Tales of the Argonauts

by Bret Harte

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TALES OF THE ARGONAUTS

By Bret Harte

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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 peephole 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 tailboard 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 ondressed.”

“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 it's 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 bedclothes 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 ontil 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 onsatisfactory 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 unparalleled 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 herself 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 'blase' 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 “Jinny 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 Chemisal 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 forever, 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 Kentuckian, 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 onsuited 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 diworce. Et about thet time, however, Providence sends a circus into thet town, and a feller ez rode three horses to onct. Hevin' allez 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 did.”

“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 biziness, 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 'Mams'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 tonight, 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 unarmed 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, throwing 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 her 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 luxurious 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 inthralling 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. Oakhurst 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 angers, 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 home. 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 deprecatingly. “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 Jose, 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 Jose 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 canyon 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 lounging 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 Jose, in Oakland? You see I have followed you. I saw you as you came down the canyon, 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 any 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 rooms 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 homemade 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 ruling 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 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 happiness, 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 nondescript 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 back ground, 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,” “Antaeus,” &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 foreman, 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 correspondence 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 denoument: 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 everywhere: 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 facetiae 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 ennuye 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, victimized 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 firearms.”

“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 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 returned 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 Heavytree 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 vertebrae 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-townsman, Mr. Henry York, now on a visit to his relatives in the East, lately took with him in his 'dugout' 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, there was only one to whom the rain had not brought 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 deposited 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 this 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 specilation 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 Hamlin 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, was 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 goneness here, and a kind o' feelin' as it 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 tenement 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 hilltop. 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 doubtingly 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 orator'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 fox “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, pocketbook, 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 doorbell, 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 melody 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 in visible elaque.

“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' Star 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 lady. 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 onless 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 “prospectin',” 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 schoolmarm, 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-morrer; 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 tunnelmen 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 denouement. 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 canyons 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 champagny 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 established 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 canyon, 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 canyon, 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 repeopled 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 serape lying on the wooden couch. Here were the walls fancifully papered with illustrations from “The London News;” here was the woodcut 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 serape over me,

as a 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 serape; 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 serape 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 serape 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 topmost 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 boy,—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 a 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 “hard-heartedness.” 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 dammish.”

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 quickened 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 handcart, 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 hatrack, 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 performance, 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, still 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 execrations 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 “Fideletown,” 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 jocularity 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. Tretherick 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 dresses. 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 avoid 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 turn 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 sniffling,” 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. Tretherick, 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 storeroom. 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 it was for this reason that this whole scene affected her most unpleasantly; and the conclusion 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. Mrs. 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 dowin 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 dowin 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 an 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'ril thet she'd get away some day, and stampede 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 jist hung around thet hotel all night, and payrolled them corriders, 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 exchanged, 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 electrically lightened. The child clapped her hands, and caught at his blouse. Then he said shortly, “Me John—Ah Fe—allee 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 topside 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. Tretherick 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 singularly inadequate to defray the expenses of herself 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 deerskin-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 that 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! hunerstan?—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 nonshense 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 shedder 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-sashes, 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 beaux. 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 elan 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 loftily, "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 under stood 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 Tretherick 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 step-mother 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, indignant, 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, as 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 careless-like (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 poenitentiae, for the embarrassed or bashful visitor: 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-house, 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, lo! thy name is again spoken of men, and for a moment lifted up above thy betters.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK TALES OF THE ARGONAUTS ***

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