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A MILLIONAIRE OF ROUGH-AND-READY;
A PHYLLIS OF THE SIERRAS; A DRIFT FROM
REDWOOD CAMP BY BRET HARTE.

IN ONE VOLUME.

TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

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BY

BRET HARTE,

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1888

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A MILLIONAIRE OF ROUGH-AND-READY.

A MILLIONAIRE OF ROUGH-AND-READY.

PROLOGUE.

THERE was no mistake this time: he had struck gold at last!

It had lain there before him a moment ago—a misshapen piece of brown-stained quartz, interspersed with dull yellow metal; yielding enough to have allowed the points of his pick to penetrate its honeycombed recesses; yet heavy enough to drop from the point of his pick as he endeavoured to lift it from the red earth.

He was seeing all this plainly, although he found himself, he knew not why, at some distance from the scene of his discovery, his heart foolishly beating, his breath impotently hurried. Yet he was walking slowly and vaguely; conscious of stopping and staring at the landscape, which no longer looked familiar to him. He was hoping for some instinct or force of habit to recall him to himself, yet when he saw a neighbour at work in an adjacent claim, he hesitated, and then turned his

back upon him. Yet only a moment before he had thought of running to him, saying, "By Jingo! I've struck it," or, "D—n it, old man, I've got it"; but that moment had passed, and now it seemed to him that he could scarce raise his voice, or, if he did, the ejaculation would appear forced and artificial. Neither could he go over to him coolly and tell his good fortune; and, partly from this strange shyness, and partly with a hope that another survey of the treasure might restore him to natural expression, he walked back to his tunnel.

Yes; it was there! No mere "pocket" or "deposit," but a part of the actual vein he had been so long seeking. It was there, sure enough, lying beside the pick and the débris of the "face" of the vein that he had exposed sufficiently, after the first shock of discovery, to assure himself of the fact and the permanence of his fortune. It was there, and with it the refutation of his enemies' sneers, the corroboration of his friends' belief, the practical demonstration of his own theories, the reward of his patient labours. It was there, sure enough. But, somehow, he not only failed to recall the first joy of discovery; but was conscious of a vague sense of responsibility and unrest. It was, no doubt, an enormous fortune to a man in his circumstances; perhaps it meant a couple of hundred thousand dollars, or more, judging from the value of the old Martin lead, which was not as rich as this, but it required to be worked constantly and judiciously. It was with a decided sense of uneasiness that he again sought the open

sunlight of the hillside. His neighbour was still visible on the adjacent claim; but he had apparently stopped working, and was contemplatively smoking a pipe under a large pine-tree. For an instant he envied him his apparent contentment. He had a sudden fierce and inexplicable desire to go over to him and exasperate his easy poverty by a revelation of his own new-found treasure. But even that sensation quickly passed, and left him staring blankly at the landscape again.

As soon as he had made his discovery known, and settled its value, he would send for his wife and her children in the States. He would build a fine house on the opposite hillside, if she would consent to it, unless she preferred, for the children's sake, to live in San Francisco. A sense of a loss of independence—of a change of circumstances that left him no longer his own master, began to perplex him, in the midst of his brightest projects. Certain other relations with other members of his family, which had lapsed by absence and his insignificance, must now be taken up anew. He must do something for his sister Jane, for his brother William, for his wife's poor connections. It would be unfair to him to say that he contemplated those things with any other instinct than that of generosity; yet he was conscious of being already perplexed and puzzled.

Meantime, however, the neighbour had apparently finished his pipe, and, knocking the ashes out of it, rose suddenly, and ended any further uncertainty of

their meeting by walking over directly towards him. The treasure-finder advanced a few steps on his side, and then stopped irresolutely.

"Hollo, Slinn!" said the neighbour, confidently.

"Hollo, Masters," responded Slinn, faintly. From the sound of the two voices a stranger might have mistaken their relative condition. "What in thunder are you mooning about for? What's up?" Then, catching sight of Slinn's pale and anxious face, he added abruptly, "Are you sick?"

Slinn was on the point of telling him his good fortune, but stopped. The unlucky question confirmed his consciousness of his physical and mental disturbance, and he dreaded the ready ridicule of his companion. He would tell him later; Masters need not know *when* he had made the strike. Besides, in his present vagueness, he shrank from the brusque, practical questioning that would be sure to follow the revelation to a man of Masters' temperament.

"I'm a little giddy here," he answered, putting his hand to his head, "and I thought I'd knock off until I was better."

Masters examined him with two very critical grey eyes. "Tell ye what, old man!—if you don't quit this dog-goned foolin' of yours in that God-forsaken tunnel you'll get looney! Times you got so tangled up in follerin' that blind lead o' your's you aint sensible!"

Here was the opportunity to tell him all, and vindicate the justice of his theories! But he shrank from it

again; and now, adding to the confusion, was a singular sense of dread at the mental labour of explanation. He only smiled painfully, and began to move away. "Look you!" said Masters, peremptorily, "ye want about three fingers of straight whiskey to set you right, and you've got to take it with me. D—n it man, it may be the last drink we take together! Don't look so skeered! I mean—I made up my mind about ten minutes ago to cut the whole d——d thing, and light out for fresh diggings. I'm sick of getting only grub wages out o' this hill. So that's what I mean by saying it's the last drink you and me 'll take together. You know my ways: sayin' and doin' with me 's the same thing."

It was true. Slinn had often envied Masters' promptness of decision and resolution. But he only looked at the grim face of his interlocutor with a feeble sense of relief. He was *going*. And he, Slinn, would not to have explain anything!

He murmured something about having to go over to the settlement on business. He dreaded lest Masters should insist upon going into the tunnel.

"I suppose you want to mail that letter," said Masters, drily. "The mail don't go till to-morrow, so you've got time to finish it, and put it in an envelope."

Following the direction of Masters' eyes, Slinn looked down and saw, to his utter surprise, that he was holding an unfinished pencilled note in his hand. How it came there, when he had written it, he could not tell; he dimly remembered that one of his first impulses was

to write to his wife; but that he had already done so, he had forgotten. He hastily concealed the note in his breast-pocket, with a vacant smile. Masters eyed him half contemptuously, half compassionately.

"Don't forget yourself and drop it in some hollow tree for a letter-box," he said. "Well—so long!—since you won't drink. Take care of yourself," and, turning on his heel, Masters walked away.

Slinn watched him as he crossed over to his abandoned claim, saw him gather his few mining utensils, strap his blanket over his back, lift his hat on his long-handled shovel as a token of farewell, and then stride light-heartedly over the ridge.

He was alone now with his secret and his treasure. The only man in the world who knew of the exact position of his tunnel had gone away for ever. It was not likely that this chance companion of a few weeks would ever remember him or the locality again; he would now leave his treasure alone—for even a day perhaps—until he had thought out some plan and sought out some friend in whom to confide. His secluded life, the singular habits of concentration which had at last proved so successful, had, at the same time, left him few acquaintances and no associates. And in all his well-laid plans and patiently-digested theories for finding the treasure, the means and methods of working it and disposing of it had never entered.

And now, at the hour when he most needed his

faculties, what was the meaning of this strange benumbing of them!

Patience! He only wanted a little rest—a little time to recover himself. There was a large boulder under a tree in the highway to the settlement—a sheltered spot where he had often waited for the coming of the stage coach. He would go there, and when he was sufficiently rested and composed, he would go on.

Nevertheless, on his way he diverged and turned into the woods for no other apparent purpose than to find a hollow tree. "A hollow tree." Yes! that was what Masters had said; he remembered it distinctly; and something was to be done there; but what it was, or why it should be done, he could not tell. However, it was done, and very luckily, for his limbs could scarcely support him further, and reaching that boulder he dropped upon it like another stone.

And now, strange to say, the uneasiness and perplexity which had possessed him ever since he had stood before his revealed wealth, dropped from him like a burden laid upon the wayside. A measureless peace stole over him, in which visions of his new-found fortune, no longer a trouble and perplexity, but crowned with happiness and blessing to all around him, assumed proportions far beyond his own weak, selfish plans. In its even-handed benefaction, his wife and children, his friends and relations, even his late poor companion of the hillside, met and moved harmoniously together; in its far-reaching consequences there was only the in-

fluence of good. It was not strange that this poor finite mind should never have conceived the meaning of the wealth extended to him; or that conceiving it, he should faint and falter under the revelation. Enough that for a few minutes he must have tasted a joy of perfect anticipation that years of actual possession might never bring.

The sun seemed to go down in a rosy dream of his own happiness, as he still sat there. Later, the shadows of the trees thickened and surrounded him, and still later fell the calm of a quiet evening sky with far-spaced passionless stars, that seemed as little troubled by what they looked upon as he was by the stealthy creeping life in the grasses and underbrush at his feet. The dull patter of soft little feet in the soft dust of the road; the gentle gleam of moist and wondering little eyes on the branches, and in the mossy edges of the boulder, did not disturb him. He sat patiently through it all, as if he had not yet made up his mind.

But when the stage came with the flashing sun the next morning, and the irresistible clamour of life and action, the driver suddenly laid his four spirited horses on their haunches before the quiet spot. The express messenger clambered down from the box, and approached what seemed to be a heap of cast-off clothes upon the boulder.

"He don't seem to be drunk," he said, in reply to a querulous interrogation from the passengers. "I can't

make him out, His eyes are open; but he cannot speak or move. Take a look at him, Doc."

A rough, unprofessional-looking man here descended from the inside of the coach, and carelessly thrusting aside the other curious passengers, suddenly leant over the heap of clothes in a professional attitude.

"He is dead," said one of the passengers.

The rough man let the passive head sink softly down again. "No such luck for him," he said, curtly, but not unkindly. "It's a stroke of paralysis—and about as big as they make 'em. It's a toss-up if he ever speaks or moves again as long as he lives."

CHAPTER I.

WHEN Alvin Mulrady announced his intention of growing potatoes and garden "truck" on the green slopes of Los Gatos, the mining community of that region, and the adjacent hamlet of "Rough-and-Ready," regarded it with the contemptuous indifference usually shown by those adventurers towards all bucolic pursuits. There was certainly no active objection to the occupation of two hillsides, which gave so little promise to the prospector for gold that it was currently reported that a single prospector, called "Slinn," had once gone mad or imbecile through repeated failures. The only opposition came, incongruously enough, from the original pastoral owner of the soil—one Don Ramon Alvarado—whose claim for seven leagues of hill and valley, including the now prosperous towns of Rough-and-Ready and Red Dog, was met with simple derision from the squatters and miners. "Looks ez ef we woz goin' to travel 3000 miles to open up his d——d old wilderness, and then pay for the increased valoo we give it—don't it? Oh, yes, certainly!" was their ironical commentary. Mulrady might have been pardoned for adopting this popular opinion; but, by an equally incongruous sentiment, peculiar, however, to the man, he called upon

Don Ramon, and actually offered to purchase the land or "go shares" with him in the agricultural profits. It was alleged that the Don was so struck with this concession, that he not only granted the land, but struck up a quaint, reserved friendship for the simple-minded agriculturist and his family. It is scarcely necessary to add that this intimacy was viewed by the miners with the contempt that it deserved. They would have been more contemptuous, however, had they known the opinion that Don Ramon entertained of their particular vocation, and which he early confided to Mulrady.

"They are savages who expect to reap where they have not sown; to take out of the earth without returning anything to it but their precious carcases; heathens, who worship the mere stones they dig up." "And was there no Spaniard who ever dug gold?" asked Mulrady, simply. "Ah, there are Spaniards and Moors," responded Don Ramon, sententiously. "Gold has been dug, and by caballeros; but no good ever came of it. There were Alvarados in Sonora, look you, who had mines of *silver,* and worked them with peons and mules, and lost their money—a gold mine to work a silver one—like gentlemen! But this grubbing in the dirt with one's fingers that a little gold may stick to them, is not for caballeros. And then, one says nothing of the curse."

"The curse!" echoed Mary Mulrady, with youthful feminine superstition. "What is that?"

"You knew not, friend Mulrady, that when these

lands were given to my ancestors by Charles V., the Bishop of Monterey laid a curse upon any who should desecrate them. Good! Let us see! Of the three Americanos who founded yonder town—one was shot, another died of a fever—poisoned, you understand, by the soil—and the last got himself crazy of aguardiente. Even the scientifico,* who came here years ago and spied into the trees and the herbs: he was afterwards punished for his profanation, and died of an accident in other lands. But," added Don Ramon, with grave courtesy, "this touches not yourself. Through me—*you* are of the soil."

Indeed, it would seem as if a secure if not a rapid prosperity was the result of Don Ramon's manorial patronage. The potato patch and market garden flourished exceedingly; the rich soil responded with magnificent vagaries of growth; the even sunshine set the seasons at defiance with extraordinary and premature crops. The salt pork and biscuit consuming settlers did not allow their contempt of Mulrady's occupation to prevent their profiting by this opportunity for changing their diet. The gold they had taken from the soil presently began to flow into his pockets in exchange for his more modest treasures. The little cabin, which barely sheltered his family—a wife, son, and daughter—was enlarged, extended, and refitted, but in turn

* Don Ramon probably alluded to the eminent naturalist Douglas, who visited California before the gold excitement, and died of an accident in the Sandwich Islands.

abandoned for a more pretentious house on the opposite hill. A white-washed fence replaced the rudely-split rails, which had kept out the wilderness. By degrees, the first evidences of cultivation—the gashes of red soil, the piles of brush and undergrowth, the bared boulders, and heaps of stone—melted away, and were lost under a carpet of lighter green, which made an oasis in the tawny desert of wild oats on the hillside. Water was the only free boon denied this garden of Eden—what was necessary for irrigation had to be brought from a mining ditch at great expense, and was of insufficient quantity. In this emergency Mulrady thought of sinking an artesian well on the sunny slope beside his house; not, however, without serious consultation and much objection from his Spanish patron. With great austerity Don Ramon pointed out that this trifling with the entrails of the earth was not only an indignity to Nature almost equal to shaft-sinking and tunnelling, but was a disturbance of vested interests. "I and my fathers, San Diego rest them!" said Don Ramon, crossing himself, "were content with wells and cisterns, filled by Heaven at its appointed seasons; the cattle, dumb brutes though they were, knew where to find water when they wanted it. But thou sayest truly," he added, with a sigh, "that was before streams and rain were choked with hellish engines, and poisoned with their spume. Go on, friend Mulrady, dig and bore if thou wilt, but in a seemly fashion, and not with impious earthquakes of devilish gunpowder."

With this concession Alvin Mulrady began to sink his first artesian shaft. Being debarred the auxiliaries of steam and gunpowder, the work went on slowly. The market garden did not suffer meantime, as Mulrady had employed two Chinamen to take charge of the ruder tillage while he superintended the engineering work of the well. This trifling incident marked an epoch in the social condition of the family. Mrs. Mulrady at once assumed a conscious importance among her neighbours. She spoke of her husband's "men"; she alluded to the well as "the works"; she checked the easy frontier familiarity of her customers with pretty Mary Mulrady, her seventeen-year-old daughter. Simple Alvin Mulrady looked with astonishment at this sudden development of the germ planted in all feminine nature to expand in the slightest sunshine of prosperity. "Look yer, Malviny; ain't ye rather puttin' on airs with the boys that want to be civil to Mamie. Like as not one of 'em may be makin' up to her already." "You don't mean to say, Alvin Mulrady," responded Mrs. Mulrady, with sudden severity, "that you ever thought of givin' your daughter to a common miner; or that I'm goin' to allow her to marry out of our own set?" "Our own set!" echoed Mulrady feebly, blinking at her in astonishment, and then glancing hurriedly across at his freckle-faced son and the two Chinamen at work in the cabbages. "Oh, you know what I mean," said Mrs. Mulrady, sharply, "the set that we move in. The Alvarados and their friends! Doesn't the old Don come here

every day, and aint his son the right age for Mamie? And aint they the real first families here—all the same as if they were noblemen? No; leave Mamie to me, and keep to your shaft; there never was a man yet had the least *sabe* about these things, or knew what was due to his family." Like most of his larger minded, but feebler equipped sex, Mulrady was too glad to accept the truth of the latter proposition, which left the meannesses of life to feminine manipulation, and went off to his shaft on the hillside. But during that afternoon he was perplexed and troubled. He was too loyal a husband not to be pleased with this proof of an unexpected and superior foresight in his wife, although he was, like all husbands, a little startled by it. He tried to dismiss it from his mind. But looking down from the hillside upon his little venture, where gradual increase and prosperity had not been beyond his faculties to control and understand, he found himself haunted by the more ambitious projects of his helpmate. From his own knowledge of men, he doubted if Don Ramon, any more than himself, had ever thought of the possibility of a matrimonial connection between the families. He doubted if he would consent to it. And unfortunately it was this very doubt that, touching his own pride as a self-made man, made him first seriously consider his wife's proposition. He was as good as Don Ramon, any day! With this subtle feminine poison instilled in his veins, carried completely away by the logic of his wife's illogical premises, he almost hated

his old benefactor. He looked down upon the little Garden of Eden, where his Eve had just tempted him with the fatal fruit, and felt a curious consciousness that he was losing its simple and innocent enjoyment for ever.

Happily, about this time Don Ramon died. It is not probable that he ever knew the amiable intentions of Mrs. Mulrady in regard to his son, who now succeeded to the paternal estate, sadly partitioned by relatives and lawsuits. The feminine Mulradys attended the funeral, in expensive mourning from Sacramento; even the gentle Alvin was forced into ready-made broadcloth, which accented his good-natured but unmistakably common presence. Mrs. Mulrady spoke openly of her "loss"; declared that the old families were dying out; and impressed the wives of a few new arrivals at Red Dog with the belief that her own family was contemporary with the Alvarados, and that her husband's health was far from perfect. She extended a motherly sympathy to the orphaned Don Cæsar. Reserved, like his father, in natural disposition, he was still more gravely ceremonious from his loss; and, perhaps from the shyness of an evident partiality for Mamie Mulrady, he rarely availed himself of her mother's sympathising hospitality. But he carried out the intentions of his father by consenting to sell to Mulrady, for a small sum, the property he had leased. The idea of purchasing had originated with Mrs. Mulrady.

"It'll be all in the family," had observed that astute

lady, "and it's better for the looks of the things that we shouldn't be his tenants."

It was only a few weeks later that she was startled by hearing her husband's voice calling her from the hillside as he rapidly approached the house. Mamie was in her room putting on a new pink cotton gown, in honour of an expected visit from young Don Cæsar, and Mrs. Mulrady was tidying the house in view of the same event. Something in the tone of her good man's voice, and the unusual circumstance of his return to the house before work was done, caused her, however, to drop her dusting cloth, and run to the kitchen door to meet him. She saw him running through the rows of cabbages, his face shining with perspiration and excitement, a light in his eyes which she had not seen for years. She recalled, without sentiment, that he looked like that when she had called him—a poor farm hand of her father's—out of the brush heap at the back of their former home, in Illinois, to learn the consent of her parents. The recollection was the more embarrassing as he threw his arms around her, and pressed a resounding kiss upon her sallow cheek.

"Sakes alive! Mulrady!" she said, exorcising the ghost of a blush that had also been recalled from the past with her housewife's apron, "What are you doin', and company expected every minit?"

"Malviny, I've struck it; and struck it rich!"

She disengaged herself from his arms, without ex-

citement, and looked at him with bright, but shrewdly observant eyes.

"I've struck it in the well. The regular vein that the boys have been looking fer. There's a fortin' fer you and Mamie: thousands and tens of thousands!"

"Wait a minit."

She left him quickly, and went to the foot of the stairs. He could hear her wonderingly and distinctly. "Ye can take off that new frock, Mamie," she called out.

There was a sound of undisguised expostulation from Mamie.

"I'm speaking," said Mrs. Mulrady, emphatically.

The murmuring ceased. Mrs. Mulrady returned to her husband. The interruption seemed to have taken off the keen edge of his enjoyment. He at once abdicated his momentary elevation as a discoverer, and waited for her to speak.

"Ye haven't told anyone yet?" she asked.

"No. I was alone, down in the shaft. Ye see, Malviny, I wasn't expectin' of anything." He began, with an attempt at fresh enjoyment, "I was just clearin' out, and hadn't reckoned on anythin'."

"You see, I was right when I advised your taking the land," she said, without heeding him.

Mulrady's face fell. "I hope Don Cæsar won't think"—he began, hesitatingly. "I reckon, perhaps, I oughter make some sorter compensation—you know."

"Stuff!" said Mrs. Mulrady, decidedly. "Don't be

a fool. Any gold discovery, anyhow, would have been yours—that's the law. And you bought the land without any restrictions. Besides, you never had any idea of this!"—she stopped, and looked him suddenly in the face—"Had you?"

Mulrady opened his honest, pale-grey eyes widely.

"Why Malviny! You know I hadn't, I could swear!"

"Don't swear, and don't let on to anybody but what you *did* know it was there. Now, Alvin Mulrady, listen to me." Her voice here took the strident form of action. "Knock off work at the shaft, and send your man away at once. Put on your things, catch the next stage to Sacramento, at four o'clock, and take Mamie with you."

"Mamie!" echoed Mulrady, feebly.

"You want to see Lawyer Cole and my brother Jim at once," she went on, without heeding him, "and Mamie wants a change and some proper clothes. Leave the rest to me and Abner. I'll break it to Mamie, and get her ready."

Mulrady passed his hands through his tangled hair, wet with perspiration. He was proud of his wife's energy and action; he did not dream of opposing her, but somehow he was disappointed. The charming glamour and joy of his discovery had vanished before he could fairly dazzle her with it; or, rather, she was not dazzled with it at all. It had become like business, and the expression "breaking it" to Mamie jarred upon him. He would have preferred to tell her him-

self; to watch the colour come into her delicate oval face, to have seen her soft eyes light with an innocent joy he had not seen in his wife's; and he felt a sinking conviction that his wife was the last one to awaken it.

"You aint got any time to lose," she said, impatiently, as he hesitated.

Perhaps it was her impatience that struck harshly upon him; perhaps, if she had not accepted her good fortune so confidently, he would not have spoken what was in his mind at the time; but he said, gravely, "Wait a minit, Malviny; I've suthin' to tell you 'bout this find of mine that's sing'lar."

"Go on," she said, quickly.

"Lyin' among the rotten quartz of the vein was a pick," he said, constrainedly; "and the face of the vein sorter looked ez if it had been worked at. Follering the line outside to the base of the hill there was signs of there having been an old tunnel; but it had fallen in, and was blocked up."

"Well?" said Mrs. Mulrady, contemptuously.

"Well," returned her husband, somewhat disconnectedly, "it kinder looked as if some feller might have discovered it before."

"And went away, and left it for others! That's likely —aint it?" interrupted his wife, with ill-disguised intolerance. "Everybody knows the hill wasn't worth that for prospectin'; and it was abandoned when we came here. It's your property, and you've paid for it. Are

you goin' to wait to advertise for the owner, Alvin Mulrady, or are you going to Sacramento at four o'clock to-day?"

Mulrady started. He had never seriously believed in the possibility of a previous discovery; but his conscientious nature had prompted him to give it a fair consideration. She was probably right. What he might have thought had she treated it with equal conscientiousness he did not consider. "All right," he said, simply. "I reckon we'll go at once."

"And when you talk to Lawyer Cole and Jim, keep that silly stuff about the pick to yourself. There's no use of putting queer ideas into other people's heads because you happen to have 'em yourself."

When the hurried arrangements were at last completed, and Mr. Mulrady and Mamie, accompanied by a taciturn and discreet Chinaman, carrying their scant luggage, were on their way to the high road to meet the up stage, the father gazed somewhat anxiously and wistfully into his daughter's face. He had looked forward to those few moments to enjoy the freshness and naiveté of Mamie's youthful delight and enthusiasm as a relief to his wife's practical, far-sighted realism. There was a pretty pink suffusion in her delicate cheek, the breathless happiness of a child in her half-opened little mouth, and a beautiful absorption in her large grey eyes that augured well for him.

"Well, Mamie, how do we like bein' an heiress?

How do we like layin' over all the gals between this and 'Frisco?"

"Eh?"

She had not heard him. The tender beautiful eyes were engaged in an anticipatory examination of the remembered shelves in the "Fancy Emporium" at Sacramento; in reading the admiration of the clerks; in glancing down a little criticisingly at the broad cowhide brogues that strode at her side; in looking up the road for the stage-coach; in regarding the fit of her new gloves—everywhere, but in the loving eyes of the man beside her.

He, however, repeated the question, touched with her charming preoccupation, and passing his arm around her little waist.

"I like it well enough, pa, you know!" she said, slightly disengaging his arm, but adding a perfunctory little squeeze to his elbow to soften the separation. "I always had an idea *something* would happen. I suppose I'm looking like a fright," she added; "but ma made me hurry to get away before Don Cæsar came."

"And you didn't want to go without seeing him?" he added, archly.

"I didn't want him to see me in this frock," said Mamie, simply. "I reckon that's why ma made me change," she added, with a slight laugh.

"Well, I reckon you're allus good enough for him in any dress," said Mulrady, watching her attentively;

"and more than a match for him *now*," he added, triumphantly.

"I don't know about that," said Mamie. "He's been rich all the time, and his father and grandfather before him; while we've been poor, and his tenants."

His face changed; the look of bewilderment, with which he had followed her words, gave way to one of pain, and then of anger. "Did he git off such stuff as that?" he asked, quickly.

"No. I'd like to catch him at it," responded Mamie, promptly. "There's better nor him to be had for the asking now."

They had walked on a few moments in aggrieved silence, and the Chinaman might have imagined some misfortune had just befallen them. But Mamie's teeth shone again between her parted lips. "La, pa! it ain't that! He cares everything for me, and I do for him; and if ma hadn't got new ideas"—— She stopped suddenly.

"What new ideas?" queried her father, anxiously.

"Oh, nothing! I wish, pa, you'd put on your other boots! Everybody can see these are made for the farrows. And you aint a market gardener any more."

"What am I, then?" asked Mulrady, with a half-pleased, half-uneasy laugh.

"You're a capitalist, *I* say; but ma says, a landed proprietor." Nevertheless, the landed proprietor, when he reached the boulder on the Red Dog highway, sat down in somewhat moody contemplation, with his head

bowed over the broad cowhide brogues, that seemed to have already gathered enough of the soil to indicate his right to that title. Mamie, who had recovered her spirits, but had not lost her preoccupation, wandered off by herself in the meadow, or ascended the hillside as her occasional impatience at the delay of the coach, or the following of some ambitious fancy alternately prompted her. She was so far away at one time, that the stage-coach, which finally drew up before Mulrady, was obliged to wait for her.

When she was deposited safely inside, and Mulrady had climbed to the box beside the driver, the latter remarked curtly,

"Ye gave me a right smart skeer, a minit ago, stranger."

"Ez how?"

"Well, about three years ago, I was comin' down this yer grade, at just this time, and, sittin' right on that stone, in just your attitude, was a man about your build and years. I pulled up to let him in, when, darn my skin! if he ever moved, but sorter looked at me without speakin'. I called to him, and he never answered, 'cept with that idiotic stare. I then let him have my opinion of him, in mighty strong English, and drove off, leavin' him there. The next morning when I came by on the up-trip, darn my skin, if he wasn't thar, but lyin' all of a heap on the boulder. Jim drops down and picks him up. Doctor Duchesne, ez was along, allows it was a played-out prospector, with a big

case of paralysis, and we expressed him through to the County Hospital, like so much dead freight. I've allus bin kinder superstitious about passin' that rock, and when I saw you jist now, sittin' thar, dazed like, with your head down like the other chap, it rather drew me off my centre."

In the inexplicable and half-superstitious uneasiness that this coincidence awakened in Mulrady's unimaginative mind, he was almost on the point of disclosing his good fortune to the driver, in order to prove how preposterous was the parallel, but checked himself in time.

"Did you find out who he was?" broke in a rash passenger. "Did you ever get over it?" added another unfortunate.

With a pause of insulting scorn at the interruption, the driver resumed, pointedly, to Mulrady: "The pint of the whole thing was my cussin' a helpless man, ez could neither cuss back nor shoot; and then afterwards takin' you for his ghost layin' for me to get even." He paused again, and then added, carelessly, "They say he never kem to enuff, to let on who he was or whar he kem from; and he was eventooally taken to a 'Sylum for Doddering Idjits and Gin'ral and Permiskus Imbeciles at Sacramento. I've heerd it's considered a first-class institooshun, not only for them ez is paralysed and can't talk, as for them ez is the reverse and is too chipper. Now," he added, languidly turning for the first time to his miserable questioners, "how did *you* find it?"

CHAPTER II.

When the news of the discovery of gold in Mulrady shaft was finally made public, it created an excitement hitherto unknown in the history of the country. Half of Red Dog and all Rough-and-Ready were emptied upon the yellow hills surrounding Mulrady's, until their circling camp fires looked like a besieging army that had invested his peaceful pastoral home, preparatory to carrying it by assault. Unfortunately for them, they found the various points of 'vantage already garrisoned with notices of "pre-emption" for mining purposes in the name of the various members of the Alvarado family. This stroke of business was due to Mrs. Mulrady, as a means of mollifying the conscientious scruples of her husband and of placating the Alvarados, in view of some remote contingency. It is but fair to say that this degradation of his father's Castilian principles was opposed by Don Cæsar. "You needn't work them yourself, but sell out to them that will; it's the only way to keep the prospectors from taking it without paying for it at all," argued Mrs. Mulrady. Don Cæsar finally assented; perhaps less to the business arguments of Mulrady's wife than to the simple suggestion of Mamie's mother. Enough, that he realised a sum in money for

a few acres that exceeded the last ten years' income of Don Ramon's seven leagues.

Equally unprecedented and extravagant was the realisation of the discovery in Mulrady's shaft. It was alleged that a company, hastily formed in Sacramento, paid him a million of dollars down, leaving him still a controlling two-thirds interest in the mine. With an obstinacy, however, that amounted almost to a moral conviction, he refused to include the house and potato-patch in the property. When the company had yielded the point, he declined with equal tenacity to part with it to outside speculators on even the most extravagant offers. In vain Mrs. Mulrady protested; in vain she pointed out to him that the retention of the evidence of his former humble occupation was a green blot upon their social escutcheon.

"If you will keep the land, build on it, and root up the garden." But Mulrady was adamant.

"It's the only thing I ever made myself, and got out of the soil with my own hands; it's the beginning of my fortune, and it may be the end of it. Mebbee, I'll be glad enough to have it to come back to some day, and be thankful for the square meal I can dig out of it."

By repeated pressure, however, Mulrady yielded the compromise that a portion of it should be made into a vineyard and flower-garden, and by a suitable colouring of ornament and luxury obliterate its vulgar part. Less successful, however, was that energetic woman in another

effort to mitigate the austerities of their earlier state. It occurred to her to utilise the softer accents of Don Cæsar in the pronunciation of their family name, and privately had "Mulrade" take the place of Mulrady on her visiting card. "It might be Spanish," she argued with her husband; "Lawyer Cole says most American names are corrupted, and how do you know that yours aint?" Mulrady, who would not swear that his ancestors came from Ireland to the Carolinas in '98, was helpless to refute the assertion. But the terrible Nemesis of an un-Spanish, American provincial speech avenged the orthographical outrage at once. When Mrs. Mulrady began to be addressed orally, as well as by letter, as "Mrs. Mulraid," and when simple amatory effusions to her daughter rhymed with "lovely maid," she promptly restored the original vowel. But she fondly clung to the Spanish courtesy which transformed her husband's baptismal name, and usually spoke of him—in his absence—as "Don Alvino." But in the presence of his short, square figure, his orange tawny hair, his twinkling grey eyes, and retroussé nose, even that dominant woman withheld his title. It was currently reported at Red Dog that a distinguished foreigner had one day approached Mulrady with the formula, "I believe I have the honour of addressing Don Alvino Mulrady?" "You kin bet your boots, stranger, that's me," had returned that simple hidalgo.

Although Mrs. Mulrady would have preferred that Mamie should remain at Sacramento until she could

join her, preparatory to a trip to "the States" and Europe, she yielded to her daughter's desire to astonish Rough-and-Ready, before she left, with her new wardrobe, and unfold in the parent nest the delicate and painted wings with which she was to fly from them for ever. "I don't want them to remember me afterwards in those spotted prints, ma, and like as not say I never had a decent frock until I went away." There was something so like the daughter of her mother in this delicate foresight that the touched and gratified parent kissed her, and assented. The result was gratifying beyond her expectation. In that few weeks' sojourn at Sacramento, the young girl seemed to have adapted and assimilated herself to the latest modes of fashion with even more than the usual American girl's pliancy and taste. Equal to all emergencies of style and material, she seemed to supply, from some hitherto unknown quality she possessed, the grace and manner peculiar to each. Untrammelled by tradition, education, or precedent, she had the Western girl's confidence in all things being possible, which made them so often probable. Mr. Mulrady looked at his daughter with mingled sentiments of pride and awe. Was it possible that this delicate creature, so superior to him that he seemed like a degenerate scion of her remoter race, was his own flesh and blood? Was she the daughter of her mother, who even in her remembered youth was never equipped like this? If the thought brought no pleasure to his simple, loving nature, it at least spared him the

pain of what might have seemed ingratitude in one more akin to himself. "The fact is, we aint quite up to her style," was his explanation and apology. A vague belief that in another and a better world than this he might approximate and understand this perfection somewhat soothed and sustained him.

It was quite consistent, therefore, that the embroidered cambric dress which Mamie Mulrady wore one summer afternoon on the hill-side at Los Gatos, while to the critical feminine eye at once artistic and expensive, should not seem incongruous to her surroundings or to herself in the eyes of a general audience. It certainly did not seem so to one pair of frank humorous ones that glanced at her from time to time, as their owner, a young fellow of five-and-twenty, walked at her side. He was the new editor of the *Rough-and-Ready Record,* and, having been her fellow-passenger from Sacramento, had already once or twice availed himself of her father's invitation to call upon them. Mrs. Mulrady had not discouraged this mild flirtation. Whether she wished to disconcert Don Cæsar for some occult purpose, or whether, like the rest of her sex, she had an overweening confidence in the unheroic, unseductive, and purely platonic character of masculine humour, did not appear.

"When I say I'm sorry you are going to leave us, Miss Mulrady," said the young fellow, lightly, "you will comprehend my unselfishness, since I frankly admit your departure would be a positive relief to me as an editor

and a man. The pressure in the Poets' Corner of the *Record* since it was mistakingly discovered that a person of your name might be induced to seek the 'glade' and 'shade' without being 'afraid,' 'dismayed,' or 'betrayed,' has been something enormous, and, unfortunately, I am debarred from rejecting anything, on the just ground that I am myself an interested admirer."

"It is dreadful to be placarded around the country by one's own full name, isn't it?" said Mamie, without, however, expressing much horror in her face.

"They think it much more respectful than to call you 'Mamie,'" he responded, lightly; "and many of your admirers are middle-aged men, with a mediæval style of compliment. I've discovered that amatory versifying wasn't entirely a youthful passion. Colonel Cash is about as fatal with a couplet as with a double-barrelled gun, and scatters as terribly. Judge Butts and Doctor Wilson have both discerned the resemblance of your gifts to those of Venus, and their own to Apollo. But don't under-value those tributes, Miss Mulrady," he added, more seriously. "You'll have thousands of admirers where you are going; but you'll be willing to admit in the end, I think, that none were more honest and respectful than your subjects at Rough-and-Ready and Red Dog." He stopped, and added in a graver tone, "Does Don Cæsar write poetry?"

"He has something better to do," said the young lady, pertly.

"I can easily imagine that," he returned, mischiev-

ously, "it must be a pallid substitute for other opportunities."

"What did you come here for?" she asked, suddenly.

"To see you."

"Nonsense! You know what I mean. Why did you ever leave Sacramento to come here? I should think it would suit you so much better than this place."

"I suppose I was fired by your father's example, and wished to find a gold mine."

"Men like you never do," she said, simply.

"Is that a compliment, Miss Mulrady?"

"I don't know. But I think that you think that it is."

He gave her the pleased look of one who had unexpectedly found a sympathetic intelligence. "Do I? This is interesting. Let's sit down." In their desultory rambling they had reached, quite unconsciously, the large boulder at the roadside. Mamie hesitated a moment, looked up and down the road, and then, with an already opulent indifference to the damaging of her spotless skirt, sat herself upon it with her furled parasol held by her two little hands thrown over her half drawn-up knee. The young editor, half sitting, half leaning against the stone, began to draw figures in the sand with his cane.

"On the contrary, Miss Mulrady, I hope to make some money here. You are leaving Rough-and-Ready because you are rich. We are coming to it because we are poor."

"We?" echoed Mamie, lazily, looking up the road.

"Yes. My father and two sisters."

"I am sorry. I might have known them if I hadn't been going away." At the same moment, it flashed across her mind that, if they were like the man before her, they might prove disagreeably independent and critical. "Is your father in business?" she asked.

He shook his head. After a pause, he said, punctuating his sentences with the point of his stick in the soft dust, "He is paralysed, and out of his mind, Miss Mulrady. I came to California to seek him, as all news of him ceased three years since; and I found him only two weeks ago, alone, friendless—an unrecognised pauper in the county hospital."

"Two weeks ago? That was when I went to Sacramento."

"Very probably."

"It must have been very shocking to you?"

"It was."

"I should think you'd feel real bad?"

"I do, at times." He smiled, and laid his stick on the stone. "You now see, Miss Mulrady, how necessary to me is this good fortune that you don't think me worthy of. Meantime, I must try to make a home for them at Rough-and-Ready."

Miss Mulrady put down her knee and her parasol. "We mustn't stay here much longer, you know."

"Why?"

"Why, the stage-coach comes by at about this time."

"And you think the passengers will observe us sitting here?"

"Of course they will."

"Miss Mulrady, I implore you to stay."

He was leaning over her with such apparent earnestness of voice and gesture that the colour came into her cheek. For a moment she scarcely dared to lift her conscious eyes to his. When she did so, she suddenly glanced her own aside with a flash of anger. He was laughing.

"If you have any pity for me, do not leave me now," he repeated. "Stay a moment longer, and my fortune is made. The passengers will report us all over Red Dog as engaged. I shall be supposed to be in your father's secrets, and shall be sought after as a director of all the new companies. The *Record* will double its circulation; poetry will drop out of its columns; advertising rush to fill its place, and I shall receive five dollars a week more salary, if not seven and a half. Never mind the consequences to yourself at such a moment. I assure you there will be none. You can deny it the next day—*I* will deny it—nay, more, the *Record* itself will deny it in an extra edition of one thousand copies, at ten cents each. Linger a moment longer, Miss Mulrady. Fly, oh fly not yet. They're coming—hark! ho! By Jove, it's only Don Cæsar!"

It was, indeed, only the young scion of the house of Alvarado, blue-eyed, sallow-skinned, and high-shouldered, coming towards them on a fiery, half-broken

mustang, whose very spontaneous lawlessness seemed to accentuate and bring out the grave and decorous ease of his rider. Even in his burlesque preoccupation the editor of the *Record* did not withhold his admiration of this perfect horsemanship. Mamie, who, in her wounded *amour propre*, would like to have made much of it to annoy her companion, was thus estopped any ostentatious compliment.

Don Cæsar lifted his hat with sweet seriousness to the lady, with grave courtesy to the gentleman. While the lower half of this Centaur was apparently quivering with fury, and stamping the ground in his evident desire to charge upon the pair, the upper half, with natural dignity, looked from the one to the other as if to leave the privilege of an explanation with them. But Mamie was too wise, and her companion too indifferent to offer one. A slight shade passed over Don Cæsar's face. To complicate the situation at that moment, the expected stage-coach came rattling by. With quick feminine intuition, Mamie caught in the faces of the driver and the express-man, and reflected in the mischievous eyes of her companion, a peculiar interpretation of their meeting that was not removed by the whispered assurance of the editor that the passengers were anxiously looking back "to see the shooting."

The young Spaniard, equally oblivious of humour or curiosity, remained impassive.

"You know Mr. Slinn, of the *Record*," said Mamie; "don't you?"

Don Cæsar had never before met the Señor Esslinn. He was under the impression that it was a Señor Robinson that was of the *Record.*

"Oh! *he* was shot," said Slinn. "I am taking his place."

"Bueno! To be shot too? I trust not."

Slinn looked quickly and sharply into Don Cæsar's grave face. He seemed to be incapable of any double meaning. However, as he had no serious reason for awakening Don Cæsar's jealousy, and very little desire to become an embarrassing third in this conversation, and possibly a burden to the young lady, he proceeded to take his leave of her. From a sudden feminine revulsion of sympathy, or from some unintelligible instinct of diplomacy, Mamie said, as she extended her hand, "I hope you'll find a home for your family near here. Mamma wants pa to let our old house. Perhaps it might suit you, if not too far from your work. You might speak to ma about it."

"Thank you; I will," responded the young man, pressing her hand with unaffected cordiality.

Don Cæsar watched him until he had disappeared behind the wayside buckeyes.

"He is a man of family—this one—your countryman?"

It seemed strange to her to have a mere acquaintance spoken of as "her countryman"—not the first time nor the last time in her career. As there appeared no

trace or sign of jealousy in her questioner's manner, she answered briefly, but vaguely.

"Yes; it's a shocking story. His father disappeared some years ago, and he has just found him—a helpless paralytic—in the Sacramento Hospital. He'll have to support him—and they're very poor."

"So, then, they are not independent of each other always—these fathers and children of Americanos!"

"No," said Mamie, shortly. Without knowing why, she felt inclined to resent Don Cæsar's manner. His serious gravity—gentle and high-bred as it was, undoubtedly—was somewhat trying to her at times, and seemed even more so after Slinn's irreverent humour. She picked up her parasol, a little impatiently, as if to go.

But Don Cæsar had already dismounted, and tied his horse to a tree with a strong lariat that hung at his saddle-bow.

"Let us walk through the woods towards your home. I can return alone for the horse when you shall dismiss me."

They turned in among the pines that, overcrowding the hollow, crept partly up the side of the hill of Mulrady's shaft. A disused trail, almost hidden by the waxen-hued yerba buena, led from the highway, and finally lost itself in the undergrowth. It was a lovers' walk; they were lovers evidently, and yet the man was too self-poised in his gravity, the young woman too

conscious and critical to suggest an absorbing or oblivious passion.

"I should not have made myself so obtrusive to-day before your friend," said Don Cæsar, with proud humility, "but I could not understand from your mother whether you were alone or whether my company was desirable. It is of this I have now to speak, Mamie. Lately, your mother has seemed strange to me; avoiding any reference to our affection; treating it lightly, and even, as to-day, I fancy, putting obstacles in the way of our meeting alone. She was disappointed at your return from Sacramento, where, I have been told, she intended you to remain until you left the country; and since your return I have seen you but twice. I may be wrong. Perhaps I do not comprehend the American mother; I have—who knows?—perhaps offended in some point of etiquette, omitted some ceremony that was her due. But when you told me, Mamie, that it was not necessary to speak to *her* first, that it was not the American fashion"——

Mamie started, and blushed slightly.

"Yes," she said hurriedly, "certainly; but ma has been quite queer of late, and she may think—you know—that since—since there has been so much property to dispose of, she ought to have been consulted."

"Then let us consult her at once, dear child! And as to the property, in Heaven's name, let her dispose of it as she will. Saints forbid that an Alvarado should ever interfere. And what is it to us, my little one?

Enough that Doña Mameta Alvarado will never have less state than the richest bride that ever came to Los Gatos."

Mamie had not forgotten that, scarcely a month ago, even had she loved the man before her no more than she did at present, she would still have been thrilled with delight at these words! Even now she was moved — conscious as she had become that the "state" of a bride of the Alvarados was not all she had imagined, and that the bare adobe court of Los Gatos was open to the sky and the free criticism of Sacramento capitalists!

"Yes, dear," she murmured, with a half childlike pleasure, that lit up her face and eyes so innocently that it stopped any minute investigation into its origin and real meaning. "Yes, dear; but we need not have a fuss made about it at present, and perhaps put ma against us. She wouldn't hear of our marrying now; and she might forbid our engagement."

"But you are going away."

"I should have to go to New York or Europe *first,* you know," she answered, naively, "even if it were all settled. I should have to get things! One couldn't be decent here."

With the recollection of the pink cotton gown, in which she had first pledged her troth to him, before his eyes, he said, "But you are charming now. You cannot be more so to me. If I am satisfied, little one,

with you as you are, let us go together, and then you can get dresses to please others."

She had not expected this importunity. Really, if it came to this, she might have engaged herself to someone like Slinn; he at least would have understood her. He was much cleverer, and certainly more of a man of the world. When Slinn had treated her like a child, it was with the humorous tolerance of an admiring superior, and not the didactic impulse of a guardian. She did not say this, nor did her pretty eyes indicate it, as in the instance of her brief anger with Slinn. She only said gently,

"I should have thought you, of all men, would have been particular about your wife doing the proper thing. But never mind! Don't let us talk any more about it. Perhaps, as it seems such a great thing to you and so much trouble, there may be no necessity for it at all."

I do not think that the young lady deliberately planned this charmingly illogical deduction from Don Cæsar's speech, or that she calculated its effect upon him; but it was part of her nature to say it, and profit by it. Under the unjust lash of it, his pride gave way.

"Ah, do you not see why I wish to go with you?" he said, with sudden and unexpected passion. "You are beautiful; you are good; it has pleased Heaven to make you rich also; but you are a child in experience, and know not your own heart. With your beauty, your goodness, and your wealth, you will attract all to you —as you do here—because you cannot help it. But

you will be equally helpless, little one, if *they* should attract *you*—and you had no tie to fall back upon."

It was an unfortunate speech. The words were Don Cæsar's; but the thought she had heard before from her mother, although the deduction had been of a very different kind. Mamie followed the speaker with bright but visionary eyes. There must be some truth in all this. Her mother had said it; Mr. Slinn had laughingly admitted it. She *had* a brilliant future before her! Was she right in making it impossible by a rash and foolish tie? He himself had said she was inexperienced. She knew it; and yet, what was he doing now but taking advantage of that inexperience? If he really loved her, he would be willing to submit to the test. She did not ask a similar one from him; and was willing, if she came out of it free, to marry him just the same. There was something so noble in this thought, that she felt for a moment carried away by an impulse of compassionate unselfishness, and smiled tenderly as she looked up in his face.

"Then you consent, Mamie?" he said eagerly, passing his arm around her waist.

"Not now, Cæsar," she said, gently disengaging herself. "I must think it over; we are both too young to act upon it rashly; it would be unfair to you, who are so quiet and have seen so few girls—I mean Americans—to tie yourself to the first one you have known. When I am gone you will go more into the world. There are Mr. Slinn's two sisters coming here—I shouldn't

wonder if they were far cleverer and talked far better than I do—and think how I should feel if I knew that only a wretched pledge to me kept you from loving them!" She stopped, and cast down her eyes.

It was her first attempt at coquetry; for, in her usual charming selfishness, she was perfectly frank and open; and it might not have been her last, but she had gone too far at first, and was not prepared for a recoil of her own argument.

"If you admit that it is possible—that it is possible to you!" he said, quickly.

She saw her mistake. "We may not have many opportunities to meet alone," she answered, quietly; "and I am sure we would be happier when we meet not to accuse each other of impossibilities. Let us rather see how we can communicate together, if anything should prevent our meeting. Remember, it was only by chance that you were able to see me now. If ma has believed that she ought to have been consulted, our meeting together in this secret way will only make matters worse. She is even now wondering where I am, and may be suspicious. I must go back at once. At any moment someone may come here looking for me."

"But I have so much to say," he pleaded. "Our time has been so short."

"You can write."

"But what will your mother think of that?" he said, in grave astonishment.

She coloured again as she returned, quickly, "Of course, you must not write to the house. You can leave a letter somewhere for me—say, somewhere about here. Stop!" she added, with a sudden girlish gaiety, "see, here's the very place. Look here!"

She pointed to the decayed trunk of a blasted sycamore, a few feet from the trail. A cavity, breast high, half filled with skeleton leaves and pine-nuts, showed that it had formerly been a squirrel's hoard, but for some reason had been deserted.

"Look! it's a regular letter-box;" she continued, gaily, rising on tip-toe to peep into its recesses. Don Cæsar looked at her admiringly—it seemed like a return to their first idyllic love-making in the old days, when she used to steal out of the cabbage rows in her brown linen apron and sun bonnet to walk with him in the woods. He recalled the fact to her with the fatality of a lover already seeking to restore in past recollections something that was wanting in the present. She received it with the impatience of youth, to whom the present is all sufficient.

"I wonder how you could ever have cared for me in that holland apron," she said, looking down upon her new dress.

"Shall I tell you why?" he said, fondly, passing his arm around her waist, and drawing her pretty head nearer his shoulder.

"No—not now!" she said, laughingly; but struggling to free herself. "There's not time. Write it, and put

it in the box. There," she added, hastily, "listen!—what's that?"

"It's only a squirrel," he whispered reassuringly in her ear.

"No; it's somebody coming! I must go! Please! Cæsar, dear! There, then"——

She met his kiss half-way, released herself with a lithe movement of her wrist and shoulder, and the next moment seemed to slip into the woods, and was gone.

Don Cæsar listened with a sigh as the last rustling ceased, cast a look at the decayed tree as if to fix it in his memory, and then slowly retraced his steps towards his tethered mustang.

He was right, however, in his surmise of the cause of that interruption. A pair of bright eyes had been watching them from the bough of an adjacent tree. It was a squirrel, who, having had serious and prior intentions of making use of the cavity they had discovered, had only withheld examination by an apparent courteous discretion towards the intruding pair. Now that they were gone he slipped down the tree and ran towards the decayed stump.

CHAPTER III.

APPARENTLY dissatisfied with the result of an investigation, which proved that the cavity was unfit as a treasure hoard for a discreet squirrel, whatever its value as a receptacle for the love-tokens of incautious humanity, the little animal at once set about to put things in order. He began by whisking out an immense quantity of dead leaves, disturbed a family of tree-spiders, dissipated a drove of patient aphides browsing in the bark, as well as their attendant dairymen, the ants, and otherwise ruled it with the high hand of dispossession and a contemptuous opinion of the previous incumbents. It must not be supposed, however, that his proceedings were altogether free from contemporaneous criticism; a venerable crow sitting on a branch above him displayed great interest in his occupation, and hopping down a few moments afterwards, disposed of some worm-eaten nuts, a few larvæ, and an insect or two, with languid dignity and without prejudice. Certain incumbrances, however, still resisted the squirrel's general eviction; among them a folded square of paper with sharply defined edges, that declined investigation, and, owing to a nauseous smell of tobacco, escaped nibbling as it had apparently escaped insect ravages. This, owing to its

sharp angles, which persisted in catching in the soft decaying wood in his whirlwind of house cleaning, he allowed to remain. Having thus, in a general way, prepared for the coming winter, the self-satisfied little rodent dismissed the subject from his active mind.

His rage and indignation a few days later may be readily conceived, when he found, on returning to his new-made home, another square of paper, folded like the first, but much fresher and whiter, lying within the cavity, on top of some moss which had evidently been placed there for the purpose. This he felt was really more than he could bear, but as it was smaller, with a few energetic kicks and whisks of his tail he managed to finally dislodge it through the opening, where it fell ignominiously to the earth. The eager eyes of the ever-attendant crow, however, instantly detected it; he flew to the ground, and, turning it over, examined it gravely. It was certainly not edible, but it was exceedingly rare, and, as an old collector of curios, he felt he could not pass it by. He lifted it in his beak, and, with a desperate struggle against the superincumbent weight, regained the branch with his prize. Here, by one of those delicious vagaries of animal nature, he apparently at once discharged his mind of the whole affair, became utterly oblivious of it, allowed it to drop without the least concern, and eventually flew away with an abstracted air, as if he had been another bird entirely. The paper got into a manzanita bush, where it remained suspended until the evening, when, being

dislodged by a passing wild cat on its way to Mulrady's henroost, gave that delicately sensitive marauder such a turn that she fled into the adjacent county.

But the troubles of the squirrel were not yet over. On the following day the young man who had accompanied the young woman returned to the trunk, and the squirrel had barely time to make his escape before the impatient visitor approached the opening of the cavity, peered into it, and even passed his hand through its recesses. The delight visible upon his anxious and serious face at the disappearance of the letter, and the apparent proof that it had been called for, showed him to have been its original depositor; and probably awakened a remorseful recollection in the dark bosom of the omnipresent crow, who uttered a conscience-stricken croak from the bough above him. But the young man quickly disappeared again, and the squirrel was once more left in undisputed possession.

A week passed. A weary, anxious interval to Don Cæsar, who had neither seen nor heard from Mamie since their last meeting. Too conscious of his own self-respect to call at the house after the equivocal conduct of Mrs. Mulrady, and too proud to haunt the lanes and approaches in the hope of meeting her daughter, like an ordinary lover, he hid his gloomy thoughts in the monastic shadows of the courtyard at Los Gatos, or found relief in furious riding at night and early morning on the highway. Once or twice the up-stage had been

overtaken and passed by a rushing figure as shadowy as a phantom horseman, with only the star-like point of a cigarette to indicate its humanity. It was in one of these fierce recreations that he was obliged to stop in early morning at the blacksmith's shop at Rough-and-Ready, to have a loosened horseshoe replaced, and while waiting, picked up a newspaper. Don Cæsar seldom read the papers, but noticing that this was the *Record,* he glanced at its columns. A familiar name suddenly flashed out of the dark type like a spark from the anvil. With a brain and heart that seemed to be beating in unison with the blacksmith's sledge, he read as follows:—

"Our distinguished fellow-townsman, Alvin Mulrady, Esq., left town, day before yesterday to attend an important meeting of directors of the Red Dog Ditch Company, in San Francisco. Society will regret to hear that Mrs. Mulrady and her beautiful and accomplished daughter, who were expecting to depart for Europe at the end of the month—anticipated the event nearly a fortnight, by taking this opportunity of accompanying Mr. Mulrady as far as San Francisco, on their way to the East. Mrs. and Miss Mulrady intend to visit London, Paris, and Berlin, and will be absent three years. It is possible that Mr. Mulrady may join them later at one or other of those capitals. Considerable disappointment is felt that a more extended leave-taking was not possible, and that, under the circumstances, no opportunity was offered for a 'send off' suitable to the condition of

the parties, and the esteem in which they are held in Rough-and-Ready."

The paper dropped from his hands. Gone! and without a word! No, that was impossible! There must be some mistake; she had written; the letter had miscarried; she must have sent word to Los Gatos, and the stupid messenger had blundered; she had probably appointed another meeting, or expected him to follow to San Francisco. "The day before yesterday!" It was the morning's paper—she had been gone scarcely two days—it was not too late yet to receive a delayed message by post, by some forgetful hand—by—ah—the tree!

Of course it was in the tree, and he had not been there for a week! Why had he not thought of it before? The fault was his, not hers. Perhaps she had gone away, believing him faithless, or a country boor.

"In the name of the Devil, will you keep me here till eternity!"

The blacksmith stared at him. Don Cæsar suddenly remembered that he was speaking, as he was thinking —in Spanish.

"Ten dollars, my friend, if you have done in five minutes!"

The man laughed. "That's good enough American," he said beginning to quicken his efforts. Don Cæsar again took up the paper. There was another paragraph that recalled his last interview with Mamie:—

"Mr. Harry Slinn, jun., the editor of this paper, has just moved into the pioneer house formerly occupied by

Alvin Mulrady, Esq., which has already become historic in the annals of the county. Mr. Slinn brings with him his father—H. J. Slinn, Esq.,—and his two sisters. Mr. Slinn, sen., who has been suffering for many years from complete paralysis, we understand is slowly improving; and it is by the advice of his physicians that he has chosen the invigorating air of the foothills as a change to the debilitating heat of Sacramento."

The affair had been quickly settled, certainly, reflected Don Cæsar, with a slight chill of jealousy, as he thought of Mamie's interest in the young editor. But the next moment he dismissed it from his mind; all except a dull consciousness that, if she really loved him —Don Cæsar—as he loved her, she could not have assisted in throwing into his society the two young sisters of the editor, who she expected might be so attractive.

Within the five minutes the horse was ready, and Don Cæsar in the saddle again. In less than half an hour he was at the wayside boulder. Here he picketed his horse, and took the narrow foot-trail through the hollow. It did not take him long to reach their old trysting-place. With a beating heart he approached the decaying trunk and looked into the cavity. There was no letter there!

A few blackened nuts and some of the dry moss he had put there were lying on the ground at its roots. He could not remember whether they were there when he had last visited the spot. He began to grope in the cavity with both hands. His fingers struck against the

sharp angles of a flat paper packet: a thrill of joy ran through them and stopped his beating heart; he drew out the hidden object, and was chilled with disappointment.

It was an ordinary-sized envelope of yellowish-brown paper, bearing, besides the usual Government stamp, the official legend of an express company, and showing its age as much by this record of a now obsolete carrying service as by the discolouration of time and atmosphere. Its weight, which was heavier than that of an ordinary letter of the same size and thickness, was evidently due to some loose inclosures, that slightly rustled and could be felt by the fingers, like minute pieces of metal or grains of gravel. It was within Don Cæsar's experience that gold specimens were often sent in that manner. It was in a state of singular preservation, except the address, which being written in pencil was scarcely discernible, and even when deciphered appeared to be incoherent and unfinished. The unknown correspondent had written "dear Mary" and then "Mrs. Mary Slinn" —with an unintelligible scrawl following for the direction. If Don Cæsar's mind had not been lately preoccupied with the name of the editor, he would hardly have guessed the superscription.

In his cruel disappointment and fully aroused indignation, he at once began to suspect a connection of circumstances which at any other moment he would have thought purely accidental, or perhaps not have considered at all. The cavity in the tree had evidently

been used as a secret receptacle for letters before; did Mamie know it at the time; and how did she know it? The apparent age of the letter made it preposterous to suppose that it pointed to any secret correspondence of hers with young Mr. Slinn; and the address was not in her handwriting. Was there any secret previous intimacy between the families? There was but one way in which he could connect this letter with Mamie's faithlessness. It was an infamous, a grotesquely horrible idea, a thought which sprang as much from his inexperience of the world and his habitual suspiciousness of all humour as anything else! It was that the letter was a brutal joke of Slinn's—a joke perhaps concocted by Mamie and himself—a parting insult that should at the last moment proclaim their treachery and his own credulity. Doubtless, it contained a declaration of their shame, and the reason why she had fled from him without a word of explanation. And the inclosure, of course, was some significant and degrading illustration. Those Americans were full of those low conceits: it was their national vulgarity.

He held the letter in his angry hand. He could break it open if he wished, and satisfy himself; but it was not addressed to *him,* and the instinct of honour, strong even in his rage, was the instinct of an adversary as well. No; Slinn should open the letter before him. Slinn should explain everything, and answer for it. If it was nothing—a mere accident—it would lead to some general explanation, and perhaps even news of

Mamie. But he would arraign Slinn, and at once. He put the letter in his pocket, quickly retraced his steps to his horse, and, putting spurs to the animal, followed the high road to the gate of Mulrady's pioneer cabin.

He remembered it well enough. To a cultivated taste, it was superior to the more pretentious "new house." During the first year of Mulrady's tenancy, the plain square log-cabin had received those additions and attractions which only a tenant can conceive and actual experience suggest; and in this way, the hideous right angles were broken with sheds, "lean-to" extensions, until a certain picturesqueness was given to the irregularity of outline, and a home-like security and companionship to the congregated buildings. It typified the former life of the great capitalist, as the tall new house illustrated the loneliness and isolation that wealth had given him. But the real points of vantage were the years of cultivation and habitation that had warmed and enriched the soil, and evoked the climbing vines and roses that already hid its unpainted boards, rounded its hard outlines, and gave projection and shadow from the pitiless glare of a summer's long sun, or broke the steady beating of the winter rains. It was true that pea and bean poles surrounded it on one side, and the only access to the house was through the cabbage rows that once were the pride and sustenance of the Mulradys. It was this fact, more than any other, that had impelled Mrs. Mulrady to abandon its site; she did not like to

read the history of their humble origin reflected in the faces of their visitors as they entered.

Don Cæsar tied his horse to the fence, and hurriedly approached the house. The door, however, hospitably opened when he was a few paces from it, and when he reached the threshold he found himself unexpectedly in the presence of two pretty girls. They were evidently Slinn's sisters, whom he had neither thought of nor included in the meeting he had prepared. In spite of his preoccupation, he felt himself suddenly embarrassed, not only by the actual distinction of their beauty, but by a kind of likeness that they seemed to bear to Mamie.

"We saw you coming," said the elder, unaffectedly. "You are Don Cæsar Alvarado. My brother has spoken of you."

The words recalled Don Cæsar to himself and a sense of courtesy. He was not here to quarrel with these fair strangers at their first meeting; he must seek Slinn elsewhere, and at another time. The frankness of his reception, and the allusion to their brother, made it appear impossible that they should be either a party to his disappointment, or even aware of it. His excitement melted away before a certain lazy ease, which the consciousness of their beauty seemed to give them. He was able to put a few courteous inquiries, and, thanks to the paragraph in the *Record,* to congratulate them upon their father's improvement.

"Oh, pa is a great deal better in his health, and

has picked up even in the last few days, so that he is able to walk round with crutches," said the elder sister. "The air here seems to invigorate him wonderfully."

"And you know, Esther," said the younger, "I think he begins to take more notice of things, especially when he is out of doors. He looks around on the scenery, and his eye brightens, as if he knew all about it; and sometimes he knits his brows, and looks down so, as if he was trying to remember."

"You know, I suppose," explained Esther, "that since his seizure his memory has been a blank—that is, three or four years of his life seemed to have been dropped out of his recollection."

"It might be a mercy sometimes, Señora," said Don Cæsar, with a grave sigh, as he looked at the delicate features before him, which recalled the face of the absent Mamie.

"That's not very complimentary," said the younger girl, laughingly; "for pa didn't recognise us, and only remembered us as little girls."

"Vashti!" interrupted Esther, rebukingly; then, turning to Don Cæsar, she added, "my sister, Vashti, means that father remembers more what happened before he came to California, when we were quite young, than he does of the interval that elapsed. Dr. Duchesne says it's a singular case. He thinks that, with his present progress, he will recover the perfect use of his limbs; though his memory may never come back again."

"Unless—— You forget what the doctor told us this morning," interrupted Vashti again, briskly.

"I was going to say it," said Esther, a little curtly. "*Unless* he has another stroke. Then he will either die or recover his mind entirely."

Don Cæsar glanced at the bright faces, a trifle heightened in colour by their eager recital and the slight rivalry of narration, and looked grave. He was a little shocked at a certain lack of sympathy and tenderness towards their unhappy parent. They seemed to him, not only to have caught that dry, curious toleration of helplessness which characterises even relationship in its attendance upon chronic suffering and weakness, but to have acquired an unconscious habit of turning it to account. In his present sensitive condition, he even fancied that they flirted mildly over their parent's infirmity.

"My brother Harry has gone to Red Dog," continued Esther; "he'll be right sorry to have missed you; Mrs. Mulrady spoke to him about you! you seem to have been great friends. I s'pose you knew her daughter, Mamie; I hear she is very pretty."

Although Don Cæsar was now satisfied that the Slinns knew nothing of Mamie's singular behaviour to him, he felt embarrassed by this conversation. "Miss Mulrady is very pretty," he said, with grave courtesy; "it is a custom of her race. She left suddenly," he added, with affected calmness.

"I reckon she *did* calculate to stay here longer—so

mother said; but the whole thing was settled a week ago. I know my brother was quite surprised to hear from Mr. Mulrady that if we were going to decide about this house we must do it at once; he had an idea himself of moving out of the big one into this when they left."

"Mamie Mulrady hadn't much to keep her here, considerin' the money and the good looks she has, I reckon," said Vashti. "She isn't the sort of girl to throw herself away in the wilderness, when she can pick and choose elsewhere. I only wonder she ever come back from Sacramento. They talk about papa Mulrady having *business* at San Francisco, and *that* hurrying them off! Depend upon it that 'business' was Mamie herself. Her wish is gospel to them. If she'd wanted to stay and have a farewell party, old Mulrady's business would have been nowhere."

"Aint you a little rough on Mamie," said Esther, who had been quietly watching the young man's face with her large, languid eyes, "considering that we don't know her, and haven't even the right of friends to criticise?"

"I don't call it rough," returned Vashti, frankly, "for I'd do the same if I were in her shoes—and they're four-and-a-halves, for Harry told me so. Give me her money and her looks, and you wouldn't catch me hanging round these diggings—goin' to choir meeting Saturdays, church Sundays, and buggy-riding once a month—for society! No—Mamie's head was level—you bet!"

Don Cæsar rose hurriedly. They would present his compliments to their father, and he would endeavour to find their brother at Red Dog. He, alas! had neither father, mother, nor sister, but if they would receive his aunt, the Doña Inez Sepulvida, the next Sunday, when she came from mass, she should be honoured and he would be delighted. It required all his self-possession to deliver himself of this formal courtesy before he could take his leave, and on the back of his mustang give way to the rage, disgust, and hatred of everything connected with Mamie that filled his heart. Conscious of his disturbance, but not entirely appreciating their own share in it, the two girls somewhat wickedly prolonged the interview by following him into the garden.

"Well, if you *must* leave now," said Esther, at last, languidly, "it aint much out of your way to go down through the garden and take a look at pa as you go. He's somewhere down there, near the woods, and we don't like to leave him alone too long. You might pass the time of day with him; see if he's right side up. Vashti and I have got a heap of things to fix here yet; but if anything's wrong with him, you can call us. So-long."

Don Cæsar was about to excuse himself hurriedly; but that sudden and acute perception of all kindred sorrow, which belongs to refined suffering, checked his speech. The loneliness of the helpless old man in this atmosphere of active and youthful selfishness touched him. He bowed assent, and turned aside into one of

the long perspectives of bean-poles. The girls watched him until out of sight.

"Well," said Vashti, "don't tell *me*. But if there wasn't something between him and that Mamie Mulrady, I don't know a jilted man when I see him."

"Well, you needn't have let him *see* that you knew it, so that any civility of ours would look as if we were ready to take up with her leavings," responded Esther, astutely, as the girls re-entered the house.

Meantime, the unconscious object of their criticism walked sadly down the old market-garden whose rude outlines and homely details he once clothed with the poetry of a sensitive man's first love. Well, it was a common cabbage-field and potato patch after all. In his disgust he felt conscious of even the loss of that sense of patronage and superiority which had invested his affection for a girl of meaner condition. His self-respect was humiliated with his love. The soil and dirt of those wretched cabbages had clung to him, but not to her. It was she who had gone higher; it was he who was left in the vulgar ruins of his misplaced passion.

He reached the bottom of the garden without observing any sign of the lonely invalid. He looked up and down the cabbage rows, and through the long perspective of pea-vines, without result. There was a newer trail leading from a gap in the pines to the wooded hollow which undoubtedly intersected the little path that he and Mamie had once followed from the high road. If the old man had taken this trail he had

possibly overtasked his strength, and there was the more reason why he should continue his search, and render any assistance if required. There was another idea that occurred to him, which eventually decided him to go on. It was that both these trails led to the decayed sycamore stump, and the older Slinn might have something to do with the mysterious letter. Quickening his steps through the field, he entered the hollow, and reached the intersecting trail as he expected. To the right it lost itself in the dense woods in the direction of the ominous stump; to the left it descended in nearly a straight line to the highway, now plainly visible, as was equally the boulder on which he had last discovered Mamie sitting with young Slinn. If he was not mistaken, there was a figure sitting there now; it was surely a man. And by that half-bowed, helpless attitude, the object of his search!

It did not take him long to descend the track to the highway and approach the stranger. He was seated with his hands upon his knees, gazing in a vague, absorbed fashion upon the hillside, now crowned with the engine-house and chimney that marked the site of Mulrady's shaft. He started slightly, and looked up, as Don Cæsar paused before him. The young man was surprised to see that the unfortunate man was not as old as he had expected, and that his expression was one of quiet and beatified contentment.

"Your daughters told me you were here," said Don Cæsar, with gentle respect. "I am Cæsar Alvarado,

your not very far neighbour; very happy to pay his respects to you as he has to them."

"My daughters?" said the old man, vaguely. "Oh, yes! nice little girls. And my boy Harry. Did you see Harry? Fine little fellow, Harry."

"I am glad to hear that you are better," said Don Cæsar, hastily, "and that the air of our country does you no harm. God benefit you, Señor," he added, with a profoundly reverential gesture, dropping unconsciously into the religious habit of his youth. "May He protect you, and bring you back to health and happiness!"

"Happiness?" said Slinn, amazedly. "I am happy —very happy! I have everything I want: good air, good food, good clothes, pretty little children, kind friends"—— He smiled benignantly at Don Cæsar. "God is very good to me!"

Indeed, he seemed very happy; and his face, albeit crowned with white hair, unmarked by care and any disturbing impression, had so much of satisfied youth in it that the grave features of his questioner made him appear the elder. Nevertheless, Don Cæsar noticed that his eyes, when withdrawn from him, sought the hillside with the same visionary abstraction.

"It is a fine view, Señor Esslinn," said Don Cæsar.

"It is a beautiful view, Sir," said Slinn, turning his happy eyes upon him for a moment, only to rest them again on the green slope opposite.

"Beyond that hill which you are looking at—not

far, Señor Esslinn—I live. You shall come and see me there—you and your family."

"You—you—live there?" stammered the invalid, with a troubled impression—the first and only change to the complete happiness that had hitherto suffused his face. "You—and your name is—is Ma"——

"Alvarado," said Don Cæsar, gently. "Cæsar Alvarado."

"You said Masters," said the old man, with sudden querulousness.

"No, good friend. I said Alvarado," returned Don Cæsar, gravely.

"If you didn't say Masters, how could *I* say it? I don't know any Masters."

Don Cæsar was silent. In another moment, the happy tranquillity returned to Slinn's face; and Don Cæsar continued.

"It is not a long walk over the hill, though it is far by the road. When you are better, you shall try it. Yonder little trail leads to the top of the hill, and then"——

He stopped, for the invalid's face had again assumed its troubled expression. Partly to change his thoughts, and partly for some inexplicable idea that had suddenly seized him, Don Cæsar continued,

"There is a strange old stump near the trail, and in it a hole. In the hole I found this letter." He stopped again—this time in alarm. Slinn had staggered to his feet with ashen and distorted features, and was

glancing at the letter which Don Cæsar had drawn from his pocket. The muscles of his throat swelled as if he was swallowing; his lips moved, but no sound issued from them. At last, with a convulsive effort, he regained a disjointed speech, in a voice scarcely audible.

"My letter! my letter! It's mine! Give it me! It's my fortune—all mine! In the tunnel—hill! Masters stole it—stole my fortune! Stole it all! See, see!"

He seized the letter from Don Cæsar with trembling hands, and tore it open forcibly: a few dull yellow grains fell from it heavily, like shot, to the ground.

"See, it's true! My letter! My gold! My strike! My—my—my God!"

A tremor passed over his face. The hand that held the letter suddenly dropped sheer and heavy as the gold had fallen. The whole side of his face and body nearest Don Cæsar seemed to drop and sink into itself as suddenly. At the same moment, and without a word, he slipped through Don Cæsar's outstretched hands to the ground. Don Cæsar bent quickly over him, but not longer than to satisfy himself that he lived and breathed, although helpless. He then caught up the fallen letter, and, glancing over it with flashing eyes, thrust it and the few specimens in his pocket. He then sprang to his feet, so transformed with energy and intelligence that he seemed to have added the lost vitality of the man before him to his own. He glanced quickly up and down the highway. Every moment to him was precious now; but he could not leave the

stricken man in the dust of the road; nor could he carry him to the house; nor, having alarmed his daughters, could he abandon his helplessness to their feeble arms. He remembered that his horse was still tied to the garden fence. He would fetch it, and carry the unfortunate man across the saddle to the gate. He lifted him with difficulty to the boulder, and ran rapidly up the road in the direction of his tethered steed. He had not proceeded far when he heard the noise of wheels behind him. It was the up stage coming furiously along. He would have called to the driver for assistance, but even through that fast sweeping cloud of dust and motion he could see that the man was utterly oblivious of anything but the speed of his rushing chariot, and had even risen in his box to lash the infuriated and frightened animals forward.

An hour later, when the coach drew up at the Red Dog Hotel, the driver descended from the box, white, but taciturn. When he had swallowed a glass of whisky at a single gulp, he turned to the astonished express agent, who had followed him in:

"One of two things, Jim, hez got to happen," he said, huskily. "Either that there rock hez got to get off the road, or *I* have. I've seed *him* on it agin!"

CHAPTER IV.

No further particulars of the invalid's second attack were known than those furnished by Don Cæsar's brief statement, that he had found him lying insensible on the boulder. This seemed perfectly consistent with the theory of Dr. Duchesne, and as the young Spaniard left Los Gatos the next day, he escaped not only the active reporter of the *Record,* but the perusal of a grateful paragraph in the next day's paper recording his prompt kindness and courtesy. Dr. Duchesne's prognosis, however, seemed at fault; the elder Slinn did not succumb to this second stroke, nor did he recover his reason. He apparently only relapsed into his former physical weakness, losing the little ground he had gained during the last month, and exhibiting no change in his mental condition, unless the fact that he remembered nothing of his seizure, and the presence of Don Cæsar, could be considered as favourable. Dr. Duchesne's gravity seemed to give that significance to this symptom, and his cross-questioning of the patient was characterised by more than his usual curtness.

"You are sure you don't remember walking in the garden before you were ill?" he said. "Come, think

again. You must remember that." The old man's eyes wandered restlessly around the room, but he answered by a negative shake of his head. "And you don't remember sitting down on a stone by the road?"

The old man kept his eyes resolutely fixed on the bed-clothes before him. "No!" he said, with a certain sharp decision that was new to him.

The Doctor's eye brightened. "All right, old man; then don't."

On his way out he took the eldest Miss Slinn aside. "He'll do," he said, grimly: "he's beginning to lie."

"Why, he only said he didn't remember," responded Esther.

"That was because he didn't want to remember," said the Doctor, authoritatively. "The brain is acting on some impression that is either painful and unpleasant, or so vague that he can't formulate it; he is conscious of it, and won't attempt it yet. It's a heap better than his old self-satisfied incoherency."

A few days later, when the fact of Slinn's identification with the paralytic of three years ago by the stage-driver became generally known, the Doctor came in quite jubilant.

"It's all plain now," he said, decidedly. "That second stroke was caused by the nervous shock of his coming suddenly upon the very spot where he had the first one. It proved that his brain still retained old impressions, but as this first act of his memory was a

painful one, the strain was too great. It was mighty unlucky; but it was a good sign."

"And you think, then"—— hesitated Harry Slinn.

"I think," said Dr. Duchesne, "that this activity still exists, and the proof of it, as I said before, is that he is trying now to forget it, and avoid thinking of it. You will find that he will fight shy of any allusion to it, and will be cunning enough to dodge it every time."

He certainly did. Whether the doctor's hypothesis was fairly based or not, it was a fact that, when he was first taken out to drive with his watchful physician, he apparently took no notice of the boulder—which still remained on the roadside, thanks to the later practical explanation of the stage-driver's vision—and curtly refused to talk about it. But, more significant to Duchesne, and perhaps more perplexing, was a certain morose abstraction, which took the place of his former vacuity of contentment, and an intolerance of his attendants, which supplanted his old habitual trustfulness to their care, that had been varied only by the occasional querulousness of an invalid. His daughters sometimes found him regarding them with an attention little short of suspicion, and even his son detected a half-suppressed aversion in his interviews with him.

Referring this among themselves to his unfortunate malady, his children, perhaps, justified this estrangement by paying very little attention to it. They were more pleasantly occupied. The two girls succeeded to the position held by Mamie Mulrady in the society of

the neighbourhood, and divided the attentions of Rough-and-Ready. The young editor of the *Record* had really achieved, through his supposed intimacy with the Mulradys, the good fortune he had jestingly prophesied. The disappearance of Don Cæsar was regarded as a virtual abandonment of the field to his rival: and the general opinion was that he was engaged to the millionaire's daughter on a certain probation of work and influence in his prospective father-in-law's interests. He became successful in one or two speculations, the magic of the lucky Mulrady's name befriending him. In the superstition of the mining community, much of this luck was due to his having secured the old cabin.

"To think," remarked one of the augurs of Red Dog—French Pete, a polyglot jester, "that, while every d——d fool went to taking up claims where the gold had already been found, no one thought of stepping into the old man's old *choux* in the cabbage-garden!" Any doubt, however, of the alliance of the families was dissipated by the intimacy that sprang up between the elder Slinn and the millionaire, after the latter's return from San Francisco.

It began in a strange kind of pity for the physical weakness of the man, which enlisted the sympathies of Mulrady, whose great strength had never been deteriorated by the luxuries of wealth, and who was still able to set his workmen an example of hard labour; it was sustained by a singular and superstitious reverence for his mental condition, which to the paternal Mulrady,

seemed to possess that spiritual quality with which popular ignorance invests demented people.

"Then you mean to say that during these three years the vein o' your mind, so to speak, was a lost lead, and sorter dropped out o' sight or follerin'," queried Mulrady, with infinite seriousness.

"Yes," returned Slinn, with less impatience than he usually showed to questions.

"And durin' that time, when you was dried up and waitin' for rain, I reckon you kinder had visions?"

A cloud passed over Slinn's face.

"Of course, of course!" said Mulrady, a little frightened at his tenacity in questioning the oracle. "Nat'rally, this was private, and not to be talked about. I meant, you had plenty of room for 'em without crowdin'; you kin tell me some day when you're better, and kin sorter select what's points and what aint."

"Perhaps I may some day," said the invalid, gloomily, glancing in the direction of his preoccupied daughters; "when we're alone."

When his physical strength had improved, and his left arm and side had regained a feeble but slowly gathering vitality, Alvin Mulrady one day surprised the family by bringing the convalescent a pile of letters and accounts, and spreading them on a board before Slinn's invalid chair, with the suggestion that he should look over, arrange, and docket them. The idea seemed preposterous, until it was found that the old man was actually able to perform this service, and exhibited a

degree of intellectual activity and capacity for this kind of work that was unsuspected. Dr. Duchesne was delighted, and divided with admiration between his patient's progress and the millionaire's sagacity. "And there are envious people," said the enthusiastic doctor, "who believe that a man like him, who could conceive of such a plan for occupying a weak intellect without taxing its memory or judgment, is merely a lucky fool! Look here. Maybe it didn't require much brains to stumble on a gold mine, and it is a gift of Providence. But, in my experience, Providence don't go round buyin' up d——d fools, or investin' in dead beats."

When Mr. Slinn, finally, with the aid of crutches, was able to hobble every day to the imposing counting-house and office of Mr. Mulrady, which now occupied the lower part of the new house, and contained some of its gorgeous furniture, he was installed at a rosewood desk behind Mr. Mulrady's chair, as his confidential clerk and private secretary. The astonishment of Red Dog and Rough-and-Ready at this singular innovation knew no bounds; but the boldness and novelty of the idea carried everything before it. Judge Butts, the oracle of Rough-and-Ready, delivered its decision. "He's got a man who's physically incapable of running off with his money, and has no memory to run off with his ideas. How could he do better?" Even his own son, Harry, coming upon his father thus installed, was for a moment struck with a certain filial respect, and for a day or two patronised him.

In this capacity Slinn became the confident not only of Mulrady's business secrets, but of his domestic affairs. He knew that young Mulrady, from a freckle-faced slow country boy, had developed into a freckle-faced fast city man, with coarse habits of drink and gambling. It was through the old man's hands that extravagant bills and shameful claims passed on their way to be cashed by Mulrady; it was he that at last laid before the father one day his signature perfectly forged by the son.

"Your eyes are not ez good ez mine you know, Slinn," said Mulrady, gravely. "It's all right. I sometimes make my y's like that. I'd clean forgot to cash that cheque. You must not think you've got the monopoly of disremembering," he added, with a faint laugh.

Equally through Slinn's hands passed the record of the lavish expenditure of Mrs. Mulrady and the fair Mamie, as well as the chronicle of their movements and fashionable triumphs. As Mulrady had already noticed that Slinn had no confidence with his own family, he didn't try to withhold from them these domestic details, possibly as an offset to the dreary catalogue of his son's misdeeds, but more often in the hope of gaining from the taciturn old man some comment that might satisfy his innocent vanity as father and husband, and perhaps dissipate some doubts that were haunting him.

"Twelve hundred dollars looks to be a good figger for a dress, aint it? But Malviny knows, I reckon,

what ought to be worn at the Tooilleries, and she don't want our Mamie to take a back seat before them furrin' Princesses and Gran' Dukes. It's a slap-up affair, I kalkilate. Let's see. I disremember whether it's an Emperor or a King that's rulin' over thar now. It must be suthin' first class and A 1, for Malviny aint the woman to throw away twelve hundred dollars on any of them small-potato despots! She says Mamie speaks French already like them French Petes. I don't quite make out what she means here. She met Don Cæsar in Paris, and she says, 'I think Mamie is nearly off with Don Cæsar, who has followed her here. I don't care about her dropping him *too* suddenly; the reason I'll tell you hereafter. I think the man might be a dangerous enemy.' Now, what do you make of this. I allus thought Mamie rather cottoned to him, and it was the old woman who fought shy, thinkin' Mamie would do better. Now, I am agreeable that my gal should marry anyone she likes, whether it's a Dook or a poor man, as long as he's on the square. I was ready to take Don Cæsar; but now things seem to have shifted round. As to Don Cæsar's being a dangerous enemy if Mamie won't have him, that's a little too high and mighty for me, and I wonder the old woman don't make him climb down. What do you think?"

"What is Don Cæsar?" asked Slinn.

"The man what picked you up that day. I mean," continued Mulrady, seeing the marks of evident ignorance on the old man's face. "I mean a sort of grave, genteel

chap, suthin' between a parson and a circus-rider. You might have seen him round the house talkin' to your gals."

But Slinn's entire forgetfulness of Don Cæsar was evidently unfeigned. Whatever sudden accession of memory he had at the time of his attack, the incident that caused it had no part in his recollection. With the exception of these rare intervals of domestic confidences with his crippled private secretary, Mulrady gave himself up to money-getting. Without any especial faculty for it—an easy prey often to unscrupulous financiers—his unfailing luck, however, carried him safely through, until his very mistakes seemed to be simply insignificant means to a large significant end and a part of his original plan. He sank another shaft, at a great expense, with a view to following the lead he had formerly found, against the opinions of the best mining engineers, and struck the artesian spring he did *not* find at that time, with a volume of water that enabled him not only to work his own mine, but to furnish supplies to his less fortunate neighbours at a vast profit. A league of tangled forest and cañon behind Rough-and-Ready for which he had paid Don Ramon's heirs an extravagant price in the presumption that it was auriferous, furnished the most accessible timber to build the town, at prices which amply remunerated him. The practical schemes of experienced men, the wildest visions of daring dreams delayed or abortive for want of capital, eventually fell into his hands. Men sneered at his methods, but bought

his shares. Some who affected to regard him simply as a man of money were content to get only his name to any enterprise. Courted by his superiors, quoted by his equals, and admired by his inferiors, he bore his elevation equally without ostentation or dignity. Bidden to banquets, and forced by his position as director or president into the usual gastronomic feats of that civilisation and period, he partook of simple food, and continued his old habit of taking a cup of coffee with milk and sugar at dinner. Without professing temperance, he drank sparingly in a community where alcoholic stimulation was a custom. With neither refinement nor an extended vocabulary, he was seldom profane, and never indelicate. With nothing of the Puritan in his manner or conversation, he seemed to be as strange to the vices of civilisation as he was to its virtues. That such a man should offer little to and receive little from the companionship of women of any kind was a foregone conclusion. Without the dignity of solitude, he was pathetically alone.

Meantime, the days passed; the first six months of his opulence were drawing to a close, and in that interval he had more than doubled the amount of his discovered fortune. The rainy season set in early. Although it dissipated the clouds of dust under which Nature and Art seemed to be slowly disappearing, it brought little beauty to the landscape at first, and only appeared to lay bare the crudenesses of civilisation. The unpainted wooden buildings of Rough-and-Ready, soaked

and dripping with rain, took upon themselves a sleek and shining ugliness, as of second-hand garments; the absence of cornices or projections to break the monotony of the long straight lines of downpour made the town appear as if it had been recently submerged, every vestige of ornamentation swept away, and only the bare outlines left. Mud was everywhere; the outer soil seemed to have risen and invaded the houses even to their most secret recesses, as if outraged Nature was trying to revenge herself. Mud was brought into the saloons and bar-rooms and express offices, on boots, on clothes, on baggage, and sometimes appeared mysteriously in splashes of red colour on the walls, without visible conveyance. The dust of six months, closely packed in cornice and carving, yielded under the steady rain a thin yellow paint, that dropped on wayfarers or unexpectedly oozed out of ceilings and walls on the wretched inhabitants within. The outskirts of Rough-and-Ready, and the dried hills round Los Gatos, did not appear to fare much better; the new vegetation had not yet made much headway against the dead grasses of the summer; the pines in the hollow wept lugubriously into a small rivulet that had sprung suddenly into life near the old trail: everywhere was the sound of dropping, splashing, gurgling, or rushing waters.

More hideous than ever, the new Mulrady house lifted itself against the leaden sky, and stared with all its large-framed, shutterless windows blankly on the prospect, until they seemed to the wayfarer to become

mere mirrors set in the walls, reflecting only the watery landscape, and unable to give the least indication of light or heat within. Nevertheless, there was a fire in Mulrady's private office that December afternoon, of a smoky, intermittent variety, that sufficed more to record the defects of hasty architecture than to comfort the Millionaire and his private secretary, who had lingered after the early withdrawal of the clerks. For the next day was Christmas, and, out of deference to the near approach of this festivity, a half-holiday had been given to the employés. "They'll want, some of them, to spend their money before to-morrow; and others would like to be able to rise up comfortably drunk Christmas morning," the superintendent had suggested. Mr. Mulrady had just signed a number of cheques indicating his largesse to those devoted adherents with the same unostentatious, undemonstrative, matter-of-fact manner that distinguished his ordinary business. The men had received it with something of the same manner. A half-humorous "Thank you, Sir"—as if to show that, with their patron, they tolerated this deference to a popular custom, but were a little ashamed of giving way to it—expressed their gratitude and their independence.

"I reckon that the old lady and Mamie are having a high old time in some of them gilded pallises in St. Petersburg or Berlin about this time. Them diamonds that I ordered at Tiffany ought to have reached 'em about now, so that Mamie could cut a swell at Christmas with her war-paint. I suppose it's the style to give

presents in furrin' countries ez it is here, and I allowed to the old lady that whatever she orders in that way she is to do in Californy style—no dollar jewelry and galvanised watches business. If she wants to make a present to any of them nobles ez has been purlite to her, it's got to be something that Rough-and-Ready aint ashamed of. I showed you that pin Mamie bought me in Paris, didn't I? It's just come for my Christmas present. No! I reckon I put it in the safe, for them kind o' things don't suit my style; but 'spose I orter sport it to-morrow. It was mighty thoughtful in Mamie, and it must cost a lump; it's got no slouch of a pearl in it. I wonder what Mamie gave for it?"

"You can easily tell; the bill is here. You paid it yesterday," said Slinn. There was no satire in the man's voice, nor was there the least perception of irony in Mulrady's manner, as he returned quietly,

"That's so; it was suthin' like a thousand francs; but French money, when you pan it out as dollars and cents, don't make so much, after all." There was a few moments' silence, when he continued, in the same tone of voice, "Talkin' o' them things, Slinn, I've got suthin' for you." He stopped suddenly. Ever watchful of any undue excitement in the invalid, he had noticed a slight flush of disturbance pass over his face, and continued carelessly, "But we'll talk it over to-morrow; a day or two don't make much difference to you and me in such things, you know. P'raps I'll drop in and see you. We'll be shut up here."

"Then you're going out somewhere?" asked Slinn, mechanically.

"No," said Mulrady, hesitatingly. It had suddenly occurred to him that he had nowhere to go, if he wanted to, and he continued, half in explanation, "I aint reckoned much on Christmas, myself. Abner's at the Springs; it wouldn't pay him to come here for a day—even if there was anybody here he cared to see. I reckon I'll hang round the shanty, and look after things generally. I haven't been over the house up-stairs to put things to rights since the folks left. But *you* needn't come here, you know."

He helped the old man to rise, assisted him in putting on his overcoat, and then handed him the cane which had lately replaced his crutches.

"Good-bye, old man! You mustn't trouble yourself to say 'Merry Christmas' now, but wait until you see me again. Take care of yourself."

He slapped him lightly on the shoulder, and went back into his private office. He worked for some time at his desk, and then laid his pen aside, put away his papers methodically, placing a large envelope on his private secretary's vacant table. He then opened the office door and ascended the staircase. He stopped on the first landing to listen to the sound of rain on the glass skylight, that seemed to echo through the empty hall like the gloomy roll of a drum. It was evident that the searching water had found out the secret sins of the house's construction, for there were great fissures

of discolouration in the white and gold paper in the corners of the wall. There was a strange odour of the dank forest in the mirrored drawing-room, as if the rain had brought out the sap again from the unseasoned timbers; the blue and white satin furniture looked cold, and the marble mantels and centre tables had taken upon themselves the clamminess of tombstones. Mr. Mulrady, who had always retained his old farmer-like habit of taking off his coat with his hat on entering his own house, and appearing in his shirt-sleeves, to indicate domestic ease and security, was obliged to replace it, on account of the chill. He had never felt at home in this room. Its strangeness had lately been heightened by Mrs. Mulrady's purchase of a family portrait of someone she didn't know, but who, she had alleged, resembled her "Uncle Bob," which hung on the wall beside some paintings in massive frames. Mr. Mulrady cast a hurried glance at the portrait that, on the strength of a high coat-collar and high top curl—both rolled with equal precision and singular sameness of colour—had always glared at Mulrady as if *he* was the intruder; and, passing through his wife's gorgeous bed-room, entered the little dressing-room, where he still slept on the smallest of cots, with hastily improvised surroundings, as if he was a bailiff in "possession." He didn't linger here long, but, taking a key from a drawer, continued up the staircase, to the ominous funeral marches of the beating rain on the skylight, and paused on the landing to glance into his son's and daughter's bed-

rooms, duplicates of the bizarre extravagance below. If he were seeking some characteristic traces of his absent family, they certainly were not here in the painted and still damp blazoning of their later successes. He ascended another staircase, and, passing to the wing of the house, paused before a small door, which was locked. Already the ostentatious decorations of wall and passages were left behind, and the plain lath-and-plaster partition of the attic lay before him. He unlocked the door, and threw it open.

CHAPTER V.

THE apartment he entered was really only a lumber-room or loft over the wing of the house, which had been left bare and unfinished, and which revealed in its meagre skeleton of beams and joints the hollow sham of the whole structure. But in more violent contrast to the fresher glories of the other part of the house were its contents, which were the heterogeneous collection of old furniture, old luggage, and cast-off clothing, left over from the past life in the old cabin. It was a much plainer record of the simple beginnings of the family than Mrs. Mulrady cared to have remained in evidence, and for that reason it had been relegated to the hidden recesses of the new house, in the hope that it might absorb or digest it. There were old cribs in which the infant limbs of Mamie and Abner had been tucked up; old looking-glasses that had reflected their shining soapy faces, and Mamie's best chip Sunday hat; an old sewing-machine, that had been worn out in active service; old patch-work quilts; an old accordion, to whose long-drawn inspirations Mamie had sung hymns; old pictures, books, and old toys. There were one or two old chromos, and, stuck in an old frame, a coloured print from the *Illustrated London News* of a

Christmas gathering in an old English country house. He stopped and picked up this print, which he had often seen before, gazing at it with a new and singular interest. He wondered if Mamie had seen anything of this kind in England, and why couldn't he have had something like it here, in their own fine house, with themselves and a few friends? He remembered a past Christmas when he had brought Mamie that now headless doll with the few coins that were left him after buying their frugal Christmas dinner. There was an old spotted hobbyhorse that another Christmas had brought to Abner. Abner, who would be driving a fast trotter to-morrow at the Springs! How everything had changed! How they had all got up in the world, and how far beyond this kind of thing—and yet—yet it would have been rather comfortable to have all been together again here. Would *they* have been more comfortable? No! Yet then he might have had something to do, and been less lonely to-morrow. What of that? He *had* something to do; to look after this immense fortune. What more could a man want? or should he want? It was rather mean in him, able to give his wife and children everything they wanted, to be wanting anything more. He laid down the print gently, after dusting its glass and frame with his silk handkerchief, and slowly left the room.

The drum-beat of the rain followed him down the staircase, but he shut it out with his other thoughts, when he again closed the door of his office. He sat

diligently to work by the declining winter light until he was interrupted by the entrance of his Chinese waiter to tell him that supper—which was the meal that Mulrady religiously adhered to in place of the late dinner of civilisation—was ready in the dining-room. Mulrady mechanically obeyed the summons; but, on entering the room, the oasis of a few plates in a desert of white table-cloth which awaited him, made him hesitate. In its best aspect, the high dark Gothic mahogany ecclesiastical sideboard and chairs of this room, which looked like the appointments of a mortuary chapel, were not exhilarating: and to-day, in the light of the rain-filmed windows and the feeble rays of a lamp half obscured by the dark, shining walls, it was most depressing.

"You kin take up supper into my office," said Mulrady, with a sudden inspiration. "I'll eat it there."

He ate it there, with his usual healthy appetite, which did not require even the stimulation of company. He had just finished, when his Irish cook—the one female servant of the house—came to ask permission to be absent that evening and the next day.

"I suppose the likes of your Honour won't be at home on the Christmas Day? And it's me cousins from the old counthry at Rough-and-Ready that are invitin' me."

"Why don't you ask them over here?" said Mulrady, with another vague inspiration. "I'll stand treat."

"Lord preserve you for a jinerous gintleman! But it's the likes of them and myself that wouldn't be at home here on such a day."

There was so much truth in this that Mulrady checked a sigh as he gave the required permission, without saying that he had intended to remain. He could cook his own breakfast: he had done it before; and it would be something to occupy him. As to his dinner, perhaps he could go to the hotel at Rough-and-Ready. He worked on until the night had well advanced. Then, overcome with a certain restlessness that disturbed him, he was forced to put his books and papers away. It had began to blow in fitful gusts, and occasionally the rain was driven softly across the panes like the passing of childish fingers. This disturbed him more than the monotony of silence, for he was not a nervous man. He seldom read a book, and the county paper furnished him only the financial and mercantile news which was part of his business. He knew he could not sleep, if he went to bed. At last, he rose, opened the window, and looked out from pure idleness of occupation. A splash of wheels in the distant muddy road and fragments of a drunken song showed signs of an early wandering reveller. There were no lights to be seen at the closed works: a profound darkness encompassed the house, as if the distant pines in the hollow had moved up and round it. The silence was broken now only by the occasional sighing of wind and rain. It was not an inviting night

for a perfunctory walk; but an idea struck him—he would call upon the Slinns, and anticipate his next day's visit! They would probably have company, and be glad to see him: he could tell the girls of Mamie and her success. That he had not thought of this before was a proof of his usual self-contained isolation; that he thought of it now was an equal proof that he was becoming at last accessible to loneliness. He was angry with himself for what seemed to him a selfish weakness.

He returned to his office, and putting the envelope that had been lying on Slinn's desk in his pocket, threw a *serape* over his shoulders, and locked the front door of the house behind him. It was well that the way was a familiar one to him, and that his feet instinctively found the trail, for the night was very dark. At times he was warned only by the gurgling of water of little rivulets that descended the hill and crossed his path. Without the slightest fear, and with neither imagination nor sensitiveness, he recalled how, the winter before, one of Don Cæsar's vaqueros, crossing this hill at night, had fallen down the chasm of a landslip caused by the rain, and was found the next morning with his neck broken in the gully. Don Cæsar had to take care of the man's family. Suppose such an accident should happen to him? Well, he had made his will. His wife and children would be provided for, and the work of the mine would go on all the same; he had arranged for that. Would anybody miss him?

would his wife, or his son, or his daughter? No. He felt such a sudden and overwhelming conviction of the truth of this, that he stopped as suddenly as if the chasm had opened before him. No! It was the truth. If he were to disappear for ever in the darkness of the Christmas night, there was none to feel his loss. His wife would take care of Mamie; his son would take care of himself as he had before—relieved of even the scant paternal authority he rebelled against. A more imaginative man than Mulrady would have combatted or have followed out this idea, and then dismissed it; to the Millionaire's matter-of-fact mind it was a deduction that, having once presented itself to his perception, was already a recognised fact. For the first time in his life, he felt a sudden instinct of something like aversion towards his family, a feeling that even his son's dissipation and criminality had never provoked. He hurried on angrily through the darkness.

It was very strange; the old house should be almost before him now, across the hollow, yet there were no indications of light! It was not until he actually reached the garden-fence, and the black bulk of shadow rose out against the sky, that he saw a faint ray of light from one of the lean-to windows. He went to the front door and knocked. After waiting in vain for a reply, he knocked again. The second knock proving equally futile, he tried the door; it was unlocked, and, pushing it open, he walked in. The narrow passage was quite dark, but from his knowledge of the house he knew

the "lean-to" was next to the kitchen, and, passing through the dining-room into it, he opened the door of the little room from which the light proceeded. It came from a single candle on a small table, and beside it, with his eyes moodily fixed on the dying embers of the fire, sat old Slinn. There was no other light nor another human being in the whole house.

For the instant Mulrady, forgetting his own feelings in the mute picture of the utter desolation of the helpless man, remained speechless on the threshold. Then, recalling himself, he stepped forward and laid his hand gaily on the bowed shoulders.

"Rouse up out o' this, old man! Come! this won't do. Look! I've run over here in the rain, jist to have a sociable time with you all."

"I knew it," said the old man, without looking up; "I knew you'd come."

"You knew I'd come?" echoed Mulrady, with an uneasy return of the strange feeling of awe with which he regarded Slinn's abstraction.

"Yes; you were alone—like myself—all alone!"

"Then, why in thunder didn't you open the door or sing out just now?" he said, with an affected brusquerie to cover his uneasiness. "Where's your daughters?"

"Gone to Rough-and-Ready to a party."

"And your son?"

"He never comes here when he can amuse himself elsewhere."

"Your children might have stayed home on Christmas Eve."

"So might yours."

He didn't say this impatiently, but with a certain abstracted conviction far beyond any suggestion of its being a retort. Mulrady did not appear to notice it.

"Well, I don't see why us old folks can't enjoy ourselves without them," said Mulrady, with affected cheerfulness. "Let's have a good time, you and me. Let's see—you haven't any one you can send to my house, hev you?"

"They took the servant with them," said Slinn, briefly. "There is no one here."

"All right," said the Millionaire, briskly. "I'll go myself. Do you think you could manage to light up a little more, and build a fire in the kitchen while I'm gone? It used to be mighty comfortable in the old times."

He helped the old man to rise from his chair, and seemed to have infused into him some of his own energy. He then added: "Now, don't you get yourself down again into that chair until I come back," and darted out into the night once more.

In a quarter of an hour he returned with a bag on his broad shoulders, which one of his porters would have shrunk from lifting, and laid it before the blazing hearth of the now-lighted kitchen. "It's something the old woman got for her party, that didn't come off," he said apologetically. "I reckon we can pick out enough

for a spread. That darned Chinaman wouldn't come with me," he added, with a laugh, "because, he said, he'd knocked off work 'allee same, Mellican man!' Look here, Slinn," he said, with a sudden decisiveness, "my pay-roll of the men around here don't run short of a hundred and fifty dollars a day, and yet I couldn't get a hand to help me bring this truck over for my Christmas dinner."

"Of course," said Slinn, gloomily.

"Of course; so it oughter be," returned Mulrady, shortly. "Why, it's only their one day out of 364; and I can have 363 days off, as I am their boss. I don't mind a man's being independent," he continued, taking off his coat and beginning to unpack his sack—a common "gunny bag"—used for potatoes. "We're independent ourselves, aint we, Slinn?"

His good spirits, which had been at first laboured and affected, had become natural. Slinn, looking at his brightened eye and fresher colour, could not help thinking he was more like his own real self at this moment than in his counting-house and offices—with all his simplicity as a capitalist. A less abstracted and more observant critic than Slinn would have seen in this patient aptitude for real work, and the recognition of the force of petty detail, the dominance of the old market-gardener in his former humble, as well as his later more ambitious, successes.

"Heaven keep us from being dependent upon our children!" said Slinn, darkly.

"Let the young ones alone to-night; we can get along without them, as they can without us," said Mulrady, with a slight twinge as he thought of his reflections on the hillside. "But look here, there's some champagne and them sweet cordials that women like; there's jellies and such like stuff, about as good as they make 'em, I reckon; and preserves, and tongues, and spiced beef—take your pick! Stop, let's spread them out." He dragged the table to the middle of the floor, and piled the provisions upon it. They certainly were not deficient in quality or quantity. "Now, Slinn, wade in."

"I don't feel hungry," said the invalid, who had lapsed again into a chair before the fire.

"No more do I," said Mulrady; "but I reckon it's the right thing to do about this time. Some folks think they can't be happy without they're getting outside o' suthin', and my directors down at 'Frisco can't do any business without a dinner. Take some champagne, to begin with."

He opened a bottle, and filled two tumblers. "It's past twelve o'clock, old man, so here's a merry Christmas to you, and both of us ez is here. And here's another to our families—ez isn't."

They both drank their wine stolidly. The rain beat against the windows sharply, but without the hollow echoes of the house on the hill. "I must write to the old woman and Mamie, and say that you and me had a high old time on Christmas Eve."

"By ourselves," added the invalid.

Mr. Mulrady coughed. "Nat'rally—by ourselves. And her provisions," he added, with a laugh. "We're really beholden to *her* for 'em. If she hadn't thought of having them"——

"For somebody else, you wouldn't have had them —would you?" said Slinn, slowly, gazing at the fire.

"No," said Mulrady, dubiously. After a pause he began more vivaciously, and as if to shake off some disagreeable thought that was impressing him, "But I mustn't forget to give you *your* Christmas, old man, and I've got it right here with me." He took the folded envelope from his pocket, and, holding it in his hand with his elbow on the table, continued, "I don't mind telling you what idea I had in giving you what I'm goin' to give you now. I've been thinking about it for a day or two. A man like you don't want money—you wouldn't spend it. A man like you don't want stocks or fancy investments—for you couldn't look after them. A man like you don't want diamonds and jewellery, nor a gold-headed cane, when it's got to be used as a crutch. No, Sir. What you want is suthin' that won't run away from you; that is always there before you and won't wear out, and will last after you're gone. That's land! And if it wasn't that I have sworn never to sell or give away this house and that garden; if it wasn't that I've held out agin the old woman and Mamie on that point, you should have *this* house and *that* garden. But, mebbee, for the same reason that I've

told you, I want that land to keep for myself. But I've selected four acres of the hill this side of my shaft, and here's the deed of it. As soon as you're ready, I'll put you up a house as big as this—that shall be yours with the land as long as you live, old man; and after that your children's."

"No; not theirs," broke in the old man, passionately. "Never!"

Mulrady recoiled for an instant in alarm at the sudden and unexpected vehemence of his manner. "Go slow, old man; go slow," he said, soothingly. "Of course, you'll do with your own as you like." Then, as if changing the subject, he went on cheerfully. "Perhaps you'll wonder why I picked out that spot on the hillside. Well, first, because I reserved it after my strike in case the lead should run that way, but it didn't. Next, because when you first came here you seemed to like the prospect. You used to sit there looking at it, as if it reminded you of something. You never said it did. They say you was sitting on that boulder there when you had that last attack, you know; but," he added, gently, "you've forgotten all about it."

"I have forgotten nothing," said Slinn, rising, with a choking voice. "I wish to God I had; I wish to God I could!"

He was on his feet now, supporting himself by the table. The subtle generous liquor he had drunk had evidently shaken his self-control, and burst those voluntary bonds he had put upon himself for the last six

months; the insidious stimulant had also put a strange vigour into his blood and nerves. His face was flushed, but not distorted; his eyes were brilliant, but not fixed; he looked as he might have looked to Masters in his strength three years before on that very hillside.

"Listen to me, Alvin Mulrady," he said, leaning over him with burning eyes. "Listen, while I have brain to think and strength to utter, why I have learnt to distrust, fear, and hate them! You think you know my story. Well, hear the truth from *me* to-night, Alvin Mulrady, and do not wonder if I have cause."

He stopped, and, with pathetic inefficiency, passed the fingers and inward turned thumb of his paralysed hand across his mouth, as if to calm himself. "Three years ago I was a miner, but not a miner like you! I had experience, I had scientific knowledge, I had a theory, and the patience and energy to carry it out. I selected a spot that had all the indications, made a tunnel, and without aid, counsel, or assistance of any kind, worked it for six months, without rest or cessation, and with scarcely food enough to sustain my body. Well, I made a strike; not like you, Mulrady, not a blunder of good luck, a fool's fortune—there, I don't blame you for it—but in perfect demonstration of my theory, the reward of my labour. It was no pocket—but a vein—a lead, that I had regularly hunted down and found—a fortune!

"I never knew how hard I had worked until that morning; I never knew what privations I had undergone

until that moment of my success, when I found I could scarcely think or move! I staggered out into the open air. The only human soul near me was a disappointed prospector, a man named Masters, who had a tunnel not far away. I managed to conceal from him my good fortune and my feeble state, for I was suspicious of him —of anyone, and as he was going away that day I thought I could keep my secret until he was gone. I was dizzy and confused, but I remember that I managed to write a letter to my wife, telling her of my good fortune, and begging her to come to me; and I remember that I saw Masters go. I don't remember anything else. They picked me up on the road, near that boulder, as you know."

"I know," said Mulrady, with a swift recollection of the stage driver's account of his discovery.

"They say," continued Slinn, tremblingly, "that I never recovered my senses or consciousness for nearly three years; they *say* I lost my memory completely during my illness, and that, by God's mercy, while I lay in that hospital, I knew no more than a babe; they say that because I could not speak or move, and only had my food as nature required it, that I was an imbecile, and that I never really came to my senses until after my son found me in the hospital. They *say* that —but I tell you to-night, Alvin Mulrady," he said, raising his voice to a hoarse outcry, "I tell you that it is a lie! I came to my senses a week after I lay on that hospital cot; I kept my senses and memory ever after

during the three years that I was there, until Harry brought his cold, hypocritical face to my bedside and recognised me. Do you understand? I, the possessor of millions, lay there a pauper! Deserted by wife and children—a spectacle for the curious, a sport for the doctors—*and I knew it!* I heard them speculate on the cause of my helplessness. I heard them talk of excesses and indulgences; I, that never knew wine or woman! I heard a preacher speak of the finger of God, and point to me. May God curse him!"

"Go slow, old man; go slow," said Mulrady, gently.

"I heard them speak of me as a friendless man, an outcast, a criminal—a being whom no one would claim. They were right; no one claimed me. The friends of others visited them; relations came and took away their kindred; a few lucky ones got well; a few, equally lucky, died! I alone lived on, uncared for, deserted.

"The first year," he went on more rapidly, "I prayed for their coming. I looked for them every day. I never lost hope. I said to myself, 'She has not got my letter; but when the time passes she will be alarmed by my silence, and then she will come or send someone to seek me. A young student got interested in my case, and, by studying my eyes, thought that I was not entirely imbecile and unconscious. With the aid of an alphabet, he got me to spell my name and town in Illinois, and promised by signs to write to my family. But in an evil moment I told him of my cursed fortune,

and in that moment I saw that he thought me a fool and an idiot. He went away, and I saw him no more. Yet I still hoped. I dreamed of their joy at finding me, and the reward that my wealth would give them. Perhaps I was a little weak still, perhaps a little flighty, too, at times; but I was quite happy that year, even in my disappointment, for I had still hope!"

He paused, and again composed his face with his paralysed hand; but his manner had become less excited, and his voice was stronger.

"A change must have come over me the second year, for I only dreaded their coming now and finding me so altered. A horrible idea that they might, like the student, believe me crazy if I spoke of my fortune, made me pray to God that they might not reach me until after I had regained my health and strength—and found my fortune. When the third year found me still there—I no longer prayed for them—I cursed them! I swore to myself that they should never enjoy my wealth; but I wanted to live, and let them know I had it. I found myself getting stronger; but as I had no money, no friends, and nowhere to go, I concealed my real condition from the doctors, except to give them my name, and to try to get some little work to do to enable me to leave the hospital and seek my lost treasure. One day I found out by accident that it had been discovered! You understand—my treasure!—that had cost me years of labour and my reason; and left me a helpless, forgotten pauper. That gold I had never

enjoyed had been found and taken possession of by another!"

He checked an exclamation from Mulrady with his hand. "They say they picked me up senseless from the floor, where I must have fallen when I heard the news—I don't remember—I recall nothing until I was confronted, nearly three weeks after by my son, who had called at the hospital, as a reporter for a paper, and had accidentally discovered me through my name and appearance. He thought me crazy, or a fool. I didn't undeceive him. I did not tell him the story of the mine to excite his doubts and derision, or worse (if I could bring proof to claim it), have it perhaps pass into his ungrateful hands. No; I said nothing. I let him bring me here. He could do no less, and common decency obliged him to do that."

"And what proof could you show of your claim?" asked Mulrady, gravely.

"If I had that letter—if I could find Masters," began Slinn, vaguely.

"Have you any idea where the letter is, or what has become of Masters?" continued Mulrady, with a matter-of-fact gravity, that seemed to increase Slinn's vagueness and excite his irritability.

"I don't know—I sometimes think"—— He stopped, sat down again, and passed his hands across his forehead. "I have seen the letter somewhere since. Yes," he went on, with sudden vehemence, "I know it, I have seen it! I"—— His brows knitted, his features

began to work convulsively; he suddenly brought his paralysed hand down partly opened upon the table. "I *will* remember where."

"Go slow, old man; go slow."

"You asked me once about my visions. Well, that is one of them. I remember a man somewhere showing me that letter. I have taken it from his hands and opened it, and knew it was mine by the specimens of gold that were in it. But where—or when—or what became of it, I cannot tell. It will come to me—it *must* come to me soon."

He turned his eyes upon Mulrady, who was regarding him with an expression of grave curiosity, and said bitterly, "You think me crazy. I know it. It needed only this."

"Where is this mine?" asked Mulrady, without heeding him.

The old man's eyes swiftly sought the ground.

"It is a secret then?"

"No."

"You have spoken of it to anyone?"

"No."

"Not to the man who possesses it?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I wouldn't take it from him."

"Why wouldn't you?"

"Because that man is yourself!"

In the instant of complete silence that followed

they could hear that the monotonous patter of rain on the roof had ceased.

"Then all this was in *my* shaft, and the vein I thought I struck there was *your* lead, found three years ago in *your* tunnel? Is that your idea?"

"Yes."

"Then I don't *sabe* why you don't want to claim it."

"I have told you why I don't want it for my children. I go further, now, and I tell you, Alvin Mulrady, that I was willing that your children should squander it, as they were doing. It has only been a curse to me; it could only be a curse to them; but I thought you were happy in seeing it feed selfishness and vanity. You think me bitter and hard. Well, I should have left you in your fool's paradise, but that I saw to-night when you came here that your eyes had been opened like mine. You, the possessor of my wealth—my treasure—could not buy your children's loving care and company with your millions, any more than I could keep mine in my poverty. You were to-night lonely and forsaken, as I was. We were equal, for the first time in our lives. If that cursed gold had dropped down the shaft between us into the hell from which it sprung, we might have clasped hands like brothers across the chasm."

Mulrady, who in a friendly show of being at his ease had not yet resumed his coat, rose in his shirt sleeves, and, standing before the hearth, straightened his square figure by drawing down his waistcoat on each side with

two powerful thumbs. After a moment's contemplative survey of the floor between him and the speaker, he raised his eyes to Slinn. They were small and colourless; the forehead above them was low, and crowned with a shock of tawny reddish hair; even the rude strength of his lower features was enfeebled by a long straggling goat-like beard; but for the first time in his life the whole face was impressed and transformed with a strong and simple dignity.

"Ez far ez I kin see, Slinn," he said gravely, "the pint between you and me aint to be settled by our children, or wot we allow is doo and right from them to us. Afore we preach at them for playing in the slumgullion, and gettin' themselves splashed, perhaps we mout ez well remember that that thar slumgullion comes from our own sluice-boxes, where we wash our gold. So we'll just put *them* behind us, so"—he continued, with a backward sweep of his powerful hand towards the chimney—"and goes on. The next thing that crops up ahead of us, is your three years in the hospital, and wot you went through at that time. I aint sayin' it wasn't rough on you, and that you didn't have it about as big as it's made; but ez you'll allow that you'd hev had that for three years, whether I'd found your mine or whether I hadn't, I think we can put *that* behind us, too. There's nothin' now left to prospect but your story of your strike. Well, take your own proofs. Masters is not here; and if he was, accordin' to your own story, he knows nothin' of your strike that

day, and could only prove you were a disappointed prospector in a tunnel: your letter—that the person you wrote to never got—*you* can't produce; and if you did, would be only your own story without proof! There is not a business man ez would look at your claim; there isn't a friend of yours that wouldn't believe you were crazy, and dreamed it all; there isn't a rival of yours ez wouldn't say ez you'd invented it. Slinn, I'm a business man—I am your friend—I am your rival—but I don't think you're lyin'—I don't think you're crazy—and I'm not sure your claim aint a good one!

"Ef you reckon from that that I'm goin' to hand you over the mine to-morrow," he went on, after a pause, raising his hand with a deprecating gesture, "you're mistaken. For your own sake, and the sake of my wife and children, you've got to prove it more clearly than you hev; but I promise you that from this night forward I will spare neither time nor money to help you to do it. I have more than doubled the amount that you would have had had you taken the mine the day you came from the hospital. When you prove to me that your story is true—and we will find some way to prove it, if it *is* true—that amount will be yours at once, without the need of a word from law or lawyers. If you want my name to that in black and white, come to the office to-morrow, and you shall have it."

"And you think I'll take it now?" said the old man, passionately. "Do you think that your charity will bring back my dead wife, the three years of my lost life, the

love and respect of my children? Or do you think that your own wife and children, who deserted you in your wealth, will come back to you in your poverty? No! Let the mine stay with its curse where it is—I'll have none of it!"

"Go slow, old man; go slow," said Mulrady, quietly, putting on his coat. "You will take the mine if it is yours; if it isn't, I'll keep it. If it is yours, you will give your children a chance to show what they can do for you in your sudden prosperity, as I shall give mine a chance to show how they can stand reverse and disappointment. If my head is level—and I reckon it is—they'll both pan out all right."

He turned and opened the door. With a quick revulsion of feeling, Slinn suddenly seized Mulrady's hand between both of his own, and raised it to his lips. Mulrady smiled, disengaged his hand gently, and saying soothingly, "Go slow, old man; go slow," closed the door behind him, and passed out into the clear Christmas dawn.

For the stars, with the exception of one that seemed to sparkle brightly over the shaft of his former fortunes, were slowly paling. A burden seemed to have fallen from his square shoulders as he stepped out sturdily into the morning air. He had already forgotten the lonely man behind him, for he was thinking only of his wife and daughter. And at the same moment they were thinking of him; and in their elaborate villa overlooking

the blue Mediterranean at Cannes, were discussing, in the event of Mamie's marriage with Prince Rosso e Negro, the possibility of Mr. Mulrady's paying two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, the gambling debts of that unfortunate but deeply conscientious nobleman.

CHAPTER VI.

When Alvin Mulrady re-entered his own house, he no longer noticed its loneliness. Whether the events of the last few hours had driven it from his mind, or whether his late reflections had repeopled it with his family under pleasanter auspices, it would be difficult to determine. Destitute as he was of imagination, and matter-of-fact in his judgments, he realised his new situation as calmly as he would have considered any business proposition. While he was decided to act upon his moral convictions purely, he was prepared to submit the facts of Slinn's claim to the usual patient and laborious investigation of his practical mind. It was the least he could do to justify the ready and almost superstitious assent he had given to Slinn's story.

When he had made a few memoranda at his desk by the growing light, he again took the key of the attic, and ascended to the loft that held the tangible memories of his past life. If he was still under the influence of his reflections, it was with very different sensations that he now regarded them. Was it possible that these ashes might be warmed again, and these scattered embers rekindled? His practical sense said No! whatever his wish might have been. A sudden chill came over

him; he began to realise the terrible change that was probable, more by the impossibility of his accepting the old order of things, than by his voluntarily abandoning the new. His wife and children would never submit. They would go away from this place—far away, where no reminiscence of either former wealth or former poverty could obtrude itself upon them. Mamie—his Mamie—should never go back to the cabin, since desecrated by Slinn's daughters, and take their places. No! Why should she?—because of the half-sick, half-crazy dreams of an old vindictive man?

He stopped suddenly. In moodily turning over a heap of mining clothing, blankets, and india-rubber boots, he had come upon an old pickaxe—the one he had found in the shaft; the one he had carefully preserved for a year, and then forgotten! Why had he not remembered it before? He was frightened, not only at this sudden resurrection of the proof he was seeking, but at his own fateful forgetfulness. Why had he never thought of this when Slinn was speaking? A sense of shame, as if he had voluntarily withheld it from the wronged man, swept over him. He was turning away, when he was again startled.

This time it was by a voice from below—a voice calling him—Slinn's voice. How had the crippled man got here so soon, and what did he want? He hurriedly laid aside the pick, which, in his first impulse, he had taken to the door of the loft with him, and descended

the stairs. The old man was standing at the door of his office awaiting him.

As Mulrady approached, he trembled violently, and clung to the doorpost for support.

"I had to come over, Mulrady," he said, in a choked voice; "I could stand it there no longer. I've come to beg you to forget all that I have said; to drive all thought of what passed between us last night out of your head and mine for ever! I've come to ask you to swear with me that neither of us will ever speak of this again for ever. It is not worth the happiness I have had in your friendship for the last half-year; it is not worth the agony I have suffered in its loss in the last half-hour."

Mulrady grasped his outstretched hand. "P'raps," he said, gravely, "there mayn't be any use for another word, if you can answer one now. Come with me. No matter," he added, as Slinn moved with difficulty; "I will help you."

He half-supported, half-lifted the paralysed man up the three flights of stairs, and opened the door of the loft. The pick was leaning against the wall, where he had left it. "Look around, and see if you recognise anything."

The old man's eyes fell upon the implement in a half-frightened way, and then lifted themselves interrogatively to Mulrady's face.

"Do you know that pick?"

Slinn raised it in his trembling hands. "I think I do; and yet"——

"Slinn! is it yours?"

"No," he said, hurriedly.

"Then what makes you think you know it?"

"It has a short handle like one I've seen."

"And it isn't yours?"

"No. The handle of mine was broken and spliced. I was too poor to buy a new one."

"Then you say that this pick which I found in my shaft is not yours?"

"Yes."

"Slinn!"

The old man passed his hand across his forehead, looked at Mulrady, and dropped his eyes. "It is not mine," he said, simply.

"That will do," said Mulrady, gravely.

"And you will not speak of this again?" said the old man, timidly.

"I promise you—not until I have some more evidence."

He kept his word, but not before he had extorted from Slinn as full a description of Masters as his imperfect memory and still more imperfect knowledge of his former neighbour could furnish. He placed this with a large sum of money, and the promise of a still larger reward, in the hands of a trustworthy agent. When this was done he resumed his old relations with Slinn, with the exception that the domestic letters of Mrs.

Mulrady and Mamie were no longer a subject of comment, and their bills no longer passed through his private secretary's hands.

Three months passed; the rainy season had ceased, the hillsides around Mulrady's shaft were bridal-like with flowers; indeed, there were rumours of an approaching fashionable marriage in the air, and vague hints in the *Record* that the presence of a distinguished capitalist might soon be required abroad. The face of that distinguished man did not, however, reflect the gaiety of nature nor the anticipation of happiness; on the contrary, for the past few weeks, he had appeared disturbed and anxious, and that rude tranquillity which had characterised him was wanting. People shook their heads; a few suggested speculations; all agreed on extravagance.

One morning, after office hours, Slinn, who had been watching the care-worn face of his employer, suddenly rose and limped to his side.

"We promised each other," he said, in a voice trembling with emotion, "never to allude to our talk of Christmas Eve again, unless we had other proofs of what I told you then. We have none; I don't believe we'll ever have any more; I don't care if we ever do, and I break that promise now because I cannot bear to see you unhappy and know that this is the cause."

Mulrady made a motion of deprecation, but the old man continued:

"You are unhappy, Alvin Mulrady. You are unhappy because you want to give your daughter a dowry of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and you will not use the fortune that you think may be mine."

"Who's been talking about a dowry?" asked Mulrady, with an angry flush.

"Don Cæsar Alvarado told my daughter."

"Then that is why he has thrown off on me since he returned," said Mulrady, with sudden small malevolence, "just that he might unload his gossip because Mamie wouldn't have him. The old woman was right in warnin' me agin him."

The outburst was so unlike him, and so dwarfed his large though common nature with its littleness, that it was easy to detect its feminine origin, although it filled Slinn with vague alarm.

"Never mind him," said the old man, hastily; "what I wanted to say now is that I abandon everything to you and yours. There are no proofs; there never will be any more than what we know, than what we have tested and found wanting. I swear to you that, except to show you that I have not lied and am not crazy, I would destroy them on their way to your hands. Keep the money, and spend it as you will. Make your daughter happy, and, through her, yourself. You have made me happy through your liberality, don't make me suffer through your privation."

"I tell you what, old man," said Mulrady, rising to

his feet, with an awkward mingling of frankness and shame in his manner and accent, "I should like to pay that money for Mamie, and let her be a Princess, if it would make her happy. I should like to shut the lantern jaws of that Don Cæsar, who'd be too glad if anything happened to break off Mamie's match, but I shouldn't touch that capital—unless you'd lend it to me. If you'll take a note from me, payable if the property ever becomes yours, I'd thank you. A mortgage on the old house and garden, and the lands I bought of Don Cæsar, outside the mine, will screen you."

"If that pleases you," said the old man, with a smile, "have your way; and if I tear up the note, it does not concern you."

It did please the distinguished capitalist of Rough-and-Ready; for the next few days his face wore a brightened expression, and he seemed to have recovered his old tranquillity. There was, in fact, a slight touch of consequence in his manner, the first ostentation he had ever indulged in, when he was informed one morning at his private office that Don Cæsar Alvarado was in the counting-house, desiring a few moments' conference. "Tell him to come in," said Mulrady, shortly. The door opened upon Don Cæsar—erect, sallow, and grave. Mulrady had not seen him since his return from Europe, and even his experienced eyes were struck with the undeniable ease and grace with which the young Spanish-American had assimilated the style and fashion of an older civilisation. It seemed rather

as if he had returned to a familiar condition than adopted a new one.

"Take a cheer," said Mulrady.

The young man looked at Slinn with quietly persistent significance.

"You can talk all the same," said Mulrady, accepting the significance. "He's my private secretary."

"It seems that for that reason we might choose another moment for our conversation," returned Don Cæsar, haughtily. "Do I understand you cannot see me now?"

Mulrady hesitated. He had always revered and recognised a certain social superiority in Don Ramon Alvarado; somehow his son—a young man of half his age, and once a possible son-in-law—appeared to claim that recognition also. He rose, without a word, and preceded Don Cæsar up-stairs into his drawing-room. The alien portrait on the wall seemed to evidently take sides with Don Cæsar, as against the common intruder, Mulrady.

"I hoped the Señora Mulrady might have saved me this interview," said the young man, stiffly; "or at least have given you some intimation of the reason why I seek it. As you just now proposed my talking to you in the presence of the unfortunate Señor Esslinn himself, it appears she has not."

"I don't know what you're driving at, or what Mrs. Mulrady's got to do with Slinn or you," said Mulrady, in angry uneasiness.

"Do I understand," said Don Cæsar, sternly, "that Señora Mulrady has not told you that I entrusted to her an important letter, belonging to Señor Esslinn, which I had the honour to discover in the wood, six months ago, and which she said she would refer to you?"

"Letter?" echoed Mulrady, slowly, "my wife had a letter of Slinn's?"

Don Cæsar regarded the Millionaire attentively. "It is as I feared," he said gravely. "You do not know, or you would not have remained silent." He then briefly recounted the story of his finding Slinn's letter, his exhibition of it to the invalid, its disastrous effect upon him, and his innocent discovery of the contents. "I believed myself at that time on the eve of being allied with your family, Señor Mulrady," he said, haughtily; "and when I found myself in possession of a secret which affected its integrity and good name, I did not choose to leave it in the helpless hands of its imbecile owner, or his sillier children, but proposed to trust it to the care of the Señora, that she and you might deal with it as became your honour and mine. I followed her to Paris, and gave her the letter there. She affected to laugh at any pretension of the writer, or any claim he might have on your bounty; but she kept the letter and, I fear, destroyed it. You will understand, Señor Mulrady, that when I found that my attentions were no longer agreeable to your daughter, I had no longer the right to speak to you on the subject,

nor could I, without misapprehension, force her to return it. I should have still kept the secret to myself, if I had not since my return here made the nearer acquaintance of Señor Esslinn's daughters. I cannot present myself at his house, as a suitor for the hand of the Señorita Vashti, until I have asked his absolution for my complicity in the wrong that has been done to him. I cannot, as a *caballero,* do that without your permission. It is for that purpose I am here."

It needed only this last blow to complete the humiliation that whitened Mulrady's face. But his eye was none the less clear and his voice none the less steady as he turned to Don Cæsar.

"You know perfectly the contents of that letter?"

"I have kept a copy of it."

"Come with me."

He preceded his visitor down the staircase and back into his private office. Slinn looked up at his employer's face in unrestrained anxiety. Mulrady sat down at his desk, wrote a few hurried lines and rang a bell. A manager appeared from the counting-room.

"Send that to the bank."

He wiped his pen as methodically as if he had not at that moment countermanded the order to pay his daughter's dowry, and turned quietly to Slinn.

"Don Cæsar Alvarado has found the letter you wrote your wife on the day you made your strike in the tunnel that is now my shaft. He gave the letter to Mrs. Mulrady; but he has kept a copy."

Unheeding the frightened gesture of entreaty from Slinn, equally with the unfeigned astonishment of Don Cæsar, who was entirely unprepared for this revelation of Mulrady's and Slinn's confidences, he continued, "He has brought the copy with him. I reckon it would be only square for you to compare it with what you remember of the original."

In obedience to a gesture from Mulrady, Don Cæsar mechanically took from his pocket a folded paper, and handed it to the paralytic. But Slinn's trembling fingers could scarcely unfold the paper; and as his eyes fell upon its contents, his convulsive lips could not articulate a word.

"P'raps I'd better read it for you," said Mulrady, gently. "You kin follow me and stop me when I go wrong."

He took the paper, and, in a dead silence, read as follows:—

"Dear Wife,—I've just struck gold in my tunnel, and you must get ready to come here with the children, at once. It was after six months' hard work; and I'm so weak I . . . It's a fortune for us all. We should be rich even if it were only a branch vein dipping west towards the next tunnel, instead of dipping east, according to my theory"——

"Stop!" said Slinn, in a voice that shook the room.

Mulrady looked up.

"It's wrong, aint it?" he asked, anxiously; "it should be *east* towards the next tunnel."

"No! *It's right!* *I* am wrong! We're all wrong!"

Slinn had risen to his feet, erect and inspired. "Don't you see," he almost screamed, with passionate vehemence; "it's *Masters' abandoned tunnel* your shaft has struck? Not mine! It was Masters' pick you found! I know it now!"

"And your own tunnel?" said Mulrady, springing to his feet in his excitement. "And *your* strike?"

"Is still there!"

The next instant, and before another question could be asked, Slinn had darted from the room. In the exaltation of that supreme discovery he regained the full control of mind and body. Mulrady and Don Cæsar, no less excited, followed him precipitately, and with difficulty kept up with his feverish speed. Their way lay along the base of the hill below Mulrady's shaft, and on a line with Master's abandoned tunnel. Only once he stopped to snatch a pick from the hand of an astonished Chinaman at work in a ditch, as he still kept on his way, a quarter of a mile beyond the shaft. Here he stopped before a jagged hole in the hillside. Bared to the sky and air, the very openness of its abandonment, its unpropitious position, and distance from the strike in Mulrady's shaft had no doubt preserved its integrity from wayfarer or prospector.

"You can't go in there alone and without a light," said Mulrady, laying his hand on the arm of the excited man. "Let me get more help and proper tools."

"I know every step in the dark as in the daylight,"

returned Slinn, struggling. "Let me go, while I have yet strength and reason! Stand aside!"

He broke from them, and the next moment was swallowed up in the yawning blackness. They waited with bated breath until, after a seeming eternity of night and silence, they heard his returning footsteps, and ran forward to meet him. As he was carrying something clasped to his breast, they supported him to the opening. But at the same moment the object of his search, and his burden, a misshapen wedge of gold and quartz, dropped with him, and both fell together with equal immobility to the ground. He had still strength to turn his fading eyes to the other Millionaire of Rough-and-Ready, who leaned over him.

"You—see," he gasped, brokenly, "I was not—crazy!"

No. He was dead!

A PHYLLIS OF THE SIERRAS.

A PHYLLIS OF THE SIERRAS.

CHAPTER I.

WHERE the great highway of the Sierras nears the summit, and the pines begin to show sterile reaches of rock and waste in their drawn-up files, there are signs of occasional departures from the main road, as if the weary traveller had at times succumbed to the long ascent, and turned aside for rest and breath again. The tired eyes of many a dusty passenger on the old overland coach have gazed wistfully on those sylvan openings, and imagined recesses of primeval shade and virgin wilderness in their dim perspectives. Had he descended, however, and followed one of these diverging paths, he would have come upon some rude waggon track, or "log-slide," leading from a clearing on the slope, or the ominous saw-mill, half hidden in the forest it was slowly decimating. The woodland hush might have been broken by the sound of water passing over some unseen dam in the hollow, or the hiss of escaping steam and throb of an invisible engine in the covert.

Such, at least, was the experience of a young fellow of five-and-twenty, who, knapsack on back and stick in hand, had turned aside from the highway and entered the woods one pleasant afternoon in July. But he was evidently a deliberate pedestrian, and not a recent deposit of the proceeding stage-coach; and although his stout walking-shoes were covered with dust, he had neither the habitual slouch and slovenliness of the tramp, nor the hurried fatigue and growing negligence of an involuntary wayfarer. His clothes, which were strong and serviceable, were better fitted for their present usage than the ordinary garments of the Californian travellers, which were too apt to be either above or below their requirements. But perhaps the stranger's greatest claim to originality was the absence of any weapon in his equipment. He carried neither rifle nor gun in his hand, and his narrow leathern belt was empty of either knife or revolver.

A half-mile from the main road, which seemed to him to have dropped out of sight the moment he had left it, he came upon a half-cleared area, where the hastily-cut stumps of pines, of irregular height, bore an odd resemblance to the broken columns of some vast and ruined temple. A few fallen shafts, denuded of their bark and tesselated branches, sawn into symmetrical cylinders, lay beside the stumps, and lent themselves to the illusion. But the freshly-cut chips, so damp that they still clung in layers to each other as they had fallen from the axe, and the stumps themselves

still wet and viscous from their drained life-blood, were redolent of an odour of youth and freshness.

The young man seated himself on one of the logs and deeply inhaled the sharp balsamic fragrance—albeit with a slight cough and a later hurried respiration. This, and a certain drawn look about his upper lip, seemed to indicate, in spite of his strength and colour, some pulmonary weakness. He, however, rose after a moment's rest with undiminished energy and cheerfulness, readjusted his knapsack, and began to lightly pick his way across the fallen timber. A few paces on, the muffled whirr of machinery became more audible, with the lazy, monotonous command of "Gee thar," from some unseen ox-driver. Presently, the slow, deliberately swaying heads of a team of oxen emerged from the bushes, followed by the clanking chain of the "skids" of sawn planks, which they were ponderously dragging with that ostentatious submissiveness peculiar to their species. They had nearly passed him when there was a sudden hitch in the procession. From where he stood he could see that a projecting plank had struck a pile of chips and become partly imbedded in it. To run to the obstruction and, with a few dexterous strokes and the leverage of his stout stick, dislodge the plank was the work not only of the moment but of an evidently energetic hand. The teamster looked back and merely nodded his appreciation, and with a "Gee up! Out of that, now!" the skids moved on.

"Much obliged, there!" said a hearty voice, as if

supplementing the teamster's imperfect acknowledgment.

The stranger looked up. The voice came from the open, sashless, shutterless window of a rude building—a mere shell of boards and beams half hidden in the still leafy covert before him. He had completely overlooked it in his approach, even as he had ignored the nearer throbbing of the machinery, which was so violent as to impart a decided tremor to the slight edifice, and to shake the speaker so strongly that he was obliged while speaking to steady himself by the sashless frame of the window at which he stood. He had a face of good-natured and alert intelligence, a master's independence and authority of manner in spite of his blue jean overalls and flannel shirt.

"Don't mention it," said the stranger, smiling with equal but more deliberate good-humour. Then, seeing that his interlocutor still lingered a hospitable moment in spite of his quick eyes and the jarring impatience of the machinery, he added hesitatingly, "I fancy I've wandered off the track a bit. Do you know a Mr. Bradley—somewhere here?"

The stranger's hesitation seemed to be more from some habitual conscientiousness of statement than awkwardness. The man in the window replied, "I'm Bradley."

"Ah! Thank you: I've a letter for you—somewhere. Here it is. He produced a note from his breast-pocket. Bradley stooped to a sitting posture in the window.

"Pitch it up." It was thrown and caught cleverly. Bradley opened it, read it hastily, smiled and nodded, glanced behind him as if to implore further delay from the impatient machinery, leaned perilously from the window, and said—

"Look here! Do you see that silver-fir straight ahead."

"Yes."

A little to the left there's a trail. Follow it and skirt along the edge of the canyon until you see my house. Ask for my wife—that's Mrs. Bradley—and give her your letter. Stop!" He drew a carpenter's pencil from his pocket, scrawled two or three words across the open sheet and tossed it back to the stranger. "See you at tea! Excuse me—Mr. Mainwaring—we're short handed—and—the engine"——But here he disappeared suddenly.

Without glancing at the note again, the stranger quietly replaced it in his pocket, and struck out across the fallen trunks towards the silver-fir. He quickly found the trail indicated by Bradley, although it was faint and apparently worn by a single pair of feet as a shorter and private cut from some more travelled path. It was well for the stranger that he had a keen eye or he would have lost it; it was equally fortunate that he had a mountaineering instinct, for a sudden profound deepening of the blue mist seen dimly through the leaves before him caused him to slacken his steps. The trail bent abruptly to the right; a gulf fully two

thousand feet deep was at his feet! It was the Great Canyon.

At the first glance it seemed so narrow that a rifle-shot could have crossed its tranquil depths; but a second look at the comparative size of the trees on the opposite mountain convinced him of his error. A nearer survey of the abyss also showed him that instead of its walls being perpendicular they were made of successive ledges or terraces to the valley below. Yet the air was so still, and the outlines so clearly cut, that they might have been only the reflections of the mountains around him cast upon the placid mirror of a lake. The spectacle arrested him, as it arrested all men, by some occult power beyond the mere attraction of beauty or magnitude; even the teamster never passed it without the tribute of a stone or broken twig tossed into its immeasurable profundity.

Reluctantly leaving the spot, the stranger turned with the trail that now began to skirt its edge. This was no easy matter, as the undergrowth was very thick, and the foliage dense to the perilous brink of the precipice. He walked on, however, wondering why Bradley had chosen so circuitous and dangerous a route to his house, which naturally would be some distance back from the canyon. At the end of ten minutes struggling through the "brush," the trail became vague, and, to all appearances, ended. Had he arrived? The thicket was as dense as before; through the interstices of leaf and spray he could see the blue void of the canyon at his

side, and he even fancied that the foliage ahead of him was more symmetrical and less irregular, and was touched here and there with faint bits of colour. To complete his utter mystification, a woman's voice, very youthful, and by no means unmusical, rose apparently from the circumambient air. He looked hurriedly to the right and left, and even hopelessly into the trees above him.

"Yes," said the voice, as if renewing a suspended conversation, "it was too funny for anything. There were the two Missouri girls from Skinner's, with their auburn hair ringletted, my dear, like the old 'Books of Beauty'—in white frocks and sashes of an unripe greenish yellow, that puckered up your mouth like persimmons. One of them was speechless from good behaviour, and the other—well! the other was so energetic she called out the figures before the fiddler did, and shrieked to my vis-à-vis to dance up to the entire stranger—meaning *me,* if you please."

The voice appeared to come from the foliage that overhung the cañon, and the stranger even fancied he could detect through the shimmering leafy veil something that moved monotonously to and fro. Mystified and impatient, he made a hurried stride forward, his foot struck a wooden step, and the next moment the mystery was made clear. He had almost stumbled upon the end of a long verandah that projected over the abyss before a low, modern dwelling, till then invisible, nestling on its very brink. The symmetrically-trimmed

foliage he had noticed were the luxuriant Madeira vines that hid the rude pillars of the verandah; the moving object was a rocking-chair with its back towards the intruder, that disclosed only the brown hair above, and the white skirts and small slippered feet below, of a seated female figure. In the meantime, a second voice from the interior of the house had replied to the figure in the chair, who was evidently the first speaker:

"It must have been very funny; but as long as Jim is always bringing somebody over from the mill, I don't see how *I* can go to those places. You were lucky, my dear, to escape from the new Division Superintendent last night; he was insufferable to Jim with his talk of his friend the San Francisco millionaire, and to me with his cheap society airs. I do hate a provincial fine gentleman."

The situation was becoming embarrassing to the intruder. At the apparition of the woman, the unaffected and simple directness he had previously shown in his equally abrupt contact with Bradley had fled utterly; confused by the awkwardness of his arrival, and shocked at the idea of overhearing a private conversation, he stepped hurriedly on the verandah.

"Well? go on!" said the second voice impatiently. "Well; who else was there? *What* did you say? I don't hear you. What's the matter?"

The seated figure had risen from her chair, and turned a young and pretty face somewhat superciliously

towards the stranger, as she said in a low tone to her unseen auditor, "Hush! there is somebody here."

The young man came forward with an awkwardness that was more boyish than rustic. His embarrassment was not lessened by the simultaneous entrance from the open door of a second woman, apparently as young as and prettier than the first.

"I trust you'll excuse me for—for—being so wretchedly stupid," he stammered, "but I really thought, you know, that—that—I was following the trail to—to —the front of the house, when I stumbled in—in here."

Long before he had finished, both women, by some simple feminine intuition, were relieved and even prepossessed by his voice and manner. They smiled graciously. The later-comer pointed to the empty chair. But with his habit of pertinacious conscientiousness the stranger continued, "It was regularly stupid, wasn't it? —and I ought to have known better. I should have turned back and gone away when I found out what an ass I was likely to be; but I was—afraid—you know, of alarming you by the noise."

"Won't you sit down?" said the second lady, pleasantly.

"Oh, thanks!" I've a letter here—I—" he transferred his stick and hat to his left hand as he felt in his breast-pocket with his right. But the action was so awkward that the stick dropped on the verandah. Both women made a movement to restore it to its embarrassed owner, who, however, quickly anticipated them. "Pray

don't mind it," he continued, with accelerated breath and heightened colour. "Ah, here's the letter!" He produced the note Bradley had returned to him. "It's mine, in fact—that is, I brought it to Mr. Bradley. He said I was to give it to—to—to—Mrs. Bradley." He paused, glancing embarrassedly from the one to the other.

"I'm Mrs. Bradley, said the prettiest one, with a laugh. He handed her the letter. It ran as follows:—

"Dear Bradley,—Put Mr. Mainwaring through as far as he wants to go, or hang him up at The Lookout, just as he likes. The Bank's behind him, and his hat's chalked all over the Road; but he don't care much about being on velvet. That ain't his style—and you'll like him. He's somebody's son in England. B."

Mrs. Bradley glanced simply at the first sentence. "Pray sit down, Mr. Mainwaring," she said gently; "or, rather, let me first introduce my cousin—Miss Macy."

"Thanks," said Mainwaring, with a bow to Miss Macy, "but I—I—I—think," he added conscientiously, "you did not notice that your husband had written something across the paper."

Mrs. Bradley smiled, and glanced at her husband's indorsement—"All right. Wade in." "It's nothing but Jim's slang," she said, with a laugh and a slightly heightened colour. "He ought not to have sent you by that short cut; it's a bother, and even dangerous for a stranger. If you had come directly to *us* by the road, without making your first call at the mill," she added,

with a touch of coquetry, "you would have had a pleasanter walk, and seen *us* sooner. I suppose, however, you got off the stage at the mill?"

"I was not on the coach," said Mainwaring, unfastening the strap of his knapsack. "I walked over from Lone Pine Flat."

"Walked!" echoed both women in simultaneous astonishment.

"Yes," returned Mainwaring simply, laying aside his burden and taking the proffered seat. "It's a very fine bit of country."

"Why, it's fifteen miles," said Mrs. Bradley, glancing horror-stricken at her cousin. "How dreadful! And to think Jim could have sent you a horse to Lone Pine. Why, you must be dead!"

"Thanks, I'm all right! I rather enjoyed it, you know."

"But," said Miss Macy, glancing wonderingly at his knapsack, "you must want something, a change—or some refreshment—after fifteen miles."

"Pray don't disturb yourself," said Mainwaring, rising hastily, but not quickly enough to prevent the young girl from slipping past him into the house, whence she rapidly returned with a decanter and glasses.

"Perhaps Mr. Mainwaring would prefer to go into Jim's room and wash his hands and put on a pair of slippers?" said Mrs. Bradley, with gentle concern.

"Thanks, no. I really am not tired. I sent some luggage yesterday by the coach to the Summit Hotel,"

he said, observing the women's eyes still fixed upon his knapsack. "I dare say I can get them if I want them. I've got a change here," he continued, lifting the knapsack as if with a sudden sense of its incongruity with its surroundings, and depositing it on the end of the verandah.

"Do let it remain where it is," said Mrs. Bradley, greatly amused, "and pray sit still and take some refreshment. You'll make yourself ill after your exertions," she added, with a charming assumption of matronly solicitude.

"But I'm not at all deserving of your sympathy," said Mainwaring, with a laugh. "I'm awfully fond of walking and my usual constitutional isn't much under this."

"Perhaps you were stronger than you are now," said Mrs. Bradley, gazing at him with a frank curiosity that, however, brought a faint deepening of colour to his cheek.

"I dare say you're right," he said suddenly, with an apologetic smile. "I quite forgot that I'm a sort of an invalid, you know, travelling for my health. I'm not very strong here," he added, lightly tapping his chest, that now, relieved of the bands of his knapsack, appeared somewhat thin and hollow in spite of his broad shoulders. His voice, too, had become less clear and distinct.

Mrs. Bradley, who was still watching him, here rose potentially. "You ought to take more care of yourself,"

she said. "You should begin by eating this biscuit, drinking that glass of whisky, and making yourself more comfortable in Jim's room until we can get the spare room fixed a little."

"But I am not to be sent to bed—am I?" asked Mainwaring, in half-real, half-amused consternation.

"I'm not so sure of that," said Mrs. Bradley, with playful precision. "But for the present we'll let you off with a good wash and a nap afterwards in that rocking-chair, while my cousin and I make some little domestic preparations. You see," she added with a certain proud humility, "we've got only one servant—a Chinaman, and there are many things we can't leave to him."

The colour again rose in Mainwaring's cheek, but he had tact enough to reflect that any protest or hesitation on his part at that moment would only increase the difficulties of his gentle entertainers. He allowed himself to be ushered into the house by Mrs. Bradley, and shown to her husband's room, without perceiving that Miss Macy had availed herself of his absence to run to the end of the verandah, mischievously try to lift the discarded knapsack to her own pretty shoulder, but, failing, heroically stagger with it into the passage and softly deposit it at his door. This done, she pantingly rejoined her cousin in the kitchen.

"Well," said Mrs. Bradley, emphatically. "*Did* you ever? Walking fifteen miles for pleasure—and with such lungs!"

"And that knapsack!" added Louise Macy, pointing to the mark in her little palm where the strap had imbedded itself in the soft flesh.

"He 's nice, though; isn't he?" said Mrs. Bradley, tentatively.

"Yes," said Miss Macy; "he isn't, certainly, one of those provincial fine gentlemen you object to. But *did* you see his shoes? I suppose they make the miles go quickly, or seem to measure less by comparison."

"They're probably more serviceable than those high-heeled things that Captain Greyson hops about in."

"But the Captain always rides—and rides very well—you know," said Louise, reflectively. There was a moment's pause.

"I suppose Jim will tell us all about him," said Mrs. Bradley, dismissing the subject, as she turned her sleeves back over her white arms, preparatory to grappling certain culinary difficulties.

"Jim," observed Miss Macy, shortly, "in my opinion, knows nothing more than his note says. That's like Jim."

"There's nothing more to know, really," said Mrs. Bradley, with a superior air. "He's undoubtedly the son of some Englishman of fortune, sent out here for his health."

"Hush!"

Miss Macy had heard a step in the passage. It halted at last, half irresolutely, before the open door of the kitchen, and the stranger appeared with an embar-

rassed air. But in his brief absence he seemed to have completely groomed himself, and stood there, the impersonation of close-cropped, clean and wholesome English young manhood. The two women appreciated it with cat-like fastidiousness.

"I beg your pardon; but really you're going to let a fellow do something for you," he said, "just to keep him from looking like a fool. I really can do no end of things, you know, if you'll try me. I've done some camping-out, and can cook as well as the next man."

The two women made a movement of smiling remonstrance, half coquettish, and half superior, until Mrs. Bradley, becoming conscious of her bare arms and the stranger's wandering eyes, coloured faintly, and said with more decision,

"Certainly not. You'd only be in the way. Besides, you need rest more than we do. Put yourself in the rocking-chair in the verandah, and go to sleep until Mr. Bradley comes."

Mainwaring saw that she was serious, and withdrew, a little ashamed at the familiarity into which his boyishness had betrayed him. But he had scarcely seated himself in the rocking-chair before Miss Macy appeared, carrying with both hands a large tin basin of unshelled peas.

"There," she said pantingly, placing her burden in his lap, "if you really want to help, there's something to do that isn't very fatiguing. You may shell these peas."

"*Shell* them—I beg pardon, but how?" he asked, with smiling earnestness.

"How? Why, I'll show you—look."

She frankly stepped beside him, so close that her full-skirted dress half encompassed him and the basin in a delicious confusion, and, leaning over his lap, with her left hand picked up a pea-cod, which, with a single movement of her charming little right thumb, she broke at the end, and stripped the green shallow of its tiny treasures.

He watched her with smiling eyes; her own, looking down on him, were very bright and luminous. "There; that's easy enough," she said, and turned away.

"But—one moment, Miss—Miss——?"

"Macy," said Louise.

"Where am I to put the shells?"

"Oh! throw them down there—there's room enough."

She was pointing to the canyon below. The verandah actually projected over its brink, and seemed to hang in mid air above it. Mainwaring almost mechanically threw his arm out to catch the incautious girl, who had stepped heedlessly to its extreme edge.

"How odd! Don't you find it rather dangerous here?" he could not help saying. "I mean—you might have had a railing that wouldn't intercept the view and yet be safe?"

"It's a fancy of Mr. Bradley's," returned the young girl carelessly. "It's all like this. The house was built

on a ledge against the side of the precipice, and the road suddenly drops down to it."

"It's tremendously pretty, all the same, you know," said the young man thoughtfully, gazing, however, at the girl's rounded chin above him.

"Yes," she replied curtly. "But this isn't working. I must go back to Jenny. You can shell the peas until Mr. Bradley comes home. He won't be long."

She turned away, and re-entered the house. Without knowing why, he thought her withdrawal abrupt, and he was again feeling his ready colour rise with the suspicion of either having been betrayed by the young girl's innocent fearlessness into some unpardonable familiarity, which she had quietly resented, or of feeling an ease and freedom in the company of these two women that were inconsistent with respect, and should be restrained.

He, however, began to apply himself to the task given to him with his usual conscientiousness of duty, and presently acquired a certain manual dexterity in the operation. It was "good fun" to throw the cast-off husks into the mighty unfathomable void before him and watch them linger with suspended gravity in mid air for a moment—apparently motionless—until they either lost themselves, a mere vanishing black spot in the thin ether, or slid suddenly at a sharp angle into unknown shadow. How deuced odd for him to be sitting here in this fashion! It would be something to talk of hereafter, and yet—he stopped—it was not at

all in the line of that characteristic adventure, uncivilised novelty, and barbarous freedom which for the last month he had sought and experienced. It was not at all like his meeting with the grizzly last week while wandering in a lonely canyon; not a bit in the line of his chance acquaintance with that notorious ruffian, Spanish Jack, or his witnessing with his own eyes that actual lynching affair at Angels. No! Nor was it at all characteristic, according to his previous ideas of frontier rural seclusion—as for instance the Pike County cabin of the family where he stayed one night, and where the handsome daughter asked him what his Christian name was. No! These two young women were very unlike her; they seemed really quite the equals of his family and friends in England—perhaps more attractive—and yet, yes, it was this very attractiveness that alarmed his inbred social conservatism regarding women. With a man it was very different; that alert, active, intelligent husband, instinct with the throbbing life of his saw-mill, creator and worker in one, challenged his unqualified trust and admiration.

He had become conscious for the last minute or two of thinking rapidly and becoming feverishly excited; of breathing with greater difficulty, and a renewed tendency to cough. The tendency increased until he instinctively put aside the pan from his lap and half rose. But even that slight exertion brought on an accession of coughing. He put his handkerchief to his lips, partly to keep the sound from disturbing the women in the

kitchen, partly because of a certain significant taste in his mouth which he unpleasantly remembered. When he removed the handkerchief it was, as he expected, spotted with blood. He turned quickly and re-entered the house softly, regaining the bed-room without attracting attention. An increasing faintness here obliged him to lie down on the bed until it should pass.

Everything was quiet. He hoped they would not discover his absence from the verandah until he was better; it was deucedly awkward that he should have had this attack just now—and after he had made so light of his previous exertions. They would think him an effeminate fraud, these two bright, active women and that alert, energetic man. A faint colour came into his cheek at the idea, and an uneasy sense that he had been in some way foolishly imprudent about his health. Again, they might be alarmed at missing him from the verandah; perhaps he had better have remained there; perhaps he ought to tell them that he had concluded to take their advice and lie down. He tried to rise, but the deep blue chasm before the window seemed to be swelling up to meet him, the bed slowly sinking into its oblivious profundity. He knew no more.

He came to with the smell and taste of some powerful volatile spirit, and the vague vision of Mr. Bradley still standing at the window of the mill and vibrating with the machinery; this changed presently to a pleasant lassitude and lazy curiosity as he perceived Mr. Bradley

smile and apparently slip from the window of the mill to his bedside.

"You're all right now," said Bradley, cheerfully.

He was feeling Mainwaring's pulse. Had he really been ill and was Bradley a doctor?

Bradley evidently saw what was passing in his mind. "Don't be alarmed," he said gaily. "I'm not a doctor, but I practise a little medicine and surgery on account of the men at the mill, and accidents, you know. You're all right now; you've lost a little blood: but in a couple of weeks in this air we'll have that tubercle healed, and you'll be as right as a trivet."

"In a couple of weeks!" echoed Mainwaring, in faint astonishment. "Why, I leave here to-morrow."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Bradley, with smiling peremptoriness, suddenly slipping out from behind her husband. "Everything is all perfectly arranged. Jim has sent off messengers to your friends, so that if you can't come to them, they can come to you. You see, you can't help yourself! If you *will* walk fifteen miles with such lungs, and then frighten people to death, you must abide by the consequences."

"You see, the old lady has fixed you," said Bradley, smiling; "and she's the master here. Come, Mainwaring, you can send any other message you like, and have who and what you want here; but *here* you must stop for a while."

"But did I frighten you really?" stammered Mainwaring, faintly, to Mrs. Bradley.

"Frighten us!" said Mrs. Bradley. "Well, look there!"

She pointed to the window, which commanded a view of the verandah. Miss Macy had dropped into the vacant chair, with her little feet stretched out before her, her cheeks burning with heat and fire, her eyes partly closed, her straw hat hanging by a ribbon round her neck, her brown hair clinging to her ears and forehead in damp tendrils, and an enormous palm-leaf fan in each hand violently playing upon this charming picture of exhaustion and abandonment.

"She came tearing down to the mill, barebacked on our half-broken mustang, about half an hour ago, to call me 'to help you,'" explained Bradley. "Heaven knows how she managed to do it."

CHAPTER II.

THE medication of the woods was not over-estimated by Bradley. There was surely some occult healing property in that vast reservoir of balmy and resinous odours over which The Lookout beetled and clung, and from which at times the pure exhalations of the terraced valley seemed to rise. Under its remedial influence and a conscientious adherence to the rules of absolute rest and repose laid down for him, Mainwaring had no return of the hemorrhage. The nearest professional medical authority hastily summoned saw no reason for changing or for supplementing Bradley's intelligent and simple treatment, although astounded that the patient had been under no more radical or systematic cure than travel and exercise. The women especially were amazed that Mainwaring had taken "nothing for it," in their habitual experience of an unfettered pill-and-elixir consuming democracy. In their knowledge of the thousand "panaceas" that filled the shelves of the General Store, this singular abstention of their guest seemed to indicate a national peculiarity.

His bed was moved beside the low window, from which he could not only view the verandah but con-

verse at times with its occupants, and even listen to the book which Miss Macy, seated without, read aloud to him. In the evening Bradley would linger by his couch until late, beguiling the tedium of his convalescence with characteristic stories and information which he thought might please the invalid. For Mainwaring, who had been early struck with Bradley's ready and cultivated intelligence, ended by shyly avoiding the discussion of more serious topics, partly because Bradley impressed him with a suspicion of his own inferiority and partly because Mainwaring questioned the taste of Bradley's apparent exhibition of his manifest superiority. He learned accidentally that this mill-owner and backwoodsman was a college-bred man; but the practical application of that education to the ordinary affairs of life was new to the young Englishman's traditions, and grated a little harshly on his feelings. He would have been quite content if Bradley had, like himself and fellows he knew, undervalued his training, and kept his gifts conservatively impractical. The knowledge also that his host's education naturally came from some provincial institution unlike Oxford and Cambridge may have unconsciously affected his general estimate. I say unconsciously, for his strict conscientiousness would have rejected any such formal proposition.

Another trifle annoyed him. He could not help noticing also that although Bradley's manner and sympathy were confidential and almost brotherly, he never

made any allusion to Mainwaring's own family or connections, and, in fact, gave no indication of what he believed was the national curiosity in regard to strangers. Somewhat embarrassed by this indifference, Mainwaring made the occasion of writing some letters home an opportunity for laughingly alluding to the fact that he had made his mother and his sisters fully aware of the great debt they owed the household of The Lookout.

"They'll probably all send you a round robin of thanks, except, perhaps, my next brother, Bob." Bradley contented himself with a gesture of general deprecation, and did not ask *why* Mainwaring's young brother should contemplate his death with satisfaction. Nevertheless, some time afterwards Miss Macy remarked that it seemed hard that the happiness of one member of a family should depend upon a calamity to another. "As for instance?" asked Mainwaring, who had already forgotten the circumstance. "Why, if you had died and your younger brother succeeded to the baronetcy, and become Sir Robert Mainwaring," responded Miss Macy, with precision. This was the first and only allusion to his family and prospective rank. On the other hand he had—through naïve and boyish inquiries, which seemed to amuse his entertainers—acquired as he believed a full knowledge of the history and antecedents of the Bradley household. He knew how Bradley had brought his young wife and her cousin to California and abandoned a lucrative law practice in San Francisco

to take possession of this mountain mill and woodland, which he had acquired through some professional service.

"Then you are a barrister really?" said Mainwaring, gravely.

Bradley laughed. "I'm afraid I've had more practice— though not as lucrative a one— as surgeon or doctor."

"But you're regularly on the rolls, you know; you're entered as Counsel, and all that sort of thing?" continued Mainwaring, with great seriousness.

"Well, yes," replied Bradley, much amused. "I'm afraid I must plead guilty to that."

"It's not a bad sort of thing," said Mainwaring, naïvely, ignoring Bradley's amusement. "I've got a cousin who's gone in for the law. Got out of the Army to do it—too. He's a sharp fellow."

"Then you *do* allow a man to try many trades—over there," said Miss Macy, demurely.

"Yes, sometimes," said Mainwaring, graciously, but by no means certain that the case was at all analogous.

Nevertheless, as if relieved of certain doubts of the conventional quality of his host's attainments, he now gave himself up to a very hearty and honest admiration of Bradley. "You know it's awfully kind of him to talk to a fellow like me who just pulled through, and never got any prizes at Oxford, and don't understand the half of these things," he remarked confidentially to Mrs. Bradley. "He knows more about the things we

used to go in for at Oxford than lots of our men, and he's never been there. He's uncommonly clever."

"Jim was always very brilliant," returned Mrs. Bradley, indifferently, and with more than even conventionally polite wifely deprecation; "I wish he were more practical."

"Practical! Oh, I say, Mrs. Bradley! Why, a fellow that can go in among a lot of workmen and tell them just what to do—an all-round chap that can be independent of his valet, his doctor, and his—banker! By jove—*that's* practical!"

"I mean," said Mrs. Bradley, coldly, "that there are some things that a gentleman ought not to be practical about nor independent of. Mr. Bradley would have done better to have used his talents in some more legitimate and established way."

Mainwaring looked at her in genuine surprise. To his inexperienced observation Bradley's intelligent energy and, above all, his originality, ought to have been priceless in the eyes of his wife—the American female of his species. He felt that slight shock which most loyal or logical men feel when first brought face to face with the easy disloyalty and incomprehensible logic of the feminine affections. Here was a fellow, by Jove, that any woman ought to be proud of, and—and—he stopped blankly. He wondered if Miss Macy sympathised with her cousin.

Howbeit, this did not affect the charm of their idyllic life at The Lookout. The precipice over which they

hung was as charming as ever in its poetic illusions of space and depth and colour; the isolation of their comfortable existence in the tasteful yet audacious habitation, the pleasant routine of daily tasks and amusements, all tended to make the enforced quiet and inaction of his convalescence a lazy recreation. He was really improving; more than that, he was conscious of a certain satisfaction in this passive observation of novelty that was healthier and perhaps *truer* than his previous passion for adventure and that febrile desire for change and excitement which he now felt was a part of his disease. Nor were incident and variety entirely absent from this tranquil experience. He was one day astonished at being presented by Bradley with copies of the latest English newspapers, procured from Sacramento, and he equally astonished his host, after profusely thanking him, by only listlessly glancing at their columns. He estopped a proposed visit from one of his influential countrymen; in the absence of his fair entertainers at their domestic duties, he extracted infinite satisfaction from Foo-Yup, the Chinese servant, who was particularly detached for his service. From his invalid coign of vantage at the window he was observant of all that passed upon the verandah, that al fresco audience-room of The Lookout, and he was good-humouredly conscious that a great many eccentric and peculiar visitors were invariably dragged thither by Miss Macy, and goaded into characteristic exhibition within sight and hearing of her guest, with a too evident view, under the osten-

tatious excuse of extending his knowledge of national character, of mischievously shocking him. "When you are strong enough to stand Captain Gashweiler's opinions of the Established Church and Chinamen," said Miss Macy, after one of those revelations, "I'll get Jim to bring him here, for really he swears so outrageously that even in the broadest interests of international understanding and good-will neither Mrs. Bradley nor myself could be present."

On another occasion she provokingly lingered before his window for a moment with a rifle slung jauntily over her shoulder. "If you hear a shot or two don't excite yourself, and believe we're having a lynching case in the woods. It will be only me. There's some creature —confess, you expected me to say 'critter'—hanging round the barn. It may be a bear. Good-bye." She missed the creature—which happened to be really a bear—much to Mainwaring's illogical satisfaction. "I wonder why," he reflected, with vague uneasiness, "she doesn't leave all that sort of thing to girls like that tow-headed girl at the blacksmith's."

It chanced, however, that this blacksmith's tow-headed daughter, who, it may be incidentally remarked, had the additional eccentricities of large black eyes and large white teeth, came to the fore in quite another fashion. Shortly after this, Mainwaring being able to leave his room and join the family board, Mrs. Bradley found it necessary to enlarge her domestic service, and arranged with their nearest neighbour, the blacksmith,

to allow his daughter to come to The Lookout for a few days to "do the chores" and assist in the housekeeping, as she had on previous occasions. The day of her advent Bradley entered Mainwaring's room, and, closing the door mysteriously, fixed his blue eyes, kindling with mischief, on the young Englishman.

"You are aware, my dear boy," he began with affected gravity, "that you are now living in a land of liberty, where mere artificial distinctions are not known, and where Freedom from her mountain heights generally levels all social positions. I think you have graciously admitted that fact."

"I know I've been taking a tremendous lot of freedom with you and yours, old man, and it's a deuced shame," interrupted Mainwaring, with a faint smile.

"And that nowhere," continued Bradley, with immovable features, "does equality exist as perfectly as above yonder unfathomable abyss, where you have also, doubtless, observed the American eagle proudly soars and screams defiance."

"Then that was the fellow that kept me awake this morning, and made me wonder if I was strong enough to hold a gun again."

"That wouldn't have settled the matter," continued Bradley, imperturbably. "The case is simply this: Miss Minty Sharpe, that blacksmith's daughter, has once or twice consented, for a slight emolument, to assist in our domestic service for a day or two, and she comes back again to-day. Now, under the ægis of that noble bird

whom your national instincts tempt you to destroy, she has on all previous occasions taken her meals with us, at the same table, on terms of perfect equality. She will naturally expect to do the same now. Mrs. Bradley thought it proper, therefore, to warn you, that, in case your health was not quite equal to this democratic simplicity, you could still dine in your room."

"It would be great fun—if Miss Sharpe won't object to my presence."

"But it must not be 'great fun,'" returned Bradley, more seriously; "for Miss Minty's perception of humour is probably as keen as yours, and she would be quick to notice it. And, so far from having any objection to you, I am inclined to think that we owe her consent to come to her desire of making your acquaintance."

"She will find my conduct most exemplary," said Mainwaring, earnestly.

"Let us hope so," concluded Bradley, with unabated gravity. "And, now that you have consented, let me add from my own experience that Miss Minty's lemon-pies alone are worthy of any concession."

The dinner-hour came. Mainwaring, a little pale and interesting, leaning on the arm of Bradley, crossed the hall, and for the first time entered the dining-room of the house where he had lodged for three weeks. It was a bright, cheerful apartment, giving upon the laurels of the rocky hill-side, and permeated, like the rest of the house, with the wholesome spice of the valley—an odour that, in its pure desiccating property, seemed to

obliterate all flavour of alien human habitation, and even to dominate and etherealise the appetising smell of the viands before them. The bare, shining, planed, boarded walls appeared to resent any decoration that might have savoured of dust, decay, or moisture. The four large windows and long, open door, set in scanty strips of the plainest spotless muslin, framed in themselves pictures of woods and rock and sky of limitless depth, colour, and distance, that made all other adornment impertinent. Nature, invading the room at every opening, had banished Art from those neutral walls.

"It's like a picnic, with comfort," said Mainwaring, glancing round him with boyish appreciation. Miss Minty was not yet there; the Chinaman was alone in attendance. Mainwaring could not help whispering, half mischievously, to Louise, "You draw the line at Chinamen, I suppose?"

"*We* don't, but *he* does," answered the young girl. "He considers us his social inferiors. But—hush!"

Minty Sharpe had just entered the room, and was advancing with smiling confidence towards the table. Mainwaring was a little startled; he had seen Minty in a holland sun-bonnet and turned up skirt crossing the verandah only a moment before; in the brief instant between the dishing-up of dinner and its actual announcement she had managed to change her dress, put on a clean collar, cuffs, and a large jet brooch, and apply some odorous unguent to her rebellious hair. Her face, guiltless of powder or cold cream, was still shining

with the healthy perspiration of her last labours as she promptly took the vacant chair beside Mainwaring.

"Don't mind me, folks," she said, cheerfully, resting her plump elbow on the table, and addressing the company generally, but gazing with frank curiosity into the face of the young man at her side. "It was a keen jump, I tell yer, to get out of my old duds inter these, and look decent inside o' five minutes. But I reckon I aint kept yer waitin' long—least of all this yer sick stranger. But you're looking pearter than you did. You're wonderin' like ez not where I ever saw ye before?" she continued, laughing. "Well, I'll tell you. Last week! I'd kem over yer on a chance of seein' Jenny Bradley, and while I was meanderin' down the verandah I saw you lyin' back in your chair by the window drowned in sleep, like a baby. Lordy! I mout hev won a pair o' gloves, but I reckoned you were Loo's game, and not mine."

The slightly constrained laugh which went round the table after Miss Minty's speech was due quite as much to the faint flush that had accented Mainwaring's own smile as to the embarrassing remark itself. Mrs. Bradley and Miss Macy exchanged rapid glances. Bradley, who alone retained his composure, with a slight flicker of amusement in the corner of his eye and nostril, said quickly: "You see, Mainwaring, how Nature stands ready to help your convalescence at every turn. If Miss Minty had only followed up her healing opportunity, your cure would have been complete."

"Ye mout hev left some o' that pretty talk for *him* to say," said Minty, taking up her knife and fork with a slight shrug, "and you needn't call me *Miss* Minty either, jest because there's kempeny present."

"I hope you won't look upon me as company, Minty, or I shall be obliged to call you 'Miss' too," said Mainwaring, unexpectedly regaining his usual frankness.

Bradley's face brightened; Miss Minty raised her black eyes from her plate with still broader appreciation.

"There's nothin' mean about that," she said, showing her white teeth. "Well, what's *your* first name?"

"Not as pretty as yours, I'm afraid. It's Frank."

"No it aint, it's Francis! You reckon to be Sir Francis some day," she said gravely. "You can't play any Frank off on me. You wouldn't do it on *her,*" she added, indicating Louise with her elbow.

A momentous silence followed. The particular form that Minty's vulgarity had taken had not been anticipated by the two other women. They had not unreasonably expected some original audacity or *gaucherie* from the blacksmith's daughter, which might astonish yet amuse their guest, and condone for the situation forced upon them. But they were not prepared for a playfulness that involved themselves in a ridiculous indiscretion. Mrs. Bradley's eyes sought her husband's meaningly; Louise's pretty mouth hardened. Luckily the cheerful cause of it suddenly jumped up from the table, and saying that the stranger was starving, insisted upon bringing a dish from the other side and helping him

herself plentifully. Mainwaring rose gallantly to take the dish from her hand, a slight scuffle ensued, which ended in the young man being forced down in his chair by the pressure of Minty's strong plump hand on his shoulder. "There," she said, "ye kin mind your dinner now, and I reckon we'll give the others a chance to chip into the conversation," and at once applied herself to the plate before her.

The conversation presently became general, with the exception that Minty, more or less engrossed by professional anxiety in the quality of the dinner and occasional hurried visits to the kitchen, briefly answered the few polite remarks which Mainwaring felt called upon to address to her. Nevertheless, he was conscious, *malgré* her rallying allusions to Miss Macy, that he felt none of the vague yet half pleasant anxiety with which Louise was beginning to inspire him. He felt at ease in Minty's presence, and believed, rightly or wrongly, that she understood him as well as he understood her. And there were certainly points in common between his two hostesses and their humbler though proud dependant. The social evolution of Mrs. Bradley and Louise Macy from some previous Minty was neither remote nor complete; the self-sufficient independence, ease, and quiet self-assertion were alike in each. The superior position was still too recent and accidental for either to resent or criticise qualities that were common to both. At least, this was what he thought when not abandoning himself to the gratification of a convalescent

appetite; to the presence of two pretty women the sympathy of a genial friend, the healthy intoxication of the white sunlight that glanced upon the pine walls, the views that mirrored themselves in the open windows, and the pure atmosphere in which The Lookout seemed to swim. Wandering breezes of balm and spice lightly stirred the flowers on the table, and seemed to fan his hair and forehead with softly healing breath. Looking up in an interval of silence, he caught Bradley's grey eyes fixed upon him with a subdued light of amusement and affection, as of an elder brother regarding a schoolboy's boisterous appetite at some feast. Mainwaring laid down his knife and fork with a laughing colour, touched equally by Bradley's fraternal kindliness and the consciousness of his gastronomical powers.

"Hang it, Bradley; look here! I know my appetite's disgraceful, but what can a fellow do? In such air, with such viands and such company! It's like the bees getting drunk on Hybla and Hymettus, you know. I'm not responsible!"

"It's the first square meal I believe you've really eaten in six months," said Bradley, gravely. "I can't understand why your doctor allowed you to run down so dreadfully."

"I reckon you aint as keerful of yourself, you Britishers, ez us," said Minty. "Lordy! Why there's Pop invests in more patent medicines in one day than you have in two weeks, and he'd make two of you. Mebbe your folks don't look after you enough."

"I'm a splendid advertisement of what *your* care and your medicines have done," said Mainwaring, gratefully, to Mrs. Bradley; "and if you ever want to set up a 'Cure' here, I'm ready with a ten-page testimonial."

"Have a care, Mainwaring," said Bradley, laughing, "that the ladies don't take you at your word. Louise and Jenny have been doing their best for the last year to get me to accept a flattering offer from a Sacramento firm to put up a Hotel for Tourists on the site of The Lookout. Why, I believe that they have already secretly in their hearts concocted a flaming prospectus of 'Unrivalled Scenery' and 'Health-giving Air,' and are looking forward to Saturday night hops on the piazza."

"Have you really though?" said Mainwaring, gazing from the one to the other.

"We should certainly see more company than we do now, and feel a little less out of the world," said Louise, candidly. "There are no neighbours here—I mean the people at the Summit are not," she added, with a slight glance towards Minty.

"And Mr. Bradley would find it more profitable—not to say more suitable to a man of his position—than this wretched saw-mill and timber business," said Mrs. Bradley, decidedly.

Mainwaring was astounded; was it possible they considered it more dignified for a lawyer to keep an hotel than a saw-mill? Bradley, as if answering what

was passing in his mind, said mischievously, "I'm not sure, exactly, what my position is, my dear, and I'm afraid I've declined the hotel on business principles. But, by-the-way, Mainwaring, I found a letter at the mill this morning from Mr. Richardson. He is about to pay us the distinguished honour of visiting The Lookout, solely on your account, my dear fellow."

"But I wrote him that I was much better, and it wasn't necessary for him to come," said Mainwaring.

"He makes an excuse of some law business with me. I suppose he considers the mere fact of his taking the trouble to come here, all the way from San Francisco, a sufficient honour to justify any absence of formal invitation," said Bradley, smiling.

"But he's only—I mean he's my father's banker," said Mainwaring, correcting himself, "and—you don't keep an hotel."

"Not yet," returned Bradley, with a mischievous glance at the two women, "but The Lookout is elastic, and I dare say we can manage to put him up."

A silence ensued. It seemed as if some shadow, or momentary darkening of the brilliant atmosphere; some film across the mirror-like expanse of the open windows, or misty dimming of their wholesome light had arisen to their elevation. Mainwaring felt that he was looking forward with unreasoning indignation and uneasiness to this impending interruption of their idyllic life; Mrs. Bradley and Louise, who had become a little more constrained and formal under Minty's freedom,

were less sympathetic; even the irrepressible Minty appeared absorbed in the responsibilities of the dinner.

Bradley alone preserved his usual patient good-humour. "We'll take our coffee on the verandah, and the ladies will join us by-and-by, Mainwaring; besides, I don't know that I can allow you, as an invalid, to go entirely through Minty's bountiful *menu* at present. You shall have the sweets another time."

When they were alone on the verandah, he said, between the puffs of his black briarwood pipe—a pet aversion of Mrs. Bradley—"I wonder how Richardson will accept Minty!"

"If *I* can, I think he *must*," returned Mainwaring, drily. "By Jove, it will be great fun to see him; but"—he stopped and hesitated—"I don't know about the ladies. I don't think, you know, that they'll stand Minty again before another stranger."

Bradley glanced quickly at the young man; their eyes met, and they both joined in a superior and, I fear, disloyal smile. After a pause Bradley, as if in a spirit of further confidence, took his pipe from his mouth and pointed to the blue abyss before them.

"Look at that profundity, Mainwaring, and think of it ever being bullied and overawed by a long verandah-load of gaping, patronising tourists, and the idiotic flirting females of their species. Think of a lot of over-dressed creatures flouting those severe outlines and deep-toned distances with frippery and garishness. You know how you have been lulled to sleep by that deli-

cious indefinite far-off murmur of the canyon at night —think of it being broken by a crazy waltz or a monotonous German—by the clatter of waiters and the pop of champagne corks. And yet, by thunder, those women are capable of liking both and finding no discord in them!"

"Dancing aint half bad, you know," said Mainwaring, conscientiously, "if a chap's got the wind to do it; and all Americans, especially the women, dance better than we do. But I say, Bradley, to hear you talk, a fellow wouldn't suspect you were as big a Vandal as anybody, with a beastly, howling saw-mill in the heart of the primeval forest. By Jove, you quite bowled me over that first day we met, when you popped your head out of that delirium tremens shaking mill, like the very genius of destructive improvement."

"But that was *fighting* Nature, not patronising her; and it's a business that pays. That reminds me that I must go back to it," said Bradley, rising and knocking the ashes from his pipe.

"Not *after* dinner, surely!" said Mainwaring, in surprise. "Come now, that's too much like the bolting Yankee of the travellers' books."

"There's a heavy run to get through to-night. We're working against time," returned Bradley. Even while speaking he had vanished within the house, returned quickly—having replaced his dark suit by jean trousers tucked in heavy boots, and a red flannel shirt over his starched white one—and, nodding gaily to Mainwaring,

stepped from the lower end of the verandah. "The beggar actually looks pleased to go," said Mainwaring to himself in wonderment.

"Oh! Jim," said Mrs. Bradley, appearing at the door.

"Yes," said Bradley, faintly, from the bushes.

"Minty's ready. You might take her home."

"All right. I'll wait."

"I hope I haven't frightened Miss Sharpe away," said Mainwaring. "She isn't going, surely?"

"Only to get some better clothes, on account of company. I'm afraid you are giving her a good deal of trouble, Mr. Mainwaring," said Mrs. Bradley, laughing.

"She wished me to say good-bye to you for her, as she couldn't come on the verandah in her old shawl and sun-bonnet," added Louise, who had joined them. "What do you really think of her, Mr. Mainwaring? I call her quite pretty, at times. Don't you?"

Mainwaring knew not what to say. He could not understand why they could have any special interest in the girl, or care to know what he, a perfect stranger, thought of her. He avoided a direct reply, however, by playfully wondering how Mrs. Bradley could subject her husband to Miss Minty's undivided fascinations.

"Oh, Jim always takes her home—if it's in the evening. He gets along with these people better than we do," returned Mrs. Bradley, drily. "But," she added, with a return of her piquant Quaker-like coquettishness,

"Jim says we are to devote ourselves to you to-night —in retaliation, I suppose. We are to amuse you, and not let you get excited; and you are to be sent to bed early."

It is to be feared that these latter wise precautions —invaluable for all defenceless and enfeebled humanity —were not carried out; and it was late when Mainwaring eventually retired, with brightened eyes and a somewhat accelerated pulse. For the ladies, who had quite regained that kindly equanimity which Minty had rudely interrupted, had also added a delicate and confidential sympathy in their relations with Mainwaring— as of people who had suffered in common—and he experienced these tender attentions at their hands which any two women are emboldened by each other's saving presence to show any single member of our sex. Indeed, he hardly knew if his satisfaction was the more complete when Mrs. Bradley, withdrawing for a few moments, left him alone on the verandah with Louise and the vast, omnipotent Night.

For a while they sat silent, in the midst of the profound and measureless calm. Looking down upon the dim moonlit abyss at their feet, they themselves seemed a part of this night that arched above it; the half-risen moon appeared to linger long enough at their side to enwrap and suffuse them with its glory; a few bright stars quietly ringed themselves around them, and looked wonderingly into the level of their own shining eyes. For some vague yearning to humanity seemed to draw

this dark and passionless void towards them. The vast protecting maternity of Nature leant hushed and breathless over this solitude. Warm currents of air rose occasionally from the valley, which one might have believed were sighs from its full and overflowing breast, or a grateful coolness swept their cheeks and hair when the tranquil heights around them were moved to slowly respond. Odours from invisible bay and laurel sometimes filled the air; the incense of some rare and remoter cultivated meadow beyond their ken, or the strong germinating breath of leagues of wild oats, that had yellowed the upland by day. In the silence and shadow, their voices took upon themselves, almost without their volition, a far-off confidential murmur, with intervals of meaning silence—rather as if their thoughts had spoken for themselves, and they had stopped wonderingly to listen. They talked at first vaguely to this discreet audience of space and darkness, and then, growing bolder, spoke to each other and of themselves. Invested by the infinite gravity of nature, they had no fear of human ridicule to restrain their youthful conceit or the extravagance of their unimportant confessions. They talked of their tastes, of their habits, of their friends and acquaintances. They settled some points of doctrine, duty, and etiquette, with the sweet seriousness of youth and its all-powerful convictions. The listening vines would have recognised no flirtation or love-making in their animated but important confidences; yet when Mrs. Bradley reappeared to warn the

invalid that it was time to seek his couch, they both coughed slightly in the nervous consciousness of some unaccustomed quality in their voices, and a sense of interruption far beyond their own or the innocent intruder's ken.

"Well?" said Mrs. Bradley, in the sitting-room as Mainwaring's steps retreated down the passage to his room.

"Well," said Louise with a slight yawn, leaning her pretty shoulders languidly against the door-post, as she shaded her moonlight-accustomed eyes from the vulgar brilliancy of Mrs. Bradley's bed-room candle. "Well—oh, he talked a great deal about 'his people' as he called them, and I talked about us. He's very nice. You know, in some things he's really like a boy."

"He looks much better."

"Yes; but he is far from strong yet."

Meantime, Mainwaring had no other confidant of his impressions than his own thoughts. Mingled with his exaltation, which was the more seductive that it had no well-defined foundation for existing, and implied no future responsibility, was a recurrence of his uneasiness at the impending visit of Richardson the next day. Strangely enough, it had increased under the stimulus of the evening. Just as he was really getting on with the family, he felt sure that this visitor would import some foreign element into their familiarity, as Minty had done. It was very possible they would not like him: now he remembered there was really something

ostentatiously British and insular about this Richardson —something they would likely resent. Why couldn't this fellow have come later—or even before? Before what? But here he fell asleep, and almost instantly slipped from this verandah in the Sierras, six thousand miles away, to an ancient terrace, overgrown with moss and tradition, that overlooked the sedate glory of an English park. Here he found himself, restricted painfully by his inconsistent night-clothes, endeavouring to impress his mother and sisters with the singular virtues and excellences of his American host and hostesses—virtues and excellences that he himself was beginning to feel conscious had become more or less apocryphal in that atmosphere. He heard his mother's voice saying severely, "When you learn, Francis, to respect the opinions and prejudices of your family enough to prevent your appearing before them in this uncivilised aboriginal costume, we will listen to what you have to say of the friends whose habits you seem to have adopted;" and he was frantically indignant that his efforts, to convince them that his negligence was a personal oversight, and not a Californian custom, were utterly futile. But even then this vision was brushed away by the bewildering sweep of Louise's pretty skirt across the dreamy picture, and her delicate features and softly-fringed eyes remained the last to slip from his fading consciousness.

The moon rose higher and higher above the sleeping house and softly breathing canyon. There was no-

thing to mar the idyllic repose of the landscape; only the growing light of the last two hours had brought out in the far eastern horizon a dim white peak, that gleamed faintly among the stars, like a bridal couch spread between the hills ringed with fading nuptial torches. No one would have believed that behind that impenetrable shadow to the west, in the heart of the forest, the throbbing saw-mill of James Bradley was even at that moment eating its destructive way through the conserved growth of Nature and centuries, and that the refined proprietor of house and greenwood, with the glow of his furnace fires on his red shirt, and his alert, intelligent eyes, was the geni of that devastation, and the toiling leader of the shadowy toiling figures around him.

CHAPTER III.

Amid the beauty of the most uncultivated and untrodden wilderness there are certain localities where the meaner and more common processes of Nature take upon themselves a degrading likeness to the slovenly, wasteful, and improvident processes of man. The unrecorded landslip disintegrating a whole hill-side will not only lay bare the delicate framework of strata and deposit to the vulgar eye, but hurl into the valley a débris so monstrous and unlovely as to shame even the hideous ruins left by dynamite, hydraulic, or pick and shovel; an overflown and forgotten woodland torrent will leave in some remote hollow a disturbed and ungraceful chaos of inextricable logs, branches, rock, and soil that will rival the unsavoury details of some wrecked or abandoned settlement. Of lesser magnitude and importance, there are certain natural dust-heaps, sinks, and cesspools, where the elements have collected the cast-off, broken, and frayed disjecta of wood and field —the sweepings of the sylvan household. It was remarkable that Nature, so kindly considerate of mere human ruins, made no attempt to cover up or disguise these monuments of her own mortality: no grass grew over the unsightly landslides, no moss or ivy clothed

the stripped and bleached skeletons of overthrown branch and tree; the dead leaves and withered husks rotted in their open grave uncrossed by vine or creeper. Even the animals, except the lower organisations, shunned those haunts of decay and ruin.

It was scarcely a hundred yards from one of those dreary receptacles that Mr. Bradley had taken leave of Miss Minty Sharpe. The cabin occupied by her father, herself, and a younger brother, stood, in fact, on the very edge of the little hollow, which was partly filled with decayed wood, leaves, and displacements of the crumbling bank, with the coal dust and ashes which Mr. Sharpe had added from his forge, that stood a few paces distant at the corner of a cross-road. The occupants of the cabin had also contributed to the hollow the refuse of their household in broken boxes, earthenware, tin cans, and cast-off clothing; and it is not improbable that the site of the cabin was chosen with reference to this convenient disposal of useless and encumbering impedimenta. It was true that the locality offered little choice in the way of beauty. An outcrop of brown granite—a portent of higher altitudes—extended a quarter of a mile from the nearest fringe of dwarf laurel and "brush" in one direction; in the other an advanced file of Bradley's woods had suffered from some long-forgotten fire, and still raised its blackened masts and broken stumps over the scorched and arid soil, swept of older underbrush and verdure. On the other side of the road a dark ravine, tangled with briars

and haunted at night by owls and wild cats, struggled wearily on, until blundering at last upon the edge of the Great Canyon, it slipped and lost itself for ever in a single furrow of those mighty flanks. When Bradley had once asked Sharpe why he had not built his house in the ravine, the blacksmith had replied: "That until the Lord had appointed his time, he reckoned to keep his head above ground and the foundations thereof." Howbeit the ravine, or the "run" as it was locally known, was Minty's only Saturday-afternoon resort for recreation or berries. "It was," she had explained, "pow'ful soothin', and solitary."

She entered the house—a rude, square building of unpainted boards—containing a sitting-room, a kitchen, and two bed-rooms. A glance at these rooms, which were plainly furnished, and whose canvas-coloured walls were adorned with gorgeous agricultural implement circulars, patent medicine calendars, with polytinted chromos and cheaply-illuminated Scriptural texts, showed her that a certain neatness and order had been preserved during her absence; and, finding the house empty, she crossed the barren and blackened intervening space between the back-door and her father's forge, and entered the open shed. The light was fading from the sky; but the glow of the forge lit up the dusty road before it, and accented the blackness of the rocky ledge beyond. A small curly-headed boy, bearing a singular likeness to a smudged and blackened crayon drawing of Minty, was mechanically blowing the bellows and

obviously intent upon something else; while her father —a powerfully-built man, with a quaintly dissatisfied expression of countenance—was with equal want of interest mechanically hammering at a horse-shoe. Without noticing Minty's advent, he lazily broke into a querulous drawling chaunt of some vague religious character:—

> O tur-ren, sinner; tur-ren.
> For the Lord bids you turn—ah!
> O tur-ren, sinner; tur-ren.
> Why will you die!

The musical accent adapted itself to the monotonous fall of the sledge-hammer; and at every repetition of the word "turn" he suited the action to the word by turning the horse-shoe with the iron in his left hand. A slight grunt at the end of every stroke, and the simultaneous repetition of "turn" seemed to offer him amusement and relief. Minty, without speaking, crossed the shop, and administered a sound box on her brother's ear. "Take that, and let me ketch you agen layin' low when my back's turned, to put on your store pants."

"The others had fetched away in the laig," said the boy, opposing a knee and elbow at acute angle to further attack.

"You jest get and change 'em," said Minty.

The sudden collapse of the bellows broke in upon the soothing refrain of Mr. Sharpe, and caused him to turn also.

"It's Minty," he said, replacing the horse-shoe on

the coals, and setting his powerful arms and the sledge on the anvil with an exaggerated expression of weariness.

"Yes; it's me," said Minty, "and Creation knows it's time I *did* come, to keep that boy from ruinin' us with his airs and conceits."

"Did ye bring over any o' that fever mixter?"

"No. Bradley sez you're loading yerself up with so much o' that bitter bark—kuinine they call it over there—that you'll lift the ruff off your head next. He allows ye aint got no ague; it's jest wind and dyspepsy. He sez yer's strong ez a hoss."

"Bradley," said Sharpe, laying aside his sledge with an aggrieved manner which was, however, as complacent as his fatigue and discontent, "ez one of them nat'ral born finikin skunks ez I despise. I reckon he began to give p'ints to his parents when he was about knee-high to Richelieu there. He's on them confidential terms with hisself and the Almighty that he reckons he ken run a saw-mill and a man's insides at the same time with one hand tied behind him. And his finikin is up to his conceit: he wanted to tell me that that yer handy brush dump outside our shanty was unhealthy. Give a man with frills like that his own way and he'd be a sprinkling odor Cologne and peppermint all over the country."

"He set your shoulder as well as any doctor," said Minty.

"That's bone-settin', and a nat'ral gift," returned

Sharpe, as triumphantly as his habitual depression would admit; "it aint conceit and finikin got out o' books! Well," he added, after a pause, "wot 's happened?"

Minty's face slightly changed. "Nothin'; I kem back to get some things," she said shortly, moving away.

"And ye saw *him?*"

"Ye-e-s," drawled Minty, carelessly, still retreating.

"Bixby was along here about noon. He says the stranger was suthin' high and mighty in his own country, and them 'Frisco millionaires are quite sweet on him. Where are ye goin'?"

"In the house."

"Well, look yer, Minty. Now that you're here, ye might get up a batch o' hot biscuit for supper. Dinner was that promiscous and experimental to-day, along o' Richelieu's nat'ral foolin', that I think I could git outside of a little suthin' now, if only to prop up a kind of innard sinkin' that takes me. Ye ken tell me the news at supper."

Later, however, when Mr. Sharpe had quitted his forge for the night and, seated at his domestic board, was, with a dismal presentiment of future indigestion, voraciously absorbing his favourite meal of hot saleratus biscuits swimming in butter, he had apparently forgotten his curiosity concerning Mainwaring and settled himself to a complaining chronicle of the day's mishaps. "Nat'rally, havin' an extra lot o' work on hand and no

time for foolin', what does that ornery Richelieu get up and do this mornin'? Ye know them ridiklus specimens that he's been chippin' outer that ledge that the yearth slipped from down the run, and litterin' up the whole shanty with 'em. Well, darn my skin! if he didn't run a heap of 'em, mixed up with coal, unbeknownd to me, in the forge, to make what he called a 'fire essay' of 'em. Nat'rally, I couldn't get a blessed iron hot, and didn't know what had gone of the fire, or the coal either, for two hours, till I stopped work and raked out the coal. That comes from his hangin' round that saw-mill in the woods, and listenin' to Bradley's high-falutin' talk about rocks and strata and sich."

"But Bradley don't go a cent on minin', Pop," said Minty. "He sez the woods is good enough for him; and there's millions to be made when the railroad comes along, and timber's wanted."

"But until then he's got to keep hisself, to pay wages, and keep the mill runnin'. Onless it's, ez Bixby says, that he hopes to get that Englishman to rope in some o' them 'Frisco friends of his to take a hand. Ye didn't have any o' that kind o' talk, did ye?"

"No; not *that* kind o' talk," said Minty.

"Not *that* kind o' talk!" repeated her father with aggrieved curiosity. "Wot kind, then?"

"Well," said Minty, lifting her black eyes to her father's; "I aint no account, and you aint no account either. You aint got no college education, aint got no friends in 'Frisco, and aint got no high-toned style; I

can't play the pianner, jabber French, nor get French dresses. We aint got no fancy 'Shallet,' as they call it, with a first-class view of nothing; but only a shanty on dry rock. But, afore *I'd* take advantage of a lazy, gawky boy—for it aint anything else, though he's good meanin' enough—that happened to fall sick in *my* house, and coax and cosset him, and wrap him in white cotton, and mother him, and sister him, and Aunt Sukey him, and almost dry-nuss him gin'rally, jist to get him sweet on me and on mine, and take the inside track of others—*I'd* be an Injin! And if you'd allow it, Pop, you'd be wuss nor a nigger!"

"Sho!" said her father, kindling with that intense gratification with which the male receives any intimation of alien feminine weakness. "It aint that, Minty, I wanter know!"

"It's jist that, Pop; and I ez good ez let 'em know I seed it. I aint a fool, if some folks do drop their eyes and pertend to wipe the laugh out of their noses with a handkerchief when I let out to speak. I mayn't be good enough kempany"——

"Look yer, Minty," interrupted the blacksmith, sternly, half rising from his seat with every trace of his former weakness vanished from his hardset face; "do you mean to say that they put on airs to ye—to *my* darter?"

"No," said Minty, quickly; "the men didn't; and don't you, a man, mix yourself up with women's meannesses. I ken manage 'em, Pop, with one hand."

Mr. Sharpe looked at his daughter's flashing black eyes. Perhaps an uneasy recollection of the late Mrs. Sharpe's remarkable capacity in that respect checked his further rage.

"No. Wot I was sayin'," resumed Minty, "ez that I mayn't be thought by others good enough to keep kempany with baronetts ez is to be—though baronetts mightn't object—but I aint mean enough to try to steal away some ole woman's darling boy in England, or snatch some likely young English girl's big brother outer the family without sayin' by your leave. How 'd you like it if Richelieu was growed up, and went to sea—and it would be like his peartness—and he fell sick in some foreign land, and some princess or other skyugled *him* underhand away from us?"

Probably owing to the affair of the specimens, the elder Sharpe did not seem to regard the possible mesalliance of Richelieu with extraordinary disfavour. "That boy is conceited enough with hair ile and fine clothes for anything," he said plaintively. "But didn't that Louie Macy hev a feller already—that Captain Greyson? Wot's gone o' him?"

"That's it," said Minty: "he kin go out in the woods and whistle now. But all the same, she could hitch him in again at any time if the other stranger kicked over the traces. That's the style over there at The Lookout. There aint ez much heart in them two women put together ez would make a green gal flush up playin' forfeits. It's all in their breed, Pop. Love

aint going to spile their appetites and complexions, give 'em nose-bleed, nor put a drop o' water into their eyes in all their natural born days. That's wot makes me mad. Ef I thought that Loo cared a bit for that child I wouldn't mind; I'd just advise her to make him get up and get—pack his duds out o' camp, and go home and not come back until he had a written permit from his mother, or the other baronet in office."

"Looks sorter ef someone orter interfere," said the blacksmith, reflectively. "'Taint exakly a case for a vigilance committee, tho' it's agin public morals, this sorter kidnappin' o' strangers. Looks ez if it might bring the country into discredit in England."

"Well, don't *you* go and interfere and havin' folks say ez my nose was put out o' jint over there," said Minty, curtly. "There's another Englishman comin' up from 'Frisco to see him to-morrow. Ef he aint scooped up by Jenny Bradley he'll guess there's a nigger in the fence somewhere. But there, Pop, let it drop. It's a bad aig, any way," she concluded, rising from the table, and passing her hands down her frock and her shapely hips, as if to wipe off further contamination of the subject. "Where's Richelieu agin?"

"Said he didn't want supper, and like ez not he's gone over to see that fammerly at the Summit. There's a little girl thar he's sparkin', about his own age."

"His own age!" said Minty, indignantly. "Why, she's double that, if she's a day. Well—if he aint the triflinest, conceitednest little limb that ever grew! I'd

like to know where he got it from—it wasn't mar's style."

Mr. Sharpe smiled darkly. Richelieu's precocious gallantry evidently was not considered as gratuitous as his experimental metallurgy. But as his eyes followed his daughter's wholesome, Phyllis-like figure, a new idea took possession of him: needless to say, however, it was in the line of another personal aggrievement, albeit it took the form of religious reflection.

"It's curous, Minty, wot's fore-ordained, and wot aint. Now, yer's one of them high and mighty fellows, after the Lord, ez comes meanderin' around here, and drops off—ez fur ez I kin hear—in a kind o' faint at the first house he kems to, and is taken in and lodged and sumptuously fed; and, nat'rally, they gets their reward for it. Now, wot's to hev kept that young feller from coming *here* and droppin' down in my forge, or in this very room, and *you* a tendin' him, and jist layin' over them folks at The Lookout?"

"Wot 's got hold o' ye, Pop? Don't I tell ye he had a letter to Jim Bradley?" said Minty, quickly, with an angry flash of colour in her cheek.

"That aint it," said Sharpe, confidently; "it's cos he *walked.* Nat'rally, you'd think he'd *ride,* being high and mighty, and that's where, ez the parson will tell ye, wot 's merely fi-nite and human wisdom errs! Ef that feller had ridden, he'd have had to come by this yer road, and by this yer forge, and stop a spell like any other. But it was fore-ordained that he should walk,

jest cos it wasn't generally kalkilated and reckoned on. So, *you* had no show."

For a moment, Minty seemed struck with her father's original theory. But with a vigorous shake of her shoulders she threw it off. Her eyes darkened.

"I reckon you aint thinking, Pop"—she began.

"I was only sayin' it was curous," he rejoined quietly. Nevertheless, after a pause, he rose, coughed, and going up to the young girl, as she leaned over the dresser, bent his powerful arm around her, and, drawing her and the plate she was holding against his breast, laid his bearded cheek for an instant softly upon her rebellious head. "It's all right, Minty," he said; "aint it, pet?" Minty's eyelids closed gently under the familiar pressure. "Wot 's that in your hair, Minty?" he said tactfully, breaking an embarrassing pause.

"Bar's grease, father," murmured Minty, in a child's voice—the grown-up woman, under that magic touch, having lapsed again into her father's motherless charge of ten years before.

"It's pow'ful soothin', and pretty," said her father.

"I made it myself—do you want some?" asked Minty.

"Not now, girl!" For a moment they slightly rocked each other in that attitude—the man dextrously, the woman with infinite tenderness—and then they separated.

Late that night, after Richelieu had returned, and her father wrestled in his fitful sleep with the remorse of his guilty indulgence at supper, Minty remained alone

in her room, hard at work, surrounded by the contents of one of her mother's trunks and the fragments of certain ripped-up and newly-turned dresses. For Minty had conceived the bold idea of altering one of her mother's gowns to the fashion of a certain fascinating frock worn by Louise Macy. It was late when her self-imposed task was completed. With a nervous trepidation that was novel to her, Minty began to disrobe herself preparatory to trying on her new creation. The light of a tallow candle and a large swinging lantern, borrowed from her father's forge, fell shyly on her milky neck and shoulders, and shone in her sparkling eyes, as she stood before her largest mirror—the long glazed door of a kitchen clock which she had placed upon her chest of drawers. Had poor Minty been content with the full, free, and goddess-like outlines that it reflected, she would have been spared her impending disappointment. For, alas! the dress of her model had been framed upon a symmetrically attenuated French corset, and the unfortunate Minty's fuller and ampler curves had under her simple country stays known no more restraining cincture than knew the Venus of Milo. The alteration was a hideous failure, it was neither Minty's statuesque outline nor Louise Macy's graceful contour. Minty was no fool, and the revelation of this slow education of the figure and training of outline—whether fair or false in art—struck her quick intelligence with all its full and hopeless significance. A bitter light sprang to her eyes; she tore the wretched sham from her

shoulders, and then wrapping a shawl around her, threw herself heavily and sullenly on the bed. But inaction was not a characteristic of Minty's emotion; she presently rose again, and, taking an old work-box from her trunk, began to rummage in its recesses. It was an old shell-incrusted affair, and the apparent receptacle of such cheap odds and ends of jewellery as she possessed; a hideous cameo ring, the property of the late Mrs. Sharpe, was missing. She again rapidly explored the contents of the box, and then an inspiration seized her, and she darted into her brother's bed-room.

That precocious and gallant Lovelace often, despite all sentiment, had basely succumbed to the gross materialism of youthful slumber. On a cot in the corner, half hidden under the wreck of his own careless and hurried disrobing, with one arm hanging out of the coverlid, Richelieu lay supremely unconscious. On the forefinger of his small but dirty hand the missing cameo was still glittering guiltily. With a swift movement of indignation Minty rushed with uplifted palm towards the tempting expanse of youthful cheek that lay invitingly exposed upon the pillow. Then she stopped suddenly.

She had seen him lying thus a hundred times before. On the pillow near him an undistinguishable mass of golden fur—the helpless bulk of a squirrel chained to the leg of his cot; at his feet a wall-eyed cat, who had followed his tyrannous caprices with the long-suffering devotion of her sex; on the shelf above him a loath-

some collection of flies and tarantulas in dull green bottles; a slab of ginger-bread for light nocturnal refection, and her own pot of bear's grease. Perhaps it was the piteous defencelessness of youthful sleep, perhaps it was some lingering memory of her father's caress; but as she gazed at him with troubled eyes, the juvenile reprobate slipped back into the baby-boy that she had carried in her own childish arms such a short time ago, when the maternal responsibility had descended with the dead mother's ill-fitting dresses upon her lank girlish figure and scant virgin breast—and her hand fell listlessly at her side.

The sleeper stirred slightly and awoke. At the same moment, by some mysterious sympathy, a pair of beady bright eyes appeared in the bulk of fur near his curls, the cat stretched herself, and even a vague agitation was heard in the bottles on the shelf. Richelieu's blinking eyes wandered from the candle to his sister, and then the guilty hand was suddenly withdrawn under the bedclothes.

"No matter, dear," said Minty; "it's mar's, and you kin wear it when you like, if you'll only ask for it."

Richelieu wondered if he was dreaming! This unexpected mildness—this inexplicable tremor in his sister's voice: it must be some occult influence of the night season on the sisterly mind, possibly akin to a fear of ghosts! He made a mental note of it in view of future favours, yet for the moment he felt embarrassedly gratified. "Ye aint wantin' anything, Minty," he said

affectionately; "a pail o' cold water from the far spring —no, nothin'?" He made an ostentatious movement as if to rise, yet sufficiently protracted to prevent any hasty acceptance of his prodigal offer.

"No, dear," she said, still gazing at him with an absorbed look in her dark eyes.

Richelieu felt a slight creepy sensation under that lonely far-off gaze. "Your eyes look awful big at night, Minty," he said. He would have added "and pretty," but she was his sister, and he had the lofty fraternal conviction of his duty in repressing the inordinate vanity of the sex. "Ye're sure ye aint wantin' nothin'?"

"Not now, dear." She paused a moment, and then said deliberately: "But you wouldn't mind turnin' out after sun-up and runnin' an errand for me over to The Lookout?"

Richelieu's eyes sparkled so suddenly that even in her absorption Minty noticed the change. "But ye're not goin' to tarry over there, ner gossip—you hear? Yer to take this yer message. Yer to say 'that it will be onpossible for me to come back there, on account—on account of'"——

"Important business," suggested Richelieu; "that's the perlite style."

"Ef you like." She leaned over the bed and put her lips to his forehead, still damp with the dews of sleep, and then to his long-lashed lids. "Mind Nip!" —the squirrel—he practically suggested. For an in-

stant their blonde curls mingled on the pillow. "Now go to sleep," she said curtly.

But Richelieu had taken her white neck in the short strangulatory hug of the small boy, and held her fast. "Ye'll let me put on my best pants?"

"Yes."

"And wear that ring?"

"Yes"—a little sadly.

"Then yer kin count me in, Minty; and see here"—his voice sank to a confidential whisper—"mebbee some day ye'll be beholden to *me* for a lot o' real jewellery."

She returned slowly to her room, and, opening the window, looked out upon the night. The same moon that had lent such supererogatory grace to the natural beauty of The Lookout, here seemed to have failed, as Minty had, in disguising the relentless limitations of Nature or the cruel bonds of custom. The black plain of granite, under its rays, appeared only to extend its poverty to some remoter barrier; the blackened stumps of the burnt forest stood bleaker against the sky, like broken and twisted pillars of iron. The cavity of the broken ledge where Richelieu had prospected was a hideous chasm of blueish blackness, over which a purple vapour seemed to hover; the "brush dump" beside the house showed a cavern of writhing and distorted objects stiffened into dark rigidity. She had often looked upon the prospect: it had never seemed so hard and changeless; yet she accepted it, as she had accepted it before.

She turned away, undressed herself mechanically, and went to bed. She had an idea that she had been very foolish; that her escape from being still more foolish was something miraculous, and in some measure connected with Providence, her father, her little brother, and her dead mother, whose dress she had recklessly spoiled. But that she had even so slightly touched the bitterness and glory of renunciation—as written of heroines and fine ladies by novelists and poets—never entered the foolish head of Minty Sharpe, the blacksmith's daughter.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a little after daybreak next morning that Mainwaring awoke from the first unrefreshing night he had passed at The Lookout. He was so feverish and restless that he dressed himself at sunrise, and cautiously stepped out upon the still silent verandah. The chairs which he and Louise Macy had occupied were still, it seemed to him, conspicuously confidential with each other, and he separated them; but as he looked down into the Great Canyon at his feet he was conscious of some undefinable change in the prospect. A slight mist was rising from the valley, as if it were the last of last night's illusions; the first level sunbeams were obtrusively searching, and the keen morning air had a dryly practical insistance which irritated him, until a light footstep on the further end of the verandah caused him to turn sharply.

It was the singular apparition of a small boy, bearing a surprising resemblance to Minty Sharpe, and dressed in an unique fashion. On a tumbled sea of blonde curls a "chip" sailor hat, with a broad red ribbon, rode jauntily. But here the nautical suggestion changed, as had the desire of becoming a pirate which induced it. A red shirt, with a white collar, and a yellow plaid

ribbon tie, that also recalled Minty Sharpe, lightly turned the suggestion of his costume to mining. Short black velvet trousers, coming to his knee, and ostentatiously new short-legged boots, with visible straps like curling ears, completed the entirely original character of his lower limbs.

Mainwaring, always easily gentle and familiar with children and his inferiors, looked at him with an encouraging smile. Richelieu—for it was he—advanced gravely and held out his hand, with the cameo ring apparent. Mainwaring, with equal gravity, shook it warmly, and removed his hat. Richelieu, keenly observant, did the same.

"Is Jim Bradley out yet?" asked Richelieu, carelessly.

"No; I think not. But I'm Frank Mainwaring. Will I do?"

Richelieu smiled. The dimples, the white teeth, the dark, laughing eyes, were surely Minty's?

"I'm Richelieu," he rejoined with equal candour.

"Richelieu?"

"Yes. That Frenchman—the Lord Cardinal—you know. Mar saw Forrest do him out in St. Louis."

"Do him?"

"Yes, in the theayter."

With a confused misconception of his meaning, Mainwaring tried to recall the historical dress of the great Cardinal and fit it to the masquerader—if such he were—before him. But Richelieu relieved him by adding—

"Richelieu Sharpe."

"Oh, that's your *name!*" said Mainwaring, cheerfully. "Then you're Miss Minty's brother. I know her. How jolly lucky!"

They both shook hands again. Richelieu, eager to get rid of the burden of his sister's message, which he felt was in the way of free-and-easy intercourse with this charming stranger, looked uneasily towards the house.

"I say," said Mainwaring, "if you're in a hurry, you'd better go in there and knock. I hear someone stirring in the kitchen."

Richelieu nodded, but first went back to the steps of the verandah, picked up a small blue knotted handkerchief, apparently containing some heavy objects, and repassed Mainwaring.

"What! have you cut it, Richelieu, with your valuables? What have you got there?"

"Specimins," said Richelieu, shortly, and vanished.

He returned presently. "Well, Cardinal, did you see anybody?" asked Mainwaring.

"Mrs. Bradley; but Jim's over to the mill. I'm goin' there."

"Did you see Miss Macy?" continued Mainwaring, carelessly.

"Loo?"

"Loo!—well; yes.

"No. She's philanderin' with Captain Greyson."

"Philandering with Greyson?" echoed Mainwaring, in wonder.

"Yes; on horseback on the ridge."

"You mean she's riding out with Mr.—with Captain Greyson?"

"Yes; ridin' *and* philanderin'," persisted Richelieu.

"And what do you call philandering?"

"Well; I reckon you and she oughter know," returned Richelieu, with a precocious air.

"Certainly," said Mainwaring, with a faint smile. Richelieu really was like Minty.

There was a long silence. This young Englishman was becoming exceedingly uninteresting. Richelieu felt that he was gaining neither profit nor amusement, and losing time. "I'm going," he said.

"Good morning," said Mainwaring, without looking up.

Richelieu picked up his specimens, thoroughly convinced of the stranger's glittering deceitfulness, and vanished.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Mrs. Bradley came from the house. She apologised, with a slightly distrait smile, for the tardiness of the household. "Mr. Bradley stayed at the mill all night, and will not be here until breakfast, when he brings your friend Mr. Richardson with him"—Mainwaring scarcely repressed a movement of impatience—"who arrives early. It's unfortunate that Miss Sharpe can't come to-day."

In his abstraction Mainwaring did not notice that Mrs. Bradley slightly accented Minty's formal appellation, and said carelessly—

"Oh, that's why her brother came over here so early!"

"Did *you* see him?" asked Mrs. Bradley, almost abruptly.

"Yes. He is an amusing little beggar; but I think he shares his sister's preference for Mr. Bradley. He deserted me here in the verandah for him at the mill."

"Louise will keep you company as soon as she has changed her dress," continued Mrs. Bradley. "She was out riding early this morning with a friend. She's very fond of early morning rides."

"*And* philandering," repeated Mainwaring to himself. It was quite natural for Miss Macy to ride out in the morning, after the fashion of the country, with an escort; but why had the cub insisted on the "philandering"? He had said, "*and* philandering," distinctly. It was a nasty thing for him to say. Any other fellow but he, Mainwaring, might misunderstand the whole thing. Perhaps he ought to warn her—but no! he could not repeat the gossip of a child, and that child the brother of one of her inferiors. But was Minty an inferior? Did she and Minty talk together about this fellow Greyson? At all events, it would only revive the awkwardness of the preceding day, and he resolved to say nothing.

He was rewarded by a half-inquiring, half-confiding look in Louise's bright eyes, when she presently greeted him on the verandah. "She had quite forgotten," she said, "to tell him last night of her morning's engage-

ment; indeed, she had half forgotten *it.* It used to be a favourite practice of hers, with Captain Greyson; but she had lately given it up. She believed she had not ridden since—since"——

"Since when?" asked Mainwaring.

"Well, since you were ill," she said frankly.

A quick pleasure shone in Mainwaring's cheek and eye; but Louise's pretty lids did not drop, nor her faint quiet bloom deepen. Breakfast was already waiting when Mr. Richardson arrived alone. He explained that Mr. Bradley had some important and unexpected business which had delayed him, but which, he added, "Mr. Bradley says may prove interesting enough to you to excuse his absence this morning." Mainwaring was not displeased that his critical and observant host was not present at their meeting. Louise Macy was, however, as demurely conscious of the different bearing of the two compatriots. Richardson's somewhat self-important patronage of the two ladies, and that Californian familiarity he had acquired, changed to a certain uneasy deference towards Mainwaring; while the younger Englishman's slightly stiff and deliberate cordiality was, nevertheless, mingled with a mysterious understanding that appeared innate and unconscious. Louise was quick to see that these two men, more widely divergent in quality than any two of her own countrymen, were yet more subtly connected by some unknown sympathy than the most equal of Americans. Minty's prophetic belief of the effect of the two women

upon Richardson was certainly true as regarded Mrs. Bradley. The banker—a large material nature—was quickly fascinated by the demure, puritanic graces of that lady, and was inclined to exhibit a somewhat broad and ostentatious gallantry that annoyed Mainwaring. When they were seated alone on the verandah, which the ladies had discreetly left to them, Richardson said—

"Odd I didn't hear of Bradley's wife before. She seems a spicy, pretty, comfortable creature. Regularly thrown away with him up here."

Mainwaring replied coldly that she was "an admirable helpmeet of a very admirable man," not, however, without an uneasy recollection of her previous confidences respecting her husband. "They have been most thoroughly good and kind to me; my own brother and sister could not have done more. And certainly not with better taste or delicacy," he added markedly.

"Certainly, certainly," said Richardson, hurriedly. "I wrote to Lady Mainwaring that you were taken capital care of by some very honest people; and that——"

"Lady Mainwaring already knows what I think of them, and what she owes to their kindness," said Mainwaring, drily.

"True, true," said Richardson, apologetically. "Of course you must have seen a good deal of them. I only know Bradley in a business way. He's been trying to get the Bank to help him put up some new mills

here; but we didn't see it. I daresay he is good company—rather amusing, eh?"

Mainwaring had the gift of his class of snubbing by the polite and forgiving oblivion of silence. Richardson shifted uneasily in his chair, but continued with assumed carelessness.

"No; I only knew of this cousin, Miss Macy. I heard of her when she was visiting some friends in Menlo Park last year. Rather an attractive girl. They say Colonel Johnson, of Sacramento, took quite a fancy to her—it would have been a good match, I daresay, for he is very rich—but the thing fell through in some way. Then, they say, *she* wanted to marry that Spaniard, young Pico, of the Amador Ranche; but his family wouldn't hear of it. Somehow, she's deuced unlucky. I suppose she'll make a mess of it with that Captain Greyson she was out riding with this morning."

"Didn't the Bank think Bradley's mills a good investment?" asked Mainwaring quietly, when Richardson paused.

"Not with him in it; he is not a business man, you know."

"I thought he was. He seems to me an energetic man, who knows his work, and is not afraid to look after it himself."

"That's just it. He has got absurd ideas of co-operating with his workmen, you know, and doing everything slowly, and on a limited scale. The only thing to be done is to buy up all the land on this

ridge, run off the settlers, freeze out all the other mills, and put it into a big San Francisco company on shares. That's the only way we would look at it."

"But you don't consider the investment bad, even from *his* point of view?"

"Perhaps not."

"And you only decline it because it isn't big enough for the Bank?"

"Exactly."

"Richardson," said Mainwaring, slowly rising, putting his hands in his trouser pockets, and suddenly looking down upon the banker from the easy level of habitual superiority, "I wish you'd attend to this thing for me. I desire to make some return to Mr. Bradley for his kindness. I wish to give him what help he wants—in his own way—you understand. I wish it, and I believe my father wishes it, too. If you'd like him to write to you to that effect"——

"By no means, it's not at all necessary," said Richardson, dropping with equal suddenness into his old-world obsequiousness. "I shall certainly do as you wish. It is not a bad investment, Mr. Mainwaring, and, as you suggest, a very proper return for their kindness. And, being here, it will come quite naturally for me to take up the affair again."

"And—I say, Richardson."

"Yes, Sir?"

"As these ladies are rather short-handed in their domestic service, you know, perhaps you'd better *not*

stay to luncheon or dinner, but go on to the Summit House — it's only a mile or two further — and come back here this evening. I sha'n't want you until then."

"Certainly!" stammered Richardson. "I'll just take leave of the ladies!"

"It's not at all necessary," said Mainwaring, quietly; "you would only disturb them in their household duties. I'll tell them what I've done with you, if they ask. You'll find your stick and hat in the passage, and you can leave the verandah by these steps. By-the-way, you had better manage at the Summit to get someone to bring my traps from here to be forwarded to Sacramento to-morrow. I'll want a conveyance, or a horse of some kind, myself, for I've given up walking for a while; but we can settle about that to-night. Come early. Good morning!"

He accompanied his thoroughly subjugated countryman—who, however, far from attempting to reassert himself, actually seemed easier and more cheerful in his submission — to the end of the verandah, and watched him depart. As he turned back, he saw the pretty figure of Louise Macy leaning against the doorway. How graceful and refined she looked in that simple morning dress! What wonder that she was admired by Greyson, by Johnson, and by that Spaniard! —no, by Jove, it was *she* that wanted to marry him!

"What have you sent away Mr. Richardson for?" asked the young girl, with a half-reproachful, half-mischievous look in her bright eyes.

"I packed him off because I thought it was a little too hard on you and Mrs. Bradley to entertain him without help."

"But as he was *our* guest, you might have left that to us," said Miss Macy.

"By Jove! I never thought of that," said Mainwaring, colouring in consternation. "Pray forgive me, Miss Macy —but you see I knew the man, and could say it, and you couldn't."

"Well, I forgive you, for you look really so cut up," said Louise, laughing. "But I don't know what Jenny will say of your disposing of her conquest so summarily." She stopped and regarded him more attentively. "Has he brought you any bad news? if so, it's a pity you didn't send him away before. He's quite spoiling our cure."

Mainwaring thought bitterly that he had. "But it's a cure for all that, Miss Macy," he said, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "and being a cure, you see, there's no longer an excuse for my staying here. I have been making arrangements for leaving here tomorrow."

"So soon?"

"Do you think it soon, Miss Macy?" asked Mainwaring, turning pale in spite of himself.

"I quite forgot—that you were here as an invalid only, and that we owe our pleasure to the accident of your pain."

She spoke a little artificially, he thought, yet her

cheeks had not lost their pink bloom, nor her eyes their tranquillity. Had he heard Minty's criticism he might have believed that the organic omission noticed by her was a fact.

"And now that your good work as Sister of Charity is completed, you'll be able to enter the world of gaiety again with a clear conscience," said Mainwaring, with a smile that he inwardly felt was a miserable failure. "You'll be able to resume your morning rides, you know, which the wretched invalid interrupted."

Louise raised her clear eyes to his, without reproach, indignation, or even wonder. He felt as if he had attempted an insult and failed.

"Does my cousin know you are going so soon?" she asked finally.

"No, I did not know myself until to-day. You see," he added hastily, while his honest blood blazoned the lie in his cheek. "I've heard of some miserable business affairs that will bring me back to England sooner than I expected."

"I think you should consider your health more important than any mere business," said Louise. "I don't mean that you should remain *here,*" she added with a hasty laugh, "but it would be a pity, now that you have reaped the benefit of rest and taking care of yourself, that you should not make it your only business to seek it elsewhere."

Mainwaring longed to say that within the last half hour, living or dying had become of little moment to

him; but he doubted the truth or efficacy of this time-worn heroic of passion. He felt, too, that anything he said was a mere subterfuge for the real reason of his sudden departure. And how was he to question her as to that reason? In escaping from these subterfuges —he was compelled to lie again. With an assumption of changing the subject, he said calmly. "Richardson thought he had met you before—in Menlo Park, I think."

Amazed at the evident irrelevance of the remark, Louise said coldly, that she did not remember having seen him before.

"I think it was at a Mr. Johnson's—or *with* a Mr. Johnson—or perhaps at one of those Spanish Ranches —I think he mentioned some name like Pico!"

Louise looked at him wonderingly for an instant and then gave way to a frank, irrepressible laugh, which lent her delicate but rather set little face all the colour he had missed. Partially relieved by her unconcern, and yet mortified that he had only provoked her sense of the ludicrous, he tried to laugh also.

"Then, to be quite plain," said Louise, wiping her now humid eyes, "you want me to understand that you really didn't pay sufficient attention to hear correctly! Thank you; that's a pretty English compliment, I suppose."

"I daresay you wouldn't call it 'philandering'?"

"I certainly shouldn't, for I don't know what 'philandering' means."

Mainwaring could not reply, with Richelieu, "You ought to know"; nor did he dare explain what he thought it meant, and how he knew it. Louise, however, innocently solved the difficulty.

"There's a country song I've heard Minty sing," she said. "It runs—

> Come, Philander, let us be a-marchin',
> Everyone for his true love a-sarchin'
> Choose your true love now or never. . . .

Have you been listening to her also?"

"No," said Mainwaring, with a sudden incomprehensible, but utterly irrepressible, resolution; "but *I'm* 'a-marchin'', you know, and perhaps I must 'choose my true love now or never.' Will you help me, Miss Macy?"

He drew gently near her. He had become quite white, but also very manly, and it struck her, more deeply, thoroughly, and conscientiously sincere than any man who had before addressed her. She moved slightly away, as if to rest herself by laying both hands upon the back of the chair.

"Where do you expect to begin your 'sarchin''?" she said, leaning on the chair and tilting it before her; "or are you as vague as usual as to locality? Is it at some 'Mr. Johnson' or 'Mr. Pico,' or"—

"Here," he interrupted boldly.

"I really think you ought to first tell my cousin that you are going away to-morrow," she said, with a faint smile: "it's such short notice. She's just in there."

She nodded her pretty head, without raising her eyes, towards the hall.

"But it may not be so soon," said Mainwaring.

"Oh, then the 'sarchin'' is not so important?" said Louise, raising her head, and looking towards the hall with some uneasy but indefinable feminine instinct.

She was right; the sitting-room door opened, and Mrs. Bradley made her smiling appearance.

"Mr. Mainwaring was just looking for you," said Louise, for the first time raising her eyes to him. "He's not only sent off Mr. Richardson, but he's going away himself to-morrow."

Mrs. Bradley looked from the one to the other in mute wonder. Mainwaring cast an imploring glance at Louise, which had the desired effect. Much more seriously, and in a quaint, business-like way, the young girl took it upon herself to explain to Mrs. Bradley that Richardson had brought the invalid some important news that would, unfortunately, not only shorten his stay in America, but even compel him to leave The Lookout sooner than he expected—perhaps to-morrow. Mainwaring thanked her with his eyes, and then turned to Mrs. Bradley.

"Whether I go to-morrow or next day," he said with simple and earnest directness, "I intend, you know, to see you soon again, either here or in my own home in England. I do not know," he added with marked gravity, "that I have succeeded in convincing you that I have made your family already well known to my

people, and that"—he fixed his eyes with a meaning look on Louise—"no matter when, or in what way, you come to them, your place is made ready for you. You may not like them, you know: the governor is getting to be an old man—perhaps too old for young Americans—but *they* will like *you,* and you must put up with that. My mother and sisters know Miss Macy as well as I do, and will make her one of the family."

The conscientious earnestness with which these apparent conventionalities were uttered, and some occult quality of quiet conviction in the young man's manner, brought a pleasant sparkle to the eyes of Mrs. Bradley and Louise.

"But," said Mrs. Bradley, gaily, "our going to England is quite beyond our present wildest dreams; nothing but a windfall, an unexpected rise in timber, or even the tabooed hotel speculation could make it possible."

"But *I* shall take the liberty of trying to present it to Mr. Bradley to-night in some practical way that may convince even his critical judgment," said Mainwaring, still seriously. "It will be," he added more lightly, "the famous testimonial of my cure which I promised you."

"And you will find Mr. Bradley so sceptical that you will be obliged to defer your going," said Mrs. Bradley, triumphantly. "Come, Louise, we must not forget that we have still Mr. Mainwaring's present comfort to look after; that Minty has basely deserted us,

and that we ourselves must see that the last days of our guest beneath our roof are not remembered for their privation."

She led Louise away with a half-mischievous suggestion of maternal propriety, and left Mainwaring once more alone on the verandah.

He had done it! Certainly she must have understood his meaning, and there was nothing left for him to do but to acquaint Bradley with his intentions tonight, and press her for a final answer in the morning. There would be no indelicacy then in asking her for an interview more free from interruption than this public verandah. Without conceit, he did not doubt what the answer would be. His indecision, his sudden resolution to leave her, had been all based upon the uncertainty of *his* own feelings, the propriety of *his* declaration, the possibility of some previous experience of hers that might compromise *him*. Convinced by her unembarrassed manner of her innocence, or rather satisfied of her indifference to Richardson's gossip, he had been hurried by his feelings into an unexpected avowal. Brought up in the perfect security of his own social position, and familiarly conscious—without vanity—of its importance and power in such a situation, he believed, without undervaluing Louise's charms or independence, that he had no one else than himself to consult. Even the slight uneasiness that still pursued him was more due to his habitual conscientiousness of his own intention than to any fear that she would not

fully respond to it. Indeed, with his conservative ideas of proper feminine self-restraint, Louise's calm passivity and undemonstrative attitude were a proof of her superiority; had she blushed over-much, cried, or thrown herself into his arms, he would have doubted the wisdom of so easy a selection. It was true he had known her scarcely three weeks; if he chose to be content with that, his own accessible record of three centuries should be sufficient for her, and condone any irregularity.

Nevertheless, as an hour slipped away and Louise did not make her appearance—either on the verandah, or in the little sitting-room off the hall, Mainwaring became more uneasy as to the incompleteness of their interview. Perhaps a faint suspicion of the inadequacy of her response began to trouble him; but he still fatuously regarded it rather as owing to his own hurried and unfinished declaration. It was true that he hadn't said half what he intended to say; it was true that she might have misunderstood it as the conventional gallantry of the situation, as—terrible thought!—the light banter of the habitual love-making American, to which she had been accustomed; perhaps even now she relegated him to the level of Greyson, and this accounted for her singular impassiveness—an impassiveness that certainly was singular now he reflected upon it—that might have been even contempt. The last thought pricked his deep conscientiousness; he walked hurriedly up and down the verandah, and then suddenly

re-entering his room, took up a sheet of notepaper, and began to write to her:—

"Can you grant me a few moments' interview alone? Icannot bear you should think that what I was trying to tell you when we were interrupted was prompted by anything but the deepest sincerity and conviction, or that I am willing it should be passed over lightly by you or be forgotten. Pray give me a chance of proving it, by saying you will see me.

"F. M."

But how should he convey this to her? His delicacy revolted against handing it to her behind Mrs. Bradley's back, or the prestidigitation of slipping it into her lap or under her plate before them at luncheon; he thought for an instant of the Chinaman, but gentlemen—except in that "mirror of nature" the stage—usually hesitate to suborn other people's servants, or entrust a woman's secret to her inferiors. He remembered that Louise's room was at the further end of the house, and its low window gave upon the verandah, and was guarded at night by a film of white and blue curtains that were parted during the day, to allow a triangular revelation of a pale blue and white draped interior. Mainwaring reflected that the low inside window ledge was easily accessible from the verandah, would afford a capital lodgment for the note, and be quickly seen by the fair occupant of the room on entering. He sauntered slowly past the window; the room was empty, the moment propitious. A slight

breeze was stirring the blue ribbons of the curtain; it would be necessary to secure the note with something; he returned along the verandah to the steps, where he had noticed a small irregular stone lying, which had evidently escaped from Richelieu's bag of treasure specimens, and had been overlooked by that ingenuous child. It was of a pretty peacock-blue colour, and, besides securing a paper, would be sure to attract her attention. He placed his note on the inside ledge, and the blue stone atop, and went away with a sense of relief.

Another half hour passed without incident. He could hear the voices of the two women in the kitchen and dining-room. After a while they appeared to cease, and he heard the sound of an opening door. It then occurred to him that the verandah was still too exposed for a confidential interview, and he resolved to descend the steps, pass before the windows of the kitchen where Louise might see him, and penetrate the shrubbery, where she might be induced to follow him. They would not be interrupted nor overheard there.

But he had barely left the verandah before the figure of Richelieu, who had been patiently waiting for Mainwaring's disappearance, emerged stealthily from the shrubbery. He had discovered his loss on handing his "fire assays" to the good-humoured Bradley for later examination, and he had retraced his way, step by step, looking everywhere for his missing stone with the unbounded hopefulness, lazy persistency, and lofty dis-

regard for time and occupation known only to the genuine boy. He remembered to have placed his knotted bag upon the verandah, and, slipping off his stiff boots slowly and softly, slid along against the wall of the house, looking carefully on the floor, and yet preserving a studied negligence of demeanour, with one hand in his pocket, and his small mouth contracted into a singularly soothing and almost voiceless whistle —Richelieu's own peculiar accomplishment. But no stone appeared. Like most of his genus he was superstitious, and repeated to himself the cabalistic formula: "Losin's seekin's, findin's keepin's"—presumed to be of great efficacy in such cases—with religious fervour. He had laboriously reached the end of the verandah when he noticed the open window of Louise's room, and stopped as a perfunctory duty to look in. And then Richelieu Sharpe stood for an instant utterly confounded and aghast at this crowning proof of the absolute infamy and sickening enormity of Man.

There was *his* stone—*his, Richelieu's, own specimen,* carefully gathered by himself and none other—and now stolen, abstracted, "skyugled," "smouged," "hooked" by this "rotten, skunkified, long-legged, splay-footed, hoss-laughin', nigger-toothed, or'nary despot!" And, worse than all, actually made to do infamous duty as a love token!—a "candy-gift"!—a "philanderin' box"! to *his,* Richelieu's, girl—for Louise belonged to that innocent and vague outside seraglio of Richelieu's boyish dreams—and put atop of a letter to her! and

Providence permitted such an outrage! "Wot was he, Richelieu, sent to school for, and organised wickedness in the shape of gorilla Injins like this allowed to ride high horses rampant over Californey!" He looked at the heavens in mute appeal. And then—Providence not immediately interfering—he thrust his own small arm into the window, regained his priceless treasure, and fled swiftly.

A fateful silence ensued. The wind slightly moved the curtain outward, as if in a playful attempt to follow him, and then subsided. A moment later, apparently reinforced by other winds, or sympathising with Richelieu, it lightly lifted the unlucky missive and cast it softly from the window. But here another wind, lying in wait, caught it cleverly, and tossed it, in a long curve, into the abyss. For an instant it seemed to float lazily, as on the mirrored surface of a lake, until, turning upon its side, it suddenly darted into utter oblivion.

When Mainwaring returned from the shrubbery, he went softly to the window. The disappearance of the letter and stone satisfied him of the success of his stratagem, and for the space of three hours relieved his anxiety. But at the end of that time, finding no response from Louise, his former uneasiness returned. Was she offended, or—the first doubt of her acceptance of him crossed his mind! A sudden and inexplicable sense of shame came upon him. At the same moment, he heard his name called from the steps, turned—and beheld Minty.

Her dark eyes were shining with a pleasant light, and her lips parted on her white teeth with a frank, happy smile. She advanced and held out her hand. He took it with a mingling of disappointment and embarrassment.

"You're wondering why I kem on here, arter I sent word this morning that I kelkilated not to come. Well, 'twixt then and now suthin' 's happened. We've had fine doin's over at our house, you bet! Pop don't know which end he's standin' on; and I reckon that for about ten minutes I didn't know my own name. But ez soon ez I got fairly hold o' the hull thing, and had it put straight in my mind, I sez to myself, Minty Sharpe, sez I, the first thing for you to do now, is to put on yer bonnet and shawl, and trapse over to Jim Bradley's, and help them two womenfolks get dinner for themselves and that sick stranger. And," continued Minty, throwing herself into a chair and fanning her glowing face with her apron, "yer I am!"

"But you have not told me *what* has happened," said Mainwaring, with a constrained smile, and an uneasy glance towards the house.

"That's so," said Minty, with a brilliant laugh. "I clean forgot the hull gist of the thing. Well, we're rich folks now—over thar' on Barren Ledge! That onery brother of mine, Richelieu, hez taken some of his specimens over to Jim Bradley to be tested. And Bradley, just to please that child, takes 'em; and not an hour ago Bradley comes running, likety switch, over to

Pop to tell him to put up his notices, for the hull of that ledge where the forge stands is a mine o' silver and copper. Afore ye knew it, Lordy! half the folks outer the Summit and the mill was scattered down thar all over it. Richardson—that stranger ez knows you—kem thar too with Jim, and he allows, ef Bradley's essay is right, it's worth more than a hundred thousand dollars ez it stands!"

"I suppose I must congratulate you, Miss Sharpe," said Mainwaring with an attempt at interest, but his attention still preoccupied with the open doorway.

"Oh, *they* know all about it!" said Minty, following the direction of his abstracted eyes with a slight darkening of her own, "I jest kem out o' the kitchen the other way, and Jim sent 'em a note; but I allowed I'd tell *you* myself. Specially ez you was going away to-morrow."

"Who said I was going away to-morrow?" asked Mainwaring, uneasily.

"Loo Macy!"

"Ah—she did? But I may change my mind, you know!" he continued, with a faint smile.

Minty shook her curls decisively. "I reckon *she* knows," she said drily, "she's got law and Gospel for wot she says. But yer she comes. Ask her! Look yer, Loo," she added, as the two women appeared at the doorway, with a certain exaggeration of congratulatory manner that struck Mainwaring as being as artificial

and disturbed as his own, "didn't Sir Francis yer say he was going to-morrow?"

"That's what I understood!" returned Louise, with cold astonishment, letting her clear indifferent eyes fall upon Mainwaring. "I do not know that he has changed his mind."

"Unless, as Miss Sharpe is a great capitalist now, she is willing to use her powers of persuasion," added Mrs. Bradley, with a slight acidulous pointing of her usual prim playfulness.

"I reckon Minty Sharpe 's the same ez she allus wos, unless more so," returned Minty, with an honest egotism that carried so much conviction to the hearer as to condone its vanity. "But I kem yer to do a day's work, gals, and I allow to pitch in and do it, and not sit yer swoppin' compliments and keeping *him* from packin' his duds. Onless," she stopped, and looked around at the uneasy, unsympathetic circle with a faint tremulousness of lip that belied the brave black eyes above it, "onless I'm in yer way."

The two women sprang forward with a feminine bewildering excess of protestation; and Mainwaring, suddenly pierced through his outer selfish embarrassment to his more honest depths, stammered quickly—

"Look here, Miss Sharpe, if you think of running away again, after having come all the way here to make us share the knowledge of your good fortune and your better heart, by Jove! I'll go back with you."

But here the two women effusively hurried her away

from the dangerous proximity of such sympathetic honesty, and a moment later Mainwaring heard her laughing voice, as of old, ringing in the kitchen. And then, as if unconsciously responding to the significant common-sense that lay in her last allusion to him, he went to his room and grimly began his packing.

He did not again see Louise alone. At their informal luncheon the conversation turned upon the more absorbing topic of the Sharpes' discovery, its extent, and its probable effect upon the fortunes of the locality. He noticed, abstractedly, that both Mrs. Bradley and her cousin showed a real or assumed scepticism of its value. This did not disturb him greatly, except for its intended check upon Minty's enthusiasm. He was more conscious, perhaps — with a faint touch of mortified vanity—that his own contemplated departure was of lesser importance than this local excitement. Yet, in his growing conviction that all was over—if, indeed, it had ever begun—between himself and Louise, he was grateful to this natural diversion of incident which spared them both an interval of embarrassing commonplaces. And, with the suspicion of some indefinable insincerity — either of his own or Louise's — haunting him, Minty's frank heartiness and outspoken loyalty gave him a strange relief. It seemed to him as if the clear cool breath of the forest had entered with her homely garments, and the steadfast truths of Nature were incarnate in her shining eyes. How far this poetic fancy would have been consistent or even coexistent

with any gleam of tenderness or self-forgetfulness in Louise's equally pretty orbs, I leave the satirical feminine reader to determine.

It was late when Bradley at last returned, bringing further and more complete corroboration of the truth of Sharpe's good fortune. Two experts had arrived, one from Pine Flat and another from the Summit, and upon this statement Richardson had offered to purchase an interest in the discovery that would at once enable the blacksmith to develop his mine. "I shouldn't wonder, Mainwaring," he added cheerfully, "if he'd put you into it, too, and make your eternal fortune."

"With larks falling from the skies all round you, it's a pity *you* couldn't get put into something," said Mrs. Bradley, straightening her pretty brows.

"I'm not a gold-miner, my dear," said Bradley, pleasantly.

"Nor a gold-finder," returned his wife, with a cruel little depression of her pink nostrils, "but you can work all night in that stupid mill and then," she added in a low voice, to escape Minty's attention, "spend the whole of the next day examining and following up a boy's discovery that his own relations had been too lazy and too ignorant to understand and profit by. I suppose that next you will be hunting up a site on the *other side* of the Canyon, where somebody else can put up an hotel and ruin your own prospects."

A sensitive shadow of pain quickly dimmed Bradley's glance—not the first or last time, evidently, for it was

gradually bringing out a background of sadness in his intelligent eyes. But the next moment he turned kindly to Mainwaring, and began to deplore the necessity of his early departure, which Richardson had already made known to him with practical and satisfying reasons.

"I hope you won't forget, my dear fellow, that your most really urgent business is to look after your health; and if, hereafter, you'll only remember the old Lookout enough to impress that fact upon you, I shall feel that any poor service I have rendered you has been amply repaid."

Mainwaring, notwithstanding that he winced slightly at this fateful echo of Louise's advice, returned the grasp of his friend's hand with an honest pressure equal to his own. He longed now only for the coming of Richardson, to complete his scheme of grateful benefaction to his host.

The banker came, fortunately as the conversation began to flag; and Mrs. Bradley's half-coquettish ill-humour of a pretty woman, and Louise's abstracted indifference, were becoming so noticeable as to even impress Minty into a thoughtful taciturnity. The graciousness of his reception by Mrs. Bradley somewhat restored his former ostentatious gallantry, and his self-satisfied, domineering manner had enough masculine power in it to favourably affect the three women, who, it must be confessed, were a little bored by the finer abstractions of Bradley and Mainwaring. After a few

moments, Mainwaring rose and, with a significant glance at Richardson to remind him of his proposed conference with Bradley, turned to leave the room. He was obliged to pass Louise, who was sitting by the table. His attention was suddenly arrested by something in her hand with which she was listlessly playing. It was the stone which he had put on his letter to her.

As he had not been present when Bradley arrived, he did not know that this fateful object had been brought home by his host, who, after receiving it from Richelieu, had put it in his pocket to illustrate his story of the discovery. On the contrary, it seemed that Louise's careless exposure of his foolish stratagem was gratuitously and purposely cruel. Nevertheless, he stopped and looked at her.

"That's a queer stone you have there," he said, in a tone which she recognised as coldly and ostentatiously civil.

"Yes," she replied, without looking up; "it's the outcrop of that mine." She handed it to him as if to obviate any further remark. "I thought you had seen it before."

"The outcrop," he repeated drily. "That is—it—it—it is the indication or sign of something important that 's below it—isn't it?"

Louise shrugged her shoulders sceptically. "It don't follow. It's just as likely to cover rubbish, after you've taken the trouble to look."

"Thanks," he said, with measured gentleness, and passed quietly out of the room.

The moon had already risen when Bradley, with his briarwood pipe, preceded Richardson upon the verandah. The latter threw his large frame into Louise's rocking-chair near the edge of the abyss; Bradley, with his own chair tilted against the side of the house after the national fashion, waited for him to speak. The absence of Mainwaring and the stimulus of Mrs. Bradley's graciousness had given the banker a certain condescending familiarity, which Bradley received with amused and ironical tolerance that his twinkling eyes made partly visible in the darkness.

"One of the things I wanted to talk to you about, Bradley, was that old affair of the advance you asked for from the Bank. We did not quite see our way to it then, and, speaking as a business man, it isn't really a matter of business now; but it has lately been put to me in a light that would make the doing of it possible —you understand? The fact of the matter is this: Sir Robert Mainwaring, the father of the young fellow you've got in your house, is one of our directors and largest shareholders, and I can tell you—if you don't suspect it already —you've been lucky, Bradley—deucedly lucky—to have had him in your house, and to have rendered him a service. He's the heir to one of the largest landed estates in his county, one of the oldest county families, and will step into the title some day. But, ahem!" he coughed patronisingly, "you knew all that! No? Well, that

charming wife of yours, at least, does; for she's been talking about it. Gad, Bradley, it takes those women to find out anything of that kind, eh?"

The light in Bradley's eyes and his pipe went slowly out together.

"Then we'll say that affair of the advance is as good as settled. It's Sir Robert's wish, you understand —and this young fellow's wish—and if you'll come down to the Bank next week we'll arrange it for you; I think you'll admit they're doing the handsome thing to you and yours. And therefore," he lowered his voice confidentially, "you'll see, Bradley, that it will only be the honourable thing in you, you know, to look upon the affair as finished, and, in fact, to do all you can" —he drew his chair closer—"to—to—to drop this other foolishness."

"I don't think I quite understand you!" said Bradley, slowly.

"But your wife does, if you don't," returned Richardson, bluntly; "I mean this foolish flirtation between Louise Macy and Mainwaring, which is utterly preposterous. Why, man, it can't possibly come to anything, and it couldn't be allowed for a moment. Look at his position and hers. I should think, as a practical man, it would strike you"——

"Only one thing strikes me, Richardson," interrupted Bradley in a singularly distinct whisper, rising, and moving nearer the speaker: "it is that you're sitting perilously near the edge of this verandah. For, by the

living God, if you don't take yourself out of that chair and out of this house, I won't be answerable for the consequences!"

"Hold on there a minute, will you?" said Mainwaring's voice from the window.

Both men turned towards it. A long leg was protruding from Mainwaring's window; it was quickly followed by the other leg and body of the occupant, and the next moment Mainwaring came towards the two men, with his hands in his pockets.

"Not so loud," he said, looking towards the house.

"Let that man go," said Bradley, in a repressed voice. "You and I, Mainwaring, can speak together afterwards."

"That man must stay until he hears what I have got to say," said Mainwaring, stepping between them. He was very white and grave in the moonlight, but very quiet; and he did not take his hands from his pockets. "I've listened to what he said because he came here on *my* business, which was simply to offer to do you a service. That was all, Bradley, that *I* told him to do. This rot about what he expects of you in return is his own impertinence. If you'd punched his head when he began it, it would have been all right. But since he has begun it, before he goes I think he ought to hear me tell you that I have already *offered* myself to Miss Macy, and she has *refused* me! If she had given me the least encouragement, I should have told you before. Further, I want to say that, in spite

of that man's insinuations, I firmly believe that no one is aware of the circumstance except Miss Macy and myself."

"I had no idea of intimating that anything had happened that was not highly honourable and creditable to you and the young lady," began Richardson, hurriedly.

"I don't know that it was necessary for you to have any ideas on the subject at all," said Mainwaring, sternly; "nor that, having been shown how you have insulted this gentleman and myself, you need trouble us an instant longer with your company. You need not come back. I will manage my other affairs myself."

"Very well, Mr. Mainwaring—but—you may be sure that I shall certainly take the first opportunity to explain myself to Sir Robert," returned Richardson as, with an attempt at dignity, he strode away.

There was an interval of silence.

"Don't be too hard upon a fellow, Bradley," said Mainwaring, as Bradley remained dark and motionless in the shadow. "It is a poor return I'm making you for your kindness, but I swear I never thought of anything like—like—this."

"Nor did I," said Bradley, bitterly.

"I know it, and that's what makes it so infernally bad for me. Forgive me, won't you? Think of me, old fellow, as the wretchedest ass you ever met, but not such a cad as this would make me!" As Mainwaring stepped out from the moonlight towards him with extended hand, Bradley grasped it warmly.

"Thanks—there—thanks, old fellow! And, Bradley —I say—don't say anything to your wife, for I don't think she knows it. And, Bradley—look here—I didn't like to be anything but plain before that fellow; but I don't mind telling *you,* now that it's all over, that I really think Louise—Miss Macy—didn't altogether understand me either."

With another shake of the hand they separated for the night. For a long time after Mainwaring had gone, Bradley remained gazing thoughtfully into the Great Canyon. He thought of the time when he had first come there, full of life and enthusiasm, making an ideal world of his pure and wholesome eyrie on the ledge. What else he thought will, probably, never be known until the misunderstanding of honourable and chivalrous men by a charming and illogical sex shall incite the audacious pen of some more daring romancer.

When he returned to the house, he said kindly to his wife, "I have been thinking to-day about your hotel scheme, and I shall write to Sacramento to-night to accept that capitalist's offer."

CHAPTER V.

THE sun was just rising. In two years of mutation and change it had seen the little cottage clinging like a swallow's nest to the rocky eaves of a great Sierran canyon give way to a straggling, many-galleried hotel, and a dozen blackened chimneys rise above the barren tableland where once had stood the lonely forge. To that conservative orb of light and heat there must have been a peculiar satisfaction in looking down a few hours earlier upon the battlements and gables of Oldenhurst, whose base was deeply embedded in the matured foundations and settled traditions of an English county. For the rising sun had for ten centuries found Oldenhurst in its place, from the heavy stone terrace that covered the dead-and-forgotten wall, where a Roman sentinel had once paced, to the little grating in the cloistered quadrangle, where it had seen a Cistercian brother place the morning dole. It had daily welcomed the growth of this vast and picturesque excrescence of the times; it had smiled every morning upon this formidable yet quaint incrustation of power and custom, ignoring, as Oldenhurst itself had ignored, the generations who possessed it, the men who built it, the men who carried it with fire and sword, the men who had

lied and cringed for it, the King who had given it to a favourite, the few brave hearts who had died for it in exile, and the one or two who had bought and paid for it. For Oldenhurst had absorbed all these and more until it had become a story of the past, incarnate in stone, greenwood, and flower; it had even drained the life-blood from adjacent hamlets, repaying them with tumuli growths like its own, in the shape of purposeless lodges, quaintly incompetent hospitals and schools, and churches where the inestimable blessing and knowledge of Its gospel were taught and fostered. Nor had it dealt more kindly with the gentry within its walls, sending some to the scaffold, pillorying others in infamous office, reducing a few to poverty, and halting its later guests with gout and paralysis. It had given them in exchange the dubious immortality of a portrait gallery, from which they stared with stony and equal resignation; it had preserved their useless armour and accoutrements; it had set up their marble effigies in churches or laid them in cross-legged attitudes to trip up the unwary, until in death, as in life, they got between the congregation and the Truth that was taught there. It had allowed an Oldenhurst crusader, with a broken nose like a pugilist, on the strength of his having been twice to the Holy Land, to hide the beautifully illuminated Word from the lowlier worshipper on the humbler benches; it had sent an iconoclastic Bishop of the Reformation to a nearer minster to ostentatiously occupy the place of the consecrated image he had over-

thrown. Small wonder that crowding the Oldenhurst retainers gradually into smaller space, with occasional Sabbath glimpses of the living rulers of Oldenhurst already in railed-off exaltation, it had forced them to accept Oldenhurst as a synonym of eternity, and left the knowledge of a higher Power to what time they should be turned out to their longer sleep under the tender grass of the beautiful outer churchyard.

And even so, while every stone of the pile of Oldenhurst and every tree in its leafy park might have been eloquent with the story of vanity, selfishness, and unequal justice, it had been left to the infinite mercy of Nature to seal their lips with a spell of beauty that left mankind equally dumb; earth, air, and moisture had entered into a gentle conspiracy to soften, mellow, and clothe its external blemishes of breach and accident, its irregular design, its additions, accretions, ruins, and lapses with a harmonious charm of outline and colour; poets, romancers, and historians had equally conspired to illuminate the dark passages and uglier inconsistencies of its interior life with the glamour of their own fancy. The fragment of menacing keep, with its choked oubliettes, became a bower of tender ivy; the grim story of its crimes, properly edited by a contemporary bard of the family, passed into a charming ballad. Even the superstitious darkness of its religious house had escaped through fallen roof and shattered wall, leaving only the foliated and sun-pierced screen of front, with its rose-window and pinnacle of cross be-

hind. Pilgrims from all lands had come to see it; fierce Republicans had crossed the seas to gaze at its mediæval outlines, and copy them in wood and stucco on their younger soil. Politicians had equally pointed to it as a convincing evidence of their own principles and in refutation of each other; and it had survived both. For it was this belief in its own perpetuity that was its strength and weakness. And that belief was never stronger than on this bright August morning, when it was on the verge of dissolution. A telegram brought to Sir Robert Mainwaring had even then as completely shattered and disintegrated Oldenhurst, in all it was and all it meant, as if the brown-paper envelope had been itself charged with the electric fluid.

Sir Robert Mainwaring, whose family had for three centuries possessed Oldenhurst, had received the news of his financial ruin; and the vast pile which had survived the repeated invasion of superstition, force, intrigue, and even progress, had succumbed to a foe its founders and proprietors had loftily ignored and left to Jews and traders. The acquisition of money, except by despoilment, gift, Royal favour, or inheritance, had been unknown at Oldenhurst. The present degenerate custodian of its fortunes, staggering under the weight of its sentimental mortmain already alluded to, had speculated in order to keep up its material strength, that was gradually shrinking through impoverished land and the ruined trade it had despised. He had invested largely in California mines, and was the chief shareholder in a

San Francisco Bank. But the mines had proved worthless, the Bank had that morning suspended payment, owing to the failure of a large land and timber company on the Sierras, which it had imprudently "carried." The spark which had demolished Oldenhurst had been fired from the new telegraph-station in the hotel above the great Sierran canyon.

There was a large house-party at Oldenhurst that morning. But it had been a part of the history of the Mainwarings to accept defeat gallantly and as became their blood. Sir Percival—the second gentleman on the left as you entered the library—unhorsed, dying on a distant moor, with a handful of followers, abandoned by a charming Prince and a miserable cause, was scarcely a greater hero than this ruined but undaunted gentleman of eighty, entering the breakfast-room a few hours later as jauntily as his gout would permit, and conscientiously dispensing the hospitalities of his crumbling house. When he had arranged a few pleasure parties for the day, and himself thoughtfully anticipated the different tastes of his guests, he turned to Lady Mainwaring.

"Don't forget that somebody ought to go to the station to meet the Bradleys. Frank writes from St. Moritz that they are due here to-day."

Lady Mainwaring glanced quickly at her husband, and said *sotto voce,* "Do you think they'll care to come *now?* They probably have heard all about it."

"Not how it affects me," returned Sir Robert, in the

same tone; "and as they might think that because Frank was with them on that California mountain we would believe it had something to do with Richardson involving the Bank in that wretched company, we must really *insist* upon their coming."

"Bradley!" echoed the Hon. Captain FitzHarry, overhearing the name during a late forage on the sideboard, "Bradley!—there was an awfully pretty American at Biarritz, travelling with a cousin, I think—a Miss Mason or Macy. Those sort of people, you know, who have a companion as pretty as themselves: bring you down with the other barrel if one misses—eh? Very clever, both of them, and hardly any accent."

"Mr. Bradley was a very dear friend of Frank's and most kind to him," said Lady Mainwaring, gravely.

"Didn't know there *was* a Mr. Bradley, really. He didn't come to the fore then," said the unabashed Captain. "Deuced hard to follow up those American husbands!"

"And their wives wouldn't thank you, if you did," said Lady Griselda Armiger, with a sweet smile.

"If it is the Mrs. Bradley I mean," said Lady Canterbridge from the lower end of the table, looking up from her letter, "who looks a little like Mrs. Summertree, and has a pretty cousin with her who has very good frocks, I'm afraid you won't be able to get her down here. She's booked with engagements for the next six weeks. She and her cousin made all the running at Grigsby Royal, and she has quite deposed

that other American beauty in Northforeland's good graces. She regularly *affiché'd* him, and it is piteous to see him follow her about. No, my dear; I don't believe they'll come to anyone of less rank than a Marquis. If they did, I'm sure Canterbridge would have had them at Buckenthorpe already."

"I wonder if there was ever anything in Frank's admiration of this Miss Macy?" said Lady Mainwaring a few moments later, lingering beside her husband in his study.

"I really don't know," said Sir Robert, abstractedly; "his letters were filled with her praises, and Richardson thought"——

"Pray don't mention that man's name again," said Lady Mainwaring, with the first indication of feeling she had shown. "I shouldn't trust him."

"But why do you ask?" returned her husband.

Lady Mainwaring was silent for a moment. "She is very rich, I believe," she said slowly. "At least, Frank writes that some neighbours of theirs whom he met in the Engadine told him they had sold the site of that absurd cottage where he was ill for some extravagant sum."

"My dear Geraldine," said the old man, affectionately, taking his wife's hand in his own, that now for the first time trembled, "if you have any hope based upon what you are thinking of now, let it be the last and least. You forget that Paget told us that with the best care he could scarcely ensure Frank's return to

perfect health. Even if God in his mercy spared him long enough to take my place, what girl would be willing to tie herself to a man doomed to sickness and poverty? Hardly the one you speak of, my dear."

Lady Canterbridge proved a true prophet. Mrs. Bradley and Miss Macy did not come, regretfully alleging a previous engagement made on the Continent with the Duke of Northforeland and the Marquis of Dungeness; but the unexpected and apocryphal husband *did* arrive. "I myself have not seen my wife and cousin since I returned from my visit to your son in Switzerland. I am glad they were able to amuse themselves without waiting for me at a London hotel, though I should have preferred to have met them here." Sir Robert and Lady Mainwaring were courteous but slightly embarrassed. Lady Canterbridge, who had come to the station in bored curiosity, raised her clear blue eyes to his. He did not look like a fool, a complaisant or fashionably-cynical husband—this well-dressed, well-mannered, but quietly and sympathetically observant man. Did he really care for his selfish wife? was it perfect trust or some absurd Transatlantic custom? She did not understand him. It wearied her and she turned her eyes indifferently away. Bradley, a little irritated, he knew not why, at the scrutiny of this tall, handsome, gentlemanly-looking woman, who, however, in spite of her broad shoulders and narrow hips possessed a refined muliebrity superior to mere womanliness of outline, turned slightly towards Sir Robert. "Lady Canterbridge,

Frank's cousin," explained Sir Robert, hesitatingly, as if conscious of some vague awkwardness. Bradley and Lady Canterbridge both bowed—possibly the latter's salutation was the most masculine—and Bradley, eventually forgetting her presence, plunged into an earnest, sympathetic, and intelligent account of the condition in which he had found the invalid at St. Moritz. The old man at first listened with an almost perfunctory courtesy and a hesitating reserve; but as Bradley was lapsing into equal reserve and they drove up to the gates of the quadrangle, he unexpectedly warmed with a word or two of serious welcome. Looking up with a half-unconscious smile, Bradley met Lady Canterbridge's examining eyes.

The next morning, finding an opportunity to be alone with him, Bradley, with a tactful mingling of sympathy and directness, informed his host that he was cognisant of the disaster that had overtaken the Bank, and delicately begged him to accept of any service he could render him. "Pardon me," he said, "if I speak as plainly to you as I would to your son: my friendship for him justifies an equal frankness to anyone he loves; but I should not intrude upon your confidence if I did not believe that my knowledge and assistance might be of benefit to you. Although *I* did not sell my lands to Richardson or approve of his methods," he continued, "I fear it was some suggestion of mine that eventually induced him to form the larger and more disastrous scheme that ruined the Bank. So you see," he added

lightly, "I claim a right to offer you my services." Touched by Bradley's sincerity and discreet intelligence, Sir Robert was equally frank. During the recital of his Californian investments—a chronicle of almost fatuous speculation and imbecile enterprise—Bradley was profoundly moved at the naïve ignorance of business and hopeless ingenuousness of this old habitué of a cynical world and an intriguing and insincere society, to whom no scheme had been too wild for acceptance. As Bradley listened with a half-saddened smile to the grave visions of this aged enthusiast, he remembered the son's unsophisticated simplicity: what he had considered as the "boyishness" of immaturity was the taint of the utterly unpractical Mainwaring blood. It was upon this blood, and others like it, that Oldenhurst had for centuries waxed and fattened.

Bradley was true to his promise of assistance, and with the aid of two or three of his brother millionaires, whose knowledge of the resources of the locality was no less powerful and convincing than the security of their actual wealth, managed to stay the immediate action of the catastrophe until the affairs of the Sierran Land and Timber Company could be examined and some plan of reconstruction arranged. During this interval of five months, in which the credit of Sir Robert Mainwaring was preserved with the secret of his disaster, Bradley was a frequent and welcome visitor to Oldenhurst. Apart from his strange and chivalrous friendship for the Mainwarings—which was as incomprehensible to

Sir Robert as Sir Robert's equally eccentric and Quixotic speculations had been to Bradley—he began to feel a singular and weird fascination for the place. A patient martyr in the vast London house he had taken for his wife and cousin's amusement, he loved to escape the loneliness of its autumn solitude or the occasional greater loneliness of his wife's social triumphs. The handsome, thoughtful man who sometimes appeared at the foot of his wife's table or melted away like a well-bred ghost in the hollow emptiness of her brilliant receptions, piqued the languid curiosity of a few. A distinguished personage, known for his tactful observance of *convenances* that others forgot, had made a point of challenging this gentlemanly apparition, and had followed it up with courteous civilities, which led to exchange of much respect but no increase of acquaintance. He had even spent a week at Buckenthorpe, with Canterbridge in the coverts and Lady Canterbridge in the music-room and library. He had returned more thoughtful, and for some time after was more frequent in his appearances at home, and more earnest in his renewed efforts to induce his wife to return to America with him.

"You'll never be happy anywhere but in California among those common people," she replied; "and while I was willing to share your poverty *there*," she added drily, "I prefer to share your wealth among civilised ladies and gentlemen. Besides," she continued, "we must consider Louise. She is as good as engaged to Lord Dunshunner, and I do not intend that you shall

make a mess of her affairs here as you did in California."

It was the first time he had heard of Lord Dunshunner's proposals; it was the first allusion she had ever made to Louise and Mainwaring.

Meantime, the autumn leaves had fallen silently over the broad terraces of Oldenhurst with little changes to the fortunes of the great house itself. The Christmas house-party included Lady Canterbridge, whose husband was still detained at Homburg in company with Dunshunner; and Bradley, whose wife and cousin lingered on the Continent. He was slightly embarrassed when Lady Canterbridge turned to him one afternoon as they were returning from the lake and congratulated him abruptly upon Louise's engagement.

"Perhaps you don't care to be congratulated," she said, as he did not immediately respond, "and you had as little to do with it as with that other? It is a woman's function."

"What other?" echoed Bradley.

Lady Canterbridge slightly turned her handsome head towards him as she walked unbendingly at his side. "Tell me how you manage to keep your absolute simplicity so fresh. Do you suppose it wasn't known at Oldenhurst that Frank had quite compromised himself with Miss Macy over there?"

"It certainly was not known 'over there,'" said Bradley, curtly.

"Don't be angry with me."

Such an appeal from the tall, indifferent woman at his side, so confidently superior to criticism, and uttered in a lower tone, made him smile, albeit uneasily.

"I only meant to congratulate you," she continued carelessly. "Dunshunner is not a bad sort of fellow, and will come into a good property some day. And then, society is so made up of caprice, just now, that it is well for your wife's cousin to make the most of her opportunities while they last. She is very popular now; but next season"—— Seeing that Bradley remained silent, she did not finish her sentence, but said with her usual abruptness, "Do you know a Miss Araminta Eulalie Sharpe?"

Bradley started. Could anyone recognise honest Minty in the hopeless vulgarity which this fine lady had managed to carelessly import into her name? His eye kindled.

"She is an old friend of mine, Lady Canterbridge."

"How fortunate! Then I can please you by giving you good news of her. She is the coming sensation. They say she is very rich, but quite one of the people, you know: in fact, she makes no scruples of telling you her father was a blacksmith, I think, and takes the dear old man with her everywhere. Fitz-Harry raves about her, and says her naïveté is something too delicious. She is regularly in with some of the best people already. Lady Dungeness has taken her up, and Northforeland is only waiting for your cousin's engagement to be able to go over decently. Shall I ask her to Buckenthorpe?

—come, now, as an apology for my rudeness to your cousin?" She was very womanly now in spite of her high collar, her straight back, and her tightly-fitting jacket, as she stood there smiling. Suddenly, her smile faded; she drew her breath in quickly.

She had caught a glimpse of his usually thoughtful face and eyes, now illuminated with some pleasant memory.

"Thank you," he said smilingly, yet with a certain hesitation, as he thought of The Lookout and Araminta Eulalie Sharpe, and tried to reconcile them with the lady before him. "I should like it very much."

"Then you have known Miss Sharpe a long time?" continued Lady Canterbridge as they walked on.

"While we were at The Lookout she was our nearest neighbour."

"And I suppose your wife will consider it quite proper for you to see her again at my house?" said Lady Canterbridge, with a return of conventional levity.

"Oh! quite," said Bradley.

They had reached the low Norman-arched side-entrance to the quadrangle. As Bradley swung open the bolt-studded oaken-door to let her pass, she said carelessly,

"Then you are not coming in now?"

"No; I shall walk a little longer."

"And I am quite forgiven?"

"I am thanking you very much," he said, smiling

directly into her blue eyes. She lowered them, and vanished into the darkness of the passage.

The news of Minty's success was further corroborated by Sir Robert, who later that evening called Bradley into the study. "Frank has been writing from Nice that he has renewed his acquaintance with some old Californian friends of yours—a Mr. and Miss Sharpe. Lady Canterbridge says that they are well known in London to some of our friends, but I would like to ask you something about them. Lady Mainwaring was on the point of inviting them here when I received a letter from Mr. Sharpe asking for a *business* interview. Pray, who is this Sharpe?"

"You say he writes for a *business* interview?" asked Bradley.

"Yes."

Bradley hesitated for a moment and then said quietly, "Perhaps, then, I am justified in a breach of confidence to him, in order to answer your question. He is the man who has assumed all the liabilities of the Sierran Land and Timber Company to enable the Bank to resume payment. But he did it on the condition that you were never to know it. For the rest, he was a blacksmith who made a fortune, as Lady Canterbridge will tell you."

"How very odd—how kind, I mean! I should like to have been civil to him on Frank's account alone."

"I should see him on business and be civil to him

afterwards." Sir Robert received the American's levity with his usual seriousness.

"No, they must come here for Christmas. His daughter is"——

"Araminta Eulalie Sharpe," said Bradley, in defiant memory of Lady Canterbridge.

Sir Robert winced audibly. "I shall rely on you, my dear boy, to help me make it pleasant for them," he said.

Christmas came, but not Minty. It drew a large contingent from Oldenhurst to the quaint old church, who came to view the green-wreathed monuments, and walls spotted with crimson berries, as if with the blood of former Oldenhurst warriors, and to impress the wondering villagers with the ineffable goodness and bounty of the Creator towards the Lords of Oldenhurst and their friends. Sir Robert, a little gouty, kept the house, and Bradley, somewhat uneasy at the Sharpes' absence, but more distrait with other thoughts, wandered listlessly in the long library. At the lower angle it was embayed into the octagon space of a former tower, which was furnished as a quaint recess for writing or study, pierced through its enormous walls with a lance-shaped window, hidden by heavy curtains. He was gazing abstractedly at the melancholy eyes of Sir Percival, looking down from the dark panel opposite, when he heard the crisp rustle of a skirt. Lady Canterbridge, tightly and stiffly buttoned in black from her long narrow boots to her slim white-collared neck,

stood beside him with a prayer-book in her ungloved hand. Bradley coloured quickly; the penetrating incense of the Christmas boughs and branches that decked the walls and ceilings, mingling with some indefinable intoxicating aura from the woman at his side, confused his senses. He seemed to be losing himself in some forgotten past coeval with the long, quaintly-lighted room, the rich hangings, and the painted ancestor of this handsome woman. He recovered himself with an effort, and said, "You are going to church?"

"I may meet them coming home; it's all the same. You like *him?*" she said abruptly, pointing to the portrait. "I thought you did not care for that sort of man over there."

"A man like that must have felt the impotence of his sacrifice before he died, and that condoned everything," said Bradley, thoughtfully.

"Then you don't think him a fool? Bob says it was a fair bargain for a title and an office, and that by dying he escaped trial and the confiscation of what he had."

Bradley did not reply.

"I am disturbing your illusions again. Yet I rather like them. I think you are quite capable of a sacrifice —perhaps you know what it is already."

He felt that she was looking at him; he felt equally that he could not respond with a commonplace. He was silent.

"I have offended you again, Mr. Bradley," she said.

"Please be Christian, and pardon me. You know this is a season of peace and goodwill." She raised her blue eyes at the same moment to the Christmas decorations on the ceiling. They were standing before the parted drapery of the lance window. Midway between the arched curtains hung a spray of mistletoe—the conceit of a mischievous housemaid. Their eyes met it simultaneously.

Bradley had Lady Canterbridge's slim, white hand in his own. The next moment voices were heard in the passage, and the door nearly opposite to them opened deliberately. The idea of their apparent seclusion and half compromising attitude flashed through the minds of both at the same time. Lady Canterbridge stepped quickly backward, drawing Bradley with her, into the embrasure of the window; the folds of the curtain swung together and concealed them from view.

The door had been opened by the footman, ushering in a broad-shouldered man, who was carrying a travelling-bag and an umbrella in his hand. Dropping into an arm-chair before the curtain he waved away the footman, who, even now, mechanically repeated a previously vain attempt to relieve the stranger of his luggage.

"You leave that 'ere grip sack where it is, young man, and tell Sir Robert Mainwaring that Mr. Demander Sharpe, of Californy, wishes to see him—on business—on *business,* do ye' hear? You hang onter that sentence

—*on business!* it's about ez much ez you kin carry, I reckon, and leave that grip sack alone."

From behind the curtain Bradley made a sudden movement to go forward; but Lady Canterbridge—now quite pale but collected—restrained him with a warning movement of her hand. Sir Robert's stick and halting step were next heard along the passage, and he entered the room. His simple and courteous greeting of the stranger was instantly followed by a renewed attack upon the "grip sack," and a renewed defence of it by the stranger.

"No, Sir Robert," said the voice argumentatively, "this yer's a *business* interview, and until it's over—if *you* please—we'll remain ez we air. I'm Demander Sharpe, of Californy, and I and my darter, Minty, oncet had the pleasure of knowing your boy over thar, and of meeting him agin the other day at Nice."

"I think," said Sir Robert's voice gently, "that these are not the only claims you have upon me. I have only a day or two ago heard from Mr. Bradley that I owe to your generous hands and your disinterested liberality the saving of my California fortune."

There was the momentary sound of a pushed-back chair, a stamping of feet, and then Mr. Sharpe's voice rose high with the blacksmith's old querulous aggrieved utterance:

"So it's that finikin', conceited Bradley agin—that's giv' me away! Ef that man's all-fired belief in his being the Angel Gabriel and Dan'l Webster rolled inter one

don't beat anythin'! I suppose that high-flyin' jay-bird kalkilated to put you and me and my gal and yer boy inter harness for his fourhoss chariot and he sittin' kam on the box drivin' us! Why don't he 'tend to his own business, and look arter his own concerns—instead o' leaving Jinny Bradley and Loo Macy dependent on Kings and Queens and titled folks gen'rally, and he, Jim Bradley, philanderin' with another man's wife—while that thar man is hard at work tryin' to make a honest livin' fer his wife, buckin' agin faro an' the tiger genr'ally at Monaco! Eh? And that man a-intermeddlin' with me! Ef," continued the voice dropped to a tone of hopeless moral conviction, "Ef there's a man I mor'lly despise—it's that finikin' Jim Bradley."

"You quite misunderstand me, my dear Sir," said Sir Robert's hurried voice; "he told me you had pledged him to secresy, and he only revealed it to explain why you wished to see me."

There was a grunt of half-placated wrath from Sharpe and then the voice resumed, but more deliberately, "Well, to come back to business: you've got a boy, Francis, and I've got a darter, Araminty. They've sorter taken a shine to each other and they want to get married. Mind yer—wait a moment!—it wasn't allus so. No, Sir; when my gal Araminty first seed your boy in Californy she was poor, and she didn't kalkilate to get inter anybody's family unbeknownst or on sufferance. Then she got rich and you got poor; and then—hold on a minit!—she allows, does my girl, that there aint

any nearer chance o' their making a match than they were afore, for she isn't goin' to hev it said that she married your son fur the chance of some day becomin' Lady Mainwaring."

"One moment, Mr. Sharpe," said the voice of the Baronet, gravely: "I am both flattered and pained by what I believe to be the kindly object of your visit. Indeed, I may say I have gathered a suspicion of what might be the sequel of this most unhappy acquaintance of my son and your daughter; but I cannot believe that he has kept you in ignorance of his unfortunate prospects and his still more unfortunate state of health."

"When I told ye to hold on a minit," continued the blacksmith's voice, with a touch of querulousness in its accent, "that was jist wot I was comin' to. I knowed part of it from my own pocket, she knowed the rest of it from his lips and the doctors she interviewed. And then she says to me—sez my girl Minty—'Pop,' she sez, 'he's got nothing to live for now but his title, and that he never may live to get, so that I think ye kin jist go, Pop, and fairly and squarely, as a honest man, ask his father to let me hev him.' Them's my darter's own words, Sir Robert; and when I tell yer that she's got a million o' dollars to back them, ye'll know she means business every time."

"Did Francis know that you were coming here?"

"Bless ye, no! He don't know that she would have him. Ef it kem to that, he aint even asked her! She wouldn't let him until she was sure of *you.*"

"Then you mean to say there is no engagement?"

"In course not. I reckoned to do the square thing first with ye."

The halting step of the Baronet crossing the room was heard distinctly. He had stopped beside Sharpe. "My dear Mr. Sharpe," he said, in a troubled voice, "I cannot permit this sacrifice. It is too—too great!"

"Then," said Sharpe's voice querulously, "I'm afraid we must do without your permission. I didn't reckon to find a sort o' British Jim Bradley in you. If *you* can't permit my darter to sacrifice herself by marryin' your son, I can't permit her to sacrifice her love and him by *not* marryin' him. So I reckon this yer interview is over."

"I am afraid we are both old fools, Mr. Sharpe; but—we will talk this over with Lady Mainwaring. Come"—There was evidently a slight struggle near the chair over some inanimate object. But the next moment the Baronet's voice rose, persuasively, "Really, I must insist upon relieving you of your bag and umbrella."

"Well, if you'll let me telegraph 'yes' to Minty, I don't care if yer do."

When the room was quiet again, Lady Canterbridge and James Bradley silently slipped from the curtain, and, without a word, separated at the door.

There was a merry Christmas at Oldenhurst and at Nice. But whether Minty's loving sacrifice was accepted

or not, or whether she ever reigned as Lady Mainwaring, or lived an untitled widow, I cannot say. But as Oldenhurst still exists in all its pride and power, it is presumed that the peril that threatened its fortunes was averted, and that if another heroine was not found worthy of a frame in its picture-gallery, at least it had been sustained as of old by devotion and renunciation.

A DRIFT FROM REDWOOD CAMP.

A DRIFT FROM REDWOOD CAMP.

THEY had all known him as a shiftless, worthless creature. From the time he first entered Redwood Camp, carrying his entire effects in a red handkerchief on the end of a long-handled shovel, until he lazily drifted out of it on a plank in the terrible inundation of '56, they never expected anything better of him. In a community of strong men with sullen virtues and charmingly fascinating vices, he was tolerated as possessing neither—not even rising by any dominant human weakness or ludicrous quality to the importance of a butt. In the *dramatis personæ* of Redwood Camp he was a simple "super"—who had only passive, speechless rôles in those fierce dramas that were sometimes unrolled beneath its green-curtained pines. Nameless and penniless, he was overlooked by the census and ignored by the tax collector, while in a hotly-contested election for sheriff, when even the head-boards of the scant cemetery were consulted to fill the poll-lists, it was discovered that neither candidate had thought fit

to avail himself of his actual vote. He was debarred the rude heraldry of a nickname of achievement, and in a camp made up of "Euchre Bills," "Poker Dicks," "Profane Pete," and "Snap-shot Harry," was known vaguely as "him," "Skeesicks, or "that coot." It was remembered long after, with a feeling of superstition, that he had never even met with the dignity of an accident, nor received the fleeting honor of a chance shot meant for somebody else in any of the liberal and broadly comprehensive encounters which distinguished the camp. And the inundation that finally carried him out of it was partly anticipated by his passive incompetency, for while the others escaped—or were drowned in escaping—he calmly floated off on his plank without an opposing effort.

For all that, Elijah Martin—which was his real name—was far from being unamiable or repellent. That he was cowardly, untruthful, selfish, and lazy, was undoubtedly the fact; perhaps it was his peculiar misfortune that, just then, courage, frankness, generosity, and activity were the dominant factors in the life of Redwood Camp. His submissive gentleness, his unquestioned modesty, his half refinement, and his amiable exterior consequently availed him nothing against the fact that he was missed during a raid of the Digger Indians, and lied to account for it; or that he lost his right to a gold discovery by failing to make it good against a bully, and selfishly kept this discovery from the knowledge of the camp. Yet this weakness awakened

no animosity in his companions, and it is probable that the indifference of the camp to his fate in this final catastrophe came purely from a simple forgetfulness of one who at that supreme moment was weakly incapable.

Such was the reputation and such the antecedents of the man who, on the 15th of March, 1856, found himself adrift in a swollen tributary of the Minyo. A spring freshet of unusual volume had flooded the adjacent river until, bursting its bounds, it escaped through the narrow, wedge-shaped valley that held Redwood Camp. For a day and a night the surcharged river poured half its waters through the straggling camp. At the end of that time every vestige of the little settlement was swept away; all that was left was scattered far and wide in the country, caught in the hanging branches of water-side willows and alders, embayed in sluggish pools, dragged over submerged meadows, and one fragment—bearing up Elijah Martin—pursuing the devious courses of an unknown tributary fifty miles away. Had he been a rash, impatient man, he would have been speedily drowned in some earlier desperate attempt to reach the shore; had he been an ordinarily bold man, he would have succeeded in transferring himself to the branches of some obstructing tree; but he was neither, and he clung to his broken raft-like berth with an endurance that was half the paralysis of terror and half the patience of habitual misfortune.

Eventually he was caught in a side current, swept to the bank, and cast ashore on an unexplored wilderness.

His first consciousness was one of hunger that usurped any sentiment of gratitude for his escape from drowning. As soon as his cramped limbs permitted, he crawled out of the bushes in search of food. He did not know where he was; there was no sign of habitation—or even occupation—anywhere. He had been too terrified to notice the direction in which he had drifted—even if he had possessed the ordinary knowledge of a backwoodsman, which he did not. He was helpless. In his bewildered state, seeing a squirrel cracking a nut on the branch of a hollow tree near him, he made a half-frenzied dart at the frightened animal, which ran away. But the same association of ideas in his torpid and confused brain impelled him to search for the squirrel's hoard in the hollow of the tree. He ate the few hazel-nuts he found there, ravenously. The purely animal instinct satisfied, he seemed to have borrowed from it a certain animal strength and intuition. He limped through the thicket not unlike some awkward, shy quadrumane, stopping here and there to peer out through the openings over the marshes that lay beyond. His sight, hearing, and even the sense of smell had become preternaturally acute. It was the latter which suddenly arrested his steps with the odor of dried fish. It had a significance beyond the mere

instincts of hunger—it indicated the contiguity of some Indian encampment. And as such—it meant danger, torture, and death.

He stopped, trembled violently, and tried to collect his scattered senses. Redwood Camp had embroiled itself needlessly and brutally with the surrounding Indians, and only held its own against them by reckless courage and unerring marksmanship. The frequent use of a casual wandering Indian as a target for the practising rifles of its members had kept up an undying hatred in the heart of the aborigines and stimulated them to terrible and isolated reprisals. The scalped and skinned dead body of Jack Trainer, tied on his horse and held hideously upright by a cross of wood behind his saddle, had passed, one night, a slow and ghastly apparition, into camp; the corpse of Dick Ryner had been found anchored on the river-bed, disembowelled and filled with stone and gravel. The solitary and unprotected member of Redwood Camp who fell into the enemy's hands was doomed.

Elijah Martin remembered this, but his fears gradually began to subside in a certain apathy of the imagination, which, perhaps, dulled his apprehensions and allowed the instinct of hunger to become again uppermost. He knew that the low bark tents, or wigwams, of the Indians were hung with strips of dried salmon, and his whole being was now centred upon an attempt to stealthily procure a delicious morsel. As yet he had distinguished no other sign of life or habitation; a few

moments later, however, and grown bolder with an animal-like trustfulness in his momentary security, he crept out of the thicket and found himself near a long, low mound or burrow-like structure of mud and bark on the river-bank. A single narrow opening, not unlike the entrance of an Esquimau hut, gave upon the river. Martin had no difficulty in recognising the character of the building. It was a "sweat-house," an institution common to nearly all the aboriginal tribes of California. Half a religious temple, it was also half a sanitary asylum, was used as a Russian bath or superheated vault, from which the braves, sweltering and stifling all night, by smothered fires, at early dawn plunged, perspiring, into the ice-cold river. The heat and smoke were further utilized to dry and cure the long strips of fish hanging from the roof, and it was through the narrow aperture that served as a chimney that the odor escaped which Martin had detected. He knew that, as the bathers only occupied the house from midnight to early morn, it was now probably empty. He advanced confidently toward it.

He was a little surprised to find that the small open space between it and the river was occupied by a rude scaffolding, like that on which certain tribes exposed their dead, but in this instance it only contained the feathered leggings, fringed blanket, and eagle-plumed head-dress of some brave. He did not, however, linger in this plainly visible area, but quickly dropped on all-fours and crept into the interior of the

house. Here he completed his feast with the fish, and warmed his chilled limbs on the embers of the still smouldering fires. It was while drying his tattered clothes and shoeless feet that he thought of the dead brave's useless leggings and moccasins, and it occurred to him that he would be less likely to attract the Indians' attention from a distance and provoke a ready arrow, if he were disguised as one of them. Crawling out again, he quickly secured, not only the leggings, but the blanket and head-dress, and putting them on, cast his own clothes into the stream. A bolder, more energetic, or more provident man would have followed the act by quickly making his way back to the thicket to reconnoitre, taking with him a supply of fish for future needs. But Elijah Martin succumbed again to the recklessness of inertia; he yielded once more to the animal instinct of momentary security. He returned to the interior of the hut, curled himself again on the ashes, and weakly resolving to sleep until moonrise, and as weakly hesitating, ended by falling into uneasy but helpless stupor.

When he awoke, the rising sun, almost level with the low entrance to the sweat-house, was darting its direct rays into the interior, as if searching it with fiery spears. He had slept ten hours. He rose tremblingly to his knees. Everything was quiet without; he might yet escape. He crawled to the opening. The open space before it was empty, but the scaffolding was gone. The clear, keen air revived him. As he sprang

out, erect, a shout that nearly stunned him seemed to rise from the earth on all sides. He glanced around him in a helpless agony of fear. A dozen concentric circles of squatting Indians, whose heads were visible above the reeds, encompassed the banks around the sunken base of the sweat-house with successive dusky rings. Every avenue of escape seemed closed. Perhaps for that reason the attitude of his surrounding captors was passive rather than aggressive, and the shrewd, half-Hebraic profiles nearest him expressed only stoical waiting. There was a strange similarity of expression in his own immovable apathy of despair. His only sense of averting his fate was a confused idea of explaining his intrusion. His desperate memory yielded a few common Indian words. He pointed automatically to himself and the stream. His white lips moved.

"I come—from—the river!"

A guttural cry, as if the whole assembly were clearing their throats, went round the different circles. The nearest rocked themselves to and fro and bent their feathered heads toward him. A hollow-cheeked, decrepit old man arose and said, simply:

"It is he! The great chief has come!"

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He was saved. More than that, he was recreated. For, by signs and intimations he was quickly made aware that since the death of their late chief, their medicine-men had prophesied that his perfect successor should appear miraculously before them, borne noise-

lessly on the river *from the sea,* in the plumes and insignia of his predecessor. This mere coincidence of appearance and costume might not have been convincing to the braves had not Elijah Martin's actual deficiencies contributed to their unquestioned faith in him. Not only his inert possession of the sweat-house and his apathetic attitude in their presence, but his utter and complete unlikeness to the white frontiersmen of their knowledge and tradition — creatures of fire and sword and malevolent activity—as well as his manifest dissimilarity to themselves, settled their conviction of his supernatural origin. His gentle, submissive voice, his yielding will, his lazy helplessness, the absence of strange weapons and fierce explosives in his possession, his unwonted sobriety—all proved him an exception to his apparent race that was in itself miraculous. For it must be confessed that, in spite of the cherished theories of most romances and all statesmen and commanders, that *fear* is the great civilizer of the savage barbarian, and that he is supposed to regard the prowess of the white man and his mysterious death-dealing weapons as evidence of his supernatural origin and superior creation, the facts have generally pointed to the reverse. Elijah Martin was not long in discovering that when the Minyo hunter, with his obsolete bow, dropped dead by a bullet from a viewless and apparently noiseless space, it was *not* considered the lightnings of an avenging Deity, but was traced directly to the ambushed rifle of Kansas Joe, swayed by a

viciousness quite as human as their own; the spectacle of Blizzard Dick, verging on *delirium tremens,* and riding "amuck" into an Indian village with a revolver in each hand, did *not* impress them as a supernatural act, nor excite their respectful awe as much as the less harmful frenzy of one of their own medicine-men; they were *not* influenced by implacable white gods, who relaxed only to drive hard bargains and exchange mildewed flour and shoddy blankets for their fish and furs. I am afraid they regarded these raids of Christian civilization as they looked upon grasshopper plagues, famines, inundations, and epidemics; while an utterly impassive God washed his hands of the means he had employed, and even encouraged the faithful to resist and overcome his emissaries—the white devils! Had Elijah Martin been a student of theology, he would have been struck with the singular resemblance of these theories—although the application thereof was reversed —to the Christian faith. But Elijah Martin had neither the imagination of a theologian nor the insight of a politician. He only saw that he, hitherto ignored and despised in a community of half-barbaric men, now translated to a community of men wholly savage, was respected and worshipped!

It might have turned a stronger head than Elijah's. He was at first frightened, fearful lest his reception concealed some hidden irony, or that, like the flower-crowned victim of ancient sacrifice, he was exalted and sustained to give importance and majesty to some im-

pending martyrdom. Then he began to dread that his innocent deceit—if deceit it was—should be discovered; at last, partly from meekness and partly from the animal contentment of present security, he accepted the situation. Fortunately for him it was purely passive. The Great Chief of the Minyo tribe was simply an expressionless idol of flesh and blood. The previous incumbent of that office had been an old man, impotent and senseless of late years through age and disease. The chieftains and braves had consulted in council before him, and perfunctorily submitted their decisions, like offerings, to his unresponsive shrine. In the same way, all material events—expeditions, trophies, industries—were supposed to pass before the dull, impassive eyes of the great chief, for direct acceptance. On the second day of Elijah's accession, two of the braves brought a bleeding human scalp before him. Elijah turned pale, trembled, and averted his head, and then, remembering the danger of giving way to his weakness, grew still more ghastly. The warriors watched him with impassioned faces. A grunt—but whether of astonishment, dissent, or approval, he could not tell—went round the circle. But the scalp was taken away and never again appeared in his presence.

An incident still more alarming quickly followed. Two captives, white men, securely bound, were one day brought before him on their way to the stake, followed by a crowd of old and young squaws and children. The unhappy Elijah recognized in the prisoners two

packers from a distant settlement who sometimes passed through Redwood Camp. An agony of terror, shame, and remorse shook the pseudo chief to his crest of high feathers, and blanched his face beneath its paint and yellow ochre. To interfere to save them from the torture they were evidently to receive at the hands of those squaws and children, according to custom, would be exposure and death to him as well as themselves; while to assist by his passive presence at the horrible sacrifice of his countrymen was too much for even his weak selfishness. Scarcely knowing what he did as the lugubrious procession passed before him, he hurriedly hid his face in his blanket and turned his back upon the scene. There was a dead silence. The warriors were evidently unprepared for this extraordinary conduct of their chief. What might have been their action it was impossible to conjecture, for at that moment a little squaw, perhaps impatient for the sport and partly emboldened by the fact that she had been selected, only a few days before, as the betrothed of the new chief, approached him slyly from the other side. The horrified eyes of Elijah, momentarily raised from his blanket, saw and recognized her. The feebleness of a weak nature, that dared not measure itself directly with the real cause, vented its rage on a secondary object. He darted a quick glance of indignation and hatred at the young girl. She ran back in startled terror to her companions, a hurried consultation followed, and in another moment the whole bevy of girls, old women, and

children were on the wing, shrieking and crying, to their wigwams.

"You see," said one of the prisoners coolly to the other, in English, "I was right. They never intended to do anything to us. It was only a bluff. These Minyos are a different sort from the other tribes. They never kill anybody if they can help it."

"You're wrong," said the other, excitedly. "It was that big chief there, with his head in a blanket, that sent those dogs to the right about. Hell! did you see them run at just a look from him? He's a high and mighty feller, you bet. Look at his dignity!"

"That's so—he ain't no slouch," said the other, gazing at Elijah's muffled head, critically. "D——d if he ain't a born king."

The sudden conflict and utter revulsion of emotion that those simple words caused in Elijah's breast was almost incredible. He had been at first astounded by the revelation of the peaceful reputation of the unknown tribe he had been called upon to govern; but even this comforting assurance was as nothing compared to the greater revelations implied in the speaker's praise of himself. He, Elijah Martin! the despised, the rejected, the worthless outcast of Redwood Camp, recognized as a "born king," a leader; his power felt by the very men who had scorned him! And he had done nothing —stop! had he actually done *nothing?* Was it not possible that he was *really* what they thought him? His brain reeled under the strong, unaccustomed wine

of praise; acting upon his weak selfishness, it exalted him for a moment to their measure of his strength, even as their former belief in his inefficiency had kept him down. Courage is too often only the memory of past success. This was his first effort: he forgot he had not earned it, even as he now ignored the danger of earning it. The few words of unconscious praise had fallen like the blade of knighthood on his cowering shoulders; he had risen ennobled from the contact. Though his face was still muffled in his blanket, he stood erect and seemed to have gained in stature.

The braves had remained standing irresolute, and yet watchful, a few paces from their captives. Suddenly, Elijah, still keeping his back to the prisoners, turned upon the braves, with blazing eyes, violently throwing out his hands with the gesture of breaking bonds. Like all sudden demonstrations of undemonstrative men, it was extravagant, weird, and theatrical. But it was more potent than speech—the speech that, even if effective, would still have betrayed him to his countrymen. The braves hurriedly cut the thongs of the prisoners; another impulsive gesture from Elijah, and they, too, fled. When he lifted his eyes cautiously from his blanket, captors and captives had dispersed in opposite directions, and he was alone—and triumphant!

From that moment Elijah Martin was another man. He went to bed that night in an intoxicating dream of power; he arose a man of will, of strength. He read it in the eyes of the braves, albeit at times averted in

wonder. He understood, now, that although peace had been their habit and custom, they had nevertheless sought to test his theories of administration with the offering of the scalps and the captives, and in this detection of their common weakness he forgot his own. Most heroes require the contrast of the unheroic to set them off; and Elijah actually found himself devising means for strengthening the defensive and offensive character of the tribe, and was himself strengthened by it. Meanwhile the escaped packers did not fail to heighten the importance of their adventure by elevating the character and achievements of their deliverer; and it was presently announced throughout the frontier settlements that the hitherto insignificant and peaceful tribe of Minyos, who inhabited a large territory bordering on the Pacific Ocean, had developed into a powerful nation, only kept from the war-path by a more powerful but mysterious chief. The Government sent an Indian agent to treat with them, in its usual half-paternal, half-aggressive, and wholly inconsistent policy. Elijah, who still retained the imitative sense and adaptability to surroundings which belong to most lazy, impressible natures, and in striped yellow and vermilion features looked the chief he personated, met the agent with silent and becoming gravity. The council was carried on by signs. Never before had an Indian treaty been entered into with such perfect knowledge of the intentions and designs of the whites by the Indians, and such profound ignorance of the qualities of the In-

dians by the whites. It need scarcely be said that the treaty was an unquestionable Indian success. They did not give up their arable lands; what they did sell to the agent they refused to exchange for extravagant-priced shoddy blankets, worthless guns, damp powder, and mouldy meal. They took pay in dollars, and were thus enabled to open more profitable commerce with the traders at the settlements for better goods and better bargains; they simply declined beads, whiskey, and Bibles at any price. The result was that the traders found it profitable to protect them from their countrymen, and the chances of wantonly shooting down a possible valuable customer stopped the old indiscriminate rifle-practice. The Indians were allowed to cultivate their fields in peace. Elijah purchased for them a few agricultural implements. The catching, curing, and smoking of salmon became an important branch of trade. They waxed prosperous and rich; they lost their nomadic habits—a centralized settlement bearing the external signs of an Indian village took the place of their old temporary encampments, but the huts were internally an improvement on the old wigwams. The dried fish were banished from the tent-poles to long sheds especially constructed for that purpose. The sweat-house was no longer utilized for wordly purposes. The wise and mighty Elijah did not attempt to reform their religion, but to preserve it in its integrity.

That these improvements and changes were due to the influence of one man was undoubtedly true, but

that he was necessarily a superior man did not follow. Elijah's success was due partly to the fact that he had been enabled to impress certain negative virtues, which were part of his own nature, upon a community equally constituted to receive them. Each was strengthened by the recognition in each other of the unexpected value of those qualities; each acquired a confidence begotten of their success. *"He-hides-his-face,"* as Elijah Martin was known to the tribe after the episode of the released captives, was really not so much of an autocrat as many constitutional rulers.

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Two years of tranquil prosperity passed. Elijah Martin, foundling, outcast, without civilized ties or relationship of any kind, forgotten by his countrymen, and lifted into alien power, wealth, security, respect, became—homesick!

It was near the close of a summer afternoon. He was sitting at the door of his lodge, which overlooked, on one side, the far-shining levels of the Pacific and, on the other, the slow descent to the cultivated meadows and banks of the Minyo River, that debouched through a waste of salt-marsh, beach-grass, sand-dunes, and foamy estuary into the ocean. The headland, or promontory—the only eminence of the Minyo territory—had been reserved by him for his lodge, partly on account of its isolation from the village at its base, and partly for the view it commanded of his territory. Yet his wearying and discontented eyes were more often found on the

ocean, as a possible highway of escape from his irksome position, than on the plain and the distant range of mountains, so closely connected with the nearer past and his former detractors. In his vague longing he had no desire to return to them, even in triumph; in his present security there still lingered a doubt of his ability to cope with the old conditions. It was more like his easy, indolent nature—which revived in his prosperity—to trust to this least practical and remote solution of his trouble. His homesickness was as vague as his plan for escape from it; he did not know exactly what he regretted, but it was probably some life he had not enjoyed, some pleasure that had escaped his former incompetency and poverty.

He had sat thus a hundred times, as aimlessly blinking at the vast possibilities of the shining sea beyond, turning his back upon the nearer and more practicable mountains, lulled by the far-off beating of monotonous rollers, the lonely cry of the curlew and plover, the drowsy changes of alternate breaths of cool, fragrant reeds and warm, spicy sands that blew across his eyelids, and succumbed to sleep, as he had done a hundred times before. The narrow strips of colored cloth, insignia of his dignity, flapped lazily from his tent-poles, and at last seemed to slumber with him; the shadows of the leaf-tracery thrown by the bay-tree, on the ground at his feet, scarcely changed its pattern. Nothing moved but the round, restless, berry-like eyes of Wachita, his child-wife, the former heroine of the

incident with the captive packers, who sat near her lord, armed with a willow wand, watchful of intruding wasps, sand-flies, and even the more ostentatious advances of a rotund and clerical-looking humble-bee, with his monotonous homily. Content, dumb, submissive, vacant, at such times, Wachita, debarred her husband's confidences through the native customs and his own indifferent taciturnity, satisfied herself by gazing at him with the wondering but ineffectual sympathy of a faithful dog. Unfortunately for Elijah her purely mechanical ministration could not prevent a more dangerous intrusion upon his security.

He awoke with a light start, and eyes that gradually fixed upon the woman a look of returning consciousness. Wachita pointed timidly to the village below.

"The Messenger of the Great White Father has come to-day, with his wagons and horses; he would see the chief of the Minyos, but I would not disturb my lord."

Elijah's brow contracted. Relieved of its characteristic metaphor, he knew that this meant that the new Indian agent had made his usual official visit, and had exhibited the usual anxiety to see the famous chieftain.

"Good!" he said. "White Rabbit [his lieutenant] will see the Messenger and exchange gifts. It is enough."

"The white messenger has brought his wangee [white] woman with him. They would look upon the

face of him who hides it," continued Wachita, dubiously. "They would that Wachita should bring them nearer to where my lord is, that they might see him when he knew it not."

Elijah glanced moodily at his wife, with the half suspicion with which he still regarded her alien character. "Then let Wachita go back to the squaws and old women, and let her hide herself with them until the wangee strangers are gone," he said, curtly. "I have spoken. Go!"

Accustomed to these abrupt dismissals, which did not necessarily indicate displeasure, Wachita disappeared without a word. Elijah, who had risen, remained for a few moments leaning against the tent-poles, gazing abstractedly toward the sea. The bees droned uninterruptedly in his ears, the far-off roll of the breakers came to him distinctly; but suddenly, with greater distinctness, came the murmur of a woman's voice.

"He don't look savage a bit! Why, he's real handsome."

"Hush! you——" said a second voice, in a frightened whisper.

"But if he *did* hear he couldn't understand," returned the first voice. A suppressed giggle followed.

Luckily, Elijah's natural and acquired habits of repression suited the emergency. He did not move, although he felt the quick blood fly to his face, and the voice of the first speaker had suffused him with a strange and delicious anticipation. He restrained him-

self, though the words she had naively dropped were filling him with new and tremulous suggestion. He was motionless, even while he felt that the vague longing and yearning which had possessed him hitherto was now mysteriously taking some unknown form and action.

The murmuring ceased. The humble-bee's drone again became ascendant—a sudden fear seized him. She was *going;* he should never see her! While he had stood there a dolt and sluggard, she had satisfied her curiosity and stolen away. With a sudden yielding to impulse, he darted quickly in the direction where he had heard her voice. The thicket moved, parted, crackled, and rustled, and then undulated thirty feet before him in a long wave, as if from the passage of some lithe, invisible figure. But at the same moment a little cry, half of alarm, half of laughter, broke from his very feet, and a bent manzanito-bush, relaxed by frightened fingers, flew back against his breast. Thrusting it hurriedly aside, his stooping, eager face came almost in contact with the pink, flushed cheeks and tangled curls of a woman's head. He was so near, her moist and laughing eyes almost drowned his eager glance; her parted lips and white teeth were so close to his that her quick breath took away his own.

She had dropped on one knee, as her companion fled, expecting he would overlook her as he passed, but his direct onset had extracted the feminine outcry. Yet even then she did not seem greatly frightened.

"It's only a joke, sir," she said, coolly lifting herself

to her feet by grasping his arm. "I'm Mrs. Dall, the Indian agent's wife. They said you wouldn't let anybody see you—and *I* determined I would. That's all!" She stopped, threw back her tangled curls behind her ears, shook the briers and thorns from her skirt, and added: "Well, I reckon you aren't afraid of a woman, are you? So no harm's done. Good-by!"

She drew slightly back as if to retreat, but the elasticity of the manzanito against which she was leaning threw her forward once more. He again inhaled the perfume of her hair; he saw even the tiny freckles that darkened her upper lip and brought out the moist, red curve below. A sudden recollection of a playmate of his vagabond childhood flashed across his mind; a wild inspiration of lawlessness, begotten of his past experience, his solitude, his dictatorial power, and the beauty of the woman before him, mounted to his brain. He threw his arms passionately around her, pressed his lips to hers, and with a half-hysterical laugh drew back and disappeared in the thicket.

Mrs. Dall remained for an instant dazed and stupefied. Then she lifted her arm mechanically, and with her sleeve wiped her bruised mouth and the ochre-stain that his paint had left, like blood, upon her cheek. Her laughing face had become instantly grave, but not from fear; her dark eyes had clouded, but not entirely with indignation. She suddenly brought down her hand sharply against her side with a gesture of discovery. "That's no Injun!" she said, with prompt de-

cision. The next minute she plunged back into the trail again, and the dense foliage once more closed around her. But as she did so the broad, vacant face and the mutely wondering eyes of Wachita rose, like a placid moon, between the branches of a tree where they had been hidden, and shone serenely and impassively after her.

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A month elapsed. But it was a month filled with more experience to Elijah than his past two years of exaltation. In the first few days following his meeting with Mrs. Dall, he was possessed by terror, mingled with flashes of desperation, at the remembrance of his rash imprudence. His recollection of extravagant frontier chivalry to womankind, and the swift retribution of the insulted husband or guardian, alternately filled him with abject fear or extravagant recklessness. At times prepared for flight, even to the desperate abandonment of himself in a canoe to the waters of the Pacific; at times he was on the point of inciting his braves to attack the Indian agency and precipitate the war that he felt would be inevitable. As the days passed, and there seemed to be no interruption to his friendly relations with the agency, with that relief a new, subtle joy crept into Elijah's heart. The image of the agent's wife framed in the leafy screen behind his lodge, the perfume of her hair and breath mingled with the spicing of the bay, the brief thrill and tantalization of the stolen kiss still haunted him. Through his long, shy abstention

from society, and his two years of solitary exile, the fresh beauty of this young Western wife, in whom the frank artlessness of girlhood still lingered, appeared to him like a superior creation. He forgot his vague longings in the inception of a more tangible but equally unpractical passion. He remembered her unconscious and spontaneous admiration of him; he dared to connect it with her forgiving silence. If she had withheld her confidences from her husband, he could hope—he knew not exactly what!

One afternoon Wachita put into his hand a folded note. With an instinctive presentiment of its contents, Elijah turned red and embarrassed in receiving it from the woman who was recognized as his wife. But the impassive, submissive manner of this household drudge, instead of touching his conscience, seemed to him a vulgar and brutal acceptance of the situation that dulled whatever compunction he might have had. He opened the note and read hurriedly as follows:

"You took a great freedom with me the other day, and I am justified in taking one with you now. I believe you understand English as well as I do. If you want to explain that, and your conduct to me, I will be at the same place this afternoon. My friend will accompany me, but she need not hear what you have to say."

Elijah read the letter, which might have been written by an ordinary school-girl, as if it had conveyed the veiled rendezvous of a princess. The reserve, caution,

and shyness which had been the safeguard of his weak nature were swamped in a flow of immature passion. He flew to the interview with the eagerness and inexperience of first love. He was completely at her mercy. So utterly was he subjugated by her presence that she did not even run the risk of his passion. Whatever sentiment might have mingled with her curiosity, she was never conscious of a necessity to guard herself against it. At this second meeting she was in full possession of his secret. He had told her everything; she had promised nothing in return—she had not even accepted anything. Even her actual after-relations to the denouement of his passion are still shrouded in mystery.

Nevertheless, Elijah lived two weeks on the unsubstantial memory of this meeting. What might have followed could not be known, for at the end of that time an outrage—so atrocious that even the peaceful Minyos were thrilled with savage indignation—was committed on the outskirts of the village. An old chief, who had been specially selected to deal with the Indian agent, and who kept a small trading outpost, had been killed and his goods despoiled by a reckless Redwood packer. The murderer had coolly said that he was only "serving out" the tool of a fraudulent imposture on the Government, and that he dared the arch-impostor himself, the so-called Minyo chief, to help himself. A wave of ungovernable fury surged up to the very tent-poles of Elijah's lodge and demanded venge-

ance. Elijah trembled and hesitated. In the thraldom of his selfish passion for Mrs. Dall he dared not contemplate a collision with her countrymen. He would have again sought refuge in his passive, non-committal attitude, but he knew the impersonal character of Indian retribution and compensation—a sacrifice of equal value, without reference to the culpability of the victim —and he dreaded some spontaneous outbreak. To prevent the enforced expiation of the crime by some innocent brother packer, he was obliged to give orders for the pursuit and arrest of the criminal, secretly hoping for his escape or the interposition of some circumstance to avert his punishment. A day of sullen expectancy to the old men and squaws in camp, of gloomy anxiety to Elijah alone in his lodge, followed the departure of the braves on the war-path. It was midnight when they returned. Elijah, who from his habitual reserve and the accepted etiquette of his exalted station had remained impassive in his tent, only knew from the guttural rejoicings of the squaws that the expedition had been successful and the captive was in their hands. At any other time he might have thought it an evidence of some growing scepticism of his infallibility of judgment and a diminution of respect that they did not confront him with their prisoner. But he was too glad to escape from the danger of exposure and possible arraignment of his past life by the desperate captive, even though it might not have been understood by the spectators. He reflected that the omission might

have arisen from their recollection of his previous aversion to a retaliation on other prisoners. Enough that they would wait his signal for the torture and execution at sunrise the next day.

The night passed slowly. It is more than probable that the selfish and ignoble torments of the sleepless and vacillating judge were greater than those of the prisoner who dozed at the stake between his curses. Yet it was part of Elijah's fatal weakness that his kinder and more human instincts were dominated even at that moment by his lawless passion for the Indian agent's wife, and his indecision as to the fate of his captive was as much due to this preoccupation as to a selfish consideration of her relations to the result. He hated the prisoner for his infelicitous and untimely crime, yet he could not make up his mind to his death. He paced the ground before his lodge in dishonorable incertitude. The small eyes of the submissive Wachita watched him with vague solicitude.

Toward morning he was struck by a shameful inspiration. He would creep unperceived to the victim's side, unloose his bonds, and bid him fly to the Indian agency. There he was to inform Mrs. Dall that her husband's safety depended upon his absenting himself for a few days, but that she was to remain and communicate with Elijah. She would understand everything, perhaps; at least she would know that the prisoner's release was to please her, but even if she did not, no harm would be done, a white man's life would

be saved, and his real motive would not be suspected. He turned with feverish eagerness to the lodge. Wachita had disappeared—probably to join the other women. It was well; she would not suspect him.

The tree to which the doomed man was bound was, by custom, selected nearest the chief's lodge, within its sacred enclosure, with no other protection than that offered by its reserved seclusion and the outer semicircle of warriors' tents before it. To escape, the captive would therefore have to pass beside the chief's lodge to the rear and descend the hill toward the shore. Elijah would show him the way, and make it appear as if he had escaped unaided. As he glided into the shadow of a group of pines, he could dimly discern the outline of the destined victim, secured against one of the larger trees in a sitting posture, with his head fallen forward on his breast as if in sleep. But at the same moment another figure glided out from the shadow and approached the fatal tree. It was Wachita!

He stopped in amazement. But in another instant a flash of intelligence made it clear. He remembered her vague uneasiness and solicitude at his agitation, her sudden disappearance; she had fathomed his perplexity, as she had once before. Of her own accord she was going to release the prisoner! The knife to cut his cords glittered in her hand. Brave and faithful animal!

He held his breath as he drew nearer. But, to his horror, the knife suddenly flashed in the air and darted down, again and again, upon the body of the helpless

man. There was a convulsive struggle, but no outcry, and the next moment the body hung limp and inert in its cords. Elijah would himself have fallen, half-fainting, against a tree, but, by a revulsion of feeling, came the quick revelation that the desperate girl had rightly solved the problem! She had done what he ought to have done—and his loyalty and manhood were preserved. That conviction and the courage to act upon it—to have called the sleeping braves to witness his sacrifice—would have saved him, but it was ordered otherwise.

As the girl rapidly passed him he threw out his hand and seized her wrist. "Who did you do this for?" he demanded.

"For you," she said, stupidly.

"And why?"

"Because you no kill him—you love his squaw."

"*His* squaw!" He staggered back. A terrible suspicion flashed upon him. He dashed Wachita aside and ran to the tree. It was the body of the Indian agent! Aboriginal justice had been satisfied. The warriors had not caught the *murderer,* but, true to their idea of vicarious retribution, had determined upon the expiatory sacrifice of a life as valuable and innocent as the one they had lost.

. . . . . .

"So the Gov'rment hev at last woke up and wiped out them cussed Digger Minyos," said Snap-shot Harry, as he laid down the newspaper, in the brand-new saloon

of the brand-new town of Redwood. "I see they've stampeded both banks of the Minyo River, and sent off a lot to the reservation. I reckon the soldiers at Fort Cass got sick o' sentiment after those hounds killed the Injun agent, and are beginning to agree with us that the only 'good Injun' is a dead one."

"And it turns out that that wonderful chief, that them two packers used to rave about, woz about as big a devil ez any, and tried to run off with the agent's wife, only the warriors killed her. I'd like to know what become of him. Some says he was killed, others allow that he got away. I've heerd tell that he was originally some kind of Methodist preacher!—a kind o' saint that got a sort o' spiritooal holt on the old squaws and children."

"Why don't you ask old Skeesicks? I see he's back here ag'in—and grubbin' along at a dollar a day on tailin's. He's been somewhere up north, they say."

"What, Skeesicks? that shiftless, o'n'ry cuss! You bet he wusn't anywhere where there was danger or fighting. Why, you might as well hev suspected *him* of being the big chief himself! There he comes—ask him."

And the laughter was so general that Elijah Martin —alias Skeesicks—lounging shyly into the bar-room, joined in it weakly.

THE END.

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