

"The soul of the woman, Dil?"

"No; the letter I wrote to the woman. I discovered traces of her out there in the solitude, in the silence, Tommy—prehistoric traces, you may say. It has been the study of these which has kept my soul alive. It has been what I learned from her that has made it possible for me to endure what I have. Mr. Papin understands. I said, didn't I, that Mr. Papin had once done me a great service? It is true. The service was inestimable. He told me her name."

He pointed to the inscription on the outside of the package. Letlow stooped to read, and Papin peered over his shoulder.

"Katherine Cusack," half-whispered Letlow, his eyes growing big, "Kath— why, man of many marvels, that's the name of Captain Cusack's niece! That's the girl who is going to Alaska on the same boat with us! That's the—the—"

"O, you're fooling, Tommy! Please don't." Brown spoke like a teased boy.

"Fooling? I'm not such a donkey. It's she, I tell you. The captain said she needed

a change, that she had recently buried her brother, and—''

''Oh, the poor devil is dead! Papin, you hear that? The bleating wretch is gone.''

''Yes, he's dead. His sister stayed with him till the last. Captain Cusack told me all about it. Then I came on, hot-footed, for you.''

''But I say, Tommy, it can't be, you know. There's some mistake.''

''No mistake, Dil. We'll close up your affairs here—''

''O that's easy. One of my men will take things off my hands for me. He's very trustworthy. I'll let them run things till I come back, share and share alike—Li Lung included. He's a good heathen. He told me to come over here to-night. I'll go back and pack.''

He was thinking of the work-basket and the little glove, the clay jugs and the folding mirror. He would need them for an argument.

''And then it's the Klondike, Tommy! My uncle, there's the smell of adventure in it! What route shall you take, the Dyea, the Chilcat?—but that doesn't matter. Of

course I may not go over the pass with you, eh? I may go into business in—in Juneau. As you say,'' though indeed the bewildered Letlow had said nothing of the sort, ''it would be no place for me back in the old town. Not without Aunt Betty. Why, I couldn't keep that boxwood trimmed—now could I, Tommy? It's adventure I need. The Klondike's just the thing. As for the East, it can get along without me very well, can't it, Papin?''

''Very well indeed,'' said Papin, who knew.

The Home-Madness

The Home-Madness

Louis Papin laid his thumbed Shakespeare on the table, after many ineffectual attempts to read it, and said aloud, in a speculative tone of voice, "Perhaps I'd better try a game of solitaire."

He spread the cards out before him with much care; but the game proceeded slowly, for the reason that he seemed to have difficulty in recognizing the value of a card, staring at a three-spot or a knave of clubs with uncomprehending eyes, as if he had never seen the like before. All of which meant, of course, that the enterprising impresario of the Esmeralda ranch had something on his mind.

Something was, indeed, so imperatively upon his mind that, after fifteen minutes of uncomprehending devotion to his game, he gathered up his cards, and putting them in their case, began to pace the floor of his room. He had, no doubt, plenty of troubles of a personal sort, if he had had the time to think about them. But his perplexity on this

night was of another kind. The truth was, he stood face to face with the most vexatious problem which had confronted him since he first came down from San Francisco to look after eight thousand merinos for Leonard and Filbin. One year there had been an epidemic of acute tonsillitis, but he had nursed the men through that so successfully that not one grave on the wind-ravaged desert told the tale; another season the sheep had been stricken with influenza, but that was weathered with the loss of a few hundred head; and once, in the dead of the wet season—the season of black nights—a series of disastrous raids had been made by the Mexicans, in which nearly two thousand of the long-wooled sheep had been "cut out."

Papin congratulated himself upon having met all of these difficulties with decision and a heart for the struggle. Neither he nor his men faltered till order and normality were restored. But it was a different matter now. A malady of more serious character than tonsillitis had broken out among the men. It was homesickness — endemic, contagious, malignant homesickness.

Three of the men were down in bed from

sheer sullenness, and there was hardly a man about the place who would vouchsafe an intelligible and frank answer to a question. The home-madness was on them, and deeper each day grew their disgust for the desert, where the senseless sheep browsed and the rabid sun made its frantic course.

It had come about naturally enough. The season had been unusually hot and dusty, and it seemed as if the sun grudged every hour which the night claimed for its own. The stars were well upon their way before the eyes of the herders could discover them, and the dawn was hustled, dry and breathless, over the mountains. They hardly caught a glimpse of her pale draperies before the day, swaggering and insolent, was there, holding her place with evil assurance. The quarters looked even more than usually uninviting. Lee Hang, the Chinaman, was an evil fellow, careless and ill-natured, and things got at their worst under his management. It seemed as if the men breathed and ate dust; it was actually in their food; it was on their beds; they could not escape it; the sky appeared to be blurred with it. They began to see visions in the twilight hour—visions of trees

beside running brooks, and dewy paths where women walked The desert was womanless, and thereby doubly a desert. All of these things Papin reviewed in his weary mind. He wished more than he could say that some perfectly sane and disinterested person would come along, to whom he might explain his perplexities. Perhaps he was a trifle anxious about his own poise. It had come to him once or twice that if there should be a hejira of the whole gang—the dogs would follow merrily—he, Papin, would have a good and legitimate excuse for ceasing to be factor of the dreariest ranch in southern California. But this thought, upon reflection, did not seem to be just the sort which Leonard and Filbin would expect their manager to entertain.

He was granted his wish for a companion much sooner than could possibly have been expected.

The next afternoon, just as the west was getting red, along came a white-covered wagon, driven by a coolie, and containing Mrs. Ambrose Herrick, wife of the manager for Stebbins of the 'Toinette ranch, with her baby and two maids.

"I've been up in the mountains all sum-

mer, Mr. Papin,'' she explained, when she had been lifted out of her roomy vehicle. ''Mr. Herrick said it wasn't fit for the sheep down here in midsummer. But I'm worn out with sunrise excursions and horseback parties and hops. I made up my mind that if the rest of you could stand it down here, we could. Besides,'' she added, somewhat anxiously, ''it's the middle of September. Don't you think Mr. Herrick will forgive me for surprising him by my return?''

''I should think it would be an offense easy to overlook,'' answered Papin.

''The first night we put up at Farnsworth's Inn, but there was no hope for a roof over our heads to-night unless we reached the Esmeralda. I hope you are not going to be inconvenienced. We'll put up with any sort of accommodation.''

''Don't you know you are conferring a favor, Mrs. Herrick? Lee Hang will be tickled to death at sight of your coolie; and the maids can have more admirers than they ever dreamed of, if they'll only consent to talk with my lonely fellows. The sight of women will do us all good.''

It was an enthusiastic welcome, as she had

known that it would be. Papin made her pour the coffee at dinner, while he gave himself up to the enjoyment of an evanescent sense of domesticity.

"I wish I could commend your impulsiveness, Mrs. Herrick," he said. "Herrick will certainly congratulate himself because of it. But the actual truth is that you have come back four weeks too soon. You haven't had a chance yet to learn what the Californian desert *can* do. Pity may sit in the heavens elsewhere, but not here. The world's hidden batteries may hold swift currents for others; for us they have nothing—not even the boon of swift destruction."

And he told her of the madness that had come upon the men.

"They are preposterous children, Mrs. Herrick. If they were down with the fever, I might see some hope ahead. But they're in the dumps, and it's dangerous."

"I suppose I am to take you seriously?"

"Quite seriously, madam. I have told them my best stories, and had the pain of seeing them fall flat. I have essayed jokes—they might as well have been lamentations. I have played jigs on my violin, but I might

better have devoted myself to funeral marches.''

The Chinese sweets had been served and eaten, and Mrs. Herrick's host led the way out to the gallery.

They seated themselves comfortably in low chairs, and Mrs. Herrick clasped her hands and watched the stars beginning to burn fervidly through the dust-laden atmosphere.

''Our stars have all turned red,'' commented Papin; ''and as for our sunsets, they are bloody.''

''I'm afraid it *was* too soon to bring the baby back,'' Mrs. Herrick said, anxiously.

A penetrating and imperative cry broke the stillness.

''There is the baby now!'' She arose and ran to her chamber, returning with the little creature in her arms.

''The maids are at dinner, so I thought I would bring him out here, Mr. Papin. I hope you don't mind.''

''A man who has seen only saddle-skinned herders with sun-bleached elf-locks for four months is not likely to object to this,'' was Papin's ardent reply.

The baby was undressed and its flesh showed the tint of a half-opened wild rose. Its shy azure eyes contemplated Papin curiously, and it finally reached out a moist and clinging hand and inclosed one of the impresario's fingers. It gave inarticulate, wild-bird cries; and when the moon showed a florid face above the horizon, it stretched out its arms in longing for this celestial toy.

"The immemorial aspiration of babies," said Papin, really very much amused at the offended manner in which the baby buried its face in its mother's breast and wailed, when it found that the glorious object was not handed over to it.

"Everything seems immemorial," Mrs. Herrick said; "the desert most of all."

"I know what you mean," responded Papin. "I have felt it. The herders—how ancient is their vocation! The sheep—they are of eld! I believe these are the same flocks that the holy shepherds tended; the same ones that Phyllis and Corydon piped to. And I, am I not the most ancient of all? I, the man who does nothing, who waits for some event within his own soul, knowing it will never come?"

"I read Amiel's Journal while I was up in the hills," commented Mrs. Herrick.

"Did you? I started to read it, but I feared I might be trying to extenuate myself by means of its logic. It will make me melancholy if we talk of Amiel. See what a flush the moonlight has! No one could call this a silver light."

"No; it is red gold."

A silence fell—a tribute to the beauty of the night. Then the baby grew restless, and Mrs. Herrick nuzzled it, and sent it to Banbury Cross and brought it back again. Somehow, all this gave a certain pang to Papin. It even embarrassed him. He ventured a suggestion.

"Mrs. Herrick, I wonder if you would have the great goodness to take the baby to the quarters and show him to the men? You have no idea how they would appreciate it!"

"If any poor creature wants to see the baby, he must *not* be denied. It is really pitiable to me to think of the number of persons in the world who have never seen the baby." She arose, laughing and eager, and followed her host.

Such of the herders as were not upon the

night shift were sitting on benches without the house, looking off with unanticipatory eyes toward the arching sky, when Victoria Herrick went out to them in her fragrant white garments, carrying her half-naked baby in her arms. The glorifying radiance of the night lit up her young face, elate with its maternal joy, picked out the rounded whiteness of her arm, and glimmered through the drifting draperies of her gown.

The men stared from her to the babe, and something clinked hard and dry in their throats. Louis Papin had made a mistake, and he realized it. Still, the scene must be gone through with somehow.

"We are all a trifle awkward with babies," he said, addressing Mrs. Herrick, but speaking for the benefit of the men. "The only ones we see are at lambing time."

Mrs. Herrick's clear and happy laugh rang out.

"I like all kinds of babies, from pigs to monkeys," she said. "I am sure I should like little lambs. But this kind of a baby is my choice!" And she snatched her little son close to her, fairly wreathing him about her neck, while the baby clutched at his mother's

hair, and gave little shrieks, as penetrating as the cries of a young jay. Then, under cover of the little one's happy clamor and the shy compliments of the men, Mrs. Herrick made good her retreat.

"You should not have asked me to go out there!" she cried, reprovingly, when she was alone again with the impresario. "The baby quite upset them."

Louis Papin looked at the glowing and beautiful face of the young woman, and smiled.

"The vision was too fair," he admitted. "I might better have left them to a contemplation of the desert."

When the serving-women had made all comfortable for the night, and the lady and her little one were sleeping, Louis Papin paced the earthen floor of the gallery, and indulged himself in a luxury of reminiscence, which, unfortunately, he could confide to none. The great lack in his life was a friend. As star dust may float in space, luminous and unformed, so the friendliness of this man failed to find any creature to whom it could attach itself. There had once been a man, not so long ago, out there at the Edge of

Things, to whom Papin might have told many secrets, but somehow the chances slipped by; and just when he had reached the point where he might have unburdened his heart, the man had gone off toward the North, with exultant heart, following a beautiful phantom, and Papin saw him no more.

To-night there came to him, with cruel tantalization, a vision of the home potential—the home to which he had not attained, and which, because of some inherent hesitancy of his nature, compacted of delicacy and melancholy, he seemed never to be likely to achieve. As a convict in his cell dreams of joy, so this man, environed by the desert, who had sucked solitude into his soul, permitted himself for an hour to picture eagerly the comforts, the fine amenities, of a life about a hearthstone. He reproached himself for having been false to his generation. He blamed himself bitterly for what seemed, to-night, to be nothing better than criminal stupidity. He had turned his back, with silly cowardice, upon the beauty and fire of life, and secure, as he had thought, from all assaults of passion or ambition, had fixed himself here in the wilderness among these sullen men. Perhaps never in his ex-

perience with them had he been so willing to apply unpleasant epithets as he was this night. For a fortnight he had seen them slouching about their tasks, cross to the dogs and brutal to the sheep. He had heard them using ugly words in the quarters.

"We're ripe for murder," he thought. "We must have a diversion of some nature. If I were to break my leg, even, it would have a bracing effect. But it's absurd to hope for the unexpected. It is the expected that always happens out here."

But for once he was unfair to the land of eternal heartbreak, for even while he complained a horse's hoofs pounded the earth with a message of haste.

Papin heard. He was glad to hear anything. He hastened to the gallery, and by the starlight he saw approaching a mounted figure in headlong haste, and heard a short barking cry—the danger signal of the Esmeraldas. The factor sent back a cheerful shout. The unexpected was arriving—in the form of disaster, perhaps, but welcome nevertheless.

"The Salita gang!" the man cried, as his horse plunged forward and was brought up on his haunches at the edge of the gallery.

"They crept up by the arroyo and shot into the crowd."

"Anybody hit?"

"Dox."

"Not killed?"

"I didn't stay to see, sir. I saw a black crowd of fellows, and I lit out to git help."

"Going to have a pitched battle, think?"

"It's on now."

Papin walked with a quick step to the outer door of the quarters.

"Out, men! Out!" he cried, his voice trumpet-clear. "The Salita gang is making a raid! Billy Dox has been shot! Best hurry, or he'll have company!"

There was no excitement in Papin's voice. Certainly vociferation would have been superfluous. The men were on their feet before he had finished speaking. It does not take a herder of the sun-blistered desert long to make his toilet. His articles of clothing are not numerous, even when his catridge belt, his pistols, and his short rifle are counted in. Now the men dressed themselves with the rapidity of firemen, and ran shouting to the corral, where the saddles lay in a heap. They had no trouble, however, in finding their own

—no more trouble than soldiers do to pick their muskets from a stack of arms. The ponies struggled up, snorting and curious; sniffed the air to make sure that it was not yet dawn; and then, smelling adventure, nervously submitted to the adjustment of the saddles and the rough haste of the men who mounted them.

Papin did not stop to get out of his white linens, but put himself at the head of his men, armed like the rest, and with riding boots adding to the incongruity of his costume. The men fell into their places behind him, riding four abreast as was their habit, and the ponies, roweled to the feat, scurried over the plain like frightened rabbits.

After fifteen minutes of this kind of riding the sound of firing reached their ears—a brisk fusillade. The men sent a shout ahead of them that scared the breathless desert, but which was intended to convey reassurance to their fighting comrades. A moment later the stars showed them bunches of sheep plunging aimlessly forward, and it was necessary to drive carefully to avoid trampling them.

"Push ahead! Push ahead!" came Papin's voice. The firing reached their ears spas-

modically, and each time the advancing herders sent their wild cry of warning through the startled night. Then, a moment more, they were in the thick of the tumult. At first it was almost impossible to distinguish friend from foe. Then it became apparent that the Mexicans had ranged themselves so as to protect a great body of the sheep which they had succeeded in detaching from the herd; but Papin led a flanking movement, and pressed down on them relentlessly. They made a feint of fighting, but gave way almost immediately before the onslaught of avenging men and frantic horses, and were blown before the herders like flies before a wind. Papin laughed aloud at the flight, and then sent out warnings to his men, too headlong to note the arroyo, now not a hundred yards distant.

"Steady! Steady!" came his voice, above the din.

They halted on the verge of the rocky declivity.

"They're brilliant thieves, but rather dull fighters," commented the factor. "They might have given us more of a party than this!"

The men were rending the air with their

derisive calls, and curveting their horses in sheer excess of activity.

"Who's hurt?" called out Papin.

"I got plunked in the arm," sang Basil Watts, cheerfully.

"Richards," said Papin, sharply, "why are you sitting limp like that? Why don't you own you're wounded?"

"All I need is a screwdriver, sir. Something seems a leetle loose about my right ribs."

"Ride home slowly, Richards. Some one go with him. Now, how about Dox?"

A man rode to find out, and the herders, once more the swaggering guardians of the desert, sent out their long, wild sheep-cry:

"Coo-ee! Coo-ee! Coo-ee!"

The beat of a myriad little hoofs was heard. The sheep began to answer to the homing call, and came running together excitedly, still full of vague alarms. Seeing this, the call of the men became steadier and more reassuring. Papin gave orders that the trampled sheep should be carried to a designated spot, watered, and left till morning, when the experienced surgery of the men might benefit some of them. Nobody wanted

to go home. The wind of the dawn began singing afar off in the east, and the pink and yellow clouds that danced about the horizon appeared as a procession of Aurora's servitors.

It was decided finally not to return to the ranch for breakfast. No man had a notion for an indoor meal. Some one was dispatched for the wagons, and a fire made on the ground ready for the coffee when it appeared in the guardianship of the smiling Chinese, who brought word incidentally that Mrs. Herrick had a sufficient guard in her coolie, and would set out upon her journey without delay.

"Dey lun, dose Salita lascals?" queried Lee Hang.

"Run!" responded Papin. "They ran so, my friend, that if they had had pigtails like yours they would have all been whipped off."

The smoke of the fire flirted up through the golden air. The strange voices of the waste whispered along the ground. Then the fragrant scent of the coffee reached the nostrils of the hungry men, and Lee Hang began tossing griddle-cakes in the air. The horses, staked at a little distance, called out their congratulations to their masters in tremu-

lous whinnies, and the sheep kept up a sociable bleating. The men were full of noise, and told stock jokes, at which everybody roared.

"They'd even laugh at one of my jokes this morning," thought Papin.

The man who had been sent to inquire about the wounded herder returned with word that Dox wanted coffee. A great shout went up.

"What's the matter with Billy Dox?" they inquired of the scurrying coyote who appeared above the edge of the arroyo. Then, as he vouchsafed no answer to this vociferous inquiry, they supplied the antiphon, "He's all right!"

He was, in fact, lying in the shelter of a clump of bushes suffering from a rather serious head wound.

"Thank God the Mexicans are not better marksmen!" said Papin, devoutly. "We're all alive; but the real question is, are we glad of it?"

A chorus of yells greeted him. The homesickness was gone. The desert claimed its children again. The familiar scene appealed to the men with eloquence. The arch

of the sky, the limitless space, the friendly beasts, the dauntless company, the comradeship, the liberty from man's yea and nay—was this not better a thousand times than a life of rules between walls or along thronging streets, with women forever cluttering the world?

"Lyon," said Papin, "where's your music-box? Out of order?"

Lyon was the singer among the Esmeraldas.

He set his cup of coffee down between his knees, and as the dawn gilded the low sky behind the scrub of twisted oaks, he opened his mouth like one who utters a challenge to destiny, and cheered his messmates thus:

"Sonny, there was seven cities a-builded on th' plain;
Coronado, he beheld 'em, so he said.
But I've hunted high an' low, under sun an' in th' rain,
An' them highfalutin' cities, they is fled.
I have ranged this blisterin' desert for a pretty turn of years,
I ken foller paths no mortal man ken see,
But I'd ruther take my chances roundin' up unbranded steers,
Then a-verifyin' statements of a giddy ole grandee."

To this there was added a chorus, ribald and strident:

The Home-Madness

"He was talkin' thro' his hat,
Don't you see?
O where could he have bin at,
That grandee?
Coo-ee! Coo-ee! Coo-ee!"

The wild and melancholy sheep-call, uttered by fifty throats at once, heralded the scarlet face of the sun as it swung arrogantly upon the habitated desert—a desert which, upon that morning, found no man sad among all the tribe of the Esmeraldas.

Wan Tsze-King

Wan Tsze-King

Three ships with princely cargoes lay in the harbor of San Francisco waiting for the morning tide; and meanwhile, it being still early in the evening, Wan Chang, importer and gentleman, was celebrating the departure of his vessels and also keeping the harvest festival with the rest of Chinatown. All in a lacquer of red and black were the walls of the banquet-hall, and the lights, glowing behind their colored glasses, could have been counted by the hundred, although all of them together made less glow than did the green eyes, the fiery nostrils, and flaming breath of the papier-mâché dragon which leered down upon the guests from the end of the hall.

"There is no victim prepared for you, my friend," said Wan Chang, whimsically, addressing himself to the dragon; and the guests, with much applause at the gigantic toy, shook their heads and cried, "No victim for you, O dragon!"

"I am to have the happiness of presenting

my son to you,'' the host announced to the company. ''He accompanied me on this my auspicious visit to America, and has been living at the house of his uncle. Although my son is still so young that I make a demand upon your courtesy by bringing him here to-night, yet I could not deny myself, knowing how great an honor it will be to him.''

All the guests bowed profoundly. They considered it quite right that the boy who was to succeed to the interests that made his father one of the leading men of Hongkong and of Chinatown, San Francisco, should meet with the friends and correspondents of his father.

''He has been feasting in the cabin of the Flying Fish with some youths,'' said Wan Chang, by way of apology for his son's delay. As a matter of fact, he was not sorry that Wan Tsze-king was to enter the hall after the last guest had arrived. He wished him to make a sensation with his graceful, proudly carried body and frank, intelligent eyes. Wan Chang was pleased, too, to remember how fine was the embroidery on the blue silken trousers and the purple jacket. Also, that morning he had given the boy a

ruby, set in yellow gold, to wear upon his finger.

There were steps. Wan Chang went into the anteroom. "I myself will lead in my son," he thought.

But it was only the tutor of Wan Tsze-king who met him, his eyes starting from his head and his breath coming hard.

Wan Chang caught the man roughly by the shoulder.

"My son—"

"Oh, merciful! He is taken! Ten men —as we were entering the carriage at the wharf after the feast—Chinamen—they it was! He and I were alone. I cried out, and the sailors came, but they—they—the servants, the police, all are searching. But likewise, I came to tell you."

He sank on his knees, hiding his face. Wan Chang felt the ice steal about his heart and he hated the man at his feet.

"My grandfather would have slain this varlet," he thought, "but I—am I not of a different age?" Aloud he said: "Drive to the headquarters of the police. Offer as large a reward as they advise. Have the goodness not to venture into my presence

till my son is found.'' The tutor fled, and Wan Chang, setting his face toward the banquet-hall, walked in slowly, with much rustling of his embroidered robes.

''My son,'' he said, ''is delayed. Will you do me the honor to seat yourselves at my poor table?''

Of soups and fishes, of curries and meats, of candied fruits and sugared flowers, of cakes and compounds, there were many courses; but as Wan Chang tasted the savors of spices and fruits, his eyes turned restlessly to the dragon with the breath of fire.

''You insisted on your victim, my friend,'' he reflected, with miserable jocoseness.

After the feast was over, the haggard man drove wildly through the streets of Chinatown to the wharves, and with his servants and sailors, searched like one who has lost a jewel which was all his wealth. He crept into loathsome cellars, routed dim-eyed men out of their bunks in the opium-houses, stole from one underground chamber to another, and everywhere pressed aside swarms of curious human creatures. Through it all he bore an impassive face, and the deep-sunken eyes might have been of bronze, but when

he was alone he cried, "My son! My son!"

As for the ships with the princely cargoes, they sailed away with the tide, bound for the under side of the world. Wan Chang remained behind. For him there was no country. There was only his son—who was lost.

Lee Hang, cook for the Esmeralda Ranch, got leave to go to San Francisco to the harvest festival. It was a long journey which he had to take—two days by wagon over the sun-blistered desert, two days across the mountains into the western valleys, and a day and a night by steam.

Meanwhile Louis Papin put the herders at the task of cooking, and they made some famous experiments. There was a story going afterward of how Bud Hennessey seasoned a rice pudding with pain-killer, mistaking it for vanilla, and how Sam Nelson's coffee came out scrambled eggs as the result of too much "settling."

It was well along in the season, and the men were worn with the interminable monotony, and were well enough pleased at diversion, even though it came in the way of work.

Still, they were more than willing that Lee Hang should return, and as the second week of his absence wore to a close, they fell into the way of watching the drab ribbon of a road with the eagerness of children awaiting the return of their mother.

At last, one afternoon, as the sun bounded along the autumnal sky toward its place of rest—and an uncommonly dust-blurred and burning place of rest it appeared to be—the white top of the supply wagon hove in sight.

"Lee Hang! Lee Hang!" shouted some one. The crew was at supper, eating raised biscuits streaked with saleratus, and rice which was underdone. A shout went up. The men—there were fifty of them—rushed out with greetings which startled the horses in their corral.

The Chinaman sat half-doubled up on the front seat, grinning, as with one inert hand he guided the mules toward the adobe. He gave back no verbal answer. His grin sufficed for everything. He slid rather than jumped from his seat, and flicked the dust of the desert from his white garments. Just then Papin appeared.

"Well, Lee Hang," asked he, in his kindly fashion, "what's the news?"

Lee Hang bowed profoundly, all the time watching the manager out of the tail of his eye.

"Me blung boy," he said, in his oily voice. "He helpee me. Me pay him. He my boy."

"A boy? Where is he?"

The Chinaman went to the rear of the supply wagon and motioned, and a moment later a slender Mongolian youth stood among the herders. His height was almost as great as that of the manager, but it was easy to see that he was overgrown for his age. His forehead was high and narrow, his nostrils and lips quivered slightly, and his eyes looked as if he had been weeping heavily.

"Have you come out here to help Lee Hang?" asked Papin, by way of greeting. He held out his hand, as he always did to a new workman, but the youth drew back, trembling.

"He greenee," explained Lee Hang. "He jus' ober. He no spik Enklis."

"We shall have you two jabbering all day long, I suppose," Papin sighed. "You really

ought not to have brought such a young fellow as that out here, Lee Hang. He's sure to want to go back before the end of a week."

"He stay all light," the Chinaman replied, laconically.

After supper Lee Hang set his assistant to unloading the supply wagon. The youth went about his task awkwardly and with sullen anger. He perspired amazingly and as the result of exertions which seemed insignificant to the herders, who sat about watching him.

"He's soft," they commented; "but Lee Hang will break him in all right enough." They laughed with grim humor. The truth was, that in spite of their eagerness to have the Chinaman return, they did not like Lee Hang. Their interest had its seat solely in the stomach.

Papin, pacing up and down the compound before the cactus garden, had an observant eye, too.

"The boy appears to have the sulks, but really, it's no wonder. He's city-raised, no doubt, and depressed at being among strangers in a cracking adobe in this world of dust. I must watch my coolie to see that he doesn't overwork him."

That night the manager, being besieged with his old enemy, sleeplessness, and wandering about his room, looked out of the window, and by the moonlight, which turned the desert into a sea of silver, he saw the boy creep out of Lee Hang's sleeping-tent.

"What now?" wondered the manager. "Is the bird about to fly away?" It was nothing to him whether the boy went or stayed, but Papin had a mind to give a friendly warning against venturing out unprovided with food. The youth listened cautiously, then moved out into the radiance of the night. He looked toward the west as if trying to measure those dusty miles; then, flinging up his arms as if in silent despair, he sank upon the sand.

"Shall I go out to him?" asked Papin of himself. "We have not a word between us which both can understand. Neither of us has knowledge of a letter which the other can read." As he watched he saw the boy stretch himself at full length upon the sand, with his arms crossed, and his face turned up to the sky.

"It's an odd thing," mused the manager, "but I think I never before had a man about

me who would not rather sleep than enjoy the night. Somehow, that fellow doesn't look like a cook's boy to me. I wonder if I ought to go out and warn him that he's running a risk to sleep under the rays of that moon? But an Oriental ought to know that. Besides, this may be only a part of the plan to escape. Who am I that I should prevent the flight of a free man from the tent of Lee Hang? I'll just go to bed."

The next morning at five o'clock the cook's gong aroused the sleepers, and Louis Papin, for whom this gong was not a summons, turned on his bed and remembered the cook's assistant.

"I wonder if he's made off," he said to himself. After dressing, he looked about for the cook's boy, more than half expecting not to see him. But there he was, serving the breakfasting men awkwardly. He glanced up, met Papin's eye, and flushed deeply, returning the manager's bow with embarrassment.

"Lee Hang," said the manager, "what is the name of your boy?"

"He? O he ain't got much name. He jus' Sam. Nice name, Sam."

"I think I'd like Sam to wait on me."

Lee made a deprecatory gesture. "Sam my boy, Mislee Papin. I mus' hab Sam."

"O very well, Lee Hang," Papin said, and strolled out about the compound. He chanced to be near the well when the cook's boy came out for water, and surprised him with the tears raining down his face. Papin walked up and faced him, looking straight into his eyes. Then he laid his hand on his breast and said, "My name is Louis Papin. What is your name?" Eye and tone made the question unmistakable.

"Wan Tsze-king," the boy answered, sadly, and his supple hands, outspread before him, appeared to add, "at your service."

As Papin walked away musing, he saw the slanting eyes of Lee Hang peering around the corner of the cook-house.

Three hours later the manager, driving back unexpectedly from the grazing-grounds, heard the voice of Lee Hang rasping through the lazy air in angry screechings. Entering his office undiscovered, Papin looked through the curtain of the window which commanded the cook-house. The cook was venting his spleen upon his assistant, who stood listening

contemptuously, and who, at some word which the cook spoke, tore off his work-apron and dashed it on the floor. With a snarl, Lee Hang seized a short whip from the wall and advanced toward the boy, who, with an involuntary exclamation of horror, leaped aside and snatched a sharp, thin-bladed knife from the table.

"I think Lee Hang is about to go to his fathers," reflected Papin, "and I suppose I ought—" But he paused in his thought, for the youth had turned the knife upon himself, and would have used it desperately had not Lee Hang flung away his whip and groveled before the youth, imploring him not to use it.

"That's mighty curious!" said Papin aloud. "Why should it be worth as much as that to Lee Hang to keep the boy alive?"

The youth, with a gesture of impatience, tossed the knife harmlessly at the cringing Lee Hang, and going out, threw himself upon the ground in the shade of the adobe, and gave way to a boyish passion of tears.

The next day Papin summoned the cook's boy to his office for an experiment. When "Sam" entered the room, Papin rose, bowed,

and motioned the boy to a seat. The lad started and a flush came to his brow. He looked at Papin with an indefinable inquiry.

Papin smiled as if to say: "I understand. We are of a class, you and I, although prevented by circumstances from communicating with each other freely."

Again he motioned to a seat. The youth made a graceful gesture of protest, and refused to be seated before the elder man had resumed his chair. Papin reflected that the world was made up of diverting trifles—even in the desert. By the quality of his deportment for that single moment, the cook's boy had separated himself from the cook by a space as great as that separating the eagle from the chicken-hawk.

Papin filled two glasses with cooled fruit juice and extended one to the lad, who accepted it gracefully, and with hope springing to his soft eyes.

After that Papin was not of a mind to leave the boy at the mercy of the cook; and that night, when the quarters were darkened and the night-shift was on duty five miles distant, he prepared a number of telegraphic

messages designed to cover all imaginable contingencies.

"I'll send these straight from the grazing-ground by Bud Hennessey in the morning," said Papin, "and the oily beggar in the kitchen will be none the wiser."

He picked up his tattered Shakespeare—this was the ladder which enabled him to look over the wall of silence which surrounded him. There came a soft knock at the door. With a swift premonition of who was without, Papin darkened the light that the rays might tell no tales through the opened door.

"Is it you, Wan Tsze-king?" There came an answering word. Papin made way for the lad to slip in, turned up the light, and had the pleasure of beholding Wan Tsze-king in his true estate. The boy's face glowed, the spring of youth had come back to his body. He ran to the table, drawing a roll from his blouse, and spread out a series of simple but striking pencil sketches. Papin gave one glance, gathered their purport, and indulged in a congratulatory slap on the lad's shoulders.

The blunt point of a soft pencil told in graphic lines the full tale of Wan Tsze-king's

journey to America, his pleasures, and his adventures. The concluding touches portrayed the scene on the dark wharf when he had been taken from his tutor; the long stairs leading to the underground den where he had been hidden by his captors; the journey in a small boat; the long drive through the country in the charge of three Chinamen; the railway journey under the same charge; and last of all, the drive with Lee Hang in the supply wagon. But in the picture Lee Hang was not the grinning cook, but a hard-featured man with a revolver laid across his knees, and sidelong glance fixed on his captive.

"We are getting very sensational at the Esmeralda," thought Papin, and he drew marginal sketches on the pictures representing coins falling from a full bag. Wan Tsze-king clapped his hands and nodded. He knew, clearly enough, that he was being held for a ransom.

Papin, who was facing the door by which Wan Tsze-king had entered, was wondering stupidly why it was that, there being no wind, the door should be slowly opening. Then, sharply, realization came to him. He put his hand at his hip pocket and leaped before his

young guest. He had expected to face Lee Hang. He faced him and two other men—strangers—of Lee Hang's race.

Papin chuckled a little in a way he always had when in danger.

"Louis Papin," he grumbled to himself, "don't you know any better than to be murdered by slant-eyed heathen like these?" Still laughing he walked toward them. He would have given much for words by which to indicate to the boy that it was time to make good his escape, but he dared not take his eyes from the men who entered.

"Lee Hang," he said, jestingly, "you haven't introduced your friends."

Lee Hang was transformed. The grin was gone; the obsequiousness had vanished. The others Papin knew for the men of Wan Tsze-king's sketches. The cook seemed to be bunching himself together like a cougar about to spring, and Papin was drawing his revolver, when in a breath, the light was out and they were in perfect blackness.

The revolver went off in Papin's hand, and then, fancying that his assailants would expect a retreat on his part, he made a rush past them and ran squarely into the grasp of a

HE PUT HIS HAND TO HIS HIP AND SPRANG BEFORE HIS YOUNG GUEST.

trained wrestler, whose chief desire appeared to be to strangle him.

Papin was not in the best of training, but he bent his energies to keeping his antagonist in action.

"In that way I'll avoid a knife-thrust from the others," he thought.

So the dull noise of their pushing and plunging filled all the place. Save for that there was silence, and Papin began to feel a cold anxiety about his ally.

"Have they made off with the boy?" he wondered.

The Chinaman had bent the manager's head back till it almost touched his spine, and Papin was guessing how long a man was likely to live after his spine was broken, when, down through the length of the adobe there came a noise of rushing feet, and the sharp, barking cry of the Esmeraldas! A moment later there were lights, and the herders. Papin felt himself lifted in the air. His antagonist was throwing him—by way of a farewell.

"When I fall it'll be all over with one inconsequent fool!" he reflected with lightning-quick self-pity. But he was mistaken. He

was caught in stout arms—the arms of Bud Hennessey, who laid him down carefully and undid his shirt. As the purple blood stilled itself gradually in the swelling arteries, Papin heard wild cries from the darkness outside. He wanted to say that the Chinamen were not to be killed—it was not always possible to tell what the Esmeraldas would do when they got a chance to break the monotony of their lives—but no words came to his dry throat.

Some one lifted his head and held water to his lips. It was Wan Tsze-king, pale, with tears in his eyes. Papin drank and felt better. He sat up. Wan Tsze-king laid one boyish cheek against the manager's hand, and then he softly kissed the hem of Papin's old coat. The manager shook him off as one does a too affectionate kitten; then, with quick remorse at his act, he took the boy in his arms. He realized that they had both escaped from great peril.

The men made a fearful howling outside, and the manager was starting to the door to see what they were doing. He hoped they were not tearing the creatures limb from limb, but he couldn't be quite sure. But just then they came in, dragging two human bundles,

which proved to be the two strangers, tied as safe as good cattlemen were capable of tying them.

"How did the brutes get here?" inquired Papin.

"They rode. The horses are outside, sir —or one of them is. Lee Hang has just made off on the other one."

"Is no one following?"

"Twenty are following. They have lassos."

"Ah!" said Papin, as if dismissing the subject. "Well, to-morrow these fellows must be dumped in the supply wagon and taken to town. Lee Hang shall drive them— and Bud Hennessey shall see that he drives straight. Or perhaps, Bud, you'd rather stay behind and cook the biscuit?" The men guffawed.

"Here're the boys, sir! They've got him!"

They had him sure enough—Lee Hang— weeping, cursing through chattering teeth! He tried to kneel to the manager, and he blurted out an explanation of his temptations, of how he was a poor man and the son of a poor man, and these wicked ones had offered

him a great reward for concealing the boy, till the boy's father, who was rich beyond riches, should pay the half of his fortune for his son's return. Such a reward had been offered, and they, the wicked ones, had driven by day and by night to secure the boy and take him with them to his father's house. Then they had forced him, Lee Hang, who was most miserable, to attack his protector. For which he prayed that he might suffer the shame of them that forgot their father!

'Pah!'' said Papin. ''Take him to the wash-room and get the blood off the rat.'' He looked once more at the creature, trying to summon some pity or generosity. ''I hate rats!'' he said, and turned to Wan Tsze-king.

''This boy has wept long enough in captivity,'' he said, in his own voice again. ''So he and I will ride beside the wagon to-morrow, and when the men there are given up to the authorities, we will go on to San Francisco. Kindly have some one put that sofa in my bedroom, will you? Wan Tsze-king and I will end the night as we began it —together.'' He put his arm about the lad's shoulders to draw him from the room.

"As for you—you fellows, you've stuck to me in the old way. I'll remember—"

But at the first word of thanks—and the manager's voice had a quiver of emotion in it which he could not keep down—the herders bolted out of the door as if Louis Papin had the plague.

But upon consideration—if he had had the plague, they would not have bolted!

Two days by wagon over the sun-blistered desert, two days across the Western valleys, and a day and a night by steam. When he reached a house with three black balconies, Wan Tsze-king ran ahead of Papin and pounded on the door. A servant opened to him. Papin heard cries; he saw his friend surrounded. A dozen were chattering. Then down through the dim, scented hall came a man, stumbling along, his arms outstretched toward the lad. Papin chuckled. He was glad he was not dead—he had been glad of it for a whole fortnight.

A week later, when Papin would have no more feastings, no more exhibitions of wrestling and of jugglery, no more gifts of jade and ivory, of silk and crêpe, he said good by to

Wan Tsze-king in the porch under the black balcony.

As he walked away, his heart was full.

"Even an Oriental can have a son," said he, "but I—I—"

The streets of Chinatown, the fluttering bazaars, were swallowed up in a vision of the drab road to the Esmeralda ranch, down which he should presently be urging his horse.

Time's Fool

Time's Fool

The sheep herders of the Californian waste have not much to say in an autobiographical way. Their reminiscences are liable to be impersonal—or fictional. They jest and curse, swing and swagger, lie and laugh, fight on provocation, and keep shamefacedly within their hearts those sentiments and emotions which are the mainsprings of their loyalty and their courage. It is only by this loyalty and this courage that a stranger may discover that sentiment exists among them at all.

It therefore surprised no one that Reg Westover "kept a close mouth"; but it was generally agreed that if he had a mind to tell his tale it would be worth the listener's while, for there was an incongruity between him and his surroundings which amounted to mystery. Slouch as he would in his soiled khaki, letting hair and beard grow long and ragged, neglecting his whole person with an obvious scorn for it, he could not hide certain tricks of movement and address which seemed to

speak a knowledge of crowd and pavements; and the patois of the herders sat awkwardly upon his tongue. He used it extravagantly, and now and then with inaccuracy.

Louis Papin made a point of talking with him one day soon after his arrival, hoping to find some one there, in that desperate solitude, who could talk of the Further World—the world beyond the cactus and the stunted piñon, the sun-dried arroyos and the dusty waste—but Westover had answered with such ill humor and slovenly indifference that the factor turned away in disgust and went back to his serene if melancholy loneliness. Papin had the code of an upright heathen, and to leave each man to the living of his own life was one of the articles of this code; so Westover was dismissed from his thoughts till a disagreeable incident brought him once more to mind.

It was Saturday night, and the men, having "cleaned up," were gathered for a "party." Sometimes, if it was not too hot, they danced at these festivities; sometimes they sang or told tales, and on this particular Saturday night it was agreed that stories were to be told. They started out with tales of

adventure, which were none the less interesting because they were impossible. But little by little the quality of these narratives lowered till they became the scurvy leavings of the imagination—that putrid débris of the soul which men rake up in evil moments.

Not far from the men's veranda, hidden by the night, sat the factor, engaged with his new toy, a two-inch telescope, which he was focusing on a tangle of jeweled stars. He could not help overhearing these sorry tales.

"Pah!" he muttered, under his breath. "Shall I tell them to hold their unclean tongues or shall I move out of earshot?"

He was about to do the latter when he heard Reg Westover's voice. He was making his addition to this obscene lore in an anecdote so blasphemous and scortatory that Papin held his breath in horrified curiosity. Nor was the tale told in an ordinary manner. In this lamentable competition it was meant to cap the climax of the impious. It seemed to be dragged up out of hell and to accommodate itself but ill to the upper air.

Papin presented an austere face before the men.

"Westover," he commanded, "come here."

"What d'yeh want?" The manner was the perfection of insolence.

"You!"

The man arose with insulting nonchalance and went out. Papin led the way to the telescope, looked through it, withdrew his eye, and motioned imperatively to his companion.

"Look through that glass," he said. There was a sullen accession to this demand.

"You see those stars?"

"Yes."

"Two of them are blue. Do you notice that? One is yellow, and one is red. Another is a sort of green. You see that, don't you?"

"I guess that hits 'em off."

"You can't understand it, can you? You can't even make out the force that keeps them where they are, I suppose."

The man turned from the instrument and looked at the factor with mingled curiosity and disgust.

"Well, in the presence of things like that, which I could never understand, and which mean some sort of a power beyond our high-

est thought, I wouldn't dare do what you did just now, Westover! I—I wouldn't be so ungrateful as to—as to blaspheme.''

There was a silence, but the insolent smile was still on the man's face. Papin resumed:

''I've always made a point of not interfering with you men—made too much of a point of it, very likely. I haven't been doing my level best myself, and I didn't feel in a position to criticise other men. But to-night—well, I wondered if I hadn't some responsibility in the matter of the conversation I overheard a few minutes ago, Westover?''

The man's sullenness was intensified, if anything. Papin saw him clench his hands, as if he would like to put a violent end to the humiliation he was undergoing.

''O I hate the preaching just as much as you do, Westover. Preaching isn't in my line. I've a notion, too, that blaspheming isn't in *yours*—eh? It didn't seem to come naturally, some way. The other men were vile enough, but they were unthinking. With you—well, you *thought*, man. I heard the defiance in your voice. Now, why should you feel defiant?''

The man turned away with an ugly shrug of the shoulders.

"Wait," said Papin, with a change of tone. "Wait a moment if you please, Westover. I saw you look in the telescope like a man accustomed to it. Now, I'm quite a novice. I got the glass for company, you see. I haven't the advantage of as much society as you men in the quarters."

The man straightened himself with a sudden, half-resentful gesture which Papin noticed.

"So I feel my way slowly," Papin went on, indicating the glass. "I think I have my glass trained on the Scorpion. Can you tell me?"

Westover went to the telescope and looked through it again. He swung it a little, and then swung it back again.

"Those stars lie north of the Scorpion, I think. Antares is above—see, that red star. This group is Grassia." His heavy manner had quite disappeared. His very intonation was different.

"I see." Papin lifted a hand to his mustache. "What college, Westover?"

"University of Pennsylvania."

The factor took out two cigars, handed one to his companion, and slowly lit the other.

"Man, what damnable nonsense brought you here to chase merinos in a desert?"

Westover was lighting his cigar and did not reply for a moment. Then he said: "I wouldn't ask that of you, Mr. Papin."

"No, I suppose not. I beg your pardon. It was interest, man, not curiosity. Your thoughts are your thoughts, God help you! And mine—my thoughts are *my* thoughts, Westover. Well, make the best, not the worst of your situation. Come talk with me sometimes—when it rains. I can get on very well nights like this, but when the rainy season comes on I'm turned in upon myself. You haven't been through a winter of it yet, but you'll find the evenings dire. They've turned my hair white."

"Thank you," said the other, somewhat resentfully, "but I think I'll stay where I belong—with the men. If I had wanted to stay with my own kind, I'd have stayed there, you know. If I have my reasons, I prefer to keep them to myself. I'm not worrying other folks—in fact, I'm not worrying myself very much."

A weak and almost boyish bravado was apparent in the tone.

"I'm sorry, Westover. If you change your mind—"

"I sha'n't change my mind," said the other, roughly. "And I'll be obliged to you if you will avoid letting the men know that I'm not just the sort of a brute they thought me. You won't tell—"

"Westover!"

"I beg *your* pardon, sir. Good night."

"Good night."

The Descent of Westover.

The Descent of Westover

For a month Papin saw little of Westover. The two men avoided each other—an easy enough thing to do, for there is a social barrier between the employed and the employer, even in the desert. But Billy Dox came one day to say that Westover had been in his bunk for a week and over with a bad cough.

"He ought to hev took to his bed long afore he did," said Dox. "And the hull truth is, the boys think they see his finish."

"Well?"

"Consumption. He wasn't much physically when he come out, and the dust played dido with him. You know how it is, sir, this here climate agrees with you or it don't. When it don't it hustles you into your grave so fast you can't count the telegraph poles as you go by."

Papin went straight to the quarters and looked the sick man over with the skill of one who knows something about most things and a good deal about a few.

"It's a phthisis," he said, shortly, hiding his sympathy. "You'd better let me send you home."

"O I'm a scotched snake, sir, I know that, but you needn't worry about sending me home, because I haven't one."

"No home?"

"What's the difference! Of course if you don't want me to die on your hands, I can crawl off somewhere."

"I don't see that you've any call to insult me," said the factor, sternly. "You haven't long to stay, so why not be agreeable?" The herder saw that he had tried the other's patience a little too far.

"Just as you please," he said, more amiably.

"Let me send for your wife."

"How do you know I have a wife?"

"You look married, somehow."

Westover gave a short, hard laugh.

"If it's just the same to you," he said, "I guess we won't send for my wife."

"Is there any one else, then, you'd like to see?"

"No, Mr. Papin, there isn't. I came out here not to be seen, and I want to be put away without any fuss."

"I'm thinking about myself as well as you," said Papin, severely. "Is there any one who may blame me for not sending?"

"No one will know whether I'm under the ground or above it, and that's the truth. I'm buried already, and now I'm reversing things by dying. I always did things topsy-turvy."

"Your mother—"

"She's dead. O let's drop the subject! Bury me under that monkey-cactus out there —the sooner the better, and forget all about it—as I shall. However, there's this—you might send my—you might let my sister know, after it's all over."

"The address?"

"Miss Evangeline Westover, Philadelphia."

Papin wrote down the street and number, and that noon while he ate his dinner, he arranged with Billy Dox to carry a message to the nearest telegraph station, which was a day and a half to the west, riding as a man rides who goes on an errand of speed.

Then he turned a small adobe storehouse into a hospital, dropped canvas curtains at the window, and rigged up a sort of punkah, which the boys took turns in swinging. Westover

was put in there, and Li Lung, a Chinaman for whom Papin had more than a passing regard, who had been put in the kitchen for old association's sake after Lee Hang, that thief of a heathen, had been cast forth for an attempt on the factor's life, proved his excellence by the attention he gave the invalid. Once or twice every day Papin managed to drop in for a talk, and the two fell into the way of talking about matters that lay close to their imagination—talked of travel, and people back east, and college and books and business. Little by little Westover's sullenness disappeared. He was often querulous, with the fretfulness of a child, and he sulked if Papin was late in making his visits. He came, in fact, to depend upon the impresario, partly because of his suffering, but partly, too, because of an inherent weakness, not of body, but of soul.

"Well," said he one day, as Papin was engaged in ministering to his comfort, "in a week or two more I won't even have the privilege of being cross."

"O, I expect to be rowed by you a good deal longer than that," Papin answered, cheerily.

"'There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest,'" quoted the sick man.

"I didn't know you quoted scripture," smiled Papin.

"Why not? I used to learn fifty verses a Sunday—I and my sister. We looked down on any one who couldn't do that."

"Well, I'm sorry not to agree with the Wise Man," said the factor; "I mean in regard to the absence of wisdom in the grave. There's so little wisdom this side the grave that I'm convinced there must be some beyond."

"I'll soon know," said the other. He made an attempt to speak lightly.

"My soul, Westover, what a monster I am!" groaned Papin. "If you were going on a journey over the mountains, I'd fix you out carefully, wouldn't I? I'd look after your water-bottles and your grub-sack, and see to your saddle and your blankets. But here you are, starting out on a journey so long that no man knows the end of it, and I'm not doing a thing to help you get ready. But I don't know how, you see. I've always had an uppish pride. 'Nature,' I have said, 'shall

suffice for me. I was born, I shall live, I shall die, and in living and in dying I shall take things as they come and ask no questions.' Well, that's the way I settled it for myself. But now here you are, dying in your youth, with your teeth on edge, so to speak, and as I'm a man, I don't know a thing to say to you!''

The sick man smiled wanly.

''Don't worry,'' he said. ''I've had preaching enough done to me—if that's what you mean.''

''Preaching? I don't know that that *is* what I mean. I want to fill your grub-sack and your water-bottles. I want to give you a new saddle.''

''Give me a stirrup-cup and let it go at that,'' said the other, almost gayly. ''You see, Mr. Papin, I probably know a great deal more than you do about the promises given to the faithful. I was dodgasted good when I was—when I was a boy, and Evangeline and I lived with Aunt Belinda Phipps. We had prayers morning and evening; we lived in the fear of the Lord all the day long. Everything was regulated for us. But somehow it didn't suit either of us. Evangeline was a

good deal like me. She liked to do the thing no one expected her to do. But she played in better luck than I did.''

That occasional distaste for the man which Papin felt, assailed him now. He noted the weak chin, the timid eyes, the indications of incertitude of purpose.

''I shall probably like his sister even less than I do him,'' he reflected, and thought with a bachelor's irritation of the way everything would be put about by the presence of a woman in the house.

''I ought to write up to Mrs. Herrick,'' he decided, mentally, ''and ask her if she can't come down and stay while my expected guest is here.''

Virginia Herrick was at home now with her husband and son on the neighboring ranch —and she was a marvel of wifely and young-motherly sacrifice and devotion, according to Papin's verdict.

''But perhaps she will not be the sort of a person I ought to ask Mrs. Herrick to stay with,'' he concluded. Westover had been going on garrulously about his old home life, but the words carried little meaning to the factor. There was a distinct note of com-

plaint in the sick man's voice. He seemed to be finding fault with destiny in general, and with several persons in particular. At length Papin came back from his mental wanderings, and inclined an inert ear to these vaporings.

"It was at college," Westover was saying, "that I met the girl I married. I didn't finish my university course. I thought I had to marry her right off-hand, so I went into business. I had a little money, and I invested it in a bindery. I owned a third of the business, and I did two-thirds of the work. My wife was ambitious for a home of her own, so we built a house, and had a mortgage and a garden and all manner of luxuries. After a time three little daughters came to us—first one, and two years later, twins."

"Well, you seem to have had your share of good fortune," said Papin, rather sharply.

"I had my bad fortune, too—as much bad as good, even then. We couldn't make both ends meet. The children wore embroidered dresses and I had to go without my down-town lunch. The lamps were never ready to be lighted when night came, and

dinner was never cooked on time. My wife said we couldn't afford help, and that she got the meals as soon as she could. She said she was worn out working, and that she never had clothes to go anywhere. I couldn't make it out. Other men's wives got along on the same amount or less. She always seemed to have perfumery and lace parasols, but she'd go without good shoes or cloaks. Everything was at sixes and sevens. I ought to have been able to get some sense into her, but I didn't know how to go about it. If I said anything she cried, and she would get up in the night and pray aloud over by the children's cots. The next morning she'd be sick in bed and I'd have to get breakfast. She used to say the source of all our evils was our poverty, and I thought perhaps she was right. That was the beginning of our disaster.''

''I can understand,'' murmured Papin, sympathetic in spite of his disgust at the man's tone.

''The accounts of the firm were in my charge. I—O what's the use of going on? I'm a fugitive from justice, Mr. Papin.''

''You can escape everything here except memory,'' said the impresario, slowly. ''I

know, for I've tried. What became of your wife?''

''She asked prayers for me at church,'' he said, dryly; ''then she went back to her father in western New York. I turned my face the other way. I went on a sheep ranch in Colorado and stuck it out there for nine months. Then I got to dreaming of the children.'' The sick man dragged himself nearer the edge of the cot, and Papin checked an impulse to move away from him. ''I couldn't shake the thing off. I heard their voices whenever I was alone; I used to dream they were hanging on me and jumping about me, and then I'd wake up and hear the wind whistling down the gorge back of the house, and find myself in that crawling bunk in the shack. I thought I was losing my senses. Anyway, I knew I had to get out. I knew I had to see those girls of mine. I made my way on freight cars or tramped it all the way from Colorado to Utica, New York; I was almost a month getting there. It was raining the evening I reached town. I splashed up through the street to the house where my wife was. It was an old-fashioned place with a big bedroom opening off the parlor, and I—I

stood outside and heard the voices of the—I heard the voices of my little girls in there, Mr. Papin.''

He paused for a moment, breathing hard. Then he resumed:

''Their mother was undressing them for bed. I stood on a stone and looked in, and I saw their three curly yellow heads, and their feet peeping out from below their night-gowns. It was too much for me. I had to lie down in the grass a while to keep from falling. I lay there and let the rain beat in my face. Then, after a time, I went to the front door and rang the bell. My wife answered it!''

''Yes,'' said Papin, very gently.

''I was in rags and unshaved and starved. My eyes were deep in my head, and my hands cut up with hard work. You can imagine how I looked. But I was fool enough to think she would pity me. Oh, I can't go on!''

He buried his face in his thin arm and lay there quivering with a shameful remembrance.

''You were not allowed to see the children at all?'' Papin inquired, softly. Westover shook his head.

''Her words were flails,'' he said. ''They

were flails. They beat the life out of me. I felt myself crumbling away, it seemed to me. In the morning I found myself lying in a barn, but I don't remember how I got there."

"Did you try again?"

"No. I was beaten. I got a job with a shovel and I worked on the street. The children passed me one day, and never so much as looked my way. I threw down my shovel then, and left. Since then I've been wandering. At last I came here, and I've liked it. I seemed to be at the end."

" 'The Edge of Things,' a friend of mine used to call it."

"And about day after to-morrow I'll be over the Edge. After that I sha'n't want anything—not even to see my girls."

Papin began to mutter a verse:

" 'Ah, make the most of what we yet may spend,
Before we, too, into the dust descend;
Dust into dust, and under dust, to lie,
Sans Wine, sans Song, sans Singer, and sans End.' "

"Dust!" cried the sick man, with sudden querulousness, "there'll be dust enough out yonder, Mr. Papin, God knows."

The impresario made no reply. He looked out of the window at the interminable

desert, and the dust seemed creeping upon him before his time—aye, piling upon him, and he forced his thoughts to turn otherward.

"We're all poor devils, Westover," he concluded, pensively, and he brought a drink of fresh water for the sick man, and then went out to walk among the cactus.

A Woman Intervenes

A Woman Intervenes

There came a certain tender day to the desert. There was a reminder of freshness in the air, as if the wind in its long journey had somewhere swept across a sea. A few clouds broke the relentless blue of the sky, and the dry grass flushed into something almost like verdure. The men and horses moved with alacrity, and the sick man aroused himself sufficiently to complain about his breakfast, which complimented poor Li Lung, whose cooking had been meeting with the most sodden indifference.

"It sets me to thinking of the creek I used to live in most of the time when I was a boy —this day does," said Westover, musingly. "It seems as if I could hear water gurgling. Evangeline and I used to go around barefooted all summer. I remember how she used to laugh when she made a cloud of wrigglers scatter as she rushed through the creek, and how she used to feed the turtles."

He sighed and laid back on his pillow.

This was a reminder of the things that were to be—of the woman that was to come. Papin almost shivered. The thought was certainly disagreeable. A timidity and an aversion united to make him dislike the idea of being under the roof with this woman. Would she be as selfish, as complaining, as dull in her moral sense as her brother? There was a great deal of Westover—a great deal of manner and magnetism. He could not be ignored. It was necessary to have a definite opinion about him—like or dislike. In the midst of his reflections, his eyes wandered eastward, from whence the wagon bearing his dreaded guest would come, and there, behold, in the light of day, *was* the wagon, almost upon him! Papin seized his field-glass and adjusted it with nervous fingers.

"There she is," he muttered, in a panic. "There she is, sitting beside Dox!"

He ran to the kitchen and told Li Lung—who met his excitement with imperturbable calm. Then he plunged to the "guest-chamber"—a dusty cell, furnished with an iron bed, a deal table stained red, a mirror, and two chairs.

"Get fresh linen on this bed, quick," he

shouted to Li Lung. "See how dusty this is, you rascal! Bring clean towels, too—an armful of 'em! O my soul!" Everything looked dust cursed and poverty cursed. He thought of Virginia Herrick's cool, exquisitely kept rooms—Virginia Herrick, over at the 'Toinette Ranch, who had made a heaven for one poor sheep factor, and a palace out of an adobe. It would never do to let Miss Westover stay there alone—he should have to write to Mrs. Herrick and beseech her to come to his rescue. But the inconvenience of the Esmeralda! Papin blushed at the thought of it. Even if Mrs. Herrick came, she would not be willing to subject the baby to the trial of being away from its own nursery. And of course she wouldn't come without the baby!

The wagon was almost at the door, and he was starting out, when he chanced to take a glance at his duck uniform. It was far from spotless! He ran to his room, and as he struggled with starched button-holes, heard Dox making his guest welcome out in the office. It was ten minutes before he could make his appearance.

"She'll be nosing around everything," he thought, resentfully, thinking of some half-

written verses he had left lying out on the desk, and of that pathetically thumbed Shakespeare of his, which he could never bear to see in the hands of another. There was a letter from Dilling Brown, too—a letter not for other eyes.

But when he first entered the room he did not see any one there at all. He looked about him with a wild wonder as to whether she was on a tour of investigation about the premises. If so, what would she think of the heap of saddles and water-bottles and bridles and pots and boots and lassos and pails in the court? And there was Bud Hennessey's tame copperhead running about! She would have hysterics the first thing. The perspiration started out on Papin's brow. But at that moment a little figure arose out of Papin's own steamer-chair—it was sitting facing the door and far from the desk with its treasures—and confronted him with anxious and timid eyes.

Dust lay thick over the little brown traveling suit, and on the curls of the soft, brown hair; the little brown shoes showing beneath the short skirt were dusty, too; but around the eyes were circles conspicuously clean.

"She has been weeping," thought Papin.

"I forgot that she would be likely to weep." This anthropological study upon which he was entering seemed to be complex enough, goodness knew! Well, anyway, she must be spoken to. He went forward, horribly conscious of his stiff collar and the awful cleanliness of those white ducks.

"Are you Mr. Papin?" said a quiet voice. "I can see that you are! How good of you to send for me—it was the greatest favor you could have done me, truly."

Papin, shaking her hand—the slimness of which visibly disconcerted him—was making some confused disclaimer to kindness, but she interrupted him with a direct question.

"How is my brother? Is he—"

"Come, refresh yourself, and I will go to prepare him—" began Papin, trying to avoid her eyes. But she interrupted him.

"He is very weak?"

"Yes, but—"

"He is doomed? There is no hope?"

Papin straightened himself and drew his breath in sharply between his teeth. He wished he were anywhere else—under fire of the Mexican bandits, in the thick of the rainy season, worrying over plague-stricken sheep

—anywhere, anyhow, but this where and how.

"There is really no hope," he said, clearly. "If you had come two days later, I fear—"

"I see. Thank you, Mr. Papin. This is the way to my room? And will you be good enough to have my luggage sent in?"

Papin—who knew how to obey—did as he was requested, and then he lit a cigar to steady his nerves.

"She bears it like a Trojan," he said; and he tried to comfort himself with the thought that he would be spared superfluous lamentations. It would have been so like a woman to have rent the heavens with lamentations for a man who had never been able to make honest use of the life that was given to him. Papin paced the floor for twenty minutes. Then he wrote a note to Virginia Herrick and implored her aid. At the end of that time Miss Westover made her appearance.

"I've just been writing to the lady on the adjoining ranch, Miss Westover, to ask her if she cannot come over here during your stay. We are many men here, and I fear—"

"O, if you do not mind, Mr. Papin, please

do not send the note! I should have to divide my time, you see, if any lady came here. I'd have to do that in common gratitude. Just don't mind my being here. Forget I'm a woman. I want to be free to do nothing but care for Reggie, you see. And—Oh, I'd have no heart to talk with any one! You won't mind if I seem silent, will you? I haven't known for years where my brother was. And now that I find him dying—you understand that I can't be anything but—but concentrated on my trouble, don't you? I hope you won't think me ungrateful.''

She said it quietly and swiftly, her words somewhat broken with her distress, but her meaning clear enough.

Papin tore up the note to Mrs. Herrick, and held out his hand.

''I understand entirely,'' he said. ''I'll try to do as you wish—forget that you're a woman, as you say, and help you through.''

Some girls would have flushed, but Miss Westover did not. She sighed sharply, and said, ''Now take me to my brother.'' So Papin led the way and she followed, with a gentle whiffling of her blue lawn frock. An odor of violets made itself faintly perceptible,

and the brown locks were braided in careful grace upon the small head. Papin had not made up his mind about her beauty. She looked fatigued, and her face was naturally small and her eyes large, so that, in spite of her bravery, she made an appeal to the sympathies.

"Remember," he said at the door, "that I haven't prepared him."

He wondered then why he had not done it in the twenty minutes he spent pacing the floor What had he been thinking of? However, it was too late now. He saw the girl straighten her shoulders, and then run almost gayly into the room. He heard her give a little laugh, and then call out something with an indescribable tenderness of voice. He heard Westover say:

"It's not you, Eva! Not you!"

Then he sped back to his office, congratulating himself on having done at least one intelligent thing in the course of a blundering life.

What Papin Had to Tell

What Papin Had to Tell

Undoubtedly Papin's task as host had been simplified for him.

"She wants to be left alone," he said, smilingly, to himself—or perhaps to Bud Hennessey's tame copperhead—"and I certainly ought to know how to oblige her. I've had practice enough in leaving people alone."

But they met in the sick-room, and they took turns at the night-watch, and they stood side by side awaiting the coming of the "Intruder."

It was longer coming than Papin expected. The dying man had a sudden accession of nervous force after his sister's arrival. He took an acute interest in everything pertaining to life. He seemed to be clutching with both hands at the palpable, material evidences of existence. He wanted to talk, to sing, to walk, to eat, to laugh.

Miss Westover's courage was exaggerated to a sort of bravado to meet this demand. Papin heard her jest and laugh, and noticed

that her cheeks flamed scarlet with the strain and her eyes were over-brilliant.

But she made no attempt to appear oblivious to the approaching event. Papin heard her talking about it.

"I shouldn't think it would make any difference how far one had traveled away from home, dear," he heard her saying, "one should be all the more glad to get back if one had gone a good way, you see. There wouldn't be any doubt about the reception, once one walked within the door."

Westover made no reply. Papin could see him lying on his cot, with his eyes straining off across the endless stretch of waste.

"Aunt Belinda always believed in you, dear. I always believed in you. We knew your heart was aching, even when you were doing wrong. We knew you wanted to be good. When Aunt Belinda died she told me she thought you would come back to us sometime, and to your old belief in the goodness of God. It's a desert—this agnosticism—a desert like that out there! There's no comfort in it. And then it isn't respectful—this doubt. I don't pretend to know anything,

Reggie, but I want to keep a respectful attitude toward my Creator. I can't understand any of the things he's done, or myself, or what is to be. But I can wait respectfully. Something may be revealed to me some time.''

Papin sat up to listen! His own ideas, precisely, but told more frankly and sweetly than he had the courage to state them. He half-wheeled round in his chair to get a fuller glimpse of the girl. Then he saw that it cost her something, too, to speak of sacred matters. There were tears of embarrassment in her eyes, and her hands were trembling as they played with the fan she held. He nodded approvingly. He liked a reticent person, and these signs showed him what a strong habit of reserve she must have broken.

Sometimes, when her brother slept, she came out to take a little exercise, and Papin gave her Linda Lund, his strawberry mare, to ride. Papin could see that for all of her natural dread of the event she was to face, that she was not grieving profoundly. There seemed to be a pain back of the pain that reconciled her. He could understand that,

too. The man had had an ill-spent life. This was making up the books—it was squaring things. She said as much one day.

"It's the best way," she remarked, under her breath; "it's the simplest way. As long as he lived he'd be tortured. He'd want the children and his wife and his old friends and the esteem he used to have. He couldn't get any of them back."

Westover had confessed to her that he had told his story to Papin.

"He has one thing regained," she went on; "he used to have a hope of immortality, but he lost it. Now he hopes again. Perhaps he even believes. He is at peace, at any rate."

"This is a fine place to teach a man peace," said Papin.

"Yes," replied the girl, "I know. Nothing seems worth while—except truth. Ever since I've been here I've been thinking how ridiculous the city will seem to me when I go back to it, with every one fuming and rushing and wanting things."

"I suppose you fumed and rushed and wanted things as much as any one when you were there?"

"Yes. I was a little more bewildered than the rest, that is all."

"What did you do? How did you spend your days?"

"After Aunt Belinda died I went into settlement work. There wasn't very much I could do, but I had to live somewhere, so I got them to take me in at the Ann House."

Papin had heard of settlement work, but he had vague ideas about it. He immediately saw visions of Miss Westover caring for small-pox patients, or persuading burglars from their evil ways, or picking up foundlings from doorsteps. He looked at her with utter reverence.

"Tell me what you did," he said.

Evangeline blushed brilliantly. "I—I danced—mostly."

"Danced!" he dropped his cigar in his astonishment.

"Yes; I always loved to dance. I have a knack for it. So that seemed the best thing for me to do at Ann House. I had a dancing class every evening, and the boys and girls came up there after work. It kept them from going to worse places, and it gave us all a great deal of pleasure. It was like

watching a flower open out of an ugly sheath, to see how a sullen, awkward, over-worked Bohemian girl would brighten up after she learned the way of it. It was a fine room, and the music was sometimes tremendously good. Great artists used to play for us sometimes. I was happy there—only I worried about Reggie. And there wasn't any future, some way."

Papin sat staring open-mouthed, trying to adjust his understanding to totally new things.

"I don't know that I was altogether cut out for community life," Evangeline resumed. "I have the home instinct. Aunt Belinda always gave us such a very homey sort of a home. I want to be where I can smell the baking of my own bread, and read my own magazine by my own reading-lamp, and invite my own friends to my own table."

"You have an instinct for proprietorship," responded Papin.

"I suppose so. The settlement life was very exciting. There was always some event. I never seemed to have time to catch my breath."

"Well, you've had time out here."

"I should think the years would cheat you,

here. They fairly sneak by. I never knew such quiet, unobtrusive things. I suppose you have got so that you don't notice their coming and going at all.''

''They *do* cheat me, that's a fact!'' cried Papin. ''I've lived here year in and year out, looking at the dawn, watching the noon, staring at the sunset. I've ridden out among the sheep, overseen the lambing and shearing, slept, eaten, dreamed, and my youth has gone. My friends have forgotten me. I lost my grip of the world. I am Time's fool. You've spoken the truth, Miss Westover.''

He leaned forward to look at her. The large eyes were regarding him sympathetically.

''But I did not mean to make a personal remark,'' she apologized. ''I was thinking of the adroitness of time more than of the effect of its subtlety upon you. I was thinking of the great similarity of the days.''

''Yes; but, however, thought has variety enough. A man can always change his mood, even if he has to keep the same company. I have had my diversions, even here.''

Miss Westover smiled gently, and let that wistful gaze of hers wander away where the high chaparral made a horizon line—but that

had an inconclusive look, and did not deceive the eye, which held the fact of the desert still beyond.

The waste was, however, at its best on this particular day. The sky wore its most mysterious and impenetrable blue. Depths upon depths of blueness tantalized the eye—mocked the spirit. Westward ran the road to the "Edge of Things," where a friend of Papin's once lived. Papin meant to tell Dilling Brown's story to Miss Westover some time. A day ago he would have sworn that his story should never pass his lips, but now he resolved that she should know it. He wanted her to understand the best and the worst of the place. East by north straggled the road to the 'Toinette ranch, where the Herricks lived. Some day, too, he would tell her about Virginia Herrick, and how she gave up everything to live there in the desert with the man she loved. He blamed Herrick, himself. He thought to accept such a sacrifice was too excessive a demonstration of masculine selfishness. He concluded it might be a good story to tell her then and there, but the invalid stirred, and she hastened away to test the temperature of the water in the olla.

Papin watched her without offering to help. He watched her draw the water and see to the wrappings of the jug, and carry a drink in to her brother.

"What a good boy you are," he heard her saying, cheerfully. "You have slept till almost twilight. See, the worst of the sun is over. Did you ever see such a sky? Just fancy how the stars will look when they come out in it! I'll go tell Li Lung you're awake. He wanted to know the very minute. He says he has something simply gorgeous to give you."

Still Papin did not help. He watched her tripping to the kitchen, and he noticed how airy light her step was, and with what a charming nonchalance she played with her little Japanese fan.

"I suppose I shall never see her dance," he reflected. "I shall only see her weep. It is my luck."

The days passed unobtrusively. The delay of the death scene came to produce a sort of dull disappointment, like the delay of any other event. The restrained emotion wore upon the nerves, nibbling at the courage of Evangeline. But she made no complaint

of fatigue, though she slept seldom and never gave vent to her grief. Louis Papin became accustomed to her quiet ways; to the neatness she produced in the establishment without appearing to assume an iota of responsibility. An atmosphere of refinement seemed to be diffusing itself, even over the office, where the shelves with their litter, the worn chairs, the round-faced clock, and the old typewriter acquired an hitherto unsuspected air of domesticity. Moreover, if the invalid chanced to be sleeping at dinner-time, then that meal took to itself the aspect of a function. Whatever Miss Westover's distresses and apprehensions, she did not permit herself to abuse these occasions.

They sat together one evening—Bud Hennessey being on watch beside the sleeping sick man—and Miss Westover watched with kindling eyes the swift approach of the mounted herders.

"The world is all empty, except for them," she said. "That is what impresses me all the time out here. You own the world. That is generally thought to be a very desirable thing."

"But there are not enough things in our

world to make it as interesting as it might be. For one thing, we are defrauded of the pastime of envying. We have no one here with whom to compare our state, so we can neither commiserate nor congratulate ourselves.''

''Well, there's one thing about it, you have your own way out here.''

''Well, hardly,'' said the host, with a certain bitterness of accent. ''A great many things have happened since I came out to run the Esmeralda which were not at all according to my wishes. As, for instance, that poor boy in there—dying. He's only just learned the lessons that would fit him for living. Oh, no man has his own way! If I could have my own way to-day, Miss Westover, do you know what I would do?''

''I have not the least idea, Mr Papin.''

''Well, I should come to life again. I should begin at the beginning. I should find out whether I amount to anything. Here I have been sitting on the fence, and the procession has gone by.''

''You have not met the insurmountable obstacle,'' said the girl, solemnly. ''You have not died the final death. While the

brain thinks and the heart beats it is always possible to be interested in something.''

''My soul!'' cried Papin, half-angrily, ''do you mean that I ought to be interested in the merinos? You mean I ought to be satisfied with the herders?''

Those who had known him for a languid philosopher, content with inertia, dreaming through the golden, idle days, would not have known the accent nor the attitude.

He himself discovered that these lines did not belong in his rôle, as he had learned it in patience and self-contempt years ago.

''I'm trying to get her to pity me,'' he thought, with disgust for himself. And he was, indeed, indulging in the immemorial secondary form of wooing. For the first is that of the adolescent swaggerer, who will arouse the admiration of his love; but the man whom the years have chastened endeavors to awaken the compassion of the woman he wishes to attract. The first says, ''Behold what I am willing to suffer—for you!'' The second, ''Behold what I have suffered on the long road before I met—you! Comfort me for love of Love.''

So it came about that two nights later

What Papin Had to Tell

Papin told his story—the story his friends had wondered over, which no man had ever heard from his lips.

"I was twenty-two," he said, commiseratingly. "Perhaps that is why I was so offended when fate frowned at me. At twenty-two one expects good treatment. I started out by believing implicitly in my future and in myself. I think I've told you that I grew up in Toronto. Well, when I started out for myself, I went the way of other and more famous voyagers down the road of waters to New Orleans. I met a girl there—an orphan, teaching the children at a house where I visited—and I—from the first minute I—I wanted her. I have often reflected on that ecstasy of mine, and wondered if it could be possible that I, a sun-dried, weather-bleached factor of a God-forsaken sheep ranch could be the same glorified being who haunted that house. I asked her to go to my mother's and stay there till I could marry her. I told her we should be married in the church where I was christened, and that she should wear my mother's wedding-veil. I wrote my brother to meet her at Chicago, and then, feeling her secure and

protected, I plunged into work. I assure you my prospects were more promising than they are now. At last fortune was all but within my grasp, and I felt justified in going home for my bride. I remember what a fever I was in. Everything seemed unreal to me—except Lucie. O it was insanity! But I had been consecrated to her, you understand. I had been trying to make even my thoughts worthy of her. Well, I reached Chicago—and there I found a message awaiting me.''

He drew out a long, black purse and took from it a sheet of paper which almost fell apart at its foldings.

''Do not imagine that I usually carry this around with me now. I took it out of my desk to-day and brought it here for you to read.''

Evangeline took it with some hesitation, and read it slowly

''My dear Louis,'' it read, ''you asked me to take care of Lucie. I have done so, and now I find that I must care for her always. We love each other and are to be married to-day. There is no help for it. Perhaps we shall never be happy, but that makes no difference. We *cannot* part.

Believe that our treason will be forgiven by you before it will by ourselves. Come home. We shall be gone. Mother knows, and she wants you to come home.''

Evangeline handed the note back.

''Did you go home?'' she asked.

''I have never been home since.''

Evangeline asked nothing, but her eyes confessed to an unsatisfied curiosity.

Papin sat silent a moment, and then resumed his tale with a grim smile.

''They went to Australia a few years ago —my brother and his—and Lucie. By the Devil's own arrangement I chanced to be at San Francisco at that very time, and I met them on the wharf, face to face.''

''Oh!'' cried the girl, sympathetically.

''It was under the electric light. They saw me, and Lucie clutched at Philip's arm. I lifted my hat and waited.''

''And something banal happened, I know it did!'' cried Evangeline. ''I have noticed that in real life the moments we expect to be dramatic never are so!''

''Yes—that was the way of it. Philip saw me and said, 'Is that you, Louis? I didn't know you, you are so brown.' ''

"Mr. Papin, is that really what happened?"

"That's what happened. Lucie was the next to speak. 'We are on the point of sailing,' she said. I had a nervous desire to laugh. In fact, I felt the impulse conquering me. It seized me by the throat, and I literally ran away, but I knew my laughter floated back to them like smoke after a steamer."

He looked at his companion, half shyly. The color was coming and going in her face, and her eyes looked larger than ever.

"You've never heard from them since?"

"Never. Nor have I ever spoken of it since—it has seemed too grotesque. Don't think I've told the tale for the sake of gossipping about it. I wanted you to know my tragedy, so I've spread it out before you like a map, with all its depressions and elevations. I thought it was something terrific—something like the death valley over beyond us. But you see it is commonplace enough."

Evangeline sat silent for a time. Then she arose with a gesture as if to brush the miserable tale away.

"So that's what you've had to think about here all these years!" she said, with aversion

"THERE ARE BETTER THINGS TO THINK OF," SHE SAID.

for the fact. She had started to leave the room, but she turned suddenly and came back.

"There are better things to think of," she half whispered.

Papin would have given worlds if the light had not been so dim. He could not make out the expression of her face, nor penetrate the meaning of her words.

"I must relieve poor, good Hennessey," she went on, before he could summon his wits. "I'll take the watch till midnight, and then I'll have you called as usual. Good night."

"Good night—good night! O don't mind my foolishness in confiding in you! Or do mind it! I'm—I'm a fool! Punish me any way you want." He stopped, furious with himself, wondering if she hated him, trying to summon back the self-respect he had lost in talking over those he had once loved. "Call me earlier if you need me," he said, and stood while she left the room.

Westover Crosses the Divide

Westover Crosses the Divide

The dawn arrived triumphantly, like a king who comes to his own, and Reginald Westover, opening his eyes, wore an expression of wonder, as if he beheld a new world.

He stretched out all his limbs and relaxed with something of his old languid grace.

"It's very still," he said, and smiled vaguely, as if the stillness had a meaning which he could not catch. "If my little girls—" the smile deepened, became a contraction, grew grotesque—remained fixed.

After a little Papin laid his long fingers lightly on the eyes of the dead man and closed them. Evangeline went out of the room and Papin followed her, and sitting in the dusty courtyard, she made her wailing after the manner of women.

"He was never lucky," she said, sobbing quite unrestrainedly. "Nothing ever came out as he expected it to. When no one else disappointed him, I did. I would never like the persons he wanted me to like or do the

things he wanted me to do. Oh, oh, the poor, poor lad!''

Papin guessed that the dead man had been an unceasing cause of anxiety and chagrin to his family. The ardor of his sister's pity seemed to suggest it. A woman may withhold her love from the strong and capable, but for the inefficient, the faithless, she has maternal compassion.

Two days later it was all over. Reginald Westover was laid in earth.

The Herricks were there to witness it, and most of the herders. Papin read the words of the burial service.

''To-morrow,'' said Papin, ''I shall set a cross at this place.''

When they were all back at the house, Virginia Herrick tried to persuade Evangeline to stay with her for a time. She offered her arguments very graciously, but Evangeline rejected them with a slow shake of the head.

''We need you here,'' cooed Mrs. Herrick. ''You can't imagine what such society as yours would mean to us. I'm sure no one at your home can need you more.''

''O as to that, I'm not needed elsewhere. I seemed to be always waiting and hoping to

find Reggie. Now that's all over I don't know exactly what I am to look forward to.''

But her manner was not as helpless as her words. Papin noticed the suggestion of reserved strength in the little figure; saw that the sorrow made her restless and impatient.

''She's made for happiness,'' thought poor Papin. ''But I could never help her to it. What business have I thinking of her at all? Even if I had any right to speak to her of—of staying here with me—it certainly wouldn't be now, when she's grieving.''

But in his heart of hearts he knew that her grief was tempered with relief, and that the reason he could not bring himself to bid her stay was because he was a coward. It had become his habit to think of his life as quite over and done with. He had regarded himself as a man with a spiritual malady. Now that his pulses leaped within him, and his mind skurried away against his will on happy excursions in the field of anticipatory fancy, he was amazed.

''It's the sap of spring stirring in last year's grasses,'' he said.

Everything seemed intensely dramatic to him—that burial by yellow sunlight on the

desert; the presence of the Herricks, always interesting and more or less unobtainable to him; the herders, hushed and awkward; and that little, alert, sorrowing, nervous, eager-eyed mourner, who appeared only half to mourn—the mourner who had told him that when she served the poor she danced for them. Well, well, whatever came, she would never dance for him!

(Ah, the sap stirring in last year's grasses!)

So he would not urge her to stay.

"Tell us your plans," said Virginia Herrick, softly. "Shall you go back East?"

Evangeline Westover looked at her wistfully. "I think not," she said, slowly. "I've half a notion to go to Los Angeles and —and teach school—or kindergarten. I've prepared myself after a fashion. I'd come to know new people. I'd like to begin all over. It's always interesting—beginning over!" She sighed, and then sat lost in that daze which falls mercifully upon those who have endured a strain or a shock.

It was agreed that the Herricks were to stay that night, and at dinner there was almost a festive air, despite the day's funereal significance.

"I often think how my friends are pitying me," said Victoria Herrick. "They think I'm worse than dead, out here on the ranch, with no theater and no club and no church. But I can tell them they are wasting their sympathy. It's a sort of gypsy joy that one gets into one's blood here. Theoretically, of course, we live in a house, but as a matter of fact we live on air like orchids—grow fat on sunshine, and tall on ozone! I couldn't stand a town now—and I suppose the town couldn't stand me. Why, set me on Nancy, my mare, and give me a southwest wind, and I wouldn't give up the desert here for *any* boulevard."

Papin looked at Herrick with something of the glance of a brave toward a medicine man. What necromancy had he used to teach this beautiful woman contentment here in the wilderness?

"But next year," said Herrick, "Mrs. Herrick and I are going to Paris. We're going to have three months of life, and then we'll come back here and talk it over."

"You ought to see the 'Toinette ranch—the Herrick's place," said Papin to Evangeline. "It's a palace inside."

Then he blushed, because it seemed as if he had been making a plea.

"O well," said Mrs. Herrick, deprecatingly, "it isn't anything wonderful that I should have made things cosy. I find it worth while in the rainy season, you know."

"I know," sighed Papin, and thought of the black nights and the dull days, with the gray rain falling, and the desert repeating an endless tale like an ancient idiot.

At ten the Herricks retired, and Evangeline went to her room to pack. She intended leaving the next morning.

"She's become intensely conventional of a sudden," thought Papin, with bitterness. "She will not stay one night under my roof now that poor wretch is gone. It's an affront —such precipitancy—and I should think she'd know I take it that way."

Affronted he might be, but it is nevertheless true that he paced the beaten ground of his gallery for hours that night. She had so little packing to do that it was incredible how she was occupying herself. But surely, after her labors were over she would come out for a breath of the cool night air. It might be

said to be luscious this night. It was as kind as a warmed and spiced wine, and it caressed the lungs that inhaled it. The sky was of blue-black velvet, and the crescent moon and countless stars made a tender light. A swift and strong bird beat the air above Papin's head; a wild, lonely creature cried from out the darkness, reminding the factor that he was among the untamed places of earth. A pony sniffled in the corral, and a sleeping herder cried out sharply, as if from a goading dream. Everything took to itself a significance. Life appeared to grow more tense every moment—and suddenly, the draperies of her door parted and she came out there in the night!

Papin stood in the shadow for a moment, and she came near him, unconsciously. An indescribable freshness pervaded the negligée she wore, and her hair, loosely braided, hung down her back. The very spirit of that fragrant night she seemed, and she slowly unbraided her hair and shook it out to the breeze.

"The princess has come from her bath," mused Papin, and he tried to slip away further into the shadows and escape, for now that she

had come he felt that he had committed a profane impertinence in waiting for her. But she saw him and gave a little cry, half of surprise and half of—fear? Papin was not perfectly sure it was fear.

Papin Tells Something More

Papin Tells Something More

"I don't see why you cry out," said Papin, angrily—all the more angrily because of his impertinent, quickly checked suspicion that her emotion might not have been all fear.

The girl gave a nervous and half-mocking laugh—the first laugh Papin had heard from her for many days.

"I don't know why the coyote out there howls," she retorted, "and really, I wouldn't take the liberty of asking him." Her voice still had the strained and weary sound of one who has wept much; but for all that she seemed eager for the badinage. (It is wonderful how quickly a flower that has been rain-beaten, will struggle up to renew its bloom when the fairing winds begin to blow!)

"You wish me to go away, I suppose," continued Papin, sullen as a boy.

"I hadn't formulated that wish yet, but I shall, if you desire."

"It's natural that you should want me to go." But he remained as stationary as

the yucca-tree that reared its shaft before them.

"Perhaps it is. But I'm rather artificial."

Papin sat down on a bench. Miss Westover flung out her hair to the breeze and let the wind blow the moist strands into gay bannerets.

"I should say at the present moment that you were anything but artificial," he commented.

"Do you imagine that I am going to apologize for my appearance?" asked Evangeline, with uncertain gayety. "As a matter of fact, I am heartily annoyed that you should have seen me this way, but nothing can force me to say so—officially."

Her simplicity made a maddening appeal to Papin's imagination. The very commonplaceness of her remarks established an intimacy between them of a different character from any that had hitherto existed. The idea that she would presently be gone pierced him like a sword thrust.

"How do you like Mrs. Herrick?" he asked with abrupt irrelevance.

"Evangeline tossed back her locks and straightened herself.

"O she's the dearest!" she cried, in a tone of enthusiasm Papin had not yet heard from her. "How beautiful she is—and how surprising—like those lovely yucca flowers out there in the dust! O when I saw her, so delicate and fine, in this wild place, so heavenly kind to me, so courteous to the men, I wondered you did not all fall down and worship her."

"Herrick does," said Papin under his breath.

"And you would if you dared?" smiled Evangeline. "Well, it is the destiny of some people to find happiness everywhere. Poor Reggie could not—here or anywhere—Oh, poor Reggie! Mr. Papin, I ought to be old enough to have a little patience with the course of nature—with death, for example. But when I think that Reggie is all unknowing of this delicious night, that he cannot see these near, bright stars—"

"Oh," broke in Papin, impatient with sorrow, "why not reflect that he cannot suffer any more? Do you know what home-longings such as he had are? Well, they are horrible little rats, and they gnaw, gnaw, gnaw! I tell you, he's well out of it. But

we who cannot get under the monkey-cactus and forget that and other grotesque things, but must stay and contemplate them all, who have a thousand thoughts that come out like buds and die before they reach flower or fruit for want of some one to culture them—we're the ones that are to be pitied.''

Evangeline twisted her hair up on her head in a loose coil, her white arms gleaming beneath the sleeves of her kimono.

''But there'll be no pity in your heart,'' continued Papin, hunting for a grievance. ''You'll go away from here and forget us. And we'll stay here and remember. This is the Devil's place for remembering! In the nights to come—there will be an everlasting string of them, and no one will mean any more than another—I'll be haunted with a vision of you standing there, all tender as you are now, with that smile on your lips, for all of your heartache; and I'll—''

Evangeline interrupted him. ''I'm glad you've straightened out your pronouns, Mr. Papin,'' she said, in a tremulous attempt to postpone a climacteric moment. ''You said 'we' and I didn't know whether you meant Bud Hennessey or Billy Dox or the Chinaman.''

Papin Tells Something More

"I meant the coolie, of course," said Papin. He got up and came toward her. She rolled her arms in the flowing sleeves of her gown and looked at him with an exaggerated gravity.

"You are making game of me," accused Papin, enraged at that piquant solemnity.

"I don't think I am," said the girl, as if it were a matter of speculation with her. "I really hope I'm not. It would be such a poor return for your hospitality!"

Then, swiftly, a recollection of the nature of that hospitality came to her—the comfort he had given her dying brother, the respect he had shown her, the manner in which he had tried to share her sorrow. She flung away her woman's weapons with disgust.

"O forgive me," she cried. "Believe me, I am not laughing at you! How could I laugh at you after all you have done for me —after all you have been to me? Mr. Papin, do not be offended. I couldn't endure it. I—oh, I mean to do right, but the place is so strange, you—I—I ought to say good night. Only it seems cowardly to do that—now."

"You *are* afraid," reproached Papin.

"You are afraid of me—as you ought to be. For I am going to ask you to give up your life for me. I am going to ask you—knowing how women sacrifice themselves—to stay here with me and be my wife. You ought to be afraid of this place, for it is the desert, and I am going to ask you to make your home in it. I want you to live here in this wild sand-waste. Do you understand? You call yourself a coward. Well, it would frighten any one to listen to what I have just said—to be urged to live in a desert with a worn, sad cynic. You saw the scoria on your way out here—those lava buttes, scarred with burnt-out fires? There are miles of them. The road through them seems to lead into the gateway of the place of lost souls. In fact, it does—it leads here—here, where I am asking you to stay!"

What had come over the moonlight that it seemed to resolve itself into globules of radiance, like enormous jewels? What troubled the stars that they had ceased to be stationary in their places? Why was the adobe floor of the patio no longer firm beneath his feet? Above all, why did the woman, who but now had been flesh and blood, look so like a spirit? Was she drifting away from him—a flushed,

smiling, tearful, palpitant, too lovely Eurydice?

It seemed to him, worn as he was with his monkish and insignificant days, that if he could—a more prosperous Orpheus—clasp her to him, that he should swoon for sheer delight. He moved toward her blindly, but she grew more spirit-like, more a thing of moonshine and mid-summer madness.

"I am not afraid of lost souls," she sobbed. "Send to-morrow and have the padre brought. I am going to stay."

She vanished. Papin stretched out empty arms. Or—had she come again? No, nothing gleamed in the pallid light save the yucca flowers, a symbol of the blossoming of waste places. The moonlight might have been some lucent liquid of oblivion, so abundantly did it pour upon the earth. A mysterious word was creeping along the desert—an ancient word of man's immemorial joy.

She was going to stay, this little creature! Delicate as a child, brave as a man, loving as a woman—the dear little brown thing with the abundant hair, the trick of looking mournful and coquettish at once, the habit of serving others—of dancing for them!

Some time, perhaps, long, long from now, when he dared ask favors of her, she would dance there on the hard earthen floor. She would emerge in the moonlight, clad in white; she would comfort him as she had comforted others with an exhibition of her beauty, her grace, her suppleness, her incomparable dark loveliness!

O profane and despicable man! (So he reproached himself, beating his hands against his brow.) What old-time spirit of masculine pride and ownership, what disguised sensuality lurks in love, debasing it! She, the pure one, a martyr for his sake, compassionate, courageous, she surely is to confer greater privileges than this! She is to reveal wonders of purity and love in her eyes. She is to instruct. She is to lead. Her little feet shall tread holy ways as well as flowery ones!

More beneficently upon the desert fell the silver light. The ground wind became articulate, murmuring the mysterious news. Louis Papin felt oblivion steal over him graciously. He threw himself in a hammock. Sweet odors of the desert flowers came to him, and he was conscious of them. The sands stretched out—a shining sea. Even the long

waves of the beach were simulated in the wind-buffeted moon-gleam. At length he fancied he heard the slow sob of the surf—its waters seemed to reach him—he was deliciously submerged.

He slept, and in his heart, treasured a dream like a jewel.

The Lady of the Northern Lights

The Lady of the Northern Lights

Thomas Letlow and Dilling Brown, gentlemen adventurers, shook the dust of the desert off their feet and hastened toward San Francisco, where they were to take ship for the Far North.

They had for spur two things, to which only the dead, the very foolish, and the very wise are indifferent, to wit, gold and woman. Therefore, they traveled fast. But, Tantalus help them, there were delays! First a horse fell sick and had to be left for the gluttonous birds of the waste. (The coyotes have noses, too!) And there was a washout where the railroad crossed the path of a mountain stream; and what with this and that, when they reached San Francisco the boat they were to have taken was gone.

Letlow, who was after the gold, deported himself like a philosopher.

"There are other boats," he said; "we can sail as well next week."

But Brown, who followed happiness in the more alluring form, fell ill of impatience—he

being weakened by long suffering of mind and body—and lay, listless, near a window which looked upon the loveliest bay of the sunset sea.

"I suppose there is Destiny in it," he declared to his friend. "From first to last it has been Destiny. How improbable, when you come to think of it, that I should have left the East, where I belonged, and come to so desperate a place as the Edge of Things" —for so he called the range where his sparse herds had browsed on dusty "filleree" and desert flowers—"only to find there a footprint in the sand, so to speak!"

"Destiny *does* mix up horribly in our affairs," smiled Letlow. Personally, he appeared to have reasons for approving of her intrusions.

"I shall never forget," said Brown, reminiscent, and more or less maudlin, after the manner of lovers, "how I felt when I entered that vacated adobe out there in the world of yellow sand. The sun grinned at me like a Cheshire cat—you don't know what a sardonic smirk the desert sun can put on, Letlow! Well, I went in, and almost at the first, dead still though the place was, it seemed as if I was met at the door and welcomed."

"Have a cigar," said Letlow. Brown took it, but held it aimlessly.

"There on the chimney was that inscription that was to comfort me in all the days to come, 'He, watching over Israel, slumbereth not nor sleeps.' There were the little jugs and jars, made by her unskilled fingers and baked in the sun; there was her little bed, her mirror, her dressing-table, her thimble, her riding glove!"

He took a small blue celluloid thimble out of his pocket and regarded it affectionately for a moment before replacing it.

"It helped me to understand myself," he concluded. "It enabled me to become acquainted with my own soul."

"You are a lucky dog, then," commented Letlow. "Heaven knows I'm an inscrutable hieroglyph to myself."

"Well, you're plain reading to me," smiled Brown, turning a mournful yet affectionate eye upon his friend. "Of all well-made, clear-typed, lucid, straightforward, and corking books, you take the cake."

"I didn't expect to draw in such a big one as that," said Letlow, with a comical frown.

"Well, I'm no confectioner," laughed Brown, "but I like to try my hand at taffy now and then. And you deserve it! Why, heavens, man, when I journeyed to Papin's that night, with night-hags hounding me, and looked in through the window—sullen and hateful and horrible, and at the end of hope—and saw you, it was like a glimpse of heaven to the souls below!"

He grew uncertain in his tones and held out a thin, mahogany-colored hand, which Letlow shook violently in his two firm, white ones. "Like heaven to the souls below," repeated Brown, and lay back on his couch for a time in silence.

"Then," he resumed, after a while, "you turned into a kindly Mephistopheles, Tommy, and offered me life—this kind and that kind. But your Faust was inert, and was tempted by none of these things. At the last came the revelation that you were going to Alaska on the same ship with my desert woman." He hesitated a moment, and flashed out what Letlow was prone to call one of his iridescent smiles. "Wasn't it corking," he asked, "that coincidence?"

"O well," said Letlow, in the easy tone

of one who stands in with the Fates, " 'There is a destiny that shapes our ends'—"

"Yes," acquiesced Brown, dreamily. "Then we came on. It was a new and wonderful feeling to me, Tommy—that pursuit of a woman. I tried to fancy how we would meet, I knowing so much of her, owing her such a debt of gratitude; attracted by her spirit alone, as the body and soul of no other woman had ever attracted me; she knowing nothing of me! What should we say? How should I state my case? The situation was unique, Tommy."

"Was? Say is, man. It grows uniquer and uniquer." He arose, and selecting a carnation from a bouquet which he had provided for the enlivenment of the sick-room, placed it in his buttonhole.

"Every day," said Brown, his eyes reaching seaward, "I said I was one day nearer her. I had such visions and hopes! And then we reached here after those infuriating delays and she was gone."

"O well, cheer up," said Letlow. "It's an accident that gives a little zest to the chase."

Brown raised himself upright and shot a reproachful glance out of his hollow eyes.

"Zest?" he said, "Zest? You know nothing about it, Letlow. It makes me feel that I am one of that accursed brotherhood who forever chase phantoms! I shall never meet her—I feel it—and I'll never get over my longing to meet her—the one woman, Tommy, I swear, who could have understood me."

"You're worse at croaking than a bullfrog in May," snapped Letlow, with an oath. And he put on his hat with a gesture of angry despair. He was back in an hour.

"They tell me Cusack was precipitate," he said, "and that his boat will be plowing through ice half the time. But I've found another fool almost as bad. He's got a brother up there in some sort of icefield starving, I believe, after the fashion of the country, and he's pushing up with supplies. He sails day after to-morrow—"

"He'll take us?" cried Brown, sharply.

"Yes, you sweep. Now shut up and let me have a little peace."

He stretched himself out with a novel and a pipe like one who has earned his reward.

In Taku Harbor

In Taku Harbor

Taku Harbor, Alaska, is a safe and melancholy spot. Glacial winds blow upon it with their indescribable and delicious clarification. At night, a boat shoving into the keen point of sea which pierces the land is walled by black and mournful mountains, so that the sea takes to itself the aspect of a dark mirror in which the stars are reflected with extraordinary brilliancy.

It is a place of great peace and loneliness, which the little ill-smelling Indian village appears to accentuate rather than mitigate.

Here in the dead of night came the Scorpion, the boat—small, staunch, impertinent, and swift—upon which Dilling Brown and Thomas Letlow had taken passage.

"The Gateway of the Shades," muttered Brown to his friend, as the plucky boat stuck its copper nose into the crisping waters.

"There's another steamer tied up there," said Letlow. "Curious! It must be from British Columbia. They said at San Fran-

cisco and again at Tacoma, that, barring Cusack's Lotus Flower, we were the first to come up this year.''

Brown said nothing. He left the taffrail and went to his steamer-chair in the lee of the cabin and lay back in it rather heavily. Letlow, his own heart beating somewhat faster than usual, paced the narrow deck alone.

''Ahoy there!'' came a voice from the bridge.

No one on the other boat bestirred himself.

''They didn't expect company,'' said the second officer to Letlow. ''I guess every one is asleep.''

But the man on the bridge was insistent, and there presently sounded a gruff response.

''Ahoy!''

''What's your name?''

''Lotus Flower.''

''San Francisco?''

''Aye, sir.''

''Where bound?''

''Juneau.''

''They are all asleep,'' said Letlow to Brown. ''But in the morning—''

"In the morning they may be gone," said Brown. "It would be my luck!"

"Confound your luck!" growled Letlow. "You make me tired, Brown!"

"Go to bed, then," said Brown. And Letlow did.

So by ways of desert and sea, he had come to his love! How sad and how still had been the long reaches of fjord, strait, and sound! Dull blue the sky, dark green the shores, humid and heavy the air, solemn the waters, long and heavily quiet the days. Now, here, by some chance, he had overtaken her—his love of the brave heart!

She was sleeping near him. She knew nothing of him, but he had come to inform her, to awake her! After the hundred years of sleep, he would kiss her lips!

His boat was anchored. It was drifting toward that other boat, as if it longed to touch it! Well, let it reach and hold it! As for him, he would watch. By no vicious sleight should that other vessel escape him again. As Letlow had insinuated —with extraordinary intensity—the time had passed when he could talk of luck. Now his destiny was in his own hands.

But what was that? A great ribbon of delicate brilliancy was flung up from the horizon to the zenith, held there a second, and drawn back. The darkness palpitated where its vernal splendor had shone. Suddenly the Spirit of the North crowned herself with crimson and gold. The glittering coronal sat upon her brow regally.

"It is fit there should be a celebration," said Brown, with a lover's egotism.

Spears of white, of crimson, of green, began to dart heavenward. There ensued a splendid sport in which these living colors appeared to hold a tourney.

"The crimson wins!" shouted Brown to the second officer.

"Ten to one on the green," laughed back the man.

The swift currents seemed to touch the rigging of the ship.

"It looks like the Last Day, doesn't it?" remarked the second officer.

"It doesn't matter," cried Brown. He shook his fist at a menacing arm of "white samite, mystic, wonderful," that hung above the ship.

Something caught his attention. A

woman's figure appeared upon the upper deck of the Lotus Flower. She mounted with agility to the bridge. She stood there, dark, slight, inspired, while the streamers of light played about it. She lifted up long arms as if to dip the fingers in that impetuous, incandescent element which played about her.

Brown thrilled with an all-comprehending consciousness.

"A woman!" ejaculated the second officer.

"The Lady of the Northern Lights," said Brown, from his dry throat.

The second officer went below. Dilling climbed to the bridge of the Scorpion—it was still a little lower than that of the Lotus Flower. The two boats continued to near one another. The air was vibratory to a startling degree. Every sound was emphasized—the groaning of the distant glacial river, the sharp sob of the surf, the lamenting of the wind in the pines, the aërial detonations from frost or electricity—Dilling could not decide which.

"A mystic place and hour for the meeting!" he thought.

He knew that on her eyrie she was aware

of him on his. He spoke out, and as he spoke the upper heavens seemed to be dissolved into a violet liquid which streamed down upon the ships.

"A wonderful night, madam," he said.

It is written that there is a brotherhood, nurtured in many lands, speaking many tongues, of unrecorded membership, yet recognizing each other whether they meet in marts or seas or purlieus—the Brotherhood of the Modulated Voice. Katherine Cusack, for a month accustomed chiefly to the deep monotonous voices of the sailors, answered the call of one of her own kind.

"It is wonderful indeed." The voice had a touch that confessed her Irish ancestry. "And lonely as the world's end."

"I have known a lonelier place," answered Dilling Brown.

"Have you that?" The modulation was deep now. "And where, if I may make so bold?" (There was every indication of at least two Irish forebears.)

"In the desert." Dilling held his voice as steady as he could.

"The desert?" The voice indicated a reluctance to enter upon the subject.

"Yes." He would tell her no more of that just then. "But this is of all places the wildest."

"It's an enchantment, I'm thinking," she said. "We must watch out or we'll be turned into goblins." And indeed at that moment she was bathed in the weird radiance.

"Why not?" laughed Dilling—and the laugh seemed to reach down to the foundations of his being and to flood him with the joy of living. "Are you afraid?"

"A little," she admitted. "I feel as if I might be tied to the end of one of these crimson ribbons and snatched away into the blue ice crevasses and left to live there in the frozen world."

"Like enough," admitted Dilling, and he intruded a vital question, "When do you leave here?"

"Not till to-morrow night, I'm told."

The captain of the Scorpion joined Dilling. A group of the crew gathered below. After a little the fires of the North began to pale. The woman on the bridge of the Lotus Flower became a dark and silent shadow. Dilling longed with an almost irresistible longing to take her in to the fire, the light, the comfort.

He felt absurdly intimate with her—the fact that she might be getting chilled concerned him. It was with difficulty that he restrained himself from calling out to inquire if she were warmly enough clad. Had he done so, his voice would have had in it that tone of tenderness and autocracy which a man employs in addressing the one woman in the world. Some one spoke to him and he turned to answer. When he looked again, that slight figure on the bridge was gone. He went to his bunk and slept heavily, as people do after a sorrow or a joy.

The next day dawned clear. The sky and water had the depths and brilliancy of rare sapphires. Dilling Brown ate sparsely and went ashore with his friend. At the village he saw two ladies buying silver trinkets of the Indians.

"Letlow," he said, "look!"

"I behold!" said Letlow, quite solemnly. The elder was Mrs. Cusack, wife of the captain of the Lotus Flower, and aunt in marriage to Katherine. She was a dark, capable-looking, strong, plain woman, dressed in furs. Her companion stood at least five feet ten in her lynx boots. Her head was carried with a

peculiarly valiant poise, her eyes were large, patient, and quiet.

"They are dark blue," said Dilling, under his breath. "I remember Papin thought perhaps they were."

An aspect of serenity distinguished her. Her face was fair and the cheeks and lips deeply colored. Dark brows all but met above her straight nose. She gave the impression of having too much hair. It escaped provokingly from the little cap of lynx fur and softened the height of her forehead. And her smile—but Dilling was to discover this later—had a piquancy, caused by going up a little further on one side than on the other. This mitigated the gravity of a face which else might have been disconcertingly noble in its expression.

Letlow marched straight upon them.

"I am looking for Captain Cusack, madam," he said, addressing the elder woman. "We are the men who hoped to take passage with him at San Francisco."

He conducted introductions boldly.

"I think I know where to find my husband," Mrs. Cusack said. She turned toward the salmon cannery. Letlow joined her, in-

quiring about the voyage of the Lotus Flower. Dilling Brown, steadying himself, telling himself over and over that it was not a dream, placed himself by the side of Katherine Cusack. She turned toward him with a friendly smile.

"I have an idea that you are the gentleman with whom I was talking last night," she said. He nodded, but could not smile. He wondered what she would do if he were to say: "Do you know you are going to marry me? Do you know I have followed you hundreds of miles? Do you know this is the moment to which I have been looking forward for two years?" What he actually said was: "I never dreamed of such a scene as that of last night."

"Nor I," she said; "but then, I am always being surprised. Just as I get accustomed to the ways of earth—or that part of earth in which I chance to be—something amazing happens."

"We seem of very little importance up here," commented Brown, looking up at the mountain solitudes about him.

"Of very little indeed," acquiesced the girl. "But that is comfortable, too. It less-

ens my sense of responsibility and makes me feel like a child—and I like that. We're looked after, I'm sure, Mr. Brown.''

Dilling leaned rather heavily upon the stick he carried.

''' 'He, watching over Israel, slumbereth not nor sleeps,' '' he quoted, slowly. That quiet grave glance turned full upon him then.

''Is that a favorite quotation of yours, Mr. Brown?''

''Of all things ever written I have said it oftenest,'' said Brown. He looked straight back in her eyes. They were both seeing, as in a vision, the ''floor of the world,'' hot and yellow, an adobe hut, a rude room, a fireplace, a bold inscription. Days of courage, pain, comfort, adventure, introspection, dread, fear, despair, passed before them.

They became aware that they were alone. Letlow and Mrs. Cusack had gone into the cannery.

''Let us walk on the beach,'' said Brown, hoarsely. They turned toward it. The girl was quiet. A heavy shadow appeared to have descended upon her. Yet she walked with a firm, strong step. Her whole carriage was gallant.

"You said last night," she ventured at length, "that you knew a lonelier place than this—the desert. May I ask what desert?"

"One where I dwelt for two years," said Dilling. "I lived in an adobe and tended—and tended sheep."

"Oh," she cried, "oh!"

"I had a coolie to cook," he went on, shaken by some mysterious fear and tumult, "and two men to help me herd. There were the sheep, the days, the nights, the silences, the thoughts. They are all mixed up together, you know."

She made no answer at all. She seemed to draw nearer to him. The fur of her jacket brushed Dilling's arm. His trembling increased. He had a sense of needing to rest. His breath troubled him—his heart seemed to be failing him.

"Katherine!" The voice came sharply into the fateful silence.

"It is my aunt," said the girl. Dilling took hold of her arm to help her along. He could feel that she, like himself, was deeply moved. They caught up with the others.

"We'll go back to the Scorpion, Brown,"

said Letlow, "and transfer our effects to the Lotus Flower. This is Captain Cusack, Mr. Brown. You see, Miss Cusack, we insist on being your fellow-voyagers. It is useless to try to escape us."

Katherine Gets Her Thimble

Katherine Gets Her Thimble

The cabin of the Lotus Flower was yellow —most appropriately. The cheerful thermometer on the wall recorded seventy-five degrees of heat. An excellent woodcut of the "Northwest Passage" hung at the aft end, and Chilkat blankets brightened the bare spaces.

As the good little boat puffed along the wonderful reaches of the Inland Passage, and the gulls, disturbed in their immemorial haunts, made noisy protestation against intruders, the inhabitants of the cabin contented themselves after the manner of good travelers.

Letlow sat by the window, where he could look out. Mrs. Cusack embroidered pomegranates—in defiance of her surroundings—on a linen centerpiece. Captain Cusack and his niece played chess. Dilling Brown did nothing at all, and did it rather intensely.

"Two moves and I have you!" declared Captain Cusack.

"I don't believe it," declared his niece,

with the fatuity of mere woman—who may not comprehend the inevitable when it takes mathematical form.

"Move!" dared Captain Cusack.

Woman can at least obey.

"Check!" The Captain shouted, with masculine satisfaction.

Miss Cusack sulked prettily.

"At least," she said, "I know how to sew." She picked some work out of a sewing-basket.

"There, I forgot I'd lost my thimble! Think of being a thousand miles from a thimble!"

Her dark brows met in a simulated frown. As a matter of fact, she was not in the least sorry to escape this feminine occupation.

Dilling Brown put his fingers in his vest pocket and leaned forward, presenting the girl with a little blue celluloid thimble.

"I am almost sure it will fit," he said.

Miss Cusack adjusted it slowly. She felt the man's eyes fixed on her with a disconcerting scrutiny. She looked at the little thimble with widening eyes. Then she arose and walked the length of the cabin and stood looking out at the procession of mist-shrouded

hills. Dilling followed her. He stood close to her. After a moment he put an irrelevant question.

"Is it not your opinion that that shelf looks rather absurd with those things on it?" he asked.

The steward had plaited some napkins in the form of ships and put them up for ornament on a little shelf.

"As absurd as possible," she acquiesced.

"Take them down," he commanded; "I will put something in the place of them."

He left the cabin, and she did as he bade her. When he returned he held in his hands certain crude, graceful jugs of sun-baked clay. He put them on the shelf and regarded them critically.

"It is fortunate there is a ledge," he said; "they would be in danger of being broken."

Captain Cusack came out and eyed them with disdain. "I can't say," he declared, "that I think them much of an improvement on the napkins, Mr. Brown. At least you could tell what the ships were intended to be."

Brown flushed; Letlow laughed.

"I think they are quite fetching," de-

clared Mrs. Cusack. "Katherine, you used to do something of that sort now and then, didn't you?"

Katherine made no answer. She moved again to the window.

"You made *those*," Brown whispered in her ear.

Her whole manner indicated a cognizance of his words, but she said nothing. He took from his pocket a packet of letters wrapped in oil-skin. He put it silently into her hand. She walked slowly down the length of the hall to her state-room and entered and closed the door. The Cusacks were oblivious, but Letlow saw it all.

"Let's take the deck, old man," he said, under his breath.

A heavy mist was gathering. They went out and paced the deck like dynamic specters.

"You're a fool, Dilling," said Letlow, cordially.

"Thank you," retorted Brown; "but what of that?"

"Couldn't you have waited a decent length of time before springing all that on the girl? She'll take you for a lunatic."

"Walk a little faster," said Brown, cheer-

fully ignoring these observations. "I like to feel myself moving!"

They pounded around the deck like Berserkers till the supper-bell rang—and at that meal Katherine Cusack did not appear.

Letlow looked reproachfully at his friend. Brown smiled vaguely, ate little, gloomed and grinned alternately. After tea he played cards till ten and lost every point a man possibly could.

They all turned in. He also made a feint of going to his state-room, but as soon as he thought himself safe, he stole out on deck.

The mist had lifted and the moon was out. The still and mysterious world was glorified. The shores were as beautiful and solemn as the Island of the Dead. A wolf cried from the inner shore. At the prow stood a shrouded figure.

Brown went toward it breathlessly.

"You are here," he whispered; "you are here!"

She half turned.

"Yes," she said. She wore that piquant, deprecating smile.

"Well?" he whispered.

"Well, I think I—I would like to—to know you, Mr. Brown."

"Know me?" Brown gave a short laugh. "Know me?" The laugh became a roar. It troubled the echoes. It chagrined Miss Cusack. No doubt it disturbed the sleepers in their bunks. "Know me? If you don't know me now, you'll never know me. If *you* don't know me no one ever will."

"O," said the girl, "don't laugh at me! Don't make me feel that I fall short of what you expected, please."

Dilling seized the hand that had been extended in protestation and carried it to his lips.

"Let me remove this mitten," he said; "I have something here I fancy will fit this hand much better."

He drew from his pocket a worn riding-glove, and with nice care fitted it over the girl's chilly fingers. As he did so he kept up his pleading with valorous assiduity.

"Never was a glove more abject than this one when I found it," he said. "It lay, covered with dust, in that deserted room out at the Edge of Things. 'Poor little glove,' I said to it, 'what hard-hearted mistress has left you here?' I put it in my pocket. I

comforted it. After a time when Louis Papin—God bless him!—told me your story, I knew that perhaps it had gone with you that dreadful day when you rode out to your poor brother.''

''Oh, don't, please, please!'' whispered Katherine, with a choked sob.

''Well, well, then, I won't! Only this I must say, that after a time the glove got to comforting *me*. In the days when the story of your brother ate into me like a cancer till I feared my fate was to be like his own, the little glove, lying at my heart, spoke courage to me.''

He looked very boyish just then. He was what his Aunt Betty, who saw him through his boyhood, would have called in his ''sweet'' mood. The girl regarded him with an almost maternal glance. She evidently thought him sweet, too.

He looked up, suddenly, having finished his task of fitting the glove.

''I refuse to believe,'' he said, ''that you care for anybody else.''

Katherine made a little teasing mouth at him.

''But do you?'' he asked.

She laughed lightly.

"I love—" she hesitated, and the Aurora, beginning to leap in the sky, menaced her playfully.

"Yes?" Brown straightened himself and stood ready. "Yes?"

"No one."

"Ah! And never did?"

"Never."

"You are telling the truth?"

She tried to look offended—then smiled with a certain tenderness.

"If I ever bothered to lie, Mr. Brown—which I do not—I would not lie to *you*."

"Oh!" he came nearer with an abrupt motion.

"Mr. Brown!" There was forbiddance in her aspect. The pale glow in the North began to brighten. The swift javelins were once more tossed across the sky.

"My Lady of the Northern Lights!" he breathed.

Any one who looked at her would have known her temperament to be ardent. His devotion, his story, his chaste, ecstatic face, were making their appeal. But she made another attempt to deny him.

"I can promise nothing," she said, "ex-

cept that I will, if you wish, continue the acquaintance.''

They were the inept and insincere words of a woman, unsophisticated and tender, tormented by her own emotions.

Dilling gave a boyish laugh.

''But come to think of it, perhaps you ask nothing,'' said the girl, piqued.

''I ask everything,'' he cried.

A look of maidenly alarm came into her eyes. It is not a foregone conclusion that one who has courage for sorrow will be able to face an intrusive and adventurous joy. She chose to remember the lateness of the hour, the loneliness of their situation, the unconventionality of their discourse, and made an effort to put him off.

''To-morrow,'' she said, ''to-morrow we will speak of this. Now, I beg you—do not be offended—let us say good night.''

Dilling brought his fortitude to bear. They said good night. They congratulated themselves on their dignity. Then a wind blew from the mysterious chambers of Destiny and Youth, and as they turned to part, she felt his arms about her and knew, as in a dream that she had lifted her lips to his.