

The Heritage of Dedlow Marsh and Other Tales

Bret Harte

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by Bret Harte

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THE HERITAGE OF DEDLOW MARSH.

I.

The sun was going down on the Dedlow Marshes. The tide was following it fast as if to meet the reddening lines of sky and water in the west, leaving the foreground to grow blacker and blacker every moment, and to bring out in startling contrast the few half-filled and half-lit pools left behind and forgotten. The

strong breath of the Pacific fanning their surfaces at times kindled them into a dull glow like dying embers. A cloud of sandpipers rose white from one of the nearer lagoons, swept in a long eddying ring against the sunset, and became a black and dropping rain to seaward. The long sinuous line of channel, fading with the light and ebbing with the tide, began to give off here and there light puffs of gray-winged birds like sudden exhalations. High in the darkening sky the long arrow-headed lines of geese and 'brant' pointed towards the upland. As the light grew more uncertain the air at times was filled with the rush of viewless and melancholy wings, or became plaintive with far-off cries and lamentations. As the Marshes grew blacker the far-scattered tussocks and accretions on its level surface began to loom in exaggerated outline, and two human figures, suddenly emerging erect on the bank of the hidden channel, assumed the proportion of giants.

When they had moored their unseen boat, they still appeared for some moments to be moving vaguely and aimlessly round the spot where they had disembarked. But as the eye became familiar with the darkness it was seen that they were really advancing inland, yet with a slowness of progression and deviousness of course that appeared inexplicable to the distant spectator. Presently it was evident that this seemingly even, vast, black expanse was traversed and intersected by inky creeks and small channels, which made human progression difficult and dangerous. As they appeared nearer and their figures took more natural proportions, it could be seen that each carried a gun; that one was a young girl, although dressed so like her companion in shaggy pea-jacket and sou'wester as to be scarcely distinguished from him above the short skirt that came halfway down her high india-rubber fishing-boots. By the time they had reached firmer ground, and turned to look back at the sunset, it could be also seen that the likeness between their faces was remarkable. Both, had crisp, black, tightly curling hair; both had dark eyes and heavy eyebrows; both had quick vivid complexions, slightly heightened by the sea and wind. But more striking than their similarity of coloring was the likeness of expression and bearing. Both wore the same air of picturesque energy; both bore themselves with a like graceful effrontery and self-possession.

The young man continued his way. The young girl lingered for a moment looking seaward, with her small brown hand lifted to shade her eyes,—a precaution which her heavy eyebrows and long lashes seemed to render utterly gratuitous.

"Come along, Mag. What are ye waitin' for?" said the young man impatiently.

"Nothin'. Lookin' at that boat from the Fort." Her clear eyes were watching a small skiff, invisible to less keen-sighted observers, aground upon a flat near the mouth of the channel. "Them chaps will have a high ole time gunnin' thar, stuck in the mud, and the tide goin' out like sixty!"

"Never you mind the sodgers," returned her companion, aggressively, "they kin take care o' their own precious skins, or Uncle Sam will do it for 'em, I reckon. Anyhow the people--that's you and me, Mag--is expected to pay for their foolishness. That's what they're sent yer for. Ye oughter to be satisfied with that," he added with deep sarcasm.

"I reckon they ain't expected to do much off o' dry land, and they can't help bein' queer on the water," returned the young girl with a reflecting sense of justice.

"Then they ain't no call to go gunnin', and wastin' Guv'nment powder on ducks instead o' Injins."

"Thet's so," said the girl thoughtfully. "Wonder ef Guv'nment pays for them frocks the Kernel's girls went cavortin' round Logport in last Sunday--they looked like a cirkis."

"Like ez not the old Kernel gets it outer contracts--one way or another. WE pay for it all the same," he added gloomily.

"Jest the same ez if they were MY clothes," said the girl, with a quick, fiery, little laugh, "ain't it? Wonder how they'd like my sayin' that to 'em when they was prancin' round, eh, Jim?"

But her companion was evidently unprepared for this sweeping feminine deduction, and stopped it with masculine promptitude.

"Look yer--instead o' botherin' your head about what the Fort girls wear, you'd better trot along a little more lively. It's late enough now."

"But these darned boots hurt like pizen," said the girl, limping. "They swallowed a lot o' water over the tops while I was wadin' down there, and my feet go swashin' around like in a churn every step."

"Lean on me, baby," he returned, passing his arm around her waist, and dropping her head smartly on his shoulder. "Thar!" The act was brotherly and slightly contemptuous, but it was sufficient to at once establish their kinship.

They continued on thus for some moments in silence, the girl, I fear, after the fashion of her sex, taking the fullest advantage of this slightly sentimental and caressing attitude. They were moving now along the edge of the Marsh, parallel with the line of rapidly fading horizon, following some trail only known to their keen youthful eyes. It was growing darker and darker. The cries of the sea-birds had ceased; even the call of a belated plover had died away inland; the hush of death lay over the black funereal pall of marsh at their side. The tide had run out with the day. Even the sea-breeze had lulled in this dead slack-water of all nature, as if waiting outside the bar with the ocean, the stars, and the night.

Suddenly the girl stopped and halted her companion. The faint far sound of a bugle broke the silence, if the idea of interruption could have been conveyed by the two or three exquisite vibrations that seemed born of that silence itself, and to fade and die in it without break or discord. Yet it was only the 'retreat' call from the Fort two miles distant and invisible.

The young girl's face had become irradiated, and her small mouth half opened as she listened. "Do you know, Jim," she said with a confidential sigh, "I allus put words to that when I hear it--it's so pow'ful pretty. It allus goes to me like this: 'Goes the day,

Far away, With the light, And the night Comes along--Comes along-- Comes along--Like a-a so-o-ong." She here lifted her voice, a sweet, fresh, boyish contralto, in such an admirable imitation of the bugle that her brother, after the fashion of more select auditors, was for a moment quite convinced that the words meant something. Nevertheless, as a brother, it was his duty to crush this weakness. "Yes; and it says:'shut your head, Go to bed,'" he returned irascibly; "and YOU'D better come along, if we're goin' to hev any supper. There's Yeller Bob hez got ahead of us over there with the game already."

The girl glanced towards a slouching burdened figure that now appeared to be preceding them, straightened herself suddenly, and then looked attentively towards the Marsh.

"Not the sodgers again?" said her brother impatiently.

"No," she said quickly; "but if that don't beat anythin'! I'd hev sworn, Jim, that Yeller Bob was somewhere behind us. I saw him only jest now when 'Taps' sounded, somewhere over thar." She pointed with a half-uneasy expression in quite another direction from that in which the slouching Yellow Bob had just loomed.

"Tell ye what, Mag, makin' poetry outer bugle calls hez kinder muddled ye. THAT'S Yeller Bob ahead, and ye orter know Injins well enuff by this time to remember that they allus crop up jest when ye don't expect them. And there's the bresh jest afore us. Come!"

The 'bresh,' or low bushes, was really a line of stunted willows and alders that seemed to have gradually sunk into the level of the plain, but increased in size farther inland, until they grew to the height and density of a wood. Seen from the channel it had the appearance of a green cape or promontory thrust upon the Marsh. Passing through its tangled recesses, with the aid of some unerring instinct, the two companions emerged upon another and much larger level that seemed as illimitable as the bay. The strong breath of the ocean lying just beyond the bar and estuary they were now facing came to them salt and humid as another tide. The nearer expanse of open water reflected the after-glow, and lightened the landscape. And between the two wayfarers and the horizon rose, bleak and startling, the strange outlines of their home.

At first it seemed a ruined colonnade of many pillars, whose base and pediment were buried in the earth, supporting a long parallelogram of entablature and cornices. But a second glance showed it to be a one-storied building, upheld above the Marsh by numberless piles placed at regular distances; some of them sunken or inclined from the perpendicular, increasing the first illusion. Between these pillars, which permitted a free circulation of air, and, at extraordinary tides, even the waters of the bay itself, the level waste of marsh, the bay, the surges of the bar, and finally the red horizon line, were distinctly visible. A railed gallery or platform, supported also on piles, and reached by steps from the Marsh, ran around the building, and gave access to the several rooms and offices.

But if the appearance of this lacustrine and amphibious dwelling was striking, and not without a certain rude and massive grandeur, its grounds and possessions, through which the brother and sister

were still picking their way, were even more grotesque and remarkable. Over a space of half a dozen acres the flotsam and jetsam of years of tidal offerings were collected, and even guarded with a certain care. The blackened hulks of huge uprooted trees, scarcely distinguishable from the fragments of genuine wrecks beside them, were securely fastened by chains to stakes and piles driven in the marsh, while heaps of broken and disjointed bamboo orange crates, held together by ropes of fibre, glistened like ligamented bones heaped in the dead valley. Masts, spars, fragments of shell-encrusted boats, binnacles, round-houses and galleys, and part of the after-deck of a coasting schooner, had ceased their wanderings and found rest in this vast cemetery of the sea. The legend on a wheel-house, the lettering on a stern or bow, served for mortuary inscription. Wailed over by the trade winds, mourned by lamenting sea-birds, once every year the tide visited its lost dead and left them wet with its tears.

To such a spot and its surroundings the atmosphere of tradition and mystery was not wanting. Six years ago Boone Culpepper had built the house, and brought to it his wife--variously believed to be a gypsy, a Mexican, a bright mulatto, a Digger Indian, a South Sea princess from Tahiti, somebody else's wife--but in reality a little Creole woman from New Orleans, with whom he had contracted a marriage, with other gambling debts, during a winter's vacation from his home in Virginia. At the end of two years she had died, succumbing, as differently stated, from perpetual wet feet, or the misanthropic idiosyncrasies of her husband, and leaving behind her a girl of twelve and a boy of sixteen to console him. How futile was this bequest may be guessed from a brief summary of Mr. Culpepper's peculiarities. They were the development of a singular form of aggrandizement and misanthropy. On his arrival at Logport he had bought a part of the apparently valueless Dedlow Marsh from the Government at less than a dollar an acre, continuing his singular investment year by year until he was the owner of three leagues of amphibious domain. It was then discovered that this property carried with it the WATER FRONT of divers valuable and convenient sites for manufactures and the commercial ports of a noble bay, as well as the natural embarcaderos of some 'lumbering' inland settlements. Boone Culpepper would not sell. Boone Culpepper would not rent or lease. Boone Culpepper held an invincible blockade of his neighbors, and the progress and improvement he despised--granting only, after a royal fashion, occasional license, revocable at pleasure, in the shape of tolls, which amply supported him, with the game he shot in his kingfisher's eyrie on the Marsh. Even the Government that had made him powerful was obliged to 'condemn' a part of his property at an equitable price for the purposes of Fort Redwood, in which the adjacent town of Logport shared. And Boone Culpepper, unable to resist the act, refused to receive the compensation or quit-claim the town. In his scant intercourse with his neighbors he always alluded to it as his own, showed it to his children as part of their strange inheritance, and exhibited the starry flag that floated from the Fort as a flaunting insult to their youthful eyes. Hated, feared, and superstitiously shunned by some, regarded as a madman by others, familiarly known as 'The Kingfisher of Dedlow,' Boone Culpepper was one day found floating dead in his skiff, with a charge of shot through his head and shoulders. The shot-gun lying at his feet at the bottom of the boat indicated the 'accident' as recorded in the verdict of the coroner's jury--but

not by the people. A thousand rumors of murder or suicide prevailed, but always with the universal rider, 'Served him right.' So invincible was this feeling that but few attended his last rites, which took place at high water. The delay of the officiating clergyman lost the tide; the homely catafalque--his own boat--was left aground on the Marsh, and deserted by all mourners except the two children. Whatever he had instilled into them by precept and example, whatever took place that night in their lonely watch by his bier on the black marshes, it was certain that those who confidently looked for any change in the administration of the Dedlow Marsh were cruelly mistaken. The old Kingfisher was dead, but he had left in the nest two young birds, more beautiful and graceful, it was true, yet as fierce and tenacious of beak and talon.

II.

Arriving at the house, the young people ascended the outer flight of wooden steps, which bore an odd likeness to the companion-way of a vessel, and the gallery, or 'deck,' as it was called--where a number of nets, floats, and buoys thrown over the railing completed the nautical resemblance. This part of the building was evidently devoted to kitchen, dining-room, and domestic offices; the principal room in the centre serving as hall or living-room, and communicating on the other side with two sleeping apartments. It was of considerable size, with heavy lateral beams across the ceiling--built, like the rest of the house, with a certain maritime strength--and looked not unlike a saloon cabin. An enormous open Franklin stove between the windows, as large as a chimney, blazing with drift-wood, gave light and heat to the apartment, and brought into flickering relief the boarded walls hung with the spoils of sea and shore, and glittering with gun-barrels. Fowling-pieces of all sizes, from the long ducking-gun mounted on a swivel for boat use to the light single-barrel or carbine, stood in racks against the walls; game-bags, revolvers in their holsters, hunting and fishing knives in their sheaths, depended from hooks above them. In one corner stood a harpoon; in another, two or three Indian spears for salmon. The carpetless floor and rude chairs and settles were covered with otter, mink, beaver, and a quantity of valuable seal-skins, with a few larger pelts of the bear and elk. The only attempt at decoration was the displayed wings and breasts of the wood and harlequin duck, the muir, the cormorant, the gull, the gannet, and the femininely delicate half-mourning of petrel and plover, nailed against the wall. The influence of the sea was dominant above all, and asserted its saline odors even through the spice of the curling drift-wood smoke that half veiled the ceiling.

A berry-eyed old Indian woman with the complexion of dried salmon; her daughter, also with berry eyes, and with a face that seemed wholly made of a moist laugh; 'Yellow Bob,' a Digger 'buck,' so called from the prevailing ochre markings of his cheek, and 'Washooh,' an ex-chief; a nondescript in a blanket, looking like a cheap and dirty doll whose fibrous hair was badly nailed on his carved wooden head, composed the Culpepper household. While the two former were preparing supper in the adjacent dining-room, Yellow Bob, relieved of his burden of game, appeared on the gallery and beckoned mysteriously to his master through the window. James

Culpepper went out, returned quickly, and after a minute's hesitation and an uneasy glance towards his sister, who had meantime pushed back her sou'wester from her forehead, and without taking off her jacket had dropped into a chair before the fire with her back towards him, took his gun noiselessly from the rack, and saying carelessly that he would be back in a moment, disappeared.

Left to herself, Maggie coolly pulled off her long boots and stockings, and comfortably opposed to the fire two very pretty feet and ankles, whose delicate purity was slightly blue-bleached by confinement in the tepid sea-water. The contrast of their waxen whiteness with her blue woolen skirt, and with even the skin of her sunburnt hands and wrists, apparently amused her, and she sat for some moments with her elbows on her knees, her skirts slightly raised, contemplating them, and curling her toes with evident satisfaction. The firelight playing upon the rich coloring of her face, the fringe of jet-black curls that almost met the thick sweep of eyebrows, and left her only a white strip of forehead, her short upper lip and small chin, rounded but resolute, completed a piquant and striking figure. The rich brown shadows on the smoke-stained walls and ceiling, the occasional starting into relief of the scutcheons of brilliant plumage, and the momentary glitter of the steel barrels, made a quaint background to this charming picture. Sitting there, and following some lingering memory of her tramp on the Marsh, she hummed to herself a few notes of the bugle call that had impressed her--at first softly, and finally with the full pitch of her voice.

Suddenly she stopped.

There was a faint and unmistakable rapping on the floor beneath her. It was distinct, but cautiously given, as if intended to be audible to her alone. For a moment she stood upright, her feet still bare and glistening, on the otter skin that served as a rug. There were two doors to the room, one from which her brother had disappeared, which led to the steps, the other giving on the back gallery, looking inland. With a quick instinct she caught up her gun and ran to that one, but not before a rapid scramble near the railing was followed by a cautious opening of the door. She was just in time to shut it on the extended arm and light blue sleeve of an army overcoat that protruded through the opening, and for a moment threw her whole weight against it.

"A dhrop of whiskey, Miss, for the love of God."

She retained her hold, cocked her weapon, and stepped back a pace from the door. The blue sleeve was followed by the rest of the overcoat, and a blue cap with the infantry blazoning, and the letter H on its peak. They were for the moment more distinguishable than the man beneath them--grimed and blackened with the slime of the Marsh. But what could be seen of his mud-stained face was more grotesque than terrifying. A combination of weakness and audacity, insinuation and timidity struggled through the dirt for expression. His small blue eyes were not ill-natured, and even the intruding arm trembled more from exhaustion than passion.

"On'y a dhrop, Miss," he repeated piteously, "and av ye pleeze, quick! afore I'm stharved with the cold entoirely."

She looked at him intently--without lowering her gun.

"Who are you?"

"Thin, it's the truth I'll tell ye, Miss--whisth then!" he said in a half-whisper; "I'm a deserter!"

"Then it was YOU that was doggin' us on the Marsh?"

"It was the sarjint I was lavin', Miss."

She looked at him hesitatingly.

"Stay outside there; if you move a step into the room, I'll blow you out of it."

He stepped back on the gallery. She closed the door, bolted it, and still holding the gun, opened a cupboard, poured out a glass of whiskey, and returning to the door, opened it and handed him the liquor.

She watched him drain it eagerly, saw the fiery stimulant put life into his shivering frame, trembling hands, and kindle his dull eye--and--quietly raised her gun again.

"Ah, put it down, Miss, put it down! Fwhot's the use? Sure the bullets yee carry in them oiyes of yours is more deadly! It's out here oi'll sthand, glory be to God, all night, without movin' a fut till the sarjint comes to take me, av ye won't level them oiyes at me like that. Ah, whirra! look at that now! but it's a gooddness she is--the livin' Jaynus of warr, standin' there like a statoo, wid her alybaster fut put forward."

In her pride and conscious superiority, any suggestion of shame at thus appearing before a common man and a mendicant was as impossible to her nature as it would have been to a queen or the goddess of his simile. His presence and his compliment alike passed her calm modesty unchallenged. The wretched scamp recognized the fact and felt its power, and it was with a superstitious reverence asserting itself through his native extravagance that he raised his grimy hand to his cap in military salute and became respectfully rigid.

"Then the sodgers were huntin' YOU?" she said thoughtfully, lowering her weapon.

"Thru for you, Miss--they worr, and it's meself that was lyin' flat in the ditch wid me faytures makin' an illigant cast in the mud--more betoken, as ye see even now--and the sarjint and his daytail thrampin' round me. It was thin that the mortal cold sthruck thro' me mouth, and made me wake for the whiskey that would resthore me."

"What did you desert fer?"

"Ah, list to that now! Fwhat did I desart fer? Shure ev there was the ghost of an inemy round, it's meself that would be in the front now! But it was the letthers from me ould mother, Miss, that is

sthru'ck wid a mortal illness--long life to her!--in County Clare, and me sisthers in Ninth Avenue in New York, fornint the daypo, that is brekken their harruts over me listin' in the Fourth Infanthy to do duty in a haythen wilderness. Av it was the cavalry--and it's me own father that was in the Innishkillen Dthragoons, Miss--oi wouldn't moind. Wid a horse betune me legs, it's on parade oi'd be now, Miss, and not wandhering over the bare flure of the Marsh, stharved wid the cold, the thirst, and hunger, wid the mud and the moire thick on me; facin' an illigant young leddy as is the ekal ov a Fayld Marshal's darter--not to sphake ov Kernal Preston's--ez couldn't hold a candle to her."

Brought up on the Spanish frontier, Maggie Culpepper was one of the few American girls who was not familiar with the Irish race. The rare smile that momentarily lit up her petulant mouth seemed to justify the intruder's praise. But it passed quickly, and she returned dryly:

"That means you want more drink, suthin' to eat, and clothes. Suppose my brother comes back and ketches you here?"

"Shure, Miss, he's just now hunten me, along wid his two haythen Diggers, beyond the laygoon there. It worr the yellar one that sphotted me lyin' there in the ditch; it worr only your own oiyes, Miss--more power to their beauty for that!--that saw me folly him unbeknownst here; and that desaved them, ye see!"

The young girl remained for an instant silent and thoughtful.

"We're no friends of the Fort," she said finally, "but I don't reckon for that reason my brother will cotton to YOU. Stay out thar where ye are, till I come to ye. If you hear me singin' again, you'll know he's come back, and ye'd better scoot with what you've already got, and be thankful."

She shut the door again and locked it, went into the dining-room, returned with some provisions wrapped in paper, took a common wicker flask from the wall, passed into her brother's bedroom, and came out with a flannel shirt, overalls, and a coarse Indian blanket, and, reopening the door, placed them before the astonished and delighted vagabond. His eye glistened; he began, "Glory be to God," but for once his habitual extravagance failed him. Nature triumphed with a more eloquent silence over his well-worn art. He hurriedly wiped his begrimed face and eyes with the shirt she had given him, and catching the sleeve of her rough pea-jacket in his dirty hand, raised it to his lips.

"Go!" she said imperiously. "Get away while you can."

"Av it vas me last words--it's speechless oi am," he stammered, and disappeared over the railing.

She remained for a moment holding the door half open, and gazing into the darkness that seemed to flow in like a tide. Then she shut it, and going into her bedroom resumed her interrupted toilette. When she emerged again she was smartly stockinged and slippared, and even the blue serge skirt was exchanged for a bright print, with a white fichu tied around her throat. An attempt to subdue her rebellious curls had resulted in the construction from

their ruins of a low Norman arch across her forehead with pillared abutments of ringlets. When her brother returned a few moments later she did not look up, but remained, perhaps a little ostentatiously, bending over the fire.

"Bob allowed that the Fort boat was huntin' MEN--deserters, I reckon," said Jim aggrievedly. "Wanted me to believe that he SAW one on the Marsh hidin'. On'y an Injin lie, I reckon, to git a little extra fire-water, for toting me out to the bresh on a fool's errand."

"Oh, THAT'S where you went!" said Maggie, addressing the fire. "Since when hev you tuk partnership with the Guv'nment and Kernel Preston to hunt up and take keer of their property?"

"Well, I ain't goin' to hev such wreckage as they pick up and enlist set adrift on our marshes, Mag," said Jim decidedly.

"What would you hev done had you ketched him?" said Maggie, looking suddenly into her brother's face.

"Given him a dose of snipe-shot that he'd remember, and be thankful it wasn't slugs," said Jim promptly. Observing a deeper seriousness in her attitude, he added, "Why, if it was in war-time he'd get a BALL from them sodgers on sight."

"Yes; but YOU ain't got no call to interfere," said Maggie.

"Ain't I? Why, he's no better than an outlaw. I ain't sure that he hasn't been stealin' or killin' somebody over their."

"Not that man!" said Maggie impulsively.

"Not what man?" said her brother, facing her quickly.

"Why," returned Maggie, repairing her indiscretion with feminine dexterity, "not ANY man who might have knocked you and me over on the marshes in the dusk, and grabbed our guns."

"Wish he'd hev tried it," said the brother, with a superior smile, but a quickly rising color. "Where d'ye suppose I'D hev been all the while?"

Maggie saw her mistake, and for the first time in her life resolved to keep a secret from her brother--overnight. "Supper's gettin' cold," she said, rising.

They went into the dining-room--an apartment as plainly furnished as the one they had quitted, but in its shelves, cupboards, and closely fitting boarding bearing out the general nautical suggestion of the house--and seated themselves before a small table on which their frugal meal was spread. In this tete-a-tete position Jim suddenly laid down his knife and fork and stared at his sister.

"Hello!"

"What's the matter?" said Maggie, starting slightly. "How you do skeer one."

"Who's been prinkin', eh?"

"My ha'r was in kinks all along o' that hat," said Maggie, with a return of higher color, "and I had to straighten it. It's a boy's hat, not a girl's."

But that necktie and that gown--and all those frills and tuckers?" continued Jim generalizing, with a rapid twirling of his fingers over her. "Are you expectin' Judge Martin, or the Expressman this evening?"

Judge Martin was the lawyer of Logport, who had proven her father's will, and had since raved about his single interview with the Kingfisher's beautiful daughter; the Expressman was a young fellow who was popularly supposed to have left his heart while delivering another valuable package on Maggie in person, and had "never been the same man since." It was a well-worn fraternal pleasantry that had done duty many a winter's evening, as a happy combination of moral admonition and cheerfulness. Maggie usually paid it the tribute of a quick little laugh and a sisterly pinch, but that evening those marks of approbation were withheld.

"Jim dear," said she, when their Spartan repast was concluded and they were reestablished before the living-room fire. "What was it the Redwood Mill Kempany offered you for that piece near Dead Man's Slough?"

Jim took his pipe from his lips long enough to say, "Ten thousand dollars," and put it back again.

"And what do ye kalkilate all our property, letting alone this yer house, and the driftwood front, is worth all together?"

"Includin' wot the Gov'nment owes us?--for that's all ours, ye know?" said Jim quickly.

"No--leavin' that out--jest for greens, you know," suggested Maggie.

"Well nigh onter a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars, I reckon, by and large."

"That's a heap o' money, Jim! I reckon old Kernel Preston wouldn't raise that in a hundred years," continued Maggie, warming her knees by the fire.

"In five million years," said Jim, promptly sweeping away further discussion. After a pause he added, "You and me, Mag, kin see anybody's pile, and go 'em fifty thousand better."

There were a few moments of complete silence, in which Maggie smoothed her knees, and Jim's pipe, which seemed to have become gorged and apoplectic with its owner's wealth, snored unctuously.

"Jim dear, what if--it's on'y an idea of mine, you know--what if you sold that piece to the Redwood Mill, and we jest tuk that money and--and--and jest lifted the ha'r offer them folks at Logport? Jest astonished 'em! Jest tuk the best rooms in that new hotel,

got a hoss and buggy, dressed ourselves, you and me, fit to kill, and made them Fort people take a back seat in the Lord's Tabernacle, oncet for all. You see what I mean, Jim," she said hastily, as her brother seemed to be succumbing, like his pipe, in apoplectic astonishment, "jest on'y to SHOW 'em what we COULD do if we keerd. Lord! when we done it and spent the money we'd jest snap our fingers and skip back yer ez nat'ral ez life! Ye don't think, Jim," she said, suddenly turning half fiercely upon him, "that I'd allow to LIVE among 'em--to stay a menet after that!"

Jim laid down his pipe and gazed at his sister with stony deliberation. "And--what--do--you--kalkilate--to make by all that?" he said with scornful distinctness.

"Why, jest to show 'em we HAVE got money, and could buy 'em all up if we wanted to," returned Maggie, sticking boldly to her guns, albeit with a vague conviction that her fire was weakened through elevation, and somewhat alarmed at the deliberation of the enemy.

"And you mean to say they don't know it now," he continued with slow derision.

"No," said Maggie. "Why, theer's that new school-marm over at Logport, you know, Jim, the one that wanted to take your picter in your boat for a young smuggler or fancy pirate or Eyetalian fisherman, and allowed that you'r handsomed some, and offered to pay you for sittin'--do you reckon SHE'D believe you owned the land her schoolhouse was built on. No! Lots of 'em don't. Lots of 'em thinks we're poor and low down--and them ez doesn't, thinks"--

"What?" asked her brother sharply.

"That we're MEAN."

The quick color came to Jim's cheek. "So," he said, facing her quickly, "for the sake of a lot of riff-raff and scum that's drifted here around us--jest for the sake of cuttin' a swell before them--you'll go out among the hounds ez allowed your mother was a Spanish nigger or a kanaka, ez called your father a pirate and landgrabber, ez much as allowed he was shot by some one or killed himself a purpose, ez said you was a heathen and a looney because you didn't go to school or church along with their trash, ez kept away from Maw's sickness ez if it was smallpox, and Dad's fun'ral ez if he was a hoss-thief, and left you and me to watch his coffin on the marshes all night till the tide kem back. And now you--YOU that jined hands with me that night over our father lyin' there cold and despised--ez if he was a dead dog thrown up by the tide--and swore that ez long ez that tide ebbed and flowed it couldn't bring you to them, or them to you agin! You now want--what? What? Why, to go and cast your lot among 'em, and live among 'em, and join in their God-forsaken holler foolishness, and--and--and"--

"Stop! It's a lie! I DIDN'T say that. Don't you dare to say it!" said the girl, springing to her feet, and facing her brother in turn, with flashing eyes.

For a moment the two stared at each other--it might have been as in a mirror, so perfectly were their passions reflected in each line, shade, and color of the other's face. It was as if they had each

confronted their own passionate and willful souls, and were frightened. It had often occurred before, always with the same invariable ending. The young man's eyes lowered first; the girl's filled with tears.

"Well, ef ye didn't mean that, what did ye mean?" said Jim, sinking, with sullen apology, back into his chair.

"I--only--meant it--for--for--revenge!" sobbed Maggie.

"Oh!" said Jim, as if allowing his higher nature to be touched by this noble instinct. "But I didn't jest see where the revenge kem in."

"No? But, never mind now, Jim," said Maggie, ostentatiously ignoring, after the fashion of her sex, the trouble she had provoked; "but to think--that--that--you thought"--(sobbing).

"But I didn't, Mag"--(caressingly).

With this very vague and impotent conclusion, Maggie permitted herself to be drawn beside her brother, and for a few moments they plumed each other's ruffled feathers, and smoothed each other's lifted crests, like two beautiful young specimens of that halcyon genus to which they were popularly supposed to belong. At the end of half an hour Jim rose, and, yawning slightly, said in a perfunctory way:

"Where's the book?"

The book in question was the Bible. It had been the self-imposed custom of these two young people to read aloud a chapter every night as their one vague formula of literary and religious discipline. When it was produced, Maggie, presuming on his affectionate and penitential condition, suggested that to-night he should pick out "suthin' interestin'." But this unorthodox frivolity was sternly put aside by Jim--albeit, by way of compromise, he agreed to "chance it," i. e., open its pages at random.

He did so. Generally he allowed himself a moment's judicious pause for a certain chaste preliminary inspection necessary before reading aloud to a girl. To-night he omitted that modest precaution, and in a pleasant voice, which in reading was singularly free from colloquial infelicities of pronunciation, began at once:

"Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

"Oh, you looked first," said Maggie.

"I didn't now--honest Injin! I just opened."

"Go on," said Maggie, eagerly shoving him and interposing her neck over his shoulder.

And Jim continued Deborah's wonderful song of Jael and Sisera to

the bitter end of its strong monosyllabic climax.

"There," he said, closing the volume, "that's what I call revenge. That's the real Scripture thing--no fancy frills therer."

"Yes; but, Jim dear, don't you see that she treated him first--sorter got round him with free milk and butter, and reg'larly blandished him," argued Maggie earnestly.

But Jim declined to accept this feminine suggestion, or to pursue the subject further, and after a fraternal embrace they separated for the night. Jim lingered long enough to look after the fastening of the door and windows, and Maggie remained for some moments at her casement, looking across the gallery to the Marsh beyond.

The moon had risen, the tide was half up. Whatever sign or trace of alien footprint or occupation had been there was already smoothly obliterated; even the configuration of the land had changed. A black cape had disappeared, a level line of shore had been eaten into by teeth of glistening silver. The whole dark surface of the Marsh was beginning to be streaked with shining veins as if a new life was coursing through it. Part of the open bay before the Fort, encroaching upon the shore, seemed in the moonlight to be reaching a white and outstretched arm towards the nest of the Kingfisher.

III.

The reveille at Fort Redwood had been supplemented full five minutes by the voice of Lieutenant George Calvert's servant, before that young officer struggled from his bed. His head was splitting, his tongue and lips were dry and feverish, his bloodshot eyes were shrinking from the insufferable light of the day, his mind a confused medley of the past night and the present morning, of cards and wild revelry, and the vision of a reproachfully trim orderly standing at his door with reports and orders which he now held composedly in his hand. For Lieutenant Calvert had been enjoying a symposium variously known as "Stag Feed" and "A Wild Stormy Night" with several of his brother officers, and a sickening conviction that it was not the first or the last time he had indulged in these festivities. At that moment he loathed himself, and then after the usual derelict fashion cursed the fate that had sent him, after graduating, to a frontier garrison--the dull monotony of whose duties made the Border horse-play of dissipation a relief. Already he had reached the miserable point of envying the veteran capacities of his superiors and equals. "If I could drink like Kirby or Crowninshield, or if there was any other cursed thing a man could do in this hole," he had wretchedly repeated to himself, after each misspent occasion, and yet already he was looking forward to them as part of a 'sub's' duty and worthy his emulation. Already the dream of social recreation fostered by West Point had been rudely dispelled. Beyond the garrison circle of Colonel Preston's family and two officers' wives, there was no society. The vague distrust and civil jealousy with which some frontier communities regard the Federal power, heightened in this instance by the uncompromising attitude the Government had taken towards the

settlers' severe Indian policy, had kept the people of Logport aloof from the Fort. The regimental band might pipe to them on Saturdays, but they would not dance.

Howbeit, Lieutenant Calvert dressed himself with uncertain hands but mechanical regularity and neatness, and, under the automatic training of discipline and duty, managed to button his tunic tightly over his feelings, to pull himself together with his sword-belt, compressing a still cadet-like waist, and to present that indescribable combination of precision and jauntiness which his brother officers too often allowed to lapse into frontier carelessness. His closely clipped light hair, yet dripping from a plunge in the cold water, had been brushed and parted with military exactitude, and when surmounted by his cap, with the peak in an artful suggestion of extra smartness tipped forward over his eyes, only his pale face--a shade lighter than his little blonde moustache--showed his last night's excesses. He was mechanically reaching for his sword and staring confusedly at the papers on his table when his servant interrupted:

"Major Bromley arranged that Lieutenant Kirby takes your sash this morning, as you're not well, sir; and you're to report for special to the colonel," he added, pointing discreetly to the envelope.

Touched by this consideration of his superior, Major Bromley, who had been one of the veterans of last night's engagement, Calvert mastered the contents of the envelope without the customary anathema of specials, said, "Thank you, Parks," and passed out on the veranda.

The glare of the quiet sunlit quadrangle, clean as a well-swept floor, the whitewashed walls and galleries of the barrack buildings beyond, the white and green palisade of officers' cottages on either side, and the glitter of a sentry's bayonet, were for a moment intolerable to him. Yet, by a kind of subtle irony, never before had the genius and spirit of the vocation he had chosen seemed to be as incarnate as in the scene before him. Seclusion, self-restraint, cleanliness, regularity, sobriety, the atmosphere of a wholesome life, the austere reserve of a monastery without its mysterious or pensive meditation, were all there. To escape which, he had of his own free will successively accepted a fool's distraction, the inevitable result of which was, the viewing of them the next morning with tremulous nerves and aching eyeballs.

An hour later, Lieutenant George Calvert had received his final instructions from Colonel Preston to take charge of a small detachment to recover and bring back certain deserters, but notably one, Dennis M'Caffrey of Company H, charged additionally with mutinous solicitation and example. As Calvert stood before his superior, that distinguished officer, whose oratorical powers had been considerably stimulated through a long course of "returning thanks for the Army," slightly expanded his chest and said paternally:

"I am aware, Mr. Calvert, that duties of this kind are somewhat distasteful to young officers, and are apt to be considered in the light of police detail; but I must remind you that no one part of a soldier's duty can be held more important or honorable than another, and that the fulfilment of any one, however trifling,

must, with honor to himself and security to his comrades, receive his fullest devotion. A sergeant and a file of men might perform your duty, but I require, in addition, the discretion, courtesy, and consideration of a gentleman who will command an equal respect from those with whom his duty brings him in contact. The unhappy prejudices which the settlers show to the military authority here render this, as you are aware, a difficult service, but I believe that you will, without forgetting the respect due to yourself and the Government you represent, avoid arousing these prejudices by any harshness, or inviting any conflict with the civil authority. The limits of their authority you will find in your written instructions; but you might gain their confidence, and impress them, Mr. Calvert, with the idea of your being their AUXILIARY in the interests of justice--you understand. Even if you are unsuccessful in bringing back the men, you will do your best to ascertain if their escape has been due to the sympathy of the settlers, or even with their preliminary connivance. They may not be aware that inciting enlisted men to desert is a criminal offence; you will use your own discretion in informing them of the fact or not, as occasion may serve you. I have only to add, that while you are on the waters of this bay and the land covered by its tides, you have no opposition of authority, and are responsible to no one but your military superiors. Good-bye, Mr. Calvert. Let me hear a good account of you."

Considerably moved by Colonel Preston's manner, which was as paternal and real as his rhetoric was somewhat perfunctory, Calvert half forgot his woes as he stepped from the commandant's piazza. But he had to face a group of his brother officers, who were awaiting him.

"Good-bye, Calvert," said Major Bromley; "a day or two out on grass won't hurt you--and a change from commissary whiskey will put you all right. By the way, if you hear of any better stuff at Westport than they're giving us here, sample it and let us know. Take care of yourself. Give your men a chance to talk to you now and then, and you may get something from them, especially Donovan. Keep your eye on Ramon. You can trust your sergeant straight along."

"Good-bye, George," said Kirby. "I suppose the old man told you that, although no part of a soldier's duty was better than another, your service was a very delicate one, just fitted for you, eh? He always does when he's cut out some hellish scrub-work for a chap. And told you, too, that as long as you didn't go ashore, and kept to a dispatch-boat, or an eight-oared gig, where you couldn't deploy your men, or dress a line, you'd be invincible."

"He did say something like that," smiled Calvert, with an uneasy recollection, however, that it was THE part of his superior's speech that particularly impressed him.

"Of course," said Kirby gravely, "THAT, as an infantry officer, is clearly your duty."

"And don't forget, George," said Rollins still more gravely, "that, whatever may befall you, you belong to a section of that numerically small but powerfully diversified organization--the American Army. Remember that in the hour of peril you can address your men in any language, and be perfectly understood. And

remember that when you proudly stand before them, the eyes not only of your own country, but of nearly all the others, are upon you! Good-bye, Georgey. I heard the major hint something about whiskey. They say that old pirate, Kingfisher Culpepper, had a stock of the real thing from Robertson County laid in his shebang on the Marsh just before he died. Pity we aren't on terms with them, for the cubs cannot drink it, and might be induced to sell. Shouldn't wonder, by the way, if your friend M'Caffrey was hanging round somewhere there; he always had a keen scent. You might confiscate it as an "incitement to desertion," you know. The girl's pretty, and ought to be growing up now."

But haply at this point the sergeant stopped further raillery by reporting the detachment ready; and drawing his sword, Calvert, with a confused head, a remorseful heart, but an unfaltering step, marched off his men on his delicate mission.

It was four o'clock when he entered Jonesville. Following a matter-of-fact idea of his own, he had brought his men the greater distance by a circuitous route through the woods, thus avoiding the ostentatious exposure of his party on the open bay in a well-manned boat to an extended view from the three leagues of shore and marsh opposite. Crossing the stream, which here separated him from the Dedlow Marsh by the common ferry, he had thus been enabled to halt unperceived below the settlement and occupy the two roads by which the fugitives could escape inland. He had deemed it not impossible that, after the previous visit of the sergeant, the deserters hidden in the vicinity might return to Jonesville in the belief that the visit would not be repeated so soon. Leaving a part of his small force to patrol the road and another to deploy over the upland meadows, he entered the village. By the exercise of some boyish diplomacy and a certain prepossessing grace, which he knew when and how to employ, he became satisfied that the objects of his quest were not THERE--however, their whereabouts might have been known to the people. Dividing his party again, he concluded to take a corporal and a few men and explore the lower marshes himself.

The preoccupation of duty, exercise, and perhaps, above all, the keen stimulus of the iodine-laden salt air seemed to clear his mind and invigorate his body. He had never been in the Marsh before, and enjoyed its novelty with the zest of youth. It was the hour when the tide of its feathered life was at its flood. Clouds of duck and teal passing from the fresh water of the river to the salt pools of the marshes perpetually swept his path with flying shadows; at times it seemed as if even the uncertain ground around him itself arose and sped away on dusky wings. The vicinity of hidden pools and sloughs was betrayed by startled splashings; a few paces from their marching feet arose the sunlit pinions of a swan. The air was filled with multitudinous small cries and pipings. In this vocal confusion it was some minutes before he recognized the voice of one of his out-flankers calling to the other.

An important discovery had been made. In a long tongue of bushes that ran down to the Marsh they had found a mud-stained uniform, complete even to the cap, bearing the initial of the deserter's company.

"Is there any hut or cabin hereabouts, Schmidt?" asked Calvert.

"Dot vos schoost it, Lefdennun," replied his corporal. "Dot vos de shanty from der Kingvisher--old Gulbeber. I pet a dollar, py shimminy, dot der men haf der gekommt."

He pointed through the brake to a long, low building that now raised itself, white in the sunlight, above the many blackened piles. Calvert saw in a single reconnoitring glance that it had but one approach--the flight of steps from the Marsh. Instructing his men to fall in on the outer edge of the brake and await his orders, he quickly made his way across the space and ascended the steps. Passing along the gallery he knocked at the front door. There was no response. He repeated his knock. Then the window beside it opened suddenly, and he was confronted with the double-muzzle of a long ducking-gun. Glancing instinctively along the barrels, he saw at their other extremity the bright eyes, brilliant color, and small set mouth of a remarkably handsome girl. It was the fact, and to the credit of his training, that he paid more attention to the eyes than to the challenge of the shining tubes before him.

"Jest stop where you are--will you!" said the girl determinedly.

Calvert's face betrayed not the slightest terror or surprise. Immovable as on parade, he carried his white gloved hand to his cap, and said gently, "With pleasure."

"Oh yes," said the girl quickly; "but if you move a step I'll jest blow you and your gloves offer that railin' inter the Marsh."

"I trust not," returned Calvert, smiling.

"And why?"

"Because it would deprive me of the pleasure of a few moments' conversation with you--and I've only one pair of gloves with me."

He was still watching her beautiful eyes--respectfully, admiringly, and strategically. For he was quite convinced that if he DID move she would certainly discharge one or both barrels at him.

"Where's the rest of you?" she continued sharply.

"About three hundred yards away, in the covert, not near enough to trouble you."

"Will they come here?"

"I trust not."

"You trust not?" she repeated scornfully. "Why?"

"Because they would be disobeying orders."

She lowered her gun slightly, but kept her black brows levelled at him. "I reckon I'm a match for YOU," she said, with a slightly contemptuous glance at his slight figure, and opened the door. For a moment they stood looking at each other. He saw, besides the handsome face and eyes that had charmed him, a tall slim figure,

made broader across the shoulders by an open pea-jacket that showed a man's red flannel shirt belted at the waist over a blue skirt, with the collar knotted by a sailor's black handkerchief, and turned back over a pretty though sunburnt throat. She saw a rather undersized young fellow in a jaunty undress uniform, scant of gold braid, and bearing only the single gold shoulder-bars of his rank, but scrupulously neat and well fitting. Light-colored hair cropped close, the smallest of light moustaches, clear and penetrating blue eyes, and a few freckles completed a picture that did not prepossess her. She was therefore the more inclined to resent the perfect ease and self-possession with which the stranger carried off these manifest defects before her.

She laid aside the gun, put her hands deep in the pockets of her pea-jacket, and, slightly squaring her shoulders, said curtly, "What do you want?"

"A very little information, which I trust it will not trouble you to give me. My men have just discovered the uniform belonging to a deserter from the Fort lying in the bushes yonder. Can you give me the slightest idea how it came there?"

"What right have you trapseing over our property?" she said, turning upon him sharply, with a slight paling of color.

"None whatever."

"Then what did you come for?"

"To ask that permission, in case you would give me no information."

"Why don't you ask my brother, and not a woman? Were you afraid?"

"He could hardly have done me the honor of placing me in more peril than you have," returned Calvert, smiling. "Then I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Culpepper?"

"I'm Jim Culpepper's sister."

"And, I believe, equally able to give or refuse the permission I ask."

"And what if I refuse?"

"Then I have only to ask pardon for having troubled you, go back, and return here with the tide. You don't resist THAT with a shot-gun, do you?" he asked pleasantly.

Maggie Culpepper was already familiar with the accepted theory of the supreme jurisdiction of the Federal Sea. She half turned her back upon him, partly to show her contempt, but partly to evade the domination of his clear, good-humored, and self-sustained little eyes.

"I don't know anythin' about your deserters, nor what rags o' theirs happen to be floated up here," she said, angrily, "and don't care to. You kin do what you like."

"Then I'm afraid I should remain here a little longer, Miss

Culpepper; but my duty"--

"Your wot?" she interrupted, disdainfully.

"I suppose I AM talking shop," he said smilingly. "Then my business"--

"Your business--pickin' up half-starved runaways!"

"And, I trust, sometimes a kind friend," he suggested, with a grave bow.

"You TRUST? Look yer, young man, she said, with her quick, fierce, little laugh, "I reckon you TRUST a heap too much!" She would like to have added, "with your freckled face, red hair, and little eyes"--but this would have obliged her to face them again, which she did not care to do.

Calvert stepped back, lifted his hand to his cap, still pleasantly, and then walked gravely along the gallery, down the steps, and towards the cover. From her window, unseen, she followed his neat little figure moving undeviatingly on, without looking to the left or right, and still less towards the house he had just quitted. Then she saw the sunlight flash on cross-belt plates and steel barrels, and a light blue line issued from out the dark green bushes, round the point, and disappeared. And then it suddenly occurred to her what she had been doing! This, then, was her first step towards that fancy she had so lately conceived, quarrelled over with her brother, and lay awake last night to place anew, in spite of all opposition! This was her brilliant idea of dazzling and subduing Logport and the Fort! Had she grown silly, or what had happened? Could she have dreamed of the coming of this whipper-snapper, with his insufferable airs, after that beggarly deserter? I am afraid that for a few moments the miserable fugitive had as small a place in Maggie's sympathy as the redoubtable whipper-snapper himself. And now the cherished dream of triumph and conquest was over! What a "looney" she had been! Instead of inviting him in, and outdoing him in "company manners," and "fooling" him about the deserter, and then blazing upon him afterwards at Logport in the glory of her first spent wealth and finery, she had driven him away!

And now "he'll go and tell--tell the Fort girls of his hairbreadth escape from the claws of the Kingfisher's daughter!"

The thought brought a few bitter tears to her eyes, but she wiped them away. The thought brought also the terrible conviction that Jim was right, that there could be nothing but open antagonism between them and the traducers of their parents, as she herself had instinctively shown! But she presently wiped that conviction away also, as she had her tears.

Half an hour later she was attracted by the appearance from the windows of certain straggling blue spots on the upland that seemed moving diagonally towards the Marsh. She did not know that it was Calvert's second "detail" joining him, but believed for a moment that he had not yet departed, and was strangely relieved. Still later the frequent disturbed cries of coot, heron, and marsh-hen, recognizing the presence of unusual invaders of their solitude,

distracted her yet more, and forced her at last with increasing color and an uneasy sense of shyness to steal out to the gallery for a swift furtive survey of the Marsh. But an utterly unexpected sight met her eyes, and kept her motionless.

The birds were rising everywhere and drifting away with querulous perturbation before a small but augmented blue detachment that was moving with monotonous regularity towards the point of bushes where she had seen the young officer previously disappear. In their midst, between two soldiers with fixed bayonets, marched the man whom even at that distance she instantly recognized as the deserter of the preceding night, in the very clothes she had given him. To complete her consternation, a little to the right marched the young officer also, but accompanied by, and apparently on the most amicable terms with, Jim--her own brother!

To forget all else and dart down the steps, flying towards the point of bushes, scarcely knowing why or what she was doing, was to Maggie the impulse and work of a moment. When she had reached it the party were not twenty paces away. But here a shyness and hesitation again seized her, and she shrank back in the bushes with an instinctive cry to her brother inarticulate upon her lips. They came nearer, they were opposite to her; her brother Jim keeping step with the invader, and even conversing with him with an animation she had seldom seen upon his face--they passed! She had been unnoticed except by one. The roving eye of the deserter had detected her handsome face among the leaves, slightly turned towards it, and poured out his whole soul in a single swift wink of eloquent but indescribable confidence.

When they had quite gone, she crept back to the house, a little reassured, but still tremulous. When her brother returned at nightfall, he found her brooding over the fire, in the same attitude as on the previous night.

"I reckon ye might hev seen me go by with the sodgers," he said, seating himself beside her, a little awkwardly, and with an unusual assumption of carelessness.

Maggie, without looking up, was languidly surprised. He had been with the soldiers--and where?

"About two hours ago I met this yer Leftenant Calvert," he went on with increasing awkwardness, "and--oh, I say, Mag--he said he saw you, and hoped he hadn't troubled ye, and--and--ye saw him, didn't ye?"

Maggie, with all the red of the fire concentrated in her cheek as she gazed at the flame, believed carelessly "that she had seen a shrimp in uniform asking questions."

"Oh, he ain't a bit stuck up," said Jim quickly, "that's what I like about him. He's ez nat'ral ez you be, and tuck my arm, walkin' around, careless-like, laffen at what he was doin', ez ef it was a game, and he wasn't sole commander of forty men. He's only a year or two older than me--and--and"--he stopped and looked uneasily at Maggie.

"So ye've bin craw-fishin' agin'?" said Maggie, in her deepest and

most scornful contralto.

"Who's craw-fishin'?" he retorted, angrily.

"What's this backen out o' what you said yesterday? What's all this trucklin' to the Fort now?"

"What? Well now, look yer," said Jim, rising suddenly, with reproachful indignation, "darned if I don't jest tell ye everythin'. I promised HIM I wouldn't. He allowed it would frighten ye."

"FRIGHTEN ME!" repeated Maggie contemptuously, nevertheless with her cheek paling again. "Frighten me--with what?"

"Well, since yer so cantankerous, look yer. We've been robbed!"

"Robbed?" echoed Maggie, facing him.

"Yes, robbed by that same deserter. Robbed of a suit of my clothes, and my whiskey-flask, and the darned skunk had 'em on. And if it hadn't bin for that Leftenant Calvert, and my givin' him permission to hunt him over the Marsh, we wouldn't have caught him."

"Robbed?" repeated Maggie again, vaguely.

"Yes, robbed! Last night, afore we came home. He must hev got in yer while we was comin' from the boat."

"Did, did that Leftenant say so?" stammered Maggie.

"Say it, of course he did! and so do I," continued Jim, impatiently. "Why, there were my very clothes on his back, and he daren't deny it. And if you'd hearkened to me jest now, instead of flyin' off in tantrums, you'd see that THAT'S jest how we got him, and how me and the Leftenant joined hands in it. I didn't give him permission to hunt deserters, but THIEVES. I didn't help him to ketch the man that deserted from HIM, but the skunk that took MY clothes. For when the Leftenant found the man's old uniform in the bush, he nat'rally kalkilated he must hev got some other duds near by in some underhand way. Don't you see? eh? Why, look, Mag. Darned if you ain't skeered after all! Who'd hev thought it? There now--sit down, dear. Why, you're white ez a gull."

He had his arm round her as she sank back in the chair again with a forced smile.

"There now," he said with fraternal superiority, "don't mind it, Mag, any more. Why, it's all over now. You bet he won't trouble us agin, for the Leftenant sez that now he's found out to be a thief, they'll jest turn him over to the police, and he's sure o' getten six months' state prison fer stealin' and burglarin' in our house. But"--he stopped suddenly and looked at his sister's contracted face; "look yer, Mag, you're sick, that's what's the matter. Take suthin'"--

"I'm better now," she said with an effort; "it's only a kind o' blind chill I must hev got on the Marsh last night. What's that?"

She had risen, and grasping her brother's arm tightly had turned quickly to the window. The casement had suddenly rattled.

"It's only the wind gettin' up. It looked like a sou'wester when I came in. Lot o' scud flyin'. But YOU take some quinine, Mag. Don't YOU go now and get down sick like Maw."

Perhaps it was this well-meant but infelicitous reference that brought a moisture to her dark eyes, and caused her lips to momentarily quiver. But it gave way to a quick determined setting of her whole face as she turned it once more to the fire, and said, slowly:

"I reckon I'll sleep it off, if I go to bed now. What time does the tide fall."

"About three, unless this yer wind piles it up on the Marsh afore then. Why?"

"I was only wonderin' if the boat wus safe," said Maggie, rising.

"You'd better hoist yourself outside some quinine, instead o' talken about those things," said Jim, who preferred to discharge his fraternal responsibility by active medication. "You aren't fit to read tonight."

"Good night, Jim," she said suddenly, stopping before him.

"Good night, Mag." He kissed her with protecting and amiable toleration, generously referring her hot hands and feverish lips to that vague mystery of feminine complaint which man admits without indorsing.

They separated. Jim, under the stimulus of the late supposed robbery, ostentatiously fastening the doors and windows with assuring comments, calculated to inspire confidence in his sister's startled heart. Then he went to bed. He lay awake long enough to be pleasantly conscious that the wind had increased to a gale, and to be lulled again to sleep by the cosy security of the heavily timbered and tightly sealed dwelling that seemed to ride the storm like the ship it resembled. The gale swept through the piles beneath him and along the gallery as through bared spars and over wave-washed decks. The whole structure, attacked above, below, and on all sides by the fury of the wind, seemed at times to be lifted in the air. Once or twice the creaking timbers simulated the sound of opening doors and passing footsteps, and again dilated as if the gale had forced a passage through. But Jim slept on peacefully, and was at last only aroused by the brilliant sunshine staring through his window from the clear wind-swept blue arch beyond.

Dressing himself lazily, he passed into the sitting-room and proceeded to knock at his sister's door, as was his custom; he was amazed to find it open and the room empty. Entering hurriedly, he saw that her bed was undisturbed, as if it had not been occupied, and was the more bewildered to see a note ostentatiously pinned upon the pillow, addressed in pencil, in a large school-hand, "To Jim."

Opening it impatiently, he was startled to read as follows:--

"Don't be angry, Jim dear--but it was all my fault--and I didn't tell you. I knew all about the deserter, and I gave him the clothes and things that they say he stole. It was while you was out that night, and he came and begged of me, and was mournful and hidjus to behold. I thought I was helping him, and getting our revenge on the Fort, all at the same time. Don't be mad, Jim dear, and do not be frighted fer me. I'm going over thar to make it all right--to free HIM of stealing--to have YOU left out of it all--and take it all on myself. Don't you be a bit feared for me. I ain't skeert of the wind or of going. I'll close reef everything, clear the creek, stretch across to Injen Island, hugg the Point, and bear up fer Logport. Dear Jim--don't get mad--but I couldn't bear this fooling of you nor HIM--and that man being took for stealing any longer!--Your loving sister,

MAGGIE."

With a confused mingling of shame, anger, and sudden fear he ran out on the gallery. The tide was well up, half the Marsh had already vanished, and the little creek where he had moored his skiff was now an empty shining river. The water was everywhere--fringing the tussocks of salt grass with concentric curves of spume and drift, or tumultuously tossing its white-capped waves over the spreading expanse of the lower bay. The low thunder of breakers in the farther estuary broke monotonously on the ear. But his eye was fascinated by a dull shifting streak on the horizon, that, even as he gazed, shuddered, whitened along its whole line, and then grew ghastly gray again. It was the ocean bar.

IV.

"Well, I must say," said Cicely Preston, emphasizing the usual feminine imperative for perfectly gratuitous statement, as she pushed back her chair from the commandant's breakfast table, "I MUST really say that I don't see anything particularly heroic in doing something wrong, lying about it just to get other folks into trouble, and then rushing off to do penance in a high wind and an open boat. But she's pretty, and wears a man's shirt and coat, and of course THAT settles anything. But why earrings and wet white stockings and slippers? And why that Gothic arch of front and a boy's hat? That's what I simply ask;" and the youngest daughter of Colonel Preston rose from the table, shook out the skirt of her pretty morning dress, and, placing her little thumbs in the belt of her smart waist, paused witheringly for a reply.

"You are most unfair, my child," returned Colonel Preston gravely. "Her giving food and clothes to a deserter may have been only an ordinary instinct of humanity towards a fellow-creature who appeared to be suffering, to say nothing of M'Caffrey's plausible tongue. But her periling her life to save him from an unjust accusation, and her desire to shield her brother's pride from ridicule, is altogether praiseworthy and extraordinary. And the moral influence of her kindness was strong enough to make that scamp refuse to tell the plain truth that might implicate her in an

indiscretion, though it saved him from state prison."

"He knew you wouldn't believe him if he had said the clothes were given to him," retorted Miss Cicely, "so I don't see where the moral influence comes in. As to her periling her life, those Marsh people are amphibious anyway, or would be in those clothes. And as to her motive, why, papa, I heard you say in this very room, and afterwards to Mr. Calvert, when you gave him instructions, that you believed those Culpeppers were capable of enticing away deserters; and you forget the fuss you had with her savage brother's lawyer about that water front, and how you said it was such people who kept up the irritation between the Civil and Federal power."

The colonel coughed hurriedly. It is the fate of all great organizers, military as well as civil, to occasionally suffer defeat in the family circle.

"The more reason," he said, soothingly, "why we should correct harsh judgments that spring from mere rumors. You should give yourself at least the chance of overcoming your prejudices, my child. Remember, too, that she is now the guest of the Fort."

"And she chooses to stay with Mrs. Bromley! I'm sure it's quite enough for you and mamma to do duty--and Emily, who wants to know why Mr. Calvert raves so about her--without MY going over there to stare."

Colonel Preston shook his head reproachfully, but eventually retired, leaving the field to the enemy. The enemy, a little pink in the cheeks, slightly tossed the delicate rings of its blonde crest, settled its skirts again at the piano, but after turning over the leaves of its music book, rose, and walked pettishly to the window.

But here a spectacle presented itself that for a moment dismissed all other thoughts from the girl's rebellious mind.

Not a dozen yards away, on the wind-swept parade, a handsome young fellow, apparently halted by the sentry, had impetuously turned upon him in an attitude of indignant and haughty surprise. To the quick fancy of the girl it seemed as if some disguised rustic god had been startled by the challenge of a mortal. Under an oilskin hat, like the petasus of Hermes, pushed back from his white forehead, crisp black curls were knotted around a head whose beardless face was perfect as a cameo cutting. In the close-fitting blue woolen jersey under his open jacket the clear outlines and youthful grace of his upper figure were revealed as clearly as in a statue. Long fishing-boots reaching to his thighs scarcely concealed the symmetry of his lower limbs. Cricket and lawn-tennis, knickerbockers and flannels had not at that period familiarized the female eye to unfettered masculine outline, and Cicely Preston, accustomed to the artificial smartness and regularity of uniform, was perhaps the more impressed by the stranger's lawless grace.

The sentry had repeated his challenge; an angry flush was deepening on the intruder's cheek. At this critical moment Cicely threw open the French windows and stepped upon the veranda.

The sentry saluted the familiar little figure of his colonel's daughter with an explanatory glance at the stranger. The young fellow looked up--and the god became human.

"I'm looking for my sister," he said, half awkwardly, half defiantly; "she's here, somewhere."

"Yes--and perfectly safe, Mr. Culpepper, I think," said the arch-hypocrite with dazzling sweetness; "and we're all so delighted. And so brave and plucky and skillful in her to come all that way--and for such a purpose."

"Then--you know--all about it"--stammered Jim, more relieved than he had imagined--"and that I"--

"That you were quite ignorant of your sister helping the deserter. Oh yes, of course," said Cicely, with bewildering promptitude. "You see, Mr. Culpepper, we girls are SO foolish. I dare say I should have done the same thing in her place, only I should never have had the courage to do what she did afterwards. You really must forgive her. But won't you come in--DO." She stepped back, holding the window open with the half-coaxing air of a spoiled child. "This way is quickest. DO come." As he still hesitated, glancing from her to the house, she added, with a demure little laugh, "Oh, I forget--this is Colonel Preston's quarters, and I'm his daughter."

And this dainty little fairy, so natural in manner, so tasteful in attire, was one of the artificial over-dressed creatures that his sister had inveighed against so bitterly! Was Maggie really to be trusted? This new revelation coming so soon after the episode of the deserter staggered him. Nevertheless he hesitated, looking up with a certain boyish timidity into Cicely's dangerous eyes.

"Is--is--my sister there?"

"I'm expecting her with my mother every moment," responded this youthful but ingenious diplomatist sweetly; "she might be here now; but," she added with a sudden heart-broken flash of sympathy, "I know HOW anxious you both must be. I'LL take you to her now. Only one moment, please." The opportunity of leading this handsome savage as it were in chains across the parade, before everybody, her father, her mother, her sister, and HIS--was not to be lost. She darted into the house, and reappeared with the daintiest imaginable straw hat on the side of her head, and demurely took her place at his side. "It's only over there, at Major Bromley's," she said, pointing to one of the vine-clad cottage quarters; but you are a stranger here, you know, and might get lost."

Alas! he was already that. For keeping step with those fairy-like slippers, brushing awkwardly against that fresh and pretty skirt, and feeling the caress of the soft folds; looking down upon the brim of that beribboned little hat, and more often meeting the upturned blue eyes beneath it, Jim was suddenly struck with a terrible conviction of his own contrasting coarseness and deficiencies. How hideous those oiled canvas fishing-trousers and pilot jacket looked beside this perfectly fitted and delicately gowned girl! He loathed his collar, his jersey, his turned-back sou'wester, even his height, which seemed to hulk beside her--

everything, in short, that the girl had recently admired. By the time that they had reached Major Bromley's door he had so far succumbed to the fair enchantress and realized her ambition of a triumphant procession, that when she ushered him into the presence of half a dozen ladies and gentlemen he scarcely recognized his sister as the centre of attraction, or knew that Miss Cicely's effusive greeting of Maggie was her first one. "I knew he was dying to see you after all you had BOTH passed through, and I brought him straight here," said the diminutive Machiavelli, meeting the astonished gaze of her father and the curious eyes of her sister with perfect calmness, while Maggie, full of gratitude and admiration of her handsome brother, forgot his momentary obliviousness, and returned her greeting warmly. Nevertheless, there was a slight movement of reserve among the gentlemen at the unlooked-for irruption of this sunburnt Adonis, until Calvert, disengaging himself from Maggie's side, came forward with his usual frank imperturbability and quiet tact, and claimed Jim as his friend and honored guest.

It then came out with that unostentatious simplicity which characterized the brother and sister, and was their secure claim to perfect equality with their entertainers, that Jim, on discovering his sister's absence, and fearing that she might be carried by the current towards the bar, had actually SWUM THE ESTUARY to Indian Island, and in an ordinary Indian canoe had braved the same tempestuous passage she had taken a few hours before. Cicely, listening to this recital with rapt attention, nevertheless managed to convey the impression of having fully expected it from the first. "Of course he'd have come here; if she'd only waited," she said, sotto voce, to her sister Emily.

"He's certainly the handsomer of the two," responded that young lady.

"Of course," returned Cicely, with a superior air, "don't you see she COPIES him."

Not that this private criticism prevented either from vying with the younger officers in their attentions to Maggie, with perhaps the addition of an open eulogy of her handsome brother, more or less invidious in comparison to the officers. "I suppose it's an active out-of-door life gives him that perfect grace and freedom," said Emily, with a slight sneer at the smartly belted Calvert. "Yes; and he don't drink or keep late hours," responded Cicely significantly. "His sister says they always retire before ten o'clock, and that although his father left him some valuable whiskey he seldom takes a drop of it." "Therein," gravely concluded Captain Kirby, "lies OUR salvation. If, after such a confession, Calvert doesn't make the most of his acquaintance with young Culpepper to remove that whiskey from his path and bring it here, he's not the man I take him for."

Indeed, for the moment it seemed as if he was not. During the next three or four days, in which Colonel Preston had insisted upon detaining his guests, Calvert touched no liquor, evaded the evening poker parties at quarters, and even prevailed upon some of his brother officers to give them up for the more general entertainment of the ladies. Colonel Preston was politician enough to avail himself of the popularity of Maggie's adventure to invite some of

the Logport people to assist him in honoring their neighbor. Not only was the old feud between the Fort and the people thus bridged over, but there was no doubt that the discipline of the Fort had been strengthened by Maggie's extravagant reputation as a mediator among the disaffected rank and file. Whatever characteristic license the grateful Dennis M'Caffrey--let off with a nominal punishment--may have taken in his praise of the "Quane of the Marshes," it is certain that the men worshiped her, and that the band pathetically begged permission to serenade her the last night of her stay.

At the end of that time, with a dozen invitations, a dozen appointments, a dozen vows of eternal friendship, much hand-shaking, and accompanied by a number of the officers to their boat, Maggie and Jim departed. They talked but little on their way home; by some tacit understanding they did not discuss those projects, only recalling certain scenes and incidents of their visit. By the time they had reached the little creek the silence and nervous apathy which usually follow excitement in the young seemed to have fallen upon them. It was not until after their quiet frugal supper that, seated beside the fire, Jim looked up somewhat self-consciously in his sister's grave and thoughtful face.

"Say, Mag, what was that idea o' yours about selling some land, and taking a house at Logport?"

Maggie looked up, and said passively, "Oh, THAT idea?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Well," said Jim somewhat awkwardly, "it COULD be done, you know. I'm willin'."

As she did not immediately reply, he continued uneasily, "Miss Preston says we kin get a nice little house that is near the Fort, until we want to build."

"Oh, then you HAVE talked about it?"

"Yes--that is--why, what are ye thinkin' of, Mag? Wasn't it YOUR idea all along?" he said, suddenly facing her with querulous embarrassment. They had been sitting in their usual evening attitudes of Assyrian frieze profile, with even more than the usual Assyrian frieze similarity of feature.

"Yes; but, Jim dear, do you think it the best thing for--for us to do?" said Maggie, with half-frightened gravity.

At this sudden and startling exhibition of female inconsistency and inconsequence, Jim was for a moment speechless. Then he recovered himself, volubly, aggrievedly, and on his legs. What DID she mean? Was he to give up understanding girls--or was it their sole vocation in life to impede masculine processes and shipwreck masculine conclusions? Here, after all she said the other night, after they had nearly "quo'lled" over her "set idees," after she'd "gone over all that foolishness about Jael and Sisera--and there wasn't any use for it--after she'd let him run on to them officers

all he was goin' to do--nay, after SHE herself, for he had heard her, had talked to Calvert about it, she wanted to know NOW if it was best." He looked at the floor and the ceiling, as if expecting the tongued and grooved planks to cry out at this crowning enormity.

The cause of it had resumed her sad gaze at the fire. Presently, without turning her head, she reached up her long, graceful arm, and clasping her brother's neck, brought his face down in profile with her own, cheek against cheek, until they looked like the double outlines of a medallion. Then she said--to the fire:

"Jim, do you think she's pretty?"

"Who?" said Jim, albeit his color had already answered the question.

"You know WHO. Do you like her?"

Jim here vaguely murmured to the fire that he thought her "kinder nice," and that she dressed mighty purty. "Ye know, Mag," he said with patronizing effusion, "you oughter get some gownds like hers."

"That wouldn't make me like her," said Maggie gravely.

"I don't know about that," said Jim politely, but with an appalling hopelessness of tone. After a pause he added slyly, "Pears to me SOMEBODY ELSE thought somebody else mighty purty--eh?"

To his discomfiture she did not solicit further information. After a pause he continued, still more archly:

"Do you like HIM, Mag?"

"I think he's a perfect gentleman," she said calmly.

He turned his eyes quickly from the glowing fire to her face. The cheek that had been resting against his own was as cool as the night wind that came through the open door, and the whole face was as fixed and tranquil as the upper stars.

V.

For a year the tide had ebbed and flowed on the Dedlow Marsh unheeded before the sealed and sightless windows of the "Kingfisher's Nest." Since the young birds had flown to Logport, even the Indian caretakers had abandoned the piled dwelling for their old nomadic haunts in the "bresh." The high spring tide had again made its annual visit to the little cemetery of drift-wood, and, as if recognizing another wreck in the deserted home, had hung a few memorial offerings on the blackened piles, softly laid a garland of grayish drift before it, and then sobbed itself out in the salt grass.

From time to time the faint echoes of the Culpeppers' life at Logport reached the upland, and the few neighbors who had only known them by hearsay shook their heads over the extravagance they

as yet only knew by report. But it was in the dead ebb of the tide and the waning daylight that the feathered tenants of the Marsh seemed to voice dismal prophecies of the ruin of their old master and mistress, and to give themselves up to gloomiest lamentation and querulous foreboding. Whether the traditional "bird of the air" had entrusted his secret to a few ornithological friends, or whether from a natural disposition to take gloomy views of life, it was certain that at this hour the vocal expression of the Marsh was hopeless and despairing. It was then that a dejected plover, addressing a mocking crew of sandpipers on a floating log, seemed to bewail the fortune that was being swallowed up by the riotous living and gambling debts of Jim. It was then that the querulous crane rose, and testily protested against the selling of his favorite haunt in the sandy peninsula, which only six months of Jim's excesses had made imperative. It was then that a mournful curlew, who, with the preface that he had always been really expecting it, reiterated the story that Jim had been seen more than once staggering home with nervous hands and sodden features from a debauch with the younger officers; it was the same desponding fowl who knew that Maggie's eyes had more than once filled with tears at Jim's failings, and had already grown more hollow with many watchings. It was a flock of wrangling teal that screamingly discussed the small scandals, jealous heart-burnings, and curious backbitings that had attended Maggie's advent into society. It was the high-flying brent who, knowing how the sensitive girl, made keenly conscious at every turn of her defective training and ingenuous ignorance, had often watched their evening flight with longing gaze, now "honked" dismally at the recollection. It was at this hour and season that the usual vague lamentings of Dedlow Marsh seemed to find at last a preordained expression. And it was at such a time, when light and water were both fading, and the blackness of the Marsh was once more reasserting itself, that a small boat was creeping along one of the tortuous inlets, at times half hiding behind the bank like a wounded bird. As it slowly penetrated inland it seemed to be impelled by its solitary occupant in a hesitating uncertain way, as if to escape observation rather than as if directed to any positive bourn. Stopping beside a bank of reeds at last, the figure rose stoopingly, and drew a gun from between its feet and the bottom of the boat. As the light fell upon its face, it could be seen that it was James Culpepper! James Culpepper! hardly recognizable in the swollen features, bloodshot eyes, and tremulous hands of that ruined figure! James Culpepper, only retaining a single trace of his former self in his look of set and passionate purpose! And that purpose was to kill himself--to be found dead, as his father had been before him--in an open boat, adrift upon the Marsh!

It was not the outcome of a sudden fancy. The idea had first come to him in a taunting allusion from the drunken lips of one of his ruder companions, for which he had stricken the offender to the earth. It had since haunted his waking hours of remorse and hopeless fatuity; it had seemed to be the one relief and atonement he could make his devoted sister; and, more fatuous than all, it seemed to the miserable boy the one revenge he would take upon the faithless coquette, who for a year had played with his simplicity, and had helped to drive him to the distraction of cards and drink. Only that morning Colonel Preston had forbidden him the house; and now it seemed to him the end had come. He raised his distorted face above the reedy bank for a last tremulous and half-frightened

glance at the landscape he was leaving forever. A glint in the western sky lit up the front of his deserted dwelling in the distance, abreast of which the windings of the inlet had unwittingly led him. As he looked he started, and involuntarily dropped into a crouching attitude. For, to his superstitious terror, the sealed windows of his old home were open, the bright panes were glittering with the fading light, and on the outer gallery the familiar figure of his sister stood, as of old, awaiting his return! Was he really going mad, or had this last vision of his former youth been purposely vouchsafed him?

But, even as he gazed, the appearance of another figure in the landscape beyond the house proved the reality of his vision, and as suddenly distracted him from all else. For it was the apparition of a man on horseback approaching the house from the upland; and even at that distance he recognized its well-known outlines. It was Calvert! Calvert the traitor! Calvert, the man whom he had long suspected as being the secret lover and destined husband of Cicely Preston! Calvert, who had deceived him with his calm equanimity and his affected preference for Maggie, to conceal his deliberate understanding with Cicely. What was he doing here? Was he a double traitor, and now trying to deceive HER--as he had him? And Maggie here! This sudden return--this preconcerted meeting. It was infamy!

For a moment he remained stupefied, and then, with a mechanical instinct, plunged his head and face in the lazy-flowing water, and then once again rose cool and collected. The half-mad distraction of his previous resolve had given way to another, more deliberate, but not less desperate determination. He knew now WHY he came there--WHY he had brought his gun--why his boat had stopped when it did!

Lying flat in the bottom, he tore away fragments of the crumbling bank to fill his frail craft, until he had sunk it to the gunwale, and below the low level of the Marsh. Then, using his hands as noiseless paddles, he propelled this rude imitation of a floating log slowly past the line of vision, until the tongue of bushes had hidden him from view. With a rapid glance at the darkening flat, he then seized his gun, and springing to the spongy bank, half crouching half crawling through reeds and tussocks, he made his way to the brush. A foot and eye less experienced would have plunged its owner helpless in the black quagmire. At one edge of the thicket he heard hoofs trampling the dried twigs. Calvert's horse was already there, tied to a skirting alder.

He ran to the house, but, instead of attracting attention by ascending the creaking steps, made his way to the piles below the rear gallery and climbed to it noiselessly. It was the spot where the deserter had ascended a year ago, and, like him, he could see and hear all that passed distinctly. Calvert stood near the open door as if departing. Maggie stood between him and the window, her face in shadow, her hands clasped tightly behind her. A profound sadness, partly of the dying day and waning light, and partly of some vague expiration of their own sorrow, seemed to encompass them. Without knowing why, a strange trembling took the place of James Culpepper's fierce determination, and a film of moisture stole across his staring eyes.

"When I tell you that I believe all this will pass, and that you will still win your brother back to you," said Calvert's sad but clear voice, "I will tell you why--although, perhaps, it is only a part of that confidence you command me to withhold. When I first saw you, I myself had fallen into like dissolute habits; less excusable than he, for I had some experience of the world and its follies. When I met YOU, and fell under the influence of your pure, simple, and healthy life; when I saw that isolation, monotony, misunderstanding, even the sense of superiority to one's surroundings could be lived down and triumphed over, without vulgar distractions or pitiful ambitions; when I learned to love you--hear me out, Miss Culpepper, I beg you--you saved ME--I, who was nothing to you, even as I honestly believe you will still save your brother, whom you love."

"How do you know I didn't RUIN him?" she said, turning upon him bitterly. "How do you know that it wasn't to get rid of OUR monotony, OUR solitude that I drove him to this vulgar distraction, this pitiful--yes, you were right--pitiful ambition?"

"Because it isn't your real nature," he said quietly.

"My real nature," she repeated with a half savage vehemence that seemed to be goaded from her by his very gentleness, "my real nature! What did HE--what do YOU know of it?--My real nature!--I'll tell you what it was," she went on passionately. "It was to be revenged on you all for your cruelty, your heartlessness, your wickedness to me and mine in the past. It was to pay you off for your slanders of my dead father--for the selfishness that left me and Jim alone with his dead body on the Marsh. That was what sent me to Logport--to get even with you--to--to fool and flaunt you! There, you have it now! And now that God has punished me for it by crushing my brother--you--you expect me to let you crush ME too."

"But," he said eagerly, advancing toward her, "you are wronging me--you are wronging yourself, cruelly."

"Stop," she said, stepping back, with her hands still locked behind her. "Stay where you are. There! That's enough!" She drew herself up and let her hands fall at her side. "Now, let us speak of Jim," she said coldly.

Without seeming to hear her, he regarded her for the first time with hopeless sadness.

"Why did you let my brother believe you were his rival with Cicely Preston?" she asked impatiently.

"Because I could not undeceive him without telling him I hopelessly loved his sister. You are proud, Miss Culpepper," he said, with the first tinge of bitterness in his even voice. "Can you not understand that others may be proud too?"

"No," she said bluntly; "it is not pride but weakness. You could have told him what you knew to be true: that there could be nothing in common between her folk and such savages as we; that there was a gulf as wide as that Marsh and as black between our natures, our training and theirs, and even if they came to us across it, now and then, to suit their pleasure, light and easy as that tide--it was

still there to some day ground and swamp them! And if he doubted it, you had only to tell him your own story. You had only to tell him what you have just told me--that you yourself, an officer and a gentleman, thought you loved me, a vulgar, uneducated, savage girl, and that I, kinder to you than you to me or him, made you take it back across that tide, because I couldn't let you link your life with me, and drag you in the mire."

"You need not have said that, Miss Culpepper, returned Calvert with the same gentle smile, "to prove that I am your inferior in all but one thing."

"And that?" she said quickly.

"Is my love."

His gentle face was as set now as her own as he moved back slowly towards the door. There he paused.

"You tell me to speak of Jim, and Jim only. Then hear me. I believe that Miss Preston cares for him as far as lies in her young and giddy nature. I could not, therefore, have crushed HIS hope without deceiving him, for there are as cruel deceits prompted by what we call reason as by our love. If you think that a knowledge of this plain truth would help to save him, I beg you to be kinder to him than you have been to me,--or even, let me dare to hope, to YOURSELF."

He slowly crossed the threshold, still holding his cap lightly in his hand.

"When I tell you that I am going away to-morrow on a leave of absence, and that in all probability we may not meet again, you will not misunderstand why I add my prayer to the message your friends in Logport charged me with. They beg that you will give up your idea of returning here, and come back to them. Believe me, you have made yourself loved and respected there, in spite--I beg pardon--perhaps I should say BECAUSE of your pride. Good-night and good-bye."

For a single instant she turned her set face to the window with a sudden convulsive movement, as if she would have called him back, but at the same moment the opposite door creaked and her brother slipped into the room. Whether a quick memory of the deserter's entrance at that door a year ago had crossed her mind, whether there was some strange suggestion in his mud-stained garments and weak deprecating smile, or whether it was the outcome of some desperate struggle within her, there was that in her face that changed his smile into a frightened cry for pardon, as he ran and fell on his knees at her feet. But even as he did so her stern look vanished, and with her arm around him she bent over him and mingled her tears with his.

"I heard it all, Mag dearest! All! Forgive me! I have been crazy!--wild!--I will reform!--I will be better! I will never disgrace you again, Mag! Never, never! I swear it!"

She reached down and kissed him. After a pause, a weak boyish smile struggled into his face.

"You heard what he said of HER, Mag. Do you think it might be true?"

She lifted the damp curls from his forehead with a sad half-maternal smile, but did not reply.

"And Mag, dear, don't you think YOU were a little--just a little--hard on HIM? No! Don't look at me that way, for God's sake! There, I didn't mean anything. Of course you knew best. There, Maggie dear, look up. Hark there! Listen, Mag, do!"

They lifted their eyes to the dim distance seen through the open door. Borne on the fading light, and seeming to fall and die with it over marsh and river, came the last notes of the bugle from the Fort.

"There! Don't you remember what you used to say, Mag?"

The look that had frightened him had quite left her face now.

"Yes," she smiled, laying her cold cheek beside his softly. "Oh yes! It was something that came and went, 'Like a song'--'Like a song.'"

A KNIGHT-ERRANT OF THE FOOTHILLS.

I.

As Father Felipe slowly toiled up the dusty road towards the Rancho of the Blessed Innocents, he more than once stopped under the shadow of a sycamore to rest his somewhat lazy mule and to compose his own perplexed thoughts by a few snatches from his breviary. For the good padre had some reason to be troubled. The invasion of Gentile Americans that followed the gold discovery of three years before had not confined itself to the plains of the Sacramento, but stragglers had already found their way to the Santa Cruz Valley, and the seclusion of even the mission itself was threatened. It was true that they had not brought their heathen engines to disembowel the earth in search of gold, but it was rumored that they had already speculated upon the agricultural productiveness of the land, and had espied "the fatness thereof." As he reached the higher plateau he could see the afternoon sea-fog--presently to obliterate the fair prospect--already pulling through the gaps in the Coast Range, and on a nearer slope--no less ominously--the smoke of a recent but more permanently destructive Yankee saw-mill was slowly drifting towards the valley.

"Get up, beast!" said the father, digging his heels into the comfortable flanks of his mule with some human impatience, "or art THOU, too, a lazy renegade? Thinkest thou, besotted one, that the heretic will spare thee more work than the Holy Church."

The mule, thus apostrophized in ear and flesh, shook its head obstinately as if the question was by no means clear to its mind,

but nevertheless started into a little trot, which presently brought it to the low adobe wall of the courtyard of "The Innocents," and entered the gate. A few lounging peons in the shadow of an archway took off their broad-brimmed hats and made way for the padre, and a half dozen equally listless vaqueros helped him to alight. Accustomed as he was to the indolence and superfluity of his host's retainers, to-day it nevertheless seemed to strike some note of irritation in his breast.

A stout, middle-aged woman of ungirt waist and beshawled head and shoulders appeared at the gateway as if awaiting him. After a formal salutation she drew him aside into an inner passage.

"He is away again, your Reverence," she said.

"Ah--always the same?"

"Yes, your Reverence--and this time to 'a meeting' of the heretics at their pueblo, at Jonesville--where they will ask him of his land for a road."

"At a MEETING?" echoed the priest uneasily.

"Ah yes! a meeting--where Tiburcio says they shout and spit on the ground, your Reverence, and only one has a chair and him they call a 'chairman' because of it, and yet he sits not but shouts and spits even as the others and keeps up a tapping with a hammer like a very pico. And there it is they are ever 'resolving' that which is not, and consider it even as done."

"Then he is still the same," said the priest gloomily, as the woman paused for breath.

"Only more so, your Reverence, for he reads nought but the newspaper of the Americanos that is brought in the ship, the 'New York 'errald'--and recites to himself the orations of their legislators. Ah! it was an evil day when the shipwrecked American sailor taught him his uncouth tongue, which, as your Reverence knows, is only fit for beasts and heathen incantation."

"Pray Heaven THAT were all he learned of him," said the priest hastily, "for I have great fear that this sailor was little better than an atheist and an emissary from Satan. But where are these newspapers and the fantasies of publicita that fill his mind? I would see them, my daughter."

"You shall, your Reverence, and more too," she replied eagerly, leading the way along the passage to a grated door which opened upon a small cell-like apartment, whose scant light and less air came through the deeply embayed windows in the outer wall. "Here is his estudio."

In spite of this open invitation, the padre entered with that air of furtive and minute inspection common to his order. His glance fell upon a rude surveyor's plan of the adjacent embryo town of Jonesville hanging on the wall, which he contemplated with a cold disfavor that even included the highly colored vignette of the projected Jonesville Hotel in the left-hand corner. He then passed to a supervisor's notice hanging near it, which he examined with a

suspicion heightened by that uneasiness common to mere worldly humanity when opposed to an unknown and unfamiliar language. But an exclamation broke from his lips when he confronted an election placard immediately below it. It was printed in Spanish and English, and Father Felipe had no difficulty in reading the announcement that "Don Jose Sepulveda would preside at a meeting of the Board of Education in Jonesville as one of the trustees."

"This is madness," said the padre.

Observing that Dona Maria was at the moment preoccupied in examining the pictorial pages of an illustrated American weekly which had hitherto escaped his eyes, he took it gently from her hand.

"Pardon, your Reverence," she said with slightly acidulous deprecation, "but thanks to the Blessed Virgin and your Reverence's teaching, the text is but gibberish to me and I did but glance at the pictures."

"Much evil may come in with the eye," said the priest sententiously, "as I will presently show thee. We have here," he continued, pointing to an illustration of certain college athletic sports, "a number of youthful cavaliers posturing and capering in a partly nude condition before a number of shameless women, who emulate the saturnalia of heathen Rome by waving their handkerchiefs. We have here a companion picture," he said, indicating an illustration of gymnastic exercises by the students of a female academy at "Commencement," "in which, as thou seest, even the aged of both sexes unblushingly assist as spectators with every expression of immodest satisfaction."

"Have they no bull-fights or other seemly recreation that they must indulge in such wantonness?" asked Dona Maria indignantly, gazing, however, somewhat curiously at the baleful representations.

"Of all that, my daughter, has their pampered civilization long since wearied," returned the good padre, "for see, this is what they consider a moral and even a religious ceremony." He turned to an illustration of a woman's rights convention; "observe with what rapt attention the audience of that heathen temple watch the inspired ravings of that elderly priestess on the dais. It is even this kind of sacrilegious performance that I am told thy nephew Don Jose expounds and defends."

"May the blessed saints preserve us; where will it lead to?" murmured the horrified Dona Maria.

"I will show thee," said Father Felipe, briskly turning the pages with the same lofty ignoring of the text until he came to a representation of a labor procession. "There is one of their periodic revolutions unhappily not unknown even in Mexico. Thou perceivest those complacent artisans marching with implements of their craft, accompanied by the military, in the presence of their own stricken masters. Here we see only another instance of the instability of all communities that are not founded on the principles of the Holy Church."

"And what is to be done with my nephew?"

The good father's brow darkened with the gloomy religious zeal of two centuries ago. "We must have a council of the family, the alcalde, and the archbishop, at ONCE," he said ominously. To the mere heretical observer the conclusion might have seemed lame and impotent, but it was as near the Holy inquisition as the year of grace 1852 could offer.

A few days after this colloquy the unsuspecting subject of it, Don Jose Sepulvida, was sitting alone in the same apartment. The fading glow of the western sky, through the deep embrasured windows, lit up his rapt and meditative face. He was a young man of apparently twenty-five, with a colorless satin complexion, dark eyes alternating between melancholy and restless energy, a narrow high forehead, long straight hair, and a lightly penciled moustache. He was said to resemble the well-known portrait of the Marquis of Monterey in the mission church, a face that was alleged to leave a deep and lasting impression upon the observers. It was undoubtedly owing to this quality during a brief visit of the famous viceroy to a remote and married ancestress of Don Jose at Leon that the singular resemblance may be attributed.

A heavy and hesitating step along the passage stopped before the grating. Looking up, Don Jose beheld to his astonishment the slightly inflamed face of Roberto, a vagabond American whom he had lately taken into his employment.

Roberto, a polite translation of "Bob the Bucker," cleaned out at a monte-bank in Santa Cruz, penniless and profligate, had sold his mustang to Don Jose and recklessly thrown himself in with the bargain. Touched by the rascal's extravagance, the quality of the mare, and observing that Bob's habits had not yet affected his seat in the saddle, but rather lent a demoniac vigor to his chase of wild cattle, Don Jose had retained rider and horse in his service as vaquero.

Bucking Bob, observing that his employer was alone, coolly opened the door without ceremony, shut it softly behind him, and then closed the wooden shutter of the grating. Don Jose surveyed him with mild surprise and dignified composure. The man appeared perfectly sober,—it was a peculiarity of his dissipated habits that, when not actually raving with drink, he was singularly shrewd and practical.

"Look yer, Don Kosay," he began in a brusque but guarded voice, "you and me is pards. When ye picked me and the mare up and set us on our legs again in this yer ranch, I allowed I'd tie to ye whenever you was in trouble—and wanted me. And I reckon that's what's the matter now. For from what I see and hear on every side, although you're the boss of this consarn, you're surrounded by a gang of spies and traitors. Your comings and goings, your ins and outs, is dogged and followed and blown upon. The folks you trust is playing it on ye. It ain't for me to say why or wherefore-- what's their rights and what's yourn—but I've come to tell ye that if you don't get up and get outter this ranch them d--d priests and your own flesh and blood--your aunts and your uncles and your cousins, will have you chucked outter your property, and run into a lunatic asylum."

"Me--Don Jose Sepulvida--a lunatic! You are yourself crazy of drink, friend Roberto."

"Yes," said Roberto grimly, "but that kind ain't ILLEGAL, while your makin' ducks and drakes of your property and going into 'Merikin ideas and 'Merikin speculations they reckon is. And speakin' on the square, it ain't NAT'RAL."

Don Jose sprang to his feet and began to pace up and down his cell-like study. "Ah, I remember now," he muttered, "I begin to comprehend: Father Felipe's homilies and discourses! My aunt's too affectionate care! My cousin's discreet consideration! The prompt attention of my servants! I see it all! And you," he said, suddenly facing Roberto, "why come you to tell me this?"

"Well, boss," said the American dryly, "I reckoned to stand by you."

"Ah," said Don Jose, visibly affected. "Good Roberto, come hither, child, you may kiss my hand."

"If! it's all the same to you, Don Kosay,--THAT kin slide."

"Ah, if--yes," said Don Jose, meditatively putting his hand to his forehead, "miserable that I am!--I remembered not you were Americano. Pardon, my friend--embrace me--Conpanero y Amigo."

With characteristic gravity he reclined for a moment upon Robert's astonished breast. Then recovering himself with equal gravity he paused, lifted his hand with gentle warning, marched to a recess in the corner, unhooked a rapier hanging from the wall, and turned to his companion.

"We will defend ourselves, friend Roberto. It is the sword of the Comandante--my ancestor. The blade is of Toledo."

"An ordinary six-shooter of Colt's would lay over that," said Roberto grimly--"but that ain't your game just now, Don Kosay. You must get up and get, and at once. You must vamose the ranch afore they lay hold of you and have you up before the alcalde. Once away from here, they daren't follow you where there's 'Merikin law, and when you kin fight 'em in the square."

"Good," said Don Jose with melancholy preciseness. "You are wise, friend Roberto. We may fight them later, as you say--on the square, or in the open Plaza. And you, camarado, YOU shall go with me--you and your mare."

Sincere as the American had been in his offer of service, he was somewhat staggered at this imperative command. But only for a moment. "Well," he said lazily, "I don't care if I do."

"But," said Don Jose with increased gravity, "you SHALL care, friend Roberto. We shall make an alliance, an union. It is true, my brother, you drink of whiskey, and at such times are even as a madman. It has been recounted to me that it was necessary to your existence that you are a lunatic three days of the week. Who knows? I myself, though I drink not of aguardiente, am accused of fantasies for all time. Necessary it becomes therefore that we

should go TOGETHER. My fantasies and speculations cannot injure you, my brother; your whiskey shall not empoison me. We shall go together in the great world of your American ideas of which I am much inflamed. We shall together breathe as one the spirit of Progress and Liberty. We shall be even as neophytes making of ourselves Apostles of Truth. I absolve and renounce myself henceforth of my family. I shall take to myself the sister and the brother, the aunt and the uncle, as we proceed. I devote myself to humanity alone. I devote YOU, my friend, and the mare--though happily she has not a Christian soul--to this glorious mission."

The few level last rays of light lit up a faint enthusiasm in the face of Don Jose, but without altering his imperturbable gravity. The vaquero eyed him curiously and half doubtfully.

"We will go to-morrow," resumed Don Jose with solemn decision, "for it is Wednesday. It was a Sunday that thou didst ride the mare up the steps of the Fonda and demanded that thy liquor should be served to thee in a pail. I remember it, for the landlord of the Fonda claimed twenty pesos for damage and the kissing of his wife. Therefore, by computation, good Roberto, thou shouldst be sober until Friday, and we shall have two clear days to fly before thy madness again seizes thee."

"They kin say what they like, Don Kosay, but YOUR head is level," returned the unabashed American, grasping Don Jose's hand. "All right, then. Hasta manana, as your folks say."

"Hasta manana," repeated Don Jose gravely.

At daybreak next morning, while slumber still weighted the lazy eyelids of "the Blessed Innocents," Don Jose Sepulvida and his trusty squire Roberto, otherwise known as "Bucking Bob," rode forth unnoticed from the corral.

II.

Three days had passed. At the close of the third, Don Jose was seated in a cosy private apartment of the San Mateo Hotel, where they had halted for an arranged interview with his lawyer before reaching San Francisco. From his window he could see the surrounding park-like avenues of oaks and the level white high road, now and then clouded with the dust of passing teams. But his eyes were persistently fixed upon a small copy of the American Constitution before him. Suddenly there was a quick rap on his door, and before he could reply to it a man brusquely entered.

Don Jose raised his head slowly, and recognized the landlord. But the intruder, apparently awed by the gentle, grave, and studious figure before him, fell back for an instant in an attitude of surly apology.

"Enter freely, my good Jenkinson," said Don Jose, with a quiet courtesy that had all the effect of irony. "The apartment, such as it is, is at your disposition. It is even yours, as is the house."

"Well, I'm darned if I know as it is," said the landlord,

recovering himself roughly, "and that's jest what's the matter. Yer's that man of yours smashing things right and left in the bar-room and chuckin' my waiters through the window."

"Softly, softly, good Jenkinson," said Don Jose, putting a mark in the pages of the volume before him. "It is necessary first that I should correct your speech. He is not my 'MAN,' which I comprehend to mean a slave, a hireling, a thing obnoxious to the great American nation which I admire and to which HE belongs. Therefore, good Jenkinson, say 'friend,' 'companion,' 'guide,' 'philosopher,' if you will. As to the rest, it is of no doubt as you relate. I myself have heard the breakings of glass and small dishes as I sit here; three times I have seen your waiters projected into the road with much violence and confusion. To myself I have then said, even as I say to you, good Jenkinson, 'Patience, patience, the end is not far.' In four hours," continued Don Jose, holding up four fingers, "he shall make a finish. Until then, not."

"Well, I'm d--d," ejaculated Jenkinson, gasping for breath in his indignation.

"Nay, excellent Jenkinson, not dam-ned but of a possibility dam-AGED. That I shall repay when he have make a finish."

"But, darn it all," broke in the landlord angrily.

"Ah," said Don Jose gravely, "you would be paid before! Good; for how much shall you value ALL you have in your bar?"

Don Jose's imperturbability evidently shook the landlord's faith in the soundness of his own position. He looked at his guest critically and audaciously.

"It cost me two hundred dollars to fit it up," he said curtly.

Don Jose rose, and, taking a buckskin purse from his saddle-bag, counted out four slugs* and handed them to the stupefied Jenkinson. The next moment, however, his host recovered himself, and casting the slugs back on the little table, brought his fist down with an emphasis that made them dance.

* Hexagonal gold pieces valued at \$50 each, issued by a private firm as coin in the early days.

"But, look yer--suppose I want this thing stopped--you hear me--STOPPED--now."

"That would be interfering with the liberty of the subject, my good Jenkinson--which God forbid!" said Don Jose calmly. "Moreover, it is the custom of the Americanos--a habit of my friend Roberto--a necessity of his existence--and so recognized of his friends. Patience and courage, Senor Jenkinson. Stay--ah, I comprehend! you have--of a possibility--a wife?"

"No, I'm a widower," said Jenkinson sharply.

"Then I congratulate you. My friend Roberto would have kissed her.

It is also of his habit. Truly you have escaped much. I embrace you, Jenkinson."

He threw his arms gravely around Jenkinson, in whose astounded face at last an expression of dry humor faintly dawned. After a moment's survey of Don Jose's impenetrable gravity, he coolly gathered up the gold coins, and saying that he would assess the damages and return the difference, he left the room as abruptly as he had entered it.

But Don Jose was not destined to remain long in peaceful study of the American Constitution. He had barely taken up the book again and renewed his serious contemplation of its excellences when there was another knock at his door. This time, in obedience to his invitation to enter, the new visitor approached with more deliberation and a certain formality.

He was a young man of apparently the same age as Don Jose, handsomely dressed, and of a quiet self-possession and gravity almost equal to his host's.

"I believe I am addressing Don Jose Sepulvida," he said with a familiar yet courteous inclination of his handsome head. Don Jose, who had risen in marked contrast to his reception of his former guest, answered,--

"You are truly making to him a great honor."

"Well, you're going it blind as far as I'm concerned certainly," said the young man, with a slight smile, "for you don't know ME."

"Pardon, my friend," said Don Jose gently, "in this book, this great Testament of your glorious nation, I have read that you are all equal, one not above, one not below the other. I salute in you the Nation! It is enough!"

"Thank you," returned the stranger, with a face that, saving the faintest twinkle in the corner of his dark eyes, was as immovable as his host's, "but for the purposes of my business I had better say I am Jack Hamlin, a gambler, and am just now dealing faro in the Florida saloon round the corner."

He paused carelessly, as if to allow Don Jose the protest he did not make, and then continued,--

"The matter is this. One of your vaqueros, who is, however, an American, was round there an hour ago bucking against faro, and put up and LOST, not only the mare he was riding, but a horse which I have just learned is yours. Now we reckon, over there, that we can make enough money playing a square game, without being obliged to take property from a howling drunkard, to say nothing of it not belonging to him, and I've come here, Don Jose, to say that if you'll send over and bring away your man and your horse, you can have 'em both."

"If I have comprehended, honest Hamlin," said Don Jose slowly, "this Roberto, who was my vaquero and is my brother, has approached this faro game by himself unsolicited?"

"He certainly didn't seem shy of it," said Mr. Hamlin with equal gravity. "To the best of my knowledge he looked as if he'd been there before."

"And if he had won, excellent Hamlin, you would have given him the equal of his mare and horse?"

"A hundred dollars for each, yes, certainly."

"Then I see not why I should send for the property which is truly no longer mine, nor for my brother who will amuse himself after the fashion of his country in the company of so honorable a caballero as yourself? Stay! oh imbecile that I am. I have not remembered. You would possibly say that he has no longer of horses! Play him; play him, admirable yet prudent Hamlin. I have two thousand horses! Of a surety he cannot exhaust them in four hours. Therefore play him, trust to me for recompensa, and have no fear."

A quick flush covered the stranger's cheek, and his eyebrows momentarily contracted. He walked carelessly to the window, however, glanced out, and then turned to Don Jose.

"May I ask, then," he said with almost sepulchral gravity, "is anybody taking care of you?"

"Truly," returned Don Jose cautiously, "there is my brother and friend Roberto."

"Ah! Roberto, certainly," said Mr. Hamlin profoundly.

"Why do you ask, considerate friend?"

"Oh! I only thought, with your kind of opinions, you must often feel lonely in California. Good-bye." He shook Don Jose's hand heartily, took up his hat, inclined his head with graceful seriousness, and passed out of the room. In the hall he met the landlord.

"Well," said Jenkinson, with a smile half anxious, half insinuating, "you saw him? What do you think of him?"

Mr. Hamlin paused and regarded Jenkinson with a calmly contemplative air, as if he were trying to remember first who he was, and secondly why he should speak to him at all. "Think of whom?" he repeated carelessly.

"Why him--you know--Don Jose."

"I did not see anything the matter with him," returned Hamlin with frigid simplicity.

"What? nothing queer?"

"Well, no--except that he's a guest in YOUR house," said Hamlin with great cheerfulness. "But then, as you keep a hotel, you can't help occasionally admitting a--gentleman."

Mr. Jenkinson smiled the uneasy smile of a man who knew that his interlocutor's playfulness occasionally extended to the use of a

derringer, in which he was singularly prompt and proficient, and Mr. Hamlin, equally conscious of that knowledge on the part of his companion, descended the staircase composedly.

But the day had darkened gradually into night, and Don Jose was at last compelled to put aside his volume. The sound of a large bell rung violently along the hall and passages admonished him that the American dinner was ready, and although the viands and the mode of cooking were not entirely to his fancy, he had, in his grave enthusiasm for the national habits, attended the table d'hote regularly with Roberto. On reaching the lower hall he was informed that his henchman had early succumbed to the potency of his libations, and had already been carried by two men to bed. Receiving this information with his usual stoical composure, he entered the dining-room, but was surprised to find that a separate table had been prepared for him by the landlord, and that a rude attempt had been made to serve him with his own native dishes.

"Senores y Senioritas," said Don Jose, turning from it and with grave politeness addressing the assembled company, "if I seem to-day to partake alone and in a reserved fashion of certain viands that have been prepared for me, it is truly from no lack of courtesy to your distinguished company, but rather, I protest, to avoid the appearance of greater discourtesy to our excellent Jenkinson, who has taken some pains and trouble to comport his establishment to what he conceives to be my desires. Wherefore, my friends, in God's name fall to, the same as if I were not present, and grace be with you."

A few stared at the tall, gentle, melancholy figure with some astonishment; a few whispered to their neighbors; but when, at the conclusion of his repast, Don Jose arose and again saluted the company, one or two stood up and smilingly returned the courtesy, and Polly Jenkinson, the landlord's youngest daughter, to the great delight of her companions, blew him a kiss.

After visiting the vaquero in his room, and with his own hand applying some native ointment to the various contusions and scratches which recorded the late engagements of the unconscious Roberto, Don Jose placed a gold coin in the hands of the Irish chamber-maid, and bidding her look after the sleeper, he threw his serape over his shoulders and passed into the road. The loungers on the veranda gazed at him curiously, yet half acknowledged his usual serious salutation, and made way for him with a certain respect. Avoiding the few narrow streets of the little town, he pursued his way meditatively along the highroad, returning to the hotel after an hour's ramble, as the evening stage-coach had deposited its passengers and departed.

"There's a lady waiting to see you upstairs," said the landlord with a peculiar smile. "She rather allowed it wasn't the proper thing to see you alone, or she wasn't quite ekal to it, I reckon, for she got my Polly to stand by her."

"Your Polly, good Jenkinson?" said Don Jose interrogatively.

"My darter, Don Jose."

"Ah, truly! I am twice blessed," said Don Jose, gravely ascending

the staircase.

On entering the room he perceived a tall, large-featured woman with an extraordinary quantity of blond hair parted on one side of her broad forehead, sitting upon the sofa. Beside her sat Polly Jenkinson, her fresh, honest, and rather pretty face beaming with delighted expectation and mischief. Don Jose saluted them with a formal courtesy, which, however, had no trace of the fact that he really did not remember anything of them.

"I called," said the large-featured woman with a voice equally pronounced, "in reference to a request from you, which, though perhaps unconventional in the extreme, I have been able to meet by the intervention of this young lady's company. My name on this card may not be familiar to you--but I am 'Dorothy Dewdrop.'"

A slight movement of abstraction and surprise passed over Don Jose's face, but as quickly vanished as he advanced towards her and gracefully raised the tips of her fingers to his lips. "Have I then, at last, the privilege of beholding that most distressed and deeply injured of women! Or is it but a dream!"

It certainly was not, as far as concerned the substantial person of the woman before him, who, however, seemed somewhat uneasy under his words as well as the demure scrutiny of Miss Jenkinson. "I thought you might have forgotten," she said with slight acerbity, "that you desired an interview with the authoress of"--

"Pardon," interrupted Don Jose, standing before her in an attitude of the deepest sympathizing dejection, "I had not forgotten. It is now three weeks since I have read in the journal 'Golden Gate' the eloquent and touching poem of your sufferings, and your aspirations, and your miscomprehensions by those you love. I remember as yesterday that you have said, that cruel fate have linked you to a soulless state--that--but I speak not well your own beautiful language--you are in tears at evenfall 'because that you are not understood of others, and that your soul recoiled from iron bonds, until, as in a dream, you sought succor and release in some true Knight of equal plight.'"

"I am told," said the large-featured woman with some satisfaction, "that the poem to which you allude has been generally admired."

"Admired! Senora," said Don Jose, with still darker sympathy, "it is not the word; it is FELT. I have felt it. When I read those words of distress, I am touched of compassion! I have said, This woman, so disconsolate, so oppressed, must be relieved, protected! I have wrote to you, at the 'Golden Gate,' to see me here."

"And I have come, as you perceive," said the poetess, rising with a slight smile of constraint; "and emboldened by your appreciation, I have brought a few trifles thrown off"--

"Pardon, unhappy Senora," interrupted Don Jose, lifting his hand deprecatingly without relaxing his melancholy precision, "but to a cavalier further evidence is not required--and I have not yet make finish. I have not content myself to WRITE to you. I have sent my trusty friend Roberto to inquire at the 'Golden Gate' of your condition. I have found there, most unhappy and persecuted friend--

that with truly angelic forbearance you have not told ALL--that you are MARRIED, and that of a necessity it is your husband that is cold and soulless and unsympathizing--and all that you describe."

"Sir!" said the poetess, rising in angry consternation.

"I have written to him," continued Don Jose, with unheeding gravity; "have appealed to him as a friend, I have conjured him as a caballero, I have threatened him even as a champion of the Right, I have said to him, in effect--that this must not be as it is. I have informed him that I have made an appointment with you even at this house, and I challenged him to meet you here--in this room--even at this instant, and, with God's help, we should make good our charges against him. It is yet early; I have allowed time for the lateness of the stage and the fact that he will come by another conveyance. Therefore, O Dona Dewdrop, tremble not like thy namesake as it were on the leaf of apprehension and expectancy. I, Don Jose, am here to protect thee. I will take these charges"--gently withdrawing the manuscripts from her astonished grasp--"though even, as I related to thee before, I want them not, yet we will together confront him with them and make them good against him."

"Are you mad?" demanded the lady in almost stentorian accents, "or is this an unmanly hoax?" Suddenly she stopped in undeniable consternation. "Good heavens," she muttered, "if Abner should believe this. He is SUCH a fool! He has lately been queer and jealous. Oh dear!" she said, turning to Polly Jenkinson with the first indication of feminine weakness, "Is he telling the truth? is he crazy? what shall I do?"

Polly Jenkinson, who had witnessed the interview with the intensest enjoyment, now rose equal to the occasion.

"You have made a mistake," she said, uplifting her demure blue eyes to Don Jose's dark and melancholy gaze. "This lady is a POETESS! The sufferings she depicts, the sorrows she feels, are in the IMAGINATION, in her fancy only."

"Ah!" said Don Jose gloomily; "then it is all false."

"No," said Polly quickly, "only they are not her OWN, you know. They are somebody else's. She only describes them for another, don't you see?"

"And who, then, is this unhappy one?" asked the Don quickly.

"Well--a--friend," stammered Polly, hesitatingly.

"A friend!" repeated Don Jose. "Ah, I see, of possibility a dear one, even," he continued, gazing with tender melancholy into the untroubled cerulean depths of Polly's eyes, "even, but no, child, it could not be! THOU art too young."

"Ah," said Polly, with an extraordinary gulp and a fierce nudge of the poetess, "but it WAS me."

"You, Senorita," repeated Don Jose, falling back in an attitude of mingled admiration and pity. "You, the child of Jenkinson!"

"Yes, yes," joined in the poetess hurriedly; "but that isn't going to stop the consequences of your wretched blunder. My husband will be furious, and will be here at any moment. Good gracious! what is that?"

The violent slamming of a distant door at that instant, the sounds of quick scuffling on the staircase, and the uplifting of an irate voice had reached her ears and thrown her back in the arms of Polly Jenkinson. Even the young girl herself turned an anxious gaze towards the door. Don Jose alone was unmoved.

"Possess yourselves in peace, Senioritas," he said calmly. "We have here only the characteristic convalescence of my friend and brother, the excellent Roberto. He will ever recover himself from drink with violence, even as he precipitates himself into it with fury. He has been prematurely awakened. I will discover the cause."

With an elaborate bow to the frightened women, he left the room. Scarcely had the door closed when the poetess turned quickly to Polly. "The man's a stark staring lunatic, but, thank Heaven, Abner will see it at once. And now let's get away while we can. To think," she said, snatching up her scattered manuscripts, "that THAT was all the beast wanted."

"I'm sure he's very gentle and kind," said Polly, recovering her dimples with a demure pout; "but stop, he's coming back."

It was indeed Don Jose re-entering the room with the composure of a relieved and self-satisfied mind. "It is even as I said, Senora," he began, taking the poetess's hand,--"and MORE. You are SAVED!"

As the women only stared at each other, he gravely folded his arms and continued: "I will explain. For the instant I have not remember that, in imitation of your own delicacy, I have given to your husband in my letter, not the name of myself, but, as a mere Don Fulano, the name of my brother Roberto--'Bucking Bob.' Your husband have this moment arrive! Penetrating the bedroom of the excellent Roberto, he has indiscreetly seize him in his bed, without explanation, without introduction, without fear! The excellent Roberto, ever ready for such distractions, have respond! In a word, to use the language of the good Jenkinson--our host, our father--who was present, he have 'wiped the floor with your husband,' and have even carried him down the staircase to the street. Believe me, he will not return. You are free!"

"Fool! Idiot! Crazy beast!" said the poetess, dashing past him and out of the door. "You shall pay for this!"

Don Jose did not change his imperturbable and melancholy calm. "And now, little one," he said, dropping on one knee before the half-frightened Polly, "child of Jenkinson, now that thy perhaps too excitable sponsor has, in a poet's caprice, abandoned thee for some newer fantasy, confide in me thy distress, to me, thy Knight, and tell the story of thy sorrows."

"But," said Polly, rising to her feet and struggling between a laugh and a cry. "I haven't any sorrows. Oh dear! don't you see,

it's only her FANCY to make me seem so. There's nothing the matter with me."

"Nothing the matter," repeated Don Jose slowly. "You have no distress? You want no succor, no relief, no protector? This, then, is but another delusion!" he said, rising sadly.

"Yes, no--that is--oh, my gracious goodness!" said Polly, hopelessly divided between a sense of the ridiculous and some strange attraction in the dark, gentle eyes that were fixed upon her half reproachfully. "You don't understand."

Don Jose replied only with a melancholy smile, and then going to the door, opened it with a bowed head and respectful courtesy. At the act, Polly plucked up courage again, and with it a slight dash of her old audacity.

"I'm sure I'm very sorry that I ain't got any love sorrows," she said demurely. "And I suppose it's very dreadful in me not to have been raving and broken-hearted over somebody or other as that woman has said. Only," she waited till she had gained the secure vantage of the threshold, "I never knew a gentleman to OBJECT to it before!"

With this Parthian arrow from her blue eyes she slipped into the passage and vanished through the door of the opposite parlor. For an instant Don Jose remained motionless and reflecting. Then, recovering himself with grave precision, he deliberately picked up his narrow black gloves from the table, drew them on, took his hat in his hand, and solemnly striding across the passage, entered the door that had just closed behind her.

III.

It must not be supposed that in the meantime the flight of Don Jose and his follower was unattended by any commotion at the rancho of the Blessed Innocents. At the end of three hours' deliberation, in which the retainers were severally examined, the corral searched, and the well in the courtyard sounded, scouts were dispatched in different directions, who returned with the surprising information that the fugitives were not in the vicinity. A trustworthy messenger was sent to Monterey for "custom-house paper," on which to draw up a formal declaration of the affair. The archbishop was summoned from San Luis, and Don Victor and Don Vincente Sepulvida, with the Donas Carmen and Inez Alvarado, and a former alcalde, gathered at a family council the next day. In this serious conclave the good Father Felipe once more expounded the alienated condition and the dangerous reading of the absent man. In the midst of which the ordinary post brought a letter from Don Jose, calmly inviting the family to dine with him and Roberto at San Mateo on the following Wednesday. The document was passed gravely from hand to hand. Was it a fresh evidence of mental aberration--an audacity of frenzy--or a trick of the vaquero? The archbishop and alcalde shook their heads--it was without doubt a lawless, even a sacrilegious and blasphemous fete. But a certain curiosity of the ladies and of Father Felipe carried the day. Without formally accepting the invitation it was decided that the family should

examine the afflicted man, with a view of taking active measures hereafter. On the day appointed, the traveling carriage of the Sepulvidas, an equipage coeval with the beginning of the century, drawn by two white mules gaudily caparisoned, halted before the hotel at San Mateo and disgorged Father Felipe, the Donas Carmen and Inez Alvarado and Maria Sepulvida, while Don Victor and Don Vincente Sepulvida, their attendant cavaliers on fiery mustangs, like outriders, drew rein at the same time. A slight thrill of excitement, as of the advent of a possible circus, had preceded them through the little town; a faint blending of cigarette smoke and garlic announced their presence on the veranda.

Ushered into the parlor of the hotel, apparently set apart for their reception, they were embarrassed at not finding their host present. But they were still more disconcerted when a tall full-bearded stranger, with a shrewd amused-looking face, rose from a chair by the window, and stepping forward, saluted them in fluent Spanish with a slight American accent.

"I have to ask you, gentlemen and ladies," he began, with a certain insinuating ease and frankness that alternately aroused and lulled their suspicions, "to pardon the absence of our friend Don Jose Sepulvida at this preliminary greeting. For to be perfectly frank with you, although the ultimate aim and object of our gathering is a social one, you are doubtless aware that certain infelicities and misunderstandings--common to most families--have occurred, and a free, dispassionate, unprejudiced discussion and disposal of them at the beginning will only tend to augment the goodwill of our gathering."

"The Senor without doubt is"--suggested the padre, with a polite interrogative pause.

"Pardon me! I forgot to introduce myself. Colonel Parker--entirely at your service and that of these charming ladies."

The ladies referred to allowed their eyes to rest with evident prepossession on the insinuating stranger. "Ah, a soldier," said Don Vincente.

"Formerly," said the American lightly; "at present a lawyer, the counsel of Don Jose."

A sudden rigor of suspicion stiffened the company; the ladies withdrew their eyes; the priest and the Sepulvidas exchanged glances.

"Come," said Colonel Parker, with apparent unconsciousness of the effect of his disclosure, "let us begin frankly. You have, I believe, some anxiety in regard to the mental condition of Don Jose."

"We believe him to be mad," said Padre Felipe promptly, "irresponsible, possessed!"

"That is your opinion; good," said the lawyer quietly.

"And ours too," clamored the party, "without doubt."

"Good," returned the lawyer with perfect cheerfulness. "As his relations, you have no doubt had superior opportunities for observing his condition. I understand also that you may think it necessary to have him legally declared non compos, a proceeding which, you are aware, might result in the incarceration of our distinguished friend in a mad-house."

"Pardon, Senor," interrupted Dona Maria proudly, "you do not comprehend the family. When a Sepulvida is visited of God we do not ask the Government to confine him like a criminal. We protect him in his own house from the consequences of his frenzy."

"From the machinations of the worldly and heretical," broke in the priest, "and from the waste and dispersion of inherited possessions."

"Very true," continued Colonel Parker, with unalterable good-humor; "but I was only about to say that there might be conflicting evidence of his condition. For instance, our friend has been here three days. In that time he has had three interviews with three individuals under singular circumstances." Colonel Parker then briefly recounted the episodes of the landlord, the gambler, Miss Jenkinson and the poetess, as they had been related to him. "Yet," he continued, "all but one of these individuals are willing to swear that they not only believe Don Jose perfectly sane, but endowed with a singularly sound judgment. In fact, the testimony of Mr. Hamlin and Miss Jenkinson is remarkably clear on that subject."

The company exchanged a supercilious smile. "Do you not see, O Senor Advocate," said Don Vincente compassionately, "that this is but a conspiracy to avail themselves of our relative's weakness. Of a necessity they find him sane who benefits them."

"I have thought of that, and am glad to hear you say so," returned the lawyer still more cheerfully, "for your prompt opinion emboldens me to be at once perfectly frank with you. Briefly then, Don Jose has summoned me here to make a final disposition of his property. In the carrying out of certain theories of his, which it is not my province to question, he has resolved upon comparative poverty for himself as best fitted for his purpose, and to employ his wealth solely for others. In fact, of all his vast possessions he retains for himself only an income sufficient for the bare necessaries of life."

"And you have done this?" they asked in one voice.

"Not yet," said the lawyer.

"Blessed San Antonio, we have come in time!" ejaculated Dona Carmen. "Another day and it would have been too late; it was an inspiration of the Blessed Innocents themselves," said Dona Maria, crossing herself. "Can you longer doubt that this is the wildest madness?" said Father Felipe with flashing eyes.

"Yet," returned the lawyer, caressing his heavy beard with a meditative smile, "the ingenious fellow actually instanced the vows of YOUR OWN ORDER, reverend sir, as an example in support of his theory. But to be brief. Conceiving, then, that his holding of

property was a mere accident of heritage, not admitted by him, unworthy his acceptance, and a relic of superstitious ignorance"--

"This is the very sacrilege of Satanic prepossession," broke in the priest indignantly.

"He therefore," continued the lawyer composedly, "makes over and reverts the whole of his possessions, with the exceptions I have stated, to his family and the Church."

A breathless and stupefying silence fell upon the company. In the dead hush the sound of Polly Jenkinson's piano, played in a distant room, could be distinctly heard. With their vacant eyes staring at him the speaker continued:

"That deed of gift I have drawn up as he dictated it. I don't mind saying that in the opinion of some he might be declared non compos upon the evidence of that alone. I need not say how relieved I am to find that your opinion coincides with my own."

"But," gasped Father Felipe hurriedly, with a quick glance at the others, "it does not follow that it will be necessary to resort to these legal measures. Care, counsel, persuasion--"

"The general ministering of kinship--nursing, a woman's care--the instincts of affection," piped Dona Maria in breathless eagerness.

"Any light social distraction--a harmless flirtation--a possible attachment," suggested Dona Carmen shyly.

"Change of scene--active exercise--experiences--even as those you have related," broke in Don Vincente.

"I for one have ever been opposed to LEGAL measures," said Don Victor. "A mere consultation of friends--in fact, a fete like this is sufficient."

"Good friends," said Father Felipe, who had by this time recovered himself, taking out his snuff-box portentously, "it would seem truly, from the document which this discreet caballero has spoken of, that the errors of our dear Don Jose are rather of method than intent, and that while we may freely accept the one"--

"Pardon," interrupted Colonel Parker with bland persistence, "but I must point out to you that what we call in law 'a consideration' is necessary to the legality of a conveyance, even though that consideration be frivolous and calculated to impair the validity of the document."

"Truly," returned the good padre insinuatingly; "but if a discreet advocate were to suggest the substitution of some more pious and reasonable consideration"--

"But that would be making it a perfectly sane and gratuitous document, not only glaringly inconsistent with your charges, my good friends, with Don Jose's attitude towards you and his flight from home, but open to the gravest suspicion in law. In fact, its apparent propriety in the face of these facts would imply improper influence."

The countenances of the company fell. The lawyer's face, however, became still more good-humored and sympathizing. "The case is simply this. If in the opinion of judge and jury Don Jose is declared insane, the document is worthless except as a proof of that fact or a possible indication of the undue influence of his relations, which might compel the court to select his guardians and trustees elsewhere than among them."

"Friend Abogado," said Father Felipe with extraordinary deliberation, "the document thou hast just described so eloquently convinces me beyond all doubt that Don Jose is not only perfectly sane but endowed with a singular discretion. I consider it as a delicate and high-spirited intimation to us, his friends and kinsmen, of his unalterable and logically just devotion to his family and religion, whatever may seem to be his poetical and imaginative manner of declaring it. I think there is not one here," continued the padre, looking around him impressively, "who is not entirely satisfied of Don Jose's reason and competency to arrange his own affairs."

"Entirely," "truly," "perfectly," eagerly responded the others with affecting spontaneity.

"Nay, more. To prevent any misconception, we shall deem it our duty to take every opportunity of making our belief publicly known," added Father Felipe.

The padre and Colonel Parker gazed long and gravely into each other's eyes. It may have been an innocent touch of the sunlight through the window, but a faint gleam seemed to steal into the pupil of the affable lawyer at the same moment that, probably from the like cause, there was a slight nervous contraction of the left eyelid of the pious father. But it passed, and the next instant the door opened to admit Don Jose Sepulvida.

He was at once seized and effusively embraced by the entire company with every protest of affection and respect. not only Mr. Hamlin and Mr. Jenkinson, who accompanied him as invited guests, but Roberto, in a new suit of clothes and guiltless of stain or trace of dissipation, shared in the pronounced friendliness of the kinsmen. Padre Felipe took snuff, Colonel Parker blew his nose gently.

Nor were they less demonstrative of their new convictions later at the banquet. Don Jose, with Jenkinson and the padre on his right and left, preserved his gentle and half-melancholy dignity in the midst of the noisy fraternization. Even Padre Felipe, in a brief speech or exhortation proposing the health of their host, lent himself in his own tongue to this polite congeniality. "We have had also, my friends and brothers," he said in peroration, "a pleasing example of the compliment of imitation shown by our beloved Don Jose. No one who has known him during his friendly sojourn in this community but will be struck with the conviction that he has acquired that most marvelous faculty of your great American nation, the exhibition of humor and of the practical joke."

Every eye was turned upon the imperturbable face of Don Jose as he

slowly rose to reply. "In bidding you to this fete, my friends and kinsmen," he began calmly, "it was with the intention of formally embracing the habits, customs, and spirit of American institutions by certain methods of renunciation of the past, as became a caballero of honor and resolution. Those methods may possibly be known to some of you." He paused for a moment as if to allow the members of his family to look unconscious. "Since then, in the wisdom of God, it has occurred to me that my purpose may be as honorably effected by a discreet blending of the past and the present--in a word, by the judicious combination of the interests of my native people and the American nation. In consideration of that purpose, friends and kinsmen, I ask you to join me in drinking the good health of my host Senor Jenkinson, my future father-in-law, from whom I have to-day had the honor to demand the hand of the peerless Polly, his daughter, as the future mistress of the Rancho of the Blessed Innocents."

The marriage took place shortly after. Nor was the free will and independence of Don Jose Sepulvida in the least opposed by his relations. Whether they felt they had already committed themselves, or had hopes in the future, did not transpire. Enough that the escapade of a week was tacitly forgotten. The only allusion ever made to the bridegroom's peculiarities was drawn from the demure lips of the bride herself on her installation at the "Blessed Innocents."

"And what, little one, didst thou find in me to admire?" Don Jose had asked tenderly.

"Oh, you seemed to be so much like that dear old Don Quixote, you know," she answered demurely.

"Don Quixote," repeated Don Jose with gentle gravity. "But, my child, that was only a mere fiction--a romance, of one Cervantes. Believe me, of a truth there never was any such person!"

A SECRET OF TELEGRAPH HILL

I.

As Mr. Herbert Bly glanced for the first time at the house which was to be his future abode in San Francisco, he was somewhat startled. In that early period of feverish civic improvement the street before it had been repeatedly graded and lowered until the dwelling--originally a pioneer suburban villa perched upon a slope of Telegraph Hill--now stood sixty feet above the sidewalk, superposed like some Swiss chalet on successive galleries built in the sand-hill, and connected by a half-dozen distinct zigzag flights of wooden staircase. Stimulated, however, by the thought that the view from the top would be a fine one, and that existence there would have all the quaint originality of Robinson Crusoe's tree-dwelling, Mr. Bly began cheerfully to mount the steps. It should be premised that, although a recently appointed clerk in a large banking house, Mr. Bly was somewhat youthful and imaginative,

and regarded the ascent as part of that "Excelsior" climbing pointed out by a great poet as a praiseworthy function of ambitious youth.

Reaching at last the level of the veranda, he turned to the view. The distant wooded shore of Contra Costa, the tossing white-caps and dancing sails of the bay between, and the foreground at his feet of wharves and piers, with their reed-like jungles of masts and cordage, made up a bright, if somewhat material, picture. To his right rose the crest of the hill, historic and memorable as the site of the old semaphoric telegraph, the tossing of whose gaunt arms formerly thrilled the citizens with tidings from the sea. Turning to the house, he recognized the prevailing style of light cottage architecture, although incongruously confined to narrow building plots and the civic regularity of a precise street frontage. Thus a dozen other villas, formerly scattered over the slope, had been laboriously displaced and moved to the rigorous parade line drawn by the street surveyor, no matter how irregular and independent their design and structure. Happily, the few scrub-oaks and low bushes which formed the scant vegetation of this vast sand dune offered no obstacle and suggested no incongruity. Beside the house before which Mr. Bly now stood, a prolific Madeira vine, quickened by the six months' sunshine, had alone survived the displacement of its foundations, and in its untrimmed luxuriance half hid the upper veranda from his view.

Still glowing with his exertion, the young man rang the bell and was admitted into a fair-sized drawing-room, whose tasteful and well-arranged furniture at once prepossessed him. An open piano, a sheet of music carelessly left on the stool, a novel lying face downwards on the table beside a skein of silk, and the distant rustle of a vanished skirt through an inner door, gave a suggestion of refined domesticity to the room that touched the fancy of the homeless and nomadic Bly. He was still enjoying, in half embarrassment, that vague and indescribable atmosphere of a refined woman's habitual presence, when the door opened and the mistress of the house formally presented herself.

She was a faded but still handsome woman. Yet she wore that peculiar long, limp, formless house-shawl which in certain phases of Anglo-Saxon spinster and widowhood assumes the functions of the recluse's veil and announces the renunciation of worldly vanities and a resigned indifference to external feminine contour. The most audacious masculine arm would shrink from clasping that shapeless void in which the flatness of asceticism or the heavings of passion might alike lie buried. She had also in some mysterious way imported into the fresh and pleasant room a certain bombaziny shadow of the past, and a suggestion of that appalling reminiscence known as "better days." Though why it should be always represented by ashen memories, or why better days in the past should be supposed to fix their fitting symbol in depression in the present, Mr. Bly was too young and too preoccupied at the moment to determine. He only knew that he was a little frightened of her, and fixed his gaze with a hopeless fascination on a letter which she somewhat portentously carried under the shawl, and which seemed already to have yellowed in its arctic shade.

"Mr. Carstone has written to me that you would call," said Mrs. Brooks with languid formality. "Mr. Carstone was a valued friend

of my late husband, and I suppose has told you the circumstances--the only circumstances--which admit of my entertaining his proposition of taking anybody, even temporarily, under my roof. The absence of my dear son for six months at Portland, Oregon, enables me to place his room at the disposal of Mr. Carstone's young protege, who, Mr. Carstone tells me, and I have every reason to believe, is, if perhaps not so seriously inclined nor yet a church communicant, still of a character and reputation not unworthy to follow my dear Tappington in our little family circle as he has at his desk in the bank."

The sensitive Bly, struggling painfully out of an abstraction as to how he was ever to offer the weekly rent of his lodgings to such a remote and respectable person, and also somewhat embarrassed at being appealed to in the third person, here started and bowed.

"The name of Bly is not unfamiliar to me," continued Mrs. Brooks, pointing to a chair and sinking resignedly into another, where her baleful shawl at once assumed the appearance of a dust-cover; "some of my dearest friends were intimate with the Blys of Philadelphia. They were a branch of the Maryland Blys of the eastern shore, of whom my Uncle James married. Perhaps you are distantly related?"

Mrs. Brooks was perfectly aware that her visitor was of unknown Western origin, and a poor but clever protege of the rich banker; but she was one of a certain class of American women who, in the midst of a fierce democracy, are more or less cat-like conservators of family pride and lineage, and more or less feline inconsistent and treacherous to republican principles. Bly, who had just settled in his mind to send her the rent anonymously--as a weekly valentine--recovered himself and his spirits in his usual boyish fashion.

"I am afraid, Mrs. Brooks," he said gayly, "I cannot lay claim to any distinguished relationship, even to that 'Nelly Bly' who, you remember, 'winked her eye when she went to sleep.'" He stopped in consternation. The terrible conviction flashed upon him that this quotation from a popular negro-minstrel song could not possibly be remembered by a lady as refined as his hostess, or even known to her superior son. The conviction was intensified by Mrs. Brooks rising with a smileless face, slightly shedding the possible vulgarity with a shake of her shawl, and remarking that she would show him her son's room, led the way upstairs to the apartment recently vacated by the perfect Tappington.

Preceded by the same distant flutter of unseen skirts in the passage which he had first noticed on entering the drawing-room, and which evidently did not proceed from his companion, whose self-composed cerements would have repressed any such indecorous agitation, Mr. Bly stepped timidly into the room. It was a very pretty apartment, suggesting the same touches of tasteful refinement in its furniture and appointments, and withal so feminine in its neatness and regularity, that, conscious of his frontier habits and experience, he felt at once repulsively incongruous. "I cannot expect, Mr. Bly," said Mrs. Brooks resignedly, "that you can share my son's extreme sensitiveness to disorder and irregularity; but I must beg you to avoid as much as possible disturbing the arrangement of the book-shelves, which, you observe, comprise his books of serious reference, the Biblical

commentaries, and the sermons which were his habitual study. I must beg you to exercise the same care in reference to the valuable offerings from his Sabbath-school scholars which are upon the mantel. The embroidered book-marker, the gift of the young ladies of his Bible-class in Dr. Stout's church, is also, you perceive, kept for ornament and affectionate remembrance. The harmonium--even if you are not yourself given to sacred song--I trust you will not find in your way, nor object to my daughter continuing her practice during your daily absence. Thank you. The door you are looking at leads by a flight of steps to the side street."

"A very convenient arrangement," said Bly hopefully, who saw a chance for an occasional unostentatious escape from a too protracted contemplation of Tappington's perfections. "I mean," he added hurriedly, "to avoid disturbing you at night."

"I believe my son had neither the necessity nor desire to use it for that purpose," returned Mrs. Brooks severely; "although he found it sometimes a convenient short cut to church on Sabbath when he was late."

Bly, who in his boyish sensitiveness to external impressions had by this time concluded that a life divided between the past perfections of Tappington and the present renunciations of Mrs. Brooks would be intolerable, and was again abstractedly inventing some delicate excuse for withdrawing without committing himself further, was here suddenly attracted by a repetition of the rustling of the unseen skirt. This time it was nearer, and this time it seemed to strike even Mrs. Brooks's remote preoccupation. "My daughter, who is deeply devoted to her brother," she said, slightly raising her voice, "will take upon herself the care of looking after Tappington's precious mementoes, and spare you the trouble. Cherry, dear! this way. This is the young gentleman spoken of by Mr. Carstone, your papa's friend. My daughter Cherubina, Mr. Bly."

The fair owner of the rustling skirt, which turned out to be a pretty French print, had appeared at the doorway. She was a tall, slim blonde, with a shy, startled manner, as of a penitent nun who was suffering for some conventual transgression--a resemblance that was heightened by her short-cut hair, that might have been cropped as if for punishment. A certain likeness to her mother suggested that she was qualifying for that saint's ascetic shawl--subject, however, to rebellious intervals, indicated in the occasional sidelong fires of her gray eyes. Yet the vague impression that she knew more of the world than her mother, and that she did not look at all as if her name was Cherubina, struck Bly in the same momentary glance.

"Mr. Bly is naturally pleased with what he has seen of our dear Tappington's appointments; and as I gather from Mr. Carstone's letter that he is anxious to enter at once and make the most of the dear boy's absence, you will see, my dear Cherry, that Ellen has everything ready for him?"

Before the unfortunate Bly could explain or protest, the young girl lifted her gray eyes to his. Whether she had perceived and understood his perplexity he could not tell; but the swift shy glance was at once appealing, assuring, and intelligent. She was

certainly unlike her mother and brother. Acting with his usual impulsiveness, he forgot his previous resolution, and before he left had engaged to begin his occupation of the room on the following day.

The next afternoon found him installed. Yet, after he had unpacked his modest possessions and put them away, after he had placed his few books on the shelves, where they looked glaringly trivial and frivolous beside the late tenant's severe studies; after he had set out his scanty treasures in the way of photographs and some curious mementoes of his wandering life, and then quickly put them back again with a sudden angry pride at exposing them to the unsympathetic incongruity of the other ornaments, he, nevertheless, felt ill at ease. He glanced in vain around the pretty room. It was not the delicately flowered wall-paper; it was not the white and blue muslin window-curtains gracefully tied up with blue and white ribbons; it was not the spotless bed, with its blue and white festooned mosquito-net and flounced valances, and its medallion portrait of an unknown bishop at the back; it was not the few tastefully framed engravings of certain cardinal virtues, "The Rock of Ages," and "The Guardian Angel"; it was not the casts in relief of "Night" and "Morning"; it was certainly not the cosy dimity-covered arm-chairs and sofa, nor yet the clean-swept polished grate with its cheerful fire sparkling against the chill afternoon sea-fogs without; neither was it the mere feminine suggestion, for that touched a sympathetic chord in his impulsive nature; nor the religious and ascetic influence, for he had occupied a monastic cell in a school of the padres at an old mission, and slept profoundly;--it was none of those, and yet a part of all. Most habitations retain a cast or shell of their previous tenant that, fitting tightly or loosely, is still able to adjust itself to the newcomer; in most occupied apartments there is still a shadowy suggestion of the owner's individuality; there was nothing here that fitted Bly--nor was there either, strange to say, any evidence of the past proprietor in this inhospitality of sensation. It did not strike him at the time that it was this very LACK of individuality which made it weird and unreal, that it was strange only because it was ARTIFICIAL, and that a REAL Tappington had never inhabited it.

He walked to the window--that never-failing resource of the unquiet mind--and looked out. He was a little surprised to find, that, owing to the grading of the house, the scrub-oaks and bushes of the hill were nearly on the level of his window, as also was the adjoining side street on which his second door actually gave. Opening this, the sudden invasion of the sea-fog and the figure of a pedestrian casually passing along the disused and abandoned pavement not a dozen feet from where he had been comfortably seated, presented such a striking contrast to the studious quiet and cosiness of his secluded apartment that he hurriedly closed the door again with a sense of indiscreet exposure. Returning to the window, he glanced to the left, and found that he was overlooked by the side veranda of another villa in the rear, evidently on its way to take position on the line of the street. Although in actual and deliberate transit on rollers across the backyard and still occulting a part of the view, it remained, after the reckless fashion of the period, inhabited. Certainly, with a door fronting a thoroughfare, and a neighbor gradually approaching him, he would not feel lonely or lack excitement.

He drew his arm-chair to the fire and tried to realize the all-pervading yet evasive Tappington. There was no portrait of him in the house, and although Mrs. Brooks had said that he "favored" his sister, Bly had, without knowing why, instinctively resented it. He had even timidly asked his employer, and had received the vague reply that he was "good-looking enough," and the practical but discomposing retort, "What do you want to know for?" As he really did not know why, the inquiry had dropped. He stared at the monumental crystal ink-stand half full of ink, yet spotless and free from stains, that stood on the table, and tried to picture Tappington daintily dipping into it to thank the fair donors--"daughters of Rebecca." Who were they? and what sort of man would they naturally feel grateful to?

What was that?

He turned to the window, which had just resounded to a slight tap or blow, as if something soft had struck it. With an instinctive suspicion of the propinquity of the adjoining street he rose, but a single glance from the window satisfied him that no missile would have reached it from thence. He scanned the low bushes on the level before him; certainly no one could be hiding there. He lifted his eyes toward the house on the left; the curtains of the nearest window appeared to be drawn suddenly at the same moment. Could it have come from there? Looking down upon the window-ledge, there lay the mysterious missile--a little misshapen ball. He opened the window and took it up. It was a small handkerchief tied into a soft knot, and dampened with water to give it the necessary weight as a projectile.

Was it apparently the trick of a mischievous child? or--

But here a faint knock on the door leading into the hall checked his inquiry. He opened it sharply in his excitement, and was embarrassed to find the daughter of his hostess standing there, shy, startled, and evidently equally embarrassed by his abrupt response.

"Mother only wanted me to ask you if Ellen had put everything to rights," she said, making a step backwards.

"Oh, thank you. Perfectly," said Herbert with effusion. "Nothing could be better done. In fact"--

"You're quite sure she hasn't forgotten anything? or that there isn't anything you would like changed?" she continued, with her eyes leveled on the floor.

"Nothing, I assure you," he said, looking at her downcast lashes. As she still remained motionless, he continued cheerfully, "Would you--would you--care to look round and see?"

"No; I thank you."

There was an awkward pause. He still continued to hold the door open. Suddenly she moved forward with a school-girl stride, entered the room, and going to the harmonium, sat down upon the music-stool beside it, slightly bending forward, with one long,

slim, white hand on top of the other, resting over her crossed knees.

Herbert was a little puzzled. It was the awkward and brusque act of a very young person, and yet nothing now could be more gentle and self-composed than her figure and attitude.

"Yes," he continued, smilingly; "I am only afraid that I may not be able to live quite up to the neatness and regularity of the example I find here everywhere. You know I am dreadfully careless and not at all orderly. I shudder to think what may happen; but you and your mother, Miss Brooks, I trust, will make up your minds to overlook and forgive a good deal. I shall do my best to be worthy of Mr. Tap--of my predecessor--but even then I am afraid you'll find me a great bother."

She raised her shy eyelids. The faintest ghost of a long-buried dimple came into her pale cheek as she said softly, to his utter consternation:

"Rats!"

Had she uttered an oath he could not have been more startled than he was by this choice gem of Western saloon-slang from the pure lips of this Evangeline-like figure before him. He sat gazing at her with a wild hysteric desire to laugh. She lifted her eyes again, swept him with a slightly terrified glance, and said:

"Tap says you all say that when any one makes-believe politeness to you."

"Oh, your BROTHER says that, does he?" said Herbert, laughing.

"Yes, and sometimes 'Old rats.' But," she continued hurriedly, "HE doesn't say it; he says YOU all do. My brother is very particular, and very good. Doctor Stout loves him. He is thought very much of in all Christian circles. That book-mark was given to him by one of his classes."

Every trace of her dimples had vanished. She looked so sweetly grave, and withal so maidenly, sitting there slightly smoothing the lengths of her pink fingers, that Herbert was somewhat embarrassed.

"But I assure you, Miss Brooks, I was not making-believe. I am really very careless, and everything is so proper--I mean so neat and pretty--here, that I"--he stopped, and, observing the same backward wandering of her eye as of a filly about to shy, quickly changed the subject. "You have, or are about to have, neighbors?" he said, glancing towards the windows as he recalled the incident of a moment before.

"Yes; and they're not at all nice people. They are from Pike County, and very queer. They came across the plains in '50. They say 'Stranger'; the men are vulgar, and the girls very forward. Tap forbids my ever going to the window and looking at them. They're quite what you would call 'off color.'"

Herbert, who did not dare to say that he never would have dreamed of using such an expression in any young girl's presence, was

plunged in silent consternation.

"Then your brother doesn't approve of them?" he said, at last, awkwardly.

"Oh, not at all. He even talked of having ground-glass put in all these windows, only it would make the light bad."

Herbert felt very embarrassed. If the mysterious missile came from these objectionable young persons, it was evidently because they thought they had detected a more accessible and sympathizing individual in the stranger who now occupied the room. He concluded he had better not say anything about it.

Miss Brooks's golden eyelashes were bent towards the floor. "Do you play sacred music, Mr. Bly?" she said, without raising them.

"I am afraid not."

"Perhaps you know only negro-minstrel songs?"

"I am afraid--yes."

"I know one." The dimples faintly came back again. "It's called 'The Ham-fat Man.' Some day when mother isn't in I'll play it for you."

Then the dimples fled again, and she immediately looked so distressed that Herbert came to her assistance.

"I suppose your brother taught you that too?"

"Oh dear, no!" she returned, with her frightened glance; "I only heard him say some people preferred that kind of thing to sacred music, and one day I saw a copy of it in a music-store window in Clay Street, and bought it. Oh no! Tappington didn't teach it to me."

In the pleasant discovery that she was at times independent of her brother's perfections, Herbert smiled, and sympathetically drew a step nearer to her. She rose at once, somewhat primly holding back the sides of her skirt, school-girl fashion, with thumb and finger, and her eyes cast down.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Bly."

"Must you go? Good afternoon."

She walked directly to the open door, looking very tall and stately as she did so, but without turning towards him. When she reached it she lifted her eyes; there was the slightest suggestion of a return of her dimples in the relaxation of her grave little mouth. Then she said, "good-bye, Mr. Bly," and departed.

The skirt of her dress rustled for an instant in the passage. Herbert looked after her. "I wonder if she skipped then--she looks like a girl that might skip at such a time," he said to himself. "How very odd she is--and how simple! But I must pull her up in that slang when I know her better. Fancy her brother telling her

THAT! What a pair they must be!" Nevertheless, when he turned back into the room again he forbore going to the window to indulge further curiosity in regard to his wicked neighbors. A certain new feeling of respect to his late companion--and possibly to himself--held him in check. Much as he resented Tappington's perfections, he resented quite as warmly the presumption that he was not quite as perfect, which was implied in that mysterious overture. He glanced at the stool on which she had been sitting with a half-brotherly smile, and put it reverently on one side with a very vivid recollection of her shy maidenly figure. In some mysterious way too the room seemed to have lost its formal strangeness; perhaps it was the touch of individuality--HERS--that had been wanting? He began thoughtfully to dress himself for his regular dinner at the Poodle Dog Restaurant, and when he left the room he turned back to look once more at the stool where she had sat. Even on his way to that fast and famous cafe of the period he felt, for the first time in his thoughtless but lonely life, the gentle security of the home he had left behind him.

II.

It was three or four days before he became firmly adjusted to his new quarters. During this time he had met Cherry casually on the staircase, in going or coming, and received her shy greetings; but she had not repeated her visit, nor again alluded to it. He had spent part of a formal evening in the parlor in company with a calling deacon, who, unappalled by the Indian shawl for which the widow had exchanged her household ceremonies on such occasions, appeared to Herbert to have remote matrimonial designs, as far at least as a sympathetic deprecation of the vanities of the present, an echoing of her sighs like a modest encore, a preternatural gentility of manner, a vague allusion to the necessity of bearing "one another's burdens," and an everlasting promise in store, would seem to imply. To Herbert's vivid imagination, a discussion on the doctrinal points of last Sabbath's sermon was fraught with delicate suggestion and an acceptance by the widow of an appointment to attend the Wednesday evening "Lectures" had all the shy reluctant yielding of a granted rendezvous. Oddly enough, the more formal attitude seemed to be reserved for the young people, who, in the suggestive atmosphere of this spiritual flirtation, alone appeared to preserve the proprieties and, to some extent, decorously chaperon their elders. Herbert gravely turned the leaves of Cherry's music while she played and sang one or two discreet but depressing songs expressive of her unalterable but proper devotion to her mother's clock, her father's arm-chair, and her aunt's Bible; and Herbert joined somewhat boyishly in the soul-subduing refrain. Only once he ventured to suggest in a whisper that he would like to add HER music-stool to the adorable inventory; but he was met by such a disturbed and terrified look that he desisted. "Another night of this wild and reckless dissipation will finish me," he said lugubriously to himself when he reached the solitude of his room. "I wonder how many times a week I'd have to help the girl play the spiritual gooseberry downstairs before we could have any fun ourselves?"

Here the sound of distant laughter, interspersed with vivacious feminine shrieks, came through the open window. He glanced between

the curtains. His neighbor's house was brilliantly lit, and the shadows of a few romping figures were chasing each other across the muslin shades of the windows. The objectionable young women were evidently enjoying themselves. In some conditions of the mind there is a certain exasperation in the spectacle of unmeaning enjoyment, and he shut the window sharply. At the same moment some one knocked at his door.

It was Miss Brooks, who had just come upstairs.

"Will you please let me have my music-stool?"

He stared at her a moment in surprise, then recovering himself, said, "Yes, certainly," and brought the stool. For an instant he was tempted to ask why she wanted it, but his pride forbade him.

"Thank you. Good-night."

"Good-night!"

"I hope it wasn't in your way?"

"Not at all."

"Good-night!"

"Good-night."

She vanished. Herbert was perplexed. Between young ladies whose naive exuberance impelled them to throw handkerchiefs at his window and young ladies whose equally naive modesty demanded the withdrawal from his bedroom of a chair on which they had once sat, his lot seemed to have fallen in a troubled locality. Yet a day or two later he heard Cherry practising on the harmonium as he was ascending the stairs on his return from business; she had departed before he entered the room, but had left the music-stool behind her. It was not again removed.

One Sunday, the second or third of his tenancy, when Cherry and her mother were at church, and he had finished some work that he had brought from the bank, his former restlessness and sense of strangeness returned. The regular afternoon fog had thickened early, and, driving him back from a cheerless, chilly ramble on the hill, had left him still more depressed and solitary. In sheer desperation he moved some of the furniture, and changed the disposition of several smaller ornaments. Growing bolder, he even attacked the sacred shelf devoted to Tappington's serious literature and moral studies. At first glance the book of sermons looked suspiciously fresh and new for a volume of habitual reference, but its leaves were carefully cut, and contained one or two book-marks. It was only another evidence of that perfect youth's care and neatness. As he was replacing it he noticed a small object folded in white paper at the back of the shelf. To put the book back into its former position it was necessary to take this out. He did so, but its contents slid from his fingers and the paper to the floor. To his utter consternation, looking down he saw a pack of playing-cards strewn at his feet!

He hurriedly picked them up. They were worn and slippery from use,

and exhaled a faint odor of tobacco. Had they been left there by some temporary visitor unknown to Tappington and his family, or had they been hastily hidden by a servant? Yet they were of a make and texture superior to those that a servant would possess; looking at them carefully, he recognized them to be of a quality used by the better-class gamblers. Restoring them carefully to their former position, he was tempted to take out the other volumes, and was rewarded with the further discovery of a small box of ivory counters, known as "poker-chips." It was really very extraordinary! It was quite the cache of some habitual gambler. Herbert smiled grimly at the irreverent incongruity of the hiding-place selected by its unknown and mysterious owner, and amused himself by fancying the horror of his sainted predecessor had he made the discovery. He determined to replace them, and to put some mark upon the volumes before them in order to detect any future disturbance of them in his absence.

Ought he not to take Miss Brooks in his confidence? Or should he say nothing about it at present, and trust to chance to discover the sacrilegious hider? Could it possibly be Cherry herself, guilty of the same innocent curiosity that had impelled her to buy the "Ham-fat Man"? Preposterous! Besides, the cards had been used, and she could not play poker alone!

He watched the rolling fog extinguish the line of Russian Hill, the last bit of far perspective from his window. He glanced at his neighbor's veranda, already dripping with moisture; the windows were blank; he remembered to have heard the girls giggling in passing down the side street on their way to church, and had noticed from behind his own curtains that one was rather pretty. This led him to think of Cherry again, and to recall the quaint yet melancholy grace of her figure as she sat on the stool opposite. Why had she withdrawn it so abruptly; did she consider his jesting allusion to it indecorous and presuming? Had he really meant it seriously; and was he beginning to think too much about her? Would she ever come again? How nice it would be if she returned from church alone early, and they could have a comfortable chat together here! Would she sing the "Ham-fat Man" for him? Would the dimples come back if she did? Should he ever know more of this quaint repressed side of her nature? After all, what a dear, graceful, tantalizing, lovable creature she was! Ought he not at all hazards try to know her better? Might it not be here that he would find a perfect realization of his boyish dreams, and in HER all that--what nonsense he was thinking!

Suddenly Herbert was startled by the sound of a light but hurried foot upon the wooden outer step of his second door, and the quick but ineffective turning of the door-handle. He started to his feet, his mind still filled with a vision of Cherry. Then he as suddenly remembered that he had locked the door on going out, putting the key in his overcoat pocket. He had returned by the front door, and his overcoat was now hanging in the lower hall.

The door again rattled impetuously. Then it was supplemented by a female voice in a hurried whisper: "Open quick, can't you? do hurry!"

He was confounded. The voice was authoritative, not unmusical; but it was NOT Cherry's. Nevertheless he called out quickly, "One

moment, please, and I'll get the key!" dashed downstairs and up again, breathlessly unlocked the door and threw it open.

Nobody was there!

He ran out into the street. On one side it terminated abruptly on the cliff on which his dwelling was perched; on the other, it descended more gradually into the next thoroughfare; but up and down the street, on either hand, no one was to be seen. A slightly superstitious feeling for an instant crept over him. Then he reflected that the mysterious visitor could in the interval of his getting the key have easily slipped down the steps of the cliff or entered the shrubbery of one of the adjacent houses. But why had she not waited? And what did she want? As he reentered his door he mechanically raised his eyes to the windows of his neighbor's. This time he certainly was not mistaken. The two amused, mischievous faces that suddenly disappeared behind the curtain as he looked up showed that the incident had not been unwitnessed. Yet it was impossible that it could have been either of THEM. Their house was only accessible by a long detour. It might have been the trick of a confederate; but the tone of half familiarity and half entreaty in the unseen visitor's voice dispelled the idea of any collusion. He entered the room and closed the door angrily. A grim smile stole over his face as he glanced around at the dainty saint-like appointments of the absent Tappington, and thought what that irreproachable young man would have said to the indecorous intrusion, even though it had been a mistake. Would those shameless Pike County girls have dared to laugh at HIM?

But he was again puzzled to know why he himself should have been selected for this singular experience. Why was HE considered fair game for these girls? And, for the matter of that, now that he reflected upon it, why had even this gentle, refined, and melancholy Cherry thought it necessary to talk slang to HIM on their first acquaintance, and offer to sing him the "Ham-fat Man"? It was true he had been a little gay, but never dissipated. Of course he was not a saint, like Tappington--oh, THAT was it! He believed he understood it now. He was suffering from that extravagant conception of what worldliness consists of, so common to very good people with no knowledge of the world. Compared to Tappington he was in their eyes, of course, a rake and a roue. The explanation pleased him. He would not keep it to himself. He would gain Cherry's confidence and enlist her sympathies. Her gentle nature would revolt at this injustice to their lonely lodger. She would see that there were degrees of goodness besides her brother's. She would perhaps sit on that stool again and NOT sing the "Ham-fat Man."

A day or two afterwards the opportunity seemed offered to him. As he was coming home and ascending the long hilly street, his eye was taken by a tall graceful figure just preceding him. It was she. He had never before seen her in the street, and was now struck with her ladylike bearing and the grave superiority of her perfectly simple attire. In a thoroughfare haunted by handsome women and striking toilettes, the refined grace of her mourning costume, and a certain stateliness that gave her the look of a young widow, was a contrast that evidently attracted others than himself. It was with an odd mingling of pride and jealousy that he watched the admiring yet respectful glances of the passers-by, some of whom

turned to look again, and one or two to retrace their steps and follow her at a decorous distance. This caused him to quicken his own pace, with a new anxiety and a remorseful sense of wasted opportunity. What a booby he had been, not to have made more of his contiguity to this charming girl--to have been frightened at the naive decorum of her maidenly instincts! He reached her side, and raised his hat with a trepidation at her new-found graces--with a boldness that was defiant of her other admirers. She blushed slightly.

"I thought you'd overtake me before," she said naively. "I saw YOU ever so long ago."

He stammered, with an equal simplicity, that he had not dared to.

She looked a little frightened again, and then said hurriedly: "I only thought that I would meet you on Montgomery Street, and we would walk home together. I don't like to go out alone, and mother cannot always go with me. Tappington never cared to take me out--I don't know why. I think he didn't like the people staring and stopping us. But they stare more--don't you think?--when one is alone. So I thought if you were coming straight home we might come together--unless you have something else to do?"

Herbert impulsively reiterated his joy at meeting her, and averred that no other engagement, either of business or pleasure, could or would stand in his way. Looking up, however, it was with some consternation that he saw they were already within a block of the house.

"Suppose we take a turn around the hill and come back by the old street down the steps?" he suggested earnestly.

The next moment he regretted it. The frightened look returned to her eyes; her face became melancholy and formal again.

"No!" she said quickly. "That would be taking a walk with you like these young girls and their young men on Saturdays. That's what Ellen does with the butcher's boy on Sundays. Tappington often used to meet them. Doing the 'Come, Philanders,' as he says you call it."

It struck Herbert that the didactic Tappington's method of inculcating a horror of slang in his sister's breast was open to some objection; but they were already on the steps of their house, and he was too much mortified at the reception of his last unhappy suggestion to make the confidential disclosure he had intended, even if there had still been time.

"There's mother waiting for me," she said, after an awkward pause, pointing to the figure of Mrs. Brooks dimly outlined on the veranda. "I suppose she was beginning to be worried about my being out alone. She'll be so glad I met you." It didn't appear to Herbert, however, that Mrs. Brooks exhibited any extravagant joy over the occurrence, and she almost instantly retired with her daughter into the sitting-room, linking her arm in Cherry's, and, as it were, empanoplying her with her own invulnerable shawl. Herbert went to his room more dissatisfied with himself than ever.

Two or three days elapsed without his seeing Cherry; even the well-known rustle of her skirt in the passage was missing. On the third evening he resolved to bear the formal terrors of the drawing-room again, and stumbled upon a decorous party consisting of Mrs. Brooks, the deacon, and the pastor's wife--but not Cherry. It struck him on entering that the momentary awkwardness of the company and the formal beginning of a new topic indicated that HE had been the subject of their previous conversation. In this idea he continued, through that vague spirit of opposition which attacks impulsive people in such circumstances, to generally disagree with them on all subjects, and to exaggerate what he chose to believe they thought objectionable in him. He did not remain long; but learned in that brief interval that Cherry had gone to visit a friend in Contra Costa, and would be absent a fortnight; and he was conscious that the information was conveyed to him with a peculiar significance.

The result of which was only to intensify his interest in the absent Cherry, and for a week to plunge him in a sea of conflicting doubts and resolutions. At one time he thought seriously of demanding an explanation from Mrs. Brooks, and of confiding to her--as he had intended to do to Cherry--his fears that his character had been misinterpreted, and his reasons for believing so. But here he was met by the difficulty of formulating what he wished to have explained, and some doubts as to whether his confidences were prudent. At another time he contemplated a serious imitation of Tappington's perfections, a renunciation of the world, and an entire change in his habits. He would go regularly to church--HER church, and take up Tappington's desolate Bible-class. But here the torturing doubt arose whether a young lady who betrayed a certain secular curiosity, and who had evidently depended upon her brother for a knowledge of the world, would entirely like it. At times he thought of giving up the room and abandoning for ever this doubly dangerous proximity; but here again he was deterred by the difficulty of giving a satisfactory reason to his employer, who had procured it as a favor. His passion--for such he began to fear it to be--led him once to the extravagance of asking a day's holiday from the bank, which he vaguely spent in the streets of Oakland in the hope of accidentally meeting the exiled Cherry.

III.

The fortnight slowly passed. She returned, but he did not see her. She was always out or engaged in her room with some female friend when Herbert was at home. This was singular, as she had never appeared to him as a young girl who was fond of visiting or had ever affected female friendships. In fact, there was little doubt now that, wittingly or unwittingly, she was avoiding him.

He was moodily sitting by the fire one evening, having returned early from dinner. In reply to his habitual but affectedly careless inquiry, Ellen had told him that Mrs. Brooks was confined to her room by a slight headache, and that Miss Brooks was out. He was trying to read, and listening to the wind that occasionally rattled the casement and caused the solitary gas-lamp that was visible in the side street to flicker and leap wildly. Suddenly he heard the same footfall upon his outer step and a light tap at the

door. Determined this time to solve the mystery, he sprang to his feet and ran to the door; but to his anger and astonishment it was locked and the key was gone. Yet he was positive that HE had not taken it out.

The tap was timidly repeated. In desperation he called out, "Please don't go away yet. The key is gone; but I'll find it in a moment." Nevertheless he was at his wits' end.

There was a hesitating pause and then the sound of a key cautiously thrust into the lock. It turned; the door opened, and a tall figure, whose face and form were completely hidden in a veil and long gray shawl, quickly glided into the room and closed the door behind it. Then it suddenly raised its arms, the shawl was parted, the veil fell aside, and Cherry stood before him!

Her face was quite pale. Her eyes, usually downcast, frightened, or coldly clear, were bright and beautiful with excitement. The dimples were faintly there, although the smile was sad and half hysterical. She remained standing, erect and tall, her arms dropped at her side, holding the veil and shawl that still depended from her shoulders.

"So--I've caught you!" she said, with a strange little laugh. "Oh yes. 'Please don't go away yet. I'll get the key in a moment,'" she continued, mimicking his recent utterance.

He could only stammer, "Miss Brooks--then it was YOU?"

"Yes; and you thought it was SHE, didn't you? Well, and you're caught! I didn't believe it; I wouldn't believe it when they said it. I determined to find it out myself. And I have; and it's true."

Unable to determine whether she was serious or jesting, and conscious only of his delight at seeing her again, he advanced impulsively. But her expression instantly changed: she became at once stiff and school-girlishly formal, and stepped back towards the door.

"Don't come near me, or I'll go," she said quickly, with her hand upon the lock.

"But not before you tell me what you mean," he said half laughingly half earnestly. "Who is SHE? and what wouldn't you have believed? For upon my honor, Miss Brooks, I don't know what you are talking about."

His evident frankness and truthful manner appeared to puzzle her. "You mean to say you were expecting no one?" she said sharply.

"I assure you I was not."

"And--and no woman was ever here--at that door?"

He hesitated. "Not to-night--not for a long time; not since you returned from Oakland."

"Then there WAS one?"

"I believe so."

"You BELIEVE--you don't KNOW?"

"I believed it was a woman from her voice; for the door was locked, and the key was downstairs. When I fetched it and opened the door, she--or whoever it was--was gone."

"And that's why you said so imploringly, just now, 'Please don't go away yet'? You see I've caught you. Ah! I don't wonder you blush!"

If he had, his cheeks had caught fire from her brilliant eyes and the extravagantly affected sternness--as of a school-girl monitor--in her animated face. Certainly he had never seen such a transformation.

"Yes; but, you see, I wanted to know who the intruder was," he said, smiling at his own embarrassment.

"You did--well, perhaps THAT will tell you? It was found under your door before I went away." She suddenly produced from her pocket a folded paper and handed it to him. It was a misspelt scrawl, and ran as follows:--

"Why are you so cruel? Why do you keep me dancing on the steps before them gurls at the windows? Was it that stuckup Saint, Miss Brooks, that you were afraid of, my deer? Oh, you faithless trater! Wait till I ketch you! I'll tear your eyes out and hern!"

It did not require great penetration for Herbert to be instantly convinced that the writer of this vulgar epistle and the owner of the unknown voice were two very different individuals. The note was evidently a trick. A suspicion of its perpetrators flashed upon him.

"Whoever the woman was, it was not she who wrote the note," he said positively. "Somebody must have seen her at the door. I remember now that those girls--your neighbors--were watching me from their window when I came out. Depend upon it, that letter comes from them."

Cherry's eyes opened widely with a sudden childlike perception, and then shyly dropped. "Yes," she said slowly; "they DID watch you. They know it, for it was they who made it the talk of the neighborhood, and that's how it came to mother's ears." She stopped, and, with a frightened look, stepped back towards the door again.

"Then THAT was why your mother"--

"Oh yes," interrupted Cherry quickly. "That was why I went over to Oakland, and why mother forbade my walking with you again, and why she had a talk with friends about your conduct, and why she came near telling Mr. Carstone all about it until I stopped her." She checked herself--he could hardly believe his eyes--the pale, nun-like girl was absolutely blushing.

"I thank you, Miss Brooks," he said gravely, "for your thoughtfulness, although I hope I could have still proven my innocence to Mr. Carstone, even if some unknown woman tried my door by mistake, and was seen doing it. But I am pained to think that YOU could have believed me capable of so wanton and absurd an impropriety--and such a gross disrespect to your mother's house."

"But," said Cherry with childlike naivete, "you know YOU don't think anything of such things, and that's what I told mother."

"You told your mother THAT?"

"Oh yes--I told her Tappington says it's quite common with young men. Please don't laugh--for it's very dreadful. Tappington didn't laugh when he told it to me as a warning. He was shocked."

"But, my dear Miss Brooks"--

"There--now you're angry--and that's as bad. Are you sure you didn't know that woman?"

"Positive!"

"Yet you seemed very anxious just now that she should wait till you opened the door."

"That was perfectly natural."

"I don't think it was natural at all."

"But--according to Tappington"--

"Because my brother is very good you need not make fun of him."

"I assure you I have no such intention. But what more can I say? I give you my word that I don't know who that unlucky woman was. No doubt she may have been some nearsighted neighbor who had mistaken the house, and I dare say was as thoroughly astonished at my voice as I was at hers. Can I say more? Is it necessary for me to swear that since I have been here no woman has ever entered that door--but"--

"But who?"

"Yourself."

"I know what you mean," she said hurriedly, with her old frightened look, gliding to the outer door. "It's shameful what I've done. But I only did it because--because I had faith in you, and didn't believe what they said was true." She had already turned the lock. There were tears in her pretty eyes.

"Stop," said Herbert gently. He walked slowly towards her, and within reach of her frightened figure stopped with the timid respect of a mature and genuine passion. "You must not be seen going out of that door," he said gravely. "You must let me go first, and, when I am gone, lock the door again and go through the hall to your own room. No one must know that I was in the house when you came in at that door. Good-night."

Without offering his hand he lifted his eyes to her face. The dimples were all there--and something else. He bowed and passed out.

Ten minutes later he ostentatiously returned to the house by the front door, and proceeded up the stairs to his own room. As he cast a glance around he saw that the music-stool had been moved before the fire, evidently with the view of attracting his attention. Lying upon it, carefully folded, was the veil that she had worn. There could be no doubt that it was left there purposely. With a smile at this strange girl's last characteristic act of timid but compromising recklessness, after all his precautions, he raised it tenderly to his lips, and then hastened to hide it from the reach of vulgar eyes. But had Cherry known that its temporary resting-place that night was under his pillow she might have doubted his superior caution.

When he returned from the bank the next afternoon, Cherry rapped ostentatiously at his door. "Mother wishes me to ask you," she began with a certain prim formality, which nevertheless did not preclude dimples, "if you would give us the pleasure of your company at our Church Festival to-night? There will be a concert and a collation. You could accompany us there if you cared. Our friends and Tappington's would be so glad to see you, and Dr. Stout would be delighted to make your acquaintance."

"Certainly!" said Herbert, delighted and yet astounded. "Then," he added in a lower voice, "your mother no longer believes me so dreadfully culpable?"

"Oh no," said Cherry in a hurried whisper, glancing up and down the passage; "I've been talking to her about it, and she is satisfied that it is all a jealous trick and slander of these neighbors. Why, I told her that they had even said that I was that mysterious woman; that I came that way to you because she had forbidden my seeing you openly."

"What! You dared say that?"

"Yes don't you see? Suppose they said they HAD seen me coming in last night--THAT answers it," she said triumphantly.

"Oh, it does?" he said vacantly.

"Perfectly. So you see she's convinced that she ought to put you on the same footing as Tappington, before everybody; and then there won't be any trouble. You'll come, won't you? It won't be so VERY good. And then, I've told mother that as there have been so many street-fights, and so much talk about the Vigilance Committee lately, I ought to have somebody for an escort when I am coming home. And if you're known, you see, as one of US, there'll be no harm in your meeting me."

"Thank you," he said, extending his hand gratefully.

Her fingers rested a moment in his. "Where did you put it?" she said demurely.

"It? Oh! IT'S all safe," he said quickly, but somewhat vaguely.

"But I don't call the upper drawer of your bureau safe," she returned poutingly, "where EVERYBODY can go. So you'll find it NOW inside the harmonium, on the keyboard."

"Oh, thank you."

"It's quite natural to have left it there ACCIDENTALLY--isn't it?" she said imploringly, assisted by all her dimples. Alas! she had forgotten that he was still holding her hand. Consequently, she had not time to snatch it away and vanish, with a stifled little cry, before it had been pressed two or three times to his lips. A little ashamed of his own boldness, Herbert remained for a few moments in the doorway listening, and looking uneasily down the dark passage. Presently a slight sound came over the fanlight of Cherry's room. Could he believe his ears? The saint-like Cherry--no doubt tutored, for example's sake, by the perfect Tappington--was softly whistling.

In this simple fashion the first pages of this little idyl were quietly turned. The book might have been closed or laid aside even then. But it so chanced that Cherry was an unconscious prophet; and presently it actually became a prudential necessity for her to have a masculine escort when she walked out. For a growing state of lawlessness and crime culminated one day the deep tocsin of the Vigilance Committee, and at its stroke fifty thousand peaceful men, reverting to the first principles of social safety, sprang to arms, assembled at their quarters, or patrolled the streets. In another hour the city of San Francisco was in the hands of a mob--the most peaceful, orderly, well organized, and temperate the world had ever known, and yet in conception as lawless, autocratic, and imperious as the conditions it opposed.

IV.

Herbert, enrolled in the same section with his employer and one or two fellow-clerks, had participated in the meetings of the committee with the light-heartedness and irresponsibility of youth, regretting only the loss of his usual walk with Cherry and the hours that kept him from her house. He was returning from a protracted meeting one night, when the number of arrests and searching for proscribed and suspected characters had been so large as to induce fears of organized resistance and rescue, and on reaching the foot of the hill found it already so late, that to avoid disturbing the family he resolved to enter his room directly by the door in the side street. On inserting his key in the lock it met with some resisting obstacle, which, however, yielded and apparently dropped on the mat inside. Opening the door and stepping into the perfectly dark apartment, he trod upon this object, which proved to be another key. The family must have procured it for their convenience during his absence, and after locking the door had carelessly left it in the lock. It was lucky that it had yielded so readily.

The fire had gone out. He closed the door and lit the gas, and after taking off his overcoat moved to the door leading into the

passage to listen if anybody was still stirring. To his utter astonishment he found it locked. What was more remarkable--the key was also INSIDE! An inexplicable feeling took possession of him. He glanced suddenly around the room, and then his eye fell upon the bed. Lying there, stretched at full length, was the recumbent figure of a man.

He was apparently in the profound sleep of utter exhaustion. The attitude of his limbs and the order of his dress--of which only his collar and cravat had been loosened--showed that sleep must have overtaken him almost instantly. In fact, the bed was scarcely disturbed beyond the actual impress of his figure. He seemed to be a handsome, matured man of about forty; his dark straight hair was a little thinned over the temples, although his long heavy moustache was still youthful and virgin. His clothes, which were elegantly cut and of finer material than that in ordinary use, the delicacy and neatness of his linen, the whiteness of his hands, and, more particularly, a certain dissipated pallor of complexion and lines of recklessness on the brow and cheek, indicated to Herbert that the man before him was one of that desperate and suspected class--some of whose proscribed members he had been hunting--the professional gambler!

Possibly the magnetism of Herbert's intent and astonished gaze affected him. He moved slightly, half opened his eyes, said "Halloo, Tap," rubbed them again, wholly opened them, fixed them with a lazy stare on Herbert, and said:

"Now, who the devil are you?"

"I think I have the right to ask that question, considering that this is my room," said Herbert sharply.

"YOUR room?"

"Yes!"

The stranger half raised himself on his elbow, glanced round the room, settled himself slowly back on the pillows, with his hands clasped lightly behind his head, dropped his eyelids, smiled, and said:

"Rats!"

"What?" demanded Herbert, with a resentful sense of sacrilege to Cherry's virgin slang.

"Well, old rats then! D'ye think I don't know this shebang? Look here, Johnny, what are you putting on all this side for, eh? What's your little game? Where's Tappington?"

"If you mean Mr. Brooks, the son of this house, who formerly lived in this room," replied Herbert, with a formal precision intended to show a doubt of the stranger's knowledge of Tappington, "you ought to know that he has left town."

"Left town!" echoed the stranger, raising himself again. "Oh, I see! getting rather too warm for him here? Humph! I ought to have thought of that. Well, you know, he DID take mighty big risks,

anyway!" He was silent a moment, with his brows knit and a rather dangerous expression in his handsome face. "So some d--d hound gave him away--eh?"

"I hadn't the pleasure of knowing Mr. Brooks except by reputation, as the respected son of the lady upon whose house you have just intruded," said Herbert frigidly, yet with a creeping consciousness of some unpleasant revelation.

The stranger stared at him for a moment, again looked carefully round the room, and then suddenly dropped his head back on the pillow, and with his white hands over his eyes and mouth tried to restrain a spasm of silent laughter. After an effort he succeeded, wiped his moist eyes, and sat up.

"So you didn't know Tappington, eh?" he said, lazily buttoning his collar.

"No."

"No more do I."

He retied his cravat, yawned, rose, shook himself perfectly neat again, and going to Herbert's dressing-table quietly took up a brush and began to lightly brush himself, occasionally turning to the window to glance out. Presently he turned to Herbert and said:

"Well, Johnny, what's your name?"

"I am Herbert Bly, of Carstone's Bank."

"So, and a member of this same Vigilance Committee, I reckon," he continued.

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Bly, I owe you an apology for coming here, and some thanks for the only sleep I've had in forty-eight hours. I struck this old shebang at about ten o'clock, and it's now two, so I reckon I've put in about four hours' square sleep. Now, look here." He beckoned Herbert towards the window. "Do you see those three men standing under that gaslight? Well, they're part of a gang of Vigilantes who've hunted me to the hill, and are waiting to see me come out of the bushes, where they reckon I'm hiding. Go to them and say that I'm here! Tell them you've got Gentleman George--George Dornton, the man they've been hunting for a week--in this room. I promise you I won't stir, nor kick up a row, when they've come. Do it, and Carstone, if he's a square man, will raise your salary for it, and promote you." He yawned slightly, and then slowly looking around him, drew the easy-chair towards him and dropped comfortably in it, gazing at the astounded and motionless Herbert with a lazy smile.

"You're wondering what my little game is, Johnny, ain't you? Well, I'll tell you. What with being hunted from pillar to post, putting my old pards to no end of trouble, and then slipping up on it whenever I think I've got a sure thing like this,"--he cast an almost affectionate glance at the bed,--"I've come to the conclusion that it's played out, and I might as well hand in my

checks. It's only a question of my being RUN OUT of 'Frisco, or hiding until I can SLIP OUT myself; and I've reckoned I might as well give them the trouble and expense of transportation. And if I can put a good thing in your way in doing it--why, it will sort of make things square with you for the fuss I've given you."

Even in the stupefaction and helplessness of knowing that the man before him was the notorious duellist and gambler George Dornton, one of the first marked for deportation by the Vigilance Committee, Herbert recognized all he had heard of his invincible coolness, courage, and almost philosophic fatalism. For an instant his youthful imagination checked even his indignation. When he recovered himself, he said, with rising color and boyish vehemence:

"Whoever YOU may be, I am neither a police officer nor a spy. You have no right to insult me by supposing that I would profit by the mistake that made you my guest, or that I would refuse you the sanctuary of the roof that covers your insult as well as your blunder."

The stranger gazed at him with an amused expression, and then rose and stretched out his hand.

"Shake, Mr. Bly! You're the only man that ever kicked George Dornton when he deserved it. Good-night!" He took his hat and walked to the door.

"Stop!" said Herbert impulsively; "the night is already far gone; go back and finish your sleep."

"You mean it?"

"I do."

The stranger turned, walked back to the bed, unfastening his coat and collar as he did so, and laid himself down in the attitude of a moment before.

"I will call you in the morning," continued Herbert. "By that time,"--he hesitated,--"by that time your pursuers may have given up their search. One word more. You will be frank with me?"

"Go on."

"Tappington and you are--friends?"

"Well--yes."

"His mother and sister know nothing of this?"

"I reckon he didn't boast of it. I didn't. Is that all?" sleepily.

"Yes."

"Don't YOU worry about HIM. Good-night."

"Good-night."

But even at that moment George Dornton had dropped off in a quiet, peaceful sleep.

Bly turned down the light, and, drawing his easy-chair to the window, dropped into it in bewildering reflection. This then was the secret--unknown to mother and daughter--unsuspected by all! This was the double life of Tappington, half revealed in his flirtation with the neighbors, in the hidden cards behind the books, in the mysterious visitor--still unaccounted for--and now wholly exploded by this sleeping confederate, for whom, somehow, Herbert felt the greatest sympathy! What was to be done? What should he say to Cherry--to her mother--to Mr. Carstone? Yet he had felt he had done right. From time to time he turned to the motionless recumbent shadow on the bed and listened to its slow and peaceful respiration. Apart from that undefinable attraction which all original natures have for each other, the thrice-blessed mystery of protection of the helpless, for the first time in his life, seemed to dawn upon him through that night.

Nevertheless, the actual dawn came slowly. Twice he nodded and awoke quickly with a start. The third time it was day. The street-lamps were extinguished, and with them the moving, restless watchers seemed also to have vanished. Suddenly a formal deliberate rapping at the door leading to the hall startled him to his feet.

It must be Ellen. So much the better; he could quickly get rid of her. He glanced at the bed; Dornton slept on undisturbed. He unlocked the door cautiously, and instinctively fell back before the erect, shawled, and decorous figure of Mrs. Brooks. But an utterly new resolution and excitement had supplanted the habitual resignation of her handsome features, and given them an angry sparkle of expression.

Recollecting himself, he instantly stepped forward into the passage, drawing to the door behind him, as she, with equal celerity, opposed it with her hand.

"Mr. Bly," she said deliberately, "Ellen has just told me that your voice has been heard in conversation with some one in this room late last night. Up to this moment I have foolishly allowed my daughter to persuade me that certain infamous scandals regarding your conduct here were false. I must ask you as a gentleman to let me pass now and satisfy myself."

"But, my dear madam, one moment. Let me first explain--I beg"--stammered Herbert with a half-hysterical laugh. "I assure you a gentleman friend"--

But she had pushed him aside and entered precipitately. With a quick feminine glance round the room she turned to the bed, and then halted in overwhelming confusion.

"It's a friend," said Herbert in a hasty whisper. "A friend of mine who returned with me late, and whom, on account of the disturbed state of the streets, I induced to stay here all night. He was so tired that I have not had the heart to disturb him yet."

"Oh, pray don't!--I beg"--said Mrs. Brooks with a certain youthful

vivacity, but still gazing at the stranger's handsome features as she slowly retreated. "Not for worlds!"

Herbert was relieved; she was actually blushing.

"You see, it was quite unpremeditated, I assure you. We came in together," whispered Herbert, leading her to the door, "and I"--

"Don't believe a word of it, madam," said a lazy voice from the bed, as the stranger leisurely raised himself upright, putting the last finishing touch to his cravat as he shook himself neat again. "I'm an utter stranger to him, and he knows it. He found me here, biding from the Vigilantes, who were chasing me on the hill. I got in at that door, which happened to be unlocked. He let me stay because he was a gentleman--and--I wasn't. I beg your pardon, madam, for having interrupted him before you; but it was a little rough to have him lie on MY account when he wasn't the kind of man to lie on his OWN. You'll forgive him--won't you, please?--and, as I'm taking myself off now, perhaps you'll overlook MY intrusion too."

It was impossible to convey the lazy frankness of this speech, the charming smile with which it was accompanied, or the easy yet deferential manner with which, taking up his hat, he bowed to Mrs. Brooks as he advanced toward the door.

"But," said Mrs. Brooks, hurriedly glancing from Herbert to the stranger, "it must be the Vigilantes who are now hanging about the street. Ellen saw them from her window, and thought they were YOUR friends, Mr. Bly. This gentleman--your friend"--she had become a little confused in her novel excitement--"really ought not to go out now. It would be madness."

"If you wouldn't mind his remaining a little longer, it certainly would be safer," said Herbert, with wondering gratitude.

"I certainly shouldn't consent to his leaving my house now," said Mrs. Brooks with dignity; "and if you wouldn't mind calling Cherry here, Mr. Bly--she's in the dining-room--and then showing yourself for a moment in the street and finding out what they wanted, it would be the best thing to do."

Herbert flew downstairs; in a few hurried words he gave the same explanation to the astounded Cherry that he had given to her mother, with the mischievous addition that Mrs. Brooks's unjust suspicions had precipitated her into becoming an amicable accomplice, and then ran out into the street. Here he ascertained from one of the Vigilantes, whom he knew, that they were really seeking Dornton; but that, concluding that the fugitive had already escaped to the wharves, they expected to withdraw their surveillance at noon. Somewhat relieved, he hastened back, to find the stranger calmly seated on the sofa in the parlor with the same air of frank indifference, lazily relating the incidents of his flight to the two women, who were listening with every expression of sympathy and interest. "Poor fellow!" said Cherry, taking the astonished Bly aside into the hall, "I don't believe he's half as bad as THEY said he is--or as even HE makes himself out to be. But DID you notice mother?"

Herbert, a little dazed, and, it must be confessed, a trifle uneasy at this ready acceptance of the stranger, abstractedly said he had not.

"Why, it's the most ridiculous thing. She's actually going round WITHOUT HER SHAWL, and doesn't seem to know it."

V.

When Herbert finally reached the bank that morning he was still in a state of doubt and perplexity. He had parted with his grateful visitor, whose safety in a few hours seemed assured, but without the least further revelation or actual allusion to anything antecedent to his selecting Tappington's room as refuge. More than that, Herbert was convinced from his manner that he had no intention of making a confidant of Mrs. Brooks, and this convinced him that Dornton's previous relations with Tappington were not only utterly inconsistent with that young man's decorous reputation, but were unsuspected by the family. The stranger's familiar knowledge of the room, his mysterious allusions to the "risks" Tappington had taken, and his sudden silence on the discovery of Bly's ignorance of the whole affair all pointed to some secret that, innocent or not, was more or less perilous, not only to the son but to the mother and sister. Of the latter's ignorance he had no doubt--but had he any right to enlighten them? Admitting that Tappington had deceived them with the others, would they thank him for opening their eyes to it? If they had already a suspicion, would they care to know that it was shared by him? Halting between his frankness and his delicacy, the final thought that in his budding relations with the daughter it might seem a cruel bid for her confidence, or a revenge for their distrust of him, inclined him to silence. But an unforeseen occurrence took the matter from his hands. At noon he was told that Mr. Carstone wished to see him in his private room!

Satisfied that his complicity with Dornton's escape was discovered, the unfortunate Herbert presented himself, pale but self-possessed, before his employer. That brief man of business bade him be seated, and standing himself before the fireplace, looked down curiously, but not unkindly, upon his employee.

"Mr. Bly, the bank does not usually interfere with the private affairs of its employees, but for certain reasons which I prefer to explain to you later, I must ask you to give me a straightforward answer to one or two questions. I may say that they have nothing to do with your relations to the bank, which are to us perfectly satisfactory."

More than ever convinced that Mr. Carstone was about to speak of his visitor, Herbert signified his willingness to reply.

"You have been seen a great deal with Miss Brooks lately--on the street and elsewhere--acting as her escort, and evidently on terms of intimacy. To do you both justice, neither of you seemed to have made it a secret or avoided observation; but I must ask you directly if it is with her mother's permission?"

Considerably relieved, but wondering what was coming, Herbert answered, with boyish frankness, that it was.

"Are you--engaged to the young lady?"

"No, sir."

"Are you--well, Mr. Bly--briefly, are you what is called 'in love' with her?" asked the banker, with a certain brusque hurrying over of a sentiment evidently incompatible with their present business surroundings.

Herbert blushed. It was the first time he had heard the question voiced, even by himself.

"I am," he said resolutely.

"And you wish to marry her?"

"If I dared ask her to accept a young man with no position as yet," stammered Herbert.

"People don't usually consider a young man in Carstone's Bank of no position," said the banker dryly; "and I wish for your sake THAT were the only impediment. For I am compelled to reveal to you a secret." He paused, and folding his arms, looked fixedly down upon his clerk. "Mr. Bly, Tappington Brooks, the brother of your sweetheart, was a defaulter and embezzler from this bank!"

Herbert sat dumfounded and motionless.

"Understand two things," continued Mr. Carstone quickly. "First, that no purer or better women exist than Miss Brooks and her mother. Secondly, that they know nothing of this, and that only myself and one other man are in possession of the secret."

He slightly changed his position, and went on more deliberately. "Six weeks ago Tappington sat in that chair where you are sitting now, a convicted hypocrite and thief. Luckily for him, although his guilt was plain, and the whole secret of his double life revealed to me, a sum of money advanced in pity by one of his gambling confederates had made his accounts good and saved him from suspicion in the eyes of his fellow-clerks and my partners. At first he tried to fight me on that point; then he blustered and said his mother could have refunded the money; and asked me what was a paltry five thousand dollars! I told him, Mr. Bly, that it might be five years of his youth in state prison; that it might be five years of sorrow and shame for his mother and sister; that it might be an everlasting stain on the name of his dead father--my friend. He talked of killing himself: I told him he was a cowardly fool. He asked me to give him up to the authorities: I told him I intended to take the law in my own hands and give him another chance; and then he broke down. I transferred him that very day, without giving him time to communicate with anybody, to our branch office at Portland, with a letter explaining his position to our agent, and the injunction that for six months he should be under strict surveillance. I myself undertook to explain his sudden departure to Mrs. Brooks, and obliged him to write to her from time to time." He paused, and then continued: "So far I believe my plan

has been successful: the secret has been kept; he has broken with the evil associates that ruined him here--to the best of my knowledge he has had no communication with them since; even a certain woman here who shared his vicious hidden life has abandoned him."

"Are you sure?" asked Herbert involuntarily, as he recalled his mysterious visitor.

"I believe the Vigilance Committee has considered it a public duty to deport her and her confederates beyond the State," returned Carstone dryly.

Another idea flashed upon Herbert. "And the gambler who advanced the money to save Tappington?" he said breathlessly.

"Wasn't such a hound as the rest of his kind, if report says true," answered Carstone. "He was well known here as George Dornton-- Gentleman George--a man capable of better things. But he was before your time, Mr. Bly--YOU don't know him."

Herbert didn't deem it a felicitous moment to correct his employer, and Mr. Carstone continued: "I have now told you what I thought it was my duty to tell you. I must leave YOU to judge how far it affects your relations with Miss Brooks."

Herbert did not hesitate. "I should be very sorry, sir, to seem to undervalue your consideration or disregard your warning; but I am afraid that even if you had been less merciful to Tappington, and he were now a convicted felon, I should change neither my feelings nor my intentions to his sister."

"And you would still marry her?" said Carstone sternly; "YOU, an employee of the bank, would set the example of allying yourself with one who had robbed it?"

"I--am afraid I would, sir," said Herbert slowly.

"Even if it were a question of your remaining here?" said Carstone grimly.

Poor Herbert already saw himself dismissed and again taking up his weary quest for employment; but, nevertheless, he answered stoutly:

"Yes, sir."

"And nothing will prevent you marrying Miss Brooks?"

"Nothing--save my inability to support her."

"Then," said Mr. Carstone, with a peculiar light in his eyes, "it only remains for the bank to mark its opinion of your conduct by INCREASING YOUR SALARY TO ENABLE YOU TO DO SO! Shake hands, Mr. Bly," he said, laughing. "I think you'll do to tie to--and I believe the young lady will be of the same opinion. But not a word to either her or her mother in regard to what you have heard. And now I may tell you something more. I am not without hope of Tappington's future, nor--d--n it!--without some excuse for his fault, sir. He was artificially brought up. When my old friend

died, Mrs. Brooks, still a handsome woman, like all her sex wouldn't rest until she had another devotion, and wrapped herself and her children up in the Church. Theology may be all right for grown people, but it's apt to make children artificial; and Tappington was pious before he was fairly good. He drew on a religious credit before he had a moral capital behind it. He was brought up with no knowledge of the world, and when he went into it--it captured him. I don't say there are not saints born into the world occasionally; but for every one you'll find a lot of promiscuous human nature. My old friend Josh Brooks had a heap of it, and it wouldn't be strange if some was left in his children, and burst through their straight-lacing in a queer way. That's all! Good-morning, Mr. Bly. Forget what I've told you for six months, and then I shouldn't wonder if Tappington was on hand to give his sister away.

Mr. Carstone's prophecy was but half realized. At the end of six months Herbert Bly's discretion and devotion were duly rewarded by Cherry's hand. But Tappington did NOT give her away. That saintly prodigal passed his period of probation with exemplary rectitude, but, either from a dread of old temptation, or some unexplained reason, he preferred to remain in Portland, and his fastidious nest on Telegraph Hill knew him no more. The key of the little door on the side street passed, naturally, into the keeping of Mrs. Bly.

Whether the secret of Tappington's double life was ever revealed to the two women is not known to the chronicler. Mrs. Bly is reported to have said that the climate of Oregon was more suited to her brother's delicate constitution than the damp fogs of San Francisco, and that his tastes were always opposed to the mere frivolity of metropolitan society. The only possible reason for supposing that the mother may have become cognizant of her son's youthful errors was in the occasional visits to the house of the handsome George Dornton, who, in the social revolution that followed the brief reign of the Vigilance Committee, characteristically returned as a dashing stockbroker, and the fact that Mrs. Brooks seemed to have discarded her ascetic shawl forever. But as all this was contemporaneous with the absurd rumor, that owing to the loneliness induced by the marriage of her daughter she contemplated a similar change in her own condition, it is deemed unworthy the serious consideration of this veracious chronicle.

CAPTAIN JIM'S FRIEND.

I.

Hardly one of us, I think, really believed in the auriferous probabilities of Eureka Gulch. Following a little stream, we had one day drifted into it, very much as we imagined the river gold might have done in remoter ages, with the difference that WE remained there, while the river gold to all appearances had not. At first it was tacitly agreed to ignore this fact, and we made the

most of the charming locality, with its rare watercourse that lost itself in tangled depths of manzanita and alder, its laurel-choked pass, its flower-strewn hillside, and its summit crested with rocking pines.

"You see," said the optimistic Rowley, water's the main thing after all. If we happen to strike river gold, thar's the stream for washing it; if we happen to drop into quartz--and that thar rock looks mighty likely--thar ain't a more natural-born site for a mill than that right bank, with water enough to run fifty stamps. That hillside is an original dump for your tailings, and a ready found inclined road for your trucks, fresh from the hands of Providence; and that road we're kalkilatin' to build to the turnpike will run just easy along that ridge."

Later, when we were forced to accept the fact that finding gold was really the primary object of a gold-mining company, we still remained there, excusing our youthful laziness and incertitude by brilliant and effective sarcasms upon the unremunerative attractions of the gulch. Nevertheless, when Captain Jim, returning one day from the nearest settlement and post-office, twenty miles away, burst upon us with "Well, the hull thing'll be settled now, boys; Lacy Bassett is coming down yer to look round," we felt considerably relieved.

And yet, perhaps, we had as little reason for it as we had for remaining there. There was no warrant for any belief in the special divining power of the unknown Lacy Bassett, except Captain Jim's extravagant faith in his general superiority, and even that had always been a source of amused skepticism to the camp. We were already impatiently familiar with the opinions of this unseen oracle; he was always impending in Captain Jim's speech as a fragrant memory or an unquestioned authority. When Captain Jim began, "Ez Lacy was one day tellin' me," or, "Ez Lacy Bassett allows," or more formally, when strangers were present, "Ez a partickler friend o' mine, Lacy Bassett--maybe ez you know him--sez," the youthful and lighter members of the Eureka Mining Company glanced at each other in furtive enjoyment. Nevertheless no one looked more eagerly forward to the arrival of this apocryphal sage than these indolent skeptics. It was at least an excitement; they were equally ready to accept his condemnation of the locality or his justification of their original selection.

He came. He was received by the Eureka Mining Company lying on their backs on the grassy site of the prospective quartz mill, not far from the equally hypothetical "slide" to the gulch. He came by the future stage road--at present a thickset jungle of scrub-oaks and ferns. He was accompanied by Captain Jim, who had gone to meet him on the trail, and for a few moments all critical inspection of himself was withheld by the extraordinary effect he seemed to have upon the faculties of his introducer.

Anything like the absolute prepossession of Captain Jim by this stranger we had never imagined. He approached us running a little ahead of his guest, and now and then returning assuringly to his side with the expression of a devoted Newfoundland dog, which in fluffiness he generally resembled. And now, even after the introduction was over, when he made a point of standing aside in an affectation of carelessness, with his hands in his pockets, the

simulation was so apparent, and his consciousness and absorption in his friend so obvious, that it was a relief to us to recall him into the conversation.

As to our own first impressions of the stranger, they were probably correct. We all disliked him; we thought him conceited, self-opinionated, selfish, and untrustworthy. But later, reflecting that this was possibly the result of Captain Jim's over-praise, and finding none of these qualities as yet offensively opposed to our own selfishness and conceit, we were induced, like many others, to forget our first impressions. We could easily correct him if he attempted to impose upon US, as he evidently had upon Captain Jim. Believing, after the fashion of most humanity, that there was something about US particularly awe-inspiring and edifying to vice or weakness of any kind, we good-humoredly yielded to the cheap fascination of this showy, self-saturated, over-dressed, and underbred stranger. Even the epithet of "blower" as applied to him by Rowley had its mitigations; in that Trajan community a bully was not necessarily a coward, nor florid demonstration always a weakness.

His condemnation of the gulch was sweeping, original, and striking. He laughed to scorn our half-hearted theory of a gold deposit in the bed and bars of our favorite stream. We were not to look for auriferous alluvium in the bed of any present existing stream, but in the "cement" or dried-up bed of the original prehistoric rivers that formerly ran parallel with the present bed, and which--he demonstrated with the stem of Pickney's pipe in the red dust--could be found by sinking shafts at right angles with the stream. The theory was to us, at that time, novel and attractive. It was true that the scientific explanation, although full and gratuitous, sounded vague and incoherent. It was true that the geological terms were not always correct, and their pronunciation defective, but we accepted such extraordinary discoveries as "ignus fatuus rock," "splendiferous drift," "mica twist" (recalling a popular species of tobacco), "iron pirates," and "discomposed quartz" as part of what he not inaptly called a "tautological formation," and were happy. Nor was our contentment marred by the fact that the well-known scientific authority with whom the stranger had been intimate,--to the point of "sleeping together" during a survey,--and whom he described as a bent old man with spectacles, must have aged considerably since one of our party saw him three years before as a keen young fellow of twenty-five. Inaccuracies like those were only the carelessness of genius. "That's my opinion, gentlemen," he concluded, negligently rising, and with pointed preoccupation whipping the dust of Eureka Gulch from his clothes with his handkerchief, "but of course it ain't nothin' to me."

Captain Jim, who had followed every word with deep and trustful absorption, here repeated, "It ain't nothing to him, boys," with a confidential implication of the gratuitous blessing we had received, and then added, with loyal encouragement to him, "It ain't nothing to you, Lacy, in course," and laid his hand on his shoulder with infinite tenderness.

We, however, endeavored to make it something to Mr. Lacy Bassett. He was spontaneously offered a share in the company and a part of Captain Jim's tent. He accepted both after a few deprecating and muttered asides to Captain Jim, which the latter afterwards

explained to us was the giving up of several other important enterprises for our sake. When he finally strolled away with Rowley to look over the gulch, Captain Jim reluctantly tore himself away from him only for the pleasure of reiterating his praise to us as if in strictest confidence and as an entirely novel proceeding.

"You see, boys, I didn't like to say it afore HIM, we bein' old friends; but, between us, that young feller ez worth thousands to the camp. Mebbe," he continued with grave naivete, "I ain't said much about him afore, mebbe, bein' old friends and accustomed to him--you know how it is, boys,--I haven't appreciated him as much ez I ought, and ez you do. In fact, I don't ezakly remember how I kem to ask him down yer. It came to me suddent, one day only a week ago Friday night, thar under that buckeye; I was thinkin' o' one of his sayins, and sez I--thar's Lacy, if he was here he'd set the hull thing right. It was the ghost of a chance my findin' him free, but I did. And there HE is, and yer WE are settled! Ye noticed how he just knocked the bottom outer our plans to work. Ye noticed that quick sort o' sneerin' smile o' his, didn't ye--that's Lacy! I've seen him knock over a heap o' things without sayin' anythin'--with jist that smile."

It occurred to us that we might have some difficulty in utilizing this smile in our present affairs, and that we should have probably preferred something more assuring, but Captain Jim's faith was contagious.

"What is he, anyway?" asked Joe Walker lazily.

"Eh!" echoed Captain Jim in astonishment. "What is Lacy Bassett?"

"Yes, what is he?" repeated Walker.

"Wot IS--he?"

"Yes."

"I've knowed him now goin' as four year," said Captain Jim with slow reflective contentment. "Let's see. It was in the fall o' '54 I first met him, and he's allus been the same ez you see him now."

"But what is his business or profession? What does he do?"

Captain Jim looked reproachfully at his questioner.

"Do?" he repeated, turning to the rest of us as if disdainng a direct reply. "Do?--why, wot he's doin' now. He's allus the same, allus Lacy Bassett."

Howbeit, we went to work the next day under the superintendence of the stranger with youthful and enthusiastic energy, and began the sinking of a shaft at once. To do Captain Jim's friend justice, for the first few weeks he did not shirk a fair share of the actual labor, replacing his objectionable and unsuitable finery with a suit of serviceable working clothes got together by general contribution of the camp, and assuring us of a fact we afterwards had cause to remember, that "he brought nothing but himself into Eureka Gulch." It may be added that he certainly had not brought

money there, as Captain Jim advanced the small amounts necessary for his purchases in the distant settlement, and for the still smaller sums he lost at cards, which he played with characteristic self-sufficiency.

Meantime the work in the shaft progressed slowly but regularly. Even when the novelty had worn off and the excitement of anticipation grew fainter, I am afraid that we clung to this new form of occupation as an apology for remaining there; for the fascinations of our vagabond and unconventional life were more potent than we dreamed of. We were slowly fettered by our very freedom; there was a strange spell in this very boundlessness of our license that kept us from even the desire of change; in the wild and lawless arms of nature herself we found an embrace as clinging, as hopeless and restraining, as the civilization from which we had fled. We were quite content after a few hours' work in the shaft to lie on our backs on the hillside staring at the unwinking sky, or to wander with a gun through the virgin forest in search of game scarcely less vagabond than ourselves. We indulged in the most extravagant and dreamy speculations of the fortune we should eventually discover in the shaft, and believed that we were practical. We broke our "saleratus bread" with appetites unimpaired by restlessness or anxiety; we went to sleep under the grave and sedate stars with a serene consciousness of having fairly earned our rest; we awoke the next morning with unabated trustfulness, and a sweet obliviousness of even the hypothetical fortunes we had perhaps won or lost at cards overnight. We paid no heed to the fact that our little capital was slowly sinking with the shaft, and that the rainy season--wherein not only "no man could work," but even such play as ours was impossible--was momentarily impending.

In the midst of this, one day Lacy Bassett suddenly emerged from the shaft before his "shift" of labor was over with every sign of disgust and rage in his face and inarticulate with apparent passion. In vain we gathered round him in concern; in vain Captain Jim regarded him with almost feminine sympathy, as he flung away his pick and dashed his hat to the ground.

"What's up, Lacy, old pard? What's gone o' you?" said Captain Jim tenderly.

"Look!" gasped Lacy at last, when every eye was on him, holding up a small fragment of rock before us and the next moment grinding it under his heel in rage. "Look! To think that I've been fooled agin by this blanked fossiliferous trap--blank it! To think that after me and Professor Parker was once caught jist in this way up on the Stanislaus at the bottom of a hundred-foot shaft by this rotten trap--that yer I am--bluffed agin!"

There was a dead silence; we looked at each other blankly.

"But, Bassett," said Walker, picking up a part of the fragment, "we've been finding this kind of stuff for the last two weeks."

"But how?" returned Lacy, turning upon him almost fiercely. "Did ye find it superposed on quartz, or did you find it NOT superposed on quartz? Did you find it in volcanic drift, or did ye find it in old red-sandstone or coarse illuvion? Tell me that, and then ye

kin talk. But this yer blank fossiliferous trap, instead o' being superposed on top, is superposed on the bottom. And that means"--

"What?" we all asked eagerly.

"Why--blank it all--that this yer convulsion of nature, this prehistoric volcanic earthquake, instead of acting laterally and chuckin' the stream to one side, has been revolutionary and turned the old river-bed bottom-side up, and yer d--d cement hez got half the globe atop of it! Ye might strike it from China, but nowhere else."

We continued to look at one another, the older members with darkening faces, the younger with a strong inclination to laugh. Captain Jim, who had been concerned only in his friend's emotion, and who was hanging with undisguised satisfaction on these final convincing proofs of his superior geological knowledge, murmured approvingly and confidingly, "He's right, boys! Thar ain't another man livin' ez could give you the law and gospil like that! Ye can tie to what he says. That's Lacy all over."

Two weeks passed. We had gathered, damp and disconsolate, in the only available shelter of the camp. For the long summer had ended unexpectedly to us; we had one day found ourselves caught like the improvident insect of the child's fable with gauzy and unseasonable wings wet and bedraggled in the first rains, homeless and hopeless. The scientific Lacy, who lately spent most of his time as a bar-room oracle in the settlement, was away, and from our dripping canvas we could see Captain Jim returning from a visit to him, slowly plodding along the trail towards us.

"It's no use, boys," said Rowley, summarizing the result of our conference, "we must speak out to him, and if nobody else cares to do it I will. I don't know why we should be more mealy-mouthed than they are at the settlement. They don't hesitate to call Bassett a dead-beat, whatever Captain Jim says to the contrary."

The unfortunate Captain Jim had halted irresolutely before the gloomy faces in the shelter. Whether he felt instinctively some forewarning of what was coming I cannot say. There was a certain dog-like consciousness in his eye and a half-backward glance over his shoulder as if he were not quite certain that Lacy was not following. The rain had somewhat subdued his characteristic fluffiness, and he cowered with a kind of sleek storm-beaten despondency over the smoking fire of green wood before our tent.

Nevertheless, Rowley opened upon him with a directness and decision that astonished us. He pointed out briefly that Lacy Bassett had been known to us only through Captain Jim's introduction. That he had been originally invited there on Captain Jim's own account, and that his later connection with the company had been wholly the result of Captain Jim's statements. That, far from being any aid or assistance to them, Bassett had beguiled them by apocryphal knowledge and sham scientific theories into an expensive and gigantic piece of folly. That, in addition to this, they had just discovered that he had also been using the credit of the company for his own individual expenses at the settlement while they were working on his d--d fool shaft--all of which had brought them to the verge of bankruptcy. That, as a result, they were forced now

to demand his resignation--not only on their general account, but for Captain Jim's sake--believing firmly, as they did, that he had been as grossly deceived in his friendship for Lacy Bassett as THEY were in their business relations with him.

Instead of being mollified by this, Captain Jim, to our greater astonishment, suddenly turned upon the speaker, bristling with his old canine suggestion.

"There! I said so! Go on! I'd have sworn to it afore you opened your lips. I knowed it the day you sneaked around and wanted to know wot his business was! I said to myself, Cap, look out for that sneakin' hound Rowley, he's no friend o' Lacy's. And the day Lacy so far demeaned himself as to give ye that splendid explanation o' things, I watched ye; ye didn't think it, but I watched ye. Ye can't fool me! I saw ye lookin' at Walker there, and I said to myself, Wot's the use, Lacy, wot's the use o' your slingin' them words to such as THEM? Wot do THEY know? It's just their pure jealousy and ignorance. Ef you'd come down yer, and lazed around with us and fallen into our common ways, you'd ha' been ez good a man ez the next. But no, it ain't your style, Lacy, you're accustomed to high-toned men like Professor Parker, and you can't help showing it. No wonder you took to avoidin' us; no wonder I've had to foller you over the Burnt Wood Crossin' time and again, to get to see ye. I see it all now: ye can't stand the kempany I brought ye to! Ye had to wipe the slum gullion of Eureka Gulch off your hands, Lacy"-- He stopped, gasped for breath, and then lifted his voice more savagely, "And now, what's this? Wot's this hogwash? this yer lyin' slander about his gettin' things on the kempany's credit? Eh, speak up, some of ye!"

We were so utterly shocked and stupefied at the degradation of this sudden and unexpected outburst from a man usually so honorable, gentle, self-sacrificing, and forgiving, that we forgot the cause of it and could only stare at each other. What was this cheap stranger, with his shallow swindling tricks, to the ignoble change he had worked upon the man before us. Rowley and Walker, both fearless fighters and quick to resent an insult, only averted their saddened faces and turned aside without a word.

"Ye dussen't say it! Well, hark to me then," he continued with white and feverish lips. "I put him up to helpin' himself. I told him to use the kempany's name for credit. Ye kin put that down to ME. And when ye talk of HIS resigning, I want ye to understand that I resign outer this rotten kempany and TAKE HIM WITH ME! Ef all the gold yer lookin' for was piled up in that shaft from its bottom in hell to its top in the gulch, it ain't enough to keep me here away from him! Ye kin take all my share--all MY rights yer above ground and below it--all I carry,"--he threw his buckskin purse and revolver on the ground,--"and pay yourselves what you reckon you've lost through HIM. But you and me is quits from to-day."

He strode away before a restraining voice or hand could reach him. His dripping figure seemed to melt into the rain beneath the thickening shadows of the pines, and the next moment he was gone. From that day forward Eureka Gulch knew him no more. And the camp itself somehow melted away during the rainy season, even as he had done.

II.

Three years had passed. The pioneer stage-coach was sweeping down the long descent to the pastoral valley of Gilead, and I was looking towards the village with some pardonable interest and anxiety. For I carried in my pocket my letters of promotion from the box seat of the coach--where I had performed the functions of treasure messenger for the Excelsior Express Company--to the resident agency of that company in the bucolic hamlet before me. The few dusty right-angled streets, with their rigid and staringly new shops and dwellings, the stern formality of one or two obelisk-like meeting-house spires, the illimitable outlying plains of wheat and wild oats beyond, with their monotony scarcely broken by skeleton stockades, corrals, and barrack-looking farm buildings, were all certainly unlike the unkempt freedom of the mountain fastnesses in which I had lately lived and moved. Yuba Bill, the driver, whose usual expression of humorous discontent deepened into scorn as he gathered up his reins as if to charge the village and recklessly sweep it from his path, indicated a huge, rambling, obtrusively glazed, and capital-lettered building with a contemptuous flick of his whip as we passed. "Ef you're kalkilatin' we'll get our partin' drink there you're mistaken. That's wot they call a TEMPERANCE HOUSE--wot means a place where the lickie ye get underhand is only a trifle worse than the hash ye get above-board. I suppose it's part o' one o' the mysteries o' Providence that whenever you find a dusty hole like this--that's naturally THIRSTY--ye run agin a 'temperance' house. But never YOU mind! I shouldn't wonder if thar was a demijohn o' whiskey in the closet of your back office, kept thar by the feller you're relievin'--who was a white man and knew the ropes."

A few minutes later, when my brief installation was over, we DID find the demijohn in the place indicated. As Yuba Bill wiped his mouth with the back of his heavy buckskin glove, he turned to me not unkindly. "I don't like to set ye agin Gile-ad, which is a scrip-too-rural place, and a God-fearin' place, and a nice dry place, and a place ez I've heard tell whar they grow beans and pertatoes and garden sass; but afore three weeks is over, old pard, you'll be howlin' to get back on that box seat with me, whar you uster sit, and be ready to take your chances agin, like a little man, to get drilled through with buckshot from road agents. You hear me! I'll give you three weeks, sonny, just three weeks, to get your butes full o' hayseed and straws in yer har; and I'll find ye wadin' the North Fork at high water to get out o' this." He shook my hand with grim tenderness, removing his glove--a rare favor--to give me the pressure of his large, soft, protecting palm, and strode away. The next moment he was shaking the white dust of Gilead from his scornful chariot-wheels.

In the hope of familiarizing myself with the local interests of the community, I took up a copy of the "Gilead Guardian" which lay on my desk, forgetting for the moment the usual custom of the country press to displace local news for long editorials on foreign subjects and national politics. I found, to my disappointment, that the "Guardian" exhibited more than the usual dearth of domestic intelligence, although it was singularly oracular on "The

State of Europe," and "Jeffersonian Democracy." A certain cheap assurance, a copy-book dogmatism, a colloquial familiarity, even in the impersonal plural, and a series of inaccuracies and blunders here and there, struck some old chord in my memory. I was mutely wondering where and when I had become personally familiar with rhetoric like that, when the door of the office opened and a man entered. I was surprised to recognize Captain Jim.

I had not seen him since he had indignantly left us, three years before, in Eureka Gulch. The circumstances of his defection were certainly not conducive to any voluntary renewal of friendship on either side; and although, even as a former member of the Eureka Mining Company, I was not conscious of retaining any sense of injury, yet the whole occurrence flashed back upon me with awkward distinctness. To my relief, however, he greeted me with his old cordiality; to my amusement he added to it a suggestion of the large forgiveness of conscious rectitude and amiable toleration. I thought, however, I detected, as he glanced at the paper which was still in my hand and then back again at my face, the same uneasy canine resemblance I remembered of old. He had changed but little in appearance; perhaps he was a trifle stouter, more mature, and slower in his movements. If I may return to my canine illustration, his grayer, dustier, and more wiry ensemble gave me the impression that certain pastoral and agricultural conditions had varied his type, and he looked more like a shepherd's dog in whose brown eyes there was an abiding consciousness of the care of straying sheep, and possibly of one black one in particular.

He had, he told me, abandoned mining and taken up farming on a rather large scale. He had prospered. He had other interests at stake, "A flour-mill with some improvements--and--and"--here his eyes wandered to the "Guardian" again, and he asked me somewhat abruptly what I thought of the paper. Something impelled me to restrain my previous fuller criticism, and I contented myself by saying briefly that I thought it rather ambitious for the locality. "That's the word," he said with a look of gratified relief, "'ambitious'--you've just hit it. And what's the matter with that? Ye kan't expect a high-toned man to write down to the level of every karpin' hound, ken ye now? That's what he says to me"-- He stopped half confused, and then added abruptly: "That's one o' my investments."

"Why, Captain Jim, I never suspected that you"--

"Oh, I don't WRITE it," he interrupted hastily. "I only furnish the money and the advertising, and run it gin'rally, you know; and I'm responsible for it. And I select the eddyter--and"--he continued, with a return of the same uneasy wistful look--"thar's suthin' in thet, you know, eh?"

I was beginning to be perplexed. The memory evoked by the style of the editorial writing and the presence of Captain Jim was assuming a suspicious relationship to each other. "And who's your editor?" I asked.

"Oh, he's--he's--er--Lacy Bassett," he replied, blinking his eyes with a hopeless assumption of carelessness. "Let's see! Oh yes! You knowed Lacy down there at Eureka. I disremembered it till now. Yes, sir!" he repeated suddenly and almost rudely, as if to

preclude any adverse criticism, "he's the eddyter!"

To my surprise he was quite white and tremulous with nervousness. I was very sorry for him, and as I really cared very little for the half-forgotten escapade of his friend except so far as it seemed to render HIM sensitive, I shook his hand again heartily and began to talk of our old life in the gulch--avoiding as far as possible any allusion to Lacy Bassett. His face brightened; his old simple cordiality and trustfulness returned, but unfortunately with it his old disposition to refer to Bassett. "Yes, they waz high old times, and ez I waz sayin' to Lacy on'y yesterday, there is a kind o' freedom 'bout that sort o' life that runs civilization and noospapers mighty hard, however high-toned they is. Not but what Lacy ain't right," he added quickly, "when he sez that the opposition the 'Guardian' gets here comes from ignorant low-down fellers ez wos brought up in played-out camps, and can't tell a gentleman and a scholar and a scientific man when they sees him. No! So I sez to Lacy, 'Never you mind, it's high time they did, and they've got to do it and to swaller the "Guardian," if I sink double the money I've already put into the paper.'"

I was not long in discovering from other sources that the "Guardian" was not popular with the more intelligent readers of Gilead, and that Captain Jim's extravagant estimate of his friend was by no means indorsed by the community. But criticism took a humorous turn even in that practical settlement, and it appeared that Lacy Bassett's vanity, assumption, and ignorance were an unflinching and weekly joy to the critical, in spite of the vague distrust they induced in the more homely-witted, and the dull acquiescence of that minority who accepted the paper for its respectable exterior and advertisements. I was somewhat grieved, however, to find that Captain Jim shared equally with his friend in this general verdict of incompetency, and that some of the most outrageous blunders were put down to HIM. But I was not prepared to believe that Lacy had directly or by innuendo helped the public to this opinion.

Whether through accident or design on his part, Lacy Bassett did not personally obtrude himself upon my remembrance until a month later. One dazzling afternoon, when the dust and heat had driven the pride of Gilead's manhood into the surreptitious shadows of the temperance hotel's back room, and had even cleared the express office of its loungers, and left me alone with darkened windows in the private office, the outer door opened and Captain Jim's friend entered as part of that garish glitter I had shut out. To do the scamp strict justice, however, he was somewhat subdued in his dress and manner, and, possibly through some gentle chastening of epigram and revolver since I had seen him last, was less aggressive and exaggerated. I had the impression, from certain odors wafted through the apartment and a peculiar physical exaltation that was inconsistent with his evident moral hesitancy, that he had prepared himself for the interview by a previous visit to the hidden fountains of the temperance hotel.

"We don't seem to have run agin each other since you've been here," he said with an assurance that was nevertheless a trifle forced "but I reckon we're both busy men, and there's a heap too much loafing goin' on in Gilead. Captain Jim told me he met you the day you arrived; said you just cottoned to the 'Guardian' at once and

thought it a deal too good for Gilead; eh? Oh, well, jest ez likely he DIDN'T say it--it was only his gassin'. He's a queer man--is Captain Jim."

I replied somewhat sharply that I considered him a very honest man, a very simple man, and a very loyal man.

"That's all very well," said Bassett, twirling his cane with a patronizing smile, "but, as his friend, don't you find him considerable of a darned fool?"

I could not help retorting that I thought HE had found that hardly an objection.

"YOU think so," he said querulously, apparently ignoring everything but the practical fact,--"and maybe others do; but that's where you're mistaken. It don't pay. It may pay HIM to be runnin' me as his particular friend, to be quotin' me here and there, to be gettin' credit of knowin' me and my friends and ownin' me--by Gosh! but I don't see where the benefit to ME comes in. Eh? Take your own case down there at Eureka Gulch; didn't he send for me just to show me up to you fellers? Did I want to have anything to do with the Eureka Company? Didn't he set me up to give my opinion about that shaft just to show off what I knew about science and all that? And what did he get me to join the company for? Was it for you? No! Was it for me? No! It was just to keep me there for HIMSELF, and kinder pit me agin you fellers and crow over you! Now that ain't my style! It may be HIS--it may be honest and simple and loyal, as you say, and it may be all right for him to get me to run up accounts at the settlement and then throw off on me--but it ain't my style. I suppose he let on that I did that. No? He didn't? Well then, why did he want to run me off with him, and out the whole concern in an underhand way and make me leave with nary a character behind me, eh? Now, I never said anything about this before--did I? It ain't like me. I wouldn't have said anything about it now, only you talked about MY being benefited by his darned foolishness. Much I've made outer HIM."

Despicable, false, and disloyal as this was, perhaps it was the crowning meanness of such confidences that his very weakness seemed only a reflection of Captain Jim's own, and appeared in some strange way to degrade his friend as much as himself. The simplicity of his vanity and selfishness was only equalled by the simplicity of Captain Jim's admiration of it. It was a part of my youthful inexperience of humanity that I was not above the common fallacy of believing that a man is "known by the company he keeps," and that he is in a manner responsible for its weakness; it was a part of that humanity that I felt no surprise in being more amused than shocked by this revelation. It seemed a good joke on Captain Jim!

"Of course YOU kin laugh at his darned foolishness; but, by Gosh, it ain't a laughing matter to me!"

"But surely he's given you a good position on the 'Guardian,'" I urged. "That was disinterested, certainly."

"Was it? I call that the cheekiest thing yet. When he found he couldn't make enough of me in private life, he totes me out in

public as HIS editor--the man who runs HIS paper! And has his name in print as the proprietor, the only chance he'd ever get of being before the public. And don't know the whole town is laughing at him!"

"That may be because they think HE writes some of the articles," I suggested.

Again the insinuation glanced harmlessly from his vanity. "That couldn't be, because I do all the work, and it ain't his style," he said with naive discontent. "And it's always the highest style, done to please him, though between you and me it's sorter castin' pearls before swine--this 'Frisco editing--and the public would be just as satisfied with anything I could rattle off that was peart and sassy,--something spicy or personal. I'm willing to climb down and do it, for there's nothin' stuck-up about me, you know; but that darned fool Captain Jim has got the big head about the style of the paper, and darned if I don't think he's afraid if there's a lettin' down, people may think it's him! Ez if! Why, you know as well as me that there's a sort of snap I could give these things that would show it was me and no slouch did them, in a minute."

I had my doubts about the elegance or playfulness of Mr. Bassett's trifling, but from some paragraphs that appeared in the next issue of the "Guardian" I judged that he had won over Captain Jim--if indeed that gentleman's alleged objections were not entirely the outcome of Bassett's fancy. The social paragraphs themselves were clumsy and vulgar. A dull-witted account of a select party at Parson Baxter's, with a point-blank compliment to Polly Baxter his daughter, might have made her pretty cheek burn but for her evident prepossession for the meretricious scamp, its writer. But even this horse-play seemed more natural than the utterly artificial editorials with their pinchbeck glitter and cheap erudition; and thus far it appeared harmless.

I grieve to say that these appearances were deceptive. One afternoon, as I was returning from a business visit to the outskirts of the village, I was amazed on reentering the main street to find a crowd collected around the "Guardian" office, gazing at the broken glass of its windows and a quantity of type scattered on the ground. But my attention was at that moment more urgently attracted by a similar group around my own office, who, however, seemed more cautious, and were holding timorously aloof from the entrance. As I ran rapidly towards them, a few called out, "Look out--he's in there!" while others made way to let me pass. With the impression of fire or robbery in my mind, I entered precipitately, only to find Yuba Bill calmly leaning back in an arm-chair with his feet on the back of another, a glass of whiskey from my demijohn in one hand and a huge cigar in his mouth. Across his lap lay a stumpy shotgun which I at once recognized as "the Left Bower," whose usual place was at his feet on the box during his journeys. He looked cool and collected, although there were one or two splashes of printer's ink on his shirt and trousers, and from the appearance of my lavatory and towel he had evidently been removing similar stains from his hands. Putting his gun aside and grasping my hand warmly without rising, he began with even more than his usual lazy imperturbability:

"Well, how's Gilead lookin' to-day?"

It struck me as looking rather disturbed, but, as I was still too bewildered to reply, he continued lazily:

"Ez you didn't hunt me up, I allowed you might hev got kinder petrified and dried up down yer, and I reckoned to run down and rattle round a bit and make things lively for ye. I've jist cleared out a newspaper office over thar. They call it the 'Guardi-an,' though it didn't seem to offer much perfection to them fellers ez was in it. In fact, it wasn't ez much a fight ez it orter hev been. It was rather monotonous for me."

"But what's the row, Bill? What has happened?" I asked excitedly.

"Nothin' to speak of, I tell ye," replied Yuba Bill reflectively. "I jest meandered into that shop over there, and I sez, 'I want ter see the man ez runs this yer mill o' literatoo an' progress.' Thar waz two infants sittin' on high chairs havin' some innocent little game o' pickin' pieces o' lead outer pill-boxes like, and as soon ez they seed me one of 'em crawled under his desk and the other scooted outer the back door. Bimeby the door opens again, and a fluffy coyote-lookin' feller comes in and allows that HE is responsible for that yer paper. When I saw the kind of animal he was, and that he hadn't any weppings, I jist laid the Left Bower down on the floor. Then I sez, 'You allowed in your paper that I oughter hev a little sevility knocked inter me, and I'm here to hev it done. You ken begin it now.' With that I reached for him, and we waltzed oncet or twicet around the room, and then I put him up on the mantelpiece and on them desks and little boxes, and took him down again, and kinder wiped the floor with him gin'rally, until the first thing I knowed he was outside the winder on the sidewalk. On'y blamed if I didn't forget to open the winder. Ef it hadn't been for that, it would hev been all quiet and peaceful-like, and nobody hev knowed it. But the sash being in the way, it sorter created a disturbance and unpleasantness OUTSIDE."

"But what was it all about?" I repeated. "What had he done to you?"

"Ye'll find it in that paper," he said, indicating a copy of the "Guardian" that lay on my table with a lazy nod of his head. "P'r'aps you don't read it? No more do I. But Joe Bilson sez to me yesterday: 'Bill,' sez he, 'they're goin' for ye in the "Guardian."' 'Wot's that?' sez I. 'Hark to this,' sez he, and reads out that bit that you'll find there."

I had opened the paper, and he pointed to a paragraph. "There it is. Pooty, ain't it?" I read with amazement as follows:--

"If the Pioneer Stage Company want to keep up with the times, and not degenerate into the old style 'one hoss' road-wagon business, they'd better make some reform on the line. They might begin by shipping off some of the old-time whiskey-guzzling drivers who are too high and mighty to do anything but handle the ribbons, and are above speaking to a passenger unless he's a favorite or one of their set. Over-praise for an occasional scrimmage with road agents, and flattery from Eastern greenhorns, have given them the big head. If the fool-killer were let loose on the line with a big

club, and knocked a little civility into their heads, it wouldn't be a bad thing, and would be a particular relief to the passengers for Gilead who have to take the stage from Simpson's Bar."

"That's my stage," said Yuba Bill quietly, when I had ended; "and that's ME."

"But it's impossible," I said eagerly. "That insult was never written by Captain Jim."

"Captain Jim," repeated Yuba Bill reflectively. "Captain Jim,-- yes, that was the name o' the man I was playin' with. Shortish hairy feller, suthin' between a big coyote and the old-style hair-trunk. Fought pretty well for a hay-footed man from Gil-e-ad."

"But you've whipped the wrong man, Bill," I said. "Think again! Have you had any quarrel lately?--run against any newspaper man?" The recollection had flashed upon me that Lacy Bassett had lately returned from a visit to Stockton.

Yuba Bill regarded his boots on the other arm-chair for a few moments in profound meditation. "There was a sort o' gaudy insect," he began presently, "suthin' halfway betwixt a boss-fly and a devil's darnin'-needle, ez crawled up onter the box seat with me last week, and buzzed! Now I think on it, he talked high-faluten' o' the infloocene of the press and sech. I may hev said 'shoo' to him when he was hummin' the loudest. I mout hev flicked him off oncet or twicet with my whip. It must be him. Gosh!" he said suddenly, rising and lifting his heavy hand to his forehead, "now I think agin he was the feller ez crawled under the desk when the fight was goin' on, and stayed there. Yes, sir, that was HIM. His face looked sorter familiar, but I didn't know him moultin' with his feathers off." He turned upon me with the first expression of trouble and anxiety I had ever seen him wear. "Yes, sir, that's him. And I've kem--me, Yuba Bill!--kem MYSELF, a matter of twenty miles, totin' a GUN--a gun, by Gosh!--to fight that--that--that potatar-bug!" He walked to the window, turned, walked back again, finished his whiskey with a single gulp, and laid his hand almost despondingly on my shoulder. "Look ye, old--old fell, you and me's ole friends. Don't give me away. Don't let on a word o' this to any one! Say I kem down yer howlin' drunk on a gen'ral tear! Say I mistook that newspaper office for a cigar-shop, and--got licked by the boss! Say anythin' you like, 'cept that I took a gun down yer to chase a fly that had settled onter me. Keep the Left Bower in yer back office till I send for it. Ef you've got a back door somewhere handy where I can slip outer this without bein' seen I'd be thankful."

As this desponding suggestion appeared to me as the wisest thing for him to do in the then threatening state of affairs outside,-- which, had he suspected it, he would have stayed to face,--I quickly opened a door into a courtyard that communicated through an alley with a side street. Here we shook hands and parted; his last dejected ejaculation being, "That potatobug!" Later I ascertained that Captain Jim had retired to his ranch some four miles distant. He was not seriously hurt, but looked, to use the words of my informant, "ez ef he'd been hugged by a playful b'ar." As the "Guardian" made its appearance the next week without the slightest

allusion to the fracas, I did not deem it necessary to divulge the real facts. When I called to inquire about Captain Jim's condition, he himself, however, volunteered an explanation.

"I don't mind tellin' you, ez an old friend o' mine and Lacy's, that the secret of that there attack on me and the 'Guardian' was perlitikal. Yes, sir! There was a powerful orginization in the interest o' Halkins for assemblyman ez didn't like our high-toned editorials on caucus corruption, and hired a bully to kem down here and suppress us. Why, this yer Lacy spotted the idea to oncet; yer know how keen be is."

"Was Lacy present?" I asked as carelessly as I could.

Captain Jim glanced his eyes over his shoulder quite in his old furtive canine fashion, and then blinked them at me rapidly. "He war! And if it warn't for HIS pluck and HIS science and HIS strength, I don't know whar I'D hev been now! Howsomever, it's all right. I've had a fair offer to sell the 'Guardian' over at Simpson's Bar, and it's time I quit throwin' away the work of a man like Lacy Bassett upon it. And between you and me, I've got an idea and suthin' better to put his talens into."

III.

It was not long before it became evident that the "talens" of Mr. Lacy Bassett, as indicated by Captain Jim, were to grasp at a seat in the state legislature. An editorial in the "Simpson's Bar Clarion" boldly advocated his pretensions. At first it was believed that the article emanated from the gifted pen of Lacy himself, but the style was so unmistakably that of Colonel Starbottle, an eminent political "war-horse" of the district, that a graver truth was at once suggested, namely, that the "Guardian" had simply been transferred to Simpson's Bar, and merged into the "Clarion" solely on this condition. At least it was recognized that it was the hand of Captain Jim which guided the editorial fingers of the colonel, and Captain Jim's money that distended the pockets of that gallant political leader.

Howbeit Lacy Bassett was never elected; in fact he was only for one brief moment a candidate. It was related that upon his first ascending the platform at Simpson's Bar a voice in the audience said lazily, "Come down!" That voice was Yuba Bill's. A slight confusion ensued, in which Yuba Bill whispered a few words in the colonel's ear. After a moment's hesitation the "war-horse" came forward, and in his loftiest manner regretted that the candidate had withdrawn. The next issue of the "Clarion" proclaimed with no uncertain sound that a base conspiracy gotten up by the former proprietor of the "Guardian" to undermine the prestige of the Great Express Company had been ruthlessly exposed, and the candidate on learning it HIMSELF for the first time, withdrew his name from the canvass, as became a high-toned gentleman. Public opinion, ignoring Lacy Bassett completely, unhesitatingly denounced Captain Jim.

During this period I had paid but little heed to Lacy Bassett's social movements, or the successes which would naturally attend

such a character with the susceptible sex. I had heard that he was engaged to Polly Baxter, but that they had quarrelled in consequence of his flirtations with others, especially a Mrs. Sweeny, a profusely ornamented but reputationless widow. Captain Jim had often alluded with a certain respectful pride and delicacy to Polly's ardent appreciation of his friend, and had more than half hinted with the same reverential mystery to their matrimonial union later, and his intention of "doing the square thing" for the young couple. But it was presently noticed that these allusions became less frequent during Lacy's amorous aberrations, and an occasional depression and unusual reticence marked Captain Jim's manner when the subject was discussed in his presence. He seemed to endeavor to make up for his friend's defection by a kind of personal homage to Polly, and not unfrequently accompanied her to church or to singing-class. I have a vivid recollection of meeting him one afternoon crossing the fields with her, and looking into her face with that same wistful, absorbed, and uneasy canine expression that I had hitherto supposed he had reserved for Lacy alone. I do not know whether Polly was averse to the speechless devotion of these yearning brown eyes; her manner was animated and the pretty cheek that was nearest me mantled as I passed; but I was struck for the first time with the idea that Captain Jim loved her! I was surprised to have that fancy corroborated in the remark of another wayfarer whom I met, to the effect, "That now that Bassett was out o' the running it looked ez if Captain Jim was makin' up for time!" Was it possible that Captain Jim had always loved her? I did not at first know whether to be pained or pleased for his sake. But I concluded that whether the unworthy Bassett had at last found a RIVAL in Captain Jim or in the girl herself, it was a displacement that was for Captain Jim's welfare. But as I was about leaving Gilead for a month's transfer to the San Francisco office, I had no opportunity to learn more from the confidences of Captain Jim.

I was ascending the principal staircase of my San Francisco hotel one rainy afternoon, when I was pointedly recalled to Gilead by the passing glitter of Mrs. Sweeny's jewelry and the sudden vanishing behind her of a gentleman who seemed to be accompanying her. A few moments after I had entered my room I heard a tap at my door, and opened it upon Lacy Bassett. I thought he looked a little confused and agitated. Nevertheless, with an assumption of cordiality and ease he said, "It appears we're neighbors. That's my room next to yours." He pointed to the next room, which I then remembered was a sitting-room en suite with my own, and communicating with it by a second door, which was always locked. It had not been occupied since my tenancy. As I suppose my face did not show any extravagant delight at the news of his contiguity, he added, hastily, "There's a transom over the door, and I thought I'd tell you you kin hear everything from the one room to the other."

I thanked him, and told him dryly that, as I had no secrets to divulge and none that I cared to hear, it made no difference to me. As this seemed to increase his confusion and he still hesitated before the door, I asked him if Captain Jim was with him.

"No," he said quickly. "I haven't seen him for a month, and don't want to. Look here, I want to talk to you a bit about him." He walked into the room, and closed the door behind him. "I want to tell you that me and Captain Jim is played! All this runnin' o' me

and interferin' with me is played! I'm tired of it. You kin tell him so from me."

"Then you have quarrelled?"

"Yes. As much as any man can quarrel with a darned fool who can't take a hint."

"One moment. Have you quarrelled about Polly Baxter?"

"Yes," he answered querulously. "Of course I have. What does he mean by interfering?"

"Now listen to me, Mr. Bassett," I interrupted. "I have no desire to concern myself in your association with Captain Jim, but since you persist in dragging me into it, you must allow me to speak plainly. From all that I can ascertain you have no serious intentions of marrying Polly Baxter. You have come here from Gilead to follow Mrs. Sweeny, whom I saw you with a moment ago. Now, why do you not frankly give up Miss Baxter to Captain Jim, who will make her a good husband, and go your own way with Mrs. Sweeny? If you really wish to break off your connection with Captain Jim, that's the only way to do it."

His face, which had exhibited the weakest and most pitiable consciousness at the mention of Mrs. Sweeny, changed to an expression of absolute stupefaction as I concluded.

"Wot stuff are you tryin' to fool me with?" he said at last roughly.

"I mean," I replied sharply, "that this double game of yours is disgraceful. Your association with Mrs. Sweeny demands the withdrawal of any claim you have upon Miss Baxter at once. If you have no respect for Captain Jim's friendship, you must at least show common decency to her."

He burst into a half-relieved, half-hysterical laugh. "Are you crazy?" gasped he. "Why, Captain Jim's just huntin' ME down to make ME marry Polly. That's just what the row's about. That's just what he's interferin' for--just to carry out his darned fool ideas o' gettin' a wife for me; just his vanity to say HE'S made the match. It's ME that he wants to marry to that Baxter girl--not himself. He's too cursed selfish for that."

I suppose I was not different from ordinary humanity, for in my unexpected discomfiture I despised Captain Jim quite as much as I did the man before me. Reiterating my remark that I had no desire to mix myself further in their quarrels, I got rid of him with as little ceremony as possible. But a few minutes later, when the farcical side of the situation struck me, my irritation was somewhat mollified, without however increasing my respect for either of the actors. The whole affair had assumed a triviality that was simply amusing, nothing more, and I even looked forward to a meeting with Captain Jim and HIS exposition of the matter--which I knew would follow--with pleasurable anticipation. But I was mistaken.

One afternoon, when I was watching the slanting volleys of rain

driven by a strong southwester against the windows of the hotel reading-room, I was struck by the erratic movements of a dripping figure outside that seemed to be hesitating over the entrance to the hotel. At times furtively penetrating the porch as far as the vestibule, and again shyly recoiling from it, its manner was so strongly suggestive of some timid animal that I found myself suddenly reminded of Captain Jim and the memorable evening of his exodus from Eureka Gulch. As the figure chanced to glance up to the window where I stood I saw to my astonishment that it WAS Captain Jim himself, but so changed and haggard that I scarcely knew him. I instantly ran out into the hall and vestibule, but when I reached the porch he had disappeared. Either he had seen me and wished to avoid me, or he had encountered the object of his quest, which I at once concluded must be Lacy Bassett. I was so much impressed and worried by his appearance and manner, that, in this belief, I overcame my aversion to meeting Bassett, and even sought him through the public rooms and lobbies in the hope of finding Captain Jim with him. But in vain; possibly he had succeeded in escaping his relentless friend.

As the wind and rain increased at nightfall and grew into a tempestuous night, with deserted streets and swollen waterways, I did not go out again, but retired early, inexplicably haunted by the changed and brooding face of Captain Jim. Even in my dreams he pursued me in his favorite likeness of a wistful, anxious, and uneasy hound, who, on my turning to caress him familiarly, snapped at me viciously, and appeared to have suddenly developed a snarling rabid fury. I seemed to be awakened at last by the sound of his voice. For an instant I believed the delusion a part of my dream. But I was mistaken; I was lying broad awake, and the voice clearly had come from the next room, and was distinctly audible over the transom.

"I've had enough of it," he said, "and I'm givin' ye now--this night--yer last chance. Quit this hotel and that woman, and go back to Gilead and marry Polly. Don't do it and I'll kill ye, ez sure ez you sit there gapin' in that chair. If I can't get ye to fight me like a man,--and I'll spit in yer face or put some insult onto you afore that woman, afore everybody, ez would make a bigger skunk nor you turn,--I'll hunt ye down and kill ye in your tracks."

There was a querulous murmur of interruption in Lacy's voice, but whether of defiance or appeal I could not distinguish. Captain Jim's voice again rose, dogged and distinct.

"Ef YOU kill me it's all the same, and I don't say that I won't thank ye. This yer world is too crowded for yer and me, Lacy Bassett. I've believed in ye, trusted in ye, lied for ye, and fought for ye. From the time I took ye up--a feller-passenger to 'Fresco--believin' there wor the makin's of a man in ye, to now, you fooled me,--fooled me afore the Eureka boys; fooled me afore Gilead; fooled me afore HER; fooled me afore God! It's got to end here. Ye've got to take the curse of that foolishness off o' me! You've got to do one single thing that's like the man I took ye for, or you've got to die. Times waz when I'd have wished it for your account--that's gone, Lacy Bassett! You've got to do it for ME. You've got to do it so I don't see 'd--d fool' writ in the eyes of every man ez looks at me."

He had apparently risen and walked towards the door. His voice sounded from another part of the room.

"I'll give ye till to-morrow mornin' to do suthin' to lift this curse off o' me. Ef you refoose, then, by the living God, I'll slap yer face in the dinin'-room, or in the office afore them all! You hear me!"

There was a pause, and then a quick sharp explosion that seemed to fill and expand both rooms until the windows were almost lifted from their casements, a hysterical inarticulate cry from Lacy, the violent opening of a door, hurried voices, and the tramping of many feet in the passage. I sprang out of bed, partly dressed myself, and ran into the hall. But by that time I found a crowd of guests and servants around the next door, some grasping Bassett, who was white and trembling, and others kneeling by Captain Jim, who was half lying in the doorway against the wall.

"He heard it all," Bassett gasped hysterically, pointing to me. "HE knows that this man wanted to kill me."

Before I could reply, Captain Jim partly raised himself with a convulsive effort. Wiping away the blood that, oozing from his lips, already showed the desperate character of his internal wound, he said in a husky and hurried voice: "It's all right, boys! It's my fault. It was ME who done it. I went for him in a mean underhanded way jest now, when he hadn't a weppin nor any show to defend himself. We gripped. He got a holt o' my derringer--you see that's MY pistol there, I swear it--and turned it agin me in self-defense, and sarved me right. I swear to God, gentlemen, it's so!" Catching sight of my face, he looked at me, I fancied half imploringly and half triumphantly, and added, "I might hev knowed it! I allers allowed Lacy Bassett was game!--game, gentlemen--and he was. If it's my last word, I say it--he was game!"

And with this devoted falsehood upon his lips and something of the old canine instinct in his failing heart, as his head sank back he seemed to turn it towards Bassett, as if to stretch himself out at his feet. Then the light failed from his yearning upward glance, and the curse of foolishness was lifted from him forever.

So conclusive were the facts, that the coroner's jury did not deem it necessary to detain Mr. Bassett for a single moment after the inquest. But he returned to Gilead, married Polly Baxter, and probably on the strength of having "killed his man," was unopposed on the platform next year, and triumphantly elected to the legislature!

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