

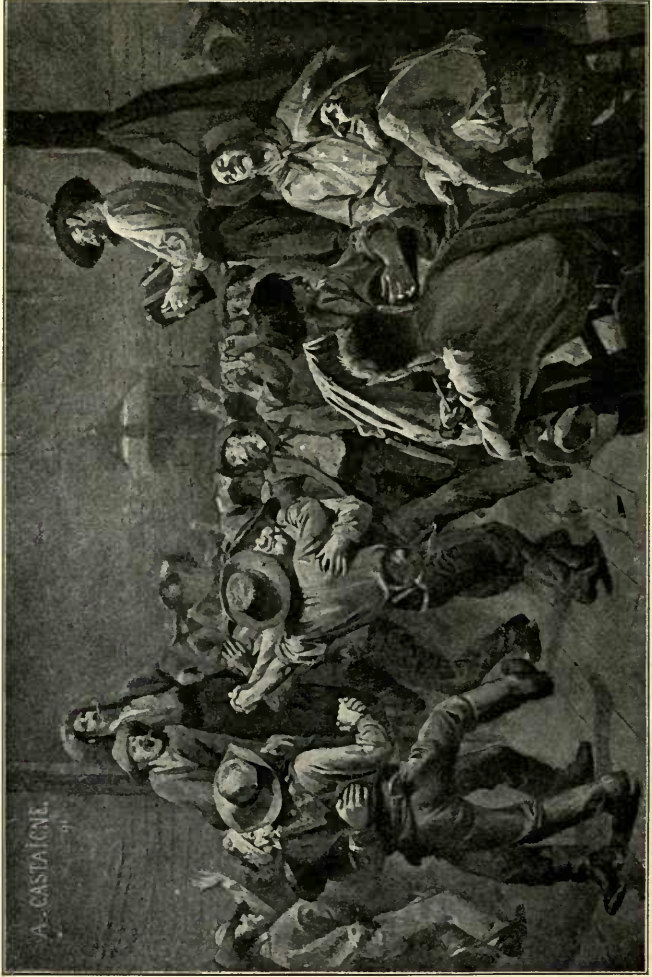


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MINERS' BALL

NOVELS AND STORIES
OF
BRET HARTE

TALES OF THE ARGONAUTS
A SAPPHO OF GREEN SPRINGS
AND OTHER STORIES



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TALES OF THE ARGONAUTS
AND OTHER SKETCHES

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THE ROSE OF TUOLUMNE.

CHAPTER I.

IT was nearly two o'clock in the morning. The lights were out in Robinson's Hall, where there had been dancing and revelry; and the moon, riding high, painted the black windows with silver. The cavalcade, that an hour ago had shocked the sedate pines with song and laughter, were all dispersed. One enamoured swain had ridden east, another west, another north, another south; and the object of their adoration, left within her bower at Chemisal Ridge, was calmly going to bed.

I regret that I am not able to indicate the exact stage of that process. Two chairs were already filled with delicate inwrappings and white confusion; and the young lady herself, half-hidden in the silky threads of her yellow hair, had at one time borne a faint resemblance to a partly-husked ear of Indian corn. But she was now clothed in that one long, formless garment that makes all women equal; and the round shoulders and neat waist, that an hour

ago had been so fatal to the peace of mind of Four Forks, had utterly disappeared. The face above it was very pretty: the foot below, albeit shapely, was not small. "The flowers, as a general thing, don't raise their heads *much* to look after me," she had said with superb frankness to one of her lovers.

The expression of the "Rose" to-night was contentedly placid. She walked slowly to the window, and, making the smallest possible peep hole through the curtain, looked out. The motionless figure of a horseman still lingered on the road, with an excess of devotion that only a coquette, or a woman very much in love, could tolerate. The "Rose," at that moment, was neither, and, after a reasonable pause, turned away, saying quite audibly that it was "too ridiculous for any thing." As she came back to her dressing-table, it was noticeable that she walked steadily and erect, without that slight affectation of lameness common to people with whom bare feet are only an episode. Indeed, it was only four years ago, that without shoes or stockings, a long-limbed, colty girl, in a waistless calico gown, she had leaped from the tail-board of her father's emigrant-wagon when it first drew up at Chemisal Ridge. Certain wild habits of the "Rose" had outlived transplanting and cultivation.

A knock at the door surprised her. In another moment she had leaped into bed, and with darkly-frowning eyes, from its secure recesses demanded "Who's there?"

An apologetic murmur on the other side of the door was the response.

"Why, father! — is that you?"

There were further murmurs, affirmative, deprecatory, and persistent.

"Wait," said the "Rose." She got up, unlocked the door, leaped nimbly into bed again, and said, "Come."

The door opened timidly. The broad, stooping shoulders, and grizzled head, of a man past the middle age, appeared: after a moment's hesitation, a pair of large, diffident feet, shod with canvas slippers, concluded to follow. When the apparition was complete, it closed the door softly, and stood there, — a very shy ghost indeed, — with apparently more than the usual spiritual indisposition to begin a conversation. The "Rose" resented this impatiently, though, I fear, not altogether intelligibly.

"Do, father, I declare!"

"You was abed, Jinny," said Mr. McClosky slowly, glancing, with a singular mixture of masculine awe and paternal pride, upon the two chairs and their contents, — "you was abed and undressed."

“ I was.”

“ Surely,” said Mr. McClosky, seating himself on the extreme edge of the bed, and painfully tucking his feet away under it, — “ surely.” After a pause, he rubbed a short, thick, stumpy beard, that bore a general resemblance to a badly-worn blacking-brush, with the palm of his hand, and went on, “ You had a good time, Jinny ? ”

“ Yes, father.”

“ They was all there ? ”

“ Yes, Rance and York and Ryder and Jack.”

“ And Jack ! ” Mr. McClosky endeavored to throw an expression of arch inquiry into his small, tremulous eyes ; but meeting the unabashed, widely-opened lid of his daughter, he winked rapidly, and blushed to the roots of his hair.

“ Yes, Jack was there,” said Jenny, without change of color, or the least self-consciousness in her great gray eyes ; “ and he came home with me.” She paused a moment, locking her two hands under her head, and assuming a more comfortable position on the pillow. “ He asked me that same question again, father, and I said, ‘ Yes.’ It’s to be — soon. We’re going to live at Four Forks, in his own house ; and next winter we’re going to Sacramento. I suppose

Is all right, father, eh?" She emphasized the question with a slight kick through the bed-clothes, as the parental McClosky had fallen into an abstract revery.

"Yes, surely," said Mr. McClosky, recovering himself with some confusion. After a pause, he looked down at the bed-clothes, and, patting them tenderly, continued, "You couldn't have done better, Jinny. They isn't a girl in Tuolumne ez could strike it ez rich as you hev—even if they got the chance." He paused again, and then said, "Jinny?"

"Yes, father."

"You'se in bed, and ondressed?"

"Yes."

"You couldn't," said Mr. McClosky, glancing hopelessly at the two chairs, and slowly rubbing his chin,— "you couldn't dress yourself again could yer?"

"Why, father!"

"Kinder get yourself into them things again?" he added hastily. "Not all of 'em, you know, but some of 'em. Not if I helped you'—sorter stood by, and lent a hand now and then with a strap, or a buckle, or a necktie, or a shoestring?" he continued, still looking at the chairs, and evidently trying to boldly familiarize himself with their contents.

"Are you crazy, father?" demanded Jenny

suddenly sitting up with a portentous switch of her yellow mane. Mr. McClosky rubbed one side of his beard, which already had the appearance of having been quite worn away by that process, and faintly dodged the question.

“Jinny,” he said, tenderly stroking the bed clothes as he spoke, “this yer’s what’s the matter. Thar is a stranger down stairs, — a stranger to you, lovey, but a man ez I’ve knowed a long time. He’s been here about an hour; and he’ll be here ontill fower o’clock, when the up-stage passes. Now I wants ye, Jinny dear, to get up and come down stairs, and kinder help me pass the time with him. It’s no use, Jinny,” he went on, gently raising his hand to deprecate any interruption, “it’s no use! He won’t go to bed; he won’t play keerds; whiskey don’t take no effect on him. Ever since I knowed him, he was the most on-satisfactory critter to hev round” —

“What do you have him round for, then?” interrupted Miss Jinny sharply.

Mr. McClosky’s eyes fell. “Ef he hedn’t kem out of his way to-night to do me a good turn, I wouldn’t ask ye, Jinny. I wouldn’t, so help me! But I thought, ez I couldn’t do any thing with him, you might come down, and sorter fetch him, Jinny, as you did the others.”

Miss Jenny shrugged her pretty shoulders.

“Is he old, or young?”

“He’s young enough, Jinny; but he knows a power of things.”

“What does he do?”

“Not much, I reckon. He’s got money in the mill at Four Forks. He travels round a good deal. I’ve heard, Jinny that he’s a poet—writes them rhymes, you know.” Mr. McClosky here appealed submissively but directly to his daughter. He remembered that she had frequently been in receipt of printed elegaic couplets known as “mottoes,” containing enclosures equally saccharine.

Miss Jenny slightly curled her pretty lip. She had that fine contempt for the illusions of fancy which belongs to the perfectly healthy young animal.

“Not,” continued Mr. McClosky, rubbing his head reflectively, “not ez I’d advise ye, Jinny, to say any thing to him about poetry. It ain’t twenty minutes ago ez *I* did. I set the whiskey afore him in the parlor. I wound up the music-box, and set it goin’. Then I sez to him, sociable-like and free, ‘Jest consider yourself in your own house, and repeat what you allow to be your finest production,’ and he raged. That man, Jinny, jest raged! Thar’s no end of the names he called me. You see Jinny,” continued Mr. McClosky apologetically ‘he’s known me a long time.”

But his daughter had already dismissed the question with her usual directness. "I'll be down in a few moments, father," she said after a pause, "but don't say any thing to him about it — don't say I was abed."

Mr. McClosky's face beamed. "You was allers a good girl, Jinny," he said, dropping on one knee the better to imprint a respectful kiss on her forehead. But Jenny caught him by the wrists, and for a moment held him captive. "Father," said she, trying to fix his shy eyes with the clear, steady glance of her own, "all the girls that were there to-night had some one with them. Mame Robinson had her aunt; Lucy Rance had her mother; Kate Pierson had her sister — all, except me, had some other woman. Father dear," her lip trembled just a little, "I wish mother hadn't died when I was so small. I wish there was some other woman in the family besides me. I ain't lonely with you, father dear; but if there was only some one, you know, when the time comes for John and me" —

Her voice here suddenly gave out, but not her brave eyes, that were still fixed earnestly upon his face. Mr. McClosky, apparently tracing out a pattern on the bedquilt, essayed words of comfort.

"Thar ain't one of them gals ez you've

named, Jinny, ez could do what you've done with a whole Noah's ark of relations at their backs! Thar ain't one ez wouldn't sacrifice her nearest relation to make the strike that you hev. Ez to mothers, maybe, my dear you're doin' better without one." He rose suddenly, and walked toward the door. When he reached it, he turned, and, in his old deprecating manner, said, "Don't be long, Jinny," smiled, and vanished from the head downward, his canvas slippers asserting themselves resolutely to the last.

When Mr. McClosky reached his parlor again, his troublesome guest was not there. The decanter stood on the table untouched; three or four books lay upon the floor; a number of photographic views of the Sierras were scattered over the sofa; two sofa-pillows, a newspaper, and a Mexican blanket, lay on the carpet, as if the late occupant of the room had tried to read in a recumbent position. A French window opening upon a veranda, which never before in the history of the house had been unfastened, now betrayed by its waving lace curtain the way that the fugitive had escaped. Mr. McClosky heaved a sigh of despair. He looked at the gorgeous carpet purchased in Sacramento at a fabulous price, at the crimson satin and rosewood furniture un

paralleled in the history of Tuolumne, at the massively-framed pictures on the walls, and looked beyond it, through the open window, to the reckless man, who, fleeing these sybaritic allurements, was smoking a cigar upon the moonlit road. This room, which had so often awed the youth of Tuolumne into filial respect, was evidently a failure. It remained to be seen if the "Rose" herself had lost her fragrance. "I reckon Jinny will fetch him yet," said Mr. McClosky with parental faith.

He stepped from the window upon the veranda ; but he had scarcely done this, before his figure was detected by the stranger, who at once crossed the road. When within a few feet of McClosky, he stopped. "You persistent old plantigrade !" he said in a low voice, audible only to the person addressed, and a face full of affected anxiety, "why don't you go to bed? Didn't I tell you to go and leave me here alone? In the name of all that's idiotic and imbecile, why do you continue to shuffle about here? Or are you trying to drive me crazy with your presence, as you have with that wretched music-box that I've just dropped under yonder tree? It's an hour and a half yet before the stage passes: do you think, do you imagine for a single moment, that I can tolerate you until then, eh? Why don't you speak?

Are you asleep? You don't mean to say that you have the audacity to add somnambulism to your other weaknesses? you're not low enough to repeat yourself under any such weak pretext as that, eh?"

A fit of nervous coughing ended this extraordinary exordium; and half sitting, half leaning against the veranda, Mr. McClosky's guest turned his face, and part of a slight elegant figure, toward his host. The lower portion of this upturned face wore an habitual expression of fastidious discontent, with an occasional line of physical suffering. But the brow above was frank and critical; and a pair of dark, mirthful eyes, sat in playful judgment over the super-sensitive mouth and its suggestion.

"I allowed to go to bed, Ridgeway," said Mr. McClosky meekly; "but my girl Jinny's jist got back from a little tear up at Robinson's, and ain't inclined to turn in yet. You know what girls is. So I thought we three would jist have a social chat together to pass away the time."

"You mendacious old hypocrite! She got back an hour ago," said Ridgeway, "as that savage-looking escort of hers, who has been haunting the house ever since, can testify. My belief is, that, like an enterprising idiot as you are, you've dragged that girl out of her bed, that we might mutually bore each other."

Mr. McClosky was too much stunned by this evidence of Ridgeway's apparently superhuman penetration to reply. After enjoying his host's confusion for a moment with his eyes, Ridgeway's mouth asked grimly, —

“And who is this girl, anyway?”

“Nancy's.”

“Your wife's?”

“Yes. But look yar, Ridgeway,” said McClosky, laying one hand imploringly on Ridgeway's sleeve, “not a word about her to Jinny. She thinks her mother's dead — died in Missouri. Eh!”

Ridgeway nearly rolled from the veranda in an excess of rage. “Good God! Do you mean to say that you have been concealing from her a fact that any day, any moment, may come to her ears? That you've been letting her grow up in ignorance of something that by this time she might have outgrown and forgotten? That you have been, like a besotted old ass, all these years slowly forging a thunderbolt that any one may crush her with? That” — but here Ridgeway's cough took possession of his voice, and even put a moisture into his dark eyes, as he looked at McClosky's aimless hand feebly employed upon his beard.

“But,” said McClosky, “look how she's done! She's held her head as high as any of

em. She's to be married in a month to the richest man in the county; and," he added cunningly, "Jack Ashe ain't the kind o' man to sit by and hear any thing said of his wife or her relations, you bet! But hush — that's her foot on the stairs. She's cummin'."

She came. I don't think the French window ever held a finer view than when she put aside the curtains, and stepped out. She had dressed herself simply and hurriedly, but with a woman's knowledge of her best points; so that you got the long curves of her shapely limbs, the shorter curves of her round waist and shoulders, the long sweep of her yellow braids, the light of her gray eyes, and even the delicate rose of her complexion, without knowing how it was delivered to you.

The introduction by Mr. McClosky was brief. When Ridgeway had got over the fact that it was two o'clock in the morning, and that the cheek of this Tuolumne goddess nearest him was as dewy and fresh as an infant's, that she looked like Marguerite, without, probably, ever having heard of Goethe's heroine, he talked, I dare say, very sensibly. When Miss Jenny — who from her childhood had been brought up among the sons of Anak, and who was accustomed to have the supremacy of our noble sex presented to her as a physical fact — found her

self in the presence of a new and strange power in the slight and elegant figure beside her, she was at first frightened and cold. But finding that this power, against which the weapons of her own physical charms were of no avail, was a kindly one, albeit general, she fell to worshipping it, after the fashion of woman, and casting before it the fetishes and other idols of her youth. She even confessed to it. So that, in half an hour, Ridgeway was in possession of all the facts connected with her life, and a great many, I fear, of her fancies — except one. When Mr. McClosky found the young people thus amicably disposed, he calmly went to sleep.

It was a pleasant time to each. To Miss Jenny it had the charm of novelty; and she abandoned herself to it, for that reason, much more freely and innocently than her companion, who knew something more of the inevitable logic of the position. I do not think, however, he had any intention of love-making. I do not think he was at all conscious of being in the attitude. I am quite positive he would have shrunk from the suggestion of disloyalty to the one woman whom he admitted to himself he loved. But, like most poets, he was much more true to an idea than a fact, and having a very lofty conception of womanhood, with a very sanguine nature,

he saw in each new face the possibilities of a realization of his ideal. It was, perhaps, an unfortunate thing for the women, particularly as he brought to each trial a surprising freshness, which was very deceptive, and quite distinct from the *blasé* familiarity of the man of gallantry. It was this perennial virginity of the affections that most endeared him to the best women, who were prone to exercise toward him a chivalrous protection, — as of one likely to go astray, unless looked after, — and indulged in the dangerous combination of sentiment with the highest maternal instincts. It was this quality which caused Jenny to recognize in him a certain boyishness that required her womanly care, and even induced her to offer to accompany him to the cross-roads when the time for his departure arrived. With her superior knowledge of woodcraft and the locality, she would have kept him from being lost. I wot not but that she would have protected him from bears or wolves, but chiefly, I think, from the feline fascinations of Mame Robinson and Lucy Rance, who might be lying in wait for this tender young poet. Nor did she cease to be thankful that Providence had, so to speak, delivered him as a trust into her hands.

It was a lovely night. The moon swung low, and languished softly on the snowy ridge

beyond. There were quaint odors in the still air; and a strange incense from the woods perfumed their young blood, and seemed to swoon in their pulses. Small wonder that they lingered on the white road, that their feet climbed, unwillingly the little hill where they were to part, and that, when they at last reached it, even the saving grace of speech seemed to have forsaken them.

For there they stood alone. There was no sound nor motion in earth, or woods, or heaven. They might have been the one man and woman for whom this goodly earth that lay at their feet, rimmed with the deepest azure, was created. And, seeing this, they turned toward each other with a sudden instinct, and their hands met, and then their lips in one long kiss.

And then out of the mysterious distance came the sound of voices, and the sharp clatter of hoofs and wheels, and Jenny slid away—a white moonbeam—from the hill. For a moment she glimmered through the trees, and then, reaching the house, passed her sleeping father on the veranda, and, darting into her bedroom, locked the door, threw open the window, and, falling on her knees beside it, leaned her hot cheeks upon her hands, and listened. In a few moments she was rewarded by the sharp clatter of hoofs on the stony road.

but it was only a horseman, whose dark figure was swiftly lost in the shadows of the lower road. At another time she might have recognized the man; but her eyes and ears were now all intent on something else. It came presently with dancing lights, a musical rattle of harness, a cadence of hoof-beats, that set her heart to beating in unison—and was gone. A sudden sense of loneliness came over her; and tears gathered in her sweet eyes.

She arose, and looked around her. There was the little bed, the dressing-table, the roses that she had worn last night, still fresh and blooming in the little vase. Every thing was there: but every thing looked strange. The roses should have been withered, for the party seemed so long ago. She could hardly remember when she had worn this dress that lay upon the chair. So she came back to the window, and sank down beside it, with her cheek a trifle paler, leaning on her hand, and her long braids reaching to the floor. The stars paled slowly, like her cheek; yet with eyes that saw not, she still looked from her window for the coming dawn.

It came, with violet deepening into purple, with purple flushing into rose, with rose shining into silver, and glowing into gold. The straggling line of black picket-fence below, that had faded away with the stars, came back with the

sun. What was that object moving by the fence? Jenny raised her head, and looked intently. It was a man endeavoring to climb the pickets, and falling backward with each attempt. Suddenly she started to her feet, as if the rosy flushes of the dawn had crimsoned her from forehead to shoulders; then she stood, white as the wall, with her hands clasped upon her bosom; then, with a single bound, she reached the door, and, with flying braids and fluttering skirt, sprang down the stairs, and out to the garden walk. When within a few feet of the fence, she uttered a cry, the first she had given, — the cry of a mother over her stricken babe, of a tigress over her mangled cub; and in another moment she had leaped the fence, and knelt beside Ridgeway, with his fainting head upon her breast.

“My boy, my poor, poor boy! who has done this?”

Who, indeed? His clothes were covered with dust; his waistcoat was torn open; and his handkerchief, wet with the blood it could not stanch, fell from a cruel stab beneath his shoulder.

“Ridgeway, my poor boy! tell me what has happened.”

Ridgeway slowly opened his heavy blue-veined lids, and gazed upon her. Presently a

gleam of mischief came into his dark eyes, a smile stole over his lips as he whispered slowly, —

“It — was — your kiss — did it, Jenny dear I had forgotten — how high-priced the article was here. Never mind, Jenny!” — he feebly raised her hand to his white lips, — “it was — worth it,” and fainted away.

Jenny started to her feet, and looked wildly around her. Then, with a sudden resolution, she stooped over the insensible man, and with one strong effort lifted him in her arms as if he had been a child. When her father, a moment later, rubbed his eyes, and awoke from his sleep upon the veranda, it was to see a goddess, erect and triumphant, striding toward the house with the helpless body of a man lying across that breast where man had never lain before, — a goddess, at whose imperious mandate he arose, and cast open the doors before her. And then, when she had laid her unconscious burden on the sofa, the goddess fled; and a woman, helpless and trembling, stood before him, — a woman that cried out that she had “killed him,” that she was “wicked, wicked!” and that, even saying so, staggered, and fell beside her late burden. And all that Mr. McClosky could do was to feebly rub his beard, and say to himself vaguely and incoherently, that “Jenny had fetched him.”

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE noon the next day, it was generally believed throughout Four Forks that Ridgeway Dent had been attacked and wounded at Chemical Ridge by a highwayman, who fled on the approach of the Wingdam coach. It is to be presumed that this statement met with Ridgeway's approval, as he did not contradict it, nor supplement it with any details. His wound was severe, but not dangerous. After the first excitement had subsided, there was, I think, a prevailing impression common to the provincial mind, that his misfortune was the result of the defective moral quality of his being a stranger, and was, in a vague sort of a way, a warning to others, and a lesson to him. "Did you hear how that San-Francisco feller was took down the other night?" was the average tone of introductory remark. Indeed, there was a general suggestion that Ridgeway's presence was one that no self-respecting, high-minded highwayman, honorably conservative of the best interests of Tuolumne County, could for a moment tolerate.

Except for the few words spoken on that eventful morning, Ridgeway was reticent of the past. When Jenny strove to gather some

details of the affray that might offer a clew to his unknown assailant, a subtle twinkle in his brown eyes was the only response. When Mr. McClosky attempted the same process, the young gentleman threw abusive epithets, and, eventually slippers, teaspoons, and other lighter articles within the reach of an invalid, at the head of his questioner. "I think he's coming round, Jinny," said Mr. McClosky: "he laid for me this morning with a candlestick."

It was about this time that Miss Jenny, having sworn her father to secrecy regarding the manner in which Ridgeway had been carried into the house, conceived the idea of addressing the young man as "Mr. Dent," and of apologizing for intruding whenever she entered the room in the discharge of her household duties. It was about this time that she became more rigidly conscientious to those duties, and less general in her attentions. It was at this time that the quality of the invalid's diet improved, and that she consulted him less frequently about it. It was about this time that she began to see more company, that the house was greatly frequented by her former admirers, with whom she rode, walked, and danced. It was at about this time also, and when Ridgeway was able to be brought out on the veranda in a chair, that, with great archness

of manner, she introduced to him Miss Lucy Ashe, the sister of her betrothed, a flashing brunette, and terrible heart-breaker of Four Forks. And, in the midst of this gayety, she concluded that she would spend a week with the Robinsons, to whom she owed a visit. She enjoyed herself greatly there, so much, indeed, that she became quite hollow-eyed, the result, as she explained to her father, of a too frequent indulgence in festivity. "You see, father, I won't have many chances after John and I are married: you know how queer he is, and I must make the most of my time;" and she laughed an odd little laugh, which had lately become habitual to her. "And how is Mr. Dent getting on?" Her father replied that he was getting on very well indeed, — so well, in fact, that he was able to leave for San Francisco two days ago. "He wanted to be remembered to you, Jinny, — 'remembered kindly,' — yes, they is the very words he used," said Mr. McClosky, looking down, and consulting one of his large shoes for corroboration. Miss Jenny was glad to hear that he was so much better. Miss Jenny could not imagine any thing that pleased her more than to know that he was so strong as to be able to rejoin his friends again, who must 'love him so much, and be so anxious about him. Her father thought she would be pleased, and

now that he was gone, there was really no necessity for her to hurry back. Miss Jenny, in a high metallic voice, did not know that she had expressed any desire to stay, still if her presence had become distasteful at home, if her own father was desirous of getting rid of her if, when she was so soon to leave his roof for ever, he still begrudged her those few days remaining, if— “My God, Jinny, so help me!” said Mr. McClosky, clutching despairingly at his beard, “I didn’t go for to say any thing of the kind. I thought that you”— “Never mind, father,” interrupted Jenny magnanimously, “you misunderstood me: of course you did, you couldn’t help it—you’re a MAN!” Mr. McClosky, sorely crushed, would have vaguely protested; but his daughter, having relieved herself, after the manner of her sex, with a mental personal application of an abstract statement, forgave him with a kiss.

Nevertheless, for two or three days after her return, Mr. McClosky followed his daughter about the house with yearning eyes, and occasionally with timid, diffident feet. Sometimes he came upon her suddenly at her household tasks, with an excuse so palpably false, and a careless manner so outrageously studied, that she was fain to be embarrassed for him. Later, he took to rambling about the house at night,

and was often seen noiselessly passing and repassing through the hall after she had retired. On one occasion, he was surprised, first by sleep, and then by the early-rising Jenny, as he lay on the rug outside her chamber-door. "You treat me like a child, father," said Jenny. "I thought, Jinny," said the father apologetically, — "I thought I heard sounds as if you was takin' on inside, and, listenin' I fell asleep." — "You dear, old simple-minded baby!" said Jenny, looking past her father's eyes, and lifting his grizzled locks one by one with meditative fingers: "what should I be takin' on for? Look how much taller I am than you!" she said, suddenly lifting herself up to the extreme of her superb figure. Then rubbing his head rapidly with both hands, as if she were anointing his hair with some rare unguent, she patted him on the back, and returned to her room. The result of this and one or two other equally sympathetic interviews was to produce a change in Mr. McClosky's manner, which was, if possible, still more discomposing. He grew unjustifiably hilarious, cracked jokes with the servants, and repeated to Jenny humorous stories, with the attitude of facetiousness carefully preserved throughout the entire narration, and the point utterly ignored and forgotten. Certain incidents reminded him of funny things, which

invariably turned out to have not the slightest relevancy or application. He occasionally brought home with him practical humorists, with a sanguine hope of setting them going, like the music-box, for his daughter's edification. He essayed the singing of melodies with great freedom of style, and singular limitation of note. He sang "Come haste to the Wedding, Ye Lasses and Maidens," of which he knew a single line, and that incorrectly, as being peculiarly apt and appropriate. Yet away from the house and his daughter's presence, he was silent and distraught. His absence of mind was particularly noted by his workmen at the Empire Quartz Mill. "Ef the old man don't look out and wake up," said his foreman, "he'll hev them feet of his yet under the stamps. When he ain't givin' his mind to 'em, they is altogether too promiskuss."

A few nights later, Miss Jenny recognized her father's hand in a timid tap at the door. She opened it, and he stood before her, with a valise in his hand, equipped as for a journey. "I takes the stage to-night, Jinny dear, from Four Forks to 'Frisco. Maybe I may drop in on Jack afore I go. I'll be back in a week. Good-by."

"Good-by." He still held her hand. Presently he drew her back into the room, closing

the door carefully, and glancing around. There was a look of profound cunning in his eye as he said slowly, —

“Bear up, and keep dark, Jinny dear, and trust to the old man. Various men has various ways. Thar is ways as is common, and ways as is uncommon; ways as is easy, and ways as is oneasy. Bear up, and keep dark.” With this Delphic utterance he put his finger to his lips, and vanished.

It was ten o'clock when he reached Four Forks. A few minutes later, he stood on the threshold of that dwelling described by the Four Forks “Sentinel” as “the palatial residence of John Ashe,” and known to the local satirist as the “ash-box.” “Hevin’ to lay by two hours, John,” he said to his prospective son-in-law, as he took his hand at the door, “a few words of social converse, not on business, but strictly private, seems to be about as nat’ral a thing as a man can do.” This introduction, evidently the result of some study, and plainly committed to memory, seemed so satisfactory to Mr. McClosky, that he repeated it again, after John Ashe had led him into his private office, where, depositing his valise in the middle of the floor, and sitting down before it, he began carefully to avoid the eye of his host. John Ashe, a tall, dark, handsome Ken

cuckian, with whom even the trifles of life were evidently full of serious import, waited with a kind of chivalrous respect the further speech of his guest. Being utterly devoid of any sense of the ridiculous, he always accepted Mr. McClosky as a grave fact, singular only from his own want of experience of the class.

"Ores is running light now," said Mr. McClosky with easy indifference.

John Ashe returned that he had noticed the same fact in the receipts of the mill at Four Forks.

Mr. McClosky rubbed his beard, and looked at his valise, as if for sympathy and suggestion.

"You don't reckon on having any trouble with any of them chaps as you cut out with Jinny?"

John Ashe, rather haughtily, had never thought of that. "I saw Rance hanging round your house the other night, when I took your daughter home; but he gave me a wide berth," he added carelessly.

"Surely," said Mr. McClosky, with a peculiar winking of the eye. After a pause, he took a fresh departure from his valise.

"A few words, John, ez between man and man, ez between my daughter's father and her husband who expects to be, is about the thing,

I take it, as is fair and square. I kem here to say them. They're about Jinny, my gal."

Ashe's grave face brightened, to Mr. McClosky's evident discomposure.

"Maybe I should have said about her mother; but, the same bein' a stranger to you, I says naterally, 'Jinny.'"

Ashe nodded courteously. Mr. McClosky, with his eyes on his valise, went on, —

"It is sixteen year ago as I married Mrs. McClosky in the State of Missouri. She let on, at the time, to be a widder, — a widder with one child. When I say let on, I mean to imply that I subsekently found out that she was not a widder, nor a wife; and the father of the child was, so to speak, onbeknowst. Thet child was Jinny — my gal."

With his eyes on his valise, and quietly ignoring the wholly-crimsoned face and swiftly darkening brow of his host, he continued, —

"Many little things sorter tended to make our home in Missouri onpleasant. A disposition to smash furniture, and heave knives around; an inclination to howl when drunk, and that frequent; a habitooal use of vulgar language, and a tendency to cuss the casooal visitor, — seemed to pint," added Mr. McClosky with submissive hesitation "that — she — was — so to speak — quite onsuted to the marriage relation in its holiest aspeck."

“Damnation! Why didn’t” — burst out John Ashe, erect and furious.

“At the end of two year,” continued Mr. McClosky, still intent on the valise, “I allowed I’d get a diworree. Et about thet time, however, Providence sends a circus into thet town, and a feller ez rode three horses to onct. Hev-in’ aliez a taste for athletic sports, she left town with this feller, leavin’ me and Jinny behind. I sent word to her, thet, if she would give Jinny to me, we’d call it quits. And she aid.”

“Tell me,” gasped Ashe, “did you ask your daughter to keep this from me? or did she do it of her own accord?”

“She doesn’t know it,” said Mr. McClosky. “She thinks I’m her father, and that her mother’s dead.”

“Then, sir, this is your” —

“I don’t know,” said Mr. McClosky slowly, “ez I’ve asked any one to marry my Jinny. I don’t know ez I’ve persood that ez a bizness, or even taken it up as a healthful recreation.”

John Ashe paced the room furiously. Mr. McClosky’s eyes left the valise, and followed him curiously. “Where is this woman?” demanded Ashe suddenly. McClosky’s eyes sought the valise again.

“She went to Kansas; from Kansas she went into Texas: from Texas she eventooally came

to Californy. Being here, I've purvided her with money, when her business was slack, through a friend."

John Ashe groaned. "She's gettin' rather old and shaky for hosses, and now does the tight-rope business and flying trapeze. Never hevin' seen her perform," continued Mr. McClosky with conscientious caution, "I can't say how she gets on. On the bills she looks well. Thar is a poster," said Mr. McClosky glancing at Ashe, and opening his valise, — "thar is a poster givin' her performance at Marysville next month." Mr. McClosky slowly unfolded a large yellow-and-blue printed poster, profusely illustrated. "She calls herself 'Mam-s'elle J. Miglawski, the great Russian Trapeziste.'"

John Ashe tore it from his hand. "Of course," he said, suddenly facing Mr. McClosky, "you don't expect me to go on with this?"

Mr. McClosky took up the poster, carefully refolded it, and returned it to his valise. "When you break off with Jinny," he said quietly, "I don't want any thing said 'bout this. She doesn't know it. She's a woman, and I reckon you're a white man."

"But what am I to say? How am I to go back of my word?"

"Write her a note. Say something hez come

to your knowledge (don't say what) that makes you break it off. You needn't be afeard Jinny'll ever ask you what."

John Ashe hesitated. He felt he had been cruelly wronged. No gentleman, no Ashe, could go on further in this affair. It was preposterous to think of it. But somehow he felt at the moment very unlike a gentleman, or an Ashe, and was quite sure he should break down under Jenny's steady eyes. But then—he could write to her.

"So ores is about as light here as on the Ridge. Well, I reckon they'll come up before the rains. Good-night." Mr. McClosky took the hand that his host mechanically extended, shook it gravely, and was gone.

When Mr. McClosky, a week later, stepped again upon his own veranda, he saw through the French window the figure of a man in his parlor. Under his hospitable roof, the sight was not unusual; but, for an instant, a subtle sense of disappointment thrilled him. When he saw it was not the face of Ashe turned toward him, he was relieved; but when he saw the tawny beard, and quick, passionate eyes of Henry Rance, he felt a new sense of apprehension, so that he fell to rubbing his beard almost upon his very threshold.

Jenny ran into the hall, and seized her father with a little cry of joy. "Father," said Jenny in a hurried whisper, "don't mind *him*," indicating Rance with a toss of her yellow braids: "he's going soon. And I think, father, I've done him wrong. But it's all over with John and me now. Read that note, and see how he's insulted me." Her lip quivered; but she went on, "It's Ridgeway that he means, father; and I believe it was *his* hand struck Ridgeway down, or that he knows who did. But hush now! not a word."

She gave him a feverish kiss, and glided back into the parlor, leaving Mr. McClosky, perplexed and irresolute, with the note in his hand. He glanced at it hurriedly, and saw that it was couched in almost the very words he had suggested. But a sudden, apprehensive recollection came over him. He listened; and, with an exclamation of dismay, he seized his hat, and ran out of the house, but too late. At the same moment a quick, nervous footstep was heard upon the veranda; the French window flew open, and, with a light laugh of greeting, Ridgeway stepped into the room.

Jenny's finer ear first caught the step. Jenny's swifter feelings had sounded the depths of hope, of joy, of despair, before he entered the room. Jenny's pale face was the only one that

met his, self-possessed and self-reliant, when he stood before them. An angry flush suffused even the pink roots of Rance's beard as he rose to his feet. An ominous fire sprang into Ridgeway's eyes, and a spasm of hate and scorn passed over the lower part of his face, and left the mouth and jaw immobile and rigid.

Yet he was the first to speak. "I owe you an apology," he said to Jenny, with a suave scorn that brought the indignant blood back to her cheek, "for this intrusion; but I ask no pardon for withdrawing from the only spot where that man dare confront me with safety."

With an exclamation of rage, Rance sprang toward him. But as quickly Jenny stood between them, erect and menacing. "There must be no quarrel here," she said to Rance. "While I protect your right as my guest, don't oblige me to remind you of mine as your hostess." She turned with a half-deprecatory air to Ridgeway; but he was gone. So was her father. Only Rance remained with a look of ill-concealed triumph on his face.

Without looking at him, she passed toward the door. When she reached it, she turned. "You asked me a question an hour ago. Come to me in the garden, at nine o'clock to-night, and I will answer you. But promise me, first, to keep away from Mr. Dent. Give me your

word not to seek him — to avoid him, if he seeks you. Do you promise? It is well.”

He would have taken her hand; but she waved him away. In another moment he heard the swift rustle of her dress in the hall, the sound of her feet upon the stair, the sharp closing of her bedroom door, and all was quiet.

And even thus quietly the day wore away; and the night rose slowly from the valley, and overshadowed the mountains with purple wings that fanned the still air into a breeze, until the moon followed it, and lulled every thing to rest as with the laying-on of white and benedictory hands. It was a lovely night; but Henry Rance, waiting impatiently beneath a sycamore at the foot of the garden, saw no beauty in earth or air or sky. A thousand suspicions common to a jealous nature, a vague superstition of the spot, filled his mind with distrust and doubt. “If this should be a trick to keep my hands off that insolent pup!” he muttered. But, even as the thought passed his tongue, a white figure slid from the shrubbery near the house, glided along the line of picket-fence, and then stopped, midway, motionless in the moonlight.

It was she. But he scarcely recognized her in the white drapery that covered her head and shoulders and breast. He approached her with a hurried whisper. “Let us withdraw from the moonlight. Everybody can see us here.”

"We have nothing to say that cannot be said in the moonlight, Henry Rance," she replied, coldly receding from his proffered hand. She trembled for a moment, as if with a chill, and then suddenly turned upon him. "Hold up your head, and let me look at you! I've known only what men are: let me see what a traitor looks like!"

He recoiled more from her wild face than her words. He saw from the first that her hollow cheeks and hollow eyes were blazing with fever. He was no coward; but he would have fled.

"You are ill, Jenny," he said: "you had best return to the house. Another time" —

"Stop!" she cried hoarsely. "Move from this spot, and I'll call for help! Attempt to leave me now, and I'll proclaim you the assassin that you are!"

"It was a fair fight," he said doggedly.

"Was it a fair fight to creep behind an un-armed and unsuspecting man? Was it a fair fight to try to throw suspicion on some one else? Was it a fair fight to deceive me? Liar and coward that you are!"

He made a stealthy step toward her with evil eyes, and a wickeder hand that crept within his breast. She saw the motion; but it only stung her to newer fury.

"Strike!" she said with blazing eyes, throw

ing her hands open before him. "Strike! Are you afraid of the woman who dares you? Or do you keep your knife for the backs of unsuspecting men? Strike, I tell you! No? Look, then!" With a sudden movement, she tore from her head and shoulders the thick lace shawl that had concealed her figure, and stood before him. "Look!" she cried passionately, pointing to the bosom and shoulders of her white dress, darkly streaked with faded stains and ominous discoloration,—"look! This is the dress I wore that morning when I found him lying here,—*here*,—bleeding from your cowardly knife. Look! Do you see? This is his blood,—my darling boy's blood!—one drop of which, dead and faded as it is, is more precious to me than the whole living pulse of any other man. Look! I come to you to-night, christened with his blood, and dare you to strike,—dare you to strike him again through me, and mingle my blood with his. Strike, I implore you! Strike! if you have any pity on me, for God's sake! Strike! if you are a man! Look! Here lay his head on my shoulder; here I held him to my breast, where never—so help me my God!—another man—Ah!"—

She reeled against the fence, and something that had flashed in Rance's hand dropped at her feet; for another flash and report rolled him

over in the dust: and across his writhing body two men strode, and caught her ere she fell.

"She has only fainted," said Mr. McClosky "Jinny dear, my girl, speak to me!"

"What is this on her dress?" said Ridgeway kneeling beside her, and lifting his set and colorless face. At the sound of his voice, the color came faintly back to her cheek: she opened her eyes, and smiled.

"It's only your blood, dear boy," she said, "but look a little deeper, and you'll find my own."

She put up her two yearning hands, and drew his face and lips down to her own. When Ridgeway raised his head again, her eyes were closed; but her mouth still smiled as with the memory of a kiss.

They bore her to the house, still breathing, but unconscious. That night the road was filled with clattering horsemen; and the summoned skill of the countryside for leagues away gathered at her couch. The wound, they said, was not essentially dangerous; but they had grave fears of the shock to a system that already seemed suffering from some strange and unaccountable nervous exhaustion. The best medical skill of Tuolumne happened to be young and observing, and waited patiently an opportunity to account for it. He was presently rewarded.

For toward morning she rallied, and looked feebly around. Then she beckoned her father toward her, and whispered, "Where is he?"

"They took him away, Jinny dear, in a cart. He won't trouble you agin." He stopped; for Miss Jenny had raised herself on her elbow, and was levelling her black brows at him. But two kicks from the young surgeon, and a significant motion towards the door, sent Mr. McClosky away muttering. "How should I know that 'he' meant Ridgeway?" he said apologetically as he went and returned with the young gentleman. The surgeon, who was still holding he pulse, smiled, and thought that — with a little care — and attention — the stimulants — might be — diminished — and — he — might leave — the patient for some hours with perfect safety. He would give further directions to Mr. McClosky — down stairs.

It was with great archness of manner, that, half an hour later, Mr. McClosky entered the room with a preparatory cough; and it was with some disappointment that he found Ridgeway standing quietly by the window, and his daughter apparently fallen into a light doze. He was still more concerned, when, after Ridgeway had retired, noticing a pleasant smile playing about her lips, he said softly —

"You was thinking of some one, Jinny?"

‘Yes, father,” the gray eyes met his steadily, — “of poor John Ashe!”

Her recovery was swift. Nature, that had seemed to stand jealously aloof from her in her mental anguish, was kind to the physical hurt of her favorite child. The superb physique, which had been her charm and her trial, now stood her in good stead. The healing balsam of the pine, the balm of resinous gums, and the rare medicaments of Sierran altitudes, touched her as it might have touched the wounded doe, so that in two weeks she was able to walk about. And when, at the end of the month, Ridgeway returned from a flying visit to San Francisco, and jumped from the Wingdam coach at four o'clock in the morning, the Rose of Tuolumne, with the dewy petals of either cheek fresh as when first unfolded to his kiss, confronted him on the road.

With a common instinct, their young feet both climbed the little hill now sacred to their thought. When they reached its summit, they were both, I think, a little disappointed. There is a fragrance in the unfolding of a passion, that escapes the perfect flower. Jenny thought the night was not as beautiful; Ridgeway, that the long ride had blunted his perceptions. But they had the frankness to confess it to each other, with the rare delight of such a

confession, and the comparison of details which they thought each had forgotten. And with this, and an occasional pitying reference to the blank period when they had not known each other, hand in hand they reached the house.

Mr. McClosky was awaiting them impatiently upon the veranda. When Miss Jenny had slipped up stairs to replace a collar that stood somewhat suspiciously awry, Mr. McClosky drew Ridgeway solemnly aside. He held a large theatre poster in one hand, and an open newspaper in the other.

"I allus said," he remarked slowly, with the air of merely renewing a suspended conversation,—"I allus said that riding three horses to onct wasn't exactly in her line. It would seem that it ain't. From remarks in this yer paper, it would appear that she tried it on at Marysville last week, and broke her neck."

A PASSAGE IN THE LIFE OF MR.
JOHN OAKHURST.

HE always thought it must have been fate. Certainly nothing could have been more inconsistent with his habits than to have been in the Plaza at seven o'clock of that midsummer morning. The sight of his colorless face in Sacramento was rare at that season, and, indeed, at any season, anywhere publicly, before two o'clock in the afternoon. Looking back upon it in after-years in the light of a chanceful life, he determined, with the characteristic philosophy of his profession, that it must have been fate.

Yet it is my duty, as a strict chronicler of facts, to state that Mr. Oakhurst's presence there that morning was due to a very simple cause. At exactly half-past six, the bank being then a winner to the amount of twenty thousand dollars, he had risen from the faro-table, relinquished his seat to an accomplished assistant, and withdrawn quietly, without attracting a glance from the silent, anxious faces bowed over the table. But when he entered his lux

urious sleeping-room, across the passage-way. he was a little shocked at finding the sun streaming through an inadvertently opened window. Something in the rare beauty of the morning, perhaps something in the novelty of the idea, struck him as he was about to close the blinds; and he hesitated. Then, taking his hat from the table, he stepped down a private staircase into the street.

The people who were abroad at that early hour were of a class quite unknown to Mr. Oakhurst. There were milkmen and hucksters delivering their wares, small tradespeople opening their shops, housemaids sweeping doorsteps, and occasionally a child. These Mr. Oakhurst regarded with a certain cold curiosity, perhaps quite free from the cynical disfavor with which he generally looked upon the more pretentious of his race whom he was in the habit of meeting. Indeed, I think he was not altogether displeased with the admiring glances which these humble women threw after his handsome face and figure, conspicuous even in a country of fine-looking men. While it is very probable that this wicked vagabond, in the pride of his social isolation, would have been coldly indifferent to the advances of a fine lady, a little girl who ran admiringly by his side in a ragged dress had the power to call a faint flush into his colorless

cheek. He dismissed her at last, but not until she had found out — what, sooner or later, her large-hearted and discriminating sex inevitably did — that he was exceedingly free and open-handed with his money, and also — what, perhaps, none other of her sex ever did — that the bold black eyes of this fine gentleman were in reality of a brownish and even tender gray.

There was a small garden before a white cottage in a side-street, that attracted Mr. Oakhurst's attention. It was filled with roses, heliotrope, and verbena, — flowers familiar enough to him in the expensive and more portable form of bouquets, but, as it seemed to him then, never before so notably lovely. Perhaps it was because the dew was yet fresh upon them; perhaps it was because they were unplucked: but Mr. Oakhurst admired them — not as a possible future tribute to the fascinating and accomplished Miss Ethelinda, then performing at the Varieties, for Mr. Oakhurst's especial benefit, as she had often assured him; nor yet as a *douceur* to the intralling Miss Montmorrissy, with whom Mr. Oakhurst expected to sup that evening; but simply for himself, and, mayhap, for the flowers' sake. Howbeit he passed on, and so out into the open Plaza, where, finding a bench under a cottonwood-tree, he first dusted the seat with his handkerchief, and then sat down.

It was a fine morning. The air was so still and calm, that a sigh from the sycamores seemed like the deep-drawn breath of the just awakening tree, and the faint rustle of its boughs as the outstretching of cramped and reviving limbs. Far away the Sierras stood out against a sky so remote as to be of no positive color, — so remote, that even the sun despaired of ever reaching it, and so expended its strength recklessly on the whole landscape, until it fairly glittered in a white and vivid contrast. With a very rare impulse, Mr. Oakhurst took off his hat, and half reclined on the bench, with his face to the sky. Certain birds who had taken a critical attitude on a spray above him, apparently began an animated discussion regarding his possible malevolent intentions. One or two, emboldened by the silence, hopped on the ground at his feet, until the sound of wheels on the gravel-walk frightened them away.

Looking up, he saw a man coming slowly toward him, wheeling a nondescript vehicle, in which a woman was partly sitting, partly reclining. Without knowing why, Mr. Oakhurst instantly conceived that the carriage was the invention and workmanship of the man, partly from its oddity, partly from the strong, mechanical hand that grasped it, and partly from a certain pride and visible consciousness in the

manner in which the man handled it. Then Mr. Oakhurst saw something more: the man's face was familiar. With that regal faculty of not forgetting a face that had ever given him professional audience, he instantly classified it under the following mental formula: "At 'Frisco, Polka Saloon. Lost his week's wages. I reckon—seventy dollars—on red. Never came again." There was, however, no trace of this in the calm eyes and unmoved face that he turned upon the stranger, who, on the contrary, blushed, looked embarrassed, hesitated and then stopped with an involuntary motion that brought the carriage and its fair occupant face to face with Mr. Oakhurst.

I should hardly do justice to the position she will occupy in this veracious chronicle by describing the lady now, if, indeed, I am able to do it at all. Certainly the popular estimate was conflicting. The late Col. Starbottle—to whose large experience of a charming sex I have before been indebted for many valuable suggestions—had, I regret to say, depreciated her fascinations. "A yellow-faced cripple, by dash! a sick woman, with mahogany eyes; one of your blanked spiritual creatures—with no flesh on her bones." On the other hand, however, she enjoyed later much complimentary disparagement from her own sex. Miss Celestina Howard,

second leader in the *ballet* at the Varieties, had, with great alliterative directness, in after-years, denominated her as an "aquiline asp." Mlle. Brimborion remembered that she had always warned "Mr. Jack" that this woman would "empoison" him. But Mr. Oakhurst, whose impressions are perhaps the most important, only saw a pale, thin, deep-eyed woman, raised above the level of her companion by the refinement of long suffering and isolation, and a certain shy virginity of manner. There was a suggestion of physical purity in the folds of her fresh-looking robe, and a certain picturesque tastefulness in the details, that, without knowing why, made him think that the robe was her invention and handiwork, even as the carriage she occupied was evidently the work of her companion. Her own hand, a trifle too thin, but well-shaped, subtle-fingered, and gentle-womanly, rested on the side of the carriage, the counterpart of the strong mechanical grasp of her companion's.

There was some obstruction to the progress of the vehicle; and Mr. Oakhurst stepped forward to assist. While the wheel was being lifted over the curbstone, it was necessary that she should hold his arm; and for a moment her thin hand rested there, light and cold as a snowflake, and then, as it seemed to him, like a

snow-flake melted away. Then there was a pause, and then conversation, the lady joining occasionally and shyly.

It appeared that they were man and wife; that for the past two years she had been a great invalid, and had lost the use of her lower limbs from rheumatism; that until lately she had been confined to her bed, until her husband — who was a master-carpenter — had bethought himself to make her this carriage. He took her out regularly for an airing before going to work, because it was his only time, and — they attracted less attention. They had tried many doctors, but without avail. They had been advised to go to the Sulphur Springs; but it was expensive. Mr. Decker, the husband, had once saved eighty dollars for that purpose, but while in San Francisco had his pocket picked — Mr Decker was so senseless! (The intelligent reader need not be told that it is the lady who is speaking.) They had never been able to make up the sum again, and they had given up the idea. It was a dreadful thing to have one's pocket picked. Did he not think so?

Her husband's face was crimson; but Mr. Oakhurst's countenance was quite calm and unmoved, as he gravely agreed with her, and walked by her side until they passed the little garden that he had admired. Here Mr. Oak-

hurst commanded a halt, and, going to the door, astounded the proprietor by a preposterously extravagant offer for a choice of the flowers. Presently he returned to the carriage with his arms full of roses, heliotrope, and verbena, and cast them in the lap of the invalid. While she was bending over them with childish delight, Mr. Oakhurst took the opportunity of drawing her husband aside.

“Perhaps,” he said in a low voice, and a manner quite free from any personal annoyance, — “perhaps it’s just as well that you lied to her as you did. You can say now that the pick-pocket was arrested the other day, and you got your money back.” Mr. Oakhurst quietly slipped four twenty-dollar gold-pieces into the broad hand of the bewildered Mr. Decker. “Say that—or any thing you like—but the truth. Promise me you won’t say that.”

The man promised. Mr. Oakhurst quietly returned to the front of the little carriage. The sick woman was still eagerly occupied with the flowers, and, as she raised her eyes to his, her faded cheek seemed to have caught some color from the roses, and her eyes some of their dewy freshness. But at that instant Mr. Oakhurst lifted his hat, and before she could thank him was gone.

I grieve to say that Mr. Decker shamelessly

broke his promise. That night, in the very goodness of his heart and uxorious self-abnegation, he, like all devoted husbands, not only offered himself, but his friend and benefactor as a sacrifice on the family-altar. It is only fair, however, to add that he spoke with great fervor of the generosity of Mr. Oakhurst, and dwelt with an enthusiasm quite common with his class on the mysterious fame and prodigal vices of the gambler.

“And now, Elsie dear, say that you’ll forgive me,” said Mr. Decker, dropping on one knee beside his wife’s couch. “I did it for the best. It was for you, dearey, that I put that money on them cards that night in ’Frisco. I thought to win a heap — enough to take you away, and enough left to get you a new dress.”

Mrs. Decker smiled, and pressed her husband’s hand. “I do forgive you, Joe dear,” she said, still smiling, with eyes abstractedly fixed on the ceiling; “and you ought to be whipped for deceiving me so, you bad boy! and making me make such a speech. There, say no more about it. If you’ll be very good hereafter and will just now hand me that cluster of roses, I’ll forgive you.” She took the branch in her fingers, lifted the roses to her face, and presently said, behind their leaves, —

“Joe!”

“What is it, lovey?”

“Do you think that this Mr. — what do you call him? — Jack Oakhurst would have given that money back to you, if I hadn't made that speech?”

“Yes.”

“If he hadn't seen me at all?”

Mr. Decker looked up. His wife had managed in some way to cover up her whole face with the roses, except her eyes, which were dangerously bright.

“No! It was you, Elsie — it was all along of seeing you that made him do it.”

“A poor sick woman like me?”

“A sweet, little, lovely, pooty Elsie — Joe's own little wifey! How could he help it?”

Mrs. Decker fondly cast one arm around her husband's neck, still keeping the roses to her face with the other. From behind them she began to murmur gently and idiotically, “Dear, ole square Joey. Elsie's oney booful big bear.” But, really, I do not see that my duty as a chronicler of facts compels me to continue this little lady's speech any further; and, out of respect to the unmarried reader, I stop.

Nevertheless, the next morning Mrs. Decker betrayed some slight and apparently uncalled for irritability on reaching the Plaza, and presently desired her husband to wheel her back

nome. Moreover, she was very much astonished at meeting Mr. Oakhurst just as they were returning, and even doubted if it were he, and questioned her husband as to his identity with the stranger of yesterday as he approached. Her manner to Mr. Oakhurst, also, was quite in contrast with her husband's frank welcome. Mr. Oakhurst instantly detected it. "Her husband has told her all, and she dislikes me," he said to himself, with that fatal appreciation of the half-truths of a woman's motives that causes the wisest masculine critic to stumble. He lingered only long enough to take the business address of the husband, and then lifting his hat gravely, without looking at the lady, went his way. It struck the honest master-carpenter as one of the charming anomalies of his wife's character, that, although the meeting was evidently very much constrained and unpleasant, instantly afterward his wife's spirits began to rise. "You was hard on him, a leetle hard; wasn't you, Elsie?" said Mr. Decker depreciatingly. "I'm afraid he may think I've broke my promise." — "Ah, indeed!" said the lady indifferently. Mr. Decker instantly stepped round to the front of the vehicle. "You look like an A 1 first-class lady riding down Broadway in her own carriage, Elsie," said he. "I never seed you lookin' so peart and sassy before."

A few days later, the proprietor of the San Isabel Sulphur Springs received the following note in Mr. Oakhurst's well-known, dainty hand:—

“DEAR STEVE,—I've been thinking over your proposition to buy Nichols's quarter-interest, and have concluded to go in. But I don't see how the thing will pay until you have more accommodation down there, and for the best class,—I mean *my* customers. What we want is an extension to the main building, and two or three cottages put up. I send down a builder to take hold of the job at once. He takes his sick wife with him; and you are to look after them as you would for one of us.

“I may run down there myself after the races, just to look after things; but I sha'n't set up any game this season.

“Yours always,

“JOHN OAKHURST.”

It was only the last sentence of this letter that provoked criticism. “I can understand,” said Mr. Hamlin, a professional brother, to whom Mr. Oakhurst's letter was shown,—“I can understand why Jack goes in heavy and builds; for it's a sure spec, and is bound to be a mighty soft thing in time, if he comes here regularly. But why in blank he don't set up a bank this season, and take the chance of getting some of the money back that he puts into circulation in building, is what gets me. I wonder now,” he mused deeply, “what is his little game.”

The season had been a prosperous one to Mr. Oakhurst, and proportionally disastrous to several members of the legislature, judges, colonels, and others who had enjoyed but briefly the pleasure of Mr. Oakhurst's midnight society. And yet Sacramento had become very dull to him. He had lately formed a habit of early morning walks, so unusual and startling to his friends, both male and female, as to occasion the intensest curiosity. Two or three of the latter set spies upon his track; but the inquisition resulted only in the discovery that Mr. Oakhurst walked to the Plaza, sat down upon one particular bench for a few moments, and then returned without-seeing anybody; and the theory that there was a woman in the case was abandoned. A few superstitious gentlemen of his own profession believed that he did it for "luck." Some others, more practical, declared that he went out to "study points."

After the races at Marysville, Mr. Oakhurst went to San Francisco; from that place he returned to Marysville, but a few days after was seen at San José, Santa Cruz, and Oakland. Those who met him declared that his manner was restless and feverish, and quite unlike his ordinary calmness and phlegm. Col. Starbottle pointed out the fact, that at San Francisco, at the club, Jack had declined to deal. "Hand

shaky, sir; depend upon it. Don't stimulate enough — blank him!"

From San José he started to go to Oregon by land with a rather expensive outfit of horses and camp equipage; but, on reaching Stockton, he suddenly diverged, and four hours later found him with a single horse entering the cañon of the San Isabel Warm Sulphur Springs.

It was a pretty triangular valley lying at the foot of three sloping mountains, dark with pines, and fantastic with madrono and manzanita. Nestling against the mountain-side, the straggling buildings and long piazza of the hotel glittered through the leaves, and here and there shone a white toy-like cottage. Mr. Oakhurst was not an admirer of Nature; but he felt something of the same novel satisfaction in the view, that he experienced in his first morning walk in Sacramento. And now carriages began to pass him on the road filled with gayly-dressed women and the cold California outlines of the landscape began to take upon themselves somewhat of a human warmth and color. And then the long hotel piazza came in view, efflorescent with the full-toiletted fair. Mr. Oakhurst, a good rider after the California fashion, did not check his speed as he approached his destination, but charged the hotel at a gallop, threw his horse on his haunches within a foot of the

piazza, and then quietly emerged from the cloud of dust that veiled his dismounting.

Whatever feverish excitement might have raged within, all his habitual calm returned as he stepped upon the piazza. With the instinct of long habit, he turned and faced the battery of eyes with the same cold indifference with which he had for years encountered the half-hidden sneers of men and the half-frightened admiration of women. Only one person stepped forward to welcome him. Oddly enough, it was Dick Hamilton, perhaps the only one present, who by birth, education, and position, might have satisfied the most fastidious social critic. Happily for Mr. Oakhurst's reputation, he was also a very rich banker and social leader. "Do you know who that is you spoke to?" asked young Parker with an alarmed expression. "Yes," replied Hamilton with characteristic effrontery. "The man you lost a thousand dollars to last week. I only know him *socially*." "But isn't he a gambler?" queried the youngest Miss Smith. "He is," replied Hamilton; "but I wish, my dear young lady, that we all played as open and honest a game as our friend yonder, and were as willing as he is to abide by its fortunes."

But Mr. Oakhurst was happily out of hearing of this colloquy, and was even then loud

ging listlessly yet watchfully along the upper hall. Suddenly he heard a light footstep behind him, and then his name called in a familiar voice that drew the blood quickly to his heart. He turned, and she stood before him.

But how transformed! If I have hesitated to describe the hollow-eyed cripple, the quaintly-dressed artisan's wife, a few pages ago, what shall I do with this graceful, shapely, elegantly-attired gentlewoman into whom she has been merged within these two months? In good faith she was very pretty. You and I, my dear madam, would have been quick to see that those charming dimples were misplaced for true beauty, and too fixed in their quality for honest mirthfulness; that the delicate lines around these aquiline nostrils were cruel and selfish; that the sweet virginal surprise of these lovely eyes were as apt to be opened on her plate as upon the gallant speeches of her dinner partner; that her sympathetic color came and went more with her own spirits than yours. But you and I are not in love with her, dear madam, and Mr. Oakhurst is. And, even in the folds of her Parisian gown, I am afraid this poor fellow saw the same subtle strokes of purity that he had seen in her homespun robe. And then there was the delightful revelation that she could walk, and that she had dear

little feet of her own in the tiniest slippers of her French shoemaker, with such preposterous blue bows, and Chappell's own stamp — Rue de something or other, Paris — on the narrow sole.

He ran toward her with a heightened color and outstretched hands. But she whipped her own behind her, glanced rapidly up and down the long hall, and stood looking at him with a half-audacious, half-mischievous admiration, in utter contrast to her old reserve.

“I've a great mind not to shake hands with you at all. You passed me just now on the piazza without speaking; and I ran after you, as I suppose many another poor woman has done.”

Mr. Oakhurst stammered that she was so changed.

“The more reason why you should know me. Who changed me? You. You have re-created me. You found a helpless, crippled, sick, poverty-stricken woman, with one dress to her back, and that her own make, and you gave her life, health, strength, and fortune. You did; and you know it, sir. How do you like your work?” She caught the side-seams of her gown in either hand, and dropped him a playful courtesy. Then, with a sudden, relenting gesture, she gave him both her hands.

Outrageous as this speech was, and unfeminine as I trust every fair reader will deem it,

I fear it pleased Mr. Oakhurst. Not but that he was accustomed to a certain frank female admiration; but then it was of the *coulisse*, and not of the cloister, with which he always persisted in associating Mrs. Decker. To be addressed in this way by an invalid Puritan, a sick saint with the austerity of suffering still clothing her, a woman who had a Bible on the dressing-table, who went to church three times a day, and was devoted to her husband, completely bowled him over. He still held her hands as she went on, —

“Why didn’t you come before? What were you doing in Marysville, in San José, in Oakland? You see I have followed you. I saw you as you came down the cañon, and knew you at once. I saw your letter to Joseph, and knew you were coming. Why didn’t you write to me? You will some time! — Good-evening, Mr. Hamilton.”

She had withdrawn her hands, but not until Hamilton, ascending the staircase, was nearly abreast of them. He raised his hat to her with well-bred composure, nodded familiarly to Oakhurst, and passed on. When he had gone, Mrs. Decker lifted her eyes to Mr. Oakhurst “Some day I shall ask a great favor of you.”

Mr. Oakhurst begged that it should be now “No, not until you know me better. Then some day, I shall want you to — kill that man!”

She laughed such a pleasant little ringing laugh, such a display of dimples, — albeit a little fixed in the corners of her mouth, — such an innocent light in her brown eyes, and such a lovely color in her cheeks, that Mr. Oakhurst (who seldom laughed) was fain to laugh too. It was as if a lamb had proposed to a fox a foray into a neighboring sheepfold.

A few evenings after this, Mrs. Decker arose from a charmed circle of her admirers on the hotel piazza, excused herself for a few moments, laughingly declined an escort, and ran over to her little cottage — one of her husband's creation — across the road. Perhaps from the sudden and unwonted exercise in her still convalescent state, she breathed hurriedly and feverishly as she entered her boudoir, and once or twice placed her hand upon her breast. She was startled on turning up the light to find her husband lying on the sofa.

“You look hot and excited, Elsie love,” said Mr. Decker. “You ain't took worse, are you?”

Mrs Decker's face had paled, but now flushed again. “No,” she said; “only a little pain here,” as she again placed her hand upon her corsage.

“Can I do any thing for you?” said Mr. Decker, rising with affectionate concern.

“Run over to the hotel and get me some brandy, quick!”

Mr. Decker ran. Mrs Decker closed and bolted the door, and then, putting her hand to her bosom, drew out the pain. It was folded foursquare, and was, I grieve to say, in Mr. Oakhurst's handwriting.

She devoured it with burning eyes and cheeks until there came a step upon the porch; then she hurriedly replaced it in her bosom, and unbolted the door. Her husband entered. She raised the spirits to her lips, and declared herself better.

"Are you going over there again to-night?" asked Mr. Decker submissively.

"No," said Mrs. Decker, with her eyes fixed dreamily on the floor.

"I wouldn't if I was you," said Mr. Decker with a sigh of relief. After a pause, he took a seat on the sofa, and, drawing his wife to his side, said, "Do you know what I was thinking of when you came in, Elsie?" Mrs. Decker ran her fingers through his stiff black hair, and couldn't imagine.

"I was thinking of old times, Elsie: I was thinking of the days when I built that kerridge for you, Elsie,—when I used to take you out to ride, and was both hoss and driver. We was poor then, and you was sick, Elsie; but we was happy. We've got money now, and a house and you're quite another woman. I may say,

dear, that you're a *new* woman. And that's where the trouble comes in. I could build you a kerridge, Elsie; I could build you a house, Elsie — but there I stopped. I couldn't build up *you*. You're strong and pretty, Elsie, and fresh and new. But somehow, Elsie, you ain't no work of mine!"

He paused. With one hand laid gently on his forehead, and the other pressed upon her bosom, as if to feel certain of the presence of her pain, she said sweetly and soothingly,—

"But it was your work, dear."

Mr. Decker shook his head sorrowfully. "No, Elsie, not mine. I had the chance to do it once, and I let it go. It's done now—but not by me."

Mrs. Decker raised her surprised, innocent eyes to his. He kissed her tenderly, and then went on in a more cheerful voice,—

"That ain't all I was thinking of, Elsie. I was thinking that maybe you give too much of your company to that Mr. Hamilton. Not that there's any wrong in it, to you or him; but it might make people talk. You're the only one here, Elsie," said the master-carpenter, looking fondly at his wife, "who isn't talked about, whose work ain't inspected or condemned."

Mrs. Decker was glad he had spoken about it. She had thought so too. But she could not well

be uncivil to Mr. Hamilton, who was a fine gentleman, without making a powerful enemy "And he's always treated me as if I was a born lady in his own circle," added the little woman, with a certain pride that made her husband fondly smile. "But I have thought of a plan. He will not stay here if I should go away. If, for instance, I went to San Francisco to visit ma for a few days, he would be gone before I should return."

Mr. Decker was delighted. "By all means," he said, "go to-morrow. Jack Oakhurst is going down; and I'll put you in his charge."

Mrs. Decker did not think it was prudent. "Mr. Oakhurst is our friend, Joseph; but you know his reputation." In fact, she did not know that she ought to go now, knowing that he was going the same day; but, with a kiss, Mr. Decker overcame her scruples. She yielded gracefully. Few women, in fact, knew how to give up a point as charmingly as she.

She staid a week in San Francisco. When she returned, she was a trifle thinner and paler than she had been. This she explained as the result of perhaps too active exercise and excitement. "I was out of doors nearly all the time, as ma will tell you," she said to her husband, "and always alone. I am getting quite independent now, she added gayly. "I don't want

my escort. I believe, Joey dear, I could get along even without you, I'm so brave!"

But her visit, apparently, had not been productive of her impelling design. Mr. Hamilton had not gone, but had remained, and called upon them that very evening. "I've thought of a plan, Joey dear," said Mrs. Decker, when he had departed. "Poor Mr. Oakhurst has a miserable room at the hotel. Suppose you ask him, when he returns from San Francisco, to stop with us. He can have our spare-room. I don't think," she added archly, "that Mr. Hamilton will call often." Her husband laughed, intimated that she was a little coquette, pinched her cheek, and complied. "The queer thing about a woman," he said afterward confidentially to Mr. Oakhurst, "is, that, without having any plan of her own, she'll take anybody's, and build a house on it entirely different to suit herself. And dern my skin if you'll be able to say whether or not you didn't give the scale and measurements yourself! That's what gets me!"

The next week Mr. Oakhurst was installed in the Deckers' cottage. The business relations of her husband and himself were known to all, and her own reputation was above suspicion. Indeed, few women were more popular. She was domestic, she was prudent, she was pious. In a country of great feminine freedom and latitude,

she never rode or walked with anybody but her husband. In an epoch of slang and ambiguous expression, she was always precise and formal in her speech. In the midst of a fashion of ostentatious decoration, she never wore a diamond, nor a single valuable jewel. She never permitted an indecorum in public. She never countenanced the familiarities of California society. She declaimed against the prevailing tone of infidelity and scepticism in religion. Few people who were present will ever forget the dignified yet stately manner with which she rebuked Mr. Hamilton in the public parlor for entering upon the discussion of a work on materialism, lately published; and some among them, also, will not forget the expression of amused surprise on Mr. Hamilton's face, that gradually changed to sardonic gravity, as he courteously waived his point; certainly not Mr. Oakhurst, who, from that moment, began to be uneasily impatient of his friend, and even — if such a term could be applied to any moral quality in Mr. Oakhurst — to fear him.

For during this time Mr. Oakhurst had begun to show symptoms of a change in his usual habits. He was seldom, if ever, seen in his old haunts, in a bar-room, or with his old associates. Pink and white notes, in distracted handwriting, accumulated on the dressing-table in his room.

at Sacramento. It was given out in San Francisco that he had some organic disease of the heart, for which his physician had prescribed perfect rest. He read more; he took long walks; he sold his fast horses; he went to church.

I have a very vivid recollection of his first appearance there. He did not accompany the Deckers, nor did he go into their pew, but came in as the service commenced, and took a seat quietly in one of the back-pews. By some mysterious instinct, his presence became presently known to the congregation, some of whom so far forgot themselves, in their curiosity, as to face around, and apparently address their responses to him. Before the service was over, it was pretty well understood that "miserable sinners" meant Mr. Oakhurst. Nor did this mysterious influence fail to affect the officiating clergyman, who introduced an allusion to Mr. Oakhurst's calling and habits in a sermon on the architecture of Solomon's temple, and in a manner so pointed, and yet labored, as to cause the youngest of us to flame with indignation. Happily, however, it was lost upon Jack: I do not think he even heard it. His handsome, colorless face, albeit a trifle worn and thoughtful, was inscrutable. Only once, during the singing of a hymn, at a certain note in the contralto's voice, there crept into his dark eyes a look of wistful

tenderness, so yearning and yet so hopeless, that those who were watching him felt their own glisten. Yet I retain a very vivid remembrance of his standing up to receive the benediction, with the suggestion, in his manner and tightly-buttoned coat, of taking the fire of his adversary at ten paces. After church, he disappeared as quietly as he had entered, and fortunately escaped hearing the comments on his rash act. His appearance was generally considered as an impertinence, attributable only to some wanton fancy, or possibly a bet. One or two thought that the sexton was exceedingly remiss in not turning him out after discovering who he was; and a prominent pew-holder remarked, that if he couldn't take his wife and daughters to that church, without exposing them to such an influence, he would try to find some church where he could. Another traced Mr. Oakhurst's presence to certain Broad Church radical tendencies, which he regretted to say he had lately noted in their pastor. Deacon Sawyer, whose delicately-organized, sickly wife had already borne him eleven children, and died in an ambitious attempt to complete the dozen, avowed that the presence of a person of Mr. Oakhurst's various and indiscriminate gallantries was an insult to the memory of the deceased, that, as a man, he could not brook.

It was about this time that Mr. Oakhurst, contrasting himself with a conventional world in which he had hitherto rarely mingled, became aware that there was something in his face, figure, and carriage quite unlike other men,—something, that, if it did not betray his former career, at least showed an individuality and originality that was suspicious. In this belief, he shaved off his long, silken mustache, and religiously brushed out his clustering curls every morning. He even went so far as to affect a negligence of dress, and hid his small, slim, arched feet in the largest and heaviest walking-shoes. There is a story told that he went to his tailor in Sacramento, and asked him to make him a suit of clothes like everybody else. The tailor, familiar with Mr. Oakhurst's fastidiousness, did not know what he meant. "I mean," said Mr. Oakhurst savagely, "something *respectable*,—something that doesn't exactly fit me, you know." But, however Mr. Oakhurst might hide his shapely limbs in homespun and home-made garments, there was something in his carriage, something in the pose of his beautiful head, something in the strong and fine manliness of his presence, something in the perfect and utter discipline and control of his muscles, something in the high repose of his nature,—a repose not so much a matter of intellectual rul

ing as of his very nature, — that, go where he would, and with whom, he was always a notable man in ten thousand. Perhaps this was never so clearly intimated to Mr. Oakhurst, as when, emboldened by Mr. Hamilton's advice and assistance, and his own predilections, he became a San-Francisco broker. Even before objection was made to his presence in the Board, — the objection, I remember, was urged very eloquently by Watt Sanders, who was supposed to be the inventor of the "freezing-out" system of disposing of poor stockholders, and who also enjoyed the reputation of having been the impelling cause of Briggs of Tuolumne's ruin and suicide, — even before this formal protest of respectability against lawlessness, the aquiline suggestions of Mr. Oakhurst's mien and countenance, not only prematurely fluttered the pigeons, but absolutely occasioned much uneasiness among the fish-hawks who circled below him with their booty. "Dash me! but he's as likely to go after us as anybody," said Joe Fielding.

It wanted but a few days before the close of the brief summer season at San Isabel Warm Springs. Already there had been some migration of the more fashionable; and there was an uncomfortable suggestion of dregs and lees in

the social life that remained. Mr. Oakhurst was moody. It was hinted that even the secure reputation of Mrs. Decker could no longer protect her from the gossip which his presence excited. It is but fair to her to say, that, during the last few weeks of this trying ordeal, she looked like a sweet, pale martyr, and conducted herself toward her traducers with the gentle, forgiving manner of one who relied not upon the idle homage of the crowd, but upon the security of a principle that was dearer than popular favor. "They talk about myself and Mr. Oakhurst, my dear," she said to a friend; "but heaven and my husband can best answer their calumny. It never shall be said that my husband ever turned his back upon a friend in the moment of his adversity, because the position was changed, — because his friend was poor, and he was rich." This was the first intimation to the public that Jack had lost money, although it was known generally that the Deckers had lately bought some valuable property in San Francisco.

A few evenings after this, an incident occurred which seemed to unpleasantly discord with the general social harmony that had always existed at San Isabel. It was at dinner; and Mr. Oakhurst and Mr. Hamilton, who sat together at a separate table, were observed to rise in some

agitation. When they reached the hall, by a common instinct they stepped into a little breakfast-room which was vacant, and closed the door. Then Mr. Hamilton turned with a half-amused, half-serious smile toward his friend, and said, —

“If we are to quarrel, Jack Oakhurst, — you and I, — in the name of all that is ridiculous, don’t let it be about a” —

I do not know what was the epithet intended. It was either unspoken or lost; for at that very instant Mr. Oakhurst raised a wineglass, and dashed its contents into Hamilton’s face.

As they faced each other, the men seemed to have changed natures. Mr. Oakhurst was trembling with excitement, and the wineglass that he returned to the table shivered between his fingers. Mr. Hamilton stood there, grayish white, erect, and dripping. After a pause, he said coldly, —

“So be it. But remember, our quarrel commences here. If I fall by your hand, you shall not use it to clear her character: if you fall by mine, you shall not be called a martyr. I am sorry it has come to this; but amen, the sooner now, the better.”

He turned proudly, dropped his lids over his cold steel-blue eyes, as if sheathing a rapier bowed, and passed coldly out

They met, twelve hours later, in a little hollow two miles from the hotel, on the Stockton road. As Mr. Oakhurst received his pistol from Col. Starbottle's hands, he said to him in a low voice, "Whatever turns up or down, I shall not return to the hotel. You will find some directions in my room. Go there" — But his voice suddenly faltered, and he turned his glistening eyes away, to his second's intense astonishment. "I've been out a dozen times with Jack Oakhurst," said Col. Starbottle afterward, "and I never saw him anyways cut before. Blank me if I didn't think he was losing his sand, till he walked to position."

The two reports were almost simultaneous. Mr. Oakhurst's right arm dropped suddenly to his side, and his pistol would have fallen from his paralyzed fingers; but the discipline of trained nerve and muscle prevailed, and he kept his grasp until he had shifted it to the other hand, without changing his position. Then there was a silence that seemed interminable, a gathering of two or three dark figures where a smoke-curl still lazily floated, and then the hurried, husky, panting voice of Col. Starbottle in his ear, "He's hit hard — through the lungs — you must run for it!"

Jack turned his dark, questioning eyes upon his second, but did not seem to listen, — rather

seemed to hear some other voice, remoter in the distance. He hesitated, and then made a step forward in the direction of the distant group. Then he paused again as the figures separated, and the surgeon came hastily toward him.

“He would like to speak with you a moment,” said the man. “You have little time to lose, I know; but,” he added in a lower voice, “it is my duty to tell you he has still less.”

A look of despair, so hopeless in its intensity, swept over Mr. Oakhurst’s usually impassive face, that the surgeon started. “You are hit,” he said, glancing at Jack’s helpless arm.

“Nothing — a mere scratch,” said Jack hastily. Then he added with a bitter laugh, “I’m not in luck to-day. But come: we’ll see what he wants.”

His long, feverish stride outstripped the surgeon’s; and in another moment he stood where the dying man lay, — like most dying men, — the one calm, composed, central figure of an anxious group. Mr. Oakhurst’s face was less calm as he dropped on one knee beside him, and took his hand. “I want to speak with this gentleman alone,” said Hamilton, with something of his old imperious manner, as he turned to those about him. When they drew back, he looked up in Oakhurst’s face.

“I’ve something to tell you, Jack.”

His own face was white, but not so white as that which Mr. Oakhurst bent over him, — a face so ghastly, with haunting doubts, and a hopeless presentiment of coming evil, — a face so piteous in its infinite weariness and envy of death, that the dying man was touched, even in the languor of dissolution, with a pang of compassion; and the cynical smile faded from his lips.

“Forgive me, Jack,” he whispered more feebly, “for what I have to say. I don’t say it in anger, but only because it must be said. I could not do my duty to you, I could not die contented, until you knew it all. It’s a miserable business at best, all around. But it can’t be helped now. Only I ought to have fallen by Decker’s pistol, and not yours.”

A flush like fire came into Jack’s cheek, and he would have risen; but Hamilton held him fast.

“Listen! In my pocket you will find two letters. Take them — there! You will know the handwriting. But promise you will not read them until you are in a place of safety. Promise me.”

Jack did not speak, but held the letters between his fingers as if they had been burning coals.

“Promise me,” said Hamilton faintly.

“Why?” asked Oakhurst, dropping his friend’s hand coldly.

“Because,” said the dying man with a bitter smile, — “because — when you have read them — you — will — go back — to capture — and death!”

They were his last words. He pressed Jack’s hand faintly. Then his grasp relaxed, and he fell back a corpse.

It was nearly ten o’clock at night, and Mrs. Decker reclined languidly upon the sofa with a novel in her hand, while her husband discussed the politics of the country in the bar-room of the hotel. It was a warm night; and the French window looking out upon a little balcony was partly open. Suddenly she heard a foot upon the balcony, and she raised her eyes from the book with a slight start. The next moment the window was hurriedly thrust wide, and a man entered.

Mrs. Decker rose to her feet with a little cry of alarm.

“For Heaven’s sake, Jack, are you mad? He has only gone for a little while — he may return at any moment. Come an hour later, to-morrow, any time when I can get rid of him — but go, now, dear, at once.”

Mr. Oakhurst walked toward the door, bolted it, and then faced her without a word. His face

was haggard ; his coat-sleeve hung loosely over an arm that was bandaged and bloody.

Nevertheless her voice did not falter as she turned again toward him. "What has happened, Jack. Why are you here?"

He opened his coat, and threw two letters in her lap.

"To return your lover's letters ; to kill you — and then myself," he said in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible.

Among the many virtues of this admirable woman was invincible courage. She did not faint ; she did not cry out ; she sat quietly down again, folded her hands in her lap, and said calmly, —

"And why should you not?"

Had she recoiled, had she shown any fear or contrition, had she essayed an explanation or apology, Mr. Oakhurst would have looked upon it as an evidence of guilt. But there is no quality that courage recognizes so quickly as courage. There is no condition that desperation bows before but desperation. And Mr. Oakhurst's power of analysis was not so keen as to prevent him from confounding her courage with a moral quality. Even in his fury, he could not help admiring this dauntless invalid.

"Why should you not?" she repeated with a smile. "You gave me life, health, and happi-

ness, Jack. You gave me your love. Why should you not take what you have given? Go on. I am ready."

She held out her hands with that same infinite grace of yielding with which she had taken his own on the first day of their meeting at the hotel. Jack raised his head, looked at her for one wild moment, dropped upon his knees beside her, and raised the folds of her dress to his feverish lips. But she was too clever not to instantly see her victory: she was too much of a woman, with all her cleverness, to refrain from pressing that victory home. At the same moment, as with the impulse of an outraged and wounded woman, she rose, and, with an imperious gesture, pointed to the window. Mr. Oakhurst rose in his turn, cast one glance upon her, and without another word passed out of her presence forever.

When he had gone, she closed the window and bolted it, and, going to the chimney-piece, placed the letters, one by one, in the flame of the candle until they were consumed. I would not have the reader think, that, during this painful operation, she was unmoved. Her hand trembled, and — not being a brute — for some minutes (perhaps longer) she felt very badly, and the corners of her sensitive mouth were depressed. When her husband arrived, it was

with a genuine joy that she ran to him, and nestled against his broad breast with a feeling of security that thrilled the honest fellow to the core.

“But I’ve heard dreadful news to-night, Elsie,” said Mr. Decker, after a few endearments were exchanged.

“Don’t tell me any thing dreadful, dear: I’m not well to-night,” she pleaded sweetly.

“But it’s about Mr. Oakhurst and Hamilton.”

“Please!” Mr. Decker could not resist the petitionary grace of those white hands and that sensitive mouth, and took her to his arms. Suddenly he said, “What’s that?”

He was pointing to the bosom of her white dress. Where Mr. Oakhurst had touched her, there was a spot of blood.

It was nothing: she had slightly cut her hand in closing the window; it shut so hard! If Mr. Decker had remembered to close and bolt the shutter before he went out, he might have saved her this. There was such a genuine irritability and force in this remark, that Mr. Decker was quite overcome by remorse. But Mrs. Decker forgave him with that graciousness which I have before pointed out in these pages. And with the halo of that forgiveness and marital confidence still lingering above the pair, with the reader’s permission we will leave them, and return to Mr. Oakhurst.

But not for two weeks. At the end of that time, he walked into his rooms in Sacramento, and in his old manner took his seat at the faro table.

“How’s your arm, Jack?” asked an incautious player.

There was a smile followed the question, which, however, ceased as Jack looked up quietly at the speaker.

“It bothers my dealing a little; but I can shoot as well with my left.”

The game was continued in that decorous silence which usually distinguished the table at which Mr. John Oakhurst presided.

WAN LEE, THE PAGAN.

AS I opened Hop Sing's letter, there fluttered to the ground a square strip of yellow paper covered with hieroglyphics, which, at first glance, I innocently took to be the label from a pack of Chinese fire-crackers. But the same envelope also contained a smaller strip of rice-paper, with two Chinese characters traced in India ink, that I at once knew to be Hop Sing's visiting-card. The whole, as afterwards literally translated, ran as follows:—

“To the stranger the gates of my house are not closed: the rice-jar is on the left, and the sweetmeats on the right, as you enter.

Two sayings of the Master:—

Hospitality is the virtue of the son and the wisdom of the ancestor.

The Superior man is light hearted after the crop-gathering: he makes a festival.

When the stranger is in your melon-patch, observe him not too closely: inattention is often the highest form of civility.

Happiness, Peace, and Prosperity.

HOP SING.”

Admirable, certainly, as was this morality and proverbial wisdom, and although this last axiom was very characteristic of my friend Hop Sing, who was that most sombre of all humorists, a Chinese philosopher, I must confess, that, even after a very free translation, I was at a loss to make any immediate application of the message. Luckily I discovered a third enclosure in the shape of a little note in English, and Hop Sing's own commercial hand. It ran thus:—

“The pleasure of your company is requested at No. — Sacramento Street, on Friday evening at eight o'clock. A cup of tea at nine, — sharp.

“HOP SING.”

This explained all. It meant a visit to Hop Sing's warehouse, the opening and exhibition of some rare Chinese novelties and *curios*, a chat in the back office, a cup of tea of a perfection unknown beyond these sacred precincts, cigars, and a visit to the Chinese theatre or temple. This was, in fact, the favorite programme of Hop Sing when he exercised his functions of hospitality as the chief factor or superintendent of the Ning Foo Company.

At eight o'clock on Friday evening, I entered the warehouse of Hop Sing. There was that deliciously commingled mysterious foreign odor that I had so often noticed: there was the old

array of uncouth-looking objects, the long procession of jars and crockery, the same singular blending of the grotesque and the mathematically neat and exact, the same endless suggestions of frivolity and fragility, the same want of harmony in colors, that were each, in themselves, beautiful and rare. Kites in the shape of enormous dragons and gigantic butterflies; kites so ingeniously arranged as to utter at intervals, when facing the wind, the cry of a hawk; kites so large as to be beyond any boy's power of restraint, — so large that you understood why kite-flying in China was an amusement for adults; gods of china and bronze so gratuitously ugly as to be beyond any human interest or sympathy from their very impossibility; jars of sweetmeats covered all over with moral sentiments from Confucius; hats that looked like baskets, and baskets that looked like hats; silks so light that I hesitate to record the incredible number of square yards that you might pass through the ring on your little finger, — these, and a great many other indescribable objects, were all familiar to me. I pushed my way through the dimly-lighted warehouse, until I reached the back office, or parlor, where I found Hop Sing waiting to receive me.

Before I describe him, I want the average reader to discharge from his mind any idea of a

Chinaman that he may have gathered from the pantomime. He did not wear beautifully scalloped drawers fringed with little bells (I never met a Chinaman who did); he did not habitually carry his forefinger extended before him at right angles with his body; nor did I ever hear him utter the mysterious sentence, "Ching a ring a ring chaw;" nor dance under any provocation. He was, on the whole, a rather grave, decorous, handsome gentleman. His complexion, which extended all over his head, except where his long pig-tail grew, was like a very nice piece of glazed brown paper-muslin. His eyes were black and bright, and his eyelids set at an angle of fifteen degrees; his nose straight, and delicately formed; his mouth small; and his teeth white and clean. He wore a dark blue silk blouse; and in the streets, on cold days, a short jacket of astrachan fur. He wore, also, a pair of drawers of blue brocade gathered tightly over his calves and ankles, offering a general sort of suggestion, that he had forgotten his trousers that morning, but that, so gentlemanly were his manners, his friends had forborne to mention the fact to him. His manner was urbane, although quite serious. He spoke French and English fluently. In brief, I doubt if you could have found the equal of this Pagan shopkeeper among the Christian traders of San Francisco.

There were a few others present, — a judge of the Federal Court, an editor, a high government official, and a prominent merchant. After we had drunk our tea, and tasted a few sweetmeats from a mysterious jar, that looked as if it might contain a preserved mouse among its other non-descript treasures, Hop Sing arose, and, gravely beckoning us to follow him, began to descend to the basement. When we got there, we were amazed at finding it brilliantly lighted, and that a number of chairs were arranged in a half-circle on the asphalt pavement. When he had courteously seated us, he said, —

“I have invited you to witness a performance which I can at least promise you no other foreigners but yourselves have ever seen. Wang, the court-juggler, arrived here yesterday morning. He has never given a performance outside of the palace before. I have asked him to entertain my friends this evening. He requires no theatre, stage accessories, or any confederate, — nothing more than you see here. Will you be pleased to examine the ground yourselves, gentlemen.”

Of course we examined the premises. It was the ordinary basement or cellar of the San-Francisco storehouse, cemented to keep out the damp. We poked our sticks into the pavement, and rapped on the walls, to satisfy our polite

host — but for no other purpose. We were quite content to be the victims of any clever deception. For myself, I knew I was ready to be deluded to any extent, and, if I had been offered an explanation of what followed, I should have probably declined it.

Although I am satisfied that Wang's general performance was the first of that kind ever given on American soil, it has, probably, since become so familiar to many of my readers, that I shall not bore them with it here. He began by setting to flight, with the aid of his fan, the usual number of butterflies, made before our eyes of little bits of tissue-paper, and kept them in the air during the remainder of the performance. I have a vivid recollection of the judge trying to catch one that had lit on his knee, and of its evading him with the pertinacity of a living insect. And, even at this time, Wang, still plying his fan, was taking chickens out of hats, making oranges disappear, pulling endless yards of silk from his sleeve, apparently filling the whole area of the basement with goods that appeared mysteriously from the ground, from his own sleeves, from nowhere! He swallowed knives to the ruin of his digestion for years to come; he dislocated every limb of his body; he reclined in the air, apparently upon nothing. But his crowning performance, which I have

never yet seen repeated, was the most weird, mysterious, and astounding. It is my apology for this long introduction, my sole excuse for writing this article, and the genesis of this veracious history.

He cleared the ground of its encumbering articles for a space of about fifteen feet square, and then invited us all to walk forward, and again examine it. We did so gravely. There was nothing but the cemented pavement below to be seen or felt. He then asked for the loan of a handkerchief; and, as I chanced to be nearest him, I offered mine. He took it, and spread it open upon the floor. Over this he spread a large square of silk, and over this, again, a large shawl nearly covering the space he had cleared. He then took a position at one of the points of this rectangle, and began a monotonous chant, rocking his body to and fro in time with the somewhat lugubrious air.

We sat still and waited. Above the chant we could hear the striking of the city clocks, and the occasional rattle of a cart in the street overhead. The absolute watchfulness and expectation, the dim, mysterious half-light of the cellar falling in a grewsome way upon the misshapen bulk of a Chinese deity in the background, a faint smell of opium-smoke mingling with spice, and the dreadful uncertainty of what

we were really waiting for, sent an uncomfortable thrill down our backs, and made us look at each other with a forced and unnatural smile. This feeling was heightened when Hop Sing slowly rose, and, without a word, pointed with his finger to the centre of the shawl.

There was something beneath the shawl Surely — and something that was not there before; at first a mere suggestion in relief, a faint outline, but growing more and more distinct and visible every moment. The chant still continued; the perspiration began to roll from the singer's face; gradually the hidden object took upon itself a shape and bulk that raised the shawl in its centre some five or six inches. It was now unmistakably the outline of a small but perfect human figure, with extended arms and legs. One or two of us turned pale. There was a feeling of general uneasiness, until the editor broke the silence by a gibe, that, poor as it was, was received with spontaneous enthusiasm. Then the chant suddenly ceased. Wang arose, and with a quick, dexterous movement, stripped both shawl and silk away, and discovered, sleeping peacefully upon my handkerchief, a tiny Chinese baby.

The applause and uproar which followed this revelation ought to have satisfied Wang, even if his audience was a small one: it was loud

enough to awaken the baby,—a pretty little boy about a year old, looking like a Cupid cut out of sandal-wood. He was whisked away almost as mysteriously as he appeared. When Hop Sing returned my handkerchief to me with a bow, I asked if the juggler was the father of the baby. “No sabe!” said the imperturbable Hop Sing, taking refuge in that Spanish form of non-committalism so common in California.

“But does he have a new baby for every performance?” I asked. “Perhaps: who knows?” —“But what will become of this one?” —“Whatever you choose, gentlemen,” replied Hop Sing with a courteous inclination. “It was born here: you are its godfathers.”

There were two characteristic peculiarities of any Californian assemblage in 1856,—it was quick to take a hint, and generous to the point of prodigality in its response to any charitable appeal. No matter how sordid or avaricious the individual, he could not resist the infection of sympathy. I doubled the points of my handkerchief into a bag, dropped a coin into it, and, without a word, passed it to the judge. He quietly added a twenty-dollar gold-piece, and passed it to the next. When it was returned to me, it contained over a hundred dollars. I knotted the money in the handkerchief, and gave it to Hop Sing.

“For the baby, from its godfathers.”

“But what name?” said the judge. There was a running fire of “Erebus,” “Nox,” “Plutus,” “Terra Cotta,” “Antæus,” &c. Finally the question was referred to our host.

“Why not keep his own name?” he said quietly, — “Wan Lee.” And he did.

And thus was Wan Lee, on the night of Friday, the 5th of March, 1856, born into this veracious chronicle.

The last form of “The Northern Star” for the 19th of July, 1865, — the only daily paper published in Klamath County, — had just gone to press; and at three, A.M., I was putting aside my proofs and manuscripts, preparatory to going home, when I discovered a letter lying under some sheets of paper, which I must have overlooked. The envelope was considerably soiled: it had no post-mark; but I had no difficulty in recognizing the hand of my friend Hop Sing. I opened it hurriedly, and read as follows: —

“MY DEAR SIR, — I do not know whether the bearer will suit you; but, unless the office of ‘devil’ in your newspaper is a purely technical one, I think he has all the qualities required. He is very quick, active, and intelligent; understands English better than he speaks it; and makes up for any defect by his habits of observation and imitation. You have only to show him how to

do a thing once, and he will repeat it, whether it is an offence or a virtue. But you certainly know him already. You are one of his godfathers; for is he not Wan Lee, the reputed son of Wang the conjurer, to whose performances I had the honor to introduce you? But perhaps you have forgotten it.

“I shall send him with a gang of coolies to Stockton, thence by express to your town. If you can use him there, you will do me a favor, and probably save his life, which is at present in great peril from the hands of the younger members of your Christian and highly-civilized race who attend the enlightened schools in San Francisco.

“He has acquired some singular habits and customs from his experience of Wang’s profession, which he followed for some years, — until he became too large to go in a hat, or be produced from his father’s sleeve. The money you left with me has been expended on his education. He has gone through the Tri-literal Classics, but, I think, without much benefit. He knows but little of Confucius, and absolutely nothing of Mencius. Owing to the negligence of his father, he associated, perhaps, too much with American children.

“I should have answered your letter before, by post; but I thought that Wan Lee himself would be a better messenger for this.

“Yours respectfully,

“HOP SING.”

And this was the long-delayed answer to my letter to Hop Sing. But where was “the bearer”? How was the letter delivered? I summoned hastily the foreman, printers, and office-boy, but without eliciting any thing. No one

had seen the letter delivered, nor knew any thing of the bearer. A few days later, I had a visit from my laundry-man, Ah Ri.

“You wantee debbil? All lightee: me catchee him.”

He returned in a few moments with a bright-looking Chinese boy, about ten years old, with whose appearance and general intelligence I was so greatly impressed, that I engaged him on the spot. When the business was concluded, I asked his name.

“Wan Lee,” said the boy.

“What! Are you the boy sent out by Hop Sing? What the devil do you mean by not coming here before? and how did you deliver that letter?”

Wan Lee looked at me, and laughed. “Me pitchee in top side window.”

I did not understand. He looked for a moment perplexed, and then, snatching the letter out of my hand, ran down the stairs. After a moment's pause, to my great astonishment, the letter came flying in the window, circled twice around the room, and then dropped gently, like a bird upon my table. Before I had got over my surprise, Wan Lee re-appeared, smiled, looked at the letter and then at me, said, “So, John,” and then remained gravely silent. I said nothing further; but it was understood that this was his first official act.

His next performance, I grieve to say, was not attended with equal success. One of our regular paper-carriers fell sick, and, at a pinch, Wan Lee was ordered to fill his place. To prevent mistakes, he was shown over the route the previous evening, and supplied at about daylight with the usual number of subscribers' copies. He returned, after an hour, in good spirits, and without the papers. He had delivered them all, he said.

Unfortunately for Wan Lee, at about eight o'clock, indignant subscribers began to arrive at the office. They had received their copies; but how? In the form of hard-pressed cannon-balls, delivered by a single shot, and a mere *tour de force*, through the glass of bedroom-windows. They had received them full in the face, like a base ball, if they happened to be up and stirring; they had received them in quarter-sheets, tucked in at separate windows; they had found them in the chimney, pinned against the door, shot through attic-windows, delivered in long slips through convenient keyholes, stuffed into ventilators, and occupying the same can with the morning's milk. One subscriber, who waited for some time at the office-door to have a personal interview with Wan Lee (then comfortably locked in my bedroom), told me, with tears of rage in his eyes, that he had been awakened

at five o'clock by a most hideous yelling below his windows; that, on rising in great agitation, he was startled by the sudden appearance of "The Northern Star," rolled hard, and bent into the form of a boomerang, or East-Indian club, that sailed into the window, described a number of fiendish circles in the room, knocked over the light, slapped the baby's face, "took" him (the subscriber) "in the jaw," and then returned out of the window, and dropped helplessly in the area. During the rest of the day, wads and strips of soiled paper, purporting to be copies of "The Northern Star" of that morning's issue, were brought indignantly to the office. An admirable editorial on "The Resources of Humboldt County," which I had constructed the evening before, and which, I had reason to believe, might have changed the whole balance of trade during the ensuing year, and left San Francisco bankrupt at her wharves, was in this way lost to the public.

It was deemed advisable for the next three weeks to keep Wan Lee closely confined to the printing-office, and the purely mechanical part of the business. Here he developed a surprising quickness and adaptability, winning even the favor and good will of the printers and freeman, who at first looked upon his introduction into the secrets of their trade as fraught with the

gravest political significance. He learned to set type readily and neatly, his wonderful skill in manipulation aiding him in the mere mechanical act, and his ignorance of the language confining him simply to the mechanical effort, confirming the printer's axiom, that the printer who considers or follows the ideas of his copy makes a poor compositor. He would set up deliberately long diatribes against himself, composed by his fellow-printers, and hung on his hook as copy, and even such short sentences as "Wan Lee is the devil's own imp," "Wan Lee is a Mongolian rascal," and bring the proof to me with happiness beaming from every tooth, and satisfaction shining in his huckleberry eyes.

It was not long, however, before he learned to retaliate on his mischievous persecutors. I remember one instance in which his reprisal came very near involving me in a serious misunderstanding. Our foreman's name was Webster; and Wan Lee presently learned to know and recognize the individual and combined letters of his name. It was during a political campaign; and the eloquent and fiery Col. Starbottle of Siskyou had delivered an effective speech, which was reported especially for "The Northern Star." In a very sublime peroration, Col. Starbottle had said, "In the language of the godlike Webster, I repeat"—and here followed

the quotation, which I have forgotten. Now, it chanced that Wan Lee, looking over the galley after it had been revised, saw the name of his chief persecutor, and, of course, imagined the quotation his. After the form was locked up, Wan Lee took advantage of Webster's absence to remove the quotation, and substitute a thin piece of lead, of the same size as the type, engraved with Chinese characters, making a sentence, which, I had reason to believe, was an utter and abject confession of the incapacity and offensiveness of the Webster family generally, and exceedingly eulogistic of Wan Lee himself personally.

The next morning's paper contained Col. Starbottle's speech in full, in which it appeared that the "godlike" Webster had, on one occasion, uttered his thoughts in excellent but perfectly enigmatical Chinese. The rage of Col. Starbottle knew no bounds. I have a vivid recollection of that admirable man walking into my office, and demanding a retraction of the statement.

"But my dear sir," I asked, "are you willing to deny, over your own signature, that Webster ever uttered such a sentence? Dare you deny, that, with Mr. Webster's well-known attainments, a knowledge of Chinese might not have been among the number? Are you willing to

submit a translation suitable to the capacity of our readers, and deny, upon your honor as a gentleman, that the late Mr. Webster ever uttered such a sentiment? If you are, sir, I am willing to publish your denial."

The colonel was not, and left, highly indignant.

Webster, the foreman, took it more coolly. Happily, he was unaware, that, for two days after, Chinamen from the laundries, from the gulches, from the kitchens, looked in the front office-door, with faces beaming with sardonic delight; that three hundred extra copies of the "Star" were ordered for the wash-houses on the river. He only knew, that, during the day, Wan Lee occasionally went off into convulsive spasms, and that he was obliged to kick him into consciousness again. A week after the occurrence, I called Wan Lee into my office.

"Wan," I said gravely, "I should like you to give me, for my own personal satisfaction, a translation of that Chinese sentence which my gifted countryman, the late godlike Webster, uttered upon a public occasion." Wan Lee looked at me intently, and then the slightest possible twinkle crept into his black eyes. Then he replied with equal gravity, —

"Mishtel Webstel, he say, 'China boy makee me belly much foolee. China boy makee me

heap sick.'” Which I have reason to think was true.

But I fear I am giving but one side, and not the best, of Wan Lee's character. As he imparted it to me, his had been a hard life. He had known scarcely any childhood: he had no recollection of a father or mother. The conjurer Wang had brought him up. He had spent the first seven years of his life in appearing from baskets, in dropping out of hats, in climbing ladders, in putting his little limbs out of joint in posturing. He had lived in an atmosphere of trickery and deception. He had learned to look upon mankind as dupes of their senses: in fine, if he had thought at all, he would have been a sceptic; if he had been a little older, he would have been a cynic; if he had been older still, he would have been a philosopher. As it was, he was a little imp. A good-natured imp it was, too,—an imp whose moral nature had never been awakened,—an imp up for a holiday, and willing to try virtue as a diversion. I don't know that he had any spiritual nature. He was very superstitious. He carried about with him a hideous little porcelain god, which he was in the habit of alternately reviling and propitiating. He was too intelligent for the commoner Chinese vices of stealing or gratuitous lying. Whatever discipline he practised was taught by his intellect.

I am inclined to think that his feelings were not altogether unimpressible, although it was almost impossible to extract an expression from him; and I conscientiously believe he became attached to those that were good to him. What he might have become under more favorable conditions than the bondsman of an overworked, under-paid literary man, I don't know: I only know that the scant, irregular, impulsive kindnesses that I showed him were gratefully received. He was very loyal and patient, two qualities rare in the average American servant. He was like Malvolio, "sad and civil" with me. Only once, and then under great provocation, do I remember of his exhibiting any impatience. It was my habit, after leaving the office at night, to take him with me to my rooms, as the bearer of any supplemental or happy after-thought, in the editorial way, that might occur to me before the paper went to press. One night I had been scribbling away past the usual hour of dismissing Wan Lee, and had become quite oblivious of his presence in a chair near my door, when suddenly I became aware of a voice saying in plaintive accents, something that sounded like "Chy Lee."

I faced around sternly.

"What did you say?"

“ Me say, ‘ Chy Lee.’ ”

“ Well ? ” I said impatiently.

“ You sabe, ‘ How do, John ? ’ ”

“ Yes.”

“ You sabe, ‘ So long, John ’ ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Well, ‘ Chy Lee ’ allee same ! ”

I understood him quite plainly. It appeared that “ Chy Lee ” was a form of “ good-night,” and that Wan Lee was anxious to go home. But an instinct of mischief, which, I fear, I possessed in common with him, impelled me to act as if oblivious of the hint. I muttered something about not understanding him, and again bent over my work. In a few minutes I heard his wooden shoes pattering pathetically over the floor. I looked up. He was standing near the door.

“ You no sabe, ‘ Chy Lee ’ ? ”

“ No,” I said sternly.

“ You sabe muchee big foolee ! allee same ! ”

And, with this audacity upon his lips, he fled. The next morning, however, he was as meek and patient as before, and I did not recall his offence. As a probable peace-offering, he blacked all my boots, — a duty never required of him, — including a pair of buff deer-skin slippers and an immense pair of horseman’s jack-boots, on which he indulged his remorse for two hours.

I have spoken of his honesty as being a quality of his intellect rather than his principle. but I recall about this time two exceptions to the rule. I was anxious to get some fresh eggs as a change to the heavy diet of a mining-town; and, knowing that Wan Lee's countrymen were great poultry-raisers, I applied to him. He furnished me with them regularly every morning, but refused to take any pay, saying that the man did not sell them, — a remarkable instance of self-abnegation, as eggs were then worth half a dollar apiece. One morning my neighbor Forster dropped in upon me at breakfast, and took occasion to bewail his own ill fortune, as his hens had lately stopped laying, or wandered off in the bush. Wan Lee, who was present during our colloquy, preserved his characteristic sad taciturnity. When my neighbor had gone, he turned to me with a slight chuckle: "Flostel's hens — Wan Lee's hens allee same!" His other offence was more serious and ambitious. It was a season of great irregularities in the mails, and Wan Lee had heard me deplore the delay in the delivery of my letters and newspapers. On arriving at my office one day, I was amazed to find my table covered with letters, evidently just from the post-office, but, unfortunately, not one addressed to me. I turned to Wan Lee,

who was surveying them with a calm satisfaction, and demanded an explanation. To my horror he pointed to an empty mail-bag in the corner, and said, "Postman he say, 'No lettee, John; no lettee, John.' Postman plentee lie! Postman no good. Me catchee lettee last night allee same!" Luckily it was still early: the mails had not been distributed. I had a hurried interview with the postmaster; and Wan Lee's bold attempt at robbing the United States mail was finally condoned by the purchase of a new mail-bag, and the whole affair thus kept a secret.

If my liking for my little Pagan page had not been sufficient, my duty to Hop Sing was enough, to cause me to take Wan Lee with me when I returned to San Francisco after my two years' experience with "The Northern Star." I do not think he contemplated the change with pleasure. I attributed his feelings to a nervous dread of crowded public streets (when he had to go across town for me on an errand, he always made a circuit of the outskirts), to his dislike for the discipline of the Chinese and English school to which I proposed to send him, to his fondness for the free, vagrant life of the mines, to sheer wilfulness. That it might have been a superstitious premonition did not occur to me until long after.

Nevertheless it really seemed as if the opportunity I had long looked for and confidently expected had come, — the opportunity of placing Wan Lee under gently restraining influences, of subjecting him to a life and experience that would draw out of him what good my superficial care and ill-regulated kindness could not reach. Wan Lee was placed at the school of a Chinese missionary, — an intelligent and kind-hearted clergyman, who had shown great interest in the boy, and who, better than all, had a wonderful faith in him. A home was found for him in the family of a widow, who had a bright and interesting daughter about two years younger than Wan Lee. It was this bright, cheery, innocent, and artless child that touched and reached a depth in the boy's nature that hitherto had been unsuspected; that awakened a moral susceptibility which had lain for years insensible alike to the teachings of society, or the ethics of the theologian.

These few brief months — bright with a promise that we never saw fulfilled — must have been happy ones to Wan Lee. He worshipped his little friend with something of the same superstition, but without any of the caprice that he bestowed upon his porcelain Pagan god. It was his delight to walk behind her to school, carrying her books, — a service always fraught

with danger to him from the little hands of his Caucasian Christian brothers. He made her the most marvellous toys; he would cut out of carrots and turnips the most astonishing roses and tulips; he made life-like chickens out of melon-seeds; he constructed fans and kites, and was singularly proficient in the making of dolls' paper dresses. On the other hand, she played and sang to him, taught him a thousand little prettinesses and refinements only known to girls, gave him a yellow ribbon for his pig-tail, as best suiting his complexion, read to him, showed him wherein he was original and valuable, took him to Sunday school with her, against the precedents of the school, and, small-woman-like, triumphed. I wish I could add here, that she effected his conversion, and made him give up his porcelain idol. But I am telling a true story; and this little girl was quite content to fill him with her own Christian goodness, without letting him know that he was changed. So they got along very well together, — this little Christian girl with her shining cross hanging around her plump, white little neck; and this dark little Pagan, with his hideous porcelain god hidden away in his blouse.

There were two days of that eventful year which will long be remembered in San Francisco, — two days when a mob of her citizens

set upon and killed unarmed, defenceless foreigners because they were foreigners, and of another race, religion, and color, and worked for what wages they could get. There were some public men so timid, that, seeing this, they thought that the end of the world had come. There were some eminent statesmen, whose names I am ashamed to write here, who began to think that the passage in the Constitution which guarantees civil and religious liberty to every citizen or foreigner was a mistake. But there were, also, some men who were not so easily frightened; and in twenty-four hours we had things so arranged, that the timid men could wring their hands in safety, and the eminent statesmen utter their doubts without hurting any body or any thing. And in the midst of this I got a note from Hop Sing, asking me to come to him immediately.

I found his warehouse closed, and strongly guarded by the police against any possible attack of the rioters. Hop Sing admitted me through a barred grating with his usual imperturbable calm, but, as it seemed to me, with more than his usual seriousness. Without a word, he took my hand, and led me to the rear of the room, and thence down stairs into the basement. It was dimly lighted; but there was something lying on the floor covered by a shawl

As I approached he drew the shawl away with a sudden gesture, and revealed Wan Lee, the Pagan, lying there dead.

Dead, my reverend friends, dead, — stoned to death in the streets of San Francisco, in the year of grace 1869, by a mob of half-grown boys and Christian school-children !

As I put my hand reverently upon his breast, I felt something crumbling beneath his blouse. I looked inquiringly at Hop Sing. He put his hand between the folds of silk, and drew out something with the first bitter smile I had ever seen on the face of that Pagan gentleman.

It was Wan Lee's porcelain god, crushed by a stone from the hands of those Christian iconoclasts !

HOW OLD MAN PLUNKETT WENT HOME.

I THINK we all loved him. Even after he mismanaged the affairs of the Amity Ditch Company, we commiserated him, although most of us were stockholders, and lost heavily. I remember that the blacksmith went so far as to say that "them chaps as put that responsibility on the old man oughter be lynched." But the blacksmith was not a stockholder; and the expression was looked upon as the excusable extravagance of a large, sympathizing nature, that, when combined with a powerful frame, was unworthy of notice. At least, that was the way they put it. Yet I think there was a general feeling of regret that this misfortune would interfere with the old man's long-cherished plan of "going home."

Indeed, for the last ten years he had been "going home." He was going home after a six-months' sojourn at Monte Flat; he was going home after the first rains; he was going home

when the rains were over; he was going home when he had cut the timber on Buckeye Hill, when there was pasture on Dow's Flat, when he struck pay-dirt on Eureka Hill, when the Amity Company paid its first dividend, when the election was over, when he had received an answer from his wife. And so the years rolled by, the spring rains came and went, the woods of Buckeye Hill were level with the ground, the pasture on Dow's Flat grew sear and dry, Eureka Hill yielded its pay-dirt and swamped its owner, the first dividends of the Amity Company were made from the assessments of stockholders, there were new county officers at Monte Flat, his wife's answer had changed into a persistent question, and still old man Plunkett remained.

It is only fair to say that he had made several distinct essays toward going. Five years before, he had bidden good-by to Monte Hill with much effusion and hand-shaking. But he never got any farther than the next town. Here he was induced to trade the sorrel colt he was riding for a bay mare, — a transaction that at once opened to his lively fancy a vista of vast and successful future speculation. A few days after, Abner Dean of Angel's received a letter from him, stating that he was going to Visalia to buy horses. "I am satisfied," wrote Plunkett, with that elevated rhetoric for which his corre

spondence was remarkable,—“I am satisfied that we are at last developing the real resources of California. The world will yet look to Dow's Flat as the great stock-raising centre. In view of the interests involved, I have deferred my departure for a month.” It was two before he again returned to us—penniless. Six months later, he was again enabled to start for the Eastern States; and this time he got as far as San Francisco. I have before me a letter which I received a few days after his arrival, from which I venture to give an extract: “You know, my dear boy, that I have always believed that gambling, as it is absurdly called, is still in its infancy in California. I have always maintained that a perfect system might be invented, by which the game of poker may be made to yield a certain percentage to the intelligent player. I am not at liberty at present to disclose the system; but before leaving this city I intend to perfect it.” He seems to have done so, and returned to Monte Flat with two dollars and thirty-seven cents, the absolute remainder of his capital after such perfection.

It was not until 1868 that he appeared to have finally succeeded in going home. He left us by the overland route,—a route which he declared would give great opportunity for the discovery of undeveloped resources. His last

letter was dated Virginia City. He was absent three years. At the close of a very hot day in midsummer, he alighted from the Wingdam stage, with hair and beard powdered with dust and age. There was a certain shyness about his greeting, quite different from his usual frank volubility, that did not, however, impress us as any accession of character. For some days he was reserved regarding his recent visit, contenting himself with asserting, with more or less aggressiveness, that he had "always said he was going home, and now he had been there." Later he grew more communicative, and spoke freely and critically of the manners and customs of New York and Boston, commented on the social changes in the years of his absence, and, I remember, was very hard upon what he deemed the follies incidental to a high state of civilization. Still later he darkly alluded to the moral laxity of the higher planes of Eastern society; but it was not long before he completely tore away the veil, and revealed the naked wickedness of New York social life in a way I even now shudder to recall. Vinous intoxication, it appeared, was a common habit of the first ladies of the city. Immoralities which he scarcely dared name were daily practised by the refined of both sexes. Niggardliness and greed were the common vices of the rich. "I have always

asserted," he continued, "that corruption must exist where luxury and riches are rampant, and capital is not used to develop the natural resources of the country. Thank you — I will take mine without sugar." It is possible that some of these painful details crept into the local journals. I remember an editorial in "The Monte Flat Monitor," entitled "The Effete East," in which the fatal decadence of New York and New England was elaborately stated, and California offered as a means of natural salvation. "Perhaps," said "The Monitor," "we might add that Calaveras County offers superior inducements to the Eastern visitor with capital."

Later he spoke of his family. The daughter he had left a child had grown into beautiful womanhood. The son was already taller and larger than his father; and, in a playful trial of strength, "the young rascal," added Plunkett, with a voice broken with paternal pride and humorous objurgation, had twice thrown his doting parent to the ground. But it was of his daughter he chiefly spoke. Perhaps emboldened by the evident interest which masculine Monte Flat held in feminine beauty, he expatiated at some length on her various charms and accomplishments, and finally produced her photograph, — that of a very pretty girl, — to their infinite peril. But his account of his first meeting with

her was so peculiar, that I must fain give it after his own methods, which were, perhaps, some shades less precise and elegant than his written style.

“ You see, boys, it’s always been my opinion that a man oughter be able to tell his own flesh and blood by instinct. It’s ten years since I’d seen my Melindy ; and she was then only seven, and about so high. So, when I went to New York, what did I do ? Did I go straight to my house, and ask for my wife and daughter, like other folks ? No, sir ! I rigged myself up as a peddler, as a peddler, sir ; and I rung the bell. When the servant came to the door, I wanted — don’t you see ? — to show the ladies some trinkets. Then there was a voice over the banister says, ‘ Don’t want any thing : send him away.’ — ‘ Some nice laces, ma’am, smuggled,’ I says, looking up. ‘ Get out, you wretch !’ says she. I knew the voice, boys : it was my wife, sure as a gun. Thar wasn’t any instinct thar. ‘ Maybe the young ladies want somethin’,’ I said. ‘ Did you hear me ?’ says she ; and with that she jumps forward, and I left. It’s ten years, boys, since I’ve seen the old woman ; but somehow, when she fetched that leap, I naterally left.”

He had been standing beside the bar — his usual attitude — when he made this speech ; but

at this point he half faced his auditors with a look that was very effective. Indeed, a few who had exhibited some signs of scepticism and lack of interest, at once assumed an appearance of intense gratification and curiosity as he went on, —

“ Well, by hangin round there for a day or two, I found out at last it was to be Melindy’s birthday next week, and that she was goin’ to have a big party. I tell ye what, boys, it weren’t no slouch of a reception. The whole house was bloomin’ with flowers, and blazin’ with lights ; and there was no end of servants and plate and refreshments and fixin’s ” —

“ Uncle Joe.”

“ Well ? ”

“ Where did they get the money ? ”

Plunkett faced his interlocutor with a severe glance. “ I always said,” he replied slowly, “ that, when I went home, I’d send on ahead of me a draft for ten thousand dollars. I always said that, didn’t I ? Eh ? And I said I was goin’ home — and I’ve been home, haven’t I ? Well ? ”

Either there was something irresistibly conclusive in this logic, or else the desire to hear the remainder of Plunkett’s story was stronger — but there was no more interruption. His ready good-humor quickly returned, and, with a slight chuckle, he went on, —

“I went to the biggest jewelry shop in town, and I bought a pair of diamond ear-rings, and put them in my pocket, and went to the house. ‘What name?’ says the chap who opened the door; and he looked like a cross ’twixt a restaurant waiter and a parson. ‘Skeesicks,’ said I. He takes me in; and pretty soon my wife comes sailin’ into the parlor, and says, ‘Excuse me; but I don’t think I recognize the name.’ She was mighty polite; for I had on a red wig and side-whiskers. ‘A friend of your husband’s from California, ma’am, with a present for your daughter, Miss ——,’ and I made as I had forgot the name. But all of a sudden a voice said, ‘That’s too thin;’ and in walked Melindy. ‘It’s playin’ it rather low down, father, to pretend you don’t know your daughter’s name; ain’t it, now? How are you, old man?’ And with that she tears off my wig and whiskers, and throws her arms around my neck — instinct, sir, pure instinct!”

Emboldened by the laughter which followed his description of the filial utterances of Melinda, he again repeated her speech, with more or less elaboration, joining in with, and indeed often leading, the hilarity that accompanied it, and returning to it, with more or less incoherency, several times during the evening.

And so, at various times and at various

places, but chiefly in bar-rooms, did this Ulysses of Monte Flat recount the story of his wanderings. There were several discrepancies in his statement; there was sometimes considerable prolixity of detail; there was occasional change of character and scenery; there was once or twice an absolute change in the *denouement*: but always the fact of his having visited his wife and children remained. Of course, in a sceptical community like that of Monte Flat, — a community accustomed to great expectation and small realization, — a community wherein, to use the local dialect, “they got the color, and struck hardpan,” more frequently than any other mining-camp, — in such a community, the fullest credence was not given to old man Plunkett’s facts. There was only one exception to the general unbelief, — Henry York of Sandy Bar. It was he who was always an attentive listener; it was his scant purse that had often furnished Plunkett with means to pursue his unprofitable speculations; it was to him that the charms of Melinda were more frequently rehearsed; it was he that had borrowed her photograph; and it was he that, sitting alone in his little cabin one night, kissed that photograph, until his honest, handsome face glowed again in the firelight.

It was dusty in Monte Flat. The ruins of

the long dry season were crumbling every where: everywhere the dying summer had strewn its red ashes a foot deep, or exhaled its last breath in a red cloud above the troubled highways. The alders and cottonwoods, that marked the line of the water-courses, were grimy with dust, and looked as if they might have taken root in the open air. The gleaming stones of the parched water-courses themselves were as dry bones in the valley of death. The dusty sunset at times painted the flanks of the distant hills a dull, coppery hue: on other days, there was an odd, indefinable earthquake halo on the volcanic cones of the farther coast-spurs. Again an acrid, resinous smoke from the burning wood on Heavytree Hill smarted the eyes, and choked the free breath of Monte Flat; or a fierce wind, driving every thing, including the shrivelled summer, like a curled leaf before it, swept down the flanks of the Sierras, and chased the inhabitants to the doors of their cabins, and shook its red fist in at their windows. And on such a night as this, the dust having in some way choked the wheels of material progress in Monte Flat, most of the inhabitants were gathered listlessly in the gilded bar-room of the Moquelumne Hotel, spitting silently at the red-hot stove that tempered the mountain winds to the shorn lambs of Monte Flat, and waiting for the rain.

Every method known to the Flat of beguiling the time until the advent of this long-looked-for phenomenon had been tried. It is true, the methods were not many, being limited chiefly to that form of popular facetiæ known as practical joking; and even this had assumed the seriousness of a business-pursuit. Tommy Roy, who had spent two hours in digging a ditch in front of his own door, into which a few friends casually dropped during the evening, looked *ennuyé* and dissatisfied. The four prominent citizens, who, disguised as foot-pads, had stopped the county treasurer on the Wingdam road, were jaded from their playful efforts next morning. The principal physician and lawyer of Monte Flat, who had entered into an unhallowed conspiracy to compel the sheriff of Calaveras and his *posse* to serve a writ of ejectment on a grizzly bear, feebly disguised under the name of one "Major Ursus," who haunted the groves of Heavytree Hill, wore an expression of resigned weariness. Even the editor of "The Monte Flat Monitor," who had that morning written a glowing account of a battle with the Wipneck Indians, for the benefit of Eastern readers,—even *he* looked grave and worn. When, at last, Abner Dean of Angel's, who had been on a visit to San Francisco, walked into the room, he was, of course, vic-

timized in the usual way by one or two apparently honest questions, which ended in his answering them, and then falling into the trap of asking another, to his utter and complete shame and mortification; but that was all. Nobody laughed; and Abner, although a victim, did not lose his good-humor. He turned quietly on his tormentors, and said, —

“I’ve got something better than that — you know old man Plunkett?”

Everybody simultaneously spat at the stove, and nodded his head.

“You know he went home three years ago?” Two or three changed the position of their legs from the backs of different chairs; and one man said, “Yes.”

“Had a good time, home?”

Everybody looked cautiously at the man who had said, “Yes;” and he, accepting the responsibility with a faint-hearted smile, said, “Yes,” again, and breathed hard. “Saw his wife and child — purty gal?” said Abner cautiously. “Yes,” answered the man doggedly. “Saw her photograph, perhaps?” continued Abner Dean quietly.

The man looked hopelessly around for support. Two or three, who had been sitting near him, and evidently encouraging him with a look of interest, now shamelessly abandoned him.

and looked another way. Henry York flushed a little, and veiled his gray eyes. The man hesitated, and then with a sickly smile, that was intended to convey the fact that he was perfectly aware of the object of this questioning, and was only humoring it from abstract good feeling, returned, "Yes," again.

"Sent home — let's see — ten thousand dollars, wasn't it?" Abner Dean went on "Yes," reiterated the man with the same smile.

"Well, I thought so," said Abner quietly. "But the fact is, you see, that he never went home at all — nary time."

Everybody stared at Abner in genuine surprise and interest, as, with provoking calmness and a half-lazy manner, he went on, —

"You see, thar was a man down in 'Frisco as knowed him, and saw him in Sonora during the whole of that three years. He was herding sheep, or tending cattle, or spekilating all that time, and hadn't a red cent. Well it 'mounts to this, — that 'ar Plunkett ain't been east of the Rocky Mountains since '49."

The laugh which Abner Dean had the right to confidently expect came; but it was bitter and sardonic. I think indignation was apparent in the minds of his hearers. It was felt, for the first time, that there was a limit to practical joking. A deception carried on for a year,

compromising the sagacity of Monte Flat, was deserving the severest reprobation. Of course, nobody had believed Plunkett; but then the supposition that it might be believed in adjacent camps that they *had* believed him was gall and bitterness. The lawyer thought that an indictment for obtaining money under false pretences might be found. The physician had long suspected him of insanity, and was not certain but that he ought to be confined. The four prominent merchants thought that the business-interests of Monte Flat demanded that something should be done. In the midst of an excited and angry discussion, the door slowly opened, and old man Plunkett staggered into the room.

He had changed pitifully in the last six months. His hair was a dusty, yellowish gray, like the chemisal on the flanks of Heavytree Hill; his face was waxen white, and blue and puffy under the eyes; his clothes were soiled and shabby, streaked in front with the stains of hurriedly eaten luncheons, and fluffy behind with the wool and hair of hurriedly-extemporized couches. In obedience to that odd law, that, the more seedy and soiled a man's garments become, the less does he seem inclined to part with them, even during that portion of the twenty-four hours when they are

deemed less essential, Plunkett's clothes had gradually taken on the appearance of a kind of a bark, or an outgrowth from within, for which their possessor was not entirely responsible. Howbeit, as he entered the room, he attempted to button his coat over a dirty shirt, and passed his fingers, after the manner of some animal, over his cracker-strewn beard, in recognition of a cleanly public sentiment. But, even as he did so, the weak smile faded from his lips; and his hand, after fumbling aimlessly around a button, dropped helplessly at his side. For as he leaned his back against the bar, and faced the group, he, for the first time, became aware that every eye but one was fixed upon him. His quick, nervous apprehension at once leaped to the truth. His miserable secret was out, and abroad in the very air about him. As a last resort, he glanced despairingly at Henry York; but his flushed face was turned toward the windows.

No word was spoken. As the bar-keeper silently swung a decanter and glass before him, he took a cracker from a dish, and mumbled it with affected unconcern. He lingered over his liquor until its potency stiffened his relaxed sinews, and dulled the nervous edge of his apprehension, and then he suddenly faced around. "It don't look as if we were goin' to hev any

rain much afore Christmas," he said with defiant ease.

No one made any reply.

"Just like this in '52, and again in '60. It's always been my opinion that these dry seasons come reg'lar. I've said it afore. I say it again. It's jist as I said about going home, you know," he added with desperate recklessness.

"Thar's a man," said Abner Dean lazily, "ez sez you never went home. Thar's a man ez sez you've been three years in Sonora. Thar's a man ez sez you hain't seen your wife and daughter since '49. Thar's a man ez sez you've been playin' this camp for six months."

There was a dead silence. Then a voice said quite as quietly, —

"That man lies."

It was not the old man's voice. Everybody turned as Henry York slowly rose, stretching out his six feet of length, and, brushing away the ashes that had fallen from his pipe upon his breast, deliberately placed himself beside Plunkett, and faced the others.

"That man ain't here," continued Abner Dean, with listless indifference of voice, and a gentle pre-occupation of manner, as he carelessly allowed his right hand to rest on his hip near his revolver. "That man ain't here; but, if I'm called upon to make good what he says, why, I'm on hand."

All rose as the two men — perhaps the least externally agitated of them all — approached each other. The lawyer stepped in between them.

“Perhaps there’s some mistake here. York, do you *know* that the old man has been home?”

“Yes.”

“How do you know it?”

York turned his clear, honest, frank eyes on his questioner, and without a tremor told the only direct and unmitigated lie of his life. “Because I’ve seen him there.”

The answer was conclusive. It was known that York had been visiting the East during the old man’s absence. The colloquy had diverted attention from Plunkett, who, pale and breathless, was staring at his unexpected deliverer. As he turned again toward his tormentors, there was something in the expression of his eye that caused those that were nearest to him to fall back, and sent a strange, indefinable thrill through the boldest and most reckless. As he made a step forward, the physician, almost unconsciously, raised his hand with a warning gesture; and old man Plunkett, with his eyes fixed upon the red-hot stove, and an odd smile playing about his mouth, began, —

“Yes — of course you did. Who says you didn’t? It ain’t no lie. I said I was goin’

home — and I've been home. Haven't I? My God! I have. Who says I've been lyin'? Who says I'm dreamin'? Is it true — why don't you speak? It is true, after all. You say you saw me there: why don't you speak again? Say, say! — is it true? It's going now. O my God! it's going again. It's going now. Save me!" And with a fierce cry he fell forward in a fit upon the floor.

When the old man regained his senses, he found himself in York's cabin. A flickering fire of pine-boughs lit up the rude rafters, and fell upon a photograph tastefully framed with fir-cones, and hung above the brush whereon he lay. It was the portrait of a young girl. It was the first object to meet the old man's gaze; and it brought with it a flush of such painful consciousness, that he started, and glanced quickly around. But his eyes only encountered those of York, — clear, gray, critical, and patient, — and they fell again.

"Tell me, old man," said York not unkindly, but with the same cold clear tone in his voice that his eye betrayed a moment ago, — "tell me, is *that* a lie too?" and he pointed to the picture.

The old man closed his eyes, and did not reply. Two hours before, the question would have stung him into some evasion or bravado.

But the revelation contained in the question, as well as the tone of York's voice, was to him now, in his pitiable condition, a relief. It was plain, even to his confused brain, that York had lied when he had indorsed his story in the bar-room; it was clear to him now that he had not been home, that he was not, as he had begun to fear, going mad. It was such a relief, that, with characteristic weakness, his former recklessness and extravagance returned. He began to chuckle, finally to laugh uproariously.

York, with his eyes still fixed on the old man, withdrew the hand with which he had taken his.

“Didn't we fool 'em nicely; eh, Yorky! He, he! The biggest thing yet ever played in this camp! I always said I'd play 'em all some day, and I have — played 'em for six months. Ain't it rich? — ain't it the richest thing you ever seed? Did you see Abner's face when he spoke 'bout that man as seed me in Sonora? Warn't it good as the minstrels? Oh, it's too much!” and, striking his leg with the palm of his hand, he almost threw himself from the bed in a paroxysm of laughter, — a paroxysm that, nevertheless, appeared to be half real and half affected.

“Is that photograph hers?” said York in a low voice, after a slight pause.

"Hers? No! It's one of the San Francisco actresses. He, he! Don't you see? I bought it for two bits in one of the bookstores. I never thought they'd swaller *that* too; but they did! Oh, but the old man played 'em this time didn't he — eh?" and he peered curiously in York's face.

"Yes, and he played *me* too," said York, looking steadily in the old man's eye.

"Yes, of course," interposed Plunkett hastily; "but you know, Yorky, you got out of it well! You've sold 'em too. We've both got 'em on a string now — you and me — got to stick together now. You did it well, Yorky: you did it well. Why, when you said you'd seen me in York City, I'm d——d if I didn't" —

"Didn't what?" said York gently; for the old man had stopped with a pale face and wandering eye.

"Eh?"

"You say when I said I had seen you in New York you thought" —

"You lie!" said the old man fiercely. "I didn't say I thought any thing. What are you trying to go back on me for, eh?" His hands were trembling as he rose muttering from the bed, and made his way toward the hearth.

"Gimme some whiskey," he said presently "and dry up. You oughter treat anyway

Them fellows oughter treated last night. By hookey, I'd made 'em — only I fell sick."

York placed the liquor and a tin cup on the table beside him, and, going to the door, turned his back upon his guest, and looked out on the night. Although it was clear moonlight, the familiar prospect never to him seemed so dreary. The dead waste of the broad Wingdam highway never seemed so monotonous, so like the days that he had passed, and were to come to him, so like the old man in its suggestion of going sometime, and never getting there. He turned, and going up to Plunkett put his hand upon his shoulder, and said, —

"I want you to answer one question fairly and squarely."

The liquor seemed to have warmed the torpid blood in the old man's veins, and softened his acerbity; for the face he turned up to York was mellowed in its rugged outline, and more thoughtful in expression, as he said, —

"Go on, my boy."

"Have you a wife and — daughter?"

"Before God I have!"

The two men were silent for a moment, both gazing at the fire. Then Plunkett began rubbing his knees slowly.

"The wife, if it comes to that, ain't much," he began cautiously, "being a little on the

shoulder, you know, and wantin', so to speak a liberal California education, which makes, you know, a bad combination. It's always been my opinion, that there ain't any worse. Why, she's as ready with her tongue as Abner Dean is with his revolver, only with the difference that she shoots from principle, as she calls it; and the consequence is, she's always layin' for you. It's the effete East, my boy, that's ruinin' her. It's them ideas she gets in New York and Boston that's made her and me what we are. I don't mind her havin' 'em, if she didn't shoot. But, havin' that propensity, them principles oughtn't to be lying round loose no more'n fire-arms."

"But your daughter?" said York.

The old man's hands went up to his eyes here, and then both hands and head dropped forward on the table. "Don't say any thing 'bout her, my boy, don't ask me now." With one hand concealing his eyes, he fumbled about with the other in his pockets for his handkerchief—but vainly. Perhaps it was owing to this fact, that he repressed his tears; for, when he removed his hand from his eyes, they were quite dry. Then he found his voice.

"She's a beautiful girl, beautiful, though I say it; and you shall see her, my boy, — you shall see her sure. I've got things about fixed now

I shall have my plan for reducin' ores perfected in a day or two; and I've got proposals from all the smeltin' works here" (here he hastily produced a bundle of papers that fell upon the floor), "and I'm goin' to send for 'em. I've got the papers here as will give me ten thousand dollars clear in the next month," he added, as he strove to collect the valuable documents again. "I'll have 'em here by Christmas, if I live; and you shall eat your Christmas dinner with me, York, my boy, — you shall sure."

With his tongue now fairly loosened by liquor and the suggestive vastness of his prospects, he rambled on more or less incoherently, elaborating and amplifying his plans, occasionally even speaking of them as already accomplished, until the moon rode high in the heavens, and York led him again to his couch. Here he lay for some time muttering to himself, until at last he sank into a heavy sleep. When York had satisfied himself of the fact, he gently took down the picture and frame, and, going to the hearth, tossed them on the dying embers, and sat down to see them burn.

The fir-cones leaped instantly into flame; then the features that had entranced San Francisco audiences nightly, flashed up and passed away (as such things are apt to pass); and even the cynical smile on York's lips faded too.

And then there came a supplemental and unexpected flash as the embers fell together, and by its light York saw a paper upon the floor. It was one that had fallen from the old man's pocket. As he picked it up listlessly, a photograph slipped from its folds. It was the portrait of a young girl; and on its reverse was written in a scrawling hand, "Melinda to father."

It was at best a cheap picture, but, ah me! I fear even the deft graciousness of the highest art could not have softened the rigid angularities of that youthful figure, its self-complacent vulgarity, its cheap finery, its expressionless ill-favor. York did not look at it a second time. He turned to the letter for relief.

It was misspelled: it was unpunctuated; it was almost illegible; it was fretful in tone, and selfish in sentiment. It was not, I fear, even original in the story of its woes. It was the harsh recital of poverty, of suspicion, of mean makeshifts and compromises, of low pains and lower longings, of sorrows that were degrading, of a grief that was pitiable. Yet it was sincere in a certain kind of vague yearning for the presence of the degraded man to whom it was written, — an affection that was more like a confused instinct than a sentiment.

York folded it again carefully, and placed it beneath the old man's pillow. Then he re-

turned to his seat by the fire. A smile that had been playing upon his face, deepening the curves behind his mustache, and gradually overrunning his clear gray eyes, presently faded away. It was last to go from his eyes; and it left there, oddly enough to those who did not know him, a tear.

He sat there for a long time, leaning forward, his head upon his hands. The wind that had been striving with the canvas roof all at once lifted its edges, and a moonbeam slipped suddenly in, and lay for a moment like a shining blade upon his shoulder; and, knighted by its touch, straightway plain Henry York arose, sustained, high-purposed and self-reliant.

The rains had come at last. There was already a visible greenness on the slopes of Heavy-tree Hill; and the long, white track of the Wingdam road was lost in outlying pools and ponds a hundred rods from Monte Flat. The spent water-courses, whose white bones had been sinuously trailed over the flat, like the vertebræ of some forgotten saurian, were full again; the dry bones moved once more in the valley; and there was joy in the ditches, and a pardonable extravagance in the columns of "The Monte Flat Monitor." "Never before in the history of the county has the yield been so satisfactory. Our

contemporary of 'The Hillside Beacon,' who yesterday facetiously alluded to the fact (?) that our best citizens were leaving town in 'dugouts,' on account of the flood, will be glad to hear that our distinguished fellow-townsmen, Mr. Henry York, now on a visit to his relatives in the East, lately took with him in his 'dug-out' the modest sum of fifty thousand dollars, the result of one week's clean-up. We can imagine," continued that sprightly journal, "that no such misfortune is likely to overtake Hillside this season. And yet we believe 'The Beacon' man wants a railroad." A few journals broke out into poetry. The operator at Simpson's Crossing telegraphed to "The Sacramento Universe" "All day the low clouds have shook their garnered fulness down." A San-Francisco journal lapsed into noble verse, thinly disguised as editorial prose: "Rejoice: the gentle rain has come, the bright and pearly rain, which scatters blessings on the hills, and sifts them o'er the plain. Rejoice," &c. Indeed, here was only one to whom the rain had not rought blessing, and that was Plunkett. In some mysterious and darksome way, it had interfered with the perfection of his new method of reducing ores, and thrown the advent of that invention back another season. It had brought him down to an habitual seat in the

bar-room, where, to heedless and inattentive ears, he sat and discoursed of the East and his family.

No one disturbed him. Indeed, it was rumored that some funds had been lodged with the landlord, by a person or persons unknown, whereby his few wants were provided for. His mania — for that was the charitable construction which Monte Flat put upon his conduct — was indulged, even to the extent of Monte Flat's accepting his invitation to dine with his family on Christmas Day, — an invitation extended frankly to every one with whom the old man drank or talked. But one day, to everybody's astonishment, he burst into the bar-room, holding an open letter in his hand. It read as follows: —

“Be ready to meet your family at the new cottage on Heavytree Hill on Christmas Day. Invite what friends you choose.

“HENRY YORK.”

The letter was handed round in silence. The old man, with a look alternating between hope and fear, gazed in the faces of the group. The doctor looked up significantly, after a pause “It's a forgery evidently,” he said in a low voice. “He's cunning enough to conceive it (they always are); but you'll find he'll fail in

executing it. Watch his face! — Old man," he said suddenly, in a loud peremptory tone, "this is a trick, a forgery, and you know it. Answer me squarely, and look me in the eye. Isn't it so?"

The eyes of Plunkett stared a moment, and then dropped weakly. Then, with a feebler smile, he said, "You're too many for me, boys. The Doc's right. The little game's up. You can take the old man's hat;" and so, tottering, trembling, and chuckling, he dropped into silence and his accustomed seat. But the next day he seemed to have forgotten this episode, and talked as glibly as ever of the approaching festivity.

And so the days and weeks passed until Christmas — a bright, clear day, warmed with south winds, and joyous with the resurrection of springing grasses — broke upon Monte Flat. And then there was a sudden commotion in the hotel bar-room; and Abner Dean stood beside the old man's chair, and shook him out of a slumber to his feet. "Rouse up, old man. York is here, with your wife and daughter, at the cottage on Heavytree. Come, old man. Here, boys, give him a lift;" and in another moment a dozen strong and willing hands had raised the old man, and bore him in triumph to the street up the steep grade of Heavytree Hill, and de-

posited him, struggling and confused, in the porch of a little cottage. At the same instant two women rushed forward, but were restrained by a gesture from Henry York. The old man was struggling to his feet. With an effort at last, he stood erect, trembling, his eye fixed, a gray pallor on his cheek, and a deep resonance in his voice.

“It’s all a trick, and a lie! They ain’t no flesh and blood or kin o’ mine. It ain’t my wife, nor child. My daughter’s a beautiful girl — a beautiful girl, d’ye hear? She’s in New York with her mother, and I’m going to fetch her here I said I’d go home, and I’ve been home: d’ye hear me?’ I’ve been home! It’s a mean trick you’re playin’ on the old man. Let me go: d’ye hear? Keep them women off me! Let me go! I’m going — I’m going — home!”

His hands were thrown up convulsively in the air, and, half turning round, he fell sideways on the porch, and so to the ground. They picked him up hurriedly, but too late. **He had gone home.**

THE FOOL OF FIVE FORKS.

HE lived alone. I do not think the peculiarity arose from any wish to withdraw his foolishness from the rest of the camp; nor was it probable that the combined wisdom of Five Forks ever drove him into exile. My impression is, that he lived alone from choice, — a choice he made long before the camp indulged in any criticism of his mental capacity. He was much given to moody reticence, and, although to outward appearances a strong man, was always complaining of ill-health. Indeed, one theory of his isolation was, that it afforded him better opportunities for taking medicine, of which he habitually consumed large quantities.

His folly first dawned upon Five Forks through the post-office windows. He was, for a long time, the only man who wrote home by every mail; his letters being always directed to the same person, — a woman. Now, it so happened that the bulk of the Five Forks correspondence was usually the other way. There were many letters received (the majority being

in the female hand), but very few answered. The men received them indifferently, or as a matter of course. A few opened and read them on the spot, with a barely repressed smile of self-conceit, or quite as frequently glanced over them with undisguised impatience. Some of the letters began with "My dear husband;" and some were never called for. But the fact that the only regular correspondent of Five Forks never received any reply became at last quite notorious. Consequently, when an envelope was received, bearing the stamp of the "dead letter office," addressed to "The Fool," under the more conventional title of "Cyrus Hawkins," there was quite a fever of excitement. I do not know how the secret leaked out; but it was eventually known to the camp, that the envelope contained Hawkins's own letters returned. This was the first evidence of his weakness. Any man who repeatedly wrote to a woman who did not reply must be a fool. I think Hawkins suspected that his folly was known to the camp; but he took refuge in symptoms of chills and fever, which he at once developed, and effected a diversion with three bottles of Indian cholagogue and two boxes of pills. At all events, at the end of a week, he resumed a pen stiffened by tonics, with all his old epistolatory pertinacity. This time the letters had a new address.

In those days a popular belief obtained in the mines, that luck particularly favored the foolish and unscientific. Consequently, when Hawkins struck a "pocket" in the hillside near his solitary cabin, there was but little surprise. "He will sink it all in the next hole" was the prevailing belief, predicated upon the usual manner in which the possessor of "nigger luck" disposed of his fortune. To everybody's astonishment, Hawkins, after taking out about eight thousand dollars, and exhausting the pocket, did not prospect for another. The camp then waited patiently to see what he would do with his money. I think, however, that it was with the greatest difficulty their indignation was kept from taking the form of a personal assault when it became known that he had purchased a draft for eight thousand dollars, in favor of "that woman." More than this, it was finally whispered that the draft was returned to him as his letters had been, and that he was ashamed to reclaim the money at the express-office. "It wouldn't be a bad speculation to go East, get some smart gal, for a hundred dollars, to dress herself up and represent that 'Hag,' and jest freeze onto that eight thousand," suggested a far-seeing financier. I may state here, that we always alluded to Hawkins's fair unknown as the "Hag" without having, I am

confident, the least justification for that epithet.

That the "Fool" should gamble seemed eminently fit and proper. That he should occasionally win a large stake, according to that popular theory which I have recorded in the preceding paragraph, appeared, also, a not improbable or inconsistent fact. That he should, however, break the faro bank which Mr. John Ham'lin had set up in Five Forks, and carry off a sum variously estimated at from ten to twenty thousand dollars, and not return the next day, and lose the money at the same table, really appeared incredible. Yet such was the fact. A day or two passed without any known investment of Mr. Hawkins's recently-acquired capital. "Ef he allows to send it to that 'Hag,'" said one prominent citizen, "suthin' ought to be done. It's jest ruinin' the reputation of this yer camp, — this sloshin' around o' capital on non-residents ez don't claim it!" "It's settin' an example o' extravagance," said another, "ez is little better nor a swindle. Thais mor'n five men in this camp, thet, hearin' thet Hawkins hed sent home eight thousand dollars, must jest rise up and send home their hard earnings too! And then to think thet thet eight thousand was only a bluff, after all, and thet it's lyin' there on call in Adams &

Co.'s bank! Well, I say it's one o' them things a vigilance committee oughter look into."

When there seemed no possibility of this repetition of Hawkins's folly, the anxiety to know what he had really done with his money became intense. At last a self-appointed committee of four citizens dropped artfully, but to outward appearances carelessly, upon him in his seclusion. When some polite formalities had been exchanged, and some easy vituperation of a backward season offered by each of the parties, Tom Wingate approached the subject.

"Sorter dropped heavy on Jack Hamlin the other night, didn't ye? He allows you didn't give him no show for revenge. I said you wasn't no such d—d fool; didn't I, Dick?" continued the artful Wingate, appealing to a confederate.

"Yes," said Dick promptly. "You said twenty thousand dollars wasn't goin' to be thrown around recklessly. You said Cyrus had suthin' better to do with his capital," super-added Dick with gratuitous mendacity. "I disremember now what partickler investment you said he was goin' to make with it," he continued, appealing with easy indifference to his friend.

Of course Wingate did not reply, but looked at the "Fool," who, with a troubled face, wa

rubbing his legs softly. After a pause, he turned deprecatingly toward his visitors.

“Ye didn’t enny of ye ever hev a sort of tremblin’ in your legs, a kind o’ shakiness from the knee down? Suthin’,” he continued, slightly brightening with his topic, — “suthin’ that begins like chills, and yet ain’t chills? A kind o’ sensation of goneeness here, and a kind o’ feelin’ as if you might die suddint? — when Wright’s Pills don’t somehow reach the spot, and quinine don’t fetch you?”

“No!” said Wingate with a curt directness, and the air of authoritatively responding for his friends, — “no, never had. You was speakin’ of this yer investment.”

“And your bowels all the time irregular?” continued Hawkins, blushing under Wingate’s eye, and yet clinging despairingly to his theme, like a shipwrecked mariner to his plank.

Wingate did not reply, but glanced significantly at the rest. Hawkins evidently saw this recognition of his mental deficiency, and said apologetically, “You was saying suthin’ about my investment?”

“Yes,” said Wingate, so rapidly as to almost take Hawkins’s breath away, — “the investment you made in” —

“Rafferty’s Ditch,” said the “Fool” timidly.

For a moment, the visitors could only stare

blankly at each other. "Rafferty's Ditch," the one notorious failure of Five Forks!—Rafferty's Ditch, the impracticable scheme of an utterly unpractical man!—Rafferty's Ditch, a ridiculous plan for taking water that could not be got to a place where it wasn't wanted!—Rafferty's Ditch, that had buried the fortunes of Rafferty and twenty wretched stockholders in its muddy depths!

"And thet's it, is it?" said Wingate, after a gloomy pause. "Thet's it! I see it all now, boys. That's how ragged Pat Rafferty went down to San Francisco yesterday in store-clothes, and his wife and four children went off in a kerridge to Sacramento. Thet's why them ten workmen of his, ez hadn't a cent to bless themselves with, was playin' billiards last night, and eatin' isters. Thet's whar that money kum frum,—one hundred dollars to pay for the long advertisement of the new issue of ditch stock in the "Times" yesterday. Thet's why them six strangers were booked at the Magnolia Hotel yesterday. Don't you see? It's thet money—and that 'Fool'!"

The "Fool" sat silent. The visitors rose without a word.

"You never took any of them Indian Vegetable Pills?" asked Hawkins timidly of Wingate.

“No!” roared Wingate as he opened the door.

“They tell me, that, took with the Panacea,— they was out o’ the Panacea when I went to the drug-store last week,— they say, that, took with the Panacea, they always effect a certin cure.” But by this time, Wingate and his disgusted friends had retreated, slamming the door on the “Fool” and his ailments.

Nevertheless, in six months the whole affair was forgotten: the money had been spent; the “Ditch” had been purchased by a company of Boston capitalists, fired by the glowing description of an Eastern tourist, who had spent one drunken night at Five Forks; and I think even the mental condition of Hawkins might have remained undisturbed by criticism, but for a singular incident.

It was during an exciting political campaign when party-feeling ran high, that the irascible Capt. McFadden of Sacramento visited Five Forks. During a heated discussion in the Prairie Rose Saloon, words passed between the captain and the Hon. Calhoun Bungstarter, ending in a challenge. The captain bore the infelicitous reputation of being a notorious duellist and a dead-shot. The captain was unpopular. The captain was believed to have been sent by the opposition for a deadly purpose; and the

captain was, moreover, a stranger. I am sorry to say that with Five Forks this latter condition did not carry the quality of sanctity or reverence that usually obtains among other nomads. There was, consequently, some little hesitation when the captain turned upon the crowd, and asked for some one to act as his friend. To everybody's astonishment, and to the indignation of many, the "Fool" stepped forward, and offered himself in that capacity. I do not know whether Capt. McFadden would have chosen him voluntarily; but he was constrained, in the absence of a better man, to accept his services.

The duel never took place. The preliminaries were all arranged, the spot indicated; the men were present with their seconds; there was no interruption from without; there was no explanation or apology passed — but the duel did not take place. It may be readily imagined that these facts, which were all known to Five Forks, threw the whole community into a fever of curiosity. The principals, the surgeon, and one second left town the next day. Only the "Fool" remained. *He* resisted all questioning, declaring himself held in honor not to divulge: in short, conducted himself with consistent but exasperating folly. It was not until six months had passed, that Col. Starbottle, the

second of Calhoun Bungstarter, in a moment of weakness, superinduced by the social glass, condescended to explain. I should not do justice to the parties, if I did not give that explanation in the colonel's own words. I may remark, in passing, that the characteristic dignity of Col. Starbottle always became intensified by stimulants, and that, by the same process, all sense of humor was utterly eliminated.

“With the understanding that I am addressing myself confidentially to men of honor,” said the colonel, elevating his chest above the bar-room counter of the Prairie Rose Saloon, “I trust that it will not be necessary for me to protect myself from levity, as I was forced to do in Sacramento on the only other occasion when I entered into an explanation of this delicate affair by—er—er—calling the individual to a personal account—er. I do not believe,” added the colonel, slightly waving his glass of liquor in the air with a graceful gesture of courteous deprecation, “knowing what I do of the present company, that such a course of action is required here. Certainly not, sir, in the home of Mr. Hawkins—er—the gentleman who represented Mr. Bungstarter, whose conduct, ged, sir, is worthy of praise, blank me!”

Apparently satisfied with the gravity and respectful attention of his listeners, Col. Starbottle smiled relentingly and sweetly, closed his eyes half-dreamily, as if to recall his wandering thoughts, and began, —

“As the spot selected was nearest the tene-ment of Mr. Hawkins, it was agreed that the parties should meet there. They did so promptly at half-past six. The morning being chilly, Mr. Hawkins extended the hospitalities of his house with a bottle of Bourbon whiskey, of which all partook but myself. The reason for that exception is, I believe, well known. It is my invariable custom to take brandy—a wineglassful in a cup of strong coffee—immediately on rising. It stimulates the functions, sir, without producing any blank derangement of the nerves.”

The barkeeper, to whom, as an expert, the colonel had graciously imparted this information, nodded approvingly; and the colonel, amid a breathless silence, went on.

“We were about twenty minutes in reaching the spot. The ground was measured, the weapons were loaded, when Mr. Bungstarter confided to me the information that he was unwell, and in great pain. On consultation with Mr. Hawkins, it appeared that his principal, in a distant part of the field, was also

suffering, and in great pain. The symptoms were such as a medical man would pronounce 'choleraic.' I say *would* have pronounced; for, on examination, the surgeon was also found to be — er — in pain, and, I regret to say, expressing himself in language unbecoming the occasion. His impression was, that some powerful drug had been administered. On referring the question to Mr. Hawkins, he remembered that the bottle of whiskey partaken by them contained a medicine which he had been in the habit of taking, but which, having failed to act upon him, he had concluded to be generally ineffective, and had forgotten. His perfect willingness to hold himself personally responsible to each of the parties, his genuine concern at the disastrous effect of the mistake, mingled with his own alarm at the state of his system, which — er — failed to — er — respond to the peculiar qualities of the medicine, was most becoming to him as a man of honor and a gentleman. After an hour's delay, both principals being completely exhausted, and abandoned by the surgeon, who was unreasonably alarmed at his own condition, Mr. Hawkins and I agreed to remove our men to Markleville. There, after a further consultation with Mr. Hawkins, an amicable adjustment of all difficulties, honorable to both parties, and governed by

profound secrecy, was arranged. I believe," added the colonel, looking around, and setting down his glass, "no gentleman has yet expressed himself other than satisfied with the result."

Perhaps it was the colonel's manner; but, whatever was the opinion of Five Forks regarding the intellectual display of Mr. Hawkins in this affair, there was very little outspoken criticism at the moment. In a few weeks the whole thing was forgotten, except as part of the necessary record of Hawkins's blunders, which was already a pretty full one. Again, some later follies conspired to obliterate the past, until, a year later, a valuable lead was discovered in the "Blazing Star" tunnel, in the hill where he lived; and a large sum was offered him for a portion of his land on the hill-top. Accustomed as Five Forks had become to the exhibition of his folly, it was with astonishment that they learned that he resolutely and decidedly refused the offer. The reason that he gave was still more astounding, — he was about to build.

To build a house upon property available for mining-purposes was preposterous; to build at all, with a roof already covering him, was an act of extravagance; to build a house of the style he proposed was simply madness.

Yet here were facts. The plans were made, and the lumber for the new building was already on the ground, while the shaft of the "Blazing Star" was being sunk below. The site was, in reality, a very picturesque one, the building itself of a style and quality hitherto unknown in Five Forks. The citizens, at first sceptical, during their moments of recreation and idleness gathered doubtfully about the locality. Day by day, in that climate of rapid growths, the building, pleasantly known in the slang of Five Forks as the "Idiot Asylum," rose beside the green oaks and clustering firs of Hawkins Hill, as if it were part of the natural phenomena. At last it was completed. Then Mr. Hawkins proceeded to furnish it with an expensiveness and extravagance of outlay quite in keeping with his former idiocy. Carpets, sofas, mirrors, and finally a piano, — the only one known in the county, and brought at great expense from Sacramento, — kept curiosity at a fever-heat. More than that, there were articles and ornaments which a few married experts declared only fit for women. When the furnishing of the house was complete, — it had occupied two months of the speculative and curious attention of the camp, — Mr. Hawkins locked the front door, put the key in his pocket, and quietly

retired to his more humble roof, lower on the hillside.

I have not deemed it necessary to indicate to the intelligent reader all of the theories which obtained in Five Forks during the erection of the building. Some of them may be readily imagined. That the "Hag" had, by artful coyness and systematic reticence, at last completely subjugated the "Fool," and that the new house was intended for the nuptial bower of the (predestined) unhappy pair, was, of course, the prevailing opinion. But when, after a reasonable time had elapsed, and the house still remained untenanted, the more exasperating conviction forced itself upon the general mind, that the "Fool" had been for the third time imposed upon; when two months had elapsed, and there seemed no prospect of a mistress for the new house, — I think public indignation became so strong, that, had the "Hag" arrived, the marriage would have been publicly prevented. But no one appeared that seemed to answer to this idea of an available tenant; and all inquiry of Mr. Hawkins as to his intention in building a house, and not renting it, or occupying it, failed to elicit any further information. The reasons that he gave were felt to be vague, evasive, and unsatisfactory. He was in no hurry to move, he said. When he *was* ready, it surely

was not strange that he should like to have his house all ready to receive him. He was often seen upon the veranda, of a summer evening, smoking a cigar. It is reported that one night the house was observed to be brilliantly lighted from garret to basement; that a neighbor, observing this, crept toward the open parlor-window, and, looking in, espied the "Fool" accurately dressed in evening costume, lounging upon a sofa in the drawing-room, with the easy air of socially entertaining a large party. Notwithstanding this, the house was unmistakably vacant that evening, save for the presence of the owner, as the witness afterward testified. When this story was first related, a few practical men suggested the theory that Mr. Hawkins was simply drilling himself in the elaborate duties of hospitality against a probable event in his history. A few ventured the belief that the house was haunted. The imaginative editor of the Five Forks "Record" evolved from the depths of his professional consciousness a story that Hawkins's sweetheart had died, and that he regularly entertained her spirit in this beautifully furnished mausoleum. The occasional spectacle of Hawkins's tall figure pacing the veranda on moonlight nights lent some credence to this theory, until an unlooked-for incident diverted all speculation into another channel.

It was about this time that a certain wild, rude valley, in the neighborhood of Five Forks, had become famous as a picturesque resort. Travellers had visited it, and declared that there were more cubic yards of rough stone cliff, and a waterfall of greater height, than any they had visited. Correspondents had written it up with extravagant rhetoric and inordinate poetical quotation. Men and women who had never enjoyed a sunset, a tree, or a flower, who had never appreciated the graciousness or meaning of the yellow sunlight that flecked their homely doorways, or the tenderness of a midsummer's night, to whose moonlight they bared their shirt-sleeves or their *tulle* dresses, came from thousands of miles away to calculate the height of this rock, to observe the depth of this chasm, to remark upon the enormous size of this unsightly tree, and to believe with ineffable self-complacency that they really admired Nature. And so it came to pass, that, in accordance with the tastes or weaknesses of the individual, the more prominent and salient points of the valley were christened; and there was a "Lace Handkerchief Fall," and the "Tears of Sympathy Cataract," and one distinguished creator's "Peak," and several "Mounts" of various noted people, living or dead, and an "Exclamation-Point," and a "Valley of Silent

Adoration." And, in course of time, empty soda-water bottles were found at the base of the cataract, and greasy newspapers, and fragments of ham-sandwiches, lay at the dusty roots of giant trees. With this, there were frequent irruptions of closely-shaven and tightly-cravated men, and delicate, flower-faced women, in the one long street of Five Forks, and a scampering of mules, and an occasional procession of dusty brown-linen cavalry.

A year after "Hawkins's Idiot Asylum" was completed, one day there drifted into the valley a riotous cavalcade of "school-marms," teachers of the San-Francisco public schools, out for a holiday. Not severely-spectacled Minervas, and chastely armed and mailed Pallases, but, I fear, for the security of Five Forks, very human, charming, and mischievous young women. At least, so the men thought, working in the ditches, and tunnelling on the hillside; and when, in the interests of science, and the mental advancement of juvenile posterity, it was finally settled that they should stay in Five Forks two or three days for the sake of visiting the various mines, and particularly the "Blazing Star" tunnel, there was some flutter of masculine anxiety. There was a considerable inquiry for "store-clothes," a hopeless overhauling of old and disused raiment, and a general demand for "boiled shirts" and the barber.

Meanwhile, with that supreme audacity and impudent hardihood of the sex when gregarious, the school-marms rode through the town, admiring openly the handsome faces and manly figures that looked up from the ditches, or rose behind the cars of ore at the mouths of tunnels. Indeed, it is alleged that Jenny Forester, backed and supported by seven other equally shameless young women, had openly and publicly waved her handkerchief to the florid Hercules of Five Forks, one Tom Flynn, formerly of Virginia, leaving that good-natured but not over-bright giant pulling his blonde mustaches in bashful amazement.

It was a pleasant June afternoon that Miss Milly Arnot, principal of the primary department of one of the public schools of San Francisco, having evaded her companions, resolved to put into operation a plan which had lately sprung up in her courageous and mischief-loving fancy. With that wonderful and mysterious instinct of her sex, from whom no secrets of the affections are hid, and to whom all hearts are laid open, she had heard the story of Hawkins's folly, and the existence of the "Idiot Asylum." Alone, on Hawkins Hill, she had determined to penetrate its seclusion. Skirting the underbrush at the foot of the hill, she managed to keep the heaviest timber between

herself and the "Blazing Star" tunnel at its base, as well as the cabin of Hawkins, half-way up the ascent, until, by a circuitous route, at last she reached, unobserved, the summit. Before her rose, silent, darkened, and motionless, the object of her search. Here her courage failed her, with all the characteristic inconsequence of her sex. A sudden fear of all the dangers she had safely passed — bears, tarantulas, drunken men, and lizards — came upon her. For a moment, as she afterward expressed it, "she thought she should die." With this belief, probably, she gathered three large stones, which she could hardly lift, for the purpose of throwing a great distance; put two hair-pins in her mouth; and carefully re-adjusted with both hands two stray braids of her lovely blue-black mane, which had fallen in gathering the stones. Then she felt in the pockets of her linen duster for her card-case, handkerchief, pocket-book, and smelling-bottle, and, finding them intact, suddenly assumed an air of easy, ladylike unconcern, went up the steps of the veranda, and demurely pulled the front door-bell, which she knew would not be answered. After a decent pause, she walked around the encompassing veranda, examining the closed shutters of the French windows until she found one that yielded to her touch. Here she paused

again to adjust her coquettish hat by the mirror-like surface of the long sash-window, that reflected the full length of her pretty figure. And then she opened the window, and entered the room.

Although long closed, the house had a smell of newness and of fresh paint, that was quite unlike the mouldiness of the conventional haunted house. The bright carpets, the cheerful walls, the glistening oil-cloths, were quite inconsistent with the idea of a ghost. With childish curiosity, she began to explore the silent house, at first timidly, — opening the doors with a violent push, and then stepping back from the threshold to make good a possible retreat, — and then more boldly, as she became convinced of her security and absolute loneliness. In one of the chambers — the largest — there were fresh flowers in a vase, evidently gathered that morning; and, what seemed still more remarkable, the pitchers and ewers were freshly filled with water. This obliged Miss Milly to notice another singular fact, namely, that the house was free from dust, the one most obtrusive and penetrating visitor of Five Forks. The floors and carpets had been recently swept, the chairs and furniture carefully wiped and dusted. If the house *was* haunted, it was possessed by a spirit who had none of the usual indifference to decay and mould. And yet

the beds had evidently never been slept in, the very springs of the chair in which she sat creaked stiffly at the novelty; the closet-doors opened with the reluctance of fresh paint and varnish; and in spite of the warmth, cleanliness, and cheerfulness of furniture and decoration, there was none of the ease of tenancy and occupation. As Miss Milly afterward confessed, she longed to "tumble things around;" and, when she reached the parlor or drawing-room again, she could hardly resist the desire. Particularly was she tempted by a closed piano, that stood mutely against the wall. She thought she would open it just to see who was the maker. That done, it would be no harm to try its tone. She did so, with one little foot on the soft pedal. But Miss Milly was too good a player, and too enthusiastic a musician, to stop at half-measures. She tried it again, this time so sincerely, that the whole house seemed to spring into voice. Then she stopped and listened. There was no response: the empty rooms seemed to have relapsed into their old stillness. She stepped out on the veranda. A woodpecker recommenced his tapping on an adjacent tree: the rattle of a cart in the rocky gulch below the hill came faintly up. No one was to be seen far or near. Miss Milly, re-assured, returned. She again ran her fingers over the keys, stopped, caught at a mel

ody running in her mind, half played it, and then threw away all caution. Before five minutes had elapsed, she had entirely forgotten herself, and with her linen duster thrown aside her straw hat flung on the piano, her white hands bared, and a black loop of her braided hair hanging upon her shoulder, was fairly embarked upon a flowing sea of musical recollection.

She had played, perhaps, half an hour, when having just finished an elaborate symphony, and resting her hands on the keys, she heard very distinctly and unmistakably the sound of applause from without. In an instant the fires of shame and indignation leaped into her cheeks; and she rose from the instrument, and ran to the window, only in time to catch sight of a dozen figures in blue and red flannel shirts vanishing hurriedly through the trees below.

Miss Milly's mind was instantly made up. I think I have already intimated, that, under the stimulus of excitement, she was not wanting in courage; and as she quietly resumed her gloves, hat, and duster, she was not, perhaps, exactly the young person that it would be entirely safe for the timid, embarrassed, or inexperienced of my sex to meet alone. She shut down the piano; and having carefully reclosed all the windows and doors, and restored the house to

its former desolate condition, she stepped from the veranda, and proceeded directly to the cabin of the unintellectual Hawkins, that reared its adobe chimney above the umbrage a quarter of a mile below.

The door opened instantly to her impulsive knock, and the "Fool of Five Forks" stood before her. Miss Milly had never before seen the man designated by this infelicitous title; and as he stepped backward, in half courtesy and half astonishment, she was, for the moment, disconcerted. He was tall, finely formed, and dark-bearded. Above cheeks a little hollowed by care and ill-health shone a pair of hazel eyes, very large, very gentle, but inexpressibly sad and mournful. This was certainly not the kind of man Miss Milly had expected to see; yet, after her first embarrassment had passed, the very circumstance, oddly enough, added to her indignation, and stung her wounded pride still more deeply. Nevertheless, the arch hypocrite instantly changed her tactics with the swift intuition of her sex.

"I have come," she said with a dazzling smile, infinitely more dangerous than her former dignified severity, — "I have come to ask your pardon for a great liberty I have just taken. I believe the new house above us on the hill is yours. I was so much pleased with its exterior, that I left

my friends for a moment below here," she continued artfully, with a slight wave of the hand, as if indicating a band of fearless Amazons without, and waiting to avenge any possible insult offered to one of their number, "and ventured to enter it. Finding it unoccupied, as I had been told, I am afraid I had the audacity to sit down and amuse myself for a few moments at the piano, while waiting for my friends."

Hawkins raised his beautiful eyes to hers. He saw a very pretty girl, with frank gray eyes glistening with excitement, with two red, slightly freckled cheeks glowing a little under his eyes, with a short scarlet upper-lip turned back, like a rose-leaf, over a little line of white teeth, as she breathed somewhat hurriedly in her nervous excitement. He saw all this calmly, quietly, and, save for the natural uneasiness of a shy, reticent man, I fear without a quickening of his pulse.

"I knowed it," he said simply. "I heerd ye as I kem up."

Miss Milly was furious at his grammar, his dialect, his coolness, and, still more, at the suspicion that he was an active member of her invisible *claque*.

"Ah!" she said, still smiling. "Then I think I heard *you*" —

"I reckon not," he interrupted gravely. "I

didn't stay long. I found the boys hanging round the house, and I allowed at first I'd go in and kinder warn you; but they promised to keep still: and you looked so comfortable, and wrapped up in your music, that I hadn't the heart to disturb you, and kem away. I hope," he added earnestly, "they didn't let on ez they heerd you. They ain't a bad lot, — them Blazin' Sta boys — though they're a little hard at times. But they'd no more hurt ye then they would a — a — a cat!" continued Mr. Hawkins, blushing with a faint apprehension of the inelegance of his simile.

"No, no!" said Miss Milly, feeling suddenly very angry with herself, the "Fool," and the entire male population of Five Forks. "No! I have behaved foolishly, I suppose — and, if they *had*, it would have served me right. But I only wanted to apologize to you. You'll find every thing as you left it. Good-day!"

She turned to go. Mr. Hawkins began to feel embarrassed. "I'd have asked ye to sit down," he said finally, "if it hed been a place fit for a ady. I oughter done so, enny way. I don't know what kept me from it. But I ain't well, miss. Times I get a sort o' dumb ager, — it's the ditches, I think, miss, — and I don't seem to hev my wits about me."

Instantly Miss Arnot was all sympathy: her quick woman's heart was touched.

“Can I — can any thing be done?” she asked more timidly than she had before spoken.

“No — not unless ye remember suthin’ about these pills.” He exhibited a box containing about half a dozen. “I forget the direction — I don’t seem to remember much, any way, these times. They’re ‘Jones’s Vegetable Compound.’ If ye’ve ever took ’em, ye’ll remember whether the reg’lar dose is eight. They ain’t but six here. But perhaps ye never tuk any,” he added deprecatingly.

“No,” said Miss Milly curtly. She had usually a keen sense of the ludicrous; but somehow Mr. Hawkins’s eccentricity only pained her.

“Will you let me see you to the foot of the hill?” he said again, after another embarrassing pause.

Miss Arnot felt instantly that such an act would condone her trespass in the eyes of the world. She might meet some of her invisible admirers, or even her companions; and, with all her erratic impulses, she was, nevertheless, a woman, and did not entirely despise the verdict of conventionality. She smiled sweetly, and assented; and in another moment the two were lost in the shadows of the wood.

Like many other apparently trivial acts in an uneventful life, it was decisive. As she expected, she met two or three of her late

applauders, whom, she fancied, looked sheepish and embarrassed; she met, also, her companions looking for her in some alarm, who really appeared astonished at her escort, and, she fancied, a trifle envious of her evident success. I fear that Miss Arnot, in response to their anxious inquiries, did not state entirely the truth, but, without actual assertion, led them to believe that she had, at a very early stage of the proceeding, completely subjugated this weak-minded giant, and had brought him triumphantly to her feet. From telling this story two or three times, she got finally to believing that she had some foundation for it, then to a vague sort of desire that it would eventually prove to be true, and then to an equally vague yearning to hasten that consummation. That it would redound to any satisfaction of the "Fool" she did not stop to doubt. That it would cure him of his folly she was quite confident. Indeed, there are very few of us, men or women, who do not believe that even a hopeless love for ourselves is more conducive to the salvation of the lover than a requited affection for another.

The criticism of Five Forks was, as the reader may imagine, swift and conclusive. When it was found out that Miss Arnot was not the "Hag" masquerading as a young and

pretty girl, to the ultimate deception of Five Forks in general, and the "Fool" in particular, it was at once decided that nothing but the speedy union of the "Fool" and the "pretty school-marm" was consistent with ordinary common sense. The singular good-fortune of Hawkins was quite in accordance with the theory of his luck as propounded by the camp. That, after the "Hag" failed to make her appearance, he should "strike a lead" in his own house, without the trouble of "prospect-in'," seemed to these casuists as a wonderful but inevitable law. To add to these fateful probabilities, Miss Arnot fell, and sprained her ankle, in the ascent of Mount Lincoln, and was confined for some weeks to the hotel after her companions had departed. During this period, Hawkins was civilly but grotesquely attentive. When, after a reasonable time had elapsed, there still appeared to be no immediate prospect of the occupancy of the new house, public opinion experienced a singular change in regard to its theories of Mr. Hawkins's conduct. The "Hag" was looked upon as a saint-like and long suffering martyr to the weaknesses and inconsistency of the "Fool." That, after erecting this new house at her request, he had suddenly "gone back" on her; that his celibacy was the result of a long habit of weak proposal and

subsequent shameless rejection; and that he was now trying his hand on the helpless school-marm, was perfectly plain to Five Forks. That he should be frustrated in his attempts at any cost was equally plain. Miss Milly suddenly found herself invested with a rude chivalry that would have been amusing, had it not been at times embarrassing; that would have been impertinent, but for the almost superstitious respect with which it was proffered. Every day somebody from Five Forks rode out to inquire the health of the fair patient. "Hez Hawkins bin over yer to-day?" queried Tom Flynn, with artful ease and indifference, as he leaned over Miss Milly's easy-chair on the veranda. Miss Milly, with a faint pink flush on her cheek, was constrained to answer, "No." "Well, he sorter sprained his foot agin a rock yesterday," continued Flynn with shameless untruthfulness. "You mus'n't think any thing o' that, Miss Arnot. He'll be over yer to-morrow; and meantime he told me to hand this yer bookay with his re-gards, and this yer specimen." And Mr. Flynn laid down the flowers he had picked *en route* against such an emergency, and presented respectfully a piece of quartz and gold, which he had taken that morning from his own sluice-box. "You mus'n't mind Hawkins's ways, Miss Milly," said another

sympathizing miner. "There ain't a better man in camp than that theer Cy Hawkins—but he don't understand the ways o' the world with wimen. He hasn't mixed as much with society as the rest of us," he added, with an elaborate Chesterfieldian ease of manner; "but he means well." Meanwhile a few other sympathetic tunnel-men were impressing upon Mr. Hawkins the necessity of the greatest attention to the invalid. "It won't do, Hawkins," they explained, "to let that there gal go back to San Francisco and say, that, when she was sick and alone, the only man in Five Forks under whose roof she had rested, and at whose table she had sat" (this was considered a natural but pardonable exaggeration of rhetoric) "ever threw off on her; and it sha'n't be done. It ain't the square thing to Five Forks." And then the "Fool" would rush away to the valley, and be received by Miss Milly with a certain reserve of manner that finally disappeared in a flush of color, some increased vivacity, and a pardonable coquetry. And so the days passed. Miss Milly grew better in health, and more troubled in mind; and Mr. Hawkins became more and more embarrassed; and Five Forks smiled, and rubbed its hands, and waited for the approaching *denoûment*. And then it came—but not, perhaps, in the manner that Five Forks had imagined.

It was a lovely afternoon in July that a party of Eastern tourists rode into Five Forks. They had just "done" the Valley of Big Things; and, there being one or two Eastern capitalists among the party, it was deemed advisable that a proper knowledge of the practical mining-resources of California should be added to their experience of the merely picturesque in Nature. Thus far every thing had been satisfactory; the amount of water which passed over the Fall was large, owing to a backward season; some snow still remained in the cañons near the highest peaks; they had ridden round one of the biggest trees, and through the prostrate trunk of another. To say that they were delighted is to express feebly the enthusiasm of these ladies and gentlemen, drunk with the champagne hospitality of their entertainers, the utter novelty of scene, and the dry, exhilarating air of the valley. One or two had already expressed themselves ready to live and die there; another had written a glowing account to the Eastern press, depreciating all other scenery in Europe and America; and, under these circumstances, it was reasonably expected that Five Forks would do its duty, and equally impress the stranger after its own fashion.

Letters to this effect were sent from San Francisco by prominent capitalists there; and,

under the able superintendence of one of their agents, the visitors were taken in hand, shown "what was to be seen," carefully restrained from observing what ought not to be visible, and so kept in a blissful and enthusiastic condition. And so the graveyard of Five Forks, in which but two of the occupants had died natural deaths; the dreary, ragged cabins on the hillsides, with their sad-eyed, cynical, broken-spirited occupants, toiling on day by day for a miserable pittance, and a fare that a self-respecting Eastern mechanic would have scornfully rejected, — were not a part of the Eastern visitors' recollection. But the hoisting works and machinery of the "Blazing Star Tunnel Company" was, — the Blazing Star Tunnel Company, whose "gentlemanly superintendent" had received private information from San Francisco to do the "proper thing" for the party. Wherefore the valuable heaps of ore in the company's works were shown; the oblong bars of gold, ready for shipment, were playfully offered to the ladies who could lift and carry them away unaided; and even the tunnel itself, gloomy, fateful, and peculiar, was shown as part of the experience; and, in the noble language of one correspondent, "The wealth of Five Forks, and the peculiar inducements that it offered to Eastern capitalists," were estab

lished beyond a doubt. And then occurred a little incident, which, as an unbiassed spectator, I am free to say offered no inducements to anybody whatever, but which, for its bearing upon the central figure of this veracious chronicle, I cannot pass over.

It had become apparent to one or two more practical and sober-minded in the party, that certain portions of the "Blazing Star" tunnel (owing, perhaps, to the exigencies of a flattering annual dividend) were economically and imperfectly "shored" and supported, and were, consequently, unsafe, insecure, and to be avoided. Nevertheless, at a time when champagne corks were popping in dark corners, and enthusiastic voices and happy laughter rang through the half-lighted levels and galleries, there came a sudden and mysterious silence. A few lights dashed swiftly by in the direction of a distant part of the gallery, and then there was a sudden sharp issuing of orders, and a dull, ominous rumble. Some of the visitors turned pale: one woman fainted.

Something had happened. What? "Nothing" (the speaker is fluent, but uneasy) — "one of the gentlemen, in trying to dislodge a 'specimen' from the wall, had knocked away a support. There had been a 'cave' — the gentleman was caught, and buried below his shoulders. It

was all right, they'd get him out in a moment — only it required great care to keep from extending the 'cave.' Didn't know his name. It was that little man, the husband of that lively lady with the black eyes. Eh! Hullo, there! Stop her! For God's sake! Not that way! She'll fall from that shaft. She'll be killed!"

But the lively lady was already gone. With staring black eyes, imploringly trying to pierce the gloom, with hands and feet that sought to batter and break down the thick darkness, with incoherent cries and supplications following the moving of *ignis fatuus* lights ahead, she ran, and ran swiftly! — ran over treacherous foundations, ran by yawning gulfs, ran past branching galleries and arches, ran wildly, ran despairingly, ran blindly, and at last ran into the arms of the "Fool of Five Forks."

In an instant she caught at his hand. "Oh, save him!" she cried. "You belong here; you know this dreadful place: bring me to him. Tell me where to go, and what to do, I implore you! Quick, he is dying! Come!"

He raised his eyes to hers, and then, with a sudden cry, dropped the rope and crowbar he was carrying, and reeled against the wall.

"Annie!" he gasped slowly. "Is it you?"

She caught at both his hands, brought her

face to his with staring eyes, murmured, "Good God, Cyrus!" and sank upon her knees before him.

He tried to disengage the hand that she wrung with passionate entreaty.

"No, no! Cyrus, you will forgive me — you will forget the past! God has sent you here to-day. You will come with me. You will — you must — save him!"

"Save who?" cried Cyrus hoarsely.

"My husband!"

The blow was so direct, so strong and overwhelming, that, even through her own stronger and more selfish absorption, she saw it in the face of the man, and pitied him.

"I thought — you — knew — it," she faltered.

He did not speak, but looked at her with fixed, dumb eyes. And then the sound of distant voices and hurrying feet started her again into passionate life. She once more caught his hand.

"O Cyrus, hear me! If you have loved me through all these years, you will not fail me now. You must save him! You can! You are brave and strong — you always were, Cyrus. You will save him, Cyrus, for my sake, for the sake of your love for me! You will — I know it. God bless you!"

She rose as if to follow him; but, at a gesture of command, she stood still. He picked up the rope and crowbar slowly, and in a dazed, blinded way, that, in her agony of impatience and alarm, seemed protracted to cruel infinity. Then he turned, and, raising her hand to his lips, kissed it slowly, looked at her again, and the next moment was gone.

He did not return; for at the end of the next half-hour, when they laid before her the half-conscious, breathing body of her husband, safe and unharmed, but for exhaustion and some slight bruises, she learned that the worst fears of the workmen had been realized. In releasing him, a second cave had taken place. They had barely time to snatch away the helpless body of her husband, before the strong frame of his rescuer, Cyrus Hawkins, was struck and smitten down in his place.

For two hours he lay there, crushed and broken-limbed, with a heavy beam lying across his breast, in sight of all, conscious and patient. For two hours they had labored around him, wildly, despairingly, hopefully, with the wills of gods and the strength of giants; and at the end of that time they came to an upright timber, which rested its base upon the beam. There was a cry for axes, and one was already swinging in the air, when the dying man called to them feebly, —

"Don't cut that upright!"

"Why?"

"It will bring down the whole gallery with it."

"How?"

"It's one of the foundations of my house."

The axe fell from the workman's hand, and with a blanched face he turned to his fellows. It was too true. They were in the uppermost gallery; and the "cave" had taken place directly below the new house. After a pause, the "Fool" spoke again more feebly.

"The lady — quick!"

They brought her, — a wretched, fainting creature, with pallid face and streaming eyes, — and fell back as she bent her face above him.

"It was built for you, Annie darling," he said in a hurried whisper, "and has been waiting up there for you and me all these long days. It's deeded to you, Annie; and you must — live there — with *him*! He will not mind that I shall be always near you; for it stands above — my grave."

And he was right. In a few minutes later, when he had passed away, they did not move him, but sat by his body all night with a torch at his feet and head. And the next day they walled up the gallery as a vault; but they put no mark or any sign thereon, trusting, rather, to

the monument, that, bright and cheerful, rose above him in the sunlight of the hill. And those who heard the story said, "This is not an evidence of death and gloom and sorrow, as are other monuments, but is a sign of life and light and hope, wherefore shall all know that **he who lies under it is what men call — "a fool"**

BABY SYLVESTER.

IT was at a little mining-camp in the California Sierras that he first dawned upon me in all his grotesque sweetness.

I had arrived early in the morning, but not in time to intercept the friend who was the object of my visit. He had gone "prospecting," — so they told me on the river, — and would not probably return until late in the afternoon. They could not say what direction he had taken; they could not suggest that I would be likely to find him if I followed. But it was the general opinion that I had better wait.

I looked around me. I was standing upon the bank of the river; and apparently the only other human beings in the world were my interlocutors, who were even then just disappearing from my horizon, down the steep bank, toward the river's dry bed. I approached the edge of the bank.

Where could I wait?

Oh! anywhere, — down with them on the river-bar, where they were working, if I liked. Or I

could make myself at home in any of those cabins that I found lying round loose. Or perhaps it would be cooler and pleasanter for me in my friend's cabin on the hill. Did I see those three large sugar-pines, and, a little to the right, a canvas roof and chimney, over the bushes? Well, that was my friend's, — that was Dick Sylvester's cabin. I could stake my horse in that little hollow, and just hang round there till he came. I would find some books in the shanty. I could amuse myself with them; or I could play with the baby.

Do what?

But they had already gone. I leaned over the bank, and called after their vanishing figures, —

“What did you say I could do?”

The answer floated slowly up on the hot, sluggish air, —

“Pla-a-y with the ba-by.”

The lazy echoes took it up, and tossed it languidly from hill to hill, until Bald Mountain opposite made some incoherent remark about the baby; and then all was still.

I must have been mistaken. My friend was not a man of family; there was not a woman within forty miles of the river camp; he never was so passionately devoted to children as to import a luxury so expensive. I must have been mistaken.

I turned my horse's head toward the hill. As we slowly climbed the narrow trail, the little settlement might have been some exhumed Pompeiian suburb, so deserted and silent were its habitations. The open doors plainly disclosed each rudely-furnished interior, — the rough pine table, with the scant equipage of the morning meal still standing; the wooden bunk, with its tumbled and dishevelled blankets. A golden lizard, the very genius of desolate stillness, had stopped breathless upon the threshold of one cabin; a squirrel peeped impudently into the window of another; a woodpecker, with the general flavor of undertaking which distinguishes that bird, withheld his sepulchral hammer from the coffin-lid of the roof on which he was professionally engaged, as we passed. For a moment I half regretted that I had not accepted the invitation to the river-bed; but, the next moment, a breeze swept up the long, dark cañon, and the waiting files of the pines beyond bent toward me in salutation. I think my horse understood, as well as myself, that it was the cabins that made the solitude human, and therefore unbearable; for he quickened his pace, and with a gentle trot brought me to the edge of the wood, and the three pines that stood like vedettes before the Sylvester outpost.

Unsaddling my horse in the little hollow, I unslung the long *riata* from the saddle-bow, and, tethering him to a young sapling, turned toward the cabin. But I had gone only a few steps, when I heard a quick trot behind me; and poor Pomposo, with every fibre tingling with fear, was at my heels. I looked hurriedly around. The breeze had died away; and only an occasional breath from the deep-chested woods, more like a long sigh than any articulate sound, or the dry singing of a cicala in the heated cañon, were to be heard. I examined the ground carefully for rattlesnakes, but in vain. Yet here was Pomposo shivering from his arched neck to his sensitive haunches, his very flanks pulsating with terror. I soothed him as well as I could, and then walked to the edge of the wood, and peered into its dark recesses. The bright flash of a bird's wing, or the quick dart of a squirrel, was all I saw. I confess it was with something of superstitious expectation that I again turned towards the cabin. A fairy-child, attended by Titania and her train, lying in an expensive cradle, would not have surprised me: a Sleeping Beauty, whose awakening would have re-peopled these solitudes with life and energy, I am afraid I began to confidently look for, and would have kissed without hesitation.

But I found none of these. Here was the evidence of my friend's taste and refinement, in the hearth swept scrupulously clean, in the picturesque arrangement of the fur-skins that covered the floor and furniture, and the striped *serápe*¹ lying on the wooden couch. Here were the walls fancifully papered with illustrations from "The London News;" here was the wood-cut portrait of Mr. Emerson over the chimney, quaintly framed with blue-jays' wings; here were his few favorite books on the swinging-shelf; and here, lying upon the couch, the latest copy of "Punch." Dear Dick! The flour-sack was sometimes empty; but the gentle satirist seldom missed his weekly visit.

I threw myself on the couch, and tried to read. But I soon exhausted my interest in my friend's library, and lay there staring through the open door on the green hillside beyond. The breeze again sprang up; and a delicious coolness, mixed with the rare incense of the woods, stole through the cabin. The slumbrous droning of bumblebees outside the canvas roof, the faint cawing of rooks on the opposite mountain, and the fatigue of my morning ride, began to droop my eyelids. I pulled the *serápe* over me, as a

¹ A fine Mexican blanket, used as an outer garment for maing.

precaution against the freshening mountain breeze, and in a few moments was asleep.

I do not remember how long I slept. I must have been conscious, however, during my slumber, of my inability to keep myself covered by the *serápe*; for I awoke once or twice, clutching it with a despairing hand as it was disappearing over the foot of the couch. Then I became suddenly aroused to the fact that my efforts to retain it were resisted by some equally persistent force; and, letting it go, I was horrified at seeing it swiftly drawn under the couch. At this point I sat up, completely awake; for immediately after, what seemed to be an exaggerated muff began to emerge from under the couch. Presently it appeared fully, dragging the *serápe* after it. There was no mistaking it now: it was a baby-bear, — a mere suckling, it was true, a helpless roll of fat and fur, but unmistakably a grizzly cub!

I cannot recall any thing more irresistibly ludicrous than its aspect as it slowly raised its small, wondering eyes to mine. It was so much taller on its haunches than its shoulders, its forelegs were so disproportionately small, that, in walking, its hind-feet invariably took precedence. It was perpetually pitching forward over its pointed, inoffensive nose, and recovering itself always, after these involuntary somersaults

with the gravest astonishment. To add to its preposterous appearance, one of its hind-feet was adorned by a shoe of Sylvester's, into which it had accidentally and inextricably stepped. As this somewhat impeded its first impulse to fly, it turned to me; and then, possibly recognizing in the stranger the same species as its master, it paused. Presently it slowly raised itself on its hind-legs, and vaguely and deprecatingly waved a baby-paw, fringed with little hooks of steel. I took the paw, and shook it gravely. From that moment we were friends. The little affair of the *serápe* was forgotten.

Nevertheless, I was wise enough to cement our friendship by an act of delicate courtesy. Following the direction of his eyes, I had no difficulty in finding on a shelf near the ridge-pole the sugar-box and the square lumps of white sugar that even the poorest miner is never without. While he was eating them, I had time to examine him more closely. His body was a silky, dark, but exquisitely-modulated gray, deepening to black in his paws and muzzle. His fur was excessively long, thick, and soft as eider-down; the cushions of flesh beneath perfectly infantine in their texture and contour. He was so very young, that the palms of his half-human feet were still tender as a baby's. Except for the bright blue, steely hooks, half

sheathed in his little toes, there was not a single harsh outline or detail in his plump figure. He was as free from angles as one of Leda's offspring. Your caressing hand sank away in his fur with dreamy languor. To look at him long was an intoxication of the senses; to pat him was a wild delirium; to embrace him, an utter demoralization of the intellectual faculties.

When he had finished the sugar, he rolled out of the door with a half-diffident, half-inviting look in his eyes as if he expected me to follow. I did so; but the sniffing and snorting of the keen-scented Pomposo in the hollow not only revealed the cause of his former terror, but decided me to take another direction. After a moment's hesitation, he concluded to go with me, although I am satisfied, from a certain impish look in his eye, that he fully understood and rather enjoyed the fright of Pomposo. As he rolled along at my side, with a gait not unlike a drunken sailor, I discovered that his long hair concealed a leather collar around his neck, which bore for its legend the single word "Baby!" I recalled the mysterious suggestion of the two miners. This, then, was the "baby" with whom I was to "play."

How we "played;" how Baby allowed me to roll him down hill, crawling and puffing up again each time with perfect good humor; how

he climbed a young sapling after my Panama hat, which I had "shied" into one of the top-most branches; how, after getting it, he refused to descend until it suited his pleasure; how, when he did come down, he persisted in walking about on three legs, carrying my hat, a crushed and shapeless mass, clasped to his breast with the remaining one; how I missed him at last, and finally discovered him seated on a table in one of the tenantless cabins, with a bottle of sirup between his paws, vainly endeavoring to extract its contents, — these and other details of that eventful day I shall not weary the reader with now. Enough that, when Dick Sylvester returned, I was pretty well fagged out, and the baby was rolled up, an immense bolster, at the foot of the couch, asleep. Sylvester's first words after our greeting were, —

"Isn't he delicious?"

"Perfectly. Where did you get him?"

"Lying under his dead mother, five miles from here," said Dick, lighting his pipe. "Knocked her over at fifty yards: perfectly clean shot; never moved afterwards. Baby crawled out, scared, but unhurt. She must have been carrying him in her mouth, and dropped him when she faced me; for he wasn't more than three days old, and not steady on his

pins. He takes the only milk that comes to the settlement, brought up by Adams Express at seven o'clock every morning. They say he looks like me. Do you think so?" asked Dick with perfect gravity, stroking his hay-colored mustachios, and evidently assuming his best expression.

I took leave of the baby early the next morning in Sylvester's cabin, and, out of respect to Pomposo's feelings, rode by without any postscript of expression. But the night before I had made Sylvester solemnly swear, that, in the event of any separation between himself and Baby, it should revert to me. "At the same time," he had added, "it's only fair to say that I don't think of dying just yet, old fellow; and I don't know of any thing else that would part the cub and me."

Two months after this conversation, as I was turning over the morning's mail at my office in San Francisco, I noticed a letter bearing Sylvester's familiar hand. But it was post-marked "Stockton," and I opened it with some anxiety at once. Its contents were as follows:—

"O FRANK!—Don't you remember what we agreed upon anent the baby? Well, consider me as dead for the next six months, or gone where cubs can't follow me,—East. I know you love the baby; but do you think, dear ooy,—now, really, do you think you *could* be a father

to it? Consider this well. You are young, thoughtless, well-meaning enough; but dare you take upon yourself the functions of guide, genius, or guardian to one so young and guileless? Could you be the Mentor to this Telemachus? Think of the temptations of a metropolis. Look at the question well, and let me know speedily; for I've got him as far as this place, and he's kicking up an awful row in the hotel-yard, and rattling his chain like maniac. Let me know by telegraph at once.

“ SYLVESTER.

“ P.S. — Of course he's grown a little, and doesn't take things always as quietly as he did. He dropped rather heavily on two of Watson's 'purps' last week, and snatched old Watson himself bald headed, for interfering. You remember Watson? For an intelligent man, he knows very little of California fauna. How are you fixed for bears on Montgomery Street, I mean in regard to corrals and things? S.

“ P.P.S. — He's got some new tricks. The boys have been teaching him to put up his hands with them. He slings an ugly left. S.”

I am afraid that my desire to possess myself of Baby overcame all other considerations; and I telegraphed an affirmative at once to Sylvester. When I reached my lodgings late that afternoon, my landlady was awaiting me with a telegram. It was two lines from Sylvester, —

“ All right. Baby goes down on night-boat. Be a father to him. S.”

It was due, then, at one o'clock that night.

For a moment I was staggered at my own precipitation. I had as yet made no preparations, had said nothing to my landlady about her new guest. I expected to arrange every thing in time; and now, through Sylvester's indecent haste, that time had been shortened twelve hours.

Something, however, must be done at once. I turned to Mrs. Brown. I had great reliance in her maternal instincts: I had that still greater reliance common to our sex in the general tender-heartedness of pretty women. But I confess I was alarmed. Yet, with a feeble smile, I tried to introduce the subject with classical ease and lightness. I even said, "If Shakspeare's Athenian clown, Mrs. Brown, believed that a lion among ladies was a dreadful thing, what must" — But here I broke down; for Mrs. Brown, with the awful intuition of her sex, I saw at once was more occupied with my manner than my speech. So I tried a business *brusquerie*, and, placing the telegram in her hand, said hurriedly, "We must do something about this at once. It's perfectly absurd; but he will be here at one to-night. Beg thousand pardons; but business prevented my speaking before" — and paused out of breath and courage.

Mrs. Brown read the telegram gravely, lifted

her pretty eyebrows, turned the paper over, and looked on the other side, and then, in a remote and chilling voice, asked me if she understood me to say that the mother was coming also.

“Oh, dear no!” I exclaimed with considerable relief. “The mother is dead, you know. Sylvester, that is my friend who sent this, shot her when the baby was only three days old.” But the expression of Mrs. Brown’s face at this moment was so alarming, that I saw that nothing but the fullest explanation would save me. Hastily, and I fear not very coherently, I told her all.

She relaxed sweetly. She said I had frightened her with my talk about lions. Indeed, I think my picture of poor Baby, albeit a trifle highly colored, touched her motherly heart. She was even a little vexed at what she called Sylvester’s “hardheartedness.” Still I was not without some apprehension. It was two months since I had seen him; and Sylvester’s vague allusion to his “slinging an ugly left” pained me. I looked at sympathetic little Mrs. Brown; and the thought of Watson’s pups covered me with guilty confusion.

Mrs. Brown had agreed to sit up with me until he arrived. One o’clock came, but no Baby. Two o’clock, three o’clock, passed. It was almost four when there was a wild clatter

of horses' hoofs outside, and with a jerk a wagon stopped at the door. In an instant I had opened it, and confronted a stranger. Almost at the same moment, the horses attempted to run away with the wagon.

The stranger's appearance was, to say the least, disconcerting. His clothes were badly torn and frayed; his linen sack hung from his shoulders like a herald's apron; one of his hands was bandaged; his face scratched; and there was no hat on his dishevelled head. To add to the general effect, he had evidently sought relief from his woes in drink; and he swayed from side to side as he clung to the door-handle, and, in a very thick voice, stated that he had "suthin" for me outside. When he had finished, the horses made another plunge.

Mrs. Brown thought they must be frightened at something.

"Frightened!" laughed the stranger with bitter irony. "Oh, no! Hossish ain't frightened! On'y ran away four timesh comin' here. Oh, no! Nobody's frightened. Every thin's all ri'. Ain't it, Bill?" he said, addressing the driver. "On'y been overboard twish; knocked down a hatchway once. Thash nothin'! On'y two men unner doctor's han's at Stockton. Thash nothin'! Six hunner dollarsh cover all dam w~~ish~~."

I was too much disheartened to reply, but moved toward the wagon. The stranger eyed me with an astonishment that almost sobered him.

“Do you reckon to tackle that animile yourself?” he asked, as he surveyed me from head to foot.

I did not speak, but, with an appearance of boldness I was far from feeling, walked to the wagon, and called “Baby!”

“All ri’. Cash loose them straps, Bill, and stan’ clear.”

The straps were cut loose; and Baby, the remorseless, the terrible, quietly tumbled to the ground, and, rolling to my side, rubbed his foolish head against me.

I think the astonishment of the two men was beyond any vocal expression. Without a word, the drunken stranger got into the wagon, and drove away.

And Baby? He had grown, it is true, a trifle larger; but he was thin, and bore the marks of evident ill usage. His beautiful coat was matted and unkempt; and his claws, those bright steel hooks, had been ruthlessly pared to the quick. His eyes were furtive and restless; and the old expression of stupid good humor had changed to one of intelligent distrust. His intercourse with mankind had evidently quick

ened his intellect, without broadening his moral nature.

I had great difficulty in keeping Mrs. Brown from smothering him in blankets, and ruining his digestion with the delicacies of her larder; but I at last got him completely rolled up in the corner of my room, and asleep. I lay awake some time later with plans for his future. I finally determined to take him to Oakland — where I had built a little cottage, and always spent my Sundays — the very next day. And in the midst of a rosy picture of domestic felicity, I fell asleep.

When I awoke, it was broad day. My eyes at once sought the corner where Baby had been lying; but he was gone. I sprang from the bed, looked under it, searched the closet, but in vain. The door was still locked; but there were the marks of his blunted claws upon the sill of the window that I had forgotten to close. He had evidently escaped that way. But where? The window opened upon a balcony, to which the only other entrance was through the hall. He must be still in the house.

My hand was already upon the bell-rope; but I stayed it in time. If he had not made himself known, why should I disturb the house? I dressed myself hurriedly, and slipped into the

hall. The first object that met my eyes was a boot lying upon the stairs. It bore the marks of Baby's teeth; and, as I looked along the hall, I saw too plainly that the usual array of freshly blackened boots and shoes before the lodgers' doors was not there. As I ascended the stairs, I found another, but with the blacking carefully licked off. On the third floor were two or three more boots, slightly mouthed; but at this point Baby's taste for blacking had evidently palled. A little farther on was a ladder, leading to an open scuttle. I mounted the ladder, and reached the flat roof, that formed a continuous level over the row of houses to the corner of the street. Behind the chimney on the very last roof, something was lurking. It was the fugitive Baby. He was covered with dust and dirt and fragments of glass. But he was sitting on his hind-legs, and was eating an enormous slab of peanut candy, with a look of mingled guilt and infinite satisfaction. He even, I fancied, slightly stroked his stomach with his disengaged fore-paw as I approached. He knew that I was looking for him; and the expression of his eye said plainly, "The past, at least, is secure."

I hurried him, with the evidences of his guilt, back to the scuttle, and descended on tiptoe to the floor beneath. Providence favored

us: I met no one on the stairs; and his own cushioned tread was inaudible. I think he was conscious of the dangers of detection; for he even forebore to breathe, or much less chew the last mouthful he had taken; and he skulked at my side with the sirup dropping from his motionless jaws. I think he would have silently choked to death just then, for my sake; and it was not until I had reached my room again, and threw myself panting on the sofa, that I saw how near strangulation he had been. He gulped once or twice apologetically, and then walked to the corner of his own accord, and rolled himself up like an immense sugarplum, sweating remorse and treacle at every pore.

I locked him in when I went to breakfast, when I found Mrs. Brown's lodgers in a state of intense excitement over certain mysterious events of the night before, and the dreadful revelations of the morning. It appeared that burglars had entered the block from the scuttles; that, being suddenly alarmed, they had quitted our house without committing any depredation, dropping even the boots they had collected in the halls; but that a desperate attempt had been made to force the till in the confectioner's shop on the corner, and that the glass show-cases had been ruthlessly smashed. A courageous servant in No. 4 had seen a

masked burglar, on his hands and knees, attempting to enter their scuttle; but, on her shouting, "Away wid yees!" he instantly fled.

I sat through this recital with cheeks that burned uncomfortably; nor was I the less embarrassed, on raising my eyes, to meet Mrs. Brown's fixed curiously and mischievously on mine. As soon as I could make my escape from the table, I did so, and, running rapidly up stairs, sought refuge from any possible inquiry in my own room. Baby was still asleep in the corner. It would not be safe to remove him until the lodgers had gone down town; and I was revolving in my mind the expediency of keeping him until night veiled his obtrusive eccentricity from the public eye, when there came a cautious tap at my door. I opened it. Mrs. Brown slipped in quietly, closed the door softly, stood with her back against it, and her hand on the knob, and beckoned me mysteriously towards her. Then she asked in a low voice, —

"Is hair-dye poisonous?"

I was too confounded to speak.

"Oh, do! you know what I mean," she said impatiently. "This stuff." She produced suddenly from behind her a bottle with a Greek label so long as to run two or three times spirally around it from top to bottom. "He

says it isn't a dye: it's a vegetable preparation, for invigorating" —

"Who says?" I asked despairingly.

"Why, Mr. Parker, of course!" said Mrs. Brown severely, with the air of having repeated the name a great many times, — "the old gentleman in the room above. The simple question I want to ask," she continued with the calm manner of one who has just convicted another of gross ambiguity of language, "is only this: If some of this stuff were put in a saucer, and left carelessly on the table, and a child, or a baby, or a cat, or any young animal, should come in at the window, and drink it up, — a whole saucer full, — because it had a sweet taste, would it be likely to hurt them?"

I cast an anxious glance at Baby, sleeping peacefully in the corner, and a very grateful one at Mrs. Brown, and said I didn't think it would.

"Because," said Mrs. Brown loftily as she opened the door, "I thought, if it was poisonous, remedies might be used in time. Because," she added suddenly, abandoning her lofty manner, and wildly rushing to the corner with a frantic embrace of the unconscious Baby, "because, if any nasty stuff should turn its booful hair a horrid green, or a naughty pink, it would break its own muzzer's heart, it would!"

But, before I could assure Mrs. Brown of the inefficiency of hair-dye as an internal application, she had darted from the room.

That night, with the secrecy of defaulters, Baby and I decamped from Mrs. Brown's. Distrusting the too emotional nature of that noble animal, the horse, I had recourse to a hand-cart, drawn by a stout Irishman, to convey my charge to the ferry. Even then, Baby refused to go, unless I walked by the cart, and at times rode in it.

"I wish," said Mrs. Brown, as she stood by the door, wrapped in an immense shawl, and saw us depart, "I wish it looked less solemn, — less like a pauper's funeral."

I must admit, that, as I walked by the cart that night, I felt very much as if I were accompanying the remains of some humble friend to his last resting-place; and that, when I was obliged to ride in it, I never could entirely convince myself that I was not helplessly overcome by liquor, or the victim of an accident, *en route* to the hospital. But at last we reached the ferry. On the boat, I think no one discovered Baby, except a drunken man, who approached me to ask for a light for his cigar, but who suddenly dropped it, and fled in dismay to the gentlemen's cabin, where his incoherent ravings were luckily taken for the earlier indications of *delirium tremens*.

It was nearly midnight when I reached my little cottage on the outskirts of Oakland; and it was with a feeling of relief and security that I entered, locked the door, and turned him loose in the hall, satisfied that henceforward his depredations would be limited to my own property. He was very quiet that night; and after he had tried to mount the hat-rack, under the mistaken impression that it was intended for his own gymnastic exercise, and knocked all the hats off, he went peaceably to sleep on the rug.

In a week, with the exercise afforded him by the run of a large, carefully-boarded enclosure, he recovered his health, strength, spirits, and much of his former beauty. His presence was unknown to my neighbors, although it was noticeable that horses invariably "shied" in passing to the windward of my house, and that the baker and milkman had great difficulty in the delivery of their wares in the morning, and indulged in unseemly and unnecessary profanity in so doing.

At the end of the week, I determined to invite a few friends to see the Baby, and to that purpose wrote a number of formal invitations. After descanting, at some length, on the great expense and danger attending his capture and training, I offered a programme of the perform

ance, of the "Infant Phenomenon of Sierran Solitudes," drawn up into the highest professional profusion of alliteration and capital letters. A few extracts will give the reader some idea of his educational progress:—

1. He will, rolled up in a Round Ball, roll down the Wood-Shed Rapidly, illustrating His manner of Escaping from His Enemy in His Native Wilds.
2. He will Ascend the Well-Pole, and remove from the Very Top a Hat, and as much of the Crown and Brim thereof, as May be Permitted.
3. He will perform in a pantomime, descriptive of the Conduct of the Big Bear, The Middle-Sized Bear, and The Little Bear of the Popular Nursery Legend.
4. He will shake his chain Rapidly, showing his Manner of striking Dismay and Terror in the Breasts of Wanderers in Ursine Wildernesses.

The morning of the exhibition came; but an hour before the performance the wretched Baby was missing. The Chinese cook could not indicate his whereabouts. I searched the premises thoroughly; and then, in despair, took my hat, and hurried out into the narrow lane that led toward the open fields and the woods beyond. But I found no trace nor track of Baby Sylvester. I returned, after an hour's fruitless search, to find my guests already assembled on the rear veranda. I briefly recounted my disappointment, my probable loss, and begged their assistance.

“Why,” said a Spanish friend, who prided himself on his accurate knowledge of English, to Barker, who seemed to be trying vainly to rise from his reclining position on the veranda, “why do you not disengage yourself from the veranda of our friend? And why, in the name of Heaven, do you attach to yourself so much of this thing, and make to yourself such unnecessary contortion? Ah,” he continued, suddenly withdrawing one of his own feet from the veranda with an evident effort, “I am myself attached! Surely it is something here!”

It evidently was. My guests were all rising with difficulty. The floor of the veranda was covered with some glutinous substance. It was — sirup!

I saw it all in a flash. I ran to the barn. The keg of “golden sirup,” purchased only the day before, lay empty upon the floor. There were sticky tracks all over the enclosure, but still no Baby.

“There’s something moving the ground over there by that pile of dirt,” said Barker.

He was right. The earth was shaking in one corner of the enclosure like an earthquake. I approached cautiously. I saw, what I had not before noticed, that the ground was thrown up; and there, in the middle of an immense grave-like cavity, crouched Baby Sylvester, stil

digging, and slowly but surely sinking from sight in a mass of dust and clay.

What were his intentions? Whether he was stung by remorse, and wished to hide himself from my reproachful eyes, or whether he was simply trying to dry his sirup-besmeared coat, I never shall know; for that day, alas! was his last with me.

He was pumped upon for two hours, at the end of which time he still yielded a thin treacle. He was then taken, and carefully inwrapped in blankets, and locked up in the store-room. The next morning he was gone! The lower portion of the window sash and pane were gone too. His successful experiments on the fragile texture of glass at the confectioner's, on the first day of his entrance to civilization, had not been lost upon him. His first essay at combining cause and effect ended in his escape.

Where he went, where he hid, who captured him, if he did not succeed in reaching the foothills beyond Oakland, even the offer of a large reward, backed by the efforts of an intelligent police, could not discover. I never saw him again from that day until —

Did I see him? I was in a horse-car on Sixth Avenue, a few days ago, when the horses suddenly became unmanageable, and left the track for the sidewalk, amid the oaths and exe

erations of the driver. Immediately in front of the car a crowd had gathered around two performing bears and a showman. One of the animals, thin, emaciated, and the mere wreck of his native strength, attracted my attention. I endeavored to attract his. He turned a pair of bleared, sightless eyes in my direction; but there was no sign of recognition. I leaned from the car-window, and called softly, "Baby!" But he did not heed. I closed the window. The car was just moving on, when he suddenly turned, and, either by accident or design, thrust a callous paw through the glass.

"It's worth a dollar and half to put in a new pane," said the conductor, "if folks will play with bears!" —

AN EPISODE OF FIDDLETOWN.

IN 1858 Fiddletown considered her a very pretty woman. She had a quantity of light chestnut hair, a good figure, a dazzling complexion, and a certain languid grace which passed easily for gentlewomanliness. She always dressed becomingly, and in what Fiddletown accepted as the latest fashion. She had only two blemishes: one of her velvety eyes, when examined closely, had a slight cast; and her left cheek bore a small scar left by a single drop of vitriol — happily the only drop of an entire phial — thrown upon her by one of her own jealous sex, that reached the pretty face it was intended to mar. But, when the observer had studied the eyes sufficiently to notice this defect, he was generally incapacitated for criticism; and even the scar on her cheek was thought by some to add piquancy to her smile. The youthful editor of "The Fiddletown Avalanche" had said privately that it was "an exaggerated dimple." Col. Starbottle was instantly "reminded of the beautifying patches of the days of Queen Anne,

but more particularly, sir, of the blankest beautiful women, that, blank you, you ever laid your two blank eyes upon, — a Creole woman, sir, in New Orleans. And this woman had a scar, — a line extending, blank me, from her eye to her blank chin. And this woman, sir, thrilled you, sir; maddened you, sir; absolutely sent your blank soul to perdition with her blank fascination! And one day I said to her, ‘Celeste, how in blank did you come by that beautiful scar, blank you?’ And she said to me, ‘Star, there isn’t another white man that I’d confide in but you; but I made that scar myself, purposely, I did, blank me.’ These were her very words, sir, and perhaps you think it a blank lie, sir; but I’ll put up any blank sum you can name and prove it, blank me.”

Indeed, most of the male population of Fiddletown were or had been in love with her. Of this number, about one-half believed that their love was returned, with the exception, possibly, of her own husband. He alone had been known to express scepticism.

The name of the gentleman who enjoyed this infelicitous distinction was Tretherick. He had been divorced from an excellent wife to marry this Fiddletown enchantress. She, also, had been divorced; but it was hinted that some previous experiences of hers in that legal formality had

made it perhaps less novel, and probably less sacrificial. I would not have it inferred from this that she was deficient in sentiment, or devoid of its highest moral expression. Her intimate friend had written (on the occasion of her second divorce), "The cold world does not understand Clara yet;" and Col. Starbottle had remarked blankly, that with the exception of a single woman in Opelousas Parish, La., she had more soul than the whole caboodle of them put together. Few indeed could read those lines entitled "Infelissimus," commencing, "Why waves no cypress o'er this brow?" originally published in "The Avalanche," over the signature of "The Lady Clare," without feeling the tear of sensibility tremble on his eyelids, or the glow of virtuous indignation mantle his cheek, at the low brutality and pitiable jocularity of "The Dutch Flat Intelligencer," which the next week had suggested the exotic character of the cypress, and its entire absence from Fiddletown, as a reasonable answer to the query.

Indeed, it was this tendency to elaborate her feelings in a metrical manner, and deliver them to the cold world through the medium of the newspapers, that first attracted the attention of Tretherick. Several poems descriptive of the effects of California scenery upon a too sensitive soul, and of the vague yearnings for the infinite.

which an enforced study of the heartlessness of California society produced in the poetic breast, impressed Mr. Tretherick, who was then driving a six-mule freight-wagon between Knight's Ferry and Stockton, to seek out the unknown poetess. Mr. Tretherick was himself dimly conscious of a certain hidden sentiment in his own nature; and it is possible that some reflections on the vanity of his pursuit, — he supplied several mining-camps with whiskey and tobacco, — in conjunction with the dreariness of the dusty plain on which he habitually drove, may have touched some chord in sympathy with this sensitive woman. Howbeit, after a brief courtship, — as brief as was consistent with some previous legal formalities, — they were married; and Mr. Tretherick brought his blushing bride to Fiddletown, or "Fidéletown," as Mrs. Tretherick preferred to call it in her poems.

The union was not a felicitous one. It was not long before Mr. Tretherick discovered that the sentiment he had fostered while freighting between Stockton and Knight's Ferry was different from that which his wife had evolved from the contemplation of California scenery and her own soul. Being a man of imperfect logic, this caused him to beat her; and she, being equally faulty in deduction, was impelled to a certain degree of unfaithfulness on the same

premise. Then Mr. Tretherick began to drink, and Mrs. Tretherick to contribute regularly to the columns of "The Avalanche." It was at this time that Col. Starbottle discovered a similarity in Mrs. Tretherick's verse to the genius of Sappho, and pointed it out to the citizens of Fiddletown in a two-columned criticism, signed "A. S.," also published in "The Avalanche," and supported by extensive quotation. As "The Avalanche" did not possess a font of Greek type, the editor was obliged to reproduce the Leucadian numbers in the ordinary Roman letter, to the intense disgust of Col. Starbottle, and the vast delight of Fiddletown, who saw fit to accept the text as an excellent imitation of Choctaw, — a language with which the colonel, as a whilom resident of the Indian Territories, was supposed to be familiar. Indeed, the next week's "Intelligencer" contained some vile doggerel, supposed to be an answer to Mrs. Tretherick's poem, ostensibly written by the wife of a Digger Indian chief, accompanied by a glowing eulogium, signed "A. S. S."

The result of this jocularly was briefly given in a later copy of "The Avalanche." "An unfortunate rencounter took place on Monday last, between the Hon. Jackson Flash of "The Dutch Flat Intelligencer" and the well-known Col. Starbottle of this place, in front of the Eureka

Saloon. Two shots were fired by the parties without injury to either, although it is said that a passing Chinaman received fifteen buckshot in the calves of his legs from the colonel's double-barrelled shot-gun, which were not intended for him. John will learn to keep out of the way of Melican man's fire-arms hereafter. The cause of the affray is not known, although it is hinted that there is a lady in the case. The rumor that points to a well-known and beautiful poetess whose lucubrations have often graced our columns seems to gain credence from those that are posted."

Meanwhile the passiveness displayed by Tretherick under these trying circumstances was fully appreciated in the gulches. "The old man's head is level," said one long-booted philosopher. "Ef the colonel kills Flash, Mrs. Tretherick is avenged: if Flash drops the colonel, Tretherick is all right. Either way, he's got a sure thing." During this delicate condition of affairs, Mrs. Tretherick one day left her husband's home, and took refuge at the Fiddletown Hotel, with only the clothes she had on her back. Here she staid for several weeks, during which period it is only justice to say that she bore herself with the strictest propriety.

It was a clear morning in early spring that

Mrs. Tretherick, unattended, left the hotel, and walked down the narrow street toward the fringe of dark pines which indicated the extreme limits of Fiddletown. The few loungers at that early hour were pre-occupied with the departure of the Wingdown coach at the other extremity of the street; and Mrs. Tretherick reached the suburbs of the settlement without discomposing observation. Here she took a cross street or road, running at right angles with the main thoroughfare of Fiddletown, and passing through a belt of woodland. It was evidently the exclusive and aristocratic avenue of the town. The dwellings were few, ambitious, and uninterrupted by shops. And here she was joined by Col. Starbottle.

The gallant colonel, notwithstanding that he bore the swelling port which usually distinguished him, that his coat was tightly buttoned, and his boots tightly fitting, and that his cane, hooked over his arm, swung jauntily, was not entirely at his ease. Mrs. Tretherick, however, vouchsafed him a gracious smile and a glance of her dangerous eyes; and the colonel, with an embarrassed cough and a slight strut, took his place at her side.

"The coast is clear," said the colonel, "and Tretherick is over at Dutch Flat on a spree. There is no one in the house but a Chinaman:

and you need fear no trouble from him. *I*," he continued, with a slight inflation of the chest that imperilled the security of his button, "I will see that you are protected in the removal of your property."

"I'm sure it's very kind of you, and so disinterested!" simpered the lady as they walked along. "It's so pleasant to meet some one who has soul,—some one to sympathize with in a community so hardened and heartless as this." And Mrs. Tretherick cast down her eyes, but not until they wrought their perfect and accepted work upon her companion.

"Yes, certainly, of course," said the colonel, glancing nervously up and down the street,— "yes, certainly." Perceiving, however, that there was no one in sight or hearing, he proceeded at once to inform Mrs. Tretherick that the great trouble of his life, in fact, had been the possession of too much soul. That many women—as a gentleman she would excuse him, of course, from mentioning names—but many beautiful women had often sought his society, but being deficient, madam, absolutely deficient, in this quality, he could not reciprocate. But when two natures thoroughly in sympathy, despising alike the sordid trammels of a low and vulgar community, and the conventional restraints of a hypocritical society,—

when two souls in perfect accord met and mingled in poetical union, then — but here the colonel's speech, which had been remarkable for a certain whiskey-and-watery fluency, grew husky, almost inaudible, and decidedly incoherent. Possibly Mrs. Tretherick may have heard something like it before, and was enabled to fill the hiatus. Nevertheless, the cheek that was on the side of the colonel was quite virginal and bashfully conscious until they reached their destination.

It was a pretty little cottage, quite fresh and warm with paint, very pleasantly relieved against a platoon of pines, some of whose foremost files had been displaced to give freedom to the fenced enclosure in which it sat. In the vivid sunlight and perfect silence, it had a new, uninhabited look, as if the carpenters and painters had just left it. At the farther end of the lot, a Chinaman was stolidly digging; but there was no other sign of occupancy. "The coast," as the colonel had said, was indeed "clear." Mrs. Tretherick paused at the gate. The colonel would have entered with her, but was stopped by a gesture. "Come for me in a couple of hours, and I shall have every thing packed," she said, as she smiled, and extended her hand. The colonel seized and pressed it with great fervor. Perhaps the pressure was

slightly returned ; for the gallant colonel was impelled to inflate his chest, and trip away as smartly as his stubby-toed, high-heeled boots would permit. When he had gone, Mrs. Trethrick opened the door, listened a moment in the deserted hall, and then ran quickly up stairs to what had been her bedroom.

Every thing there was unchanged as on the night she left it. On the dressing-table stood her bandbox, as she remembered to have left it when she took out her bonnet. On the mantle lay the other glove she had forgotten in her flight. The two lower drawers of the bureau were half open (she had forgotten to shut them) ; and on its marble top lay her shawl-pin and a soiled cuff. What other recollections came upon her I know not ; but she suddenly grew quite white, shivered, and listened with a beating heart, and her hand upon the door. Then she stepped to the mirror, and half fearfully, half curiously, parted with her fingers the braids of her blonde hair above her little pink ear, until she came upon an ugly, half-healed scar. She gazed at this, moving her pretty head up and down to get a better light upon it, until the slight cast in her velvety eyes became very strongly marked indeed. Then she turned away with a light, reckless, foolish laugh, and ran to the closet where hung her precious

resses. These she inspected nervously, and missing suddenly a favorite black silk from its accustomed peg, for a moment, thought she should have fainted. But discovering it the next instant lying upon a trunk where she had thrown it, a feeling of thankfulness to a superior Being who protects the friendless, for the first time sincerely thrilled her. Then, albeit she was hurried for time, she could not resist trying the effect of a certain lavender neck-ribbon upon the dress she was then wearing, before the mirror. And then suddenly she became aware of a child's voice close beside her, and she stopped. And then the child's voice repeated, "Is it mamma?"

Mrs. Tretherick faced quickly about. Standing in the doorway was a little girl of six or seven. Her dress had been originally fine, but was torn and dirty; and her hair, which was a very violent red, was tumbled serio-comically about her forehead. For all this, she was a picturesque little thing, even through whose childish timidity there was a certain self-sustained air which is apt to come upon children who are left much to themselves. She was holding under her arm a rag doll, apparently of her own workmanship, and nearly as large as herself,—a doll with a cylindrical head, and features roughly indicated with charcoal. A

long shawl, evidently belonging to a grown person, dropped from her shoulders, and swept the floor.

The spectacle did not excite Mrs. Tretherick's delight. Perhaps she had but a small sense of humor. Certainly, when the child, still standing in the doorway, again asked, "Is it mamma?" she answered sharply, "No, it isn't," and turned a severe look upon the intruder.

The child retreated a step, and then, gaining courage with the distance, said in deliciously imperfect speech, —

"Dow 'way then! why don't you dow away?"

But Mrs. Tretherick was eying the shawl. Suddenly she whipped it off the child's shoulders, and said angrily, —

"How dared you take my things, you bad child?"

"Is it yours? Then you are my mamma; ain't you? You are mamma!" she continued gleefully; and, before Mrs. Tretherick could void her, she had dropped her doll, and, catching the woman's skirts with both hands, was dancing up and down before her.

"What's your name, child?" said Mrs. Tretherick coldly, removing the small and not very white hands from her garments.

"Tarry."

“Tarry?”

“Yeth. Tarry. Tarowline.”

“Caroline?”

“Yeth. Tarowline Tretherick.”

“Whose child *are* you?” demanded Mrs. Tretherick still more coldly, to keep down a rising fear.

“Why, yours,” said the little creature with a laugh. “I’m your little durl. You’re my mamma, my new mamma. Don’t you know my ole mamma’s dorn away, never to tum back any more? I don’t live wid my ol’ mamma now. I live wid you and papa.”

“How long have you been here?” asked Mrs. Tretherick snappishly.

“I fink it’s free days,” said Carry reflectively.

“You think! Don’t you know?” sneered Mrs. Tretherick. “Then, where did you come from?”

Carry’s lip began to work under this sharp cross-examination. With a great effort and a small gulp, she got the better of it, and answered, —

“Papa, papa fetched me, — from Miss Simmons — from Sacramento, last week.”

“Last week! You said three days just now,” returned Mrs. Tretherick with severe deliberation.

“I mean a monf,” said Carry, now utterly adrift in sheer helplessness and confusion.

“Do you know what you are talking about?” demanded Mrs. Tretherick shrilly, restraining an impulse to shake the little figure before her, and precipitate the truth by specific gravity.

But the flaming red head here suddenly disappeared in the folds of Mrs. Tretherick's dress, as if it were trying to extinguish itself forever.

“There now — stop that sniffing,” said Mrs. Tretherick, extricating her dress from the moist embraces of the child, and feeling exceedingly uncomfortable. “Wipe your face now, and run away, and don't bother. Stop,” she continued, as Carry moved away. “Where's your papa?”

“He's dorn away too. He's sick. He's been dorn” — she hesitated — “two, free, days.”

“Who takes care of you, child?” said Mrs. Tretherick, eying her curiously.

“John, the Chinaman. I tresses myselth. John tooks and makes the beds.”

“Well, now, run away and behave yourself, and don't bother me any more,” said Mrs. Tretherick, remembering the object of her visit. “Stop — where are you going?” she added, as the child began to ascend the stairs, dragging the long doll after her by one helpless leg.

“Doin up stairs to play and be dood, and no bother mamma.”

“I ain't your mamma,” shouted Mrs. Trether.

ick, and then she swiftly re-entered her bedroom, and slammed the door.

Once inside, she drew forth a large trunk from the closet, and set to work with querulous and fretful haste to pack her wardrobe. She tore her best dress in taking it from the hook on which it hung: she scratched her soft hands twice with an ambushed pin. All the while, she kept up an indignant commentary on the events of the past few moments. She said to herself she saw it all. Tretherick had sent for this child of his first wife — this child of whose existence he had never seemed to care — just to insult her, to fill her place. Doubtless the first wife herself would follow soon, or perhaps there would be a third. Red hair, not auburn, but *red*, — of course the child, this Caroline, looked like its mother, and, if so, she was any thing but pretty. Or the whole thing had been prepared: this red-haired child, the image of its mother, had been kept at a convenient distance at Sacramento, ready to be sent for when needed. She remembered his occasional visits there on — business, as he said. Perhaps the mother already was there; but no, she had gone East. Nevertheless, Mrs. Tretherick, in her then state of mind, preferred to dwell upon the fact that she might be there. She was dimly conscious, also, of a certain satisfaction

in exaggerating her feelings. Surely no woman had ever been so shamefully abused. In fancy, she sketched a picture of herself sitting alone and deserted, at sunset, among the fallen columns of a ruined temple, in a melancholy yet graceful attitude, while her husband drove rapidly away in a luxurious coach-and-four, with a red-haired woman at his side. Sitting upon the trunk she had just packed, she partly composed a lugubrious poem, describing her sufferings, as, wandering alone, and poorly clad, she came upon her husband and "another" flaunting in silks and diamonds. She pictured herself dying of consumption, brought on by sorrow,—a beautiful wreck, yet still fascinating, gazed upon adoringly by the editor of "The Avalanche," and Col. Starbottle. And where was Col. Starbottle all this while? Why didn't he come? He, at least, understood her. He—she laughed the reckless, light laugh of a few moments before; and then her face suddenly grew grave, as it had not a few moments before.

What was that little red-haired imp doing all this time? Why was she so quiet? She opened the door noiselessly, and listened. She fancied that she heard, above the multitudinous small noises and creakings and warpings of the vacant house, a smaller voice singing on the floor above. This, as she remembered, was

only an open attic that had been used as a store-room. With a half-guilty consciousness, she crept softly up stairs, and, pushing the door partly open, looked within.

Athwart the long, low-studded attic, a slant sunbeam from a single small window lay, filled with dancing motes, and only half illuminating the barren, dreary apartment. In the ray of this sunbeam she saw the child's glowing hair, as if crowned by a red aureola, as she sat upon the floor with her exaggerated doll between her knees. She appeared to be talking to it; and it was not long before Mrs. Tretherick observed that she was rehearsing the interview of a half hour before. She catechised the doll severely cross-examining it in regard to the duration of its stay there, and generally on the measure of time. The imitation of Mrs. Tretherick's manner was exceedingly successful, and the conversation almost a literal reproduction, with a single exception. After she had informed the doll that she was not her mother at the close of the interview she added pathetically, "that if she was dood, very dood, she might be her mamma, and love her very much."

I have already hinted that Mrs. Tretherick was deficient in a sense of humor. Perhaps 't was for this reason that this whole scene affected her most unpleasantly; and the con-

clusion sent the blood tingling to her cheek. There was something, too, inconceivably lonely in the situation. The unfurnished vacant room, the half-lights, the monstrous doll, whose very size seemed to give a pathetic significance to its speechlessness, the smallness of the one animate, self-centred figure, — all these touched more or less deeply the half-poetic sensibilities of the woman. She could not help utilizing the impression as she stood there, and thought what a fine poem might be constructed from this material, if the room were a little darker, the child lonelier, — say, sitting beside a dead mother's bier, and the wind wailing in the turrets. And then she suddenly heard footsteps at the door below, and recognized the tread of the colonel's cane.

She flew swiftly down the stairs, and encountered the colonel in the hall. Here she poured into his astonished ear a voluble and exaggerated statement of her discovery, and indignant recital of her wrongs. "Don't tell me the whole thing wasn't arranged beforehand; for I know it was!" she almost screamed. "And think," she added, "of the heartlessness of the wretch, leaving his own child alone here in that way."

"It's a blank shame!" stammered the colonel without the least idea of what he was talking

about. In fact, utterly unable as he was to comprehend a reason for the woman's excitement with his estimate of her character, I fear he showed it more plainly than he intended. He stammered, expanded his chest, looked stern, gallant, tender, but all unintelligently. Mr. Tretherick, for an instant, experienced a sickening doubt of the existence of natures in perfect affinity.

"It's of no use," said Mrs. Tretherick with sudden vehemence, in answer to some inaudible remark of the colonel's, and withdrawing her hand from the fervent grasp of that ardent and sympathetic man. "It's of no use: my mind is made up. You can send for my trunk as soon as you like; but I shall stay here, and confront that man with the proof of his vileness. I will put him face to face with his infamy."

I do not know whether Col. Starbottle thoroughly appreciated the convincing proof of Tretherick's unfaithfulness and malignity afforded by the damning evidence of the existence of Tretherick's own child in his own house. He was dimly aware, however, of some unforeseen obstacle to the perfect expression of the infinite longing of his own sentimental nature. But, before he could say any thing, Carry appeared on the landing above them, looking timidly, and yet half-critically at the pair.

“That’s her,” said Mrs. Tretherick excitedly. In her deepest emotions, either in verse or prose, she rose above a consideration of grammatical construction.

“Ah!” said the colonel, with a sudden assumption of parental affection and jocularity that was glaringly unreal and affected. “Ah! pretty little girl, pretty little girl! How do you do? How are you? You find yourself pretty well, do you, pretty little girl?” The colonel’s impulse also was to expand his chest, and swing his cane, until it occurred to him that this action might be ineffective with a child of six or seven. Carry, however, took no immediate notice of this advance, but further discomposed the chivalrous colonel by running quickly to Mrs. Tretherick, and hiding herself, as if for protection, in the folds of her gown. Nevertheless, the colonel was not vanquished. Falling back into an attitude of respectful admiration, he pointed out a marvellous resemblance to the “Madonna and Child.” Mrs. Tretherick simpered, but did not dislodge Carry as before. There was an awkward pause for a moment; and then Mrs. Tretherick, motioning significantly to the child, said in a whisper, “Go now. Don’t come here again, but meet me to-night at the hotel.” She extended her hand: the colonel bent over it gallantly, and, raising his hat, the next moment was gone.

“Do you think,” said Mrs. Tretherick with an embarrassed voice and a prodigious blush, looking down, and addressing the fiery curls just visible in the folds of her dress, — “do you think you will be ‘dood,’ if I let you stay in here and sit with me?”

“And let me tall you mamma?” queried Carry, looking up.

“And let you call me mamma!” assented Mrs. Tretherick with an embarrassed laugh.

“Yeth,” said Carry promptly.

They entered the bedroom together. Carry’s eye instantly caught sight of the trunk.

“Are you downin away adain, mamma?” she said with a quick nervous look, and a clutch at the woman’s dress.

“No-o,” said Mrs. Tretherick, looking out of the window.

“Only playing your downin away,” suggested Carry with a laugh. “Let me play too.”

Mrs. Tretherick assented. Carry flew into the next room, and presently re-appeared, dragging a small trunk, into which she gravely proceeded to pack her clothes. Mrs. Tretherick noticed that they were not many. A question or two regarding them brought out some further replies from the child; and, before many minutes had elapsed, Mrs. Tretherick was in possession of all her earlier history. But, to do this, Mrs

Tretherick had been obliged to take Carry upon her lap, pending the most confidential disclosures. They sat thus a long time after Mrs. Tretherick had apparently ceased to be interested in Carry's disclosures; and, when lost in thought, she allowed the child to rattle on unheeded, and ran her fingers through the scarlet curls.

"You don't hold me right, mamma," said Carry at last, after one or two uneasy shiftings of position.

"How should I hold you?" asked Mrs. Tretherick with a half-amused, half-embarrassed laugh.

"Dis way," said Carry, curling up into position, with one arm around Mrs. Tretherick's neck, and her cheek resting on her bosom, — "dis way, — dere." After a little preparatory nestling, not unlike some small animal, she closed her eyes, and went to sleep.

For a few moments the woman sat silent, scarcely daring to breathe in that artificial attitude. And then, whether from some occult sympathy in the touch, or God best knows what, a sudden fancy began to thrill her. She began by remembering an old pain that she had forgotten, an old horror that she had resolutely put away all these years. She recalled days of sickness and distrust, — days of ar

overshadowing fear, — days of preparation for something that was to be prevented, that *was* prevented, with mortal agony and fear. She thought of a life that might have been, — she dared not say *had* been, — and wondered. It was six years ago: if it had lived, it would have been as old as Carry. The arms which were folded loosely around the sleeping child began to tremble, and tighten their clasp. And then the deep potential impulse came, and with a half-sob, half-sigh, she threw her arms out, and drew the body of the sleeping child down, down, into her breast, down again and again as if she would hide it in the grave dug there years before. And the gust that shook her passed, and then, ah me! the rain.

A drop or two fell upon the curls of Carry, and she moved uneasily in her sleep. But the woman soothed her again, — it was *so* easy to do it now, — and they sat there quiet and undisturbed, so quiet that they might have seemed incorporate of the lonely silent house, the slowly-declining sunbeams, and the general air of desertion and abandonment, yet a desertion that had in it nothing of age, decay, or despair.

Col. Starbottle waited at the Fiddletown Hotel all that night in vain. And the next morning, when Mr. Tretherick returned to his husks,

he found the house vacant and untenanted except by motes and sunbeams.

When it was fairly known that Mrs. Tretherick had run away, taking Mr. Tretherick's own child with her, there was some excitement, and much diversity of opinion, in Fiddletown. "The Dutch Flat Intelligencer" openly alluded to the "forcible abduction" of the child with the same freedom, and it is to be feared the same prejudice, with which it had criticised the abductor's poetry. All of Mrs. Tretherick's own sex, and perhaps a few of the opposite sex, whose distinctive quality was not, however, very strongly indicated, fully coincided in the views of "The Intelligencer." The majority, however, evaded the moral issue: that Mrs. Tretherick had shaken the red dust of Fiddletown from her dainty slippers was enough for them to know. They mourned the loss of the fair abductor more than her offence. They promptly rejected Tretherick as an injured husband and disconsolate father, and even went so far as to openly cast discredit on the sincerity of his grief. They reserved an ironical condolence for Col. Starbottle, overbearing that excellent man with untimely and demonstrative sympathy in bar-rooms, saloons, and other localities not generally deemed favorable to the display of sentiment. "She was alliz a

skittish thing, kernel," said one sympathizer with a fine affectation of gloomy concern, and great readiness of illustration; "and it's kinder nat'r'il thet she'd get away some day, and stampe that theer colt: but thet she should shake *you*, kernel, thet she should just shake you — is what gits me. And they do say thet you jis' hung around thet hotel all night, and payrolled them corridors, and histed yourself up and down them stairs, and meandered in and out o' thet piazzy, and all for nothing?" It was another generous and tenderly commiserating spirit that poured additional oil and wine on the colonel's wounds. "The boys yer let on thet Mrs. Tretherick prevailed on ye to pack her trunk and a baby over from the house to the stage-offis, and that the chap ez did go off with her thanked you, and offered you two short bits, and sed ez how he liked your looks, and ud employ you agin — and now you say it ain't so? Well, I'll tell the boys it aint so, and I'm glad I met you, for stories *do* get round."

Happily for Mrs. Tretherick's reputation, however, the Chinaman in Tretherick's employment, who was the only eye-witness of her flight, stated that she was unaccompanied, except by the child. He further deposed, that, obeying her orders, he had stopped the Sacramento coach, and secured a passage for herself

and child to San Francisco. It was true that Ah Fe's testimony was of no legal value. But nobody doubted it. Even those who were sceptical of the Pagan's ability to recognize the sacredness of the truth admitted his passionless, unprejudiced unconcern. But it would appear, from a hitherto unrecorded passage of this veracious chronicle, that herein they were mistaken.

It was about six months after the disappearance of Mrs. Tretherick, that Ah Fe, while working in Tretherick's lot, was hailed by two passing Chinamen. They were the ordinary mining coolies, equipped with long poles and baskets for their usual pilgrimages. An animated conversation at once ensued between Ah Fe and his brother Mongolians,—a conversation characterized by that usual shrill volubility and apparent animosity which was at once the delight and scorn of the intelligent Caucasian who did not understand a word of it. Such, at least, was the feeling with which Mr. Tretherick on his veranda, and Col. Starbottle who was passing, regarded their heathenish jargon. The gallant colonel simply kicked them out of his way: the irate Tretherick, with an oath, threw a stone at the group, and dispersed them, but not before one or two slips of yellow rice-paper, marked with hieroglyphics, were ex

changed, and a small parcel put into Ah Fe's hands. When Ah Fe opened this in the dim solitude of his kitchen, he found a little girl's apron, freshly washed, ironed, and folded. On the corner of the hem were the initials "C. T." Ah Fe tucked it away in a corner of his blouse, and proceeded to wash his dishes in the sink with a smile of guileless satisfaction.

Two days after this, Ah Fe confronted his master. "Me no likee Fiddletown. Me belly sick. Me go now." Mr. Tretherick violently suggested a profane locality. Ah Fe gazed at him placidly, and withdrew.

Before leaving Fiddletown, however, he accidentally met Col. Starbottle, and dropped a few incoherent phrases which apparently interested that gentleman. When he concluded, the colonel handed him a letter and a twenty-dollar gold-piece. "If you bring me an answer, I'll double that—Sabe, John?" Ah Fe nodded. An interview equally accidental, with precisely the same result, took place between Ah Fe and another gentleman, whom I suspect to have been the youthful editor of "The Avalanche." Yet I regret to state, that, after proceeding some distance on his journey, Ah Fe calmly broke the seals of both letters, and, after trying to read them upside down and sideways, finally divided them into accurate squares, and in this

condition disposed of them to a brother Celestial whom he met on the road, for a trifling gratuity. The agony of Col. Starbottle on finding his wash-bill made out on the unwritten side of one of these squares, and delivered to him with his weekly clean clothes, and the subsequent discovery that the remaining portions of his letter were circulated by the same method from the Chinese laundry of one Fung Ti of Fiddletown, has been described to me as peculiarly affecting. Yet I am satisfied that a higher nature, rising above the levity induced by the mere contemplation of the insignificant details of this breach of trust, would find ample retributive justice in the difficulties that subsequently attended Ah Fe's pilgrimage.

On the road to Sacramento he was twice playfully thrown from the top of the stage-coach by an intelligent but deeply-intoxicated Caucasian, whose moral nature was shocked at riding with one addicted to opium-smoking. At Hangtown he was beaten by a passing stranger, — purely an act of Christian supererogation. At Dutch Flat he was robbed by well-known hands from unknown motives. At Sacramento he was arrested on suspicion of being something or other, and discharged with a severe reprimand — possibly for not being it, and so delaying the course of justice. At San Francisco he was freely

stoned by children of the public schools ; but, by carefully avoiding these monuments of enlightened progress, he at last reached, in comparative safety, the Chinese quarters, where his abuse was confined to the police, and limited by the strong arm of the law.

The next day he entered the wash-house of Chy Fook as an assistant, and on the following Friday was sent with a basket of clean clothes to Chy Fook's several clients.

It was the usual foggy afternoon as he climbed the long wind-swept hill of California Street, — one of those bleak, gray intervals that made the summer a misnomer to any but the liveliest San-Franciscan fancy. There was no warmth or color in earth or sky, no light nor shade within or without, only one monotonous, universal neutral tint over every thing. There was a fierce unrest in the wind-whipped streets : there was a dreary vacant quiet in the gray houses. When Ah Fe reached the top of the hill, the Mission Ridge was already hidden ; and the chill sea-breeze made him shiver. As he put down his basket to rest himself, it is possible, that, to his defective intelligence and heathen experience, this " God's own climate," as it was called, seemed to possess but scant tenderness, softness, or mercy. But it is possible that Ah Fe illogically confounded this season with his

old persecutors, the school-children, who, being released from studious confinement, at this hour were generally most aggressive. So he hastened on, and, turning a corner, at last stopped before a small house.

It was the usual San-Franciscan urban cottage. There was the little strip of cold green shrubbery before it; the chilly, bare veranda, and above this, again, the grim balcony, on which no one sat. Ah Fe rang the bell. A servant appeared, glanced at his basket, and reluctantly admitted him, as if he were some necessary domestic animal. Ah Fe silently mounted the stairs, and, entering the open door of the front-chamber, put down the basket, and stood passively on the threshold.

A woman, who was sitting in the cold gray light of the window, with a child in her lap, rose listlessly, and came toward him. Ah Fe instantly recognized Mrs. Tretherick; but not a muscle of his immobile face changed, nor did his slant eyes lighten as he met her own placidly. She evidently did not recognize him as she began to count the clothes. But the child, curiously examining him, suddenly uttered a short, glad cry.

“Why, it’s John, mamma! It’s our old John what we had in Fiddletown.”

For an instant Ah Fe’s eyes and teeth electri-

cally lightened. The child clapped her hands, and caught at his blouse. Then he said shortly, "Me John—Ah Fe—altee same. Me know you. How do?"

Mrs. Tretherick dropped the clothes nervously, and looked hard at Ah Fe. Wanting the quick-witted instinct of affection that sharpened Carry's perception, she even then could not distinguish him above his fellows. With a recollection of past pain, and an obscure suspicion of impending danger, she asked him when he had left Fiddletown.

"Longee time. No likee Fiddletown, no likee Tlevelick. Likee San Flisco. Likee washee. Likee Tally."

Ah Fe's laconics pleased Mrs. Tretherick. She did not stop to consider how much an imperfect knowledge of English added to his curt directness and sincerity. But she said, "Don't tell anybody you have seen me," and took out her pocket-book.

Ah Fe, without looking at it, saw that it was nearly empty. Ah Fe, without examining the apartment, saw that it was scantily furnished. Ah Fe, without removing his eyes from blank vacancy, saw that both Mrs. Tretherick and Carry were poorly dressed. Yet it is my duty to state that Ah Fe's long fingers closed promptly and firmly over the half-dollar which Mrs. Tretherick extended to him.

Then he began to fumble in his blouse with a series of extraordinary contortions. After a few moments, he extracted from apparently no particular place a child's apron, which he laid upon the basket with the remark, —

“One piecee washman flagittee.”

Then he began anew his fumblings and contortions. At last his efforts were rewarded by his producing, apparently from his right ear, a many-folded piece of tissue-paper. Unwrapping this carefully, he at last disclosed two twenty-dollar gold-pieces, which he handed to Mrs. Tretherick.

“You leavee money top-side of blulow, Fiddletown. Me findee money. Me fetchee money to you. All lightee.”

“But I left no money on the top of the bureau, John,” said Mrs. Tretherick earnestly. “There must be some mistake. It belongs to some other person. Take it back, John.”

Ah Fe's brow darkened. He drew away from Mrs. Tretherick's extended hand, and began hastily to gather up his basket.

“Me no takee it back. No, no! Bimeby pleesman he catchee me. He say, ‘God damn thief!—catchee flowty dollar: come to jailee.’ Me no takee back. You leavee money top-side blulow, Fiddletown. Me fetchee money you. Me no takee back.”

Mrs. Tretherick hesitated. In the confusion of her flight, she *might* have left the money in the manner he had said. In any event, she had no right to jeopardize this honest Chinaman's safety by refusing it. So she said, "Very well John, I will keep it. But you must come again and see me" — here Mrs. Tretherick hesitated with a new and sudden revelation of the fact that any man could wish to see any other than herself — "and, and — Carry."

Ah Fe's face lightened. He even uttered a short ventriloquistic laugh without moving his mouth. Then shouldering his basket, he shut the door carefully, and slid quietly down stairs. In the lower hall he, however, found an unexpected difficulty in opening the front-door, and, after fumbling vainly at the lock for a moment, looked around for some help or instruction. But the Irish handmaid who had let him in was contemptuously oblivious of his needs, and did not appear.

There occurred a mysterious and painful incident, which I shall simply record without attempting to explain. On the hall-table a scarf, evidently the property of the servant before alluded to, was lying. As Ah Fe tried the lock with one hand, the other rested lightly on the table. Suddenly, and apparently of its own volition, the scarf began to creep slowly

towards Ah Fe's hand ; from Ah Fe's hand it began to creep up his sleeve slowly, and with an insinuating, snake-like motion ; and then disappeared somewhere in the recesses of his blouse. Without betraying the least interest or concern in this phenomenon, Ah Fe still repeated his experiments upon the lock. A moment later the tablecloth of red damask, moved by apparently the same mysterious impulse, slowly gathered itself under Ah Fe's fingers, and sinuously disappeared by the same hidden channel. What further mystery might have followed, I cannot say ; for at this moment Ah Fe discovered the secret of the lock, and was enabled to open the door coincident with the sound of footsteps upon the kitchen-stairs. Ah Fe did not hasten his movements, but, patiently shouldering his basket, closed the door carefully behind him again, and stepped forth into the thick encompassing fog that now shrouded earth and sky.

From her high casement-window, Mrs. Gretherick watched Ah Fe's figure until it disappeared in the gray cloud. In her present loneliness, she felt a keen sense of gratitude toward him, and may have ascribed to the higher emotions and the consciousness of a good deed, that certain expansiveness of the chest, and swelling of the bosom, that was really

due to the hidden presence of the scarf and tablecloth under his blouse. For Mrs. Tretherick was still poetically sensitive. As the gray fog deepened into night, she drew Carry closer towards her, and, above the prattle of the child, pursued a vein of sentimental and egotistic recollection at once bitter and dangerous. The sudden apparition of Ah Fe linked her again with her past life at Fiddletown. Over the dreary interval between, she was now wandering,—a journey so piteous, wilful, thorny, and useless, that it was no wonder that at last Carry stopped suddenly in the midst of her voluble confidences to throw her small arms around the woman's neck, and bid her not to cry.

Heaven forefend that I should use a pen that should be ever dedicated to an exposition of unalterable moral principle to transcribe Mrs. Tretherick's own theory of this interval and episode, with its feeble palliations, its illogical deductions, its fond excuses, and weak apologies. It would seem, however, that her experience had been hard. Her slender stock of money was soon exhausted. At Sacramento she found that the composition of verse, although appealing to the highest emotions of the human heart, and compelling the editorial breast to the noblest commendation in the editorial pages, was singu

larly inadequate to defray the expenses of her self and Carry. Then she tried the stage, but failed signally. Possibly her conception of the passions was different from that which obtained with a Sacramento audience ; but it was certain that her charming presence, so effective at short range, was not sufficiently pronounced for the footlights. She had admirers enough in the green-room, but awakened no abiding affection among the audience. In this strait, it occurred to her that she had a voice,— a contralto of no very great compass or cultivation, but singularly sweet and touching ; and she finally obtained position in a church-choir. She held it for three months, greatly to her pecuniary advantage, and, it is said, much to the satisfaction of the gentlemen in the back-pews, who faced toward her during the singing of the last hymn.

I remember her quite distinctly at this time. The light that slanted through the oriel of St. Dives choir was wont to fall very tenderly on her beautiful head with its stacked masses of deer-skin-colored hair, on the low black arches of her brows, and to deepen the pretty fringes that shaded her eyes of Genoa velvet. Very pleasant it was to watch the opening and shutting of that small straight mouth, with its quick revelation of little white teeth, and to see the

foolish blood faintly deepen her satin cheek as you watched. For Mrs. Tretherick was very sweetly conscious of admiration, and, like most pretty women, gathered herself under your eye like a racer under the spur.

And then, of course, there came trouble. I have it from the soprano, — a little lady who possessed even more than the usual unprejudiced judgment of her sex, — that Mrs. Tretherick's conduct was simply shameful; that her conceit was unbearable; that, if she considered the rest of the choir as slaves, she (the soprano) would like to know it; that her conduct on Easter Sunday with the basso had attracted the attention of the whole congregation; and that she herself had noticed Dr. Cope twice look up during the service; that her (the soprano's) friends had objected to her singing in the choir with a person who had been on the stage, but she had waived this. Yet she had it from the best authority that Mrs. Tretherick had run away from her husband, and that this red-haired child who sometimes came in the choir was not her own. The tenor confided to me behind the organ, that Mrs. Tretherick had a way of sustaining a note at the end of a line in order that her voice might linger longer with the congregation, — an act that could be attributed only to a defective moral nature; that as a man

(he was a very popular dry-goods clerk on week-days, and sang a good deal from apparently behind his eyebrows on the sabbath) — that as a man, sir, he would put up with it no longer. The basso alone — a short German with a heavy voice, for which he seemed reluctantly responsible, and rather grieved at its possession — stood up for Mrs. Tretherick, and averred that they were jealous of her because she was “bretty.” The climax was at last reached in an open quarrel, wherein Mrs. Tretherick used her tongue with such precision of statement and epithet, that the soprano burst into hysterical tears, and had to be supported from the choir by her husband and the tenor. This act was marked intentionally to the congregation by the omission of the usual soprano solo. Mrs. Tretherick went home flushed with triumph, but on reaching her room frantically told Carry that they were beggars henceforward; that she — her mother — had just taken the very bread out of her darling’s mouth, and ended by bursting into a flood of penitent tears. They did not come so quickly as in her old poetical days; but when they came they stung deeply. She was roused by a formal visit from a vestryman, — one of the music committee. Mrs. Tretherick dried her long lashes, put on a new neck-ribbon, and went down to the parlor. She staid there two

hours, — a fact that might have occasioned some remark, but that the vestryman was married, and had a family of grown-up daughters. When Mrs. Tretherick returned to her room, she sang to herself in the glass and scolded Carry — but she retained her place in the choir.

It was not long, however. In due course of time, her enemies received a powerful addition to their forces in the committee-man's wife. That lady called upon several of the church-members and on Dr. Cope's family. The result was, that, at a later meeting of the music committee, Mrs. Tretherick's voice was declared inadequate to the size of the building and she was invited to resign. She did so. She had been out of a situation for two months, and her scant means were almost exhausted, when Ah Fe's unexpected treasure was tossed into her lap.

The gray fog deepened into night, and the street-lamps started into shivering life, as, absorbed in these unprofitable memories, Mrs. Tretherick still sat drearily at her window. Even Carry had slipped away unnoticed; and her abrupt entrance with the damp evening paper in her hand roused Mrs. Tretherick, and brought her back to an active realization of the present. For Mrs. Tretherick was wont to scan the advertisements in the faint hope of finding some avenue of employment — she knew not

what — open to her needs ; and Carry had noted this habit.

Mrs. Tretherick mechanically closed the shutters, lit the lights, and opened the paper. Her eye fell instinctively on the following paragraph in the telegraphic column : —

“ FIDDLETOWN, 7th. — Mr. James Tretherick, an old resident of this place, died last night of delirium tremens. Mr. Tretherick was addicted to intemperate habits, said to have been induced by domestic trouble.”

Mrs. Tretherick did not start. She quietly turned over another page of the paper, and glanced at Carry. The child was absorbed in a book. Mrs. Tretherick uttered no word, but, during the remainder of the evening, was unusually silent and cold. When Carry was undressed and in bed, Mrs. Tretherick suddenly dropped on her knees beside the bed, and, taking Carry's flaming head between her hands, said, —

“ Should you like to have another papa, Carry darling ? ”

“ No,” said Carry, after a moment's thought.

“ But a papa to help mamma take care of you, to love you, to give you nice clothes, to make a lady of you when you grow up ? ”

Carry turned her sleepy eyes toward the questioner. “ Should you, mamma ? ”

Mrs. Tretherick suddenly flushed to the roots of her hair. "Go to sleep," she said sharply, and turned away.

But at midnight the child felt two white arms close tightly around her, and was drawn down into a bosom that heaved, fluttered, and at last was broken up by sobs.

"Don't ky, mamma," whispered Carry, with a vague retrospect of their recent conversation. "Don't ky. I fink I *should* like a new papa, if he loved you very much — very, very much!"

A month afterward, to everybody's astonishment, Mrs. Tretherick was married. The happy bridegroom was one Col. Starbottle, recently elected to represent Calaveras County in the legislative councils of the State. As I cannot record the event in finer language than that used by the correspondent of "The Sacramento Globe," I venture to quote some of his graceful periods. "The relentless shafts of the sly god have been lately busy among our gallant Solons. We quote 'one more unfortunate.' The latest victim is the Hon. C. Starbottle of Calaveras. The fair enchantress in the case is a beautiful widow, a former votary of Thespis, and lately a fascinating St. Cecilia of one of the most fashionable churches of San Francisco, where she commanded a high salary."

"The Dutch Flat Intelligencer" saw fit,

however, to comment upon the fact with the humorous freedom characteristic of an unfettered press. "The new Democratic war-horse from Calaveras has lately advented in the legislature with a little bill to change the name of Tretherick to Starbottle. They call it a marriage-certificate down there. Mr. Tretherick has been dead just one month; but we presume the gallant colonel is not afraid of ghosts." It is but just to Mrs. Tretherick to state that the colonel's victory was by no means an easy one. To a natural degree of coyness on the part of the lady was added the impediment of a rival, — a prosperous undertaker from Sacramento, who had first seen and loved Mrs. Tretherick at the theatre and church; his professional habits debarring him from ordinary social intercourse, and indeed any other than the most formal public contact with the sex. As this gentleman had made a snug fortune during the felicitous prevalence of a severe epidemic, the colonel regarded him as a dangerous rival. Fortunately, however, the undertaker was called in professionally to lay out a brother-senator, who had unhappily fallen by the colonel's pistol in an affair of honor; and either deterred by physical consideration from rivalry, or wisely concluding that the colonel was professionally valuable, he withdrew from the field.

The honeymoon was brief, and brought to a close by an untoward incident. During their bridal-trip, Carry had been placed in the charge of Col. Starbottle's sister. On their return to the city, immediately on reaching their lodgings, Mrs. Starbottle announced her intention of at once proceeding to Mrs. Culpepper's to bring the child home. Col. Starbottle, who had been exhibiting for some time a certain uneasiness which he had endeavored to overcome by repeated stimulation, finally buttoned his coat tightly across his breast, and, after walking unsteadily once or twice up and down the room, suddenly faced his wife with his most imposing manner.

"I have deferred," said the colonel with an exaggeration of port that increased with his inward fear, and a growing thickness of speech. — "I have deferr — I may say poshponed statement o' fack thash my duty ter dishclose ter ye. I did no wish to mar sushine mushal happ'ness, to bligh bud o' promise, to darken conjuglar sky by unpleasht revelashun. Musht be done — by G—d, m'm, musht do it now. The chile is gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Mrs. Starbottle.

There was something in the tone of her voice, in the sudden drawing-together of the pupils of her eyes, that for a moment nearly sobered the colonel, and partly collapsed his chest.

"I'll splain all in a minit," he said with a deprecating wave of the hand. "Every thing shall be splained. The-the-the-melencholly event wish preshipitate our happ'ness — the myster'us prov'nice wish releash you — releash chile! hun-erstan? — releash chile. The mom't Tretherick die — all claim you have in chile through him — die too. Thash law. Whose chile b'long to? Tretherick? Tretherick dead. Chile can't b'long dead man. Damn nonsense b'long dead man. I'sh your chile? no! who's chile then? Chile b'long to 'ts mother. Unnerstan?"

"Where is she?" said Mrs. Starbottle with a very white face and a very low voice.

"I'll splain all. Chile b'long to 'ts mother. Thash law. I'm lawyer, leshlator, and American sis'n. Ish my duty as lawyer, as leshlator, and 'merikan sis'n to reshtore chile to suff'rin mother at any coss — any coss."

"Where is she?" repeated Mrs. Starbottle with her eyes still fixed on the colonel's face.

"Gone to 'ts m'o'r. Gone East on shteamer, yesserday. Waffed by fav'rin gales to suff'rin p'rent. Thash so!"

Mrs. Starbottle did not move. The colonel felt his chest slowly collapsing, but steadied himself against a chair, and endeavored to beam with chivalrous gallantry not unmixed with magisterial firmness upon her as she sat.

“Your feelin’s, m’m, do honor to yer sex, but conshider situashun. Conshider m’or’s feelings — conshider *my* feelin’s.” The colonel paused, and, flourishing a white handkerchief, placed it negligently in his breast, and then smiled tenderly above it, as over laces and ruffles, on the woman before him. “Why should dark shed der cass bligh on two sholes with single beat? Chile’s fine chile, good chile, but summonelse chile! Chile’s gone, Clar’; but all ish’n’t gone, Clar’. Conshider dearesht, you all’s have me!”

Mrs. Starbottle started to her feet. “*You!*” she cried, bringing out a chest note that made the chandeliers ring, — “YOU that I married to give my darling food and clothes, — *you!* a dog that I whistled to my side to keep the men off me, — *you!*”

She choked up, and then dashed past him into the inner room, which had been Carry’s; then she swept by him again into her own bedroom, and then suddenly re-appeared before him, erect, menacing, with a burning fire over her cheek-bones, a quick straightening of her arched brows and mouth, a squaring of jaw, and ophidian flattening of the head.

“Listen!” she said in a hoarse, half-grown boy’s voice. “Hear me! If you ever expect to set eyes on me again, you must find the child. If you ever expect to speak to me again, to

touch me, you must bring her back. For where she goes, I go: you hear me! Where she has gone, look for me."

She struck out past him again with a quick feminine throwing-out of her arms from the elbows down, as if freeing herself from some imaginary bonds, and, dashing into her chamber, slammed and locked the door. Col. Starbottle, although no coward, stood in superstitious fear of an angry woman, and, recoiling as she swept by, lost his unsteady foothold, and rolled helplessly on the sofa. Here, after one or two unsuccessful attempts to regain his foothold, he remained, uttering from time to time profane but not entirely coherent or intelligible protests, until at last he succumbed to the exhausting quality of his emotions, and the narcotic quantity of his potations.

Meantime, within, Mrs. Starbottle was excitedly gathering her valuables, and packing her trunk, even as she had done once before in the course of this remarkable history. Perhaps some recollection of this was in her mind; for she stopped to lean her burning cheeks upon her hand, as if she saw again the figure of the child standing in the doorway, and heard once more a childish voice asking, "Is it mamma?" But the epithet now stung her to the quick and with a quick, passionate gesture she dashed

it away with a tear that had gathered in her eye. And then it chanced, that, in turning over some clothes, she came upon the child's slipper with a broken sandal-string. She uttered a great cry here, — the first she had uttered, — and caught it to her breast, kissing it passionately again and again, and rocking from side to side with a motion peculiar to her sex. And then she took it to the window, the better to see it through her now streaming eyes. Here she was taken with a sudden fit of coughing that she could not stifle with the handkerchief she put to her feverish lips. And then she suddenly grew very faint. The window seemed to recede before her, the floor to sink beneath her feet; and, staggering to the bed, she fell prone upon it with the sandal and handkerchief pressed to her breast. Her face was quite pale, the orbit of her eyes dark; and there was a spot upon her lip, another on her handkerchief, and still another on the white counterpane of the bed.

The wind had risen, rattling the window washes, and swaying the white curtains in a ghostly way. Later, a gray fog stole softly over the roofs, soothing the wind-roughened surfaces, and inwrapping all things in an uncertain light and a measureless peace. She lay there very quiet — for all her troubles, still a

very pretty bride. And on the other side of the bolted door the gallant bridegroom, from his temporary couch, snored peacefully.

A week before Christmas Day, 1870, the little town of Genoa, in the State of New York, exhibited, perhaps more strongly than at any other time, the bitter irony of its founders and sponsors. A driving snow-storm, that had whitened every windward hedge, bush, wall, and telegraph-pole, played around this soft Italian Capitol, whirled in and out of the great staring wooden Doric columns of its post-office and hotel, beat upon the cold green shutters of its best houses, and powdered the angular, stiff, dark figures in its streets. From the level of the street, the four principal churches of the town stood out starkly, even while their misshapen spires were kindly hidden in the low, driving storm. Near the railroad-station, the new Methodist chapel, whose resemblance to an enormous locomotive was further heightened by the addition of a pyramidal row of front-steps, like a cowcatcher, stood as if waiting for a few more houses to be hitched on to proceed to a pleasanter location. But the pride of Genoa — the great Crammer Institute for Young Ladies — stretched its bare brick length, and reared its cupola plainly from the bleak Parnassian hill

above the principal avenue. There was no evasion in the Crammer Institute of the fact that it was a public institution. A visitor upon its doorsteps, a pretty face at its window, were clearly visible all over the township.

The shriek of the engine of the four-o'clock Northern express brought but few of the usual loungers to the depot. Only a single passenger alighted, and was driven away in the solitary waiting sleigh toward the Genoa Hotel. And then the train sped away again, with that passionless indifference to human sympathies or curiosity peculiar to express-trains; the one baggage-truck was wheeled into the station again; the station-door was locked; and the station-master went home.

The locomotive-whistle, however, awakened the guilty consciousness of three young ladies of the Crammer Institute, who were even then surreptitiously regaling themselves in the bake-shop and confectionery-saloon of Mistress Phillips in a by-lane. For even the admirable regulations of the Institute failed to entirely develop the physical and moral natures of its pupils. They conformed to the excellent dietary rules in public, and in private drew upon the luxurious rations of their village caterer. They attended church with exemplary formality, and flirted informally during service with the village

deaux. They received the best and most judicious instruction during school-hours, and devoured the trashiest novels during recess. The result of which was an aggregation of quite healthy, quite human, and very charming young creatures, that reflected infinite credit on the Institute. Even Mistress Phillips, to whom they owed vast sums, exhilarated by the exuberant spirits and youthful freshness of her guests, declared that the sight of "them young things" did her good; and had even been known to shield them by shameless equivocation.

"Four o'clock, girls! and, if we're not back to prayers by five, we'll be missed," said the tallest of these foolish virgins, with an aquiline nose, and certain quiet *élan* that bespoke the leader, as she rose from her seat. "Have you got the books, Addy?" Addy displayed three dissipated-looking novels under her waterproof. "And the provisions, Carry?" Carry showed a suspicious parcel filling the pocket of her sack. "All right, then. Come girls, trudge. — Charge it," she added, nodding to her host as they passed toward the door. "I'll pay you when my quarter's allowance comes."

"No, Kate," interposed Carry, producing her purse, "let me pay: it's my turn."

"Never!" said Kate, arching her black brows ostentatiously, "even if you do have rich relatives, and

regular remittances from California. Never!—
Come, girls, forward, march!”

As they opened the door, a gust of wind nearly took them off their feet. Kind-hearted Mrs. Phillips was alarmed. “Sakes alive, galls! ye mussn’t go out in sich weather. Better let me send word to the Institoot, and make ye up a nice bed to-night in my parlor.” But the last sentence was lost in a chorus of half-suppressed shrieks, as the girls, hand in hand, ran down the steps into the storm, and were at once whirled away.

The short December day, unlit by any sunset glow, was failing fast. It was quite dark already; and the air was thick with driving snow. For some distance their high spirits, youth, and even inexperience, kept them bravely up; but, in ambitiously attempting a short-cut from the high-road across an open field, their strength gave out, the laugh grew less frequent, and tears began to stand in Carry’s brown eyes. When they reached the road again, they were utterly exhausted. “Let us go back,” said Carry.

“We’d never get across that field again,” said Addy.

“Let’s stop at the first house, then,” said Carry.

“The first house,” said Addy, peering through

the gathering darkness, "is Squire Robinson's." She darted a mischievous glance at Carry, that, even in her discomfort and fear, brought the quick blood to her cheek.

"Oh, yes!" said Kate with gloomy irony, "certainly; stop at the squire's by all means, and be invited to tea, and be driven home after tea by your dear friend Mr. Harry, with a formal apology from Mrs. Robinson, and hopes that the young ladies may be excused this time. No!" continued Kate with sudden energy. "That may suit *you*; but I'm going back as I came, — by the window, or not at all." Then she pounced suddenly, like a hawk, on Carry, who was betraying a tendency to sit down on a snowbank, and whimper, and shook her briskly. "You'll be going to sleep next. Stay, hold your tongues, all of you, — what's that?"

It was the sound of sleigh-bells. Coming down toward them out of the darkness was a sleigh with a single occupant. "Hold down your heads, girls: if it's anybody that knows us, we're lost." But it was not; for a voice strange to their ears, but withal very kindly and pleasant, asked if its owner could be of any help to them. As they turned toward him, they saw it was a man wrapped in a handsome sealskin cloak, wearing a sealskin cap; his face, half concealed by a muffler of the same material,

disclosing only a pair of long mustaches, and two keen dark eyes. "It's a son of old Santa Claus!" whispered Addy. The girls tittered audibly as they tumbled into the sleigh: they had regained their former spirits. "Where shall I take you?" said the stranger quietly. There was a hurried whispering; and then Kate said boldly, "To the Institute." They drove silently up the hill, until the long, ascetic building loomed up before them. The stranger reined up suddenly. "You know the way better than I," he said. "Where do you go in?" — "Through the back-window," said Kate with sudden and appalling frankness. "I see!" responded their strange driver quietly, and, alighting quickly, removed the bells from the horses. "We can drive as near as you please now," he added by way of explanation. "He certainly is a son of Santa Claus," whispered Addy. "Hadn't we better ask after his father?" "Hush!" said Kate decidedly. "He is an angel, I dare say." She added with a delicious irrelevance, which was, however, perfectly understood by her feminine auditors, "We are looking like three frights."

Cautiously skirting the fences, they at last pulled up a few feet from a dark wall. The stranger proceeded to assist them to alight. There was still some light from the reflected

snow; and, as he handed his fair companions to the ground, each was conscious of undergoing an intense though respectful scrutiny. He assisted them gravely to open the window, and then discreetly retired to the sleigh until the difficult and somewhat discomposing ingress was made. He then walked to the window. "Thank you and good-night!" whispered three voices. A single figure still lingered. The stranger leaned over the window-sill. "Will you permit me to light my cigar here? it might attract attention if I struck a match outside." By the upspringing light he saw the figure of Kate very charmingly framed in by the window. The match burnt slowly out in his fingers. Kate smiled mischievously. The astute young woman had detected the pitiable subterfuge. For what else did she stand at the head of her class, and had doting parents paid three years' tuition?

The storm had passed, and the sun was shining quite cheerily in the eastern recitation-room the next morning, when Miss Kate, whose seat was nearest the window, placing her hand pathetically upon her heart, affected to fall in bashful and extreme agitation upon the shoulder of Carry her neighbor. "*He* has come," she gasped in a thrilling whisper. "Who?" asked Carry sympathetically, who never clearly understood when Kate was in earnest. "Who?—

why, the man who rescued us last night ! I saw him drive to the door this moment. Don't speak : I shall be better in a moment — there !" she said ; and the shameless hypocrite passed her hand pathetically across her forehead with a tragic air.

"What can he want ?" asked Carry, whose curiosity was excited.

"I don't know," said Kate, suddenly relapsing into gloomy cynicism. "Possibly to put his five daughters to school ; perhaps to finish his young wife, and warn her against us."

"He didn't look old, and he didn't seem like a married man," rejoined Addy thoughtfully.

"That was his art, you poor creature !" returned Kate scornfully. "You can never tell any thing of these men, they are so deceitful. Besides, it's just my fate !"

"Why, Kate," began Carry, in serious concern.

"Hush ! Miss Walker is saying something," said Kate, laughing.

"The young ladies will please give attention," said a slow, perfunctory voice. "Miss Carry Tretherick is wanted in the parlor."

Meantime Mr. Jack Prince, the name given on the card, and various letters and credentials submitted to the Rev. Mr. Crammer, paced the somewhat severe apartment known publicly as

the "reception parlor," and privately to the pupils as "purgatory." His keen eyes had taken in the various rigid details, from the flat steam "radiator," like an enormous japanned soda-cracker, that heated one end of the room, to the monumental bust of Dr. Crammer, that hopelessly chilled the other; from the Lord's Prayer, executed by a former writing-master in such gratuitous variety of elegant calligraphic trifling as to considerably abate the serious value of the composition, to three views of Genoa from the Institute, which nobody ever recognized, taken on the spot by the drawing-teacher; from two illuminated texts of Scripture in an English letter, so gratuitously and hideously remote as to chill all human interest, to a large photograph of the senior class, in which the prettiest girls were Ethiopian in complexion, and sat, apparently, on each other's heads and shoulders. His fingers had turned listlessly the leaves of school-catalogues, the "Sermons" of Dr. Crammer, the "Poems" of Henry Kirke White, the "Lays of the Sanctuary" and "Lives of Celebrated Women." His fancy, and it was a nervously active one, had gone over the partings and greetings that must have taken place here, and wondered why the apartment had yet caught so little of the flavor of humanity; indeed, I am afraid he had almost forgotten the object of his

visit, when the door opened, and Carry Treth-erick stood before him.

It was one of those faces he had seen the night before, prettier even than it had seemed then; and yet I think he was conscious of some disappointment, without knowing exactly why. Her abundant waving hair was of a guinea-golden tint, her complexion of a peculiar flower-like delicacy, her brown eyes of the color of seaweed in deep water. It certainly was not her beauty that disappointed him.

Without possessing his sensitiveness to impression, Carry was, on her part, quite as vaguely ill at ease. She saw before her one of those men whom the sex would vaguely generalize as "nice," that is to say, correct in all the superficial appointments of style, dress, manners and feature. Yet there was a decidedly unconventional quality about him: he was totally unlike any thing or anybody that she could remember; and, as the attributes of originality are often as apt to alarm as to attract people, she was not entirely prepossessed in his favor.

"I can hardly hope," he began pleasantly, "that you remember me. It is eleven years ago, and you were a very little girl. I am afraid I cannot even claim to have enjoyed that familiarity that might exist between a child of six and a young man of twenty-one. I don't

think I was fond of children. But I knew your mother very well. I was editor of 'The Avalanche' in Fiddletown, when she took you to San Francisco."

"You mean my stepmother: she wasn't my mother, you know," interposed Carry hastily.

Mr. Prince looked at her curiously. "I mean your stepmother," he said gravely. "I never had the pleasure of meeting your mother."

"No: *mother* hasn't been in California these twelve years."

There was an intentional emphasizing of the title and of its distinction, that began to coldly interest Prince after his first astonishment was past.

"As I come from your stepmother now," he went on with a slight laugh, "I must ask you to go back for a few moments to that point. After your father's death, your mother—I mean your stepmother—recognized the fact that your mother, the first Mrs. Tretherick, was legally and morally your guardian, and, although much against her inclination and affections, placed you again in her charge."

"My stepmother married again within a month after father died, and sent me home," said Carry with great directness, and the faintest toss of her head.

Mr. Prince smiled so sweetly, and apparently

so sympathetically, that Carry began to like him. With no other notice of the interruption he went on, "After your stepmother had performed this act of simple justice, she entered into an agreement with your mother to defray the expenses of your education until your eighteenth year, when you were to elect and choose which of the two should thereafter be your guardian, and with whom you would make your home. This agreement, I think, you are already aware of, and, I believe, knew at the time."

"I was a mere child then," said Carry.

"Certainly," said Mr. Prince, with the same smile. "Still the conditions, I think, have never been oppressive to you nor your mother; and the only time they are likely to give you the least uneasiness will be when you come to make up your mind in the choice of your guardian. That will be on your eighteenth birthday, — the 20th, I think, of the present month."

Carry was silent.

"Pray do not think that I am here to receive your decision, even if it be already made. I only came to inform you that your stepmother, Mrs. Starbottle, will be in town to-morrow, and will pass a few days at the hotel. If it is your wish to see her before you make up your mind,

she will be glad to meet you. She does not, however, wish to do any thing to influence your judgment."

"Does mother know she is coming?" said Carry hastily.

"I do not know," said Prince gravely. "I only know, that, if you conclude to see Mrs. Starbottle, it will be with your mother's permission. Mrs. Starbottle will keep sacredly this part of the agreement, made ten years ago. But her health is very poor; and the change and country quiet of a few days may benefit her." Mr. Prince bent his keen, bright eyes upon the young girl, and almost held his breath until she spoke again.

"Mother's coming up to-day or to-morrow," she said, looking up.

"Ah!" said Mr. Prince with a sweet and languid smile.

"Is Col. Starbottle here too?" asked Carry, after a pause.

"Col. Starbottle is dead. Your stepmother is again a widow."

"Dead!" repeated Carry.

"Yes," replied Mr. Prince. "Your stepmother has been singularly unfortunate in surviving her affections."

Carry did not know what he meant, and looked so. Mr. Prince smiled re-assuringly.

Presently Carry began to whimper

Mr. Prince softly stepped beside her chair.

“I am afraid,” he said with a very peculiar light in his eye, and a singular dropping of the corners of his mustache, — “I am afraid you are taking this too deeply. It will be some days before you are called upon to make a decision. Let us talk of something else. I hope you caught no cold last evening.”

Carry's face shone out again in dimples.

“You must have thought us so queer! It was too bad to give you so much trouble.”

“None, whatever, I assure you. My sense of propriety,” he added demurely, “which might have been outraged, had I been called upon to help three young ladies out of a schoolroom window at night, was deeply gratified at being able to assist them in again.” The door-bell rang loudly, and Mr. Prince rose. “Take your own time, and think well before you make your decision.” But Carry's ear and attention were given to the sound of voices in the hall. At the same moment, the door was thrown open, and a servant announced, “Mrs. Tretherick and Mr. Robinson.”

The afternoon train had just shrieked out its usual indignant protest at stopping at Genoa at all, as Mr. Jack Prince entered the outskirts of the town, and drove towards his hotel. He was

wearied and cynical. A drive of a dozen miles through unpicturesque outlying villages, past small economic farmhouses, and hideous villas that violated his fastidious taste, had, I fear, left that gentleman in a captious state of mind. He would have even avoided his taciturn landlord as he drove up to the door; but that functionary waylaid him on the steps. "There's a lady in the sittin'-room, waitin' for ye." Mr. Prince hurried up stairs, and entered the room as Mrs. Starbottle flew towards him.

She had changed sadly in the last ten years. Her figure was wasted to half its size. The beautiful curves of her bust and shoulders were broken or inverted. The once full, rounded arm was shrunken in its sleeve; and the golden hoops that encircled her wan wrists almost slipped from her hands as her long, scant fingers closed convulsively around Jack's. Her cheek-bones were painted that afternoon with the hectic of fever: somewhere in the hollows of those cheeks were buried the dimples of long ago; but their graves were forgotten. Her lustrous eyes were still beautiful, though the orbits were deeper than before. Her mouth was still sweet, although the lips parted more easily over the little teeth, and even in breathing, and showed more of them than she was wont to do before. The glory of her blonde hair

was still left: it was finer, more silken and ethereal, yet it failed even in its plenitude to cover the hollows of the blue-veined temples.

"Clara!" said Jack reproachfully.

"Oh, forgive me, Jack!" she said, falling into a chair, but still clinging to his hand, — "forgive me, dear; but I could not wait longer. I should have died, Jack, — died before another night. Bear with me a little longer (it will not be long), but let me stay. I may not see her, I know; I shall not speak to her: but it's so sweet to feel that I am at last near her, that I breathe the same air with my darling. I am better already, Jack, I am indeed. And you have seen her to-day? How did she look? What did she say? Tell me all, every thing, Jack. Was she beautiful? They say she is. Has she grown? Would you have known her again? Will she come, Jack? Perhaps she has been here already; perhaps," she had risen with tremulous excitement, and was glancing at the door, — "perhaps she is here now. Why don't you speak, Jack? Tell me all."

The keen eyes that looked down into hers were glistening with an infinite tenderness that none, perhaps, but she would have deemed them capable of. "Clara," he said gently and cheerily, "try and compose yourself. You are trembling now with the fatigue and excitement

of your journey. I have seen Carry: she is well and beautiful. Let that suffice you now."

His gentle firmness composed and calmed her now, as it had often done before. Stroking her thin hand, he said, after a pause, "Did Carry ever write to you?"

"Twice, thanking me for some presents. They were only school-girl letters," she added, nervously answering the interrogation of his eyes.

"Did she ever know of your own troubles? of your poverty, of the sacrifices you made to pay her bills, of your pawning your clothes and jewels, of your" —

"No, no!" interrupted the woman quickly: "no! How could she? I have no enemy cruel enough to tell her that."

"But if she — or if Mrs. Tretherick — had heard of it? If Carry thought you were poor, and unable to support her properly, it might influence her decision. Young girls are fond of the position that wealth can give. She may have rich friends, maybe a lover."

Mrs. Starbottle winced at the last sentence. "But," she said eagerly, grasping Jack's hand, "when you found me sick and helpless at Sacramento, when you — God bless you for it, Jack! — offered to help me to the East, you said you knew of something, you had some plan, that would make me and Carry independent."

“Yes,” said Jack hastily; “but I want you to get strong and well first. And, now that you are calmer, you shall listen to my visit to the school.”

It was then that Mr. Jack Prince proceeded to describe the interview already recorded, with a singular felicity and discretion that shames my own account of that proceeding. Without suppressing a single fact, without omitting a word or detail, he yet managed to throw a poetic veil over that prosaic episode, to invest the heroine with a romantic roseate atmosphere, which, though not perhaps entirely imaginary, still, I fear, exhibited that genius which ten years ago had made the columns of “The Fiddletown Avalanche” at once fascinating and instructive. It was not until he saw the heightening color, and heard the quick breathing, of his eager listener, that he felt a pang of self-reproach. “God help her and forgive me!” he muttered between his clinched teeth; “but how can I tell her *all* now!”

That night, when Mrs. Starbottle laid her weary head upon her pillow, she tried to picture to herself Carry at the same moment sleeping peacefully in the great schoolhouse on the hill; and it was a rare comfort to this yearning foolish woman to know that she was so near. But at this moment Carry was sitting on the

edge of her bed, half undressed, pouting her pretty lips, and twisting her long, leonine locks between her fingers, as Miss Kate Van Corlear — dramatically wrapped in a long white counterpane, her black eyes sparkling, and her thorough-bred nose thrown high in air, — stood over her like a wrathful and indignant ghost; for Carry had that evening imparted her woes and her history to Miss Kate, and that young lady had “proved herself no friend” by falling into a state of fiery indignation over Carry’s “ingratitude,” and openly and shamelessly espousing the claims of Mrs. Starbottle. “Why, if the half you tell me is true, your mother and those Robinsons are making of you not only a little coward, but a little snob, miss. Respectability, forsooth! Look you, my family are centuries before the Trethericks; but if my family had ever treated me in this way, and then asked me to turn my back on my best friend, I’d whistle them down the wind;” and here Kate snapped her fingers, bent her black brows, and glared around the room as if in search of a recreant Van Corlear.

“You just talk this way, because you have taken a fancy to that Mr. Prince,” said Carry.

In the debasing slang of the period, that had even found its way into the virgin cloisters of the Crammer Institute, Miss Kate, as she afterwards expressed it, instantly “went for her.”

First, with a shake of her head, she threw her long black hair over one shoulder, then, dropping one end of the counterpane from the other like a vestal tunic, she stepped before Carry with a purposely-exaggerated classic stride. "And what if I have, miss! What if I happen to know a gentleman when I see him! What if I happen to know, that among a thousand such traditional, conventional, feeble editions of their grandfathers as Mr. Harry Robinson, you cannot find one original, independent, individualized gentleman like your Prince! Go to bed, miss, and pray to Heaven that he may be *your* Prince indeed. Ask to have a contrite and grateful heart, and thank the Lord in particular for having sent you such a friend as Kate Van Corlear." Yet, after an imposing dramatic exit, she re-appeared the next moment as a straight white flash, kissed Carry between the brows, and was gone.

The next day was a weary one to Jack Prince. He was convinced in his mind that Carry would not come; yet to keep this consciousness from Mrs. Starbottle, to meet her simple hopefulness with an equal degree of apparent faith, was a hard and difficult task. He would have tried to divert her mind by taking her on a long drive; but she was fearful that Carry might come during her absence; and her

strength, he was obliged to admit, had failed greatly. As he looked into her large and awe-inspiring clear eyes, a something he tried to keep from his mind — to put off day by day from contemplation — kept asserting itself directly to his inner consciousness. He began to doubt the expediency and wisdom of his management. He recalled every incident of his interview with Carry, and half believed that its failure was due to himself. Yet Mrs. Starbottle was very patient and confident: her very confidence shook his faith in his own judgment. When her strength was equal to the exertion, she was propped up in her chair by the window, where she could see the school and the entrance to the hotel. In the intervals she would elaborate pleasant plans for the future, and would sketch a country home. She had taken a strange fancy, as it seemed to Prince, to the present location; but it was notable that the future, always thus outlined, was one of quiet and repose. She believed she would get well soon: in fact, she thought she was now much better than she had been; but it might be long before she should be quite strong again. She would whisper on in this way until Jack would dash madly down into the bar-room, order liquors that he did not drink, light cigars that he did not smoke, talk with men that he did not

listen to, and behave generally as our stronger sex is apt to do in periods of delicate trials and perplexity.

The day closed with a clouded sky and a bitter, searching wind. With the night fell a few wandering flakes of snow. She was still content and hopeful; and, as Jack wheeled her from the window to the fire, she explained to him, how, that, as the school-term was drawing near its close, Carry was probably kept closely at her lessons during the day, and could only leave the school at night. So she sat up the greater part of the evening, and combed her silken hair, and, as far as her strength would allow, made an undress toilet to receive her guest. "We must not frighten the child, Jack," she said apologetically, and with something of her old coquetry.

It was with a feeling of relief, that, at ten o'clock, Jack received a message from the landlord, saying that the doctor would like to see him for a moment down stairs. As Jack entered the grim, dimly-lighted parlor, he observed the hooded figure of a woman near the fire. He was about to withdraw again, when a voice that he remembered very pleasantly said, —

"Oh, it's all right! I'm the doctor."

The hood was thrown back; and Prince saw the shining black hair, and black, audacious eyes, of Kate Van Corlear.

“Don’t ask any questions. I’m the doctor and there’s my prescription,” and she pointed to the half-frightened, half-sobbing Carry in the corner — “to be taken at once.”

“Then Mrs. Tretherick has given her permission?”

“Not much, if I know the sentiments of that lady,” replied Kate saucily.

“Then how did you get away?” asked Prince gravely.

“BY THE WINDOW.”

When Mr. Prince had left Carry in the arms of her stepmother, he returned to the parlor.

“Well?” demanded Kate.

“She will stay — *you* will, I hope, also — to-night.”

“As I shall not be eighteen, and my own mistress on the 20th, and as I haven’t a sick stepmother, I won’t.”

“Then you will give me the pleasure of seeing you safely through the window again?”

When Mr. Prince returned an hour later, he found Carry sitting on a low stool at Mrs. Starbottle’s feet. Her head was in her stepmother’s lap; and she had sobbed herself to sleep. Mrs. Starbottle put her finger to her lip. “I told you she would come. God bless you, Jack! and good-night.”

The next morning Mrs. Tretherick, indig

nant, the Rev. Asa Crammer, principal, injured, and Mr. Joel Robinson, sen., complacently respectable, called upon Mr. Prince. There was a stormy meeting, ending in a demand for Carry. "We certainly cannot admit of this interference," said Mrs. Tretherick, a fashionably dressed, indistinctive looking woman. "It is several days before the expiration of our agreement; and we do not feel, under the circumstances, justified in releasing Mrs. Starbottle from its conditions." "Until the expiration of the school-term, we must consider Miss Tretherick as complying entirely with its rules and discipline," imposed Dr. Crammer. "The whole proceeding is calculated to injure the prospects, and compromise the position, of Miss Tretherick in society," suggested Mr. Robinson.

In vain Mr. Prince urged the failing condition of Mrs. Starbottle, her absolute freedom from complicity with Carry's flight, the pardonable and natural instincts of the girl, and his own assurance that they were willing to abide by her decision. And then with a rising color in his cheek, a dangerous look in his eye, but a singular calmness in his speech, he added, —

"One word more. It becomes my duty to inform you of a circumstance which would certainly justify me, as an executor of the late

Mr. Tretherick, in fully resisting your demands. A few months after Mr. Tretherick's death, through the agency of a Chinaman in his employment, it was discovered that he had made a will, which was subsequently found among his papers. The insignificant value of his bequest — mostly land, then quite valueless — prevented his executors from carrying out his wishes, or from even proving the will, or making it otherwise publicly known, until within the last two or three years, when the property had enormously increased in value. The provisions of that bequest are simple, but unmistakable. The property is divided between Carry and her stepmother, with the explicit condition that Mrs. Starbottle shall become her legal guardian, provide for her education, and in all details stand to her *in loco parentis*."

"What is the value of this bequest?" asked Mr. Robinson. "I cannot tell exactly, but not far from half a million, I should say," returned Prince. "Certainly, with this knowledge, as a friend of Miss Tretherick, I must say that her conduct is as judicious as it is honorable to her," responded Mr. Robinson. "I shall not presume to question the wishes, or throw any obstacles in the way of carrying out the intentions, of my dead husband," added Mrs. Tretherick; and the interview was closed.

When its result was made known to Mrs. Starbottle, she raised Jack's hand to her feverish lips. "It cannot add to *my* happiness now, Jack; but tell me, why did you keep it from her?" Jack smiled, but did not reply.

Within the next week the necessary legal formalities were concluded; and Carry was restored to her stepmother. At Mrs. Starbottle's request, a small house in the outskirts of the town was procured; and thither they removed to wait the spring, and Mrs. Starbottle's convalescence. Both came tardily that year.

Yet she was happy and patient. She was fond of watching the budding of the trees beyond her window,—a novel sight to her Californian experience,—and of asking Carry their names and seasons. Even at this time she projected for that summer, which seemed to her so mysteriously withheld, long walks with Carry through the leafy woods, whose gray, misty ranks she could see along the hilltop. She even thought she could write poetry about them, and recalled the fact as evidence of her gaining strength; and there is, I believe, still treasured by one of the members of this little household a little carol so joyous, so simple, and so innocent, that it might have been an echo of the robin that called to her from the window, or perhaps it was.

And then, without warning, there dropped from Heaven a day so tender, so mystically soft, so dreamily beautiful, so throbbing, and alive with the fluttering of invisible wings, so replete and bounteously overflowing with an awakening and joyous resurrection not taught by man or limited by creed, that they thought it fit to bring her out, and lay her in that glorious sunshine that sprinkled like the droppings of a bridal torch the happy lintels and doors. And there she lay beatified and calm.

Wearied by watching, Carry had fallen asleep by her side; and Mrs. Starbottle's thin fingers lay like a benediction on her head. Presently she called Jack to her side.

"Who was that," she whispered, "who just came in?"

"Miss Van Corlear," said Jack, answering the look in her great hollow eyes.

"Jack," she said, after a moment's silence, "sit by me a moment, dear Jack: I've something I must say. If I ever seemed hard, or cold, or coquettish to you in the old days, it was because I loved you, Jack, too well to mar your future by linking it with my own. I always loved you, dear Jack, even when I seemed least worthy of you. That is gone now. But I had a dream lately, Jack, a foolish woman's dream,—that you might find what I lacked in

her," and she glanced lovingly at the sleeping girl at her side; "that you might love her as you have loved me. But even that is not to be, Jack, is it?" and she glanced wistfully in his face. Jack pressed her hand, but did not speak. After a few moments' silence, she again said, "Perhaps you are right in your choice. She is a good-hearted girl, Jack — but a little bold."

And with this last flicker of foolish, weak humanity in her struggling spirit, she spoke no more. When they came to her a moment later, a tiny bird that had lit upon her breast flew away; and the hand that they lifted from Carry's head fell lifeless at her side.

A JERSEY CENTENARIAN.

I HAVE seen her at last. She is a hundred and seven years old, and remembers George Washington quite distinctly. It is somewhat confusing, however, that she also remembers a contemporaneous Josiah W. Perkins of Basking Ridge, N.J., and, I think, has the impression that Perkins was the better man. Perkins, at the close of the last century, paid her some little attention. There are a few things that a really noble woman of a hundred and seven never forgets.

It was Perkins, who said to her in 1795, in the streets of Philadelphia, "Shall I show thee Gen. Washington?" Then she said carelessly (for you know, child, at that time it wasn't what it is now to see Gen. Washington), she said, "So do, Josiah, so do!" Then he pointed to a tall man who got out of a carriage, and went into a large house. He was larger than you be. He wore his own hair — not powdered; had a flowered chintz vest, with yellow breeches and blue stockings, and a broad-brimmed hat.

In summer he wore a white straw hat, and at his farm at Basking Ridge he always wore it. At this point, it became too evident that she was describing the clothes of the all-fascinating Perkins: so I gently but firmly led her back to Washington. Then it appeared that she did not remember exactly what he wore. To assist her, I sketched the general historic dress of that period. She said she thought he was dressed like that. Emboldened by my success, I added a hat of Charles II., and pointed shoes of the eleventh century. She indorsed these with such cheerful alacrity, that I dropped the subject.

The house upon which I had stumbled, or, rather, to which my horse — a Jersey hack, accustomed to historic research — had brought me, was low and quaint. Like most old houses, it had the appearance of being encroached upon by the surrounding glebe, as if it were already half in the grave, with a sod or two, in the shape of moss thrown on it, like ashes on ashes, and dust on dust. A wooden house, instead of acquiring dignity with age, is apt to lose its youth and respectability together. A porch, with scant, sloping seats, from which even the winter's snow must have slid uncomfortably, projected from a doorway that opened most unjustifiably into a small sitting-room. There was

no vestibule, or *locus pœnitentiæ*, for the embarrassed or bashful visiter: he passed at once from the security of the public road into shameful privacy. And here, in the mellow autumnal sunlight, that, streaming through the maples and sumach on the opposite bank, flickered and danced upon the floor, she sat and discoursed of George Washington, and thought of Perkins. She was quite in keeping with the house and the season, albeit a little in advance of both; her skin being of a faded russet, and her hands so like dead November leaves, that I fancied they even rustled when she moved them.

For all that, she was quite bright and cheery; her faculties still quite vigorous, although performing irregularly and spasmodically. It was somewhat discomposing, I confess, to observe, that at times her lower jaw would drop, leaving her speechless, until one of the family would notice it, and raise it smartly into place with a slight snap, — an operation always performed in such an habitual, perfunctory manner, generally in passing to and fro in their household duties, that it was very trying to the spectator. It was still more embarrassing to observe that the dear old lady had evidently no knowledge of this, but believed she was still talking, and that, on resuming her actual vocal

utterance, she was often abrupt and incoherent, beginning always in the middle of a sentence, and often in the middle of a word. "Sometimes," said her daughter, a giddy, thoughtless young thing of eighty-five, — "sometimes just moving her head sort of unhitches her jaw; and, if we don't happen to see it, she'll go on talking for hours without ever making a sound." Although I was convinced, after this, that during my interview I had lost several important revelations regarding George Washington through these peculiar lapses, I could not help reflecting how beneficent were these provisions of the Creator, — how, if properly studied and applied, they might be fraught with happiness to mankind, — how a slight jostle or jar at a dinner-party might make the post-prandial eloquence of garrulous senility satisfactory to itself, yet harmless to others, — how a more intimate knowledge of anatomy, introduced into the domestic circle, might make a home tolerable at least, if not happy, — how a long-suffering husband, under the pretence of a conjugal caress, might so unhook his wife's condyloid process as to allow the flow of expostulation, criticism, or denunciation, to go on with gratification to her, and perfect immunity to himself.

But this was not getting back to George Washington and the early struggles of the

Republic. So I returned to the commander-in-chief, but found, after one or two leading questions, that she was rather inclined to resent his re-appearance on the stage. Her reminiscences here were chiefly social and local, and more or less flavored with Perkins. We got back as far as the Revolutionary epoch, or, rather, her impressions of that epoch, when it was still fresh in the public mind. And here I came upon an incident, purely personal and local, but, withal, so novel, weird, and uncanny, that for a while I fear it quite displaced George Washington in my mind, and tinged the autumnal fields beyond with a red that was not of the sumach. I do not remember to have read of it in the books. I do not know that it is entirely authentic. It was attested to me by mother and daughter, as an uncontradicted tradition.

In the little field beyond, where the plough still turns up musket-balls and cartridge-boxes, took place one of those irregular skirmishes between the militiamen and Knyphausen's stragglers, that made the retreat historical. A Hessian soldier, wounded in both legs and utterly helpless, dragged himself to the cover of a hazel-copse, and lay there hidden for two days. On the third day, maddened by thirst, he managed to creep to the rail-fence of an adjoining farm

nouse, but found himself unable to mount it or pass through. There was no one in the house but a little girl of six or seven years. He called to her, and in a faint voice asked for water. She returned to the house, as if to comply with his request, but, mounting a chair, took from the chimney a heavily-loaded Queen Anne musket, and, going to the door, took deliberate aim at the helpless intruder, and fired. The man fell back dead, without a groan. She replaced the musket, and, returning to the fence, covered the body with boughs and leaves, until it was hidden. Two or three days after, she related the occurrence in a careless, casual way, and leading the way to the fence, with a piece of bread and butter in her guileless little fingers, pointed out the result of her simple, unsophisticated effort. The Hessian was decently buried, but I could not find out what became of the little girl. Nobody seemed to remember. I trust, that, in after-years, she was happily married; that no Jersey Lovelace attempted to trifle with a heart whose impulses were so prompt, and whose purposes were so sincere. They did not seem to know if she had married or not. Yet it does not seem probable that such simplicity of conception, frankness of expression, and deftness of execution, were lost to posterity, or that they failed, in their time

and season, to give flavor to the domestic felicity of the period. Beyond this, the story perhaps has little value, except as an offset to the usual anecdotes of Hessian atrocity.

They had their financial panics even in Jersey, in the old days. She remembered when Dr. White married your cousin Mary — or was it Susan? — yes, it was Susan. She remembers that your Uncle Harry brought in an armful of bank-notes, — paper money, you know, — and threw them in the corner, saying they were no good to anybody. She remembered playing with them, and giving them to your Aunt Anna — no, child, it was your own mother, bless your heart! Some of them was marked as high as a hundred dollars. Everybody kept gold and silver in a stocking, or in a “chaney” vase, like that. You never used money to buy any thing. When Josiah went to Springfield to buy any thing, he took a cartload of things with him to exchange. That yaller picture-frame was paid for in greenings. But then people knew jest what they had. They didn’t fritter their substance away in unchristian trifles, like your father, Eliza Jane, who doesn’t know that there is a God who will smite him hip and thigh; for vengeance is mine, and those that believe in me. But here, singularly enough, the inferior maxillaries gave out, and her jaw

dropped. (I noticed that her giddy daughter of eighty-five was sitting near her; but I do not pretend to connect this fact with the arrested flow of personal disclosure.) Howbeit, when she recovered her speech again, it appeared that she was complaining of the weather.

The seasons had changed very much since your father went to sea. The winters used to be terrible in those days. When she went over to Springfield, in June, she saw the snow still on Watson's Ridge. There were whole days when you couldn't git over to William Henry's, their next neighbor, a quarter of a mile away. It was that drefful winter that the Spanish sailor was found. You don't remember the Spanish sailor, Eliza Jane—it was before your time. There was a little personal skirmishing here, which I feared, at first, might end in a suspension of maxillary functions, and the loss of the story; but here it is. Ah, me! it is a pure white winter idyl: how shall I sing it this bright, gay autumnal day?

It was a terrible night, that winter's night, when she and the century were young together. The sun was lost at three o'clock: the snowy night came down like a white sheet, that flapped around the house, beat at the windows with its edges, and at last wrapped it in a close

embrace. In the middle of the night, they thought they heard above the wind a voice crying, "Christus, Christus!" in a foreign tongue. They opened the door,—no easy task in the north wind that pressed its strong shoulders against it,—but nothing was to be seen but the drifting snow. The next morning dawned on fences hidden, and a landscape changed and obliterated with drift. During the day, they again heard the cry of "Christus!" this time faint and hidden, like a child's voice. They searched in vain: the drifted snow hid its secret. On the third day they broke a path to the fence, and then they heard the cry distinctly. Digging down, they found the body of a man,—a Spanish sailor, dark and bearded, with ear-rings in his ears. As they stood gazing down at his cold and pulseless figure, the cry of "Christus!" again rose upon the wintry air; and they turned and fled in superstitious terror to the house. And then one of the children, bolder than the rest, knelt down, and opened the dead man's rough pea-jacket, and found—what think you?—a little blue-and-green parrot, nestling against his breast. It was the bird that had echoed mechanically the last despairing cry of the life that was given to save it. It was the bird, that ever after, amid outlandish oaths and wilder sailor-songs, that I

fear often shocked the pure ears of its gentle mistress, and brought scandal into the Jerseys, still retained that one weird and mournful cry.

The sun meanwhile was sinking behind the steadfast range beyond, and I could not help feeling that I must depart with my wants unsatisfied. I had brought away no historic fragment: I absolutely knew little or nothing new regarding George Washington. I had been addressed variously by the names of different members of the family who were dead and forgotten; I had stood for an hour in the past: yet I had not added to my historical knowledge, nor the practical benefit of your readers. I spoke once more of Washington, and she replied with a reminiscence of Perkins.

Stand forth, O Josiah W. Perkins of Basking Ridge, N.J. Thou wast of little account in thy life, I warrant; thou didst not even feel the greatness of thy day and time; thou didst criticise thy superiors; thou wast small and narrow in thy ways; thy very name and grave are unknown and uncared for: but thou wast once kind to a woman who survived thee, and, 10! thy name is again spoken of men, and for a moment lifted up above thy betters.

A SAPPHO OF
GREEN SPRINGS
AND OTHER STORIES

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A SAPPHO OF GREEN SPRINGS.



CHAPTER I.

“COME in,” said the editor.

The door of the editorial room of the “Excelsior Magazine” began to creak painfully under the hesitating pressure of an uncertain and unfamiliar hand. This continued until with a start of irritation the editor faced directly about, throwing his leg over the arm of his chair with a certain youthful dexterity. With one hand gripping its back, the other still grasping a proof-slip, and his pencil in his mouth, he stared at the intruder.

The stranger, despite his hesitating entrance, did not seem in the least disconcerted. He was a tall man, looking even taller by reason of the long formless overcoat he wore, known as a “duster,” and by a long straight beard that depended from his chin, which he combed with two reflective fingers as he contemplated the editor. The red dust which still lay in the creases of

his garment and in the curves of his soft felt hat, and left a dusty circle like a precipitated halo around his feet, proclaimed him, if not a countryman, a recent inland importation by coach. "Busy?" he said, in a grave but pleasant voice. "I kin wait. Don't mind *me*. Go on."

The editor indicated a chair with his disengaged hand and plunged again into his proof-slips. The stranger surveyed the scant furniture and appointments of the office with a look of grave curiosity, and then, taking a chair, fixed an earnest, penetrating gaze on the editor's profile. The editor felt it, and, without looking up, said: —

"Well, go on."

"But you 're busy. I kin wait."

"I shall not be less busy this morning. I can listen."

"I want you to give me the name of a certain person who writes in your magazine."

The editor's eye glanced at the second right-hand drawer of his desk. It did not contain the names of his contributors, but what in the traditions of his office was accepted as an equivalent, — a revolver. He had never yet presented either to an inquirer. But he laid aside his proofs, and, with a

slight darkening of his youthful, discontented face, said, "What do you want to know for?"

The question was so evidently unexpected that the stranger's face colored slightly, and he hesitated. The editor meanwhile, without taking his eyes from the man, mentally ran over the contents of the last magazine. They had been of a singularly peaceful character. There seemed to be nothing to justify homicide on his part or the stranger's. Yet there was no knowing, and his questioner's bucolic appearance by no means precluded an assault. Indeed, it had been a legend of the office that a predecessor had suffered vicariously from a geological hammer covertly introduced into a scientific controversy by an irate professor.

"As we make ourselves responsible for the conduct of the magazine," continued the young editor, with mature severity, "we do not give up the names of our contributors. If you do not agree with their opinions" —

"But I *do*," said the stranger, with his former composure, "and I reckon that 's why I want to know who wrote those verses called 'Underbrush,' signed 'White Violet,' in your last number. They're pow'ful pretty."

The editor flushed slightly, and glanced instinctively around for any unexpected witness of his ludicrous mistake. The fear of ridicule was uppermost in his mind, and he was more relieved at his mistake not being overheard than at its groundlessness.

“The verses *are* pretty,” he said, recovering himself, with a critical air, “and I am glad you like them. But even then, you know, I could not give you the lady’s name without her permission. I will write to her and ask it, if you like.”

The actual fact was that the verses had been sent to him anonymously from a remote village in the Coast Range, — the address being the post-office and the signature initials.

The stranger looked disturbed. “Then she ain’t about here anywhere?” he said, with a vague gesture. “She don’t belong to the office?”

The young editor beamed with tolerant superiority: “No, I am sorry to say.”

“I should like to have got to see her and kinder asked her a few questions,” continued the stranger, with the same reflective seriousness. “You see, it was n’t just the rhym-in’ o’ them verses, — and they kinder sing

themselves to ye, don't they? — it was n't the chyce o' words, — and I reckon they allus hit the idee in the centre shot every time, — it was n't the idees and moral she sort o' drew out o' what she was tellin', — but it was the straight thing itself, — the truth!"

"The truth?" repeated the editor.

"Yes, sir. I've bin there. I've seen all that she's seen in the brush — the little flicks and checkers o' light and shadder down in the brown dust that you wonder how it ever got through the dark of the woods, and that allus seems to slip away like a snake or a lizard if you grope. I've heard all that she's heard there — the creepin', the sighin', and the whisperin' through the bracken and the ground-vines of all that lives there."

"You seem to be a poet yourself," said the editor, with a patronizing smile.

"I'm a lumberman, up in Mendocino," returned the stranger, with sublime *naïveté*. "Got a mill there. You see, sightin' standin' timber and selectin' from the gen'ral show of the trees in the ground and the lay of roots hez sorter made me take notice." He paused. "Then," he added, somewhat despondingly, "you don't know who she is?"

“No,” said the editor, reflectively; “not even if it is really a *woman* who writes.”

“Eh?”

“Well, you see, ‘White Violet’ may as well be the *nom de plume* of a man as of a woman, especially if adopted for the purpose of mystification. The handwriting, I remember, was more boyish than feminine.”

“No,” returned the stranger doggedly, “it was n’t no *man*. There’s ideas and words there that only come from a woman: baby-talk to the birds, you know, and a kind of fearsome keer of bugs and creepin’ things that don’t come to a man who wears boots and trousers. Well,” he added, with a return to his previous air of resigned disappointment, “I suppose you don’t even know what she’s like?”

“No,” responded the editor, cheerfully. Then, following an idea suggested by the odd mingling of sentiment and shrewd perception in the man before him, he added: “Probably not at all like anything you imagine. She may be a mother with three or four children; or an old maid who keeps a boarding-house; or a wrinkled school-mistress; or a chit of a school-girl. I’ve had some fair verses from a red-haired girl of

fourteen at the Seminary," he concluded with professional coolness.

The stranger regarded him with the naïve wonder of an inexperienced man. Having paid this tribute to his superior knowledge, he regained his previous air of grave perception. "I reckon she ain't none of them. But I'm keepin' you from your work. Good-by. My name's Bowers — Jim Bowers, of Mendocino. If you're up my way, give me a call. And if you do write to this yer 'White Violet,' and she's willin', send me her address."

He shook the editor's hand warmly — even in its literal significance of imparting a good deal of his own earnest caloric to the editor's fingers — and left the room. His footfall echoed along the passage and died out, and with it, I fear, all impression of his visit from the editor's mind, as he plunged again into the silent task before him.

Presently he was conscious of a melodious humming and a light leisurely step at the entrance of the hall. They continued on in an easy harmony and unaffected as the passage of a bird. Both were pleasant and both familiar to the editor. They belonged to Jack Hamlin, by vocation a gambler, by taste a

musician, on his way from his apartments on the upper floor, where he had just risen, to drop into his friend's editorial room and glance over the exchanges, as was his habit before breakfast.

The door opened lightly. The editor was conscious of a faint odor of scented soap, a sensation of freshness and cleanliness, the impression of a soft hand like a woman's on his shoulder and, like a woman's, momentarily and playfully caressing, the passage of a graceful shadow across his desk, and the next moment Jack Hamlin was ostentatiously dusting a chair with an open newspaper preparatory to sitting down.

"You ought to ship that office-boy of yours, if he can't keep things cleaner," he said, suspending his melody to eye grimly the dust which Mr. Bowers had shaken from his departing feet.

The editor did not look up until he had finished revising a difficult paragraph. By that time Mr. Hamlin had comfortably settled himself on a cane sofa, and, possibly out of deference to his surroundings, had subdued his song to a peculiarly low, soft, and heart-breaking whistle as he unfolded a newspaper. Clean and faultless in his appear-

ance, he had the rare gift of being able to get up at two in the afternoon with much of the dewy freshness and all of the moral superiority of an early riser.

"You ought to have been here just now, Jack," said the editor.

"Not a row, old man, eh?" inquired Jack, with a faint accession of interest.

"No," said the editor, smiling. Then he related the incidents of the previous interview, with a certain humorous exaggeration which was part of his nature. But Jack did not smile.

"You ought to have booted him out of the ranch on sight," he said. "What right had he to come here prying into a lady's affairs? — at least a lady as far as *he* knows. Of course she's some old blowzy with frumpled hair trying to rope in a greenhorn with a string of words and phrases," concluded Jack, carelessly, who had an equally cynical distrust of the sex and of literature.

"That's about what I told him," said the editor.

"That's just what you *should n't* have told him," returned Jack. "You ought to have stuck up for that woman as if she'd been your own mother. Lord! you fellows

don't know how to run a magazine. You ought to let *me* sit on that chair and tackle your customers."

"What would you have done, Jack?" asked the editor, much amused to find that his hitherto invincible hero was not above the ordinary human weakness of offering advice as to editorial conduct.

"Done?" reflected Jack. "Well, first, sonny, I should n't keep a revolver in a drawer that I had to *open* to get at."

"But what would you have said?"

"I should simply have asked him what was the price of lumber at Mendocino," said Jack, sweetly, "and when he told me, I should have said that the samples he was offering out of his own head would n't suit. You see, you don't want any trifling in such matters. You write well enough, my boy," continued he, turning over his paper, "but what you're lacking in is editorial dignity. But go on with your work. Don't mind me."

Thus admonished, the editor again bent over his desk, and his friend softly took up his suspended song. The editor had not proceeded far in his corrections when Jack's voice again broke the silence.

"Where are those d—d verses, anyway?"

Without looking up, the editor waved his pencil towards an uncut copy of the "Excelsior Magazine" lying on the table.

"You don't suppose I'm going to *read* them, do you?" said Jack, aggrievedly. "Why don't you say what they're about? That's your business as editor."

But that functionary, now wholly lost and wandering in the *non-sequitur* of an involved passage in the proof before him, only waved an impatient remonstrance with his pencil and knit his brows. Jack, with a sigh, took up the magazine.

A long silence followed, broken only by the hurried rustling of sheets of copy and an occasional exasperated start from the editor. The sun was already beginning to slant a dusty beam across his desk; Jack's whistling had long since ceased. Presently, with an exclamation of relief, the editor laid aside the last proof-sheet and looked up.

Jack Hamlin had closed the magazine, but with one hand thrown over the back of the sofa he was still holding it, his slim forefinger between its leaves to keep the place, and his handsome profile and dark lashes lifted towards the window. The editor,

smiling at this unwonted abstraction, said, quietly, —

“Well, what do you think of them?”

Jack rose, laid the magazine down, settled his white waistcoat with both hands, and lounged towards his friend with audacious but slightly veiled and shining eyes. “They sort of sing themselves to you,” he said, quietly, leaning beside the editor’s desk, and looking down upon him. After a pause he said, “Then you don’t know what she’s like?”

“That’s what Mr. Bowers asked me,” remarked the editor.

“D—n Bowers!”

“I suppose you also wish me to write and ask for permission to give you her address?” said the editor, with great gravity.

“No,” said Jack, coolly. “I propose to give it to *you* within a week, and you will pay me with a breakfast. I should like to have it said that I was once a paid contributor to literature. If I don’t give it to you, I’ll stand you a dinner, that’s all.”

“Done!” said the editor. “And you know nothing of her now?”

“No,” said Jack, promptly. “Nor you?”

“No more than I have told you.”

“That ’ll do. So long!” And Jack, carefully adjusting his glossy hat over his curls at an ominously wicked angle, sauntered lightly from the room. The editor, glancing after his handsome figure and hearing him take up his pretermitted whistle as he passed out, began to think that the contingent dinner was by no means an inevitable prospect.

Howbeit, he plunged once more into his monotonous duties. But the freshness of the day seemed to have departed with Jack, and the later interruptions of foreman and publisher were of a more practical character. It was not until the post arrived that the superscription on one of the letters caught his eye, and revived his former interest. It was the same hand as that of his unknown contributor’s manuscript — ill-formed and boyish. He opened the envelope. It contained another poem with the same signature, but also a note — much longer than the brief lines that accompanied the first contribution — was scrawled upon a separate piece of paper. This the editor opened first, and read the following, with an amazement that for the moment dominated all other sense: —

MR. EDITOR, — I see you have got my poetry in. But I don't see the spondulix that oughter follow. Perhaps you don't know where to send it. Then I'll tell you. Send the money to Lock Box 47, Green Springs P. O., per Wells Fargo's Express, and I'll get it there, on account of my parents not knowing. We're very high-toned, and they would think it's low making poetry for papers. Send amount usually paid for poetry in your papers. Or may be you think I make poetry for nothing? That's where you slip up!

Yours truly, WHITE VIOLET.

P. S. — If you don't pay for poetry, send this back. It's as good as what you did put in, and is just as hard to make. You hear me? that's me — all the time.

WHITE VIOLET.

The editor turned quickly to the new contribution for some corroboration of what he felt must be an extraordinary blunder. But no! The few lines that he hurriedly read breathed the same atmosphere of intellectual repose, gentleness, and imagination as the first contribution. And yet they were in the same handwriting as the singular mis-

sive, and both were identical with the previous manuscript.

Had he been the victim of a hoax, and were the verses not original? No; they were distinctly original, local in color, and even local in the use of certain old English words that were common in the Southwest. He had before noticed the apparent incongruity of the handwriting and the text, and it was possible that for the purposes of disguise the poet might have employed an amanuensis. But how could he reconcile the incongruity of the mercenary and slangy purport of the missive itself with the mental habit of its author? Was it possible that these inconsistent qualities existed in the one individual? He smiled grimly as he thought of his visitor Bowers and his friend Jack. He was startled as he remembered the purely imaginative picture he had himself given to the seriously interested Bowers of the possible incongruous personality of the poetess.

Was he quite fair in keeping this from Jack? Was it really honorable, in view of their wager? It is to be feared that a very human enjoyment of Jack's possible discomfiture quite as much as any chivalrous

friendship impelled the editor to ring eventually for the office-boy.

“See if Mr. Hamlin is in his rooms.”

The editor then sat down, and wrote rapidly as follows:—

DEAR MADAM, — You are as right as you are generous in supposing that only ignorance of your address prevented the manager from previously remitting the honorarium for your beautiful verses. He now begs to send it to you in the manner you have indicated. As the verses have attracted deserved attention, I have been applied to for your address. Should you care to submit it to me to be used at my discretion, I shall feel honored by your confidence. But this is a matter left entirely to your own kindness and better judgment. Meantime, I take pleasure in accepting “White Violet’s” present contribution, and remain, dear madam, your obedient servant,

THE EDITOR.

The boy returned as he was folding the letter. Mr. Hamlin was not only *not* in his rooms, but, according to his negro servant Pete, had left town an hour ago for a few days in the country.

"Did he say where?" asked the editor, quickly.

"No, sir: he did n't know."

"Very well. Take this to the manager." He addressed the letter, and, scrawling a few hieroglyphics on a memorandum-tag, tore it off, and handed it with the letter to the boy.

An hour later he stood in the manager's office. "The next number is pretty well made up," he said, carelessly, "and I think of taking a day or two off."

"Certainly," said the manager. "It will do you good. Where do you think you 'll go?"

"I have n't quite made up my mind."

CHAPTER II.

“HULLO!” said Jack Hamlin.

He had halted his mare at the edge of an abrupt chasm. It did not appear to be fifty feet across, yet its depth must have been nearly two hundred to where the hidden mountain-stream, of which it was the banks, alternately slipped, tumbled, and fell with murmuring and monotonous regularity. One or two pine-trees growing on the opposite edge, loosened at the roots, had tilted their straight shafts like spears over the abyss, and the top of one, resting on the upper branches of a sycamore a few yards from him, served as an aerial bridge for the passage of a boy of fourteen to whom Mr. Hamlin's challenge was addressed.

The boy stopped midway in his perilous transit, and, looking down upon the horse-man, responded, coolly, “Hullo, yourself!”

“Is that the only way across this infernal hole, or the one you prefer for exercise?” continued Hamlin, gravely.

The boy sat down on a bough, allowing his bare feet to dangle over the dizzy depths, and critically examined his questioner. Jack had on this occasion modified his usual correct conventional attire by a tasteful combination of a vaquero's costume, and, in loose white bullion-fringed trousers, red sash, jacket, and sombrero, looked infinitely more dashing and picturesque than his original. Nevertheless, the boy did not reply. Mr. Hamlin's pride in his usual ascendancy over women, children, horses, and all unreasoning animals was deeply nettled. He smiled, however, and said, quietly, —

“Come here, George Washington. I want to talk to you.”

Without rejecting this august yet impossible title, the boy presently lifted his feet, and carelessly resumed his passage across the chasm until, reaching the sycamore, he began to let himself down squirrel-wise, leap by leap, with an occasional trapeze swinging from bough to bough, dropping at last easily to the ground. Here he appeared to be rather good-looking, albeit the sun and air had worked a miracle of brown tan and freckles on his exposed surfaces, until the mottling of his oval cheeks looked like a

polished bird's egg. Indeed, it struck Mr. Hamlin that he was as intensely a part of that sylvan seclusion as the hidden brook that murmured, the brown velvet shadows that lay like trappings on the white flanks of his horse, the quivering heat, and the stinging spice of bay. Mr. Hamlin had vague ideas of dryads and fauns, but at that moment would have bet something on the chances of their survival.

"I did not hear what you said just now, general," he remarked, with great elegance of manner, "but I know from your reputation that it could not be a lie. I therefore gather that there *is* another way across."

The boy smiled; rather, his very short upper lip apparently vanished completely over his white teeth, and his very black eyes, which showed a great deal of the white around them, danced in their orbits.

"But *you* could n't find it," he said, slyly.

"No more could you find the half-dollar I dropped just now, unless I helped you."

Mr. Hamlin, by way of illustration, leaned deeply over his left stirrup, and pointed to the ground. At the same moment a bright half-dollar absolutely appeared to glitter in the herbage at the point of his finger. It

was a trick that had always brought great pleasure and profit to his young friends, and some loss and discomfiture of wager to his older ones.

The boy picked up the coin: "There 's a dip and a level crossing about a mile over yer," — he pointed, — "but it 's through the woods, and they 're that high with thick bresh."

"With what?"

"Bresh," repeated the boy; "*that*," — pointing to a few fronds of bracken growing in the shadow of the sycamore.

"Oh! underbrush?"

"Yes; I said 'bresh,'" returned the boy, doggedly. "*You* might get through, ef you war spry, but not your hoss. Where do you want to go, anyway?"

"Do you know, George," said Mr. Hamlin, lazily throwing his right leg over the horn of his saddle for greater ease and deliberation in replying, "it 's very odd, but that 's just what *I'd* like to know. Now, what would *you*, in your broad statesmanlike views of things generally, advise?"

Quite convinced of the stranger's mental unsoundness, the boy glanced again at his half-dollar, as if to make sure of its integ-

rity, pocketed it doubtfully, and turned away.

“Where are you going?” said Hamlin, resuming his seat with the agility of a circus-rider, and spurring forward.

“To Green Springs, where I live, two miles over the ridge on the far slope,” — indicating the direction.

“Ah!” said Jack, with thoughtful gravity. “Well, kindly give my love to your sister, will you?”

“George Washington did n’t have no sister,” said the boy, cunningly.

“Can I have been mistaken?” said Hamlin, lifting his hand to his forehead with grieved accents. “Then it seems *you* have. Kindly give her my love.”

“Which one?” asked the boy, with a swift glance of mischief. “I’ve got four.”

“The one that’s like you,” returned Hamlin, with prompt exactitude. “Now, where’s the ‘bresh’ you spoke of?”

“Keep along the edge until you come to the log-slide. Foller that, and it’ll lead you into the woods. But ye won’t go far, I tell ye. When you have to turn back, instead o’ comin’ back here, you kin take the trail that goes round the woods, and that’ll bring

ye out into the stage road ag'in near the post-office at the Green Springs crossin' and the new hotel. That 'll be war ye 'll turn up, I reckon," he added, reflectively. "Fellers that come yer gunnin' and fishin' gin'rally do," he concluded, with a half-inquisitive air.

"Ah?" said Mr. Hamlin, quietly shedding the inquiry. "Green Springs Hotel is where the stage stops, eh?"

"Yes, and at the post-office," said the boy. "She 'll be along here soon," he added.

"If you mean the Santa Cruz stage," said Hamlin, "she 's here already. I passed her on the ridge half an hour ago."

The boy gave a sudden start, and a quick uneasy expression passed over his face. "Go 'long with ye!" he said, with a forced smile: "it ain't her time yet."

"But I *saw* her," repeated Hamlin, much amused. "Are you expecting company? Hullo! Where are you off to? Come back."

But his companion had already vanished in the thicket with the undeliberate and impulsive act of an animal. There was a momentary rustle in the alders fifty feet away, and then all was silent. The hidden brook

took up its monotonous murmur, the tapping of a distant woodpecker became suddenly audible, and Mr. Hamlin was again alone.

“Wonder whether he’s got parents in the stage, and has been playing truant here,” he mused, lazily. “Looked as if he’d been up to some devilment, or more like as if he was primed for it. If he’d been a little older, I’d have bet he was in league with some road-agents to watch the coach. Just my luck to have him light out as I was beginning to get some talk out of him.” He paused, looked at his watch, and straightened himself in his stirrups. “Four o’clock. I reckon I might as well try the woods and what that imp calls the ‘bresh;’ I may strike a shanty or a native by the way.”

With this determination, Mr. Hamlin urged his horse along the faint trail by the brink of the watercourse which the boy had just indicated. He had no definite end in view beyond the one that had brought him the day before to that locality — his quest of the unknown poetess. His clue would have seemed to ordinary humanity the faintest. He had merely noted the provincial name of a certain plant mentioned in the poem, and learned that its *habitat* was lim-

ited to the southern local range; while its peculiar nomenclature was clearly of French Creole or Gulf State origin. This gave him a large though sparsely-populated area for locality, while it suggested a settlement of Louisianians or Mississippians near the Summit, of whom, through their native gambling proclivities, he was professionally cognizant. But he mainly trusted Fortune. Secure in his faith in the feminine character of that goddess, he relied a great deal on her well-known weakness for scamps of his quality.

It was not long before he came to the "slide" — a lightly-cut or shallow ditch. It descended slightly in a course that was far from straight, at times diverging to avoid the obstacles of trees or boulders, at times shaving them so closely as to leave smooth abrasions along their sides made by the grinding passage of long logs down the incline. The track itself was slippery from this, and pre-occupied all Hamlin's skill as a horseman, even to the point of stopping his usual careless whistle. At the end of half an hour the track became level again, and he was confronted with a singular phenomenon.

He had entered the wood, and the trail

seemed to cleave through a far-stretching, motionless sea of ferns that flowed on either side to the height of his horse's flanks. The straight shafts of the trees rose like columns from their hidden bases and were lost again in a roof of impenetrable leafage, leaving a clear space of fifty feet between, through which the surrounding horizon of sky was perfectly visible. All the light that entered this vast sylvan hall came from the sides; nothing permeated from above; nothing radiated from below; the height of the crest on which the wood was placed gave it this lateral illumination, but gave it also the profound isolation of some temple raised by long-forgotten hands. In spite of the height of these clear shafts, they seemed dwarfed by the expanse of the wood, and in the farthest perspective the base of ferns and the capital of foliage appeared almost to meet. As the boy had warned him, the slide had turned aside, skirting the wood to follow the incline, and presently the little trail he now followed vanished utterly, leaving him and his horse adrift breast-high in this green and yellow sea of fronds. But Mr. Hamlin, imperious of obstacles, and touched by some curiosity, continued to advance lazily, taking the bear-

ings of a larger red-wood in the centre of the grove for his objective point. The elastic mass gave way before him, brushing his knees or combing his horse's flanks with wide-spread elfin fingers, and closing up behind him as he passed, as if to obliterate any track by which he might return. Yet his usual luck did not desert him here. Being on horseback, he found that he could detect what had been invisible to the boy and probably to all pedestrians, namely, that the growth was not equally dense, that there were certain thinner and more open spaces that he could take advantage of by more circuitous progression, always, however, keeping the bearings of the central tree. This he at last reached, and halted his panting horse. Here a new idea which had been haunting him since he entered the wood took fuller possession of him. He had seen or known all this before! There was a strange familiarity either in these objects or in the impression or spell they left upon him. He remembered the verses! Yes, this was the "underbrush" which the poetess had described: the gloom above and below, the light that seemed blown through it like the wind, the suggestion of hidden

life beneath this tangled luxuriance, which she alone had penetrated, — all this was here. But, more than that, here was the atmosphere that she had breathed into the plaintive melody of her verse. It did not necessarily follow that Mr. Hamlin's translation of her sentiment was the correct one, or that the ideas her verses had provoked in his mind were at all what had been hers: in his easy susceptibility he was simply thrown into a corresponding mood of emotion and relieved himself with song. One of the verses he had already associated in his mind with the rhythm of an old plantation melody, and it struck his fancy to take advantage of the solitude to try its effect. Humming to himself, at first softly, he at last grew bolder, and let his voice drift away through the stark pillars of the sylvan colonnade till it seemed to suffuse and fill it with no more effort than the light which strayed in on either side. Sitting thus, his hat thrown a little back from his clustering curls, the white neck and shoulders of his horse uplifting him above the crested mass of fern, his red sash the one fleck of color in their olive depths, I am afraid he looked much more like the real minstrel of the

grove than the unknown poetess who transfigured it. But this, as has been already indicated, was Jack Hamlin's peculiar gift. Even as he had previously outshone the vaquero in his borrowed dress, he now silenced and supplanted a few fluttering blue-jays — rightful tenants of the wood — with a more graceful and airy presence and a far sweeter voice.

The open horizon towards the west had taken a warmer color from the already slanting sun when Mr. Hamlin, having rested his horse, turned to that direction. He had noticed that the wood was thinner there, and, pushing forward, he was presently rewarded by the sound of far-off wheels, and knew he must be near the high-road that the boy had spoken of. Having given up his previous intention of crossing the stream, there seemed nothing better for him to do than to follow the truant's advice and take the road back to Green Springs. Yet he was loath to leave the wood, halting on its verge, and turning to look back into its charmed recesses. Once or twice — perhaps because he recalled the words of the poem — that yellowish sea of ferns had seemed instinct with hidden life, and he had even fancied, here

and there, a swaying of its plumed crests. Howbeit, he still lingered long enough for the open sunlight into which he had obtruded to point out the bravery of his handsome figure. Then he wheeled his horse, the light glanced from polished double bit and bridle-fripperies, caught his red sash and bullion buttons, struck a parting flash from his silver spurs, and he was gone!

For a moment the light streamed unbrokenly through the wood. And then it could be seen that the yellow mass of undergrowth *had* moved with the passage of another figure than his own. For ever since he had entered the shade, a woman, shawled in a vague, shapeless fashion, had watched him wonderingly, eagerly, excitedly, gliding from tree to tree as he advanced, or else dropping breathlessly below the fronds of fern whence she gazed at him as between parted fingers. When he wheeled she had run openly to the west, albeit with hidden face and still clinging shawl, and taken a last look at his retreating figure. And then, with a faint but lingering sigh, she drew back into the shadow of the wood again and vanished also.

CHAPTER III.

AT the end of twenty minutes Mr. Hamlin reined in his mare. He had just observed in the distant shadows of a by-lane that intersected his road the vanishing flutter of two light print dresses. Without a moment's hesitation he lightly swerved out of the high-road and followed the retreating figures.

As he neared them, they seemed to be two slim young girls, evidently so preoccupied with the rustic amusement of edging each other off the grassy border into the dust of the track that they did not perceive his approach. Little shrieks, slight scuffings, and interjections of "Cynthy! you limb!" "Quit that, Eunice, now!" and "I just call that real mean!" apparently drowned the sound of his canter in the soft dust. Checking his speed to a gentle trot, and pressing his horse close beside the opposite fence, he passed them with gravely uplifted hat and a serious, preoccupied air.

But in that single, seemingly conventional glance, Mr. Hamlin had seen that they were both pretty, and that one had the short upper lip of his errant little guide. A hundred yards farther on he halted, as if irresolutely, gazed doubtfully ahead of him, and then turned back. An expression of innocent — almost childlike — concern was clouding the rascal's face. It was well, as the two girls had drawn closely together, having been apparently surprised in the midst of a glowing eulogium of this glorious passing vision by its sudden return. At his nearer approach, the one with the short upper lip hid that piquant feature and the rest of her rosy face behind the other's shoulder, which was suddenly and significantly opposed to the advance of this handsome intruder, with a certain dignity, half real, half affected, but wholly charming. The protectress appeared — possibly from her defensive attitude — the superior of her companion.

Audacious as Jack was to his own sex, he had early learned that such rare but discomposing graces as he possessed required a certain apologetic attitude when presented to women, and that it was only a plain man who could be always complacently self-con-

fidant in their presence. There was, consequently, a hesitating lowering of this hypocrite's brown eyelashes as he said, in almost pained accents, —

“Excuse me, but I fear I've taken the wrong road. I'm going to Green Springs.”

“I reckon you've taken the wrong road, wherever you're going,” returned the young lady, having apparently made up her mind to resent each of Jack's perfections as a separate impertinence: “this is a *private* road.” She drew herself fairly up here, although gurgled at in the ear and pinched in the arm by her companion.

“I beg your pardon,” said Jack, meekly. “I see I'm trespassing on your grounds. I'm very sorry. Thank you for telling me. I should have gone on a mile or two farther, I suppose, until I came to your house,” he added, innocently.

“A mile or two! You'd have run chock ag'in' our gate in another minit,” said the short-lipped one, eagerly. But a sharp nudge from her companion sent her back again into cover, where she waited expectantly for another crushing retort from her protector.

But, alas! it did not come. One cannot

be always witty, and Jack looked distressed. Nevertheless, he took advantage of the pause.

“It was so stupid in me, as I think your brother” — looking at Short-lip — “very carefully told me the road.”

The two girls darted quick glances at each other. “Oh, Bawb!” said the first speaker, in wearied accents, — “*that* limb! He don’t keer.”

“But he *did* care,” said Hamlin, quietly, “and gave me a good deal of information. Thanks to him, I was able to see that ferny wood that’s so famous — about two miles up the road. You know — the one that there’s a poem written about!”

The shot told! Short-lip burst into a display of dazzling little teeth and caught the other girl convulsively by the shoulders. The superior girl bent her pretty brows, and said, “Eunice, what’s gone of ye? Quit that!” but, as Hamlin thought, paled slightly.

“Of course,” said Hamlin, quickly, “you know — the poem everybody’s talking about. Dear me! let me see! how does it go?” The rascal knit his brows, said, “Ah, yes,” and then murmured the verse he had lately sung quite as musically.

Short-lip was shamelessly exalted and excited. Really she could scarcely believe it! She already heard herself relating the whole occurrence. Here was the most beautiful young man she had ever seen — an entire stranger — talking to them in the most beautiful and natural way, right in the lane, and reciting poetry to her sister! It was like a novel — only more so. She thought that Cynthia, on the other hand, looked distressed, and — she must say it — “silly.”

All of which Jack noted, and was wise. He had got all he wanted — at present. He gathered up his reins.

“Thank you so much, and your brother, too, Miss Cynthia,” he said, without looking up. Then, adding, with a parting glance and smile, “But don’t tell Bob how stupid I was,” he swiftly departed.

In half an hour he was at the Green Springs Hotel. As he rode into the stable yard, he noticed that the coach had only just arrived, having been detained by a land-slip on the Summit road. With the recollection of Bob fresh in his mind, he glanced at the loungers at the stage office. The boy was not there, but a moment later Jack detected him among the waiting crowd at the post-

office opposite. With a view of following up his inquiries, he crossed the road as the boy entered the vestibule of the post-office. He arrived in time to see him unlock one of a row of numbered letter-boxes rented by subscribers, which occupied a partition by the window, and take out a small package and a letter. But in that brief glance Mr. Hamlin detected the printed address of the "Excelsior Magazine" on the wrapper. It was enough. Luck was certainly with him.

He had time to get rid of the wicked sparkle that had lit his dark eyes, and to lounge carelessly towards the boy as the latter broke open the package, and then hurriedly concealed it in his jacket-pocket, and started for the door. Mr. Hamlin quickly followed him, unperceived, and, as he stepped into the street, gently tapped him on the shoulder. The boy turned and faced him quickly. But Mr. Hamlin's eyes showed nothing but lazy good-humor.

"Hullo, Bob. Where are you going?"

The boy again looked up suspiciously at this revelation of his name.

"Home," he said, briefly.

"Oh, over yonder," said Hamlin, calmly. "I don't mind walking with you as far as the lane."

He saw the boy's eyes glance furtively towards an alley that ran beside the blacksmith's shop a few rods ahead, and was convinced that he intended to evade him there. Slipping his arm carelessly in the youth's, he concluded to open fire at once.

"Bob," he said, with irresistible gravity, "I did not know when I met you this morning that I had the honor of addressing a poet — none other than the famous author of 'Underbrush.'"

The boy started back, and endeavored to withdraw his arm, but Mr. Hamlin tightened his hold, without, however, changing his careless expression.

"You see," he continued, "the editor is a friend of mine, and, being afraid this package might not get into the right hands — as you didn't give your name — he deputized me to come here and see that it was all square. As you're rather young, for all you're so gifted, I reckon I'd better go home with you, and take a receipt from your parents. That's about square, I think?"

The consternation of the boy was so evident and so far beyond Mr. Hamlin's expectation that he instantly halted him, gazed into his shifting eyes, and gave a long whistle.

“Who said it was for *me*? Wot you talkin’ about? Lemme go!” gasped the boy, with the short intermittent breath of mingled fear and passion.

“Bob,” said Mr. Hamlin, in a singularly colorless voice which was very rare with him, and an expression quite unlike his own, “what is your little game?”

The boy looked down in dogged silence.

“Out with it! Who are you playing this on?”

“It’s all among my own folks; it’s nothin’ to *you*,” said the boy, suddenly beginning to struggle violently, as if inspired by this extenuating fact.

“Among your own folks, eh? White Violet and the rest, eh? But *she*’s not in it?”

No reply.

“Hand me over that package. I’ll give it back to you again.”

The boy handed it to Mr. Hamlin. He read the letter, and found the inclosure contained a twenty-dollar gold-piece. A half-supercilious smile passed over his face at this revelation of the inadequate emoluments of literature and the trifling inducements to crime. Indeed, I fear the affair began to

take a less serious moral complexion in his eyes.

“Then White Violet — your sister Cynthia, you know,” continued Mr. Hamlin, in easy parenthesis — “wrote for this?” holding the coin contemplatively in his fingers, “and you calculated to nab it yourself?”

The quick searching glance with which Bob received the name of his sister, Mr. Hamlin attributed only to his natural surprise that this stranger should be on such familiar terms with her; but the boy responded immediately and bluntly: —

“No! *She* did n’t write for it. She did n’t want nobody to know who she was. Nobody wrote for it but me. Nobody *knew folks was paid for po’try but me*. I found it out from a feller. I wrote for it. *I* was n’t goin’ to let that skunk of an editor have it himself!”

“And you thought *you* would take it,” said Hamlin, his voice resuming its old tone. “Well, George — I mean Bob, your conduct was praiseworthy, although your intentions were bad. Still, twenty dollars is rather too much for your trouble. Suppose we say five and call it square?” He handed the astonished boy five dollars. “Now, George

Washington," he continued, taking four other twenty-dollar pieces from his pocket, and adding them to the inclosure, which he carefully refolded, "I'm going to give you another chance to live up to your reputation. You'll take that package, and hand it to White Violet, and say you found it, just as it is, in the lock-box. I'll keep the letter, for it would knock you endways if it was seen, and I'll make it all right with the editor. But, as I've got to tell him that I've seen White Violet myself, and know she's got it, I expect *you* to manage in some way to have me see her. I'll manage the rest of it; and I won't blow on you, either. You'll come back to the hotel, and tell me what you've done. And now, George," concluded Mr. Hamlin, succeeding at last in fixing the boy's evasive eye with a peculiar look, "it may be just as well for you to understand that I know every nook and corner of this place, that I've already been through that underbrush you spoke of once this morning, and that I've got a mare that can go wherever *you* can, and a d—d sight quicker!"

"I'll give the package to White Violet," said the boy, doggedly.

“And you ’ll come back to the hotel?”

The boy hesitated, and then said, “I ’ll come back.”

“All right, then. *Adios*, general.”

Bob disappeared around the corner of a cross-road at a rapid trot, and Mr. Hamlin turned into the hotel.

“Smart little chap that!” he said to the barkeeper.

“You bet!” returned the man, who, having recognized Mr. Hamlin, was delighted at the prospect of conversing with a gentleman of such decidedly dangerous reputation. “But he’s been allowed to run a little wild since old man Delatour died, and the widder’s got enough to do, I reckon, lookin’ arter her four gals, and takin’ keer of old Delatour’s ranch over yonder. I guess it’s pretty hard sleddin’ for her sometimes to get clo’es and grub for the famerly, without follerin’ Bob around.”

“Sharp girls, too, I reckon; one of them writes things for the magazines, does n’t she? — Cynthia, eh?” said Mr. Hamlin, carelessly.

Evidently this fact was not a notorious one to the barkeeper. He, however, said, “Dunno; mabbee; her father was eddicated, and

the widder Delatour, too, though she 's sorter queer, I 've heard tell. Lord! Mr. Hamlin, *you* oughter remember old man Delatour! From Opelousas, Louisiany, you know! High old sport — French style, frilled bosom — open-handed, and us'ter buck ag'in' faro awful! Why, he dropped a heap o' money to *you* over in San José two years ago at poker! You must remember him!"

The slightest possible flush passed over Mr. Hamlin's brow under the shadow of his hat, but did not get lower than his eyes. He suddenly *had* recalled the spendthrift Delatour perfectly, and as quickly regretted now that he had not doubled the honorarium he had just sent to his portionless daughter. But he only said, coolly, "No," and then, raising his pale face and audacious eyes, continued in his laziest and most insulting manner, "no: the fact is, my mind is just now preoccupied in wondering if the gas is leaking anywhere, and if anything is ever served over this bar except elegant conversation. When the gentleman who mixes drinks comes back, perhaps you 'll be good enough to tell him to send a whisky sour to Mr. Jack Hamlin in the parlor. Meantime, you can turn off your soda fountain: I don't want any fizz in mine."

Having thus quite recovered himself, Mr. Hamlin lounged gracefully across the hall into the parlor. As he did so, a darkish young man, with a slim boyish figure, a thin face, and a discontented expression, rose from an armchair, held out his hand, and, with a saturnine smile, said: —

“Jack!”

“Fred!”

The two men remained gazing at each other with a half-amused, half-guarded expression. Mr. Hamlin was first to begin. “I did n’t think *you’d* be such a fool as to try on this kind of thing, Fred,” he said, half seriously.

“Yes, but it was to keep you from being a much bigger one that I hunted you up,” said the editor, mischievously. “Read that. I got it an hour after you left.” And he placed a little triumphantly in Jack’s hand the letter he had received from White Violet.

Mr. Hamlin read it with an unmoved face, and then laid his two hands on the editor’s shoulders. “Yes, my young friend, and you sat down and wrote her a pretty letter and sent her twenty dollars — which, permit me to say, was d—d poor pay! But that is n’t

your fault, I reckon: it's the meanness of your proprietors."

"But it is n't the question, either, just now, Jack, however you have been able to answer it. Do you mean to say seriously that you want to know anything more of a woman who could write such a letter?"

"I don't know," said Jack, cheerfully. "She might be a devilish sight funnier than if she had n't written it — which is the fact."

"You mean to say *she* did n't write it?"

"Yes."

"Who did, then?"

"Her brother Bob."

After a moment's scrutiny of his friend's bewildered face, Mr. Hamlin briefly related his adventures, from the moment of his meeting Bob at the mountain-stream to the bar-keeper's gossiping comment and sequel. "Therefore," he concluded, "the author of 'Underbrush' is Miss Cynthia Delatour, one of four daughters of a widow who lives two miles from here at the crossing. I shall see her this evening and make sure; but tomorrow morning you will pay me the breakfast you owe me. She's good-looking, but I can't say I fancy the poetic style: it's a little too high-toned for me. However, I

love my love with a C, because she is your Contributor ; I hate her with a C, because of her Connections ; I met her by Chance and treated her with Civility ; her name is Cynthia, and she lives on a Cross-road."

"But you surely don't expect you will ever see Bob, again!" said the editor, impatiently. "You have trusted him with enough to start him for the Sandwich Islands, to say nothing of the ruinous precedent you have established in his mind of the value of poetry. I am surprised that a man of your knowledge of the world would have faith in that imp the second time."

"My knowledge of the world," returned Mr. Hamlin, sententiously, "tells me that's the only way you can trust anybody. *Once* does n't make a habit, nor show a character. I could see by his bungling that he had never tried this on before. Just now the temptation to wipe out his punishment by doing the square thing, and coming back a sort of hero, is stronger than any other. 'T is n't everybody that gets that chance," he added, with an odd laugh.

Nevertheless, three hours passed without bringing Bob. The two men had gone to the billiard-room, when a waiter brought a

note, which he handed to Mr. Hamlin with some apologetic hesitation. It bore no superscription, but had been brought by a boy who described Mr. Hamlin perfectly, and requested that the note should be handed to him with the remark that "Bob had come back."

"And is he there now?" asked Mr. Hamlin, holding the letter unopened in his hand.

"No, sir; he run right off."

The editor laughed, but Mr. Hamlin, having perused the note, put away his cue. "Come into my room," he said.

The editor followed, and Mr. Hamlin laid the note before him on the table. "Bob's all right," he said, "for I'll bet a thousand dollars that note is genuine."

It was delicately written, in a cultivated feminine hand, utterly unlike the scrawl that had first excited the editor's curiosity, and ran as follows: —

He who brought me the bounty of your friend — for I cannot call a recompense so far above my deserts by any other name — gives me also to understand that you wished for an interview. I cannot believe that this is mere idle curiosity, or that you have any

motive that is not kindly and honorable, but I feel that I must beg and pray you not to seek to remove the veil behind which I have chosen to hide myself and my poor efforts from identification. I *think* I know you — I *know* I know myself — well enough to believe it would give neither of us any happiness. You will say to your generous friend that he has already given the Unknown more comfort and hope than could come from any personal compliment or publicity, and you will yourself believe that you have all unconsciously brightened a sad woman's fancy with a Dream and a Vision that before to-day had been unknown to

WHITE VIOLET.

“Have you read it?” asked Mr. Hamlin.

“Yes.”

“Then you don't want to see it any more, or even remember you ever saw it,” said Mr. Hamlin, carefully tearing the note into small pieces and letting them drift from the windows like blown blossoms.

“But, I say, Jack! look here; I don't understand! You say you have already seen this woman, and yet” —

“I *have n't* seen her,” said Jack, composedly, turning from the window.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that you and I, Fred, are going to drop this fooling right here and leave this place for Frisco by first stage to-morrow, and — that I owe you that dinner.”

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN the stage for San Francisco rolled away the next morning with Mr. Hamlin and the editor, the latter might have recognized in the occupant of a dust-covered buggy that was coming leisurely towards them the tall figure, long beard, and straight duster of his late visitor, Mr. James Bowers. For Mr. Bowers was on the same quest that the others had just abandoned. Like Mr. Hamlin, he had been left to his own resources, but Mr. Bowers's resources were a life-long experience and technical skill; he too had noted the topographical indications of the poem, and his knowledge of the sylvia of Upper California pointed as unerringly as Mr. Hamlin's luck to the cryptogamous haunts of the Summit. Such abnormal growths were indicative of certain localities only, but, as they were not remunerative from a pecuniary point of view, were to be avoided by the sagacious woodman. It was clear, therefore, that Mr. Bowers's visit to

Green Springs was not professional, and that he did not even figuratively accept the omen.

He baited and rested his horse at the hotel, where his bucolic exterior, however, did not elicit that attention which had been accorded to Mr. Hamlin's charming insolence or the editor's cultivated manner. But he glanced over a township map on the walls of the reading-room, and took note of the names of the owners of different lots, farms, and ranches, passing that of Delatour with the others. Then he drove leisurely in the direction of the woods, and, reaching them, tied his horse to a young sapling in the shade, and entered their domain with a shambling but familiar woodman's step.

It is not the purpose of this brief chronicle to follow Mr. Bowers in his professional diagnosis of the locality. He recognized Nature in one of her moods of wasteful extravagance, — a waste that his experienced eye could tell was also sapping the vitality of those outwardly robust shafts that rose around him. He knew, without testing them, that half of these fair-seeming columns were hollow and rotten at the core; he could detect the chill odor of decay

through the hot balsamic spices stirred by the wind that streamed through their long aisles, — like incense mingling with the exhalations of a crypt. He stopped now and then to part the heavy fronds down to their roots in the dank moss, seeing again, as he had told the editor, the weird *second* twilight through their miniature stems, and the microcosm of life that filled it. But, even while paying this tribute to the accuracy of the unknown poetess, he was, like his predecessor, haunted more strongly by the atmosphere and melody of her verse. Its spell was upon him, too. Unlike Mr. Hamlin, he did not sing. He only halted once or twice, silently combing his straight narrow beard with his three fingers, until the action seemed to draw down the lines of his face into limitless dejection, and an inscrutable melancholy filled his small gray eyes. The few birds which had hailed Mr. Hamlin as their successful rival fled away before the grotesque and angular half-length of Mr. Bowers, as if the wind had blown in a scarecrow from the distant farms.

Suddenly he observed the figure of a woman, with her back towards him, leaning motionless against a tree, and apparently

gazing intently in the direction of Green Springs. He had approached so near to her that it was singular she had not heard him. Mr. Bowers was a bashful man in the presence of the other sex. He felt exceedingly embarrassed; if he could have gone away without attracting her attention he would have done so. Neither could he remain silent, a tacit spy of her meditation. He had recourse to a polite but singularly artificial cough.

To his surprise, she gave a faint cry, turned quickly towards him, and then shrank back and lapsed quite helpless against the tree. Her evident distress overcame his bashfulness. He ran towards her.

“I’m sorry I frightened ye, ma’am, but I was afraid I might skeer ye more if I lay low, and said nothin’.”

Even then, if she had been some fair young country girl, he would have relapsed after this speech into his former bashfulness. But the face and figure she turned towards him were neither young nor fair: a woman past forty, with gray threads and splashes in her brushed-back hair, which was turned over her ears in two curls like frayed strands of rope. Her forehead was rather high than

broad, her nose large but well-shaped, and her eyes full but so singularly light in color as to seem almost sightless. The short upper lip of her large mouth displayed her teeth in an habitual smile, which was in turn so flatly contradicted by every other line of her careworn face that it seemed gratuitously artificial. Her figure was hidden by a shapeless garment that partook equally of the shawl, cloak, and wrapper.

“I am very foolish,” she began, in a voice and accent that at once asserted a cultivated woman, “but I so seldom meet anybody here that a voice quite startled me. That, and the heat,” she went on, wiping her face, into which the color was returning violently — “for I seldom go out as early as this — I suppose affected me.”

Mr. Bowers had that innate Far-Western reverence for womanhood which I fancy challenges the most polished politeness. He remained patient, undemonstrative, self-effacing, and respectful before her, his angular arm slightly but not obtrusively advanced, the offer of protection being in the act rather than in any spoken word, and requiring no response.

“Like as not, ma’am,” he said, cheerfully,

looking everywhere but in her burning face. "The sun *is* pow'ful hot at this time o' day; I felt it myself comin' yer, and, though the damp of this timber kinder sets it back, it's likely to come out ag'in. Ye can't check it no more than the sap in that choked limb thar" — he pointed ostentatiously where a fallen pine had been caught in the bent and twisted arm of another, but which still put out a few green tassels beyond the point of impact. "Do you live far from here, ma'am?" he added.

"Only as far as the first turning below the hill."

"I've got my buggy here, and I'm goin' that way, and I can jist set ye down thar cool and comfortable. Ef," he continued, in the same assuring tone, without waiting for a reply, "ye'll jist take a good grip of my arm thar," curving his wrist and hand behind him like a shepherd's crook, "I'll go first, and break away the brush for ye."

She obeyed mechanically, and they fared on through the thick ferns in this fashion for some moments, he looking ahead, occasionally dropping a word of caution or encouragement, but never glancing at her face. When they reached the buggy he lifted her

into it carefully, — and perpendicularly, it struck her afterwards, very much as if she had been a transplanted sapling with bared and sensitive roots, — and then gravely took his place beside her.

“Bein’ in the timber trade myself, ma’am,” he said, gathering up the reins, “I chanced to sight these woods, and took a look around. My name is Bowers, of Mendocino; I reckon there ain’t much that grows in the way o’ standin’ timber on the Pacific Slope that I don’t know and can’t locate, though I *do* say it. I’ve got ez big a mill, and ez big a run in my district, ez there is anywhere. Ef you’re ever up my way, you ask for Bowers — Jim Bowers — and that’s *me*.”

There is probably nothing more conducive to conversation between strangers than a wholesome and early recognition of each other’s foibles. Mr. Bowers, believing his chance acquaintance a superior woman, naïvely spoke of himself in a way that he hoped would reassure her that she was not compromising herself in accepting his civility, and so satisfy what must be her inevitable pride. On the other hand, the woman regained her self-possession by this exhibition of Mr. Bowers’s vanity, and, revived by

the refreshing breeze caused by the rapid motion of the buggy along the road, thanked him graciously.

“ I suppose there are many strangers at the Green Springs Hotel,” she said, after a pause.

“ I did n't get to see 'em, as I only put up my hoss there,” he replied. “ But I know the stage took some away this mornin': it seemed pretty well loaded up when I passed it.”

The woman drew a deep sigh. The act struck Mr. Bowers as a possible return of her former nervous weakness. Her attention must at once be distracted at any cost — even conversation.

“ Perhaps,” he began, with sudden and appalling lightness, “ I 'm a-talkin' to Mrs. McFadden?”

“ No,” said the woman, abstractedly.

“ Then it must be Mrs. Delatour? There are only two township lots on that cross-road.”

“ My name *is* Delatour,” she said, somewhat wearily.

Mr. Bowers was conversationally stranded. He was not at all anxious to know her name, yet, knowing it now, it seemed to suggest

that there was nothing more to say. He would, of course, have preferred to ask her if she had read the poetry about the Underbrush, and if she knew the poetess, and what she thought of it; but the fact that she appeared to be an "edicated" woman made him sensitive of displaying technical ignorance in his manner of talking about it. She might ask him if it was "subjective" or "objective" — two words he had heard used at the Debating Society at Mendocino on the question, "Is poetry morally beneficial?" For a few moments he was silent. But presently she took the initiative in conversation, at first slowly and abstractedly, and then, as if appreciating his sympathetic reticence, or mayhap finding some relief in monotonous expression, talked mechanically, deliberately, but unostentatiously about herself. So colorless was her intonation that at times it did not seem as if she was talking to him, but repeating some conversation she had held with another.

She had lived there ever since she had been in California. Her husband had bought the Spanish title to the property when they first married. The property at his death was found to be greatly involved;

she had been obliged to part with much of it to support her children — four girls and a boy. She had been compelled to withdraw the girls from the convent at Santa Clara to help about the house; the boy was too young — she feared, too shiftless — to do anything. The farm did not pay; the land was poor; she knew nothing about farming; she had been brought up in New Orleans, where her father had been a judge, and she did n't understand country life. Of course she had been married too young — as all girls were. Lately she had thought of selling off and moving to San Francisco, where she would open a boarding-house or a school for young ladies. He could advise her, perhaps, of some good opportunity. Her own girls were far enough advanced to assist her in teaching; one particularly, Cynthia, was quite clever, and spoke French and Spanish fluently.

As Mr. Bowers was familiar with many of these counts in the feminine American indictment of life generally, he was not perhaps greatly moved. But in the last sentence he thought he saw an opening to return to his main object, and, looking up cautiously, said: —

“And mebbe write po'try now and then?”

To his great discomfiture, the only effect of this suggestion was to check his companion's speech for some moments and apparently throw her back into her former abstraction. Yet, after a long pause, as they were turning into the lane, she said, as if continuing the subject: —

“I only hope that, whatever my daughters may do, they won't marry young.”

The yawning breaches in the Delatour gates and fences presently came in view. They were supposed to be reinforced by half a dozen dogs, who, however, did their duty with what would seem to be the prevailing inefficiency, retiring after a single perfunctory yelp to shameless stretching, scratching, and slumber. Their places were taken on the veranda by two negro servants, two girls respectively of eight and eleven, and a boy of fourteen, who remained silently staring. As Mr. Bowers had accepted the widow's polite invitation to enter, she was compelled, albeit in an equally dazed and helpless way, to issue some preliminary orders: —

“Now, Chloe — I mean aunt Dinah — do take Eunice — I mean Victorine and

Una — away, and — you know — tidy them ; and you, Sarah — it 's Sarah, is n't it? — lay some refreshment in the parlor for this gentleman. And, Bob, tell your sister Cynthia to come here with Eunice." As Bob still remained staring at Mr. Bowers, she added, in weary explanation, " Mr. Bowers brought me over from the Summit woods in his buggy — it was so hot. There — shake hands and thank him, and run away — do ! "

They crossed a broad but scantily-furnished hall. Everywhere the same look of hopeless incompleteness, temporary utility, and premature decay ; most of the furniture was mismatched and misplaced ; many of the rooms had changed their original functions or doubled them ; a smell of cooking came from the library, on whose shelves, mingled with books, were dresses and household linen, and through the door of a room into which Mrs. Delatour retired to remove her duster Mr. Bowers caught a glimpse of a bed, and of a table covered with books and papers, at which a tall, fair girl was writing. In a few moments Mrs. Delatour returned, accompanied by this girl, and Eunice, her short-lipped sister. Bob, who joined the party seated around Mr. Bowers and a table

set with cake, a decanter, and glasses, completed the group. Emboldened by the presence of the tall Cynthia and his glimpse of her previous literary attitude, Mr. Bowers resolved to make one more attempt.

"I suppose these yer young ladies sometimes go to the wood, too?" As his eye rested on Cynthia, she replied:—

"Oh, yes."

"I reckon on account of the purty shadows down in the brush, and the soft light, eh? and all that?" he continued, with a playful manner but a serious accession of color.

"Why, the woods belong to us. It's mar's property!" broke in Eunice with a flash of teeth.

"Well, Lordy, I wanter know!" said Mr. Bowers, in some astonishment. "Why, that's right in my line, too! I've been sightin' timber all along here, and that's how I dropped in on yer mar." Then, seeing a look of eagerness light up the faces of Bob and Eunice, he was encouraged to make the most of his opportunity. "Why, ma'am," he went on, cheerfully, "I reckon you're holdin' that wood at a pretty stiff figger, now."

“Why?” asked Mrs. Delatour, simply.

Mr. Bowers delivered a wink at Bob and Eunice, who were still watching him with anxiety. “Well, not on account of the actool timber, for the best of it ain’t sound,” he said, “but on account of its bein’ famous! Everybody that reads that pow’ful pretty poem about it in the ‘Excelsior Magazine’ wants to see it. Why, it would pay the Green Springs hotel-keeper to buy it up for his customers. But I s’pose you reckon to keep it—along with the poetess—in your famerly?”

Although Mr. Bowers long considered this speech as the happiest and most brilliant effort of his life, its immediate effect was not, perhaps, all that could be desired. The widow turned upon him a restrained and darkening face. Cynthia half rose with an appealing “Oh, mar!” and Bob and Eunice, having apparently pinched each other to the last stage of endurance, retired precipitately from the room in a prolonged giggle.

“I have not yet thought of disposing of the Summit woods, Mr. Bowers,” said Mrs. Delatour, coldly, “but if I should do so, I will consult you. You must excuse the children, who see so little company, they are

quite unmanageable when strangers are present. Cynthia, *will* you see if the servants have looked after Mr. Bowers's horse? You know Bob is not to be trusted."

There was clearly nothing else for Mr. Bowers to do but to take his leave, which he did respectfully, if not altogether hopefully. But when he had reached the lane, his horse shied from the unwonted spectacle of Bob, swinging his hat, and apparently awaiting him, from the fork of a wayside sapling.

"Hol' up, mister. Look here!"

Mr. Bowers pulled up. Bob dropped into the road, and, after a backward glance over his shoulder, said:—

"Drive 'longside the fence in the shadow." As Mr. Bowers obeyed, Bob approached the wheels of the buggy in a manner half shy, half mysterious. "You wanter buy them Summit woods, mister?"

"Well, per'aps, sonny. Why?" smiled Mr. Bowers.

"Coz I'll tell ye suthin'. Don't you be fooled into allowin' that Cynthia wrote that po'try. She did n't—no more'n Eunice nor me. Mar kinder let ye think it, 'cos she don't want folks to think *she* did it. But mar wrote that po'try herself; wrote it out

o' them thar woods — all by herself. Thar 's a heap more po'try thar, you bet, and jist as good. And she 's the one that kin write it — you hear me? That 's my mar, every time! You buy that thar wood, and get mar to run it for po'try, and you 'll make your pile, sure! I ain't lyin'. You 'd better look spry: thar 's another feller snoopin' 'round yere — only he barked up the wrong tree, and thought it was Cynthia, jist as you did."

"Another feller?" repeated the astonished Bowers.

"Yes; a rig'lar sport. He was orful keen on that po'try, too, you bet. So you 'd better hump yourself afore somebody else cuts in. Mar got a hundred dollars for that pome, from that editor feller and his pardner. I reckon that 's the rig'lar price, eh?" he added, with a sudden suspicious caution.

"I reckon so," replied Mr. Bowers, blankly. "But — look here, Bob! Do you mean to say it was your mother — your *mother*, Bob, who wrote that poem? Are you sure?"

"D' ye think I 'm lyin'?" said Bob, scornfully. "Don't I know? Don't I copy 'em out plain for her, so as folks won't know

her handwrite? Go 'way! you 're loony!" Then, possibly doubting if this latter expression were strictly diplomatic with the business in hand, he added, in half-reproach, half-apology, "Don't ye see I don't want ye to be fooled into losin' yer chance o' buying up that Summit wood? It 's the cold truth I 'm tellin' ye."

Mr. Bowers no longer doubted it. Disappointed as he undoubtedly was at first, — and even self-deceived, — he recognized in a flash the grim fact that the boy had stated. He recalled the apparition of the sad-faced woman in the wood — her distressed manner, that to his inexperienced mind now took upon itself the agitated trembling of disturbed mystic inspiration. A sense of sadness and remorse succeeded his first shock of disappointment.

"Well, are ye going to buy the woods?" said Bob, eying him grimly. "Ye 'd better say."

Mr. Bowers started. "I should n't wonder, Bob," he said, with a smile, gathering up his reins. "Anyhow, I 'm comin' back to see your mother this afternoon. And meantime, Bob, you keep the first chance for me."

He drove away, leaving the youthful diplomat standing with his bare feet in the dust. For a minute or two the young gentleman amused himself by a few light saltatory steps in the road. Then a smile of scornful superiority, mingled perhaps with a sense of previous slights and unappreciation, drew back his little upper lip, and brightened his mottled cheek.

"I'd like ter know," he said, darkly, "what this yer God-forsaken famerly would do without *me!*"

CHAPTER V.

IT is to be presumed that the editor and Mr. Hamlin mutually kept to their tacit agreement to respect the impersonality of the poetess, for during the next three months the subject was seldom alluded to by either. Yet in that period White Violet had sent two other contributions, and on each occasion Mr. Hamlin had insisted upon increasing the honorarium to the amount of his former gift. In vain the editor pointed out the danger of this form of munificence; Mr. Hamlin retorted by saying that if he refused he would appeal to the proprietor, who certainly would not object to taking the credit of this liberality. "As to the risks," concluded Jack, sententiously, "I'll take them; and as far as you're concerned, you certainly get the worth of your money."

Indeed, if popularity was an indiction, this had become suddenly true. For the poetess's third contribution, without changing its strong local color and individuality, had

been an unexpected outburst of human passion — a love-song, that touched those to whom the subtler meditative graces of the poetess had been unknown. Many people had listened to this impassioned but despairing cry from some remote and charmed solitude, who had never read poetry before, who translated it into their own limited vocabulary and more limited experience, and were inexpressibly affected to find that they, too, understood it ; it was caught up and echoed by the feverish, adventurous, and unsatisfied life that filled that day and time. Even the editor was surprised and frightened. Like most cultivated men, he distrusted popularity : like all men who believe in their own individual judgment, he doubted collective wisdom. Yet now that his *protégée* had been accepted by others, he questioned that judgment and became her critic. It struck him that her sudden outburst was strained ; it seemed to him that in this mere contortion of passion the sibyl's robe had become rudely disarranged. He spoke to Hamlin, and even approached the tabooed subject.

“Did you see anything that suggested this sort of business in — in — that woman — I mean in — your pilgrimage, Jack ?”

“No,” responded Jack, gravely. “But it’s easy to see she’s got hold of some hay-footed fellow up there in the mountains with straws in his hair, and is playing him for all he’s worth. You won’t get much more poetry out of her, I reckon.”

It was not long after this conversation that one afternoon, when the editor was alone, Mr. James Bowers entered the editorial room with much of the hesitation and irresolution of his previous visit. As the editor had not only forgotten him, but even dissociated him with the poetess, Mr. Bowers was fain to meet his unresponsive eye and manner with some explanation.

“Ye disremember my comin’ here, Mr. Editor, to ask you the name o’ the lady who called herself ‘White Violet,’ and how you allowed you could n’t give it, but would write and ask for it?”

Mr. Editor, leaning back in his chair, now remembered the occurrence, but was distressed to add that the situation remained unchanged, and that he had received no such permission.

“Never mind *that*, my lad,” said Mr. Bowers, gravely, waving his hand. “I understand all that; but, ez I’ve known the

lady ever since, and am now visiting her at her house on the Summit, I reckon it don't make much matter."

It was quite characteristic of Mr. Bowers's smileless earnestness that he made no ostentation of this dramatic retort, nor of the undisguised stupefaction of the editor.

"Do you mean to say that you have met White Violet, the author of these poems?" repeated the editor.

"Which her name is Delatour, — the widder Delatour, — ez she has herself give me permission to tell you," continued Mr. Bowers, with a certain abstracted and automatic precision that dissipated any suggestion of malice in the reversed situation.

"Delatour! — a widow!" repeated the editor.

"With five children," continued Mr. Bowers. Then, with unalterable gravity, he briefly gave an outline of her condition and the circumstances of his acquaintance with her.

"But I reckoned *you* might have known suthin' o' this; though she never let on you did," he concluded, eying the editor with troubled curiosity.

The editor did not think it necessary to

implicate Mr. Hamlin. He said, briefly, "I? Oh, no!"

"Of course, *you* might not have seen her?" said Mr. Bowers, keeping the same grave, troubled gaze on the editor.

"Of course not," said the editor, somewhat impatient under the singular scrutiny of Mr. Bowers; "and I'm very anxious to know how she looks. Tell me, what is she like?"

"She is a fine, pow'ful, eddicated woman," said Mr. Bowers, with slow deliberation. "Yes, sir, — a pow'ful woman, havin' grand ideas of her own, and holdin' to 'em." He had withdrawn his eyes from the editor, and apparently addressed the ceiling in confidence.

"But what does she look like, Mr. Bowers?" said the editor, smiling.

"Well, sir, she looks — *like — it!* Yes," — with deliberate caution, — "I should say, just like it."

After a pause, apparently to allow the editor to materialize this ravishing description, he said, gently, "Are you busy just now?"

"Not very. What can I do for you?"

"Well, not much for *me*, I reckon," he

returned, with a deeper respiration, that was his nearest approach to a sigh, "but suthin' perhaps for yourself and — another. Are you married?"

"No," said the editor, promptly.

"Nor engaged to any — young lady?" — with great politeness.

"No."

"Well, mebbe you think it a queer thing for me to say, — mebbe you reckon you *know* it ez well ez anybody, — but it's my opinion that White Violet is in love with you."

"With me?" ejaculated the editor, in a hopeless astonishment that at last gave way to an incredulous and irresistible laugh.

A slight touch of pain passed over Mr. Bowers's dejected face, but left the deep outlines set with a rude dignity. "It's so," he said, slowly, "though, as a young man and a gay feller, ye may think it's funny."

"No, not funny, but a terrible blunder, Mr. Bowers, for I give you my word I know nothing of the lady and have never set eyes upon her."

"No, but she has on *you*. I can't say," continued Mr. Bowers, with sublime *naïveté*, "that I'd ever recognize you from her de-

scription, but a woman o' that kind don't see with her eyes like you and me, but with all her senses to onct, and a heap more that ain't senses as we know 'em. The same eyes that seed down through the brush and ferns in the Summit woods, the same ears that heerd the music of the wind trailin' through the pines, don't see you with my eyes or hear you with my ears. And when she paints you, it's nat'ril for a woman with that pow'ful mind and grand ideas to dip her brush into her heart's blood for warmth and color. Yer smilin', young man. Well, go on and smile at me, my lad, but not at her. For you don't know her. When you know her story as I do, when you know she was made a wife afore she ever knew what it was to be a young woman, when you know that the man she married never understood the kind o' critter he was tied to no more than ef he'd been a steer yoked to a Morgan colt, when ye know she had children growin' up around her afore she had given over bein' a sort of child herself, when ye know she worked and slaved for that man and those children about the house — her heart, her soul, and all her pow'ful mind bein' all the time in the woods along with the flickerin'

leaves and the shadders, — when ye mind she could n't get the small ways o' the ranch because she had the big ways o' Natur' that made it, — then you 'll understand her."

Impressed by the sincerity of his visitor's manner, touched by the unexpected poetry of his appeal, and yet keenly alive to the absurdity of an incomprehensible blunder somewhere committed, the editor gasped almost hysterically, —

"But why should all this make her in love with *me*?"

"Because ye are both gifted," returned Mr. Bowers, with sad but unconquerable conviction; "because ye 're both, so to speak, in a line o' idees and business that draws ye together, — to lean on each other and trust each other ez pardners. Not that *ye* are ezakly her ekal," he went on, with a return to his previous exasperating *naïveté*, "though I 've heerd promisin' things of ye, and ye 're still young, but in matters o' this kind there is allers one ez hez to be looked up to by the other, — and gin'rally the wrong one. She looks up to you, Mr. Editor, — it's part of her po'try, — ez she looks down inter the brush and sees more than is plain to you and me. Not," he continued, with a courteously depre-

cating wave of the hand, "ez you hain't bin kind to her — mebbe *too* kind. For thar's the purty letter you writ her, thar's the per-lite, easy, captivatin' way you had with her gals and that boy — hold on!" — as the editor made a gesture of despairing renunciation, — "I ain't sayin' you ain't right in keepin' it to yourself, — and thar's the extry money you sent her every time. Stop! she knows it was *extry*, for she made a p'int o' gettin' me to find out the market price o' po'try in papers and magazines, and she reckons you've bin payin' her four hundred per cent. above them figgers — hold on! I ain't sayin' it ain't free and liberal in you, and I'd have done the same thing; yet *she* thinks" —

But the editor had risen hastily to his feet with flushing cheeks.

"One moment, Mr. Bowers," he said, hurriedly. "This is the most dreadful blunder of all. The gift is not mine. It was the spontaneous offering of another who really admired our friend's work, — a gentleman who" — He stopped suddenly.

The sound of a familiar voice, lightly humming, was borne along the passage; the light tread of a familiar foot was approach-

ing. The editor turned quickly towards the open door, — so quickly that Mr. Bowers was fain to turn also.

For a charming instant the figure of Jack Hamlin, handsome, careless, and confident, was framed in the doorway. His dark eyes, with their habitual scorn of his average fellow-man, swept superciliously over Mr. Bowers, and rested for an instant with caressing familiarity on the editor.

“Well, sonny, any news from the old girl at the Summit?”

“No-o,” hastily stammered the editor, with a half-hysterical laugh. “No, Jack. Excuse me a moment.”

“All right; busy, I see. *Hasta mañana.*”

The picture vanished, the frame was empty.

“You see,” continued the editor, turning to Mr. Bowers, “there has been a mistake. I” — but he stopped suddenly at the ashen face of Mr. Bowers, still fixed in the direction of the vanished figure.

“Are you ill?”

Mr. Bowers did not reply, but slowly withdrew his eyes, and turned them heavily on the editor. Then, drawing a longer, deeper breath, he picked up his soft felt hat, and,

moulding it into shape in his hands as if preparing to put it on, he moistened his dry, grayish lips, and said, gently: —

“Friend o’ yours?”

“Yes,” said the editor — “Jack Hamlin. Of course, you know him?”

“Yes.”

Mr. Bowers here put his hat on his head, and, after a pause, turned round slowly once or twice, as if he had forgotten it, and was still seeking it. Finally he succeeded in finding the editor’s hand, and shook it, albeit his own trembled slightly. Then he said: —

“I reckon you’re right. There’s bin a mistake. I see it now. Good-by. If you’re ever up my way, drop in and see me.” He then walked to the doorway, passed out, and seemed to melt into the afternoon shadows of the hall.

He never again entered the office of the “Excelsior Magazine,” neither was any further contribution ever received from White Violet. To a polite entreaty from the editor, addressed first to “White Violet” and then to Mrs. Delatour, there was no response. The thought of Mr. Hamlin’s cynical prophecy disturbed him, but that gentleman, preoccupied in filling some professional

engagements in Sacramento, gave him no chance to acquire further explanations as to the past or the future. The youthful editor was at first in despair and filled with a vague remorse of some unfulfilled duty. But, to his surprise, the readers of the magazine seemed to survive their talented contributor, and the feverish life that had been thrilled by her song, in two months had apparently forgotten her. Nor was her voice lifted from any alien quarter; the domestic and foreign press that had echoed her lays seemed to respond no longer to her utterance.

It is possible that some readers of these pages may remember a previous chronicle by the same historian wherein it was recorded that the volatile spirit of Mr. Hamlin, slightly assisted by circumstances, passed beyond these voices at the Ranch of the Blessed Fisherman, some two years later. As the editor stood beside the body of his friend on the morning of the funeral, he noticed among the flowers laid upon his bier by loving hands a wreath of white violets. Touched and disturbed by a memory long since forgotten, he was further embarrassed, as the *cortège* dispersed in the Mission graveyard, by the apparition of the tall figure of

Mr. James Bowers from behind a monumental column. The editor turned to him quickly.

"I am glad to see you here," he said, awkwardly, and he knew not why; then, after a pause, "I trust you can give me some news of Mrs. Delatour. I wrote to her nearly two years ago, but had no response."

"Thar's bin no Mrs. Delatour for two years," said Mr. Bowers, contemplatively stroking his beard; "and mebbe that's why. She's bin for two years Mrs. Bowers."

"I congratulate you," said the editor; "but I hope there still remains a White Violet, and that, for the sake of literature, she has not given up" —

"Mrs. Bowers," interrupted Mr. Bowers, with singular deliberation, "found that makin' po'try and tendin' to the cares of a growin'-up famerly was irritatin' to the narves. They did n't jibe, so to speak. What Mrs. Bowers wanted — and what, po'try or no po'try, I've bin tryin' to give her — was Rest! She's bin havin' it comfor'bly up at my ranch at Mendocino, with her children and me. Yes, sir" — his eye wandered accidentally to the new-made grave — "you'll

excuse my sayin' it to a man in your profes-
sion, but it's what most folks will find is a
heap better than readin' or writin' or actin'
po'try — and that's — Rest!"

THE CHATELAINE OF BURNT RIDGE.



CHAPTER I.

IT had grown dark on Burnt Ridge. Seen from below, the whole serrated crest that had glittered in the sunset as if its interstices were eaten by consuming fires, now closed up its ranks of blackened shafts and became again harsh and sombre *chevaux de frise* against the sky. A faint glow still lingered over the red valley road, as if it were its own reflection, rather than any light from beyond the darkened ridge. Night was already creeping up out of remote cañons and along the furrowed flanks of the mountain, or settling on the nearer woods with the sound of home-coming and innumerable wings. At a point where the road began to encroach upon the mountain-side in its slow winding ascent the darkness had become so real that a young girl canter-

ing along the rising terrace found difficulty in guiding her horse, with eyes still dazzled by the sunset fires.

In spite of her precautions, the animal suddenly shied at some object in the obscured roadway, and nearly unseated her. The accident disclosed not only the fact that she was riding in a man's saddle, but also a foot and ankle that her ordinary walking-dress was too short to hide. It was evident that her equestrian exercise was extempore, and that at that hour and on that road she had not expected to meet company. But she was apparently a good horsewoman, for the mischance which might have thrown a less practical or more timid rider seemed of little moment to her. With a strong hand and determined gesture she wheeled her frightened horse back into the track, and rode him directly at the object. But here she herself slightly recoiled, for it was the body of a man lying in the road.

As she leaned forward over her horse's shoulder, she could see by the dim light that he was a miner, and that, though motionless, he was breathing stertorously. Drunk, no doubt! — an accident of the locality alarming only to her horse. But although she

cantered impatiently forward, she had not proceeded a hundred yards before she stopped reflectively, and trotted back again. He had not moved. She could now see that his head and shoulders were covered with broken clods of earth and gravel, and smaller fragments lay at his side. A dozen feet above him on the hillside there was a foot trail which ran parallel with the bridle-road, and occasionally overhung it. It seemed possible that he might have fallen from the trail and been stunned.

Dismounting, she succeeded in dragging him to a safer position by the bank. The act discovered his face, which was young, and unknown to her. Wiping it with the silk handkerchief which was loosely slung around his neck after the fashion of his class, she gave a quick feminine glance around her and then approached her own and rather handsome face near his lips. There was no odor of alcohol in the thick and heavy respiration. Mounting again, she rode forward at an accelerated pace, and in twenty minutes had reached a higher tableland of the mountain, a cleared opening in the forest that showed signs of careful cultivation, and a large, rambling, yet picturesque-looking

dwelling, whose unpainted red-wood walls were hidden in roses and creepers. Pushing open a swinging gate, she entered the inclosure as a brown-faced man, dressed as a vaquero, came towards her as if to assist her to alight. But she had already leaped to the ground and thrown him the reins.

"Miguel," she said, with a mistress's quiet authority in her boyish contralto voice, "put Glory in the covered wagon, and drive down the road as far as the valley turning. There's a man lying near the right bank, drunk, or sick, may be, or perhaps crippled by a fall. Bring him up here, unless somebody has found him already, or you happen to know who he is and where to take him."

The vaquero raised his shoulders, half in disappointed expectation of some other command. "And your brother, señora, he has not himself arrived."

A light shadow of impatience crossed her face. "No," she said, bluntly. "Come, be quick."

She turned towards the house as the man moved away. Already a gaunt-looking old man had appeared in the porch, and was awaiting her with his hand shadowing his angry, suspicious eyes, and his lips moving querulously.

“Of course, you ’ve got to stand out there and give orders and ’tend to your own business afore you think o’ speaking to your own flesh and blood,” he said aggrievedly. “That ’s all *you* care!”

“There was a sick man lying in the road, and I ’ve sent Miguel to look after him,” returned the girl, with a certain contemptuous resignation.

“Oh, yes!” struck in another voice, which seemed to belong to the female of the first speaker’s species, and to be its equal in age and temper, “and I reckon you saw a jay bird on a tree, or a squirrel on the fence, and either of ’em was more important to you than your own brother.”

“Steve did n’t come by the stage, and did n’t send any message,” continued the young girl, with the same coldly resigned manner. “No one had any news of him, and, as I told you before, I did n’t expect any.”

“Why don’t you say right out you did n’t *want* any?” said the old man, sneeringly. “Much you inquired! No; I orter hev gone myself, and I would if I was master here, instead of me and your mother bein’ the dust of the yearth beneath your feet.”

The young girl entered the house, followed by the old man, passing an old woman seated by the window, who seemed to be nursing her resentment and a large Bible which she held clasped against her shawled bosom at the same moment. Going to the wall, she hung up her large hat and slightly shook the red dust from her skirts as she continued her explanation, in the same deep voice, with a certain monotony of logic and possibly of purpose and practice also.

“You and mother know as well as I do, father, that Stephen is no more to be depended upon than the wind that blows. It’s three years since he has been promising to come, and even getting money to come, and yet he has never showed his face, though he has been a dozen times within five miles of this house. He does n’t come because he does n’t want to come. As to *your* going over to the stage-office, I went there myself at the last moment to save you the mortification of asking questions of strangers that they know have been a dozen times answered already.”

There was such a ring of absolute truthfulness, albeit worn by repetition, in the young girl’s deep honest voice that for one

instant her two more emotional relatives quailed before it ; but only for a moment.

“ That ’s right ! ” shrilled the old woman. “ Go on and abuse your own brother. It ’s only the fear you have that he ’ll make his fortune yet and shame you before the father and mother you despise.”

The young girl remained standing by the window, motionless and apparently passive, as if receiving an accepted and usual punishment. But here the elder woman gave way to sobs and some incoherent snuffing, at which the younger went away. Whether she recognized in her mother’s tears the ordinary deliquescence of emotion, or whether, as a woman herself, she knew that this mere feminine conventionality could not possibly be directed at her, and that the actual conflict between them had ceased, she passed slowly on to an inner hall, leaving the male victim, her unfortunate father, to succumb, as he always did sooner or later, to their influence. Crossing the hall, which was decorated with a few elk horns, Indian trophies, and mountain pelts, she entered another room, and closed the door behind her with a gesture of relief.

The room, which looked upon a porch,

presented a singular combination of masculine business occupations and feminine taste and adornment. A desk covered with papers, a shelf displaying a ledger and account-books, another containing works of reference, a table with a vase of flowers and a lady's riding-whip upon it, a map of California flanked on either side by an embroidered silken workbag and an oval mirror decked with grasses, a calendar and interest-table hanging below two school-girl crayons of classic heads with the legend, "Josephine Forsyth *fecit*," — were part of its incongruous accessories. The young girl went to her desk, but presently moved and turned towards the window thoughtfully. The last gleam had died from the steel-blue sky; a few lights like star points began to prick out the lower valley. The expression of monotonous restraint and endurance had not yet faded from her face.

Yet she had been accustomed to scenes like the one she had just passed through since her girlhood. Five years ago, Alexander Forsyth, her uncle, had brought her to this spot — then a mere log cabin on the hillside — as a refuge from the impoverished and shiftless home of his elder brother

Thomas and his ill-tempered wife. Here Alexander Forsyth, by reason of his more dominant character and business capacity, had prospered until he became a rich and influential ranch owner. Notwithstanding her father's jealousy of Alexander's fortune, and the open rupture that followed between the brothers, Josephine retained her position in the heart and home of her uncle without espousing the cause of either; and her father was too prudent not to recognize the near and prospective advantages of such a mediator. Accustomed to her parents' extravagant denunciations, and her uncle's more repressed but practical contempt of them, the unfortunate girl early developed a cynical disbelief in the virtues of kinship in the abstract, and a philosophical resignation to its effects upon her personally. Believing that her father and uncle fairly represented the fraternal principle, she was quite prepared for the early defection and distrust of her vagabond and dissipated brother Stephen, and accepted it calmly. True to an odd standard of justice, which she had erected from the crumbling ruins of her own domestic life, she was tolerant of everything but human perfection. This

quality, however fatal to her higher growth, had given her a peculiar capacity for business which endeared her to her uncle. Familiar with the strong passions and prejudices of men, she had none of those feminine meannesses, a wholesome distrust of which had kept her uncle a bachelor. It was not strange, therefore, that when he died two years ago it was found that he had left her his entire property, real and personal, limited only by a single condition. She was to undertake the vocation of a "sole trader," and carry on the business under the name of "J. Forsyth." If she married, the estate and property was to be held distinct from her husband's, inalienable under the "Married Woman's Property Act," and subject during her life only to her own control and personal responsibilities as a trader.

The intense disgust and discomfiture of her parents, who had expected to more actively participate in their brother's fortune, may be imagined. But it was not equal to their fury when Josephine, instead of providing for them a separate maintenance out of her abundance, simply offered to transfer them and her brother to her own house on a domestic but not a business

equality. There being no alternative but their former precarious shiftless life in their "played-out" claim in the valley, they wisely consented, reserving the sacred right of daily protest and objurgation. In the economy of Burnt Ridge Ranch they alone took it upon themselves to represent the shattered domestic altar and its outraged Lares and Penates. And so conscientiously did they perform their task as even occasionally to impede the business visitor to the ranch, and to cause some of the more practical neighbors seriously to doubt the young girl's commercial wisdom. But she was firm. Whether she thought her parents a necessity of respectable domesticity, or whether she regarded their presence in the light of a penitential atonement for some previous disregard of them, no one knew. Public opinion inclined to the latter.

The black line of ridge faded out with her abstraction, and she turned from the window and lit the lamp on her desk. The yellow light illuminated her face and figure. In their womanly graces there was no trace of what some people believed to be a masculine character, except a singularly frank look of critical inquiry and patient atten-

tion in her dark eyes. Her long brown hair was somewhat rigidly twisted into a knot on the top of her head, as if more for security than ornament. Brown was also the prevailing tint of her eyebrows, thickly-set eyelashes, and eyes, and was even suggested in the slight sallowness of her complexion. But her lips were well-cut and fresh-colored and her hands and feet small and finely formed. She would have passed for a pretty girl, had she not suggested something more.

She sat down, and began to examine a pile of papers before her with that concentration and attention to detail which was characteristic of her eyes, pausing at times with prettily knit brows, and her penholder between her lips, in the semblance of a pout that was pleasant enough to see. Suddenly the rattle of hoofs and wheels struck her with the sense of something forgotten, and she put down her work quickly and stood up listening. The sound of rough voices and her father's querulous accents was broken upon by a cultivated and more familiar utterance: "All right; I'll speak to her at once. Wait there," and the door opened to the well-known physician of Burnt Ridge, Dr. Duchesne.

“Look here,” he said, with an abruptness that was only saved from being brusque by a softer intonation and a reassuring smile, “I met Miguel helping an accident into your buggy. Your orders, eh?”

“Oh, yes,” said Josephine, quietly. “A man I saw on the road.”

“Well, it’s a bad case, and wants prompt attention. And as your house is the nearest I came with him here.”

“Certainly,” she said gravely. “Take him to the second room beyond — Steve’s room — it’s ready,” she explained to two dusky shadows in the hall behind the doctor.

“And look here,” said the doctor, partly closing the door behind him and regarding her with critical eyes, “you always said you’d like to see some of my queer cases. Well, this is one — a serious one, too; in fact, it’s just touch and go with him. There’s a piece of the bone pressing on the brain no bigger than that, but as much as if all Burnt Ridge was atop of him! I’m going to lift it. I want somebody here to stand by, some one who can lend a hand with a sponge, eh? — some one who is n’t going to faint or scream, or even shake a hair’s-breadth, eh?”

The color rose quickly to the girl's cheek, and her eyes kindled. "I'll come," she said thoughtfully. "Who is he?"

The doctor stared slightly at the unessential query. "Don't know, — one of the river miners, I reckon. It's an urgent case. I'll go and get everything ready. You'd better," he added, with an ominous glance at her gray frock, "put something over your dress." The suggestion made her grave, but did not alter her color.

A moment later she entered the room. It was the one that had always been set apart for her brother: the very bed on which the unconscious man lay had been arranged that morning with her own hands. Something of this passed through her mind as she saw that the doctor had wheeled it beneath the strong light in the centre of the room, stripped its outer coverings with professional thoughtfulness, and rearranged the mattresses. But it did not seem like the same room. There was a pungent odor in the air from some freshly-opened phial; an almost feminine neatness and luxury in an open morocco case like a jewel box on the table, shining with spotless steel. At the head of the bed one of her own servants,

the powerful mill foreman, was assisting with the mingled curiosity and *blasé* experience of one accustomed to smashed and lacerated digits. At first she did not look at the central unconscious figure on the bed, whose sufferings seemed to her to have been vicariously transferred to the concerned, eager, and drawn faces that looked down upon its immunity. Then she femininely recoiled before the bared white neck and shoulders displayed above the quilt, until, forcing herself to look upon the face half-concealed by bandages and the head from which the dark tangles of hair had been ruthlessly sheared, she began to share the doctor's unconcern in his personality. What mattered who or what *he* was? It was — a case!

The operation began. With the same earnest intelligence that she had previously shown, she quickly and noiselessly obeyed the doctor's whispered orders, and even half anticipated them. She was conscious of a singular curiosity that, far from being mean or ignoble, seemed to lift her not only above the ordinary weaknesses of her own sex, but made her superior to the men around her. Almost before she knew it, the operation

was over, and she regarded with equal curiosity the ostentatious solicitude with which the doctor seemed to be wiping his fateful instrument that bore an odd resemblance to a silver-handled centre-bit. The stertorous breathing below the bandages had given way to a fainter but more natural respiration. There was a moment of suspense. The doctor's hand left the pulse and lifted the closed eyelid of the sufferer. A slight movement passed over the figure. The sluggish face had cleared; life seemed to struggle back into it before even the dull eyes participated in the glow. Dr. Duchesne with a sudden gesture waved aside his companions, but not before Josephine had bent her head eagerly forward.

“He is coming to,” she said.

At the sound of that deep clear voice — the first to break the hush of the room — the dull eyes leaped up, and the head turned in its direction. The lips moved and uttered a single rapid sentence. The girl recoiled.

“You're all right now,” said the doctor, cheerfully, intent only upon the form before him.

The lips moved again, but this time feebly and vacantly; the eyes were staring vaguely around.

“What’s matter? What’s all about?” said the man, thickly.

“You’ve had a fall. Think a moment. Where do you live?”

Again the lips moved, but this time only to emit a confused, incoherent murmur. Dr. Duchesne looked grave, but recovered himself quickly.

“That will do. Leave him alone now,” he said brusquely to the others.

But Josephine lingered.

“He spoke well enough just now,” she said eagerly. “Did you hear what he said?”

“Not exactly,” said the doctor, abstractedly, gazing at the man.

“He said: ‘You’ll have to kill me first,’” said Josephine, slowly.

“Humph;” said the doctor, passing his hand backwards and forwards before the man’s eyes to note any change in the staring pupils.

“Yes,” continued Josephine, gravely. “I suppose,” she added, cautiously, “he was thinking of the operation — of what you had just done to him?”

“What *I* had done to him? Oh, yes!”

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE noon the next day it was known throughout Burnt Ridge Valley that Dr. Duchesne had performed a difficult operation upon an unknown man, who had been picked up unconscious from a fall, and carried to Burnt Ridge Ranch. But although the unfortunate man's life was saved by the operation, he had only momentarily recovered consciousness — relapsing into a semi-idiotic state, which effectively stopped the discovery of any clue to his friends or his identity. As it was evidently an *accident*, which, in that rude community — and even in some more civilized ones — conveyed a vague impression of some contributory incapacity on the part of the victim, or some Providential interference of a retributive character, Burnt Ridge gave itself little trouble about it. It is unnecessary to say that Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth gave themselves and Josephine much more. They had a theory and a grievance. Satisfied from the

first that the alleged victim was a drunken tramp, who submitted to have a hole bored in his head in order to foist himself upon the ranch, they were loud in their protests, even hinting at a conspiracy between Josephine and the stranger to supplant her brother in the property, as he had already in the spare bedroom. "Did n't all that yer happen *the very night* she pretended to go for Stephen—eh?" said Mrs. Forsyth. "Tell me that! And did n't she have it all arranged with the buggy to bring him here, as that sneaking doctor let out—eh? Looks mighty curious, don't it?" she muttered darkly to the old man. But although that gentleman, even from his own selfish view, would scarcely have submitted to a surgical operation and later idiocy as the price of insuring comfortable dependency, he had no doubt others were base enough to do it; and lent a willing ear to his wife's suspicions.

Josephine's personal knowledge of the stranger went little further. Doctor Duchesne had confessed to her his professional disappointment at the incomplete results of the operation. He had saved the man's life, but as yet not his reason. There was still hope, however, for the diagnosis revealed

nothing that might prejudice a favorable progress. It was a most interesting case. He would watch it carefully, and as soon as the patient could be removed would take him to the county hospital, where, under his own eyes, the poor fellow would have the benefit of the latest science and the highest specialists. Physically, he was doing remarkably well ; indeed, he must have been a fine young chap, free from blood taint or vicious complication, whose flesh had healed like an infant's. It should be recorded that it was at this juncture that Mrs. Forsyth first learnt that a *silver plate* let into the artful stranger's skull was an adjunct of the healing process ! Convinced that this infamous extravagance was part and parcel of the conspiracy, and was only the beginning of other assimilations of the Forsyths' metallic substance ; that the plate was probably polished and burnished with a fulsome inscription to the doctor's skill, and would pass into the possession and adornment of a perfect stranger, her rage knew no bounds. He or his friends ought to be made to pay for it or work it out ! In vain it was declared that a few dollars were all that was found in the man's pocket, and that no memoranda gave

any indication of his name, friends, or history beyond the suggestion that he came from a distance. This was clearly a part of the conspiracy! Even Josephine's practical good sense was obliged to take note of this singular absence of all record regarding him, and the apparent obliteration of everything that might be responsible for his ultimate fate.

Homeless, friendless, helpless, and even nameless, the unfortunate man of twenty-five was thus left to the tender mercies of the mistress of Burnt Ridge Ranch, as if he had been a new-born foundling laid at her door. But this mere claim of weakness was not all; it was supplemented by a singular personal appeal to Josephine's nature. From the time that he turned his head towards her voice on that fateful night, his eyes had always followed her around the room with a wondering, yearning, canine half-intelligence. Without being able to convince herself that he understood her better than his regular attendant furnished by the doctor, she could not fail to see that he obeyed her implicitly, and that whenever any difficulty arose between him and his nurse she was always appealed to. Her pride in this proof

of her practical sovereignty was flattered; and when Doctor Duchesne finally admitted that although the patient was now physically able to be removed to the hospital, yet he would lose in the change that very strong factor which Josephine had become in his mental recovery, the young girl as frankly suggested that he should stay as long as there was any hope of restoring his reason. Doctor Duchesne was delighted. With all his enthusiasm for science, he had a professional distrust of some of its disciples, and perhaps was not sorry to keep this most interesting case in his own hands. To him her suggestion was only a womanly kindness, tempered with womanly curiosity. But the astonishment and stupefaction of her parents at this evident corroboration of suspicions they had as yet only half believed was tinged with superstitious dread. Had she fallen in love with this helpless stranger? or, more awful to contemplate, was he really no stranger, but a surreptitious lover thus strategically brought under her roof? For once they refrained from open criticism. The very magnitude of their suspicions left them dumb.

It was thus that the virgin Chatelaine of Burnt Ridge Ranch was left to gaze un-

trammled upon her pale and handsome guest, whose silken, bearded lips and sad, childlike eyes might have suggested a more Exalted Sufferer in their absence of any suggestion of a grosser material manhood. But even this imaginative appeal did not enter into her feelings. She felt for her good-looking, helpless patient a profound and honest pity. I do not know whether she had ever heard that "pity was akin to love." She would probably have resented that utterly untenable and atrocious commonplace. There was no suggestion, real or illusive, of any previous masterful quality in the man which might have made his present dependent condition picturesque by contrast. He had come to her handicapped by an unromantic accident and a practical want of energy and intellect. He would have to touch her interest anew if, indeed, he would ever succeed in dispelling the old impression. His beauty, in a community of picturesquely handsome men, had little weight with her, except to accent the contrast with their fuller manhood.

Her life had given her no illusions in regard to the other sex. She had found them, however, more congenial and safer compan-

ions than women, and more accessible to her own sense of justice and honor. In return, they had respected and admired rather than loved her, in spite of her womanly graces. If she had at times contemplated eventual marriage, it was only as a possible practical partnership in her business; but as she lived in a country where men thought it dishonorable and a proof of incompetency to rise by their wives' superior fortune, she had been free from that kind of mercenary persecution, even from men who might have worshiped her in hopeless and silent honor.

For this reason, there was nothing in the situation that suggested a single compromising speculation in the minds of the neighbors, or disturbed her own tranquillity. There seemed to be nothing in the future except a possible relief to her curiosity. Some day the unfortunate man's reason would be restored, and he would tell his simple history. Perhaps he might explain what was in his mind when he turned to her the first evening with that singular sentence which had often recurred strangely to her, she knew not why. It did not strike her until later that it was because it had been the solitary indication of an energy and

capacity that seemed unlike him. Nevertheless, after that explanation, she would have been quite willing to have shaken hands with him and parted.

And yet — for there was an unexpressed remainder in her thought — she was never entirely free or uninfluenced in his presence. The flickering vacancy of his sad eyes sometimes became fixed with a resolute immobility under the gentle questioning with which she had sought to draw out his faculties, that both piqued and exasperated her. He could say “Yes” and “No,” as she thought, intelligently, but he could not utter a coherent sentence nor write a word, except like a child in imitation of his copy. She taught him to repeat after her the names of the inanimate objects in the room, then the names of the doctor, his attendant, the servant, and, finally, her own under her Christian prenomens, with frontier familiarity; but when she pointed to himself he waited for *her* to name him! In vain she tried him with all the masculine names she knew; his was not one of them, or he would not or could not speak it. For at times she rejected the professional dictum of the doctor that the faculty of memory was wholly para-

lyzed or held in abeyance, even to the half-automatic recollection of his letters, yet she inconsistently began to teach him the alphabet with the same method, and — in her sublime unconsciousness of his manhood — with the same discipline as if he were a very child. When he had recovered sufficiently to leave his room, she would lead him to the porch before her window, and make him contented and happy by allowing him to watch her at work at her desk, occasionally answering his wondering eyes with a word, or stirring his faculties with a question. I grieve to say that her parents had taken advantage of this publicity and his supposed helpless condition to show their disgust of his assumption, to the extreme of making faces at him — an act which he resented with such a furious glare that they retreated hurriedly to their own veranda. A fresh though somewhat inconsistent grievance was added to their previous indictment of him: “If we ain’t found dead in our bed with our throats cut by that woman’s crazy husband” (they had settled by this time that there had been a clandestine marriage), “we’ll be lucky,” groaned Mrs. Forsyth.

Meantime, the mountain summer waxed

to its fullness of fire and fruition. There were days when the crowded forest seemed choked and impeded with its own foliage, and pungent and stifling with its own rank maturity; when the long hillside ranks of wild oats, thickset and impassable, filled the air with the heated dust of germination. In this quickening irritation of life it would be strange if the unfortunate man's torpid intellect was not helped in its awakening, and he was allowed to ramble at will over the ranch; but with the instinct of a domestic animal he always returned to the house, and sat in the porch, where Josephine usually found him awaiting her when she herself returned from a visit to the mill. Coming thence one day she espied him on the mountain-side leaning against a projecting ledge in an attitude so rapt and immovable that she felt compelled to approach him. He appeared to be dumbly absorbed in the prospect, which might have intoxicated a saner mind.

Half veiled by the heat that rose quivering from the fiery cañon below, the domain of Burnt Ridge stretched away before him, until, lifted in successive terraces hearsed and plumed with pines, it was at last lost in

the ghostly snow-peaks. But the practical Josephine seized the opportunity to try once more to awaken the slumbering memory of her pupil. Following his gaze with signs and questions, she sought to draw from him some indication of familiar recollection of certain points of the map thus unrolled behind him. But in vain. She even pointed out the fateful shadow of the overhanging ledge on the road where she had picked him up — there was no response in his abstracted eyes. She bit her lips; she was becoming irritated again. Then it occurred to her that, instead of appealing to his hopeless memory, she had better trust to some unreflective automatic instinct independent of it, and she put the question a little forward: “When you leave us, where will you go from here?” He stirred slightly, and turned towards her. She repeated her query slowly and patiently, with signs and gestures recognized between them. A faint glow of intelligence struggled into his eyes; he lifted his arm slowly, and pointed.

“Ah! those white peaks — the Sierras?” she asked, eagerly. No reply. “Beyond them?”

“Yes.”

“The States?” No reply. “Further still?”

He remained so patiently quiet and still pointing that she leaned forward, and, following with her eyes the direction of his hand, saw that he was pointing to the sky!

Then a great quiet fell upon them. The whole mountain-side seemed to her to be hushed, as if to allow her to grasp and realize for the first time the pathos of the ruined life at her side, which *it* had known so long, but which she had never felt till now. The tears came to her eyes; in her swift revulsion of feeling she caught the thin uplifted hand between her own. It seemed to her that he was about to raise them to his lips, but she withdrew them hastily, and moved away. She had a strange fear that if he had kissed them, it might seem as if some dumb animal had touched them — or — *it might not*. The next day she felt a consciousness of this in his presence, and a wish that he was well-cured and away. She determined to consult Dr. Duchesne on the subject when he next called.

But the doctor, secure in the welfare of his patient, had not visited him lately, and she found herself presently absorbed in the

business of the ranch, which at this season was particularly trying. There had also been a quarrel between Dick Shipley, her mill foreman, and Miguel, her ablest and most trusted vaquero, and in her strict sense of impartial justice she was obliged to side on the merits of the case with Shipley against her oldest retainer. This troubled her, as she knew that with the Mexican nature, fidelity and loyalty were not unmixed with quick and unreasoning jealousy. For this reason she was somewhat watchful of the two men when work was over, and there was a chance of their being thrown together. Once or twice she had remained up late to meet Miguel returning from the posada at San Ramon, filled with *aguardiente* and a recollection of his wrongs, and to see him safely bestowed before she herself retired. It was on one of those occasions, however, that she learned that Dick Shipley, hearing that Miguel had disparaged him freely at the posada, had broken the discipline of the ranch, and absented himself the same night that Miguel "had leave," with a view of facing his antagonist on his own ground. To prevent this, the fearless girl at once secretly set out alone to overtake and bring back the delinquent.

For two or three hours the house was thus left to the sole occupancy of Mr. and Mrs. Forsyth and the invalid — a fact only dimly suspected by the latter, who had become vaguely conscious of Josephine's anxiety, and had noticed the absence of light and movement in her room. For this reason, therefore, having risen again and mechanically taken his seat in the porch to await her return, he was startled by hearing *her* voice in the shadow of the lower porch, accompanied by a hurried tapping against the door of the old couple. The half-reasoning man arose, and would have moved towards it, but suddenly he stopped rigidly, with white and parted lips and vacantly distended eyeballs.

Meantime the voice and muffled tapping had brought the tremulous fingers of old Forsyth to the door-latch. He opened the door partly; a slight figure that had been lurking in the shadow of the porch pushed rapidly through the opening. There was a faint outcry quickly hushed, and the door closed again. The rays of a single candle showed the two old people hysterically clasping in their arms the figure that had entered — a slight but vicious-looking young fellow of five-and-twenty.

“There, d—n it!” he said impatiently, in a voice whose rich depth was like Josephine’s, but whose querulous action was that of the two old people before him, “let me go, and quit that. I did n’t come here to be strangled! I want some money — money, you hear! Devilish quick, too, for I’ve got to be off again before daylight. So look sharp, will you?”

“But, Stevy dear, when you did n’t come that time three months ago, but wrote from Los Angeles, you said you ’d made a strike at last, and” —

“What are you talking about?” he interrupted violently. “That was just my lyin’ to keep you from worryin’ me. Three months ago — three months ago! Why, you must have been crazy to have swallowed it; I had n’t a cent.”

“Nor have we,” said the old woman, shrilly. “That hellish sister of yours still keeps us like beggars. Our only hope was you, our own boy. And now you only come to — to go again.”

“But *she* has money; *she*’s doing well, and *she* shall give it to me,” he went on, angrily. “She can’t bully me with her business airs and morality. Who else has

got a right to share, if it is not her own brother?"

Alas for the fatuousness of human malevolence! Had the unhappy couple related only the simple facts they knew about the new guest of Burnt Ridge Ranch, and the manner of his introduction, they might have spared what followed.

But the old woman broke into a vindictive cry: "Who else, Steve— who else? Why, the slut has brought a *man* here— a sneaking, deceitful, underhanded, crazy lover!"

"Oh, has she?" said the young man, fiercely, yet secretly pleased at this promising evidence of his sister's human weakness. "Where is she? I'll go to her. She's in her room, I suppose," and before they could restrain him, he had thrown off their impeding embraces and darted across the hall.

The two old people stared doubtfully at each other. For even this powerful ally, whose strength, however, they were by no means sure of, might succumb before the determined Josephine! Prudence demanded a middle course. "Ain't they brother and sister?" said the old man, with an air

of virtuous toleration. "Let 'em fight it out."

The young man impatiently entered the room he remembered to have been his sister's. By the light of the moon that streamed upon the window he could see she was not there. He passed hurriedly to the door of her bedroom; it was open; the room was empty, the bed unturned. She was not in the house — she had gone to the mill. Ah! What was that they had said? An infamous thought passed through the scoundrel's mind. Then, in what he half believed was an access of virtuous fury, he began by the dim light to rummage in the drawers of the desk for such loose coin or valuables as, in the perfect security of the ranch, were often left unguarded. Suddenly he heard a heavy footstep on the threshold, and turned.

An awful vision — a recollection, so unexpected, so ghostlike in that weird light that he thought he was losing his senses — stood before him. It moved forwards with staring eyeballs and white and open lips from which a horrible inarticulate sound issued that was the speech of no living man! With a single desperate, almost superhuman effort Stephen

Forsyth bounded aside, leaped from the window, and ran like a madman from the house. Then the apparition trembled, collapsed, and sank in an undistinguishable heap to the ground.

When Josephine Forsyth returned an hour later with her mill foreman, she was startled to find her helpless patient in a fit on the floor of her room. With the assistance of her now converted and penitent employee, she had the unfortunate man conveyed to his room — but not until she had thoughtfully rearranged the disorder of her desk and closed the open drawers without attracting Dick Shipley's attention. In the morning, hearing that the patient was still in the semi-conscious exhaustion of his late attack, but without seeing him, she sent for Dr. Duchesne. The doctor arrived while she was absent at the mill, where, after a careful examination of his patient, he sought her with some little excitement.

“Well?” she said, with eager gravity.

“Well, it looks as if your wish would be gratified. Your friend has had an epileptic fit, but the physical shock has started his mental machinery again. He has recovered his faculties; his memory is returning: he

thinks and speaks coherently ; he is as sane as you and I."

"And" — said Josephine, questioning the doctor's knitted eyebrows.

"I am not yet sure whether it was the result of some shock he does n't remember ; or an irritation of the brain, which would indicate that the operation had not been successful and that there was still some physical pressure or obstruction there — in which case he would be subject to these attacks all his life."

"Do you think his reason came before the fit or after?" asked the girl, anxiously.

"I could n't say. Had anything happened?"

"I was away, and found him on the floor on my return," she answered, half uneasily. After a pause she said, "Then he has told you his name and all about himself?"

"Yes, it's nothing at all! He was a stranger just arrived from the States, going to the mines — the old story ; had no near relations, of course ; was n't missed or asked after ; remembers walking along the ridge and falling over ; name, John Baxter, of Maine." He paused, and relaxing into a slight smile, added, "I have n't spoiled your romance, have I?"

“No,” she said, with an answering smile. Then as the doctor walked briskly away she slightly knitted her pretty brows, hung her head, patted the ground with her little foot beyond the hem of her gown, and said to herself, “The man was lying to him.”

CHAPTER III.

ON her return to the house, Josephine apparently contented herself with receiving the bulletin of the stranger's condition from the servant, for she did not enter his room. She had obtained no theory of last night's incident from her parents, who, beyond a querulous agitation that was quickened by the news of his return to reason, refrained from even that insidious comment which she half feared would follow. When another day passed without her seeing him, she nevertheless was conscious of a little embarrassment when his attendant brought her the request that she would give him a moment's speech in the porch, whither he had been removed.

She found him physically weaker; indeed, so much so that she was fain, even in her embarrassment, to assist him back to the bench from which he had ceremoniously risen. But she was so struck with the change in his face and manner, a change so virile and masterful, in spite of its gentle

sadness of manner, that she recoiled with a slight timidity as if he had been a stranger, although she was also conscious that he seemed to be more at his ease than she was. He began in a low exhausted voice, but before he had finished his first sentence, she felt herself in the presence of a superior.

“My thanks come very late, Miss Forsyth,” he said, with a faint smile, “but no one knows better than yourself the reason why, or can better understand that they mean that the burden you have so generously taken on yourself is about to be lifted. I know all, Miss Forsyth. Since yesterday I have learned how much I owe you, even my life I believe, though I am afraid I must tell you in the same breath that *that* is of little worth to any one. You have kindly helped and interested yourself in a poor stranger who turns out to be a nobody, without friends, without romance, and without even mystery. You found me lying in the road down yonder, after a stupid accident that might have happened to any other careless tramp, and which scarcely gave me a claim to a bed in the county hospital, much less under this kindly roof. It was not my

fault, as you know, that all this did not come out sooner; but while it does n't lessen your generosity, it does n't lessen my debt, and although I cannot hope to ever repay you, I can at least keep the score from running on. Pardon my speaking so bluntly, but my excuse for speaking at all was to say 'Good-by' and 'God bless you.' Dr. Duchesne has promised to give me a lift on my way in his buggy when he goes."

There was a slight touch of consciousness in his voice in spite of its sadness, which struck the young girl as a weak and even ungentlemanly note in his otherwise self-abnegating and undemonstrative attitude. If he was a common tramp, he would n't talk in that way, and if he was n't, why did he lie? Her practical good sense here asserted itself.

"But you are far from strong yet; in fact, the doctor says you might have a relapse at any moment, and you have—that is, you *seem* to have no money," she said gravely.

"That's true," he said, quickly. "I remember I was quite played out when I entered the settlement, and I think I had parted from even some little trifles I carried

with me. I am afraid I was a poor find to those who picked me up, and you ought to have taken warning. But the doctor has offered to lend me enough to take me to San Francisco, if only to give a fair trial to the machine he has set once more a-going."

"Then you have friends in San Francisco?" said the young girl quickly. "Those who know you? Why not write to them first, and tell them you are here?"

"I don't think your postmaster here would be preoccupied with letters for John Baxter, if I did," he said, quietly. "But here is the doctor waiting. Good-by."

He stood looking at her in a peculiar, yet half-resigned way, and held out his hand. For a moment she hesitated. Had he been less independent and strong, she would have refused to let him go — have offered him some slight employment at the ranch; for oddly enough, in spite of the suspicion that he was concealing something, she felt that she would have trusted him, and he would have been a help to her. But he was not only determined, but *she* was all the time conscious that he was a totally different man from the one she had taken care of, and merely ordinary prudence demanded that she

should know something more of him first. She gave him her hand constrainedly; he pressed it warmly.

Dr. Duchesne drove up, helped him into the buggy, smiled a good-natured but half-perfunctory assurance that he would look after "her patient," and drove away.

The whole thing was over, but so unexpectedly, so suddenly, so unromantically, so unsatisfactorily, that, although her common sense told her that it was perfectly natural, proper, business-like, and reasonable, and, above all, final and complete, she did not know whether to laugh or be angry. Yet this was her parting from the man who had but a few days ago moved her to tears with a single hopeless gesture. Well, this would teach her what to expect. Well, what had she expected? Nothing!

Yet for the rest of the day she was unreasonably irritable, and, if the conjuncture be not paradoxical, severely practical, and inhumanly just. Falling foul of some presumption of Miguel's, based upon his prescriptive rights through long service on the estate, with the recollection of her severity towards his antagonist in her mind, she rated that trusted retainer with such pitiless equity

and unfeminine logic that his hot Latin blood chilled in his veins, and he stood livid on the road. Then, informing Dick Shipley with equally relentless calm that she might feel it necessary to change *all* her foremen unless they could agree in harmony, she sought the dignified seclusion of her castle. But her respected parents, whose triumphant relief at the stranger's departure had emboldened them to await her return in their porch with bended bows of invective and lifted javelins of aggression, recoiled before the resistless helm of this cold-browed Minerva, who galloped contemptuously past them.

Nevertheless, she sat late that night at her desk. The cold moon looked down upon her window, and lit up the empty porch where her silent guest had mutely watched her. For a moment she regretted that he had recovered his reason, excusing herself on the practical ground that he would never have known his dependence, and he would have been better cared for by her. She felt restless and uneasy. This slight divergence from the practical groove in which her life had been set had disturbed her in many other things, and given her the first views of the narrowness of it.

Suddenly she heard a step in the porch. The lateness of the hour, perhaps some other reason, seemed to startle her, and she half rose. The next moment the figure of Miguel appeared at the doorway, and with a quick, hurried look around him, and at the open window, he approached her. He was evidently under great excitement, his hollow shaven cheek looked like a waxen effigy in the mission church; his yellow, tobacco-stained eye glittered like phosphorescent amber, his lank gray hair was damp and perspiring; but more striking than this was the evident restraint he had put upon himself, pressing his broad-brimmed sombrero with both of his trembling yellow hands against his breast. The young girl cast a hurried glance at the open window and at the gun which stood in the corner, and then confronted him with clear and steady eyes, but a paler cheek.

Ah, he began in Spanish, which he himself had taught her as a child, it was a strange thing, his coming there to-night; but, then, mother of God! it was a strange, a terrible thing that she had done to him — old Miguel, her uncle's servant: he that had known her as a *muchacha*; he that had lived all his

life at the ranch — ay, and whose fathers before him had lived there all *their* lives and driven the cattle over the very spot where she now stood, before the thieving Americans came here! But he would be calm; yes, the señora should find him calm, even as she was when she told him to go. He would not speak. No, he — Miguel — would contain himself; yes, he *had* mastered himself, but could he restrain others? Ah, yes, *others* — that was it. Could he keep Manuel and Pepe and Dominguez from talking to the milkman — that leaking sieve, that gabbling brute of a Shipley, for whose sake she had cast off her old servant that very day?

She looked at him with cold astonishment, but without fear. Was he drunk with *aguardiente*, or had his jealousy turned his brain? He continued gasping, but still pressing his hat against his breast.

Ah, he saw it all! Yes, it was to-day, the day he left. Yes, she had thought it safe to cast Miguel off now — now that *he* was gone!

Without in the least understanding him, the color had leaped to her cheek, and the consciousness of it made her furious.

“How dare you?” she said, passionately. “What has that stranger to do with my affairs or your insolence?”

He stopped and gazed at her with a certain admiring loyalty. “Ah! so,” he said, with a deep breath, “the señora is the niece of her uncle. She does well not to fear *him* — a dog,” — with a slight shrug, — “who is more than repaid by the señora’s condescension. *He* dare not speak!”

“Who dare not speak? Are you mad?” She stopped with a sudden terrible instinct of apprehension. “Miguel,” she said in her deepest voice, “answer me, I command you! Do you know anything of this man?”

It was Miguel’s turn to recoil from his mistress. “Ah, my God! is it possible the señora has not suspect?”

“Suspect!” said Josephine, haughtily, albeit her proud heart was beating quickly. “I *suspect* nothing. I command you to tell me what you *know*.”

Miguel turned with a rapid gesture and closed the door. Then, drawing her away from the window, he said in a hurried whisper, —

“I know that that man has not the name of Baxter! I know that he has the name of

Randolph, a young gambler, who have won a large sum at Sacramento, and, fearing to be robbed by those he won of, have walk to himself through the road in disguise of a miner. I know that your brother Esteban have decoyed him here, and have fallen on him."

"Stop!" said the young girl, her eyes, which had been fixed with the agony of conviction, suddenly flashing with the energy of despair. "And you call yourself the servant of my uncle, and dare say this of his nephew?"

"Yes, señora," broke out the old man, passionately. "It is because I am the servant of your uncle that I, and I *alone*, dare say it to you! It is because I perjured my soul, and have perjured my soul to deny it elsewhere, that I now dare to say it! It is because I, your servant, knew it from one of my countrymen, who was of the gang, — because I, Miguel, knew that your brother was not far away that night, and because I, whom you would dismiss, have picked up this pocket-book of Randolph's and your brother's ring which he have dropped, and I have found beneath the body of the man you sent me to fetch."

He drew a packet from his bosom, and tossed it on the desk before her.

“And why have you not told me this before?” said Josephine, passionately.

Miguel shrugged his shoulders.

“What good? Possibly this dog Randolph would die. Possibly he would live — as a lunatic. Possibly would happen what has happened! The señora is beautiful. The American has eyes. If the Doña Josephine’s beauty shall finish what the silly Don Esteban’s arm have begun — what matter?”

“Stop!” cried Josephine, pressing her hands across her shuddering eyes. Then, uncovering her white and set face, she said rapidly, “Saddle my horse and your own at once. Then take your choice! Come with me and repeat all that you have said in the presence of that man, or leave this ranch forever. For if I live I shall go to him to-night, and tell the whole story.”

The old man cast a single glance at his mistress, shrugged his shoulders, and, without a word, left the room. But in ten minutes they were on their way to the county town.

Day was breaking over the distant Burnt Ridge — a faint, ghostly level, like a funeral pall, in the dim horizon — as they drew up before the gaunt, white-painted pile of the hospital building. Josephine uttered a cry. Dr. Duchesne's buggy was before the door. On its very threshold they met the doctor, dark and irritated. "Then you heard the news?" he said, quickly.

Josephine turned her white face to the doctor's. "What news?" she asked, in a voice that seemed strangely deep and resonant.

"The poor fellow had another attack last night, and died of exhaustion about an hour ago. I was too late to save him."

"Did he say anything? Was he conscious?" asked the girl, hoarsely.

"No; incoherent! Now I think of it, he harped on the same string as he did the night of the operation. What was it he said? you remember."

"'You'll have to kill me first,' " repeated Josephine, in a choking voice.

"Yes; something about his dying before he'd tell. Well, he came back to it before he went off — they often do. You seem a little hoarse with your morning ride. You

should take care of that voice of yours. By the way, it's a good deal like your brother's."

The Chatelaine of Burnt Ridge never married.

THROUGH THE SANTA CLARA WHEAT.



CHAPTER I.

It was an enormous wheat-field in the Santa Clara valley, stretching to the horizon line unbroken. The meridian sun shone upon it without glint or shadow; but at times, when a stronger gust of the trade winds passed over it, there was a quick slanting impression of the whole surface that was, however, as unlike a billow as itself was unlike a sea. Even when a lighter zephyr played down its long level, the agitation was superficial, and seemed only to momentarily lift a veil of greenish mist that hung above its immovable depths. Occasional puffs of dust alternately rose and fell along an imaginary line across the field, as if a current of air were passing through it, but were otherwise inexplicable.

Suddenly a faint shout, apparently some-

where in the vicinity of the line, brought out a perfectly clear response, followed by the audible murmur of voices, which it was impossible to localize. Yet the whole field was so devoid of any suggestion of human life or motion that it seemed rather as if the vast expanse itself had become suddenly articulate and intelligible.

“Wot say?”

“Wheel off.”

“Whare?”

“In the road.”

One of the voices here indicated itself in the direction of the line of dust, and said, “Comin’,” and a man stepped out from the wheat into a broad and dusty avenue.

With his presence three things became apparent.

First, that the puffs of dust indicated the existence of the invisible avenue through the unlimited and unfenced field of grain; secondly, that the stalks of wheat on either side of it were so tall as to actually hide a passing vehicle; and thirdly, that a vehicle had just passed, had lost a wheel, and been dragged partly into the grain by its frightened horse, which a dusty man was trying to restrain and pacify.

The horse, given up to equine hysterics, and evidently convinced that the ordinary buggy behind him had been changed into some dangerous and appalling creation, still plunged and kicked violently to rid himself of it. The man who had stepped out of the depths of the wheat quickly crossed the road, unhitched the traces, drew back the vehicle, and, glancing at the traveler's dusty and disordered clothes, said, with curt sympathy: —

“Spilt, too; but not hurt, eh?”

“No, neither of us. I went over with the buggy when the wheel cramped, but *she* jumped clear.”

He made a gesture indicating the presence of another. The man turned quickly. There was a second figure, a young girl standing beside the grain from which he had emerged, embracing a few stalks of wheat with one arm and a hand in which she still held her parasol, while she grasped her gathered skirts with the other, and trying to find a secure foothold for her two neat narrow slippers on a crumbling cake of adobe above the fathomless dust of the roadway. Her face, although annoyed and discontented, was pretty, and her light dress and slim fig-

ure were suggestive of a certain superior condition.

The man's manner at once softened with Western courtesy. He swung his broad-brimmed hat from his head, and bent his body with the ceremoniousness of the country ball-room. "I reckon the lady had better come up to the shanty out o' the dust and sun till we kin help you get these things fixed," he said to the driver. "I'll send round by the road for your hoss, and have one of mine fetch up your wagon."

"Is it far?" asked the girl, slightly acknowledging his salutation, without waiting for her companion to reply.

"Only a step this way," he answered, motioning to the field of wheat beside her.

"What! In *there*? I never could go in there," she said, decidedly.

"It's a heap shorter than by the road, and not so dusty. I'll go with you, and pilot you."

The young girl cast a vexed look at her companion as the probable cause of all this trouble, and shook her head. But at the same moment one little foot slipped from the adobe into the dust again. She instantly clambered back with a little feminine shriek,

and ejaculated: "Well, of all things!" and then, fixing her blue annoyed eyes on the stranger, asked impatiently, "Why could n't I go there by the road 'n the wagon? I could manage to hold on and keep in."

"Because I reckon you 'd find it too pow'ful hot waitin' here till we got round to ye."

There was no doubt it was very hot; the radiation from the baking roadway beating up under her parasol, and pricking her cheekbones and eyeballs like needles. She gave a fastidious little shudder, furred her parasol, gathered her skirts still tighter, faced about, and said, "Go on, then." The man slipped backwards into the ranks of stalks, parting them with one hand, and holding out the other as if to lead her. But she evaded the invitation by holding her tightly-drawn skirt with both hands, and bending her head forward as if she had not noticed it. The next moment the road, and even the whole outer world, disappeared behind them, and they seemed floating in a choking green translucent mist.

But the effect was only momentary; a few steps further she found that she could walk with little difficulty between the ranks

of stalks, which were regularly spaced, and the resemblance now changed to that of a long pillared conservatory of greenish glass, that touched all objects with its pervading hue. She also found that the close air above her head was continually freshened by the interchange of currents of lower temperature from below,—as if the whole vast field had a circulation of its own,—and that the adobe beneath her feet was gratefully cool to her tread. There was no dust, as he had said; what had at first half suffocated her seemed to be some stimulating aroma of creation that filled the narrow green aisles, and now imparted a strange vigor and excitement to her as she walked along. Meantime her guide was not conversationally idle. Now, no doubt, she had never seen anything like this before? It was ordinary wheat, only it was grown on adobe soil—the richest in the valley. These stalks, she could see herself, were ten and twelve feet high. That was the trouble, they all ran too much to stalk, though the grain yield was “suthen’ pow’ful.” She could tell that to her friends, for he reckoned she was the only young lady that had ever walked under such a growth. Perhaps she was new to Californy? He

thought so from the start. Well, this was Californy, and this was not the least of the ways it could "lay over" every other country on God's yearth. Many folks thought it was the gold and the climate, but she could see for herself what it could do with wheat. He wondered if her brother had ever told her of it? No, the stranger was n't her brother. Nor cousin, nor company? No; only the hired driver from a San José hotel, who was takin' her over to Major Randolph's. Yes, he knew the old major; the ranch was a pretty place, nigh unto three miles further on. Now that he knew the driver was no relation of hers he did n't mind telling her that the buggy was a "rather old consarn," and the driver did n't know his business. Yes, it might be fixed up so as to take her over to the major's; there was one of their own men — a young fellow — who could do anything that *could* be done with wood and iron, — a reg'lar genius! — and *he 'd* tackle it. It might take an hour, but she 'd find it quite cool waiting in the shanty. It was a rough place, for they only camped out there during the season to look after the crop, and lived at their own homes the rest of the time. Was she

going to stay long at the major's? He noticed she had not brought her trunk with her. Had she known the major's wife long? Perhaps she thought of settling in the neighborhood?

All this naïve, good-humored questioning — so often cruelly misunderstood as mere vulgar curiosity, but as often the courteous instinct of simple unaffected people to entertain the stranger by inviting him to talk of what concerns himself rather than their own selves — was nevertheless, I fear, met only by monosyllables from the young lady or an impatient question in return. She scarcely raised her eyes to the broad jean-shirted back that preceded her through the grain until the man abruptly ceased talking, and his manner, without losing its half-paternal courtesy, became graver. She was beginning to be conscious of her incivility, and was trying to think of something to say, when he exclaimed with a slight air of relief, "Here we are!" and the shanty suddenly appeared before them.

It certainly was very rough — a mere shell of unpainted boards that scarcely rose above the level of the surrounding grain, and a few yards distant was invisible. Its slightly slop-

ing roof, already warped and shrunken into long fissures that permitted glimpses of the steel-blue sky above, was evidently intended only as a shelter from the cloudless sun in those two months of rainless days and dewless nights when it was inhabited. Through the open doors and windows she could see a row of "bunks," or rude sleeping berths against the walls, furnished with coarse mattresses and blankets. As the young girl halted, the man with an instinct of delicacy hurried forward, entered the shanty, and dragging a rude bench to the doorway, placed it so that she could sit beneath the shade of the roof, yet with her back to these domestic revelations. Two or three men, who had been apparently lounging there, rose quietly, and unobtrusively withdrew. Her guide brought her a tin cup of deliciously cool water, exchanged a few hurried words with his companions, and then disappeared with them, leaving her alone.

Her first sense of relief from their company was, I fear, stronger than any other feeling. After a hurried glance around the deserted apartment, she arose, shook out her dress and mantle, and then going into the darkest corner supported herself with one

hand against the wall while with the other she drew off, one by one, her slippers from her slim, striped-stockinged feet, shook and blew out the dust that had penetrated within, and put them on again. Then, perceiving a triangular fragment of looking-glass nailed against the wall, she settled the strings of her bonnet by the aid of its reflection, patted the fringe of brown hair on her forehead with her separated five fingers as if playing an imaginary tune on her brow, and came back with maidenly abstraction to the doorway.

Everything was quiet, and her seclusion seemed unbroken. A smile played for an instant in the soft shadows of her eyes and mouth as she recalled the abrupt withdrawal of the men. Then her mouth straightened and her brows slightly bent. It was certainly very unmannerly in them to go off in that way. "Good heavens! could n't they have stayed around without talking? Surely it did n't require four men to go and bring up that wagon!" She picked up her parasol from the bench with an impatient little jerk. Then she held out her ungloved hand into the hot sunshine beyond the door with the gesture she would have used had it been

raining, and withdrew it as quickly — her hand quite scorched in the burning rays. Nevertheless, after another impatient pause she desperately put up her parasol and stepped from the shanty.

Presently she was conscious of a faint sound of hammering not far away. Perhaps there was another shed, but hidden, like everything else, in this monotonous, ridiculous grain. Some stalks, however, were trodden down and broken around the shanty; she could move more easily and see where she was going. To her delight, a few steps further brought her into a current of the trade-wind and a cooler atmosphere. And a short distance beyond them, certainly, was the shed from which the hammering proceeded. She approached it boldly.

It was simply a roof upheld by rude uprights and crossbeams, and open to the breeze that swept through it. At one end was a small blacksmith's forge, some machinery, and what appeared to be part of a small steam-engine. Midway of the shed was a closet or cupboard fastened with a large padlock. Occupying its whole length on the other side was a work-bench, and at the further end stood the workman she had heard.

He was apparently only a year or two older than herself, and clad in blue jean overalls, blackened and smeared with oil and coal-dust. Even his youthful face, which he turned towards her, had a black smudge running across it and almost obliterating a small auburn moustache. The look of surprise that he gave her, however, quickly passed; he remained patiently and in a half-preoccupied way, holding his hammer in his hand, as she advanced. This was evidently the young fellow who could "do anything that could be done with wood and iron."

She was very sorry to disturb him, but could he tell her how long it would be before the wagon could be brought up and mended? He could not say that until he himself saw what was to be done; if it was only a matter of the wheel he could fix it up in a few moments; if, as he had been told, it was a case of twisted or bent axle, it would take longer, but it would be here very soon. Ah, then, would he let her wait here, as she was very anxious to know at once, and it was much cooler than in the shed? Certainly; he would go over and bring her a bench. But here she begged he would n't trouble himself, she could sit anywhere comfortably.

The lower end of the work-bench was covered with clean and odorous shavings; she lightly brushed them aside and, with a youthful movement, swung herself to a seat upon it, supporting herself on one hand as she leaned towards him. She could thus see that his eyes were of a light-yellowish brown, like clarified honey, with a singular look of clear concentration in them, which, however, was the same whether turned upon his work, the surrounding grain, or upon her. This, and his sublime unconsciousness of the smudge across his face and his blackened hands, made her wonder if the man who could do everything with wood and iron was above doing anything with water. She had half a mind to tell him of it, particularly as she noticed also that his throat below the line of sunburn disclosed by his open collar was quite white, and his grimy hands well made. She was wondering whether he would be affronted if she said in her politest way, "I beg your pardon, but do you know you have quite accidentally got something on your face," and offer her handkerchief, which, of course, he would decline, when her eye fell on the steam-engine.

"How odd! Do you use that on the farm?"

“No,” — he smiled here, the smudge accenting it and setting off his white teeth in a Christy Minstrel fashion that exasperated her — no, although it *could* be used, and had been. But it was his first effort, made two years ago, when he was younger and more inexperienced. It was a rather rough thing, she could see — but he had to make it at odd times with what iron he could pick up or pay for, and at different forges where he worked.

She begged his pardon — where —

Where he worked.

Ah, then he was the machinist or engineer here?

No, he worked here just like the others, only he was allowed to put up a forge while the grain was green, and have his bench in consideration of the odd jobs he could do in the way of mending tools, etc. There was a heap of mending and welding to do — she had no idea how quickly agricultural machines got out of order! He had done much of his work on the steam-engine on moonlit nights. Yes; she had no idea how perfectly clear and light it was here in the valley on such nights; although of course the shadows were very dark, and when he dropped a

screw or a nut it was difficult to find. He had worked there because it saved time and because it did n't cost anything, and he had nobody to look on or interfere with him. No, it was not lonely ; the coyotes and wild cats sometimes came very near, but were always more surprised and frightened than he was ; and once a horseman who had strayed off the distant road yonder mistook him for an animal and shot at him twice.

He told all this with such freedom from embarrassment and with such apparent unconsciousness of the blue eyes that were following him, and the light, graceful figure, — which was so near his own that in some of his gestures his grimy hands almost touched its delicate garments, — that, accustomed as she was to a certain masculine aberration in her presence, she was greatly amused by his naïve acceptance of her as an equal. Suddenly, looking frankly in her face, he said :

“ I'll show you a secret, if you care to see it.”

Nothing would please her more.

He glanced hurriedly around, took a key from his pocket, and unlocked the padlock that secured the closet she had noticed. Then, reaching within, with infinite care he brought out a small mechanical model.

“There’s an invention of my own. A reaper and thresher combined. I’m going to have it patented and have a big one made from this model. This will work, as you see.”

He then explained to her with great precision how as it moved over the field the double operation was performed by the same motive power. That it would be a saving of a certain amount of labor and time which she could not remember. She did not understand a word of his explanations; she saw only a clean and pretty but complicated toy that under the manipulation of his grimy fingers rattled a number of frail-like staves and worked a number of wheels and drums, yet there was no indication of her ignorance in her sparkling eyes and smiling, breathless attitude. Perhaps she was interested in his own absorption; the revelation of his pre-occupation with this model struck her as if he had made her a confidante of some boyish passion for one of her own sex, and she regarded him with the same sympathizing superiority.

“You will make a fortune out of it,” she said pleasantly.

Well, he might make enough to be able

to go on with some other inventions he had in his mind. They cost money and time, no matter how careful one was.

This was another interesting revelation to the young girl. He not only did not seem to care for the profit his devotion brought him, but even his one beloved ideal might be displaced by another. So like a man, after all!

Her reflections were broken upon by the sound of voices. The young man carefully replaced the model in its closet with a parting glance as if he was closing a shrine, and said, "There comes the wagon." The young girl turned to face the men who were dragging it from the road, with the half-complacent air of having been victorious over their late rude abandonment, but they did not seem to notice it or to be surprised at her companion, who quickly stepped forward and examined the broken vehicle with workman-like deliberation.

"I hope you will be able to do something with it," she said sweetly, appealing directly to him. "I should thank you *so much*."

He did not reply. Presently he looked up to the man who had brought her to the shanty, and said, "The axle's strained, but

it's safe for five or six miles more of this road. I'll put the wheel on easily." He paused, and without glancing at her, continued, "You might send her on by the cart."

"Pray don't trouble yourselves," interrupted the young girl, with a pink uprising in her cheeks; "I shall be quite satisfied with the buggy as it stands." Send her on in the cart, indeed! Really, they were a rude set — *all* of them."

Without taking the slightest notice of her remark, the man replied gravely to the young mechanic, "Yes, but we'll be wanting the cart before it can get back from taking her."

"Her" again. "I assure you the buggy will serve perfectly well — if this — gentleman — will only be kind enough to put on the wheel again," she returned hotly.

The young mechanic at once set to work. The young girl walked apart silently until the wheel was restored to its axle. But to her surprise a different horse was led forward to be harnessed.

"We thought your horse was n't safe in case of another accident," said the first man, with the same smileless consideration. "This one would n't cut up if he was harnessed to

an earthquake or a worse driver than you've got."

It occurred to her instantly that the more obvious remedy of sending another driver had been already discussed and rejected by them. Yet, when her own driver appeared a moment afterwards, she ascended to her seat with some dignity and a slight increase of color.

"I am very much obliged to you all," she said, without glancing at the young inventor.

"Don't mention it, miss."

"Good afternoon."

"Good afternoon." They all took off their hats with the same formal gravity as the horse moved forward, but turned back to their work again before she was out of the field.

CHAPTER II.

THE ranch of Major Randolph lay on a rich *falda* of the Coast Range, and overlooked the great wheat plains that the young girl had just left. The house of wood and adobe, buried to its first story in rose-trees and passion vines, was large and commodious. Yet it contained only the major, his wife, her son and daughter, and the few occasional visitors from San Francisco whom he entertained, and she tolerated.

For the major's household was not entirely harmonious. While a young infantry subaltern at a Gulf station, he had been attracted by the piquant foreign accent and dramatic gestures of a French Creole widow, and — believing them, in the first flush of his youthful passion more than an offset to the encumbrance of her two children who, with the memory of various marital infidelities were all her late husband had left her — had proposed, been accepted, and promptly married to her. Before he obtained his cap-

taincy, she had partly lost her accent, and those dramatic gestures, which had accented the passion of their brief courtship, began to intensify domestic altercation and the bursts of idle jealousy to which she was subject. Whether she was revenging herself on her second husband for the faults of her first is not known, but it was certain that she brought an unhallowed knowledge of the weaknesses, cheap cynicism, and vanity of a foreign predecessor, to sit in judgment upon the simple-minded and chivalrous American soldier who had succeeded him, and who was, in fact, the most loyal of husbands. The natural result of her skepticism was an espionage and criticism of the wives of the major's brother officers that compelled a frequent change of quarters. When to this was finally added a racial divergence and antipathy, the public disparagement of the customs and education of her female colleagues, and the sudden insistence of a foreign and French dominance in her household beyond any ordinary Creole justification, Randolph, presumably to avoid later international complications, resigned while he was as yet a major. Luckily his latest banishment to an extreme Western outpost

had placed him in California during the flood of a speculation epoch. He purchased a valuable Spanish grant to three leagues of land for little over a three months' pay. Following that yearning which compels retired ship-captains and rovers of all degrees to buy a farm in their old days, the major, professionally and socially inured to border strife, sought surcease and Arcadian repose in ranching.

It was here that Mrs. Randolph, late relict of the late Scipion L'Hommadiou, devoted herself to bringing up her children after the extremest of French methods, and in resurrecting a "*de*" from her own family to give a distinct and aristocratic character to their name. The "*de Fontanges l'Hommadiou*" were, however, only known to their neighbors, after the Western fashion, by their stepfather's name,—when they were known at all—which was seldom. For the boy was unpleasantly conceited as a precocious worldling, and the girl as unpleasantly complacent in her rôle of *ingénue*. The household was completely dominated by Mrs. Randolph. A punctilious Catholic, she attended all the functions of the adjacent mission, and the shadow of a black

soutane at twilight gliding through the wild oat-fields behind the ranch had often been mistaken for a coyote. The peace-loving major did not object to a piety which, while it left his own conscience free, imparted a respectable religious air to his household, and kept him from the equally distasteful approaches of the Puritanism of his neighbors, and was blissfully unconscious that he was strengthening the antagonistic foreign element in his family with an alien church.

Meantime, as the repaired buggy was slowly making its way towards his house, Major Randolph entered his wife's boudoir with a letter which the San Francisco post had just brought him. A look of embarrassment on his good-humored face strengthened the hard lines of hers; she felt some momentary weakness of her natural enemy, and prepared to give battle.

"I'm afraid here's something of a muddle, Josephine," he began with a deprecating smile. "Mallory, who was coming down here with his daughter, you know" —

"This is the first intimation *I* have had that anything has been settled upon," interrupted the lady, with appalling deliberation.

"However, my dear, you know I told you

last week that he thought of bringing her here while he went South on business. You know, being a widower, he has no one to leave her with."

"And I suppose it is the American fashion to intrust one's daughters to any old boon companions?"

"Mallory is an old friend," interrupted the major, impatiently. "He knows I'm married, and although he has never seen *you*, he is quite willing to leave his daughter here."

"Thank you!"

"Come, you know what I mean. The man naturally believes that my wife will be a proper chaperone for his daughter. But that is not the present question. He intended to call here; I expected to take you over to San José to see her and all that, you know; but the fact of it is — that is — it seems from this letter that — he's been called away sooner than he expected, and that — well — hang it! the girl is actually on her way here now."

"Alone?"

"I suppose so. You know one thinks nothing of that here."

"Or any other propriety, for that matter."

“For heaven’s sake, Josephine, don’t be ridiculous! Of course it’s stupid her coming in this way, and Mallory ought to have brought her — but she’s coming, and we must receive her. By Jove! Here she is now!” he added, starting up after a hurried glance through the window. “But what kind of a d—d turn-out is that, anyhow?”

It certainly was an odd-looking conveyance that had entered the gates, and was now slowly coming up the drive towards the house. A large draught horse harnessed to a dust-covered buggy, whose strained fore-axle, bent by the last mile of heavy road, had slanted the tops of the fore-wheels towards each other at an alarming angle. The light, graceful dress and elegant parasol of the young girl, who occupied half of its single seat, looked ludicrously pronounced by the side of the slouching figure and grimy duster of the driver, who occupied the other half.

Mrs. Randolph gave a gritty laugh. “I thought you said she was alone. Is that an escort she has picked up, American fashion, on the road?”

“That’s her hired driver, no doubt. Hang it! she can’t drive here by herself,”

retorted the major, impatiently, hurrying to the door and down the staircase. But he was instantly followed by his wife. She had no idea of permitting a possible understanding to be exchanged in their first greeting. The late M. l'Hommadieu had been able to impart a whole plan of intrigue in a single word and glance.

Happily, Rose Mallory, already in the hall, in a few words detailed the accident that had befallen her, to the honest sympathy of the major and the coldly-polite concern of Mrs. Randolph, who, in deliberately chosen sentences, managed to convey to the young girl the conviction that accidents of any kind to young ladies were to be regarded as only a shade removed from indiscretions. Rose was impressed, and even flattered, by the fastidiousness of this foreign-appearing woman, and after the fashion of youthful natures, accorded to her the respect due to recognized authority. When to this authority, which was evident, she added a depreciation of the major, I fear that some common instinct of feminine tyranny responded in Rose's breast, and that on the very threshold of the honest soldier's home she tacitly agreed with the wife to look down upon him. Mrs.

Randolph departed to inform her son and daughter of their guest's arrival. As a matter of fact, however, they had already observed her approach to the house through the slits of their drawn window-blinds, and those even narrower prejudices and limited comprehensions which their education had fostered. The girl, Adele, had only grasped the fact that Rose had come to their house in fine clothes, alone with a man, in a broken-down vehicle, and was moved to easy mirth and righteous wonder. The young man, Emile, had agreed with her, with the mental reservation that the guest was pretty, and must eventually fall in love with him. They both, however, welcomed her with a trained politeness and a superficial attention that, while the indifference of her own countrymen in the wheat-field was still fresh in her recollection, struck her with grateful contrast; the major's quiet and unobtrusive kindness naturally made less impression, or was accepted as a matter of course.

"Well," said the major, cheerfully but tentatively, to his wife when they were alone again, "she seems a nice girl, after all; and a good deal of pluck and character, by Jove! to push on in that broken buggy rather than linger or come in a farm cart, eh?"

“She was alone in that wheat-field,” said Mrs. Randolph, with grim deliberation, “for half an hour; she confesses it herself — *talk-
ing with a young man!*”

“Yes, but the others had gone for the buggy. And, in the name of Heaven, what would you have her do — hide herself in the grain?” said the major, desperately. “Besides,” he added, with a recklessness he afterwards regretted, “that mechanical chap they’ve got there is really intelligent and worth talking to.”

“I have no doubt *she* thought so,” said Mrs. Randolph, with a mirthless smile. “In fact, I have observed that the American freedom generally means doing what you *want* to do. Indeed, I wonder she did n’t bring him with her! Only I beg, major, that you will not again, in the presence of my daughter, — and I may even say, of my son, — talk lightly of the solitary meetings of young ladies with mechanics, even though their faces were smutty, and their clothes covered with oil.”

The major here muttered something about there being less danger in a young lady listening to the intelligence of a coarsely-dressed laborer than to the compliments of

a rose-scented fop, but Mrs. Randolph walked out of the room before he finished the evident platitude.

That night Rose Mallory retired to her room in a state of self-satisfaction that she even felt was to a certain extent a virtue. She was delighted with her reception and with her hostess and family. It was strange her father had not spoken more of *Mrs. Randolph*, who was clearly the superior of his old friend. What fine manners they all had, so different from other people she had known! There was quite an Old World civilization about them; really, it was like going abroad! She would make the most of her opportunity and profit by her visit. She would begin by improving her French; they spoke it perfectly, and with such a pure accent. She would correct certain errors she was conscious of in her own manners, and copy *Mrs. Randolph* as much as possible. Certainly, there was a great deal to be said of *Mrs. Randolph's* way of looking at things. Now she thought of it calmly, there *was* too much informality and freedom in American ways! There was not enough respect due to position and circumstances. Take those men in the wheat-field, for example. Yet

here she found it difficult to formulate an indictment against them for "freedom." She would like to go there some day with the Randolphs and let them see what company manners were! She was thoroughly convinced now that her father had done wrong in sending her alone; it certainly was most disrespectful to them and careless of him (she had quite forgotten that she had herself proposed to her father to go alone rather than wait at the hotel), and she must have looked very ridiculous in her fine clothes and the broken-down buggy. When her trunk came by express to-morrow she would look out something more sober. She must remember that she was in a Catholic and religious household now. Ah, yes! how very fine it was to see that priest at dinner in his *soutane*, sitting down like one of the family, and making them all seem like a picture of some historical and aristocratic romance! And then they were actually "*de Fontanges l'Hommadieu*." How different he was from that shabby Methodist minister who used to come to see her father in a black cravat with a hideous bow! Really there was something to say for a religion that contained so much picturesque refinement; and for her part —

but that will do. I beg to say that I am not writing of any particular snob or feminine monstrosity, but of a very charming creature, who was quite able to say her prayers afterwards like a good girl, and lay her pretty cheek upon her pillow without a blush.

She opened her window and looked out. The moon, a great silver dome, was uplifting itself from a bluish-gray level, which she knew was the distant plain of wheat. Somewhere in its midst appeared a dull star, at times brightening as if blown upon or drawn upwards in a comet-like trail. By some odd instinct she felt that it was the solitary forge of the young inventor, and pictured him standing before it with his abstracted hazel eyes and a face more begrimed in the moonlight than ever. When *did* he wash himself? Perhaps not until Sunday. How lonely it must be out there! She slightly shivered and turned from the window. As she did so, it seemed to her that something knocked against her door from without. Opening it quickly, she was almost certain that the sound of a rustling skirt retreated along the passage. It was very late; perhaps she had disturbed the house by shut-

ting her window. No doubt it was the motherly interest of Mrs. Randolph that impelled her to come softly and look after her; and for once her simple surmises were correct. For not only the inspecting eyes of her hostess, but the amatory glances of the youthful Emile, had been fastened upon her window until the light disappeared, and even the Holy Mission Church of San José had assured itself of the dear child's safety with a large and supple ear at her keyhole.

The next morning Major Randolph took her with Adele in a light cariole over the ranch. Although his domain was nearly as large as the adjoining wheat plain, it was not, like that, monopolized by one enormous characteristic yield, but embraced a more diversified product. There were acres and acres of potatoes in rows of endless and varying succession; there were miles of wild oats and barley, which overtopped them as they drove in narrow lanes of dry and dusty monotony; there were orchards of pears, apricots, peaches, and nectarines, and vineyards of grapes, so comparatively dwarfed in height that they scarcely reached to the level of their eyes, yet laden and breaking beneath the weight of their ludicrously dis-

proportionate fruit. What seemed to be a vast green plateau covered with tiny patches, that headed the northern edge of the prospect, was an enormous bed of strawberry plants. But everywhere, crossing the track, bounding the fields, orchards, and vineyards, intersecting the paths of the whole domain, were narrow irrigating ducts and channels of running water.

“Those,” said the major, poetically, “are the veins and arteries of the ranch. Come with me now, and I’ll show you its pulsating heart.” Descending from the wagon into pedestrian prose again, he led Rose a hundred yards further to a shed that covered a wonderful artesian well. In the centre of a basin a column of water rose regularly with the even flow and volume of a brook. “It is one of the largest in the State,” said the major, “and is the life of all that grows here during six months of the year.”

Pleased as the young girl was with those evidences of the prosperity and position of her host, she was struck, however, with the fact that the farm-laborers, wine-growers, nurserymen, and all field hands scattered on the vast estate were apparently of the same independent, unpastoral, and unprofessional

character as the men of the wheat-field. There were no cottages or farm buildings that she could see, nor any apparent connection between the household and the estate; far from suggesting tenantry or retainers, the men who were working in the fields glanced at them as they passed with the indifference of strangers, or replied to the major's greetings or questionings with perfect equality of manner, or even business-like reserve and caution. Her host explained that the ranch was worked by a company "on shares;" that those laborers were, in fact, the bulk of the company; and that he, the major, only furnished the land, the seed, and the implements. "That man who was driving the long roller, and with whom you were indignant because he would n't get out of our way, is the president of the company."

"That need n't make him so uncivil," said Rose, poutingly, "for if it comes to that you're the *landlord*," she added triumphantly.

"No," said the major, good-humoredly. "I am simply the man driving the lighter and more easily-managed team for pleasure, and he's the man driving the heavier and

more difficult machine for work. It's for me to get out of his way; and looked at in the light of my being *the landlord* it is still worse, for as we're working 'on shares' I'm interrupting *his* work, and reducing *his* profits merely because I choose to sacrifice my own."

I need not say that those atrociously leveling sentiments were received by the young ladies with that feminine scorn which is only qualified by misconception. Rose, who, under the influence of her hostess, had a vague impression that they sounded something like the French Revolution, and that Adele must feel like the Princess Elizabeth, rushed to her relief like a good girl. "But, major, now, *you're* a gentleman, and if *you* had been driving that roller, you know you would have turned out for us."

"I don't know about that," said the major, mischievously; "but if I had, I should have known that the other fellow who accepted it was n't a gentleman."

But Rose, having sufficiently shown her partisanship in the discussion, after the feminine fashion, did not care particularly for the logical result. After a moment's silence she resumed: "And the wheat ranch below — is that carried on in the same way?"

“Yes. But their landlord is a bank, who advances not only the land, but the money to work it, and does n't ride around in a buggy with a couple of charmingly distracting young ladies.”

“And do they all share alike?” continued Rose, ignoring the pleasantry, “big and little — that young inventor with the rest?”

She stopped. She felt the *ingénue's* usually complacent eyes suddenly fixed upon her with an unhallowed precocity, and as quickly withdrawn. Without knowing why, she felt embarrassed, and changed the subject.

The next day they drove to the Convent of Santa Clara and the Mission College of San José. Their welcome at both places seemed to Rose to be a mingling of caste greeting and spiritual zeal, and the austere seclusion and reserve of those cloisters repeated that suggestion of an Old World civilization that had already fascinated the young Western girl. They made other excursions in the vicinity, but did not extend it to a visit to their few neighbors. With their reserved and exclusive ideas this fact did not strike Rose as peculiar, but on a later shopping expedition to the town of San José, a

certain reticence and aggressive sensitiveness on the part of the shopkeepers and tradespeople towards the Randolphs produced an unpleasant impression on her mind. She could not help noticing, too, that after the first stare of astonishment which greeted her appearance with her hostess, she herself was included in the antagonism. With her youthful prepossession for her friends, this distinction she regarded as flattering and aristocratic, and I fear she accented it still more by discussing with Mrs. Randolph the merits of the shopkeepers' wares in school-girl French before them. She was unfortunate enough, however, to do this in the shop of a polyglot German.

"Oxcoos me, mees," he said gravely,—"but dot lady speeks Engeleesh so goot mit yourselluf, and ven you dells to her dot silk is hallf gotton in English, she onderstand you mooch better, and it don't make nodings to me." The laugh which would have followed from her own countrywomen did not, however, break upon the trained faces of the "*de Fontanges l'Hommedius*," yet while Rose would have joined in it, albeit a little ruefully, she felt for the first time mortified at their civil insincerity.

At the end of two weeks, Major Randolph received a letter from Mr. Mallory. When he had read it, he turned to his wife: "He thanks you," he said, "for your kindness to his daughter, and explains that his sudden departure was owing to the necessity of his taking advantage of a great opportunity for speculation that had offered." As Mrs. Randolph turned away with a slight shrug of the shoulders, the major continued: "But you have n't heard all! That opportunity was the securing of a half interest in a cinabar lode in Sonora, which has already gone up a hundred thousand dollars in his hands! By Jove! a man can afford to drop a little social ceremony on those terms — eh, Josephine?" he concluded with a triumphant chuckle.

"He's as likely to lose his hundred thousand to-morrow, while his manners will remain," said Mrs. Randolph. "I've no faith in these sudden California fortunes!"

"You're wrong as regards Mallory, for he's as careful as he is lucky. He don't throw money away for appearance sake, or he'd have a rich home for that daughter. He could afford it."

Mrs. Randolph was silent. "She is his

only daughter, I believe," she continued presently.

"Yes — he has no other kith or kin," returned the major.

"She seems to be very much impressed by Emile," said Mrs. Randolph.

Major Randolph faced his wife quickly.

"In the name of all that's ridiculous, my dear, you are not already thinking of" — he gasped.

"I should be very loth to give *my* sanction to anything of the kind, knowing the difference of her birth, education, and religion, — although the latter I believe she would readily change," said Mrs. Randolph, severely. "But when you speak of *my* already thinking of 'such things,' do you suppose that your friend, Mr. Mallory, did n't consider all that when he sent that girl here?"

"Never," said the major, vehemently, "and if it entered his head now, by Jove, he 'd take her away to-morrow — always supposing I did n't anticipate him by sending her off myself."

Mrs. Randolph uttered her mirthless laugh. "And you suppose the girl would go? Really, major, you don't seem to

understand this boasted liberty of your own countrywoman. What does she care for her father's control? Why, she'd make him do just what *she* wanted. But," she added with an expression of dignity, "perhaps we had better not discuss this until we know something of Emile's feelings in the matter. That is the only question that concerns us." With this she swept out of the room, leaving the major at first speechless with honest indignation, and then after the fashion of all guileless natures, a little uneasy and suspicious of his own guilelessness. For a day or two after, he found himself, not without a sensation of meanness, watching Rose when in Emile's presence, but he could distinguish nothing more than the frank satisfaction she showed equally to the others. Yet he found himself regretting even that, so subtle was the contagion of his wife's suspicions.

CHAPTER III.

It had been a warm morning ; an unusual mist, which the sun had not dissipated, had crept on from the great grain-fields beyond, and hung around the house charged with a dry, dusty closeness that seemed to be quite independent of the sun's rays, and more like a heated exhalation or emanation of the soil itself. In its acrid irritation Rose thought she could detect the breath of the wheat as on the day she had plunged into its pale, green shadows. By the afternoon this mist had disappeared, apparently in the same mysterious manner, but not scattered by the usual trade-wind, which — another unusual circumstance — that day was not forthcoming. There was a breathlessness in the air like the hush of listening expectancy, which filled the young girl with a vague restlessness, and seemed to even affect a scattered company of crows in the field beyond the house, which rose suddenly with startled but aimless wings, and then dropped vacantly among the grain again.

Major Randolph was inspecting a distant part of the ranch, Mrs. Randolph was presumably engaged in her boudoir, and Rose was sitting between Adele and Emile before the piano in the drawing-room, listlessly turning over the leaves of some music. There had been an odd mingling of eagerness and abstraction in the usual attentions of the young man that morning, and a certain nervous affectation in his manner of twisting the ends of a small black moustache, which resembled his mother's eyebrows, that had affected Rose with a half-amused, half-uneasy consciousness, but which she had, however, referred to the restlessness produced by the weather. It occurred to her also that the vacuously amiable Adele had once or twice regarded her with the same precocious, child-like curiosity and infantine cunning she had once before exhibited. All this did not, however, abate her admiration for both — perhaps particularly for this picturesquely gentlemanly young fellow, with his gentle audacities of compliment, his caressing attentions, and his unflinching and equal address. And when, discovering that she had mislaid her fan for the fifth time that morning, he started up with equal and undiminished fire

to go again and fetch it, the look of grateful pleasure and pleading perplexity in her pretty eyes might have turned a less conceited brain than his.

“But you don’t know where it is!”

“I shall find it by instinct.”

“You are spoiling me — you two.” The parenthesis was a hesitating addition, but she continued, with fresh sincerity, “I shall be quite helpless when I leave here — if I am ever able to go by myself.”

“Don’t ever go, then.”

“But just now I want my fan; it is so close everywhere to-day.”

“I fly, mademoiselle.”

He started to the door.

She called after him: —

“Let me help your instinct, then; I had it last in the major’s study.”

“That was where I was going.”

He disappeared. Rose got up and moved uneasily towards the window. “How queer and quiet it looks outside. It’s really too bad that he should be sent after that fan again. He’ll never find it.” She resumed her place at the piano, Adele following her with round, expectant eyes. After a pause she started up again. “I’ll go and fetch it

myself," she said, with a half-embarrassed laugh, and ran to the door.

Scarcely understanding her own nervousness, but finding relief in rapid movement, Rose flew lightly up the staircase. The major's study, where she had been writing letters, during his absence, that morning, was at the further end of a long passage, and near her own bedroom, the door of which, as she passed, she noticed, half-abstractedly, was open, but she continued on and hurriedly entered the study. At the same moment Emile, with a smile on his face, turned towards her with the fan in his hand.

"Oh, you've found it," she said, with nervous eagerness. "I was so afraid you'd have all your trouble for nothing."

She extended her hand, with a half-breathless smile, for the fan, but he caught her outstretched little palm in his own, and held it.

"Ah! but you are not going to leave us, are you?"

In a flash of consciousness she understood him, and, as it seemed to her, her own nervousness, and all, and everything. And with it came a swift appreciation of all it

meant to her and her future. To be always with him and like him, a part of this refined and restful seclusion — akin to all that had so attracted her in this house ; not to be obliged to educate herself up to it, but to be in it on equal terms at once ; to know that it was no wild, foolish youthful fancy, but a wise, thoughtful, and prudent resolve, that her father would understand and her friends respect : these were the thoughts that crowded quickly upon her, more like an explanation of her feelings than a revelation, in the brief second that he held her hand. It was not, perhaps, love as she had dreamed it, and even *believed* it, before. She was not ashamed or embarrassed ; she even felt, with a slight pride, that she was not blushing. She raised her eyes frankly. What she *would* have said she did not know, for the door, which he had closed behind her, began to shake violently.

It was not the fear of some angry intrusion or interference surely that made him drop her hand instantly. It was not — her second thought — the idea that some one had fallen in a fit against it that blanched his face with abject and unreasoning terror ! It must have been something else that

caused him to utter an inarticulate cry and dash out of the room and down the stairs like a madman! What had happened?

In her own self-possession she knew that all this was passing rapidly, that it was not the door now that was still shaking, for it had swung almost shut again—but it was the windows, the book-shelves, the floor beneath her feet, that were all shaking. She heard a hurried scrambling, the trampling of feet below, and the quick rustling of a skirt in the passage, as if some one had precipitately fled from her room. Yet no one had called to her—even *he* had said nothing. Whatever had happened they clearly had not cared for her to know.

The jarring and rattling ceased as suddenly, but the house seemed silent and empty. She moved to the door, which had now swung open a few inches, but to her astonishment it was fixed in that position, and she could not pass. As yet she had been free from any personal fear, and even now it was with a half smile at her imprisonment in the major's study, that she rang the bell and turned to the window. A man, whom she recognized as one of the ranch laborers, was standing a hundred feet away in the

garden, looking curiously at the house. He saw her face as she tried to raise the sash, uttered an exclamation, and ran forward. But before she could understand what he said, the sash began to rattle in her hand, the jarring recommenced, the floor shook beneath her feet, a hideous sound of grinding seemed to come from the walls, a thin seam of dust-like smoke broke from the ceiling, and with the noise of falling plaster a dozen books followed each other from the shelves, in what in the frantic hurry of that moment seemed a grimly deliberate succession; a picture hanging against the wall, to her dazed wonder, swung forward, and appeared to stand at right angles from it; she felt herself reeling against the furniture; a deadly nausea overtook her; as she glanced despairingly towards the window, the outlying fields beyond the garden seemed to be undulating like a sea. For the first time she raised her voice, not in fear, but in a pathetic little cry of apology for her awkwardness in tumbling about and not being able to grapple this new experience, and then she found herself near the door, which had once more swung free. She grasped it eagerly, and darted out of the study into the

deserted passage. Here some instinct made her follow the line of the wall, rather than the shaking balusters of the corridor and staircase, but before she reached the bottom she heard a shout, and the farm laborer she had seen coming towards her seized her by the arm, dragged her to the open doorway of the drawing-room, and halted beneath its arch in the wall. Another thrill, but lighter than before, passed through the building, then all was still again.

“It’s over; I reckon that’s all just now,” said the man, coolly. “It’s quite safe to cut and run for the garden now, through this window.” He half led, half lifted her through the French window to the veranda and the ground, and locking her arm in his, ran quickly forward a hundred feet from the house, stopping at last beneath a large post oak where there was a rustic seat into which she sank. “You’re safe now, I reckon,” he said grimly.

She looked towards the house; the sun was shining brightly; a cool breeze seemed to have sprung up as they ran. She could see a quantity of rubbish lying on the roof from which a dozen yards of zinc gutter were perilously hanging; the broken shafts of the

further cluster of chimneys, a pile of bricks scattered upon the ground and among the battered down beams of the end of the veranda — but that was all. She lifted her now whitened face to the man, and with the apologetic smile still lingering on her lips, asked : —

“What does it all mean? What has happened?”

The man stared at her. “D’ye mean to say ye don’t know?”

“How could I? They must have all left the house as soon as it began. I was talking to — to M. l’Hommadieu, and he suddenly left.”

The man brought his face angrily down within an inch of her own. “D’ye mean to say that them d—d French half-breeds stampeded and left yer there alone?”

She was still too much stupefied by the reaction to fully comprehend his meaning, and repeated feebly with her smile still faintly lingering: “But you don’t tell me *what* it was?”

“An earthquake,” said the man, roughly, “and if it had lasted ten seconds longer it would have shook the whole shanty down and left you under it. Yer kin tell *that* to

them, if they don't know it, but from the way they made tracks to the fields, I reckon they did. They 're coming now."

Without another word he turned away half surlily, half defiantly, passing scarce fifty yards away Mrs. Randolph and her daughter, who were hastening towards their guest.

"Oh, here you are!" said Mrs. Randolph, with the nearest approach to effusion that Rose had yet seen in her manner. "We were wondering where you had run to, and were getting quite concerned. Emile was looking for you everywhere."

The recollection of his blank and abject face, his vague outcry and blind fright, came back to Rose with a shock that sent a flash of sympathetic shame to her face. The ingenious Adele noticed it, and dutifully pinched her mother's arm.

"Emile?" echoed Rose faintly — "looking for *me*?"

Mother and daughter exchanged glances.

"Yes," said Mrs. Randolph, cheerfully, "he says he started to run with you, but you got ahead and slipped out of the garden door — or something of the kind," she added, with the air of making light of Rose's girlish

fears. "You know one scarcely knows what one does at such times, and it must have been frightfully strange to *you* — and he 's been quite distracted, lest you should have wandered away. Adele, run and tell him Miss Mallory has been here under the oak all the time."

Rose started — and then fell hopelessly back in her seat. Perhaps it *was* true! Perhaps he had not rushed off with that awful face and without a word. Perhaps she herself had been half-frightened out of her reason. In the simple, weak kindness of her nature it seemed less dreadful to believe that the fault was partly her own.

"And you went back into the house to look for us when all was over," said Mrs. Randolph, fixing her black, beady, magnetic eyes on Rose, "and that stupid yokel Zake brought you out again. He need n't have clutched your arm so closely, my dear, — I must speak to the major about his excessive familiarity — but I suppose I shall be told that that is American freedom. I call it 'a liberty.'"

It struck Rose that she had not even thanked the man — in the same flash that she remembered something dreadful that he

had said. She covered her face with her hands and tried to recall herself.

Mrs. Randolph gently tapped her shoulder with a mixture of maternal philosophy and discipline, and continued: "Of course, it's an upset — and you're confused still. That's nothing. They say, dear, it's perfectly well known that no two people's recollections of these things ever are the same. It's really ridiculous the contradictory stories one hears. Is n't it, Emile?"

Rose felt that the young man had joined them and was looking at her. In the fear that she should still see some trace of the startled, selfish animal in his face, she did not dare to raise her eyes to his, but looked at his mother. Mrs. Randolph was standing then, collected but impatient.

"It's all over now," said Emile, in his usual voice, "and except the chimneys and some fallen plaster there's really no damage done. But I'm afraid they have caught it pretty badly at the mission, and at San Francisco in those tall, flashy, rattle-trap buildings they're putting up. I've just sent off one of the men for news."

Her father was in San Francisco by that time; and she had never thought of *him*!

In her quick remorse she now forgot all else and rose to her feet.

“I must telegraph to my father at once,” she said hurriedly; “he is there.”

“You had better wait until the messenger returns and hear his news,” said Emile. “If the shock was only a slight one in San Francisco, your father might not understand you, and would be alarmed.”

She could see his face now — there was no record of the past expression upon it, but he was watching her eagerly. Mrs. Randolph and Adele had moved away to speak to the servants. Emile drew nearer.

“You surely will not desert us now?” he said in a low voice.

“Please don’t,” she said vaguely. “I’m so worried,” and, pushing quickly past him, she hurriedly rejoined the two women.

They were superintending the erection of a long tent or marquee in the garden, hastily extemporized from the awnings of the veranda and other cloth. Mrs. Randolph explained that, although all danger was over, there was the possibility of the recurrence of lighter shocks during the day and night, and that they would all feel much more secure and comfortable to camp out for the next twenty-four hours in the open air.

“Only imagine you’re picnicking, and you’ll enjoy it as most people usually enjoy those horrid *al fresco* entertainments. I don’t believe there’s the slightest real necessity for it, but,” she added in a lower voice, “the Irish and Chinese servants are so demoralized now, they would n’t stay indoors with us. It’s a common practice here, I believe, for a day or two after the shock, and it gives time to put things right again and clear up. The old, one-storied, Spanish houses with walls three feet thick, and built round a courtyard or *patio*, were much safer. It’s only when the Americans try to improve upon the old order of things with their pinchbeck shams and stucco that Providence interferes like this to punish them.”

It was the fact, however, that Rose was more impressed by what seemed to her the absolute indifference of Providence in the matter, and the cool resumption by Nature of her ordinary conditions. The sky above their heads was as rigidly blue as ever, and as smilingly monotonous; the distant prospect, with its clear, well-known silhouettes, had not changed; the crows swung on lazy, deliberate wings over the grain as before; and the trade-wind was again blowing in its

quiet persistency. And yet she knew that something had happened that would never again make her enjoyment of the prospect the same — that nothing would ever be as it was yesterday. I think at first she referred only to the material and larger phenomena, and did not confound this revelation of the insecurity of the universe with her experience of man. Yet the fact also remained that to the conservative, correct, and, as she believed, secure condition to which she had been approximating, all her relations were rudely shaken and upset. It really seemed to this simple-minded young woman that the revolutionary disturbance of settled conditions might have as Providential an origin as the “Divine Right” of which she had heard so much.

CHAPTER IV.

IN her desire to be alone and to evade the now significant attentions of Emile, she took advantage of the bustle that followed the hurried transfer of furniture and articles from the house to escape through the garden to the outlying fields. Striking into one of the dusty lanes that she remembered, she wandered on for half an hour until her progress and meditation were suddenly arrested. She had come upon a long chasm or crack in the soil, full twenty feet wide and as many in depth, crossing her path at right angles. She did not remember having seen it before; the track of wheels went up to its precipitous edge; she could see the track on the other side, but the hiatus remained, unbridged and uncovered. It was not there yesterday. She glanced right and left; the fissure seemed to extend, like a moat or ditch, from the distant road to the upland between her and the great wheat valley below, from which she was shut off. An odd

sense of being in some way a prisoner confronted her. She drew back with an impatient start, and perhaps her first real sense of indignation. A voice behind her, which she at once recognized, scarcely restored her calmness.

“You can’t get across there, miss.”

She turned. It was the young inventor from the wheat ranch, on horseback and with a clean face. He had just ridden out of the grain on the same side of the chasm as herself.

“But you seem to have got over,” she said bluntly.

“Yes, but it was further up the field. I reckoned that the split might be deeper but not so broad in the rock outcrop over there than in the adobe here. I found it so and jumped it.”

He looked as if he might — alert, intelligent, and self-contained. He lingered a moment, and then continued: —

“I’m afraid you must have been badly shaken and a little frightened up there before the chimneys came down?”

“No,” she was glad to say briefly, and she believed truthfully, “I was n’t frightened. I did n’t even know it was an earthquake.”

"Ah!" he reflected, "that was because you were a stranger. It's odd — they're all like that. I suppose it's because nobody really expects or believes in the unlooked-for thing, and yet that's the thing that always happens. And then, of course, that other affair, which really is serious, startled you the more."

She felt herself ridiculously and angrily blushing. "I don't know what you mean," she said icily. "What other affair?"

"Why, the well."

"The well?" she repeated vacantly.

"Yes; the artesian well has stopped. Did n't the major tell you?"

"No," said the girl. "He was away; I have n't seen him yet."

"Well, the flow of water has ceased completely. That's what I'm here for. The major sent for me, and I've been to examine it."

"And is that stoppage so very important?" she said dubiously.

It was his turn to look at her wonderingly.

"If it's *lost* entirely, it means ruin for the ranch," he said sharply. He wheeled his horse, nodded gravely, and trotted off.

Major Randolph's figure of the "life-blood of the ranch" flashed across her suddenly. She knew nothing of irrigation or the costly appliances by which the Californian agriculturist opposed the long summer droughts. She only vaguely guessed that the dreadful earthquake had struck at the prosperity of those people whom only a few hours ago she had been proud to call her friends. The underlying goodness of her nature was touched. Should she let a momentary fault — if it were not really, after all, only a misunderstanding — rise between her and them at such a moment? She turned and hurried quickly towards the house.

Hastening onward, she found time, however, to wonder also why these common men — she now included even the young inventor in that category — were all so rude and uncivil to *her*! She had never before been treated in this way; she had always been rather embarrassed by the admiring attentions of young men (clerks and collegians) in her Atlantic home, and of professional men (merchants and stockbrokers) in San Francisco. It was true that they were not as continually devoted to her and to the nice

art and etiquette of pleasing as Emile, — they had other things to think about, being in business and not being *gentlemen*, — but then they were greatly superior to these clowns, who took no notice of her, and rode off without lingering or formal leave-taking when their selfish affairs were concluded. It must be the contact of the vulgar earth — this wretched, cracking, material, and yet ungovernable and lawless earth — that so depraved them. She felt she would like to say this to some one — not her father, for he would n't listen to her, nor to the major, who would laughingly argue with her, but to Mrs. Randolph, who would understand her, and perhaps say it some day in her own sharp, sneering way to these very clowns. With those gentle sentiments irradiating her blue eyes, and putting a pink flush upon her fair cheeks, Rose reached the garden with the intention of rushing sympathetically into Mrs. Randolph's arms. But it suddenly occurred to her that she would be obliged to state how she became aware of this misfortune, and with it came an instinctive aversion to speak of her meeting with the inventor. She would wait until Mrs. Randolph told her. But although that lady was en-

gaged in a low-voiced discussion in French with Emile and Adele, which instantly ceased at her approach, there was no allusion made to the new calamity. "You need not telegraph to your father," she said as Rose approached, "he has already telegraphed to you for news; as you were out, and the messenger was waiting an answer, we opened the dispatch, and sent one, telling him that you were all right, and that he need not hurry here on your account. So you are satisfied, I hope." A few hours ago this would have been true, and Rose would have probably seen in the action of her hostess only a flattering motherly supervision; there was, in fact, still a lingering trace of trust in her mind; yet she was conscious that she would have preferred to answer the dispatch herself, and to have let her father come. To a girl brought up with a belief in the right of individual independence of thought and action, there was something in Mrs. Randolph's practical ignoring of that right which startled her in spite of her new conservatism, while, as the daughter of a business man, her instincts revolted against Mrs. Randolph's unbusiness-like action with the telegram, however vulgar and unrefined

she may have begun to consider a life of business. The result was a certain constraint and embarrassment in her manner, which, however, had the laudable effect of limiting Emile's attention to significant glances, and was no doubt variously interpreted by the others. But she satisfied her conscience by determining to make a confidence of her sympathy to the major on the first opportunity.

This she presently found when the others were preoccupied; the major greeting her with a somewhat careworn face, but a voice whose habitual kindness was unchanged. When he had condoled with her on the terrifying phenomenon that had marred her visit to the ranch, — and she could not help impatiently noticing that he too seemed to have accepted his wife's theory that she had been half deliriously frightened, — he regretted that her father had not concluded to come down to the ranch, as his practical advice would have been invaluable in this emergency. She was about to eagerly explain why, when it occurred to her that Mrs. Randolph had only given him a suppressed version of the telegram, and that she would be betraying her, or again taking sides in

this partisan divided home. With some hesitation she at last alluded to the accident to the artesian well. The major did not ask her how she had heard of it; it was a bad business, he thought, but it might not be a total loss. The water may have been only diverted by the shock and might be found again at the lower level, or in some lateral fissure. He had sent hurriedly for Tom Bent — that clever young engineer at the wheat ranch, who was always studying up these things with his inventions — and that was his opinion. No, Tom was not a well-digger, but it was generally known that he had “located” one or two, and had long ago advised the tapping of that flow by a second boring, in case of just such an emergency. He was coming again to-morrow. By the way, he had asked how the young lady visitor was, and hoped she had not been alarmed by the earthquake!

Rose felt herself again blushing, and, what was more singular, with an unexpected and it seemed to her ridiculous pleasure, although outwardly she appeared to ignore the civility completely. And she had no intention of being so easily placated. If this young man thought by mere perfunctory civilities to her

host to make up for his clownishness to *her*, he was mistaken. She would let him see it when he called to-morrow. She quickly turned the subject by assuring the major of her sympathy and her intention of sending for her father. For the rest of the afternoon and during their *al fresco* dinner she solved the difficulty of her strained relations with Mrs. Randolph and Emile by conversing chiefly with the major, tacitly avoiding, however, any allusion to this Mr. Bent. But Mrs. Randolph was less careful.

“ You don't really mean to say, major,” she began in her driest, grittiest manner, “ that instead of sending to San Francisco for some skilled master-mechanic, you are going to listen to the vagaries of a conceited, half-educated farm-laborer, and employ him? You might as well call in some of those wizards or water-witches at once.” But the major, like many other well-managed husbands who are good-humoredly content to suffer in the sunshine of prosperity, had no idea of doing so in adversity, and the prospect of being obliged to go back to youthful struggles had recalled some of the independence of that period. He looked up quietly, and said : —

“ If his conclusions are as clear and satisfactory to-morrow as they were to-day, I shall certainly try to secure his services.”

“ Then I can only say *I* would prefer the water-witch. He at least would not represent a class of neighbors who have made themselves systematically uncivil and disagreeable to us.”

“ I am afraid, Josephine, we have not tried to make ourselves particularly agreeable to *them*,” said the major.

“ If that can only be done by admitting their equality, I prefer they should remain uncivil. Only let it be understood, major, that if you choose to take this Tom-the-ploughboy to mend your well, you will at least keep him there while he is on the property.”

With what retort the major would have kept up this conjugal discussion, already beginning to be awkward to the discreet visitor, is not known, as it was suddenly stopped by a bullet from the rosebud lips of the ingenious Adele.

“ Why, he ’s very handsome when his face is clean, and his hands are small and not at all hard. And he does n’t talk the least bit queer or common.”

There was a dead silence. "And pray where did *you* see him, and what do you know about his hands?" asked Mrs. Randolph, in her most desiccated voice. "Or has the major already presented you to him? I should n't be surprised."

"No, but" — hesitated the young girl, with a certain mouse-like audacity, — "when you sent me to look after Miss Mallory, I came up to him just after he had spoken to her, and he stopped to ask me how we all were, and if Miss Mallory was really frightened by the earthquake, and he shook hands for good afternoon — that's all."

"And who taught you to converse with common strangers and shake hands with them?" continued Mrs. Randolph, with narrowing lips.

"Nobody, mamma; but I thought if Miss Mallory, who is a young lady, could speak to him, so could I, who am not out yet."

"We won't discuss this any further at present," said Mrs. Randolph, stiffly, as the major smiled grimly at Rose. "The earthquake seems to have shaken down in this house more than the chimneys."

It certainly had shaken all power of sleep from the eyes of Rose when the household

at last dispersed to lie down in their clothes on the mattresses which had been arranged under the awnings. She was continually starting up from confused dreams of the ground shaking under her, or she seemed to be standing on the brink of some dreadful abyss like the great chasm on the grain-field, when it began to tremble and crumble beneath her feet. It was near morning when, unable to endure it any longer, she managed without disturbing the sleeping Adele, who occupied the same curtained recess with her, to slip out from the awning. Wrapped in a thick shawl, she made her way through the encompassing trees and bushes of the garden that had seemed to imprison and suffocate her, to the edge of the grain-field, where she could breathe the fresh air beneath an open, starlit sky. There was no moon and the darkness favored her; she had no fears that weighed against the horror of seclusion with her own fancies. Besides, they were camping *out* of the house, and if she chose to sit up or walk about, no one could think it strange. She wished her father were here that she might have some one of her own kin to talk to, yet she knew not what to say to him if he had come. She wanted some-

body to sympathize with her feelings, — or rather, perhaps, some one to combat and even ridicule the uneasiness that had lately come over her. She knew what her father would say, — “Do you want to go, or do you want to stay here? Do you like these people, or do you not?” She remembered the one or two glowing and enthusiastic accounts she had written him of her visit here, and felt herself blushing again. What would he think of Mrs. Randolph’s opening and answering the telegram? Would n’t he find out from the major if she had garbled the sense of his dispatch?

Away to the right, in the midst of the distant and invisible wheat-field, there was the same intermittent star, which like a living, breathing thing seemed to dilate in glowing respiration, as she had seen it the first night of her visit. Mr. Bent’s forge! It must be nearly daylight now; the poor fellow had been up all night, or else was stealing this early march on the day. She recalled Adele’s sudden eulogium of him. The first natural smile that had come to her lips since the earthquake broke up her nervous restraint, and sent her back more like her old self to her couch.

But she had not proceeded far towards the tent, when she heard the sound of low voices approaching her. It was the major and his wife, who, like herself, had evidently been unable to sleep, and were up betimes. A new instinct of secretiveness, which she felt was partly the effect of her artificial surrounding, checked her first natural instinct to call to them, and she drew back deeper in the shadow to let them pass. But to her great discomfiture the major in a conversational emphasis stopped directly in front of her.

“You are wrong, I tell you, a thousand times wrong. The girl is simply upset by this earthquake. It’s a great pity her father did n’t come instead of telegraphing. And by Jove, rather than hear any more of this, I’ll send for him myself,” said the major, in an energetic but suppressed voice.

“And the girl won’t thank you, and you’ll be a fool for your pains,” returned Mrs. Randolph, with dry persistency.

“But according to your own ideas of propriety, Mallory ought to be the first one to be consulted — and by me, too.”

“Not in this case. Of course, before any actual engagement is on, you can speak of Emile’s attentions.”

“But suppose Mallory has other views. Suppose he declines the honor. The man is no fool.”

“Thank you. But for that very reason he must. Listen to me, major; if he does n't care to please his daughter for her own sake, he will have to do so for the sake of decency. Yes, I tell you, she has thoroughly compromised herself — quite enough, if it is ever known, to spoil any other engagement her father may make. Why, ask Adele! The day of the earthquake she *absolutely* had the audacity to send him out of the room upstairs into your study for her fan, and then follow him up there alone. The servants knew it. I knew it, for I was in her room at the time with Father Antonio. The earthquake made it plain to everybody. Decline it! No. Mr. Mallory will think twice about it before he does that. What's that? Who's there?”

There was a sudden rustle in the bushes like the passage of some frightened animal — and then all was still again.

CHAPTER V.

THE sun, an hour high, but only just topping the greenish crests of the wheat, was streaming like the morning breeze through the open length of Tom Bent's workshed. An exaggerated and prolonged shadow of the young inventor himself at work beside his bench was stretching itself far into the broken-down ranks of stalks towards the invisible road, and falling at the very feet of Rose Mallory as she emerged from them.

She was very pale, very quiet, and very determined. The traveling mantle thrown over her shoulders was dusty, the ribbons that tied her hat under her round chin had become unloosed. She advanced, walking down the line of shadow directly towards him.

"I am afraid I will have to trouble you once more," she said with a faint smile, which did not, however, reach her perplexed eyes. "Could you give me any kind of a

conveyance that would take me to San José at once?"

The young man had started at the rustling of her dress in the shavings, and turned eagerly. The faintest indication of a loss of interest was visible for an instant in his face, but it quickly passed into a smile of recognition. Yet she felt that he had neither noticed any change in her appearance, nor experienced any wonder at seeing her there at that hour.

"I did not take a buggy from the house," she went on quickly, "for I left early, and did not want to disturb them. In fact, they don't know that I am gone. I was worried at not hearing news from my father in San Francisco since the earthquake, and I thought I would run down to San José to inquire without putting them to any trouble. Anything will do that you have ready, if I can take it at once."

Still without exhibiting the least surprise, Bent nodded affirmatively, put down his tools, begged her to wait a moment, and ran off in the direction of the cabin. As he disappeared behind the wheat, she lapsed quite suddenly against the work bench, but recovered herself a moment later, leaning with

her back against it, her hands grasping it on either side, and her knit brows and determined little face turned towards the road. Then she stood erect again, shook the dust out of her skirts, lifted her veil, wiped her cheeks and brow with the corner of a small handkerchief, and began walking up and down the length of the shed as Bent reappeared.

He was accompanied by the man who had first led her through the wheat. He gazed upon her with apparently all the curiosity and concern that the other had lacked.

“You want to get to San José as quick as you can?” he said interrogatively.

“Yes,” she said quickly, “if you can help me.”

“You walked all the way from the major’s here?” he continued, without taking his eyes from her face.

“Yes,” she answered with an affectation of carelessness she had not shown to Bent. “But I started very early, it was cool and pleasant, and did n’t seem far.”

“I’ll put you down in San José inside the hour. You shall have my horse and trotting sulky, and I’ll drive you myself. Will that do?”

She looked at him wonderingly. She had not forgotten his previous restraint and gravity, but now his face seemed to have relaxed with some humorous satisfaction. She felt herself coloring slightly, but whether with shame or relief she could not tell.

“I shall be so much obliged to you,” she replied hesitatingly, “and so will my father, I know.”

“I reckon,” said the man with the same look of amused conjecture; then, with a quick, assuring nod, he turned away, and dived into the wheat again.

“You ’re all right now, Miss Mallory,” said Bent, complacently. “Dawson will fix it. He ’s got a good horse, and he ’s a good driver, too.” He paused, and then added pleasantly, “I suppose they ’re all well up at the house?”

It was so evident that his remark carried no personal meaning to herself that she was obliged to answer carelessly, “Oh, yes.”

“I suppose you see a good deal of Miss Randolph—Miss Adele, I think you call her?” he remarked tentatively, and with a certain boyish enthusiasm, which she had never conceived possible to his nature.

“Yes,” she replied a little dryly, “she is

the only young lady there." She stopped, remembering Adele's naïve description of the man before her, and said abruptly, "You know her, then?"

"A little," replied the young man, modestly. "I see her pretty often when I am passing the upper end of the ranch. She's very well brought up, and her manners are very refined — don't you think so? — and yet she's just as simple and natural as a country girl. There's a great deal in education after all, isn't there?" he went on confidentially, "and although" — he lowered his voice and looked cautiously around him — "I believe that some of us here don't fancy her mother much, there's no doubt that Mrs. Randolph knows how to bring up her children. Some people think that kind of education is all artificial, and don't believe in it, but *I* do!"

With the consciousness that she was running away from these people and the shameful disclosure she had heard last night — with the recollection of Adele's scandalous interpretation of her most innocent actions and her sudden and complete revulsion against all that she had previously admired in that household, to hear this man who had

seemed to her a living protest against their ideas and principles, now expressing them and holding them up for emulation, almost took her breath away.

“I suppose that means you intend to fix Major Randolph’s well for him?” she said dryly.

“Yes,” he returned without noticing her manner; “and I think I can find that water again. I’ve been studying it up all night, and do you know what I’m going to do? I am going to make the earthquake that lost it help me to find it again.” He paused, and looked at her with a smile and a return of his former enthusiasm. “Do you remember the crack in the adobe field that stopped you yesterday?”

“Yes,” said the girl, with a slight shiver.

“I told you then that the same crack was a split in the rock outcrop further up the plain, and was deeper. I am satisfied now, from what I have seen, that it is really a rupture of the whole strata all the way down. That’s the one weak point that the imprisoned water is sure to find, and that’s where the borer will tap it—in the new well that the earthquake itself has sunk.”

It seemed to her now that she understood

his explanation perfectly, and she wondered the more that he had been so mistaken in his estimate of Adele. She turned away a little impatiently and looked anxiously towards the point where Dawson had disappeared. Bent followed her eyes.

“He ’ll be here in a moment, Miss Malory. He has to drive slowly through the grain, but I hear the wheels.” He stopped, and his voice took up its previous note of boyish hesitation. “By the way — I ’ll — I ’ll be going up to the Rancho this afternoon to see the major. Have you any message for Mrs. Randolph — or for — for Miss Adele?”

“No” — said Rose, hesitatingly, “and — and” —

“I see,” interrupted Bent, carelessly. “You don’t want anything said about your coming here. I won’t.”

It struck her that he seemed to have no ulterior meaning in the suggestion. But before she could make any reply, Dawson reappeared, driving a handsome mare harnessed to a light, spider-like vehicle. He had also assumed, evidently in great haste, a black frock coat buttoned over his waistcoatless and cravatless shirt, and a tall black hat

that already seemed to be cracking in the sunlight. He drove up, at once assisted her to the narrow perch beside him, and with a nod to Bent drove off. His breathless expedition relieved the leave-taking of these young people of any ceremony.

"I suppose," said Mr. Dawson, giving a half glance over his shoulder as they struck into the dusty highway, — "I suppose you don't care to see anybody before you get to San José?"

"No-o-o," said Rose, timidly.

"And I reckon you would n't mind my racin' a bit if anybody kem up?"

"No."

"The mare's sort o' fastidious about takin' anybody's dust."

"Is she?" said Rose, with a faint smile.

"Awful," responded her companion; "and the queerest thing of all is, she can't bear to have any one behind her, either."

He leaned forward with his expression of humorous enjoyment of some latent joke and did something with the reins — Rose never could clearly understand what, though it seemed to her that he simply lifted them with ostentatious lightness; but the mare suddenly seemed to *lengthen* herself and lose

her height, and the stalks of wheat on either side of the dusty track began to melt into each other, and then slipped like a flash into one long, continuous, shimmering green hedge. So perfect was the mare's action that the girl was scarcely conscious of any increased effort; so harmonious the whole movement that the light skeleton wagon seemed only a prolonged process of that long, slim body and free, collarless neck, both straight as the thin shafts on each side and straighter than the delicate ribbon-like traces which, in what seemed a mere affectation of conscious power, hung at times almost limp between the whiffle-tree and the narrow breast band which was all that confined the animal's powerful fore-quarters. So superb was the reach of its long easy stride that Rose could scarcely see any undulations in the brown shining back on which she could have placed her foot, nor felt the soft beat of the delicate hoofs that took the dust so firmly and yet so lightly.

The rapidity of motion which kept them both with heads bent forward and seemed to force back any utterance that rose to their lips spared Rose the obligation of conversation, and her companion was equally reti-

cent. But it was evident to her that he half suspected she was running away from the Randolphs, and that she wished to avoid the embarrassment of being overtaken even in persuasive pursuit. It was not possible that he knew the cause of her flight, and yet she could not account for his evident desire to befriend her, nor, above all, for his apparently humorous enjoyment of the situation. Had he taken it gravely, she might have been tempted to partly confide in him and ask his advice. Was she doing right, after all? Ought she not to have stayed long enough to speak her mind to Mrs. Randolph and demand to be sent home? No! She had not only shrunk from repeating the infamous slander she had overheard, but she had a terrible fear that if she had done so, Mrs. Randolph was capable of denying it, or even charging her of being still under the influence of the earthquake shock and of walking in her sleep. No! She could not trust her — she could trust no one there. Had not even the major listened to those infamous lies? Had she not seen that he was helpless in the hands of this cabal in his own household? — a cabal that she herself had thoughtlessly joined against him.

They had reached the first slight ascent. Her companion drew out his watch, looked at it with satisfaction, and changed the position of his hands on the reins. Without being able to detect the difference, she felt they were slackening speed. She turned inquiringly towards him; he nodded his head, with a half smile and a gesture to her to look ahead. The spires of San José were already faintly uplifting from the distant fringe of oaks.

So soon! In fifteen minutes she would be there — and *then!* She remembered suddenly she had not yet determined what to do. Should she go on at once to San Francisco, or telegraph to her father and await him at San José? In either case a new fear of the precipitancy of her action and the inadequacy of her reasons had sprung up in her mind. Would her father understand her? Would he underrate the cause and be mortified at the insult she had given the family of his old friend, or, more dreadful still, would he exaggerate her wrongs and seek a personal quarrel with the major. He was a man of quick temper, and had the Western ideas of redress. Perhaps even now she was precipitating a duel be-

tween them. Her cheeks grew wan again, her breath came quickly, tears gathered in her eyes. Oh, she was a dreadful girl, she knew it; she was an utterly miserable one, and she knew that too!

The reins were tightened. The pace lessened and at last fell to a walk. Conscious of her telltale eyes and troubled face, she dared not turn to her companion to ask him why, but glanced across the fields.

“When you first came I did n’t get to know your name, Miss Mallory, but I reckon I know your father.”

Her father! What made him say that? She wanted to speak, but she felt she could not. In another moment, if he went on, she must do *something* — she would cry!

“I reckon you ’ll be wanting to go to the hotel first, anyway?”

There! — she knew it! He *would* keep on! And now she had burst into tears.

The mare was still walking slowly; the man was lazily bending forward over the shafts as if nothing had occurred. Then suddenly, illogically, and without a moment’s warning, the pride that had sustained her crumbled and became as the dust of the road.

She burst out and told him — this stranger! — this man she had disliked! — all and *everything*. How she had felt, how she had been deceived, and what she had overheard!

“I thought as much,” said her companion, quietly, “and that’s why I sent for your father.”

“You sent for my father! — when? — where?” echoed Rose, in astonishment.

“Yesterday. He was to come to-day, and if we don’t find him at the hotel it will be because he has already started to come here by the upper and longer road. But you leave it to *me*, and don’t you say anything to him of this now. If he’s at the hotel, I’ll say I drove you down there to show off the mare. *Sabe?* If he is n’t, I’ll leave you there and come back here to find him. I’ve got something to tell him that will set *you* all right.” He smiled grimly, lifted the reins, the mare started forward again, and the vehicle and its occupants disappeared in a vanishing dust cloud.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was nearly noon when Mr. Dawson finished rubbing down his sweating mare in the little stable shed among the wheat. He had left Rose at the hotel, for they found Mr. Mallory had previously started by a circuitous route for the wheat ranch. He had resumed not only his working clothes but his working expression. He was now superintending the unloading of a wain of stores and implements when the light carryall of the Randolphs rolled into the field. It contained only Mrs. Randolph and the driver. A slight look of intelligence passed between the latter and the nearest one of Dawson's companions, succeeded, however, by a dull look of stupid vacancy on the faces of all the others, including Dawson. Mrs. Randolph noticed it, and was forewarned. She reflected that no human beings ever looked *naturally* as stupid as that and were able to work. She smiled sarcastically, and then began with dry distinctness and narrowing lips.

“Miss Mallory, a young lady visiting us, went out for an early walk this morning and has not returned. It is possible she may have lost her way among your wheat. Have you seen anything of her?”

Dawson raised his eyes from his work and glanced slowly around at his companions, as if taking the heavy sense of the assembly. One or two shook their heads mechanically, and returned to their suspended labor. He said, coolly:—

“Nobody here seems to.”

She felt that they were lying. She was only a woman against five men. She was only a petty domestic tyrant; she might have been a larger one. But she had all the courage of that possibility.

“Major Randolph and my son are away,” she went on, drawing herself erect. “But I know that the major will pay liberally if these men will search the field, besides making it all right with your — *employers* — for the loss of time.”

Dawson uttered a single word in a low voice to the man nearest him, who apparently communicated it to the others, for the four men stopped unloading, and moved away one after the other — even the driver

joining in the exodus. Mrs. Randolph smiled sarcastically; it was plain that these people, with all their boasted independence, were quite amenable to pecuniary considerations. Nevertheless, as Dawson remained looking quietly at her, she said:—

“Then I suppose they’ve concluded to go and see?”

“No; I’ve sent them away so that they could n’t hear.”

“Hear what?”

“What I’ve got to say to you.”

She looked at him suddenly. Then she said, with a disdainful glance around her: “I see I am helpless here, and—thanks to your trickery—alone. Have a care, sir; I warn you that you will have to answer to Major Randolph for any insolence.”

“I reckon you won’t tell Major Randolph what I have to say to you,” he returned coolly.

Her lips were nearly a grayish hue, but she said scornfully: “And why not? Do you know who you are talking to?”

The man came lazily forward to the carry-all, carelessly brushed aside the slack reins, and resting his elbows on the horse’s back, laid his chin on his hands, as he looked up in the woman’s face.

“Yes; *I* know who I’m talking to,” he said coolly. “But as the major don’t, I reckon you won’t tell him.”

“Stand away from that horse!” she said, her whole face taking the grayish color of her lips, but her black eyes growing smaller and brighter. “Hand me those reins, and let me pass! What *canaille* are you to stop me?”

“I thought so,” returned the man, without altering his position; “you don’t know *me*. You never saw *me* before. Well, I’m Jim Dawson, the nephew of L’Hommadieu, *your old master!*”

She gripped the iron rail of the seat as if to leap from it, but checked herself suddenly and leaned back, with a set smile on her mouth that seemed stamped there. It was remarkable that with that smile she flung away her old affectation of superciliousness for an older and ruder audacity, and that not only the expression, but the type of her face appeared to have changed.

“I don’t say,” continued the man quietly, “that he did n’t *marry* you before he died. But you know as well as I do that the laws of his State did n’t recognize the marriage of a master with his octoroon slave! And

you know as well as I do that even if he had freed you, he could n't change your blood. Why, if I'd been willing to stay at Avoyelles to be a nigger-driver like him, the plantation of 'de Fontanges' — whose name you have taken — would have been left to me. If *you* had stayed there, you might have been my property instead of *your* owning a square man like Randolph. You did n't think of that when you came here, did you?" he said composedly.

"*Oh, mon Dieu!*" she said, dropping rapidly into a different accent, with her white teeth and fixed mirthless smile, "so it is a claim for *property*, eh? You're wanting money — you? *Très bien*, you forget we are in California, where one does not own a slave. And you have a fine story there, my poor friend. Very pretty, but very hard to prove, *m'sieu*. And these peasants are in it, eh, working it on shares like the farm, eh?"

"Well," said Dawson, slightly changing his position, and passing his hand over the horse's neck with a half-wearied contempt, "one of these men is from Plaquemine, and the other from Coupée. They know all the l'Hommadieus' history. And they know a

streak of the tar brush when they see it. They took your measure when they came here last year, and sized you up fairly. So had I, for the matter of that, when I *first* saw you. And we compared notes. But the major is a square man, for all he is your husband, and we reckoned he had a big enough contract on his hands to take care of you and l'Hommadiieu's half-breeds, and so" — he tossed the reins contemptuously aside — "we kept this to ourselves."

"And now you want — what — eh?"

"We want an end to this foolery," he broke out roughly, stepping back from the vehicle, and facing her suddenly, with his first angry gesture. "We want an end to these airs and grimaces, and all this dandy nigger business; we want an end to this 'cake-walking' through the wheat, and flouting of the honest labor of your betters. We want you and your 'de Fontanges' to climb down. And we want an end to this roping-in of white folks to suit your little game; we want an end to your trying to mix your nigger blood with any one here, and we intend to stop it. We draw the line at the major."

Lashed as she had been by those words

apparently out of all semblance of her former social arrogance, a lower and more stubborn resistance seemed to have sprung up in her, as she sat sideways, watching him with her set smile and contracting eyes.

“Ah,” she said dryly, “so *she is here*. I thought so. Which of you is it, eh? It’s a good spec — Mallory’s a rich man. She’s not particular.”

The man had stopped as if listening, his head turned towards the road. Then he turned carelessly, and facing her again, waved his hand with a gesture of tired dismissal, and said, “Go! You’ll find your driver over there by the tool-shed. He has heard nothing yet — but I’ve given you fair warning. Go!”

He walked slowly back towards the shed, as the woman, snatching up the reins, drove violently off in the direction where the men had disappeared. But she turned aside, ignoring her waiting driver in her wild and reckless abandonment of all her old conventional attitudes, and lashing her horse forward with the same set smile on her face, the same odd relaxation of figure, and the same squaring of her elbows.

Avoiding the main road, she pushed into

a narrow track that intersected another nearer the scene of the accident to Rose's buggy three weeks before. She had nearly passed it when she was hailed by a strange voice, and looking up, perceived a horseman floundering in the mazes of the wheat to one side of the track. Whatever mean thought of her past life she was flying from, whatever mean purpose she was flying to, she pulled up suddenly, and as suddenly resumed her erect, aggressive stiffness. The stranger was a middle-aged man; in dress and appearance a dweller of cities. He lifted his hat as he perceived the occupant of the wagon to be a lady.

"I beg your pardon, but I fear I've lost my way in trying to make a short cut to the Excelsior Company's Ranch."

"You are in it now," said Mrs. Randolph, quickly.

"Thank you, but where can I find the farmhouse?"

"There is none," she returned, with her old superciliousness, "unless you choose to give that name to the shanties and sheds where the laborers and servants live, near the road."

The stranger looked puzzled. "I'm look-

ing for a Mr. Dawson," he said reflectively, "but I may have made some mistake. Do you know Major Randolph's house hereabouts?"

"I do. I am Mrs. Randolph," she said stiffly.

The stranger's brow cleared, and he smiled pleasantly. "Then this is a fortunate meeting," he said, raising his hat again as he reined in his horse beside the wagon, "for I am Mr. Mallory, and I was looking forward to the pleasure of presenting myself to you an hour or two later. The fact is, an old acquaintance, Mr. Dawson, telegraphed me yesterday to meet him here on urgent business, and I felt obliged to go there first."

Mrs. Randolph's eyes sparkled with a sudden gratified intelligence, but her manner seemed rather to increase than abate its grim precision.

"Our meeting this morning, Mr. Mallory, is both fortunate and unfortunate, for I regret to say that your daughter, who has not been quite herself since the earthquake, was missing early this morning and has not yet been found, though we have searched everywhere. Understand me," she said, as the

stranger started, "I have no fear for her *personal* safety, I am only concerned for any *indiscretion* that she may commit in the presence of these strangers whose company she would seem to prefer to ours."

"But I don't understand you, madam," said Mallory, sternly; "you are speaking of my daughter, and" —

"Excuse me, Mr. Mallory," said Mrs. Randolph, lifting her hand with her driest deprecation and her most desiccating smile, "I'm not passing judgment or criticism. I am of a foreign race, and consequently do not understand the freedom of American young ladies, and their familiarity with the opposite sex. I make no charges, I only wish to assure you that she will no doubt be found in the company and under the protection of her own countrymen. There is," she added with ironical distinctness, "a young mechanic, or field hand, or 'quack well-doctor,' whom she seems to admire, and with whom she appears to be on equal terms."

Mallory regarded her for a moment fixedly, and then his sternness relaxed to a mischievously complacent smile. "That must be young Bent, of whom I've heard," he said with unabated cheerfulness. "And I

don't know but what she may be with him, after all. For now I think of it, a chuckle-headed fellow, of whom a moment ago I inquired the way to your house, told me I'd better ask the young man and young woman who were 'philandering through the wheat' yonder. Suppose we look for them. From what I've heard of Bent he's too much wrapped up in his inventions for flirtation, but it would be a good joke to stumble upon them."

Mrs. Randolph's eyes sparkled with a mingling of gratified malice and undisguised contempt for the fatuous father beside her. But before she could accept or decline the challenge, it had become useless. A murmur of youthful voices struck her ear, and she suddenly stood upright and transfixed in the carriage. For lounging down slowly towards them out of the dim green aisles of the arborescent wheat, lost in themselves and the shimmering veil of their seclusion, came the engineer, Thomas Bent, and on his arm, gazing ingenuously into his face, the figure of Adele, — her own perfect daughter.

"I don't think, my dear," said Mr. Mal-lory, as the anxious Rose flew into his arms

on his return to San José, a few hours later, "that it will be necessary for you to go back again to Major Randolph's before we leave. I have said 'Good-by' for you and thanked them, and your trunks are packed and will be sent here. The fact is, my dear, you see this affair of the earthquake and the disaster to the artesian well have upset all their arrangements, and I am afraid that my little girl would be only in their way just now."

"And you have seen Mr. Dawson — and you know why he sent for you?" asked the young girl, with nervous eagerness.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Mallory thoughtfully, "*that* was really important. You see, my child," he continued, taking her hand in one of his own and patting the back of it gently with the other, "we think, Dawson and I, of taking over the major's ranch and incorporating it with the Excelsior in one, to be worked on shares like the Excelsior; and as Mrs. Randolph is very anxious to return to the Atlantic States with her children, it is quite possible. Mrs. Randolph, as you have possibly noticed," Mr. Mallory went on, still patting his daughter's hand, "does not feel entirely at home here, and will consequently leave the major free to rearrange, by himself,

the ranch on the new basis. In fact, as the change must be made before the crops come in, she talks of going next week. But if you like the place, Rose, I've no doubt the major and Dawson will always find room for you and me when we run down there for a little fresh air."

"And did you have all that in your mind, papa, when you came down here, and was that what you and Mr. Dawson wanted to talk about?" said the astonished Rose.

"Mainly, my dear, mainly. You see I'm a capitalist now, and the real value of capital is to know how and when to apply it to certain conditions."

"And this Mr. — Mr. Bent — do you think — he will go on and find the water, papa?" said Rose, hesitatingly.

"Ah! Bent — Tom Bent — oh, yes," said Mallory, with great heartiness. "Capital fellow, Bent! and mighty ingenious! Glad you met him! Well," thoughtfully but still heartily, "he may not find it exactly where he expected, but he'll find it or something better. We can't part with him, and he has promised Dawson to stay. We'll utilize *him*, you may be sure."

It would seem that they did, and from cer-

tain interviews and conversations that took place between Mr. Bent and Miss Mallory on a later visit, it would also appear that her father had exercised a discreet reticence in regard to a certain experiment of the young inventor, of which he had been an accidental witness.

A MÆCENAS OF THE PACIFIC SLOPE.



CHAPTER I.

As Mr. Robert Rushbrook, known to an imaginative press as the "Mæcenas of the Pacific Slope," drove up to his country seat, equally referred to as a "palatial villa," he cast a quick but practical look at the pillared pretensions of that enormous shell of wood and paint and plaster. The statement, also a reportorial one, that its site, the Cañon of Los Osos, "some three years ago was disturbed only by the passing tread of bear and wild-cat," had lost some of its freshness as a picturesque apology, and already successive improvements on the original building seemingly cast the older part of the structure back to a hoary antiquity. To many it stood as a symbol of everything Robert Rushbrook did or had done—an improvement of all previous performances; it was

like his own life — an exciting though irritating state of transition to something better. Yet the visible architectural result, as here shown, was scarcely harmonious; indeed, some of his friends — and Mæcenas had many — professed to classify the various improvements by the successive fortunate ventures in their owner's financial career, which had led to new additions, under the names of "The Comstock Lode Period," "The Union Pacific Renaissance," "The Great Wheat Corner," and "Water Front Gable Style," a humorous trifling that did not, however, prevent a few who were artists from accepting Mæcenas's liberal compensation for their services in giving shape to those ideas.

Relinquishing to a groom his fast-trotting team, the second relay in his two hours' drive from San Francisco, he leaped to the ground to meet the architect, already awaiting his orders in the courtyard. With his eyes still fixed upon the irregular building before him, he mingled his greeting and his directions.

"Look here, Barker, we'll have a wing thrown out here, and a hundred-foot ball-room. Something to hold a crowd; some-

thing that can be used for music — *sabe?* — a concert, or a show.”

“Have you thought of any style, Mr. Rushbrook?” suggested the architect.

“No,” said Rushbrook; “I’ve been thinking of the time — thirty days, and everything to be in. You’ll stop to dinner. I’ll have you sit near Jack Somers. You can talk style to him. Say I told you.”

“You wish it completed in thirty days?” repeated the architect, dubiously.

“Well, I should n’t mind if it were less. You can begin at once. There’s a telegraph in the house. Patrick will take any message, and you can send up to San Francisco and fix things before dinner.”

Before the man could reply, Rushbrook was already giving a hurried interview to the gardener and others on his way to the front porch. In another moment he had entered his own hall, — a wonderful temple of white and silver plaster, formal, yet friable like the sugared erection of a wedding cake, — where his major-domo awaited him.

“Well, who’s here?” asked Rushbrook, still advancing towards his apartments.

“Dinner is set for thirty, sir,” said the functionary, keeping step demurely with his

master, "but Mr. Appleby takes ten over to San Mateo, and some may sleep there. The *char-à-banc* is still out and five saddle-horses, to a picnic in Green Cañon, and I can't positively say, but I should think you might count on seeing about forty-five guests before you go to town to-morrow. The opera troupe seem to have not exactly understood the invitation, sir."

"How? I gave it myself."

"The chorus and supernumeraries thought themselves invited too, sir, and have come, I believe, sir. At least Signora Pegreli and Madame Denise said so, and that they would speak to you about it, but that meantime I could put them up anywhere."

"And you made no distinction, of course?"

"No, sir, I put them in the corresponding rooms opposite, sir. I don't think the prima donnas like it."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir."

Whatever was in their minds, the two men never changed their steady, practical gravity of manner. The major-domo's appeared to be a subdued imitation of his master's, worn, as he might have worn his master's clothes, had he accepted, or Mr.

Rushbrook permitted, such a degradation. By this time they had reached the door of Mr. Rushbrook's room, and the man paused. "I did n't include some guests of Mr. Leyton's, sir, that he brought over here to show around the place, but he told me to tell you he would take them away again, or leave them, as you liked. They're some Eastern strangers stopping with him."

"All right," said Rushbrook, quietly, as he entered his own apartment. It was decorated as garishly as the hall, as staring and vivid in color, but wholesomely new and clean for all its paint, veneering, and plaster. It was filled with heterogeneous splendor — all new and well kept, yet with so much of the attitude of the show-room still lingering about it that one almost expected to see the various articles of furniture ticketed with their prices. A luxurious bed, with satin hangings and Indian carved posts, standing ostentatiously in a corner, kept up this resemblance, for in a curtained recess stood a worn camp bedstead, Rushbrook's real couch, Spartan in its simplicity.

Mr. Rushbrook drew his watch from his pocket, and deliberately divested himself of his boots, coat, waistcoat, and cravat. Then

rolling himself in a fleecy, blanket-like rug with something of the habitual dexterity of a frontiersman, he threw himself on his couch, closed his eyes, and went instantly to sleep. Lying there, he appeared to be a man comfortably middle-aged, with thick iron-gray hair that might have curled had he encouraged such inclination; a skin roughened and darkened by external hardships and exposure, but free from taint of inner vice or excess, and indistinctive features redeemed by a singularly handsome mouth. As the lower part of the face was partly hidden by a dense but closely-cropped beard, it is probable that the delicate outlines of his lips had gained something from their framing.

He slept, through what seemed to be the unnatural stillness of the large house,—a quiet that might have come from the lingering influence of the still virgin solitude around it, as if Nature had forgotten the intrusion, or were stealthily retaking her own; and later, through the rattle of returning wheels or the sound of voices, which were, however, promptly absorbed in that deep and masterful silence which was the unabdicating genius of the cañon. For it

was remarkable that even the various artists, musicians, orators, and poets whom Mæcenas had gathered in his cool business fashion under that roof, all seemed to become, by contrast with surrounding Nature, as new and artificial as the house, and as powerless to assert themselves against its influence.

He was still sleeping when James re-entered the room, but awoke promptly at the sound of his voice. In a few moments he had rearranged his scarcely disordered toilette, and stepped out refreshed and observant into the hall. The guests were still absent from that part of the building, and he walked leisurely past the carelessly opened doors of the rooms they had left. Everywhere he met the same glaring ornamentation and color, the same garishness of treatment, the same inharmonious extravagance of furniture, and everywhere the same troubled acceptance of it by the inmates, or the same sense of temporary and restricted tenancy. Dresses were hung over cheval glasses; clothes piled up on chairs to avoid the use of doubtful and over ornamented wardrobes, and in some cases more practical guests had apparently encamped in a corner

of their apartment. A gentleman from Siskyou — sole proprietor of a mill patent now being considered by Mæcenas — had confined himself to a rocking-chair and clothes-horse as being trustworthy and familiar; a bolder spirit from Yreka — in treaty for capital to start an independent journal devoted to Mæcenas's interests — had got a good deal out of, and indeed all he had *into*, a Louis XVI. *armoire*; while a young painter from Sacramento had simply retired into his adjoining bath-room, leaving the glories of his bedroom untarnished. Suddenly he paused.

He had turned into a smaller passage in order to make a shorter cut through one of the deserted suites of apartments that should bring him to that part of the building where he designed to make his projected improvement, when his feet were arrested on the threshold of a sitting-room. Although it contained the same decoration and furniture as the other rooms, it looked totally different! It was tasteful, luxurious, comfortable, and habitable. The furniture seemed to have fallen into harmonious position; even the staring decorations of the walls and ceiling were toned down by sprays of laurel and red-stained *manzanito* boughs with their

berries, apparently fresh plucked from the near cañon. But he was more unexpectedly impressed to see that the room was at that moment occupied by a tall, handsome girl, who had paused to take breath, with her hand still on the heavy centre-table she was moving. Standing there, graceful, glowing, and animated, she looked the living genius of the recreated apartment.

CHAPTER II.

MR. RUSHBROOK glanced rapidly at his unknown guest. "Excuse me," he said, with respectful business brevity, "but I thought every one was out," and he stepped backward quickly.

"I've only just come," she said without embarrassment, "and would you mind, as you *are* here, giving me a lift with this table?"

"Certainly," replied Rushbrook, and under the young girl's direction the millionaire moved the table to one side.

During the operation he was trying to determine which of his unrecognized guests the fair occupant was. Possibly one of the Leyton party, that James had spoken of as impending.

"Then you have changed all the furniture, and put up these things?" he asked, pointing to the laurel.

"Yes, the room was really something awful. It looks better now, don't you think?"

“A hundred per cent.,” said Rushbrook, promptly. “Look here, I’ll tell you what you’ve done. You’ve set the furniture to *work*! It was simply lying still — with no return to anybody on the investment.”

The young girl opened her gray eyes at this, and then smiled. The intruder seemed to be characteristic of California. As for Rushbrook, he regretted that he did not know her better; he would at once have asked her to rearrange all the rooms, and have managed in some way liberally to reward her for it. A girl like that had no nonsense about her.

“Yes,” she said, “I wonder Mr. Rushbrook don’t look at it in that way. It is a shame that all these pretty things — and you know they are really good and valuable — should n’t show what they are. But I suppose everybody here accepts the fact that this man simply buys them because they are valuable, and nobody interferes, and is content to humor him, laugh at him, and feel superior. It don’t strike me as quite fair, does it you?”

Rushbrook was pleased. Without the vanity that would be either annoyed at this revelation of his reputation, or gratified at

her defense of it. he was simply glad to discover that she had not recognized him as her host, and could continue the conversation unreservedly. "Have you seen the ladies' boudoir?" he asked. "You know, the room fitted with knick-knacks and pretty things — some of 'em bought from old collections in Europe, by fellows who knew what they were; but perhaps," he added, looking into her eyes for the first time, "did n't know exactly what ladies cared for."

"I merely glanced in there when I first came, for there was such a queer lot of women — I'm told he is n't very particular in that way — that I did n't stay."

"And you did n't think *they* might be just as valuable and good as some of the furniture, if they could have been pulled around and put into shape, or set in a corner, eh?"

The young girl smiled; she thought her fellow-guest rather amusing, none the less so, perhaps, for catching up her own ideas, but nevertheless she slightly shrugged her shoulders with that hopeless skepticism which women reserve for their own sex. "Some of them looked as if they had been pulled around, as you say, and had n't been improved by it."

“There’s no one there now,” said Rushbrook, with practical directness; “come and take a look at it.” She complied without hesitation, walking by his side, tall, easy, and self-possessed, apparently accepting without self-consciousness his half paternal, half comrade-like informality. The boudoir was a large room, repeating on a bigger scale the incongruousness and ill-fitting splendor of the others. When she had of her own accord recognized and pointed out the more admirable articles, he said, gravely looking at his watch, “We’ve just about seven minutes yet; if you’d like to pull and haul these things around, I’ll help you.”

The young girl smiled. “I’m quite content with what I’ve done in my own room, where I have no one’s taste to consult but my own. I hardly know how Mr. Rushbrook, or his lady friends, might like my operating here.” Then recognizing with feminine tact the snub that might seem implied in her refusal, she said quickly, “Tell me something about our host—but first look! is n’t that pretty?”

She had stopped before the window that looked upon the dim blue abyss of the cañon,

and was leaning out to gaze upon it. Rushbrook joined her.

"There is n't much to be changed down *there*, is there?" he said, half interrogatively.

"No, not unless Mr. Rushbrook took it into his head to roof it in, and somebody was ready with a contract to do it. But what do you know of him? Remember, I'm quite a stranger here."

"You came with Charley Leyton?"

"With *Mrs.* Leyton's party," said the young girl, with a half-smiling emphasis. "But it seems that we don't know whether Mr. Rushbrook wants us here or not, till he comes. And the drollest thing about it is that they're all so perfectly frank in saying so."

"Charley and he are old friends, and you'll do well to trust to their judgment."

This was hardly the kind of response that the handsome and clever society girl before him had been in the habit of receiving, but it amused her. Her fellow-guest was decidedly original. But he had n't told her about Rushbrook, and it struck her that his opinion would be independent, at least. She reminded him of it.

“Look here,” said Rushbrook, “you ’ll meet a man here to-night — or he ’ll be sure to meet *you* — who ’ll tell you all about Rushbrook. He ’s a smart chap, knows everybody and talks well. His name is Jack Somers ; he is a great ladies’ man. He can talk to you about these sort of things, too,” — indicating the furniture with a half tolerant, half contemptuous gesture, that struck her as inconsistent with what seemed to be his previous interest, — “just as well as he can talk of people. Been in Europe, too.”

The young girl’s eye brightened with a quick vivacity at the name, but a moment after became reflective and slightly embarrassed. “I know him — I met him at Mr. Leyton’s. He has already talked of Mr. Rushbrook, but,” she added, avoiding any conclusion, with a pretty pout, “I ’d like to have the opinion of others. Yours, now, I fancy would be quite independent.”

“You stick to what Jack Somers has said, good or bad, and you won’t be far wrong,” he said assuringly. He stopped ; his quick ear had heard approaching voices ; he returned to her and held out his hand. As it seemed to her that in California everybody shook hands with’ everybody else on the

slightest occasions, sometimes to save further conversation, she gave him her own. He shook it, less forcibly than she had feared, and abruptly left her. For a moment she was piqued at this superior and somewhat brusque way of ignoring her request, but reflecting that it might be the awkwardness of an untrained man, she dismissed it from her mind. The voices of her friends in the already resounding passages also recalled her to the fact that she had been wandering about the house with a stranger, and she rejoined them a little self-consciously.

“Well, my dear,” said Mrs. Leyton, gayly, “it seems we are to stay. Leyton says Rushbrook won’t hear of our going.”

“Does that mean that your husband takes the whole opera troupe over to your house in exchange?”

“Don’t be satirical, but congratulate yourself on your opportunity of seeing an awfully funny gathering. I would n’t have you miss it for the world. It’s the most characteristic thing out.”

“Characteristic of what?”

“Of Rushbrook, of course. Nobody else would conceive of getting together such a lot of queer people.”

“But don't it strike you that we're a part of the lot?”

“Perhaps,” returned the lively Mrs. Leyton. “No doubt that's the reason why Jack Somers is coming over, and is so anxious that *you* should stay. I can't imagine why else he should rave about Miss Grace Nevil as he does. Come, Grace, no New York or Philadelphia airs, here! Consider your uncle's interests with this capitalist, to say nothing of ours. Because you're a millionaire and have been accustomed to riches from your birth, don't turn up your nose at our unpampered appetites. Besides, Jack Somers is Rushbrook's particular friend, and he may think your criticisms unkind.”

“But *is* Mr. Somers such a great friend of Mr. Rushbrook's?” asked Grace Nevil.

“Why, of course. Rushbrook consults him about all these things; gives him *carte blanche* to invite whom he likes and order what he likes, and trusts his taste and judgment implicitly.”

“Then this gathering is Mr. Somers's selection?”

“How preposterous you are, Grace. Of course not. Only Somers's *idée* of what is pleasing to Rushbrook, gotten up with a

taste and discretion all his own. You know Somers is a gentleman, educated at West Point — traveled all over Europe — you might have met him there ; and Rushbrook — well, you have only to see him to know what *he* is. Don't you understand ?”

A slight seriousness ; the same shadow that once before darkened the girl's charming face gave way to a mischievous knitting of her brows as she said naïvely, “ No.”

CHAPTER III.

GRACE NEVIL had quite recovered her equanimity when the indispensable Mr. Somers, handsome, well-bred, and self-restrained, approached her later in the crowded drawing-room. Blended with his subdued personal admiration was a certain ostentation of respect — as of a tribute to a distinguished guest — that struck her. “I am to have the pleasure of taking you in, Miss Nevil,” he said. “It’s my one compensation for the dreadful responsibility just thrust upon me. Our host has been suddenly called away, and I am left to take his place.”

Miss Nevil was slightly startled. Nevertheless, she smiled graciously. “From what I hear this is no new function of yours; that is, if there really *is* a Mr. Rushbrook. I am inclined to think him a myth.”

“You make me wish he were,” retorted Somers, gallantly; “but as I could n’t reign at all, except in his stead, I shall look to you to lend your rightful grace to my borrowed dignity.”

The more general announcement to the company was received with a few perfidious regrets from the more polite, but with only amused surprise by the majority. Indeed, many considered it "characteristic" — "so like Bob Rushbrook," and a few enthusiastic friends looked upon it as a crowning and intentional stroke of humor. It remained, however, for the gentleman from Siskyou to give the incident a subtlety that struck Miss Nevil's fancy. "It reminds me," he said in her hearing, "of ole Kernel Frisbee, of Robertson County, one of the purliest men I ever struck. When he knew a feller was very dry, he'd jest set the decanter afore him, and managed to be called outer the room on bus'ness. Now, Bob Rushbrook's about as white a man as that. He's jest the feller, who, knowing you and me might feel kinder restrained about indulging our appetites afore him, kinder drops out easy, and leaves us alone." And she was impressed by an instinct that the speaker really felt the delicacy he spoke of, and that it left no sense of inferiority behind.

The dinner, served in a large, brilliantly-lit saloon, that in floral decoration and gilded columns suggested an ingenious

blending of a steamboat *table d'hôte* and "harvest home," was perfect in its *cuisine*, even if somewhat extravagant in its proportions.

"I should be glad to receive the salary that Rushbrook pays his *chef*, and still happier to know how to earn it as fairly," said Somers to his fair companion.

"But is his skill entirely appreciated here?" she asked.

"Perfectly," responded Somers. "Our friend from Siskyou over there appreciates that *pâté* which he cannot name as well as I do. Rushbrook himself is the only exception, yet I fancy that even *his* simplicity and regularity in feeding is as much a matter of business with him as any defect in his earlier education. In his eyes, his *chef's* greatest qualification is his promptness and fertility. Have you noticed that ornament before you?" pointing to an elaborate confection. "It bears your initials, you see. It was conceived and executed since you arrived — rather, I should say, since it was known that you would honor us with your company. The greatest difficulty encountered was to find out what your initials were."

"And I suppose," mischievously added

the young girl to her acknowledgments, "that the same fertile mind which conceived the design eventually provided the initials?"

"That is our secret," responded Somers, with affected gravity.

The wines were of characteristic expensiveness, and provoked the same general comment. Rushbrook seldom drank wine; Somers had selected it. But the barbaric opulence of the entertainment culminated in the Californian fruits, piled in pyramids on silver dishes, gorgeous and unreal in their size and painted beauty, and the two Divas smiled over a basket of grapes and peaches as outrageous in dimensions and glaring color as any pasteboard banquet at which they had professionally assisted. As the courses succeeded each other, under the exaltation of wine, conversation became more general as regarded participation, but more local and private as regarded the subject, until Miss Nevil could no longer follow it. The interests of that one, the hopes of another, the claims of a third, in affairs that were otherwise uninteresting, were all discussed with singular youthfulness of trust that to her alone seemed remarkable. Not

that she lacked entertainment from the conversation of her clever companion, whose confidences and criticisms were very pleasant to her; but she had a gentlewoman's instinct that he talked to her too much, and more than was consistent with his duties as the general host. She looked around the table for her singular acquaintance of an hour before, but she had not seen him since. She would have spoken about him to Somers, but she had an instinctive idea that the latter would be antipathetic, in spite of the stranger's flattering commendation. So she found herself again following Somers's cynical but good-humored description of the various guests, and, I fear, seeing with his eyes, listening with his ears, and occasionally participating in his superior attitude. The "fearful joy" she had found in the novelty of the situation and the originality of the actors seemed now quite right from this critical point of view. So she learned how the guest with the long hair was an unknown painter, to whom Rushbrook had given a commission for three hundred yards of painted canvas, to be cut up and framed as occasion and space required, in Rushbrook's new hotel in San Francisco; how the gray-

bearded foreigner near him was an accomplished bibliophile who was furnishing Mr. Rushbrook's library from spoils of foreign collections, and had suffered unheard-of agonies from the millionaire's insisting upon a handsome uniform binding that should deprive certain precious but musty tomes of their crumbling, worm-eaten coverings; how the very gentle, clerical-looking stranger, mildest of a noisy, disputing crowd at the other table, was a notorious duelist and dead shot; how the only gentleman at the table who retained a flannel shirt and high boots was not a late-coming mountaineer, but a well-known English baronet on his travels; how the man who told a somewhat florid and emphatic anecdote was a popular Eastern clergyman; how the one querulous, discontented face in a laughing group was the famous humorist who had just convulsed it; and how a pale, handsome young fellow, who ate and drank sparingly and disregarded the coquettish advances of the prettiest *Diva* with the cold abstraction of a student, was a notorious *roué* and gambler. But there was a sudden and unlooked-for change of criticism and critic.

The festivity had reached that stage when

the guests were more or less accessible to emotion, and more or less touched by the astounding fact that every one was enjoying himself. This phenomenon, which is apt to burst into song or dance among other races, is constrained to voice itself in an Anglo-Saxon gathering by some explanation, apology, or moral — known as an after-dinner speech. Thus it was that the gentleman from Siskyou, who had been from time to time casting glances at Somers and his fair companion at the head of the table, now rose to his feet, albeit unsteadily, pushed back his chair, and began : —

“ ’Pears to me, ladies and gentlemen, and feller pardners, that on an occasion like this, suthin’ oughter be said of the man who got it up — whose money paid for it, and who ain’t here to speak for himself, except by deputy. Yet you all know that’s Bob Rushbrook’s style — he ain’t here, because he’s full of some other plan or improvements — and it’s like him to start suthin’ of this kind, give it its aim and purpose, and then stand aside to let somebody else run it for him. There ain’t no man livin’ ez hez, so to speak, more fast horses ready saddled for riding, and more fast men ready spurred to ride

'em, — whether to win his races or run his errands. There ain't no man livin' ez knows better how to make other men's games his, or his game seem to be other men's. And from Jack Somers smilin' over there, ez knows where to get the best wine that Bob pays for, and knows how to run this yer show for Bob, at Bob's expense — we're all contented. Ladies and gentlemen, we're all contented. We stand, so to speak, on the cards he's dealt us. What may be his little game, it ain't for us to say; but whatever it is, *we're in it*. Gentlemen and ladies, we'll drink Bob's health!"

There was a somewhat sensational pause, followed by good-natured laughter and applause, in which Somers joined; yet not without a certain constraint that did not escape the quick sympathy of the shocked and unsmiling Miss Nevil. It was with a feeling of relief that she caught the chaperoning eye of Mrs. Leyton, who was entreating her in the usual mysterious signal to the other ladies to rise and follow her. When she reached the drawing-room, a little behind the others, she was somewhat surprised to observe that the stranger whom she had missed during the evening was approaching her with Mrs. Leyton.

“Mr. Rushbrook returned sooner than he expected, but unfortunately, as he always retires early, he has only time to say ‘good-night’ to you before he goes.”

For an instant Grace Nevil was more angry than disconcerted. Then came the conviction that she was stupid not to have suspected the truth before. Who else would that brusque stranger develop into but this rude host? She bowed formally.

Mr. Rushbrook looked at her with the faintest smile on his handsome mouth. “Well, Miss Nevil, I hope Jack Somers satisfied your curiosity?”

With a sudden recollection of the Siskyou gentleman’s speech, and a swift suspicion that in some way she had been made use of with the others by this forceful-looking man before her, she answered pertly:—

“Yes; but there was a speech by a gentleman from Siskyou that struck me as being nearer to the purpose.”

“That’s so, — I heard it as I came in,” said Mr. Rushbrook, calmly. “I don’t know but you’re right.”

CHAPTER IV.

SIX months had passed. The Villa of Mæcenus was closed at Los Osos Cañon, and the southwest trade-winds were slanting the rains of the wet season against its shut windows and barred doors. Within that hollow, deserted shell, its aspect — save for a single exception — was unchanged; the furniture and decorations preserved their eternal youth undimmed by time; the rigidly-arranged rooms, now closed to life and light, developed more than ever their resemblance to a furniture warehouse. The single exception was the room which Grace Nevil had rearranged for herself; and that, oddly enough, was stripped and bare — even to its paper and mouldings.

In other respects, the sealed treasures of Rushbrook's villa, far from provoking any sentimentality, seemed only to give truth to the current rumor that it was merely waiting to be transformed into a gorgeous watering-place hotel under Rushbrook's direction;

that, with its new ball-room changed into an elaborate dining-hall, it would undergo still further improvement, the inevitable end and object of all Rushbrook's enterprise; and that its former proprietor had already begun another villa whose magnificence should eclipse the last. There certainly appeared to be no limit to the millionaire's success in all that he personally undertook, or in his fortunate complicity with the enterprise and invention of others. His name was associated with the oldest and safest schemes, as well as the newest and boldest — with an equal guarantee of security. A few, it was true, looked doubtingly upon this "one man power," but could not refute the fact that others had largely benefited by association with him, and that he shared his profits with a royal hand. Some objected on higher grounds to his brutalizing the influence of wealth by his material and extravagantly practical processes, instead of the gentler suggestions of education and personal example, and were impelled to point out the fact that he and his patronage were vulgar. It was felt, however, by those who received his benefits, that a proper sense of this inferiority was all that ethics demanded of them.

One could still accept Rushbrook's barbaric gifts by humorously recognizing the fact that he did n't know any better, and that it pleased him, as long as they resented any higher pretensions.

The rain-beaten windows of Rushbrook's town house, however, were cheerfully lit that December evening. Mr. Rushbrook seldom dined alone; in fact, it was popularly alleged that very often the unfinished business of the day was concluded over his bountiful and perfect board. He was dressing as James entered the room.

"Mr. Leyton is in your study, sir; he will stay to dinner."

"All right."

"I think, sir," added James, with respectful suggestiveness, "he wants to talk. At least, sir, he asked me if you would likely come downstairs before your company arrived."

"Ah! Well, tell the others I'm dining on *business*, and set dinner for two in the blue room."

"Yes, sir."

Meanwhile, Mr. Leyton — a man of Rushbrook's age, but not so fresh and vigorous-looking — had thrown himself in a chair

beside the study fire, after a glance around the handsome and familiar room. For the house had belonged to a brother millionaire ; it had changed hands with certain shares of "Water Front," — as some of Rushbrook's dealings had the true barbaric absence of money detail, — and was elegantly and tastefully furnished. The cuckoo had, however, already laid a few characteristic eggs in this adopted nest, and a white marble statue of a nude and ill-fed Virtue, sent over by Rushbrook's Paris agent, and unpacked that morning, stood in one corner, and materially brought down the temperature. A Japanese praying-throne of pure ivory, and, above it, a few yards of improper, colored exposure by an old master, equalized each other.

"And what is all this affair about the dinner?" suddenly asked a tartly-pitched female voice with a foreign accent.

Mr. Leyton turned quickly, and was just conscious of a faint shriek, the rustle of a skirt, and the swift vanishing of a woman's figure from the doorway. Mr. Leyton turned red. Rushbrook lived *en garçon*, with feminine possibilities ; Leyton was a married man and a deacon. The incident which, to a man of the world, would have brought

only a smile, fired the inexperienced Leyton with those exaggerated ideas and intense credulity regarding vice common to some very good men. He walked on tip-toe to the door, and peered into the passage. At that moment Rushbrook entered from the opposite door of the room.

“Well,” said Rushbrook, with his usual practical directness, “what do you think of her?”

Leyton, still flushed, and with eyebrows slightly knit, said, awkwardly, that he had scarcely seen her.

“She cost me already ten thousand dollars, and I suppose I’ll have to eventually fix up a separate room for her somewhere,” continued Rushbrook.

“I should certainly advise it,” said Leyton, quickly, “for really, Rushbrook, you know that something is due to the respectable people who come here, and any of them are likely to see” —

“Ah!” interrupted Rushbrook, seriously, “you think she hasn’t got on clothes enough. Why, look here, old man — she’s one of the Virtues, and that’s the rig in which they always travel. She’s a ‘Temperance’ or a ‘Charity’ or a ‘Resignation,’ or something

of that kind. You'll find her name there in French somewhere at the foot of the marble."

Leyton saw his mistake, but felt — as others sometimes felt — a doubt whether this smileless man was not inwardly laughing at him. He replied, with a keen, rapid glance at his host: —

"I was referring to some woman who stood in that doorway just now, and addressed me rather familiarly, thinking it was you."

"Oh, the Signora," said Rushbrook, with undisturbed directness; "well, you saw her at Los Osos last summer. Likely she *did* think you were me."

The cool ignoring of any ulterior thought in Leyton's objection forced the guest to be equally practical in his reply.

"Yes, but the fact is that Miss Nevil had talked of coming here with me this evening to see you on her own affairs, and it would n't have been exactly the thing for her to meet that woman."

"She would n't," said Rushbrook, promptly; "nor would *you*, if you had gone into the parlor as Miss Nevil would have done. But look here! If that's the reason why

you did n't bring her, send for her at once; my coachman can take a card from you; the brougham's all ready to fetch her, and there you are. She'll see only you and me." He was already moving towards the bell, when Leyton stopped him.

"No matter now. I can tell you her business, I fancy; and in fact, I came here to speak of it, quite independently of her."

"That won't do, Leyton," interrupted Rushbrook, with crisp decision. "One or the other interview is unnecessary; it wastes time, and is n't business. Better have her present, even if she don't say a word."

"Yes, but not in this matter," responded Leyton; "it's about Somers. You know he's been very attentive to her ever since her uncle left her here to recruit her health, and I think she fancies him. Well, although she's independent and her own mistress, as you know, Mrs. Leyton and I are somewhat responsible for her acquaintance with Somers,—and for that matter so are you; and as my wife thinks it means a marriage, we ought to know something more positive about Somers's prospects. Now, all we really know is that he's a great friend of yours; that you trust a good deal to him;

that he manages your social affairs; that you treat him as a son or nephew, and it's generally believed that he's as good as provided for by you — eh? Did you speak?"

"No," said Rushbrook, quietly regarding the statue as if taking its measurement for a suitable apartment for it. "Go on."

"Well," said Leyton, a little impatiently, "that's the belief everybody has, and you've not contradicted it. And on that we've taken the responsibility of not interfering with Somers's attentions."

"Well?" said Rushbrook, interrogatively.

"Well," replied Leyton, emphatically; "you see I must ask you positively if you *have* done anything, or are you going to do anything for him?"

"Well," replied Rushbrook, with exasperating coolness, "what do you call this marriage?"

"I don't understand you," said Leyton.

"Look here, Leyton," said Rushbrook, suddenly and abruptly facing him; "Jack Somers has brains, knowledge of society, tact, accomplishments, and good looks: that's *his* capital as much as mine is money. I employ him: that's his advertisement, recommendation, and credit. Now,

on the strength of this, as you say, Miss Nevil is willing to invest in him ; I don't see what more can be done."

"But if her uncle don't think it enough?"

"She 's independent, and has money for both."

"But if she thinks she 's been deceived, and changes her mind?"

"Leyton, you don't know Miss Nevil. Whatever that girl undertakes she 's weighed fully, and goes through with. If she 's trusted him enough to marry him, money won't stop her; if she thinks she 's been deceived, *you 'll* never know it."

The enthusiasm and conviction were so unlike Rushbrook's usual cynical toleration of the sex that Leyton stared at him.

"That 's odd," he returned. "That 's what she says of you."

"Of *me*; you mean Somers?"

"No, of *you*. Come, Rushbrook, don't pretend you don't know that Miss Nevil is a great partisan of yours, swears by you, says you 're misunderstood by people, and, what 's infernally odd in a woman who don't belong to the class you fancy, don't talk of your habits. That 's why she wants to consult you about Somers, I suppose, and that 's

why, knowing you might influence her, I came here first to warn you."

"And I've told you that whatever I might say or do would n't influence her. So we'll drop the subject."

"Not yet; for you're bound to see Miss Nevil sooner or later. Now, if she knows that you've done nothing for this man, your friend and her lover, won't she be justified in thinking that you would have a reason for it?"

"Yes. I should give it."

"What reason?"

"That I knew she'd be more contented to have him speculate with *her* money than mine."

"Then you think that he is n't a business man?"

"I think that she thinks so, or she would n't marry him; it's part of the attraction. But come, James has been for five minutes discreetly waiting outside the door to tell us dinner is ready, and the coast clear of all other company. But look here," he said, suddenly stopping, with his arm in Leyton's, "you're through your talk, I suppose; perhaps you'd rather we'd dine with the Signora and the others than alone?"

For an instant Leyton thrilled with the fascination of what he firmly believed was a guilty temptation. Rushbrook, perceiving his hesitation, added : —

“ By the way, Somers is of the party, and one or two others you know.”

Mr. Leyton opened his eyes widely at this; either the temptation had passed, or the idea of being seen in doubtful company by a younger man was distasteful, for he hurriedly disclaimed any preference. “ But,” he added with half-significant politeness, “ perhaps I ’m keeping *you* from them?”

“ It makes not the slightest difference to me,” calmly returned Rushbrook, with such evident truthfulness that Leyton was both convinced and chagrined.

Preceded by the grave and ubiquitous James, they crossed the large hall, and entered through a smaller passage a charming apartment hung with blue damask, which might have been a boudoir, study, or small reception-room, yet had the air of never having been anything continuously. It would seem that Rushbrook’s habit of “ camping out ” in different parts of his mansion obtained here as at Los Osos, and with the exception of a small closet which contained

his Spartan bed, the rooms were used separately or in suites, as occasion or his friends required. It is recorded that an Eastern guest, newly arrived with letters to Rushbrook, after a tedious journey, expressed himself pleased with this same blue room, in which he had sumptuously dined with his host, and subsequently fell asleep in his chair. Without disturbing his guest, Rushbrook had the table removed, a bed, washstand, and bureau brought in, the sleeping man delicately laid upon the former, and left to awaken to an Arabian night's realization of his wish.

CHAPTER V.

JAMES had barely disposed of his master and Mr. Leyton, and left them to the ministrations of two of his underlings, before he was confronted with one of those difficult problems that it was part of his functions to solve. The porter informed him that a young lady had just driven up in a carriage ostensibly to see Mr. Rushbrook, and James, descending to the outer vestibule, found himself face to face with Miss Grace Nevil. Happily, that young lady, with her usual tact, spared him some embarrassment.

“Oh! James,” she said sweetly, “do you think that I could see Mr. Rushbrook for a few moments *if I waited for the opportunity?* You understand, I don’t wish to disturb him or his company by being regularly announced.”

The young girl’s practical intelligence appeared to increase the usual respect which James had always shown her. “I understand, miss.” He thought for a moment,

and said: "Would you mind, then, following me where you could wait quietly and alone?" As she quickly assented, he preceded her up the staircase, past the study and drawing-room, which he did not enter, and stopped before a small door at the end of the passage. Then, handing her a key which he took from his pocket, he said: "This is the only room in the house that is strictly reserved for Mr. Rushbrook, and even he rarely uses it. You can wait here without anybody knowing it until I can communicate with him and bring you to his study unobserved. And," he hesitated, "if you would n't mind locking the door when you are in, miss, you would be more secure, and I will knock when I come for you."

Grace Nevil smiled at the man's prudence, and entered the room. But to her great surprise, she had scarcely shut the door when she was instantly struck with a singular memory which the apartment recalled. It was exactly like the room she had altered in Rushbrook's villa at Los Osos! More than that, on close examination it proved to be the very same furniture, arranged as she remembered to have arranged it, even to the flowers and grasses, now, alas! faded and

withered on the walls. There could be no mistake. There was the open ebony *escritoire* with the satin blotter open, and its leaves still bearing the marks of her own handwriting. So complete to her mind was the idea of her own tenancy in this bachelor's mansion, that she looked around with a half indignant alarm for the photograph or portrait of herself that might further indicate it. But there was no other exposition. The only thing that had been added was a gilt legend on the satin case of the blotter, — "Los Osos, August 20, 186—," the day she had occupied the room.

She was pleased, astonished, but more than all, disturbed. The only man who might claim a right to this figurative possession of her tastes and habits was the one whom she had quietly, reflectively, and understandingly half accepted as her lover, and on whose account she had come to consult Rushbrook. But Somers was not a sentimentalist; in fact, as a young girl, forced by her independent position to somewhat critically scrutinize masculine weaknesses, this had always been a point in his favor; yet even if he had joined with his friend Rushbrook to perpetuate the memory of

their first acquaintanceship, his taste merely would not have selected a *chambre de garçon* in Mr. Rushbrook's home for its exhibition. Her conception of the opposite characters of the two men was singularly distinct and real, and this momentary confusion of them was disagreeable to her woman's sense. But at this moment James came to release her and conduct her to Rushbrook's study, where he would join her at once. Everything had been arranged as she had wished.

Even a more practical man than Rushbrook might have lingered over the picture of the tall, graceful figure of Miss Nevil, quietly enthroned in a large armchair by the fire, her scarlet, satin-lined cloak thrown over its back, and her chin resting on her hand. But the millionaire walked directly towards her with his usual frankness of conscious but restrained power, and she felt, as she always did, perfectly at her ease in his presence. Even as she took his outstretched hand, its straightforward grasp seemed to endow her with its own confidence.

"You'll excuse my coming here so abruptly," she smiled, "but I wanted to get before Mr. Leyton, who, I believe, wishes to see you on the same business as myself."

“He is here already, and dining with me,” said Rushbrook.

“Ah! does he know I am here?” asked the girl, quietly.

“No; as he said you had thought of coming with him and did n’t, I presumed you did n’t care to have him know you had come alone.”

“Not exactly that, Mr. Rushbrook,” she said, fixing her beautiful eyes on him in bright and trustful confidence, “but I happen to have a fuller knowledge of this business than he has, and yet, as it is not altogether my own secret, I was not permitted to divulge it to him. Nor would I tell it to you, only I cannot bear that you should think that I had anything to do with this wretched inquisition into Mr. Somers’s prospects. Knowing as well as you do how perfectly independent I am, you would think it strange, would n’t you? But you would think it still more surprising when you found out that I and my uncle already know how liberally and generously you had provided for Mr. Somers in the future.”

“How I had provided for Mr. Somers in the future?” repeated Mr. Rushbrook, looking at the fire, “eh?”

“Yes,” said the young girl, indifferently, “how you were to put him in to succeed you in the Water Front Trust, and all that. He told it to me and my uncle at the outset of our acquaintance, confidentially, of course, and I dare say with an honorable delicacy that was like him, but — I suppose now you will think me foolish — all the while I’d rather he had not.”

“You’d rather he had not,” repeated Mr. Rushbrook, slowly.

“Yes,” continued Grace, leaning forward with her rounded elbows on her knees, and her slim, arched feet on the fender. “Now you are going to laugh at me, Mr. Rushbrook, but all this seemed to me to spoil any spontaneous feeling I might have towards him, and limit my independence in a thing that should be a matter of free will alone. It seemed too much like a business proposition! There, my kind friend!” she added, looking up and trying to read his face with a half girlish pout, followed, however, by a maturer sigh, “I’m bothering you with a woman’s foolishness instead of talking business. And” — another sigh — “I suppose it *is* business for my uncle, who has, it seems, bought into this Trust on these possi-

ble contingencies, has, perhaps, been asking questions of Mr. Leyton. But I don't want you to think that I approve of them, or advise your answering them. But you are not listening."

"I had forgotten something," said Rushbrook, with an odd preoccupation. "Excuse me a moment — I will return at once."

He left the room quite as abstractedly, and when he reached the passage, he apparently could not remember what he had forgotten, as he walked deliberately to the end window, where, with his arms folded behind his back, he remained looking out into the street. A passer-by, glancing up, might have said he had seen the pale, stern ghost of Mr. Rushbrook, framed like a stony portrait in the window. But he presently turned away, and reëntered the room, going up to Grace, who was still sitting by the fire, in his usual strong and direct fashion.

"Well! Now let me see what you want. I think this would do."

He took a seat at his open desk, and rapidly wrote a few lines.

"There," he continued, "when you write to your uncle, inclose that."

Grace took it, and read: —

DEAR MISS NEVIL, — Pray assure your uncle from me that I am quite ready to guarantee, in any form that he may require, the undertaking represented to him by Mr. John Somers. Yours very truly,

ROBERT RUSHBROOK.

A quick flush mounted to the young girl's cheeks. "But this is a *security*, Mr. Rushbrook," she said proudly, handing him back the paper, "and my uncle does not require that. Nor shall I insult him or you by sending it."

"It is *business*, Miss Nevil," said Rushbrook, gravely. He stopped, and fixed his eyes upon her animated face and sparkling eyes. "You can send it to him or not, as you like. But" — a rare smile came to his handsome mouth — "as this is a letter to *you*, you must not insult *me* by not accepting it."

Replying to his smile rather than the words that accompanied it, Miss Nevil smiled, too. Nevertheless, she was uneasy and disturbed. The interview, whatever she might have vaguely expected from it, had resolved itself simply into a business indorsement of her lover, which she had not

sought, and which gave her no satisfaction. Yet there was the same potent and indefinitely protecting presence before her which she had sought, but whose omniscience and whose help she seemed to have lost the spell and courage to put to the test. He relieved her in his abrupt but not unkindly fashion. "Well, when is it to be?"

"It?"

"Your marriage."

"Oh, not for some time. There's no hurry."

It might have struck the practical Mr. Rushbrook that, even considered as a desirable business affair, the prospective completion of this contract provoked neither frank satisfaction nor conventional dissimulation on the part of the young lady, for he regarded her calm but slightly wearied expression fixedly. But he only said: "Then I shall say nothing of this interview to Mr. Leyton?"

"As you please. It really matters little. Indeed, I suppose I was rather foolish in coming at all, and wasting your valuable time for nothing."

She had risen, as if taking his last question in the significance of a parting suggestion, and was straightening her tall figure,

preparatory to putting on her cloak. As she reached it, he stepped forward, and lifted it from the chair to assist her. The act was so unprecedented, as Mr. Rushbrook never indulged in those minor masculine courtesies, that she was momentarily as confused as a younger girl at the gallantry of a younger man. In their previous friendship he had seldom drawn near her except to shake her hand — a circumstance that had always recurred to her when his free and familiar life had been the subject of gossip. But she now had a more frightened consciousness that her nerves were strangely responding to his powerful propinquity, and she involuntarily contracted her pretty shoulders as he gently laid the cloak upon them. Yet even when the act was completed, she had a superstitious instinct that the significance of this rare courtesy was that it was final, and that he had helped her to interpose something that shut him out from her forever.

She was turning away with a heightened color, when the sound of light, hurried footsteps, and the rustle of a woman's dress was heard in the hall. A swift recollection of her companion's infelicitous reputation now returned to her, and Grace Nevil, with a

slight stiffening of her whole frame, became coldly herself again. Mr. Rushbrook betrayed neither surprise nor agitation. Begging her to wait a moment until he could arrange for her to pass to her carriage unnoticed, he left the room.

Yet it seemed that the cause of the disturbance was unsuspected by Mr. Rushbrook. Mr. Leyton, although left to the consolation of cigars and liquors in the blue room, had become slightly weary of his companion's prolonged absence. Satisfied in his mind that Rushbrook had joined the gayer party, and that he was even now paying gallant court to the Signora, he became again curious and uneasy. At last the unmistakable sound of whispering voices in the passage got the better of his sense of courtesy as a guest, and he rose from his seat, and slightly opened the door. As he did so the figures of a man and woman, conversing in earnest whispers, passed the opening. The man's arm was round the woman's waist; the woman was — as he had suspected — the one who had stood in the doorway, the Signora — but — the man was *not* Rushbrook. Mr. Leyton drew back this time in unaffected horror. It was none other than Jack Somers!

Some warning instinct must at that moment have struck the woman, for with a stifled cry she disengaged herself from Somers's arm, and dashed rapidly down the hall. Somers, evidently unaware of the cause, stood irresolute for a moment, and then more silently but swiftly disappeared into a side corridor as if to intercept her. It was the rapid passage of the Signora that had attracted the attention of Grace and Rushbrook in the study, and it was the moment after it that Mr. Rushbrook left.

CHAPTER VI.

VAGUELY uneasy, and still perplexed with her previous agitation, as Mr. Rushbrook closed the door behind him, Grace, following some feminine instinct rather than any definite reason, walked to the door and placed her hand upon the lock to prevent any intrusion until he returned. Her caution seemed to be justified a moment later, for a heavier but stealthier footstep halted outside. The handle of the door was turned, but she resisted it with the fullest strength of her small hand until a voice, which startled her, called in a hurried whisper: —

“Open quick, 't is I.”

She stepped back quickly, flung the door open, and beheld Somers on the threshold!

The astonishment, agitation, and above all, the awkward confusion of this usually self-possessed and ready man, was so unlike him, and withal so painful, that Grace hurried to put an end to it, and for an instant forgot her own surprise at seeing him. She smiled assuringly, and extended her hand.

“Grace — Miss Nevil — I beg your pardon — I did n’t imagine” — he began with a forced laugh. “I mean, of course — I cannot — but” —. He stopped, and then assuming a peculiar expression, said: “But what are *you* doing here?”

At any other moment the girl would have resented the tone, which was as new to her as his previous agitation, but in her present self-consciousness her situation seemed to require some explanation. “I came here,” she said, “to see Mr. Rushbrook on business. Your business — *our* business,” she added, with a charming smile, using for the first time the pronoun that seemed to indicate their unity and interest, and yet fully aware of a vague insincerity in doing so.

“Our *business?*” he repeated, ignoring her gentler meaning with a changed emphasis and a look of suspicion.

“Yes,” said Grace, a little impatiently. “Mr. Leyton thought he ought to write to my uncle something positive as to your prospects with Mr. Rushbrook, and” —

“You came here to inquire?” said the young man, sharply.

“I came here to stop any inquiry,” said Grace, indignantly. “I came here to say *I*

was satisfied with what you had confided to me of Mr. Rushbrook's generosity, and that was enough!"

"With what *I* had confided to you? You dared say that?"

Grace stopped, and instantly faced him. But any indignation she might have felt at his speech and manner was swallowed up in the revulsion and horror that overtook her with the sudden revelation she saw in his white and frightened face. Leyton's strange inquiry, Rushbrook's cold composure and scornful acceptance of her own credulousness, came to her in a flash of shameful intelligence. Somers had lied! The insufferable meanness of it! A lie, whose very uselessness and ignobility had defeated its purpose — a lie that implied the basest suspicion of her own independence and truthfulness — such a lie now stood out as plainly before her as his guilty face.

"Forgive my speaking so rudely," he said with a forced smile and attempt to recover his self-control, "but you have ruined me unless you deny that I told you anything. It was a joke — an extravagance that I had forgotten; at least, it was a confidence between you and me that you have foolishly

violated. Say that you misunderstood me — that it was a fancy of your own. Say anything — he trusts you — he'll believe anything you say."

"He *has* believed me," said Grace, almost fiercely, turning upon him with the paper that Rushbrook had given her in her outstretched hand. "Read that!"

He read it. Had he blushed, had he stammered, had he even kept up his former frantic and pitiable attitude, she might at that supreme moment have forgiven him. But to her astonishment his face changed, his handsome brow cleared, his careless, happy smile returned, his graceful confidence came back — he stood before her the elegant, courtly, and accomplished gentleman she had known. He returned her the paper, and advancing with extended hand, said triumphantly: —

"Superb! Splendid! No one but a woman could think of that! And only one woman achieve it. You have tricked the great Rushbrook. You are indeed worthy of being a financier's wife!"

"No," she said passionately, tearing up the paper and throwing it at his feet; "not as *you* understand it — and never *yours*! You have debased and polluted everything

connected with it, as you would have debased and polluted *me*. Out of my presence that you are insulting — out of the room of the man whose magnanimity you cannot understand !”

The destruction of the guarantee apparently stung him more than the words that accompanied it. He did not relapse again into his former shamefaced terror, but as a malignant glitter came into his eyes, he regained his coolness.

“It may not be so difficult for others to understand, Miss Nevil,” he said, with polished insolence, “and as Bob Rushbrook’s generosity to pretty women is already a matter of suspicion, perhaps you are wise to destroy that record of it.”

“Coward !” said Grace, “stand aside and let me pass !” She swept by him to the door. But it opened upon Rushbrook’s re-entrance. He stood for an instant glancing at the pair, and then on the fragments of the paper that strewed the floor. Then, still holding the door in his hand, he said quietly :—

“One moment before you go, Miss Nevil. If this is the result of any misunderstanding as to the presence of another woman here, in

company with Mr. Somers, it is only fair to him to say that that woman is here as a friend of *mine*, not of his, and I alone am responsible."

Grace halted, and turned the cold steel of her proud eyes on the two men. As they rested on Rushbrook they quivered slightly. "I can already bear witness," she said coldly, "to the generosity of Mr. Rushbrook in a matter which then touched me. But there certainly is no necessity for him to show it now in a matter in which I have not the slightest concern."

As she swept out of the room and was received in the respectable shadow of the waiting James, Rushbrook turned to Somers.

"And *I'm* afraid it won't do — for Leyton saw you," he said curtly. "Now, then, shut that door, for you and I, Jack Somers, have a word to say to each other."

What that word was, and how it was said and received, is not a part of this record. But it is told that it was the beginning of that mighty Iliad, still remembered of men, which shook the financial camps of San Francisco, and divided them into bitter contending parties. For when it became known the next day that Somers had suddenly

abandoned Rushbrook, and carried over to a powerful foreign capitalist the secret methods, and even, it was believed, the *luck* of his late employer, it was certain that there would be war to the knife, and that it was no longer a struggle of rival enterprise, but of vindictive men.

CHAPTER VII.

FOR a year the battle between the Somers faction and the giant but solitary Rushbrook raged fiercely, with varying success. I grieve to say that the *protégés* and parasites of Mæcenas deserted him in a body; nay, they openly alleged that it was the true artistic nature and refinement of Somers that had always attracted them, and that a man like Rushbrook, who bought pictures by the yard, — equally of the unknown struggling artist and the famous masters, — was no true patron of Art. Rushbrook made no attempt to recover his lost prestige, and once, when squeezed into a tight “corner,” and forced to realize on his treasures, he put them up at auction and the people called them “daubs;” their rage knew no bounds. It was then that an unfettered press discovered that Rushbrook never was a Mæcenas at all, grimly deprecated his assumption of that title, and even doubted if he were truly a millionaire. It was at this time that a few

stood by him — notably, the mill inventor from Siskyou, grown plethoric with success, but eventually ground between the upper and nether millstone of the Somers and Rushbrook party. Miss Nevil had returned to the Atlantic States with Mrs. Leyton. While rumors had played freely with the relations of Somers and the Signora as the possible cause of the rupture between him and Rushbrook, no mention had ever been made of the name of Miss Nevil.

It was raining heavily one afternoon, when Mr. Rushbrook drove from his office to his San Francisco house. The fierce struggle in which he was engaged left him little time for hospitality, and for the last two weeks his house had been comparatively deserted. He passed through the empty rooms, changed in little except the absence of some valuable monstrosities which had gone to replenish his capital. When he reached his bedroom, he paused a moment at the open door.

“James!”

“Yes, sir,” said James, appearing out of the shadow.

“What are you waiting for?”

“I thought you might be wanting something, sir.”

“You were waiting there this morning; you were in the ante-room of my study while I was writing. You were outside the blue room while I sat at breakfast. You were at my elbow in the drawing-room late last night. Now, James,” continued Mr. Rushbrook, with his usual grave directness, “I don’t intend to commit suicide; I can’t afford it, so keep your time and your rest for yourself — you want it — that’s a good fellow.”

“Yes, sir.”

“James!”

“Yes, sir.”

Rushbrook extended his hand. There was that faint, rare smile on his handsome mouth, for which James would at any time have laid down his life. But he only silently grasped his master’s hand, and the two men remained looking into each other’s eyes without a word. Then Mr. Rushbrook entered his room, lay down, and went to sleep, and James vanished in the shadow.

At the end of an hour Mr. Rushbrook awoke refreshed, and even James, who came to call him, appeared to have brightened in the interval. “I have ordered a fire, sir, in the reserved room, the one fitted up from Los Osos, as your study has had no chance

of being cleaned these two weeks. It will be a change for you, sir. I hope you'll excuse my not waking you to consult you about it."

Rushbrook remained so silent that James, fancying he had not heard him, was about to repeat himself when his master said quickly, "Very well, come for me there when dinner is ready," and entered the passage leading to the room. James did not follow him, and when Mr. Rushbrook, opening the door, started back with an exclamation, no one but the inmate heard the word that rose to his lips.

For there, seated before the glow of the blazing fire, was Miss Grace Nevil. She had evidently just arrived, for her mantle was barely loosened around her neck, and upon the fringe of brown hair between her bonnet and her broad, low forehead a few drops of rain still sparkled. As she lifted her long lashes quickly towards the door, it seemed as if they, too, had caught a little of that moisture. Rushbrook moved impatiently forward, and then stopped. Grace rose unhesitatingly to her feet, and met him half-way with frankly outstretched hands. "First of all," she said, with a half nervous

laugh, "don't scold James; it's all my fault; I forbade him to announce me, lest you should drive me away, for I heard that during this excitement you came here for rest, and saw no one. Even the intrusion into this room is all my own. I confess now that I saw it the last night I was here; I was anxious to know if it was unchanged, and made James bring me here. I did not understand it then. I do now — and — thank you."

Her face must have shown that she was conscious that he was still holding her hand, for he suddenly released it. With a heightened color and a half girlish *naïveté*, that was the more charming for its contrast with her tall figure and air of thoroughbred repose, she turned back to her chair, and lightly motioned him to take the one before her. "I am here on *business*; otherwise I should not have dared to look in upon you at all."

She stopped, drew off her gloves with a provoking deliberation, which was none the less fascinating that it implied a demure consciousness of inducing some impatience in the breast of her companion, stretched them out carefully by the fingers, laid them

down neatly on the table, placed her elbows on her knees, slightly clasped her hands together, and bending forward, lifted her honest, handsome eyes to the man before her.

“Mr. Rushbrook, I have got between four and five hundred thousand dollars that I have no use for; I can control securities which can be converted, if necessary, into a hundred thousand more in ten days. I am free and my own mistress. It is generally considered that I know what I am about — you admitted as much when I was your pupil. I have come here to place this sum in your hands, at your free disposal. You know why and for what purpose.”

“But what do you know of my affairs?” asked Rushbrook, quickly.

“Everything, and I know *you*, which is better. Call it an investment if you like — for I know you will succeed — and let me share your profits. Call it — if you please — restitution, for I am the miserable cause of your rupture with that man. Or call it revenge if you like,” she said with a faint smile, “and let me fight at your side against our common enemy! Please, Mr. Rushbrook, don’t deny me this. I have come

three thousand miles for it; I could have sent it to you — or written — but I feared you would not understand it. You are smiling — you will take it?”

“I cannot,” said Rushbrook, gravely.

“Then you force me to go into the Stock Market myself, and fight for you, and, unaided by *your* genius, perhaps lose it without benefiting you.”

Rushbrook did not reply.

“At least, then, tell me why you ‘cannot.’”

Rushbrook rose, and looking into her face, said quietly with his old directness: —

“Because I love you, Miss Nevil.”

A sudden instinct to rise and move away, a greater one to remain and hear him speak again, and a still greater one to keep back the blood that she felt was returning all too quickly to her cheek after the first shock, kept her silent. But she dropped her eyes.

“I loved you ever since I first saw you at Los Osos,” he went on quickly; “I said to myself even then, that if there was a woman that would fill my life, and make me what she wished me to be, it was you. I even fancied that day that you understood me better than any woman, or even any man,

that I had ever met before. I loved you through all that miserable business with that man, even when my failure to make you happy with another brought me no nearer to you. I have loved you always. I shall love you always. I love you more for this foolish kindness that brings *you* beneath my roof once more, and gives me a chance to speak my heart to you, if only once and for the last time, than all the fortune that you could put at my disposal. But I could not accept what you would offer me from any woman who was not my wife — and I could not marry any woman that did not love me. I am perhaps past the age when I could inspire a young girl's affection; but I have not reached the age when I would accept anything less." He stopped abruptly. Grace did not look up. There was a tear glistening upon her long eyelashes, albeit a faint smile played upon her lips.

"Do you call this business, Mr. Rushbrook?" she said softly.

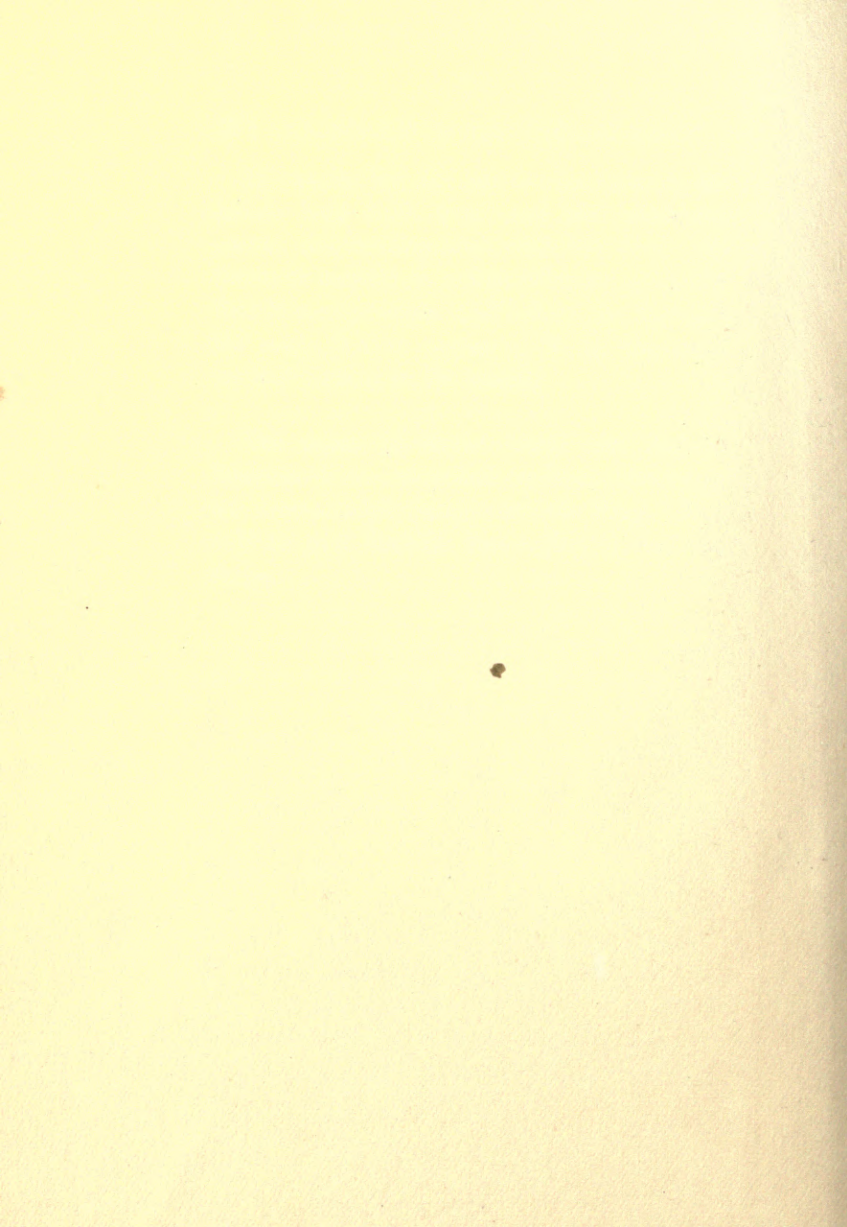
"Business?"

"To assume a proposal declined before it has been offered."

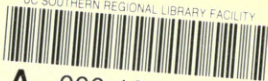
"Grace — my darling — tell me — is it possible?"

It was too late for her to rise now, as his hands held both hers, and his handsome mouth was smiling level with her own. So it really seemed to a dispassionate spectator that it *was* possible, and before she had left the room, it even appeared to be the most probable thing in the world.

The union of Grace Nevil and Robert Rushbrook was recorded by local history as the crown to his victory over the Ring. But only he and his wife knew that it was the cause.



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