The Black Cat

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The Black Cat

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His Millionaire Client.*

BY SALLIE PATE STEEN.

WHEN the government committed the crime of '93,— in other words, when the Cherokee Strip was opened for settlement, — Russell Grier made the run. He succeeded in reaching and "holding down" for two days and a night a town lot which afterwards proved to be in the middle of one of the principal thoroughfares of a city of the future. Unfortunately his concern was very much with the present. He had come West with the hackneyed resolve to make money, and, in Strip parlance, to make it quick. Incidentally he intended to practise law. Having failed in his primary ambition, he hung out his shingle. For two years, owing to prompt failures to pay office rent, he was never able to regard that sign as a fixture. During that time he had watched the town widen and spread until it crystallized, a blotch of supreme ugliness, upon the prairie. He had lived through with considerable philosophy a railroad fight, a town-site war, a county-seat squabble, and the petering out of the land office practise. In experience he was rich. Financially he was reduced to the possession of some

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sticks of office furniture, a depleted wardrobe, and the aforesaid sign, which, as the owner of his shack informed him, would, on the morrow, flutter elsewhere. Beyond these effects his only remaining resource was the unpunched number of a meal ticket, which had otherwise taken on the appearance of a sieve. One more meal, one more night's lodging, and then — chaos!

It was while he was taking this pitiful account of stock that the young lawyer's mind reverted, inappropriately enough, to a dress suit at the bottom of his trunk, — to the last time he had worn it, to something whispered behind an épergne of American Beauty roses. His last dinner, as far as his prospects pointed, in the Strip! For two years he had hesitated to destroy the iridescent tissue which during that time he had been carefully weaving in letters to relatives and friends. But pride has its limits. These limits in his case had been reached, Grier decided, until he reflected that nothing insures a man's reticence, at long range, like the want of a postage stamp, or of the amount of charges on a telegram. To-morrow he might even be capable of sending one "Collect." In the meantime he turned to his desk and began picking phrases, with a view to that contingency.

"Are you running this shop?"

The question came as though from the skies. He had not heard any one enter. A man stood over him, darkening the daylight, before Grier was aware of his presence. As the young lawyer glanced up, he started with a strange rigor of repulsion, for there was that in his visitor's face which to his fellow-man was a warning.

Not that he was a typical Western rough. There was nothing in his appearance of the cowboy, the bandit, or the train robber, those fruitful subjects for magazine illustration. Even the bluntness of his speech was a thin disguise, as Grier afterwards learned, and one that he was continually dropping. But the oblique and sinister arch of his brows, the cruel backward curl of his lips from his teeth, the fierce yet shifty glance of his eye, all these betrayed him.

"I don't suppose you've ever seen me before," he said, dropping into a chair, "but I've heard you speak at one or two political meetings, and I liked the way you talked. I happen to want a

lawyer's opinion about a little matter. I suppose it's customary to 'dough up' beforehand?"

Grier replied that he believed a fee was necessary. His visitor glanced at the meal ticket, which still lay on the table, as he took out two tens and a five from a fat pocketbook and placed them beside the ticket.

"And now," he said, drawing himself up with a subtle change of manner, "about the obligations of this here retainer. As I understand it, you're not only bound to defend my interests, but there's to be no going over to the other side, and no talking."

"If I accept it," Grier returned curtly; for he did not relish his client's manner, and failed to appreciate his instructions on legal ethics. And then he stopped suddenly, as the meal ticket caught his eye. The other laughed as Mephistopheles might have laughed at Faust.

"If you accept it, then," he said. "While you are making up your mind to accept it I'll put the case. Suppose a man had fled from his native State to escape the penalty of a crime. Suppose that after some years had passed a fortune were left him. Is there no way for him to claim it without risking his safety? Could it be made over to some other person? Could it be seized ostensibly for debt? Is there no possible means, no legal quirk or quibble, by which an outlaw as well as another man could come at what is honestly his own?"

Just why Grier could never explain, but at that moment there flashed into his mind the recollection of a letter that he had received that morning. It was simply one of those periodical inquiries after fugitives from justice, which are sent out at intervals by certain law associations. With his mind filled with the name of the particular criminal sought he turned to the man before him.

"Before I could give you anything like a reliable opinion, Mr. Pennington,—" he began, and never finished, for, with a white rage of fear and horror in his face, the man sprang toward him.

"Damn you, what do you mean by calling me by that name?" he gasped. It was by God's mercy that the young lawyer had his revolver out before the other. As it was, the man stopped with the pistol barrel between his eyes, panting like a mad dog.

"I fail to understand you," Grier said, when he had found his voice, "but there's no necessity for giving yourself away. If you will sit down I will show you the letter which was in my mind when I called — or miscalled your name. It contains a printed slip which has probably been sent out every year since Charles J. Pennington escaped from the State of California under a death sentence for murder.

Grier extended the letter in his left hand, still holding the pistol in his right. The other read it, wiping the cold drops from his face.

"And now," the lawyer went on, taking up the money which still lay on the desk, "this little affair has quite decided me. I accept your retainer and consider myself bound by the utmost stringency of the act — doubly bound by the consequences of my own blunder. As for my addressing you by the name mentioned in that letter, I give you my word of honor, as a man and a lawyer, that I can no more explain it than you can. Your statement of a case in which a criminal was concerned reminded me of the letter which you hold in your hand. I unconsciously addressed you by the name mentioned in that letter. That is absolutely all that I can tell you."

His client's face relaxed as he listened. "There's no use denying that I've made a fool of myself," he said sullenly, "but you'd have to know, sooner or later, that I am the man who would inherit the money if there wasn't a good reason for my not claiming it. I was a boy of twenty when I got into trouble about a woman — a woman, too," with a sneer, "that I wonder now I ever looked at. But that's neither here nor there. There's no use in raking up the past. I don't want your opinion about it, for it wouldn't help me. What I do want to know about is this money. I must have it. It is mine. My old father spent his life, aye, and shortened it, in hoarding up the dollars. There was but one thing he loved better, and that was his son, who stood in the shadow of the gallows. He left the money to me to keep the noose from my neck, but he overrated the power of his money. He thought it could do anything; but I know better. I know that if I ever set foot within the State of California, or if its laws ever reach me, I'll swing. And I'll not throw away a cent in fighting the

courts. No, sir, I'll take my chances. A short life and a merry one. I've managed to dodge the law for ten years, and I'll risk dodging it awhile. Now let me tell you." His eyes glittered, he leaned over the desk and dropped his voice to a husky whisper. "This is no small deal. There's a cool million waiting in the city of San Francisco for Charles Pennington to claim it. You contrive some way for him to get it without risking his neck, and the day it is handed over to him a third of it is yours."

Grier caught his breath. "Wait a moment," he said. "Let me think it over! I'm not accustomed to receive such an offer more than once a year, and it rattles me."

The third of a million! It made his head swim. As he paced the floor a dozen wild schemes were revolving in his brain. To be sure, his client was an outlaw, a criminal, a murderer. But with these phases of his career he had nothing to do. He was pledged to his interests. He had not been employed by the great State of California to apprehend the man. The money, moreover, was honestly his own. The hands of his dead father held it out to him. In fact, Grier was already beginning to entertain the remarkable opinion that a criminal naturally stood in greater need of two thirds of a million than did an honest man.

Pausing in his study, the lawyer faced his client. "Have you a wife?" he asked abruptly. He was unprepared for the dark flush that swept across his companion's face.

"It's best to be perfectly frank with you," the lawyer went on. "There's just one chance in a thousand of getting the money, and that chance would be through your wife."

"I'll have no risks taken so far as she is concerned," the other said roughly.

"There would be none. Let her make out a case of inexcusable abandonment against you, and by the laws of the State she can claim the money, the whole of it probably, if she can sustain charges of extreme cruelty on your part. Her ignorance of your whereabouts would simply bear out her statements."

There was no answer. The man had risen, and with his back turned stared moodily out of the window. Struck by his sudden change from red-hot enthusiasm to apparent indifference, Grier ventured another question.

"I am supposing, of course, that she is aware of your — of your hampered condition?"

"She is," he answered curtly.

"The risk, then, would be yours alone. There could be none personally, for her. If she is clever, — pardon me, I use the word in a legal sense simply, — cool, shrewd, determined, the danger for you is reduced to a minimum."

Still no answer. His listener stood, obstinately silent, his broad shoulders shutting out the light from the dusky panes. The man's phlegm nettled his companion, whose nerves were still tingling from the late encounter.

"You will understand," he said testily, "that I am not urging this upon you. I have given you my opinion, and been paid for it. Very well, we are quits. If you are not satisfied, some other lawyer may please you with a better. I should decline to conduct the case on any other lines than those I have mentioned."

"I'm not particularly anxious to hand this story around from one law office to another," said Pennington savagely. "A final decision, moreover, does not rest altogether with me. I live about ten miles from town. If you will ride out with me some afternoon we can talk the matter over."

He spoke with his hand upon the door knob. Before Grier could intimate that to go to the house of a client for consultation would be hardly professional, he had nodded curtly and was gone.

Now, setting legal etiquette aside, the prospect of being drawn into anything like social relations with his client was far from agreeable to Grier. Some murderers were no doubt pleasant and entertaining gentlemen, but this particular outlaw laid claim to no such distinctions, and the lawyer was haunted, moreover, by a lurking suspicion that the fact of his having in a manner forced the other's confidence had not raised him in that person's esteem. Naturally he went to bed that night with no very pleasant anticipations. Nor were his forebodings lessened when, the next afternoon, Pennington rode up to the office, leading by the bridle an extra saddle horse. Grier had counted on at least a few days of reflection before going home with his client, and it was in his mind to palter, to put him off, to refuse point blank, if necessary, to accompany him. But there was that in Pennington's habitual

sneer as he addressed his lawyer which the latter chose to construe as a challenge to his courage, and he was young enough to meet it. So he went back into the office, ostensibly to "look around and lock up," and came back carrying in his hip pocket the revolver that had stood him in such good stead the day before. Even then he felt disconcerted, at first, to read in the eye of his prospective host that he was as well aware of the concealed weapon as was its owner. But, once he had left the town behind him, his spirits rose with every stride of his good horse. On such a day it was not in his blood to cherish forebodings. Little by little he yielded himself to that charm of which those who have never seen the prairies in early spring can know nothing, — the pale, severe charm of the gray monochrome of dead grasses breaking here and there into spots and flecks of vivid green, of the misty sweep of an April day, of the wild, floating melancholy of the meadow-lark's call.

Naturally the presence of his silent companion added nothing to Grier's enjoyment of the ride, but the latter felt no weariness when they drew rein before a long, low sod house of the sort common to this country, and in outward appearance undistinguishable from half a dozen they had passed already. But the room into which he was ushered appeared, even at first glance, vastly different from that of the average Strip dweller. Its walls had been carefully cemented, their dull gray plaster forming an artistic background for the two or three fine etchings that adorned them. The floor was covered by a dull-hued Oriental rug. A wide, low couch stood in one corner, a grand piano in another. There was a well-filled bookcase, and a round table littered with magazines and papers. An open wood fire burned on the hearth, and some prairie flowers in a big Wedgwood bowl scented the warm air.

So conventional, indeed, were the room's appointments that Grier might have turned his back to the windows and imagined himself in the morning room of a Fifth Avenue residence.

All these observations the young lawyer found time for during the absence of his host, who, with a muttered excuse, had disappeared into the adjoining room. But he had hardly recovered from the surprise produced by his surroundings when Penning-

ton returned accompanied by a woman, the first glimpse of whom awakened an added sense of wonderment. This time, however, he could no more have described the beauty of the woman whose entrance so affected him than he could have analyzed the charm of her presence. Indeed, his only coherent impressions were those of horror that she should be mated with the man beside her, and of quickened aversion for Pennington — feelings which he laid to the charge of the sudden subtle change in the demeanor of his host. He had always distrusted the manner that can be put off and on like a loose glove; and in Pennington's bearing there was a spurious fineness, an easy assumption of gallantry, amazing as a proof of his powers of acting, but which left his visitor still convinced of the brutality of the man's real nature. At the same time he was bewildered by his conflicting impressions. It was especially hard to reconcile this man's evident passion for the woman beside him with the wolfish suspicion which darkened his occasional furtive glance at her downcast face. There was a tenseness in the very atmosphere. And when, in obedience to Pennington's bland suggestion, the three seated themselves at the table for consultation, Grier felt himself possessed by a grim fancy that he was playing a game in which the stakes were not declared, and whose end he could but fearfully forecast. In the beginning he had intended simply to hold his own and watch the players, but already his interest had grown too intense for an attitude so passive.

It was only after they had seated themselves that he learned, with some surprise, that their plan of action had not been disclosed to the woman on whom so much depended; his client stating, with a sardonic smile, that he thought it best for the lawyer to explain his own theories. Afterward Grier wondered if the man had assumed this neutral rôle for the purpose of gauging the effect of the explanation upon the third member of the council. While going through it, however, he felt conscious only of a feeling of embarrassment, for the woman's beauty bewildered him, and the presence of the man who sat watching them with sinister, half-shut eyes did not add to his self-possession. But it was not until her first question that he forgot his promised third of a million and went blindly over to her side of the game.

"And my identity," she said, with strange hesitation, "will there be no trouble about that?"

The lawyer shook his head. "As Mr. Pennington's wife," he replied, "you will have no difficulty about that. Your marriage certificate as affirmative proof would be sufficient."

No sooner were the words spoken than Grier longed to recall them. Even if she deserved it, he disliked to see a woman suffer; and pitted against the sudden pained flush of that exquisite face the purchasing power of his client's inheritance had been overrated. There was a dull silence, during which he felt his head going. Finally,—

"The abandonment scheme," he said with a gulp, wondering meantime at the steadiness of his own voice, "has, after all, its weak points. An altogether different idea presented itself after Mr. Pennington had left me last night. The execution of a power of attorney, enabling you to act in his stead, would be far more feasible, although his signature might have to be identified."

"Which can be done," broke in the subject of their discussion, with great excitement. "The attorney who drew up my father's will can swear to it."

"The only objection then is removed. As a matter of precaution, however, this power of attorney should be acknowledged in some State or Territory as far as possible from your place of residence, — say in Texas, say in Mexico. You don't want to furnish a clue to your enemies."

"No, by God!" the other cried, bringing his hand down upon the table. "But it is a good scheme, an excellent scheme. Let me see if you have grasped it, Anita." And as the speaker bent toward her, Grier fancied that he saw in the man's eyes that lurking devil of distrust. "We start for Mexico, the lawyer, you, and I. Armed with your power of attorney, and accompanied by our legal adviser here, you go on to California to claim my inheritance for me. When you return with the million, we can put half the world between us and this cursed dread of discovery."

"But you are forgetting the terrible risk," she said in a low tone. "Do not make me a party to it, I beseech you. Let the money go. Why should you care for it as compared to your safety?"

As the pleading sweetness of her voice and eyes sank into his own mind, Grier did not wonder that doubt seemed to die out of his client's. Apparently his next words, however, were uttered with a view to forcing some further expression of feeling from her. For he turned to the lawyer with a sort of reckless triumph and asked when he could be ready to start, — next week — to-morrow — the day after? Whereupon, moved by the pale despair in the woman's face, the young attorney made his first move in the strange game. He said that it would be impossible for him to leave within a fortnight, — his clients, his practise, must be considered. At which Pennington laughed coarsely, declaring that after dinner and a bottle the young lawyer would be willing to leave his distended practise to take care of itself, — with a million in sight. Then with a great show of hospitality he left the room, — as he said, to look after the wine. But no sooner had the door closed behind him, and the sound of his footsteps died away, than Grier was made to realize how strangely he had mistaken his other companion's lead. Rising from her chair, she came swiftly and noiselessly to his side, and placing her cool hand upon his shoulder, gazed intently into his astonished eyes.

"We start the day after to-morrow," she said, in a low, tense voice; "do you understand? — the day after to-morrow, — and for God's sake, control your face."

So, with enlightened comprehension, he allowed his client, after dinner was over and the bottles disposed of, to fulfil his own prophecy, and by turns to persuade and bully his lawyer into consenting to the earliest date fixed for the start to Mexico. As to the "distended practise" that was, indeed, left to take care of itself. For when Grier was back at home and seated once more in his office, he spent the few remaining hours, which should have been devoted to that practise, in wondering whether he should be able to guide his future conduct by the light of this strange woman's inscrutable eyes.

Thirty-six hours after the triangular episode in Pennington's library, the attorney occupied a seat in a train just starting for Mexico. In the same car sat the two remaining members of the trio — removed from him, however, by several seats, for it had been decided, as a precautionary measure, that during the journey

they should affect to be unknown to him. So it was that, becoming once more only the looker on at their drama, he found himself confronted for the first time by the moving and pitiable spectacle of a criminal existing undetected among his fellowmen. Of all who surrounded the man, Russell Grier alone held the clue to his strange deportment, his "shifty eye and hunted step," to the elaborate caution which at one time invited suspicion, and the recklessness which at another defied it. Occasionally Pennington would even loiter back to drop casually into the seat beside his lawyer, and to talk in hoarse whispers of their undertaking. For now that the affair was fairly under way, he seemed possessed by a fiend of impatience, — a fury of desire to have the thing over and done with.

In the first squalid village that they reached after crossing the Mexican border, the three stopped long enough for the power of attorney to be drawn up. At this point it was agreed they should separate, the young lawyer and the woman in whose hands was vested such authority to set out upon their long journey; the client to retrace the route by which he had come, and to wait in what security he might for their return. In obedience to his directions, Grier drove to the station first, his prospective traveling companion reaching it half an hour later. Pennington, however, remained at the hotel, to avoid, as he explained, being seen with them at the station. A prudent idea, if carried out, but a criminal is never consistent; and by this theory Grier explained a last glimpse, in a shadowy doorway, of Pennington's sinister face and skulking figure illumined by the chance light from a trainsman's lantern. A glance at his companion showed that she had not seen the lurking figure, and as his inquiry whether she had left his client at the hotel brought an answer in the affirmative, he determined not to annoy her by revealing the incident. Already her pallor and air of fatigue showed the severe strain she had undergone, and as the train rolled out of the station she sank back against her cushions as if exhausted.

Her attorney had no wish to annoy her with obtrusive attentions, but before they started he had laid on the seat beside her a bunch of violets, bought from a Mexican flower seller. And when he retired to his section in the adjoining car, the fragrance of the

flowers, in which she buried her face with evident delight, seemed wafted after him until it mingled with his dreams.

As for the succeeding days of the journey, its varied scenes, the narrow limits of the car, the faces of the passengers, even the journey itself, soon seemed, for Russell Grier, to blend into a confused background for the delicate dark head, the exquisite profile of this inexplicable woman. Concerning her and her strange association with a criminal he tortured himself with a thousand fancies, now throwing a veil over the entire affair, now trying to work out impossible solutions of the problem. That she regarded Pennington with aversion, would gladly escape from his influence, he felt convinced. Of that fact his memory of her passionate appeal of a few days before was proof sufficient; but for the vaguely expected explanations of that appeal he waited in vain. Not once did she allude to it; and his instincts rose up in arms against reminding her of what she had chosen to forget. In talk of books and art, however, of the conduct of life, of travel reminiscences, all the generalities of conversation that pass current among cultivated people the world over, Grier found a neutral meeting ground. He found, also, in the course of the journey, many unforced opportunities for ministering to her comfort without trespassing upon her reserve; and there were even moments when a responsive laugh or the sympathetic glance of intellectual comradeship seemed to reveal the real woman behind the veil. Such moments, however, were rare and ceased altogether before they reached their journey's end, — an end that seemed to the man less and less desirable, as a third of a million seemed a smaller and smaller stake to be played for, the nearer he approached both. Indeed, his only incentive to further effort now lay in her approval. In the face of her evident confidence the thought of failure was intolerable. And yet success had never seemed so unattainable as on the morning when they reached San Francisco. Here, he thought,— as, at the door of her hotel, he left her for an hour's rest, — here there awaited him practical difficulties very different from his self-torturing fancies of the journey. Indeed, as these difficulties took tangible shape and form during their walk to the court house, he was assailed by a hundred doubts. He even questioned the existence of the will

until he had examined the authenticated record of that strange instrument. But there it was — full evidence of the splendid inheritance of a felon, bearing death as the apparent penalty of its acceptance. The horrible incongruity of the thing fascinated while it appalled him. He panted for yet dreaded the final test of his scheme. And now as, with his silent companion, he made his way into the street, this test confronted him. He could not by an hour delay the interview with the executor of the will. From the court house to the door of the executor's office was a walk of barely fifteen minutes. The all-important interview would require no more than that time. In half an hour, then, Charles J. Pennington would be declared the inheritor of a million, or the hunted fugitive from justice with the law again upon his track. In half an hour he would read reward or condemnation in the eyes of the woman beside him.

As though in answer to his unspoken thought, his companion leaned suddenly toward him, lowering for the second time her guard of reserve, and speaking in that low, vibrant voice that had thrilled him once before.

"I wish you to know," she said, the rare color glowing in her olive cheeks, "that whatever the result may be, my gratitude for your kindness, my belief in your ability, your loyalty, remain the same."

With the sound of those words echoing in his ears, Grier came into the presence of the attorney who had drawn up the fate-dealing will. He was a stout, grizzled man of middle age, with lynx-like eyes, and a thin mouth that tightened as he heard the young lawyer's errand. Taking the paper that the other handed him, he scrutinized it sharply, muttering as he ran it over: —

"Charles J. Pennington — his signature, as I can swear. And the great State of California would give just five thousand dollars to know where and when you last saw him. What of that? With a million to back him, he can laugh at the State of California, and none knew that better than old Pennington. You set the son at guessing the father's tricks, did you? If you never suspected them yourself, you were a fool to come here with your paltry power of attorney, and a bullet aimed by the hand that wrote this signature awaiting you, perhaps, if you failed.

"It's lucky for you," he finished, after a brief disappearance into an inner office, "that there's a clause in this precious will to prop you."

And with the parchment clutched firmly in his short, thick fingers, he read: "Or to any person authorized by a power of attorney, duly executed, this bequest is to be paid upon demand without question."

So the great ordeal was over.

In twenty-four hours, when the technicalities of the transfer should be accomplished, the fortune would be in their keeping; the prize was won, — and without a struggle. Even in the glow of triumph Grier could not smother his humiliation at that last thought — the humiliation of a man who had exaggerated his powers and the dangers of his undertaking. But there was no belittling of the one or the other in the eyes or words of his companion, as they left the lawyer's office together; only a finality of appreciation that reminded her companion of the approaching end of their joint mission. To-morrow they would start upon their homeward journey. In a few days they would separate, — perhaps forever. Meantime the evening was theirs, and on his side the longing to show some little last attention outside the deference of a lawyer to his client. Would she not — he put it with boyish eagerness — would she not allow him to celebrate their victory by a little feast at one of the famous restaurants in the Mexican quarter?

To his delight, she was graciously acquiescent. Apparently a new mood was upon her, for once seated in a half-screened corner of the little restaurant, she expanded into a childlike enjoyment of the place, — the mingled odors of cigarette smoke and aromatic cookery, the shrilling of the parrots, the coming and going of all sorts and conditions of men, attracted thither by certain famous specialties. Only underneath all her brilliancy Grier felt occasionally that he detected an anxious note; while her eyes surveyed each new comer with an air of eager interest whose meaning the man could not fathom.

Once or twice during the dinner he would have made some reference to the future, to the disposal of her newly acquired fortune. But these questions his companion parried with a jest or

referred to "some other time," with a decision Grier could but respect.

Later, however, when they had finished their dinner, and were walking back to her hotel, the mood of the last hour fell away from his companion, leaving her silent and distrait. Occasionally she would even pause a moment and look back, as though she had forgotten something, hurrying forward afterward, with a half-intelligible apology. Finally, as they turned at the corner of Market Street, she stopped short with a little gasping breath, and an involuntary movement of her hand toward his arm. Then as they started on their way again, — "I must speak," she whispered. "I have a horrible fancy that we are followed. For days it has haunted me, and to-night it weighs upon me like a stone. And yet it must be a fancy, nothing more. But it's not about that I wish to talk; it's of — myself. You must have wondered. There, don't interrupt me. I can't rest till I've told you. It's not a long story. I don't appeal to you with the past. Weak women do that. And yet mine has been sad enough, God knows.

"I was a Spanish dancer's child, rescued in my babyhood from a life of misery by that man's father. I grew up knowing that I was destined to be the wife of his son. When the son became a murderer I pleaded in vain to be released from my promise. At last I rebelled, I determined to break my vow. At his father's entreaty I swore to keep this resolve a secret from the son until he should come into his inheritance. I took an oath," here her voice sank, "to make any guiltless sacrifice to further that end. His father died suddenly, leaving me in ignorance of the provision of the will, of which, no doubt, he intended to apprise me. The son I never saw from the day of his flight until, at his urgent summons, I went to his house, accompanied by the old nurse who has had charge of me since childhood. I even consented, at what cost you can best judge, to explain nothing to you until the final result should be determined. But, thank God," — this last with a half sob of joy, — "I am now as free as I am innocent!"

Her breath came quickly. For the rest of the way they walked on in silence. Finally, at the ladies' entrance of her hotel, Grier stretched out his hand and would have spoken, but she stopped him. "Wait," she said, turning and facing him, a figure of heroic

dignity, as she stood in the lighted doorway. "Wait, I have a message for you. In the restaurant I evaded your questions when you spoke of my return. Now you know why. And you may tell your client, when you restore to him his gold, that not all that was dug from the mines of California could ever lure me back to him!"

With these words she extended her hand as though for a good-night salutation, when some sight, unseen by her companion, seemed suddenly to petrify her into position. Wheeling swiftly, Grier saw gleaming out of the darkness two sinister eyes and a shining pistol barrel, the latter settling to an aim at the rigid form in the doorway. With a plunge forward, arms flung up to protect that figure, Grier was upon the would-be murderer just in time to deflect his hand, and send the bullet crashing harmlessly through the glass door. When the mist of fury cleared from the lawyer's brain, he found himself in the doorway, with the hand of the woman he had saved clasped reassuringly over his. Below, the center of an excited crowd, the figure of Pennington, guarded by two blue-coated officers, loomed up stolid, unresisting in its resignation to what was bound to be.

. . . . . .

Just when the great State of California exacted the penalty due it from Charles J. Pennington is not a part of this narrative. At any rate, he never received the fortune that had so nearly cost two lives. And that's how it happened that instead of gaining a third of that fortune as fee, two years later Grier became joint owner of the entire million.

The Egg That Ran Away.

BY PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS.

A BLUISH smoke wreathed lazily upward from the graying embers of a fire upon the beach of the lake, and it got in the eyes of a number of Indian mahalahs. Getting hot in the ashes were several rocks, and standing about were several baskets made of willow, the largest of them filled with a thickish and pinkish substance, of the consistency of gruel, with the making of which all the women were concerned.

The substance was what the Washoes call their acorn soup, being made of acorns dried, pounded into flour, mixed with water and regularly boiled. As a part of the process, an elderly squaw lifted rocks from the fire, with a couple of sticks dipped them quickly in some water near, to cleanse them of the ashes, and proceeded to drop them in the soup to make it cook. Another of the women had a basket the shape and capacity of a common bowl for porridge. This she filled from a basket of the cooked and finished stuff, slowly, skilfully dipping it full. At every dip her hand got more or less covered with the soup. Her first precaution was to rid this hand of everything by placing it well in her mouth; next she held up the bowl and ran a pair of fingers around inside, to push the soup away from the edge, forming a smooth little puddle; then she conscientiously removed any accumulated stuff from the fingers by the process described, held the bowl to the surface of a pool of water near, and dextrously turned out a biscuit-looking thing, the size of an ostrich's egg. Cleaning her bowl with her fingers, and her fingers with her mouth, she proceeded as before. And her hand, it is pertinent to say, was clean.

The pool of water where she sat was formed by percolation from the lake, the hollow being scooped in the sand. Along the beach were a number of the pools, the depth of which was usually one or two feet, and diameter seven to ten. On the further side of

an alder one was nicely filled with the pinkish cakes of soup solidifying, and the others were nearly filled, for the work was all but finished. The cakes were floating, suspended in the water, an inch below the surface.

When at length the stuff had all been cooked and dipped through the process, the mahalahs gathered together the baskets and wended their way through a thicket of trees to their camp, which was up in the brush.

They had all been gone an hour, and the biscuit, floating peacefully, were slowly getting harder, when a tall and slender woman, with large and scrutinizing glasses on her nose, came wandering and pondering down the beach, from a cottage in the trees. In her hand she held a net, for catching insects, and a case whereon appeared in excellent lettering.

CYNTHIA HATFIELD,
NATURALIST.

Beneath an arm she lugged a jar full of hoppers, that were vainly "giving their tobacco," in the hope thereby of earning the privilege to hop or fly away. She had just arrived the night before, from far Vermont, with her brother, and was starting already on her quests.

Near sighted not a little, Miss Cynthia nearly walked into the pool beside the alders before she noted its existence. Then she paused abruptly, got down on her knees, dropped her various trappings, and subjected the buns of soup to a keen and protracted investigation.

"Marvelous," she asserted, in a voice that piped, "most marvelous!" and her face creased itself into joyous lines at the thought of that beatific moment when she should reveal to her professor what she mentally named "these unparalleled manifestations of embryonic evolution." But how collect them?

She seemed suddenly to take compassion on the hoppers, for the large-mouthed jar was opened, cleared of insects, and filled with water. With exceeding care she then proceeded to dip a pair of the cakes from the pool with her net, and to place them in the

receptacle, after which she hurried away, a glow and smile of triumph on her face.

"Jonty," she called as she stepped to the cottage, "Jonty, reveal your present location."

From the lawn at the rear, where, with a branch, he was pounding grasshoppers on the back, to catch them and place them in a box, a lad came rolling into the house. He was singularly round and fat, his hair was the color of down on a peach, and his eyebrows and eyelashes failed to appear under closest examination.

To him the naturalist imparted, with solemn unction, her marvelous discovery — that of a new and unclassified order of egg. "And inasmuch, Jonty," Miss Cynthia concluded, "as the eggs were discovered in a quiet shaded pool, it seems to me best that you should bring the crystalline globe, place them therein, and leave them here where I can give them my personal attention and half-hourly inspection, writing out my observations during interims."

The globe brought, and the transfer accomplished, the lad unlimbered and rolled off through the door. The naturalist, submitting her collection to a most minute and penetrative scrutiny, at length went away to an inner of inners, locking two or three doors behind her till she reached her private desk, where she eagerly wrote on an endless roll of paper which she rapidly unwound, like a ribbon from its bolt.

True to her word, she issued forth at the end of every thirty minutes, made observations, and went again to write.

As the calm, delightful moments slipped away, a brown little object came, with quail-like timidity, edging from the bushes. At last it crossed the grass, unseen, and walked and crawled within the open house. It was merely the fat little heir to the chieftainship of the Washoe Indians — a chubby papoose with a tangled lot of raven hair and a coppery, health-glowing face that was round as the moon.

He crept and he toddled about the incubating room, until he reached the "crystalline globe," then his eyes grew astoundingly large, his attitude betokened interest, and he thrust his hand informally down into the water and fetched it up full of "soup," which he ate with speed and gusto. Down again went the hand,

and the bun that was left was soon reposing with its mate. Then he dabbled in the liquid, and he pushed the globe about till it went abruptly over with a crash, and the tide gushed forth to swamp the floor, making him gurgle in glee.

Then came a fearful slamming, a sound of precipitate running, and Cynthia — like a something from a catapult — came hurtling through the door.

In the room she paused, her hands went up with a gesture of unspeakable astonishment, to see before her this perfectly naked little creature on the floor, and then she found her voice and fairly screamed out: —

"Hatched!"

She ran to the door and yelled for Jonty, she grabbed for her net, and squared her glasses; she lifted her skirt and cautiously peered around and beyond the staring youngster A look somewhat of horror overspread her countenance. There was the globe, but empty; there was the floor, but nothing lay upon it. Then she moaned, as in pain: —

"Hatched and gone — the other hatched and gone! To think that after all I should thus return too late!"

But she seemed to recover not a little, doubtless buoyed by the fact that one of her egg things still remained. Slowly moving now ahead and straining her near-sighted eyes vainly to make out the nature of her specimen, she advanced on the startled papoose. Like the wild thing that he was, he had scrambled to his feet and was making little starts, as if for cover. No sooner had she come about and left a clearing toward the door than the nimble little tike made a dive to clear the space that lay between himself and freedom.

But Cynthia also was quick as a cat. And what was more, the portly form of Jonty now drew near. The naturalist jumped and ran — and her companion lifted his foot to the step — the red little chieftain darted quickly between his legs — the net came down to snatch him — but it fell athwart poor Jonty's head. Tripped below and assaulted above, he fell as a miniature mountain of boy. And Cynthia, too, lost her footing, and came to the floor most abruptly.

"Run — run!" she screamed. "The egg — the egg — it's getting away. Help me up — help me up!"

With an effort gigantic, Jonty got again to a perpendicular, assisted his sister to her feet, and away they went in hot pursuit.

"Catch it! — catch it!" cried Cynthia. "It mustn't get away — it's wonderful — it's marvelous!" and they tore along, across the green, in the waving, grassy wake of the tiny fleeing Washoe. "Run like a swallow — fly!" she piped, and Jonty flew — like a barrel up a hill.

She ran and she reached with her net, while Jonty plunged and sputtered, but the race was short, though mighty. For the Washoe, like a wily squirrel, made straight to gain a thicket, and slipped, in a wink, away beneath a tangle.

Then Cynthia, falling wildly, fairly shrieked her last despairing cry, "Dive, Jonty, dive!" and her partner in the chase went headlong in the bushes, to bounce back again, and to lie on his back waving arms and legs at random, like a turtle.

Then the two sat there, braced in the grass, and looked each other in the countenance ruefully.

"O professor, professor, you will not, you cannot forgive me for this," groaned Cynthia aloud. "And after I had nearly got them classified and named."

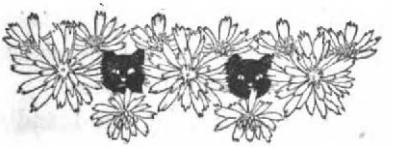
Suddenly across her vale of gloom, like a ray of hope athwart a cavernous abyss of woe, came a thought.

"The pool!" she cried. "To the pool for more!"

She hastened to the shore, whither Jonty came after — she reached the scooped-out nest — and then her wail went forth in accents loud and shrill.

"Not a single egg! Like the two I had," she piped in her anguish, "they all have hatched and are flown to their native heath!"

And indeed to the heath, to which the chieftain in embryo had scudded, they were all in reality gone.



Love and Avarice.

BY LEONARD FREEMAN BURBANK.

THE day was done. André and Marie Anquetin were eating their simple evening meal. The little kitchen in which they sat was such a room as one may see in almost any of the farming districts of Normandy; small and neat. The furniture was plain, but the white muslin curtains at the windows, and a shelf filled with geraniums in bloom gave it an air of comfort. André and his wife were old. The deep wrinkles and hard lines of their faces, their bent figures and halting gate, told a tale of trouble and hard work.

"I do wish Jean would come home," said the woman, as she arose from the table and began clearing away the dishes. "It's fifteen years since he went away, and it do seem as if he might come back to see his old mother. If he had only been easy like Lus Mignot and stayed at home, how happy we should have been."

"I told you," replied the old man, "that you should let well enough alone. The lad was a fine boy, and would have been forehanded here as well as in America. I do believe if you can't get your porridge among your own folks, strangers won't give it to you. It was your high notions that did it, and now we must bear it the best we can."

Marie was silenced, and without saying more, André went out and sat on the low wooden seat beside the door, while his wife washed the dishes and tidied up the room. When she had made the house neat she went and stood beside her husband. The sun was setting, making the rows of bright-colored flowers in the little garden glow in the rich light. The apple trees were white with their snowy promises of harvest. In the distance the poppy besprinkled grain waved in the gentle breeze.

"Ah, Marie," he said, taking her hard and wrinkled hand in his, "Normandy is beautiful in May."

She did not heed his remark. Drawing her hand away, she said, "I am going to mind Dame Robbe, and may not come home until late. The old woman is mighty used up, and isn't long for here. Don't sit up for me."

Taking his pipe from his mouth, the old man slowly arose and faced his wife. "I don't like this," he said. "Before the lad went away you were always a-working and saving to set him up when he got big. He went and left us. You made him. He has been away for fifteen years, and ever since he left us you have been a-working and a-saving for him when he comes back. What good are we getting out of life? Not any. I think it is time to stop."

"Why, André, you wouldn't have the old woman suffer for want of care, would you?"

"No," he continued; "but it is not Dame Robbe that you care for, it's her money that you want to save for the boy."

Without replying, Marie Anquetin moved up the street as fast as her bent form and halting steps would let her, and was soon lost to view in the gathering gloom. Her husband watched her retreating figure, not without feelings of sorrow. When she could no longer be seen, he relit his pipe, which had gone out during the discussion, and resumed his place on the settle.

More than thirty years before, he and Marie had married and moved into the little cottage. She was a beauty then. On market days, when they stood in the great square of Rouen selling their vegetables and flowers, many a passer-by would stop to look at the pretty flower vendor and her handsome husband. Those were happy days. When their child was born they called him Jean. His winning ways gained for him the good-will of all the village people. André and Marie were justly proud of him. "I don't want him like we are," his mother would often say, as she and her husband talked about his prospects and planned for the future. "He must be like the fine folks that used to come to the chateau when you were under butler and I ladies' maid, André."

"Perhaps so, but it takes money, and piles of it, to be like them," the father would reply.

"I know that, deary, but we can earn and save, and when he

grows up he will have enough to start on. It will be a fine thing to have our Jean a great man."

Marie Anquetin was one of those people who could love intensely; yet such was her nature that many passions, many hopes could not find a place in her heart at one time. Gradually the motherly instinct gained the ascendency, and while she yet loved her husband, she did not feel towards him as she had before the child was born. Her ruling passion was love for her boy. For him she lived, toiled, and hoarded the fruits of her labors. Year after year she gave her life to him.

One morning, coming from confession in St. Ouen's, before she took her place beside the little cart in the great square, she heard a man say to his companion that America was the best place on earth for a young man to become rich and prosperous. Her ideas of America were vague, but she at once resolved that Jean should go to that place, wherever it was. A dozen times she repeated the word to herself, that she might not forget it. An hour later, when the man stopped before the little cart, she made bold to ask about this America which he had spoken of. On their way home she talked incessantly about that strange country and Jean, until André, wearied with her prattle, got down and walked far in advance of the cart.

From that day she never wavered in her determination that Jean should go to the land of riches. If sometimes she said to herself, "Jean might stay here to help about the place," yet her motherly ambition kept her to her resolve.

When the boy was sixteen she had saved enough to pay his passage and start him in life, and in spite of André's protests, Jean was sent across the sea to make his fortune.

"It most breaks my heart to have him go," she said, when the neighbors came to bid him good-by, "but a mother must not stand in the way of her child. He can love me as well away from me as here under my nose." She saw him go down the road and across the fields, then she went into the house and shut herself away, in her boy's room, from her neighbors and husband.

The little cottage seemed very lonely after Jean had gone. In all those years of living and caring for the boy, the wife had grown blind to the needs of the husband. Now that her idol had

left her, he who remained behind neither cared for nor would receive the little kindnesses and tokens of affection that were resumed after many years of neglect. Not that they lived unhappily together,—hundreds of families have the same existence,—but the poetry of their early married life had become prose.

They both kept to their work, — André that he might support himself and wife, and Marie that she might save for Jean. Every sou that she got was carefully hidden away along with the letters that came from over the sea from her boy. When she had nothing else to do, which was seldom, or when a moment could be stolen from work, she would take from its hiding place the shining hoard, thinking, as she touched each piece, of her Jean and the good it would do him. When she could, she would take from her husband's money a few centimes to add to her own store.

The years passed, the pile grew slowly but steadily, while old age crept on with relentless pace. She was no longer young, and her beauty had gone. When she stood in the market-place of Rouen no one noticed.

"Joan must go with us to market to-day," she said to her husband one morning. Her voice trembled, and a great tear rolled down her deep-wrinkled face. Joan was her niece. "I have ceased to be attractive. Joan is beautiful and must take my place. If she succeeds, I will stay at home to work in the fields, and care for the sick. I shall be just as useful, and Jean's pile will grow."

Joan took her aunt's place, and Marie never went to market again. Mornings when Marie saw Joan leave for Rouen the tears would come to her eyes as she thought of the days when she was young and beautiful.

Even the dullest of us have times of reflection when the past comes back with startling clearness. As old André Anquetin sat there in the twilight the years seemed to roll by in a long, dismal procession. The light of his pipe went out, his head rested against the casement of the door; he had fallen asleep. A slight noise made by opening and shutting the gate aroused the sleeper. Before him stood a man. He was well dressed, wore a full beard, and carried in his hand a small bundle.

"My good man," he said, "can you direct me to the inn in this town?"

"There is no inn here. Strangers don't come this way. You will find an inn at the next place across the fields, or at Rouen."

"I have traveled a long way, and am tired. Can't you give me lodging?" said the intruder.

André hesitated a moment. "No, I don't think I can," he said. "You see, Dame Anquetin is away and might not like it. I don't think I can."

"Did you say your name was Anquetin?" said the stranger.

"Yes," replied the old man, "I am André Anquetin. My wife's name is Marie."

"I know a Jean Anquetin in America," continued the young man.

"You know Jean, you? Why, heaven bless you, come in, and if Marie don't like it, — well, well, she won't mind if you tell her of her Jean."

The old man seized the stranger and led him into the kitchen. "Well, well, you know our Jean! Sit down while I make a light. It's a blessing you came this way."

He bustled about to light a candle, and quickly set before the stranger the best he could find in the little cupboard, then he seated himself near his guest.

"Now tell me all about my son," he said. "Is he well? Is he rich? Will he soon come home? Tell me all."

"Yes," answered the stranger, "he is well, and in the years since he left home he has grown from a big boy into a strong, thoughtful man."

"Just like me," interrupted the old man, "just like me, but go on."

"He speaks of you often, and never ceases to think of you and his mother. He loves you both."

"Of course, and we both love him," said André, "while his mother works night and day to save money for him."

The young man laughed, yet had the candle given more light, old André might have seen the look of pain that came to the face of the young man.

"Works to save money for him! Why, he is rich, richer than any one in this village, so he tells me," said the guest.

"But why don't he come home and let us share his fortune?"

asked André. "We have worked and saved for him. He is a thoughtless, wicked lad not to help us in our old age. I told Marie she was a fool, and now I know it."

"Do not say that, he is working for you. Soon he hopes to come home and make you rich and happy all your life.'

"If he don't come soon it will be too late; we shan't want his help."

In his excitement the old man moved the candle, which at best gave but a dim light, near his guest. As he did so, his eyes caught the flash of the ring upon the stranger's finger. It was one of those silver bands such as the peasants of Normandy wear, of no value, yet peculiar to themselves. He gazed at it for some time, then, reaching across the table, took the stranger's hand in his and examined the bauble more closely.

"My son used to wear a ring like that," he said. "His mother gave it to him when he left home."

"And my mother gave me this," replied the stranger.

The old man looked up, the smiling eyes of the guest told their story, and in an instant they held each other in a close embrace.

"Heaven be praised for this. Come near the light, my boy, my eyes are dim; let me look at you. Your mother will be wild with delight. I will go to tell her at once."

"No, father," said the son; "let her continue her good work. Do not let her know until morning. She will be tired when she comes home, and seeing me may be too much for her. Let her know in the morning, and to-morrow we will have a holiday. Neither you nor she shall ever work again. But come, father, let us go into the garden; it is warm here."

The two men left the room, and, arm in arm, wandered through the garden and out into the fields. The moonlight shone upon them as they talked. The clock in the village struck ten.

"We must go in now," said the son; "we are both tired."

"Your room is ready for you," said old André. "Ever since you went away your mother has had it in readiness for you when you came back. Good night. Heaven bless you, as it has us all. Good night."

Taking the candle, the young man climbed the short flight of

stairs and entered the little room. It was just as he had left it years before. There were his kite, his top, and all the playthings that he used to love so well, while on the table was a bunch of fresh flowers. The perfume came to him like a breath from heaven.

As Jean was very tired, he was soon asleep, dreaming of childhood scenes. With the father it was different. His son's coming home gave him so much happiness that he could not sleep; besides, he must tell Marie, when she came back, that a stranger was upstairs. He laughed softly as he thought how curious she would be, and how surprised in the morning when she should find out that it was Jean.

Sometime after midnight the wife returned. Old Dame Robbe was dead. Marie had seen the work of the Great Destroyer so many times that his awful presence did not disturb her. She was droning a song of the people. She had hardly entered the house, when André arose to tell her the news.

"What, you up?" she said. "Get to bed."

"Hist, don't make so much noise. There is a visitor upstairs in the boy's room," said André.

The old woman stood glaring at her husband, surprised into a silence which gave him a chance to offer an apology for his offense. "He came here," he continued, "and begged of me to take him in. He was all tired out with walking, and so I let him sleep in the boy's room."

The old woman turned livid with rage. "Beast!" she hissed, "a stranger in my boy's room! I won't have it. I will go and pull him out," and she moved towards the door which led to the stairs.

André caught her and held her fast. "Marie," he said, "have a care. The man has money, heaps of it. He will pay us well, more for his night's lodging than we can earn in weeks."

At mention of the money the woman became calmer, but she did not cease talking about it until after they were in bed.

"We must charge him a good price," she said. "It's no small thing to take a stranger into one's house. He ought to bless heaven that he has a place to lay his head, instead of having to tramp across the fields. If he is rich, he can pay well, and our boy's pile grows so slow."

"Come, come, Marie, enough of this. I want to sleep, so say no more about it. I will settle with him in the morning."

"You! you settle with him! No, not you. Why, you would let him go without paying a sou, and our boy's pile be no larger."

André Anquetin was soon asleep; not so his wife. The thought of the gold set her brain on fire; she could not sleep. A dozen times she asked herself how much she should charge the stranger for his night's lodging. Surely a shining gold piece would not be too much. He had been saved a long walk; perhaps he would give her two. If she told him how she was saving that her boy might come home, no doubt he would be generous. A fever seized her. She clutched her hands together as if she already had the coins in her possession. Supposing he refused to pay her more than a few silver pieces. No, no, he would not do that, and yet he might. Why should she not take just a few bits while he slept? She would be sure of them then, and very likely he would never miss them. Jean needed them more than this man. But if she should be found out, the gendarme would arrest her, and she would be sent to prison. The thought overpowered her, and she lay quite still. How loud and terrible seemed to her the heavy, regular breathing of her husband. She could endure it no longer. The darkness and the stillness affected her, and her great desire to possess the money took complete possession of her. Rising from bed, she put on an old short skirt and a heavy blouse. Her heart beat fast, and its throbs sounded so loud to her that she felt as if it must awaken her husband. She looked at him, but he was fast asleep. With stealthy tread she climbed the stairs. At the open door she stopped to listen. The breathing of the sleeper came to her distinct and clear, yet it was almost lost in the beating of her own heart. For a moment she hesitated, a thousand thoughts of other days surged through her brain as she stood there, but the one great desire that had brought her there urged her on.

The moonlight filled the room with a mellow glow. She could see the form of the stranger; the upper part of the face was hidden by his arm, thrown over the forehead, his clothes folded and laid over a chair, and on the table beside the flowers she had put there in the morning was a pile of shining gold. She could see

nothing else. The gold pieces fairly glowed before her excited vision. They seemed to burn great holes in her brain, and fill her whole soul with a wild delirium. She thought only of that beautiful yellow pile and of her boy Jean. She felt like screaming with delight, but her parched lips gave no sound. Silently and carefully she tiptoed her way into the room like a cat approaching a mouse, and stood before the table and the golden treasure. The man slept. She took a few of the gold pieces and put them in her pocket, then she reached for more. A slight noise stopped her. The man moved in his sleep. In her excited fancy she thought he was awake and had discovered her taking the gold. Her agitation knew no bounds, the blood coursed through her veins with quickened speed; the strength of fury and despair came to her. She turned, and with a spring seized the sleeper by the throat, while her knees struck him upon the chest. The shock awoke him, and he tried to free himself, but the bedclothes hampered him. He could not speak, for she held with a grasp of iron. The frenzy was on her, and to all his efforts she opposed an irresistible pressure. For an instant he looked into the face that bent over him, and, like one in an evil dream, knew it for the face of his mother, but, still like one in a dream, struggled vainly to speak. Little by little his convulsive writhings lessened. In a few moments he ceased to struggle and was still. He was dead.

Relaxing her grip, for her strength was gone, she got down from the bed, catching her foot in the coverings as she did so. For a moment she thought that the man had seized her, and she turned pale with fear. Giving a fierce pull at her clothes, she loosened the coverings of the bed, and the hand of the man was exposed. The ring upon the finger glistened in the moonlight and attracted her attention. Raising the hand fearfully in hers, she turned the ring upon the finger. A sickening fear overcame her, for the little silver band had a strange familiar look.

"No, no," she muttered to herself. Her heart almost stopped beating. With a terrible despair she seized the head of the man and dragged it into the strong moonlight.

Then she understood.

In the morning while dressing himself, André Anquetin softly hummed a tune such as long years ago he used to sing when he

wished to send little Jean into the land of dreams. "Marie has awakened before me," he thought, "but I will have my little surprise. I will go to wake Jean." He smiled at the thought of the meeting. Slowly he climbed the stairs and stood at the door of Jean's room. He saw his son upon the bed, and kneeling beside him, the mother, singing her gentle lullaby, the lullaby of a mother and a woman bereft of reason. It was only for an instant; the next moment the disease, that of the heart, which for so many years he had feared, mercifully smote him. He was again with his son.

Years have passed since then, yet the peasants, when they go by the deserted house and the barren fields, still cross themselves and utter a prayer.

How the Widow Raised the Mortgage.

BY R. H. FLETCHER, U. S. A.

MY friend Bascom and I were idling away a warm summer afternoon in a pretty New England town, which for reasons must go nameless, but which lay at the confluence of a river with the sea. Loitering down a leafy lane which led to this river, we were confronted by a sign bearing the legend: —

BOATS BY R. GRUMMET.

Immediately we decided that we wanted a boat. A wooden hand nailed to the sign pointed out the direction of the establishment, which proved to be a gaily painted barge moored to the shore and approached by a gang plank. With its little white house at each end, it looked not unlike the Noah's arks of our childhood, while a dozen boats of all colors, which were tethered to its side, did very well for the animals waiting to be fed with passengers.

The sunlight filtered through a striped awning on to the spotless deck, illuminating the bald crown of Captain R. Grummet himself, who was seated on a folding chair mending some part of his wardrobe. He was a short, fat man snugly encased in a blue flannel shirt and trousers of true sailor cut and elaborately embroidered in true man-o'-war style. A fringe of red hair surrounded his bald pate, and on his nose was a pair of large, silver spectacles.

This highly colored Noah responded to our request for a boat with professional promptness and agility. When we had paid him, however, and the boat was ready, we found it pleasanter to loaf on the barge than to row in the sunlight. In this we were

at first discouraged by the Captain, who occupied the only chair and went on with his sewing in silence.

But when he disoovered that I had been in the navy, and when he bad, moreover, been made to chuckle by some of my light-hearted friend Bascom's irresistible nonsense, he gradually relaxed, and after we had sat out our twenty-five cents' worth of boat hire, he asked us to come again.

We went again and again, buying our right to sit on the holy-stoned deck beneath the striped awning by hiring a boat, while we smoked our pipes and talked, or listened to the Captain's yarns. Finally we so undermined the wary mariner's reserve that it gave way altogether, and he actually invited us into his living room in one of the deck houses, a beautifully neat little place, shining with white paint and polished brass, and fitted up in all respects like a regular ship's cabin.

Bascom celebrated our promotion to the quarter deck, as he called it, by procuring from the village a half dozen of English ale — I have forgotten to mention, by the way, that the Captain was an Englishman — over which he eulogized our host outrageously, declaring him the king of deep-water sailors, a Neptune whom no man could know without becoming his devoted friend, and upon whom no woman could gaze without falling in love with his manly form and honest features. He then proposed three cheers for Captain Grummet, which he and I gave, and we drank that gallant mariner's health. After which Bascom sang in a deep bass: —

> "Fifteen men on the dead man's chest,
> Yo, ho, ho! and a bottle of rum,"

and talked a lot of nonsense about "the flying jib boom of friendship ever pointing to the harbor of good-fellowship."

It was at this point of the proceedings that the Captain, who had been slowly sipping his ale and staring admiringly at Bascom, leaned forward and, laying a pudgy forefinger on his arm, said, "You weren't far h'out in wot you said a minnit ago."

"Far out!" exclaimed Bascom dramatically, "I was away in," and was proceeding in the same strain when, noticing that the Captain still kept his finger on his arm and was looking at him

with peculiar significance, he checked his flow of speech and said, "What particular part of my remarks do you refer to, Captain?"

"That about the women," said the Captain, still regarding him with mysterious gravity.

For a moment Bascom did not remember what he had said about women, and then it suddenly occurred to him and he promptly arose to the occasion. "Now that you mention it, Captain," he said, "do you know, it has always been a wonder to me that a man like you should be allowed to live in this bachelor style. It's exceedingly snug and agreeable, of course, but I don't see how you manage to escape the women. I should think you would have been married long ago."

The Captain leaned back in his chair seemingly well satisfied, and then taking off his spectacles and wiping them, said, "Why, Lord bless you, sir, I was married once. I was married and stayed married for fifteen years, purty nigh, and then I buried her."

"She died, I suppose?" suggested Bascom.

"Yes, sir," replied the Captain, so lost in retrospection as not to observe Bascom's flippancy, "she died. I was married nigh on to fifteen years, astronomical time, fifteen years lacking one month, two weeks, four days, and seven hours. I figured it h'out exact in the h'almanac. That's twelve years ago, and wot's more," he added, "if I h'aint got wedded since, it h'aint been fer lack o' h'opportunity." And the Captain again removed his glasses, this time to bestow upon Bascom a very knowing wink.

"Of course," said Bascom, "any one can see that with half an eye."

"You may 'ave noticed," continued our elderly friend, "that a good many women come down 'ere to the barge. Wot do they come for? Some on 'em comes fer boats, an' some on 'em *says* they come fer boats. They says they do, mind ye." And again the Captain bestowed upon Bascom that portentous wink, immediately after relapsing into a dignified silence, from which all of Bascom's gross flattery and palpable leads failed to draw him.

But on our very next visit the Captain drifted around to the subject again. I had asked him if he made all of his own clothes.

"Yes, sir," he replied, "every stitch of 'em. Wot's the good

o' payin' h'other men to do wot I can do meself a sight more to me h'own satisfaction? Then there's the matter o' grub," he continued; "I cooks wot I want, and I cooks it just the way I wants it, an' there h'aint' no jawin' 'ooman makin' h'out she knows wot I wants better'n I do meself. Sometimes I takes it in me 'cad I wants apple sarce an' bread an' butter fer supper. W'y not? H'apples is cheap; I buys 'em by the bushel. Or maybe it's a fish wot I catches h'off the back porch 'ere. I tell you, sir, a man can live mighty comfortable on mighty little, if 'ee knows 'ow, an' ain't got nobody but isself to please."

"Very true, Captain," said Bascom judicially. "Upon my word, I envy you. I never saw a man more independent and at the same time comfortable."

"No woman to humor, d'ye see," chimed in the Captain. "I takes me pipe and me ease w'en I wants it."

"Exactly," said Bascom.

"An' as fer the matter o' children," continued the Captain, "there ain't none 'round 'ere to tromple on me toes w'en they're kids, or do me h'out o' me money w'en they're growed."

"Quite true," said Bascom. "They tell me that you're a regular capitalist, got money out at interest, and all that sort of thing."

"Well," said our host slowly, "I h'ain't exactly wot you can call a capitalist, but I got a little money laid by, an' every once in a while some feller comes down 'ere an' 'ee says, 'Cap'n,' 'ee says, 'can you lend me a 'undred dollars?' an' I asks wot it's for an' wot security 'ee's got, an' maybe I lends it, and maybe I don't. I'd a sight rather they'd be comin' to me than me goin' to them. Then there's the women, w'y they're comin' down 'ere all the time a-tellin' me their troubles an' askin' fer adwice, or maybe wantin' to borrow a little money. I gen'rally lends it to the women — with security, o' course. I'm purty sure to get it back again, an' then I likes to 'elp 'em, 'cos they needs it. It beats everythink w'y the Lord made women so kind o' 'elpless like. I got as much as two thousand dollars loaned to one 'ooman. She's a widow wot keeps a shop up in town, fancy notions an' sich. She come to me arter her man died, in a heap o' trouble, an' I lent her a little money, an' I've added to it sence.

No more notion o' business, sir, or takin' care of 'erself than a bahby! Of course I got a mortgage on the place, all right; she owns the 'ouse and the stock, an' I got it covered. She's got a couple o' children, too, wot ain't worth the powder to blow 'em up with. I go up there h'every once in awhile an' straighten things out for her; go over the accounts an' give her advice. She's a mighty good cook, too, is the widow, an' the best ain't good enough fer me w'en I goes a-callin' on 'er." And again our nautical friend winked.

"Don't you think you're a little reckless, Captain?" said Bascom reproachfully. "The first thing you know, that widow will marry you."

"No, sir, no," said the Captain, "there's too many of 'em tried that. 'I was married once, d'ye see, fifteen years, lacking one month, two weeks, four days, and seven hours, astronomical time."

Soon after this, one beautiful moonlight night, Bascom and I walked down to the barge with the intention of taking a boat for a row. We found, however, that our friend was rushed with business. All of the boats were out except one which was engaged by a man accompanied by two women, and this party the Captain was in the act of embarking. As we stood idly watching the operation the old mariner said to them, "'Old on till I swab off that thwart," and passing Bascom ostensibly to get the swab, he nudged that gentleman in the ribs with his elbow, and whispered hoarsely behind the back of his hairy hand, "That's the widow!"

Of course our interest in the embarkation was doubled by this piece of information, and we scanned the widow as well as the occasion permitted. She was a small, middle-aged woman, rather thin and angular, but, as Bascom afterwards told the Captain, "of a tidy build." We noticed that neither she nor her benefactor indulged in look or word of a confidential character; he attended strictly to business, while she kept her eyes straight in front of her with a rigidity that defied the public gaze. When the Captain joined us after his labors we stood for awhile watching the silvery wake of the moon on the water, into the radiance of which a boat would occasionally glide, showing feminine drapery, while little peals of laughter came pleasantly to our ears, mingled with the strumming of a guitar and snatches of song.

"The moon must be a considerable help to your business, Captain," said I.

"Yes, sir," he admitted, taking his pipe from his mouth and thrusting the glowing tobacco down with his little finger, "the moon's purty good, though the stars wear better; still, the moon ain't bad. It's a powerful 'elp to the young women in gettin' married. W'en a young 'ooman comes down 'ere an' says, 'Cap'n, w'en'll there be a moon?' I don't say nothink, but I counts on losin' 'er fer a reg'lar customer inside o' a year. For, d'ye see, arter they gits married, the women don't care no more 'bout boats and the moon, an' sich. An' as fer the man, I reckon 'ee don't know an' don't care w'ether the moon's shinin' or not, 'ceptin' it might be w'en 'ee 'as to get out o' bed at night to 'unt fer the paregoric."

Bascom laughed at this, and then we fell to smoking our pipes and enjoying the quiet of the scene. The silence was finally broken by our host. "If I was a young man," he said, puffing out a long streamer of smoke meditatively, "an' was casting 'round in my mind to git wedded, I'd steer my course by the way a girl got into a boat. I'd fetch 'er alongside o' a boat an' keep me eye on 'er w'en she got in. Fer, d'ye mind, some women, the moment they gits nigh a boat, commences to giggle and larf, an' lay 'old o' everythink in sight, 'ceptin' the right thing; an' some on' 'em gits scared an' screeches, an' grabs at the feller wots 'elpin' 'em; an' some on 'em flops in, fer all the world like a whale stranded on a sand bar, an' all but capsizes the boat; an' some on 'em, an' precious few they are, steps in as light as a feather an' sits right down without any fuss or noise, so that ye'd 'ardly know they was there. Now if I was goin' to git wedded, I wouldn't 'ave nothink wotever to do with the giggling kind, nor the screeching kind, nor the flopping kind; I'd just make right up to the one wot was quick an' light o' foot, an' didn't make no fuss, I would, if I was goin' to git wedded."

"I noticed," said Bascom reflectively, "that the widow has a neat way of stepping into a boat."

At which the Captain emitted from somewhere down in his throat a curious choking sound which we had long ago learned was a concealed laugh.

Three weeks elapsed before we again visited the barge, and then we found a tall, lanky fellow by the name of Sam in charge of the Captain's domicile. In former days our nautical friend had sometimes employed Sam to help him in busy seasons, and frequently left him to care for the barge during his temporary absence. So we supposed that Sam was present in the capacity of hired man on this occasion. He quickly corrected our misapprehension, however, by announcing that he had "bought old Grummet out."

"Bought him out!" Bascom and I exclaimed in unison.

"Yep," said Sam.

"Why, what's become of the Captain?" said Bascom.

"He's married," replied Sam.

"Married!" we again chorused.

"Yep," said Sam.

"Not the widow?" said Bascom incredulously.

"Yep," said Sam. "Leastways the widow married him. You know the old man was always rilin' again marriage. Well, when he got spliced he tried to make out to me that it was a matter of business, for he prided himself on being a man of business, and he was kind of anxious to prove to me that marrying the widow was a good speculation. He allowed that the store was going to the devil for lack of proper management, and if he got in and married the widow he'd run the business to the Queen's taste, and save the money wot he'd advanced on the mortgage. But, good Lord! I ain't no marine," and Sam spat contemptuously over the side.

. . . . . .

It was about six months after the Captain's marriage that I came across a paragraph in the newspaper announcing the accidental death by drowning of Captain R. Grummet, well known in the vicinity where he had for many years kept a boat-house. I had no doubt that this was our old friend, and I read with grieved interest, not unmixed with surprise, that the Captain had hired one of his old boats, one evening, to go fishing; later on a southeaster had sprung up, and as her husband had not returned the following morning, his wife had instituted a search that resulted in the finding of the boat bottom up in the edge of the marshes,

and the discovery of his hat floating a quarter of a mile away. The body had not been found, but there was no doubt, the article said, that the old mariner had met his death in the squall, and his remains had gone out with the tide.

Although Bascom and I had not seen the Captain since his marriage, we naturally were very sorry to hear of his death, and one day, being in the neighborhood, we paid a final visit to the house boat. The place was no longer what it had been. The neat little cabin was now dirty and disordered, the bed looked as though it had not been made up for a week, the stove and cooking utensils were sadly in need of cleaning, an old woolen shirt was thrust in the cuddy sacred to the chronometer, and an empty bottle, with a candle stuck in it, stood on the compass. Outside under the awning, spitting on the once immaculate deck, sat three or four loafers, among them Sam, tilted back against the house with his hat over his eyes, whittling his chair. We called him to one side and asked him if it was true about the Captain's death.

"Why, sure," said Sam, "it's in the papers, ain't it?"

"Well," said Bascom, "we were friends of the Captain, and we are mighty sorry to hear it."

"That's a fact," said Sam, with awakened interest, "you were friends, weren't you?"

"Yes," said Bascom, "and if there was anything we could have done for him, we would have done it gladly."

At this Sam eyed us for quite a little while, then he looked across the water, then he looked down and scratched the back of his head, pushing his hat over his eyes to enable him to do it more thoroughly; finally he looked at us again from under the brim, and then, to our amazement, he slowly drew the lids of his right eye together, and at the same time thrust his tongue in his left cheek.

"What the devil do you mean by that?" demanded Bascom roughly.

"S'sh!" said Sam, and again he repeated the performance.

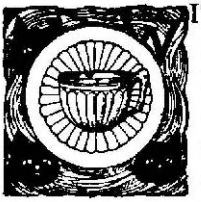
A sudden intelligence dawned on Bascom's face. "You don't mean it's all a fake, do you?" he whispered.

"I ain't sayin'," replied Sam, relapsing into his ordinary manner, "only, 'twixt you and me, there ain't water enough in this

here bay to drown the old man. As for the boat— well, I gave it to the newspapers as I found it, but that ain't provin' he's dead. He may have had his reasons for skippin' out, an' I may have helped him, I ain't sayin'. You see, the widow had a will of her own that the Captain hadn't counted on, with a temper to back it up; and when it come to managin' the store, the Captain wasn't in it. He was all for peace and quiet, the Captain was, and he may have concluded,— mind you, I don't say he did, but he may have concluded he'd rather she'd minister on his estate, or so much of it as he couldn't salt down and get away with, than to have to live alongside o' her for the balance of his days. I ain't givin' you this for gospel truth, you understand, I'm only sayin' it might be so. But there is one thing you can gamble your last dollar on, and that is, that although the widow mayn't be much on business, she raised that mortgage a durned sight quicker than any man could have done it."

Told in China.

BY ELIZABETH FLINT WADE.



WITH a sigh of contentment Miss Patricia Emory turned the key in the lock and pushed open the door of her little gray cottage. When she went away the daffy-down-dillies were just thrusting their green swords through the garden mold, and now the apple trees were dropping their pink and white flakes on her doorstone. No sooner had the key clinked in the lock than a big black cat with a yellow star on his breast came running round the corner of the house, and with a "permow" of joy leaped on Miss Emory's shoulder, rubbing his cheek against her dress and buzzing the welcome whose loudness had gained for him his name.

"You're as glad to have a home again as I am, aren't you, Bumble?" said Miss Patricia, rubbing his soft coat. Then, hastening to change her stuff dress for a cool gingham, she lighted the fire in her little cook-stove, the kindlings for which had been laid before her departure, Bumble trotting close beside her.

Scarcely had the first gray banner of smoke floated from the chimney when, without the ceremony of knocking, her next neighbor, Mrs. Benajah Tuttle, walked into the kitchen.

"How de do, Miss Patty? I see the smoke comin' out o' your chimney, and I run right over to ask you how you enjoyed your visit and tell you some news that'll surprise you, I make my guess. Why, the Hilliards have come home at last — 'tenny rate, the granddaughter has. They say Miss Powers — that's poor Katharine Hilliard's girl — is just rollin' in money; her father owned a silver mine out West; but, instead of spending some of it to furnish, she's just used old stuff that was in the house. You remember them two corner cupboards with glass doors; she's got 'em full of dishes and things, 'brake-er-bak,' she calls 'em, an' I guess 'twill break her back gittin' up and down for them every

time she wants to use 'em. Well, you just ought to see it all, an' I s'pose you will, seein' they used to be such good friends of yours — specially Theron Hilliard. Though why he's stayed away in foreign parts these twenty years, instead of marryin' you, as every one expected — "

Here a darkening of Miss Patricia's usually placid eyes brought her caller back with a plunge to the present, and to the sudden recollection of a loaf of gingerbread that would "mos' likely burn to a crisp if she stayed another minnit."

By her departure Miss Patricia was left free to prepare her own meal and to think undisturbed the thoughts invoked by the news of the reopening of the old Hilliard place, closed now twenty years, and the home-coming of the daughter of her girlhood's dearest friend. Happy thoughts they were, at first, of childish games in the old colonial house with Katharine Hilliard and her brother Theron; sober thoughts of meetings and partings with the brother, grown to the dignity of a sea captain; saddened thoughts, finally, of those dark days when, in one year, by the squire's death, the removal of Mrs. Hilliard and Katharine, and that sudden, unexplained departure of Theron, the ties of her little world had been broken, never to be renewed since; lonely thoughts, finally, of this home-coming of Katharine Hilliard's daughter, with Katharine Hilliard and her mother dead, Theron still absent on the other side of the world, while she, Patricia, was an old maid of forty living alone with a cat. Which last thought brought Patricia back to the present and to the fact that Bumble, despairing of his supper, was quietly helping himself to the contents of the cream pitcher.

But whatever the course of Miss Patty's feelings, her duty was obviously to call at once upon Katharine Hilliard's daughter. So it was only the next afternoon that Miss Emory, feeling like the very ghost of herself, lifted the ponderous knocker of the Hilliard house, and sent its echoes trailing down the long hall. Once inside, and awaiting Miss Powers's appearance in the familiar, yet strangely renovated parlor, Miss Emory recognized, with a thrill of pleasure, the well-remembered corner cupboard. But as she crossed the room and peered through the glass doors for a closer view of the "brake-er-bak," a curious little gasp broke from Miss

Patty's lips. Then with a half-frightened look over her shoulder, she put out a trembling hand, and lifted from the shelf a fragile cup decorated with blue forget-me-nots. Hardly, however, had her nervous fingers abstracted the bit of china when a step in the hall startled her, and, hastily setting the dainty thing back in its place, she turned away. A fatal turn, as it proved, for in her haste the long fringe of her silk shawl became entangled in the cup, whirling it to the floor, where it shivered into a dozen pieces. For an instant Miss Patricia stood looking at the china fragments with the helplessness of despair. Then, as the step passed on, the culprit, hardly realizing her action, stooped, and gathering up the broken bits, dropped them into her bead-embroidered reticule. A similar vagary of impulse moved her to turn the key in the cupboard, and to retreat to the farther end of the room, where Miss Powers found her sitting stiffly upright a few minutes later.

Of the rest of her call Miss Patricia had only a confused and painful recollection. Fortunately for the little spinster, the cordial young Westerner had a ready tongue and an abounding desire to do the honors of the place to her mother's old friend. Under the cover of that flood of girlish enthusiasm Miss Patricia finally regained her self-possession sufficiently to say "yes" and "no" in the right place; to demonstrate how a certain grinning Chinese idol, brought from over the seas by the girl's uncle, Theron Hilliard, could be made to turn its eyes; and even to show the secret workings of some carved boxes that the same seafaring uncle had given his sister, Miss Powers's mother. "He always brought some sort of puzzle to Katharine, and usually one like it to me," the speaker finished, with an imperceptible sigh.

But the next question set her heart fluttering again, and it was with burning ears that she heard her hostess say: —

"There is one thing that I want you to tell me about, and that is the dearest little china cup, all covered with forget-me-nots woven in and out in the drollest way imaginable. Janey," calling to the maid, "go and bring me that blue and white cup in the cupboard on the left of the fireplace in the parlor."

In agony of spirit Miss Patricia rose, murmuring incoherently that she must go at once, that some other time she would tell about the cup, and — this to a cordial invitation to tea — that she

would like to stay, thank you, but there were home duties — in fact, Miss Patricia never knew quite how she got away from the scene of her misdeed and back to the shelter of her own home.

But even after she was tucked away in her comfortable canopy-topped bed she obtained no respite from her torturing conscience. The very katydids in the trees by the gate voiced her guilt, for, instead of proclaiming Katy's misdeeds, they were saying, "Stole-a-cup, stole-a-cup, she did, she did, a cup, a cup!" first one, and then another, and now they were saying it together so loud and fast that the brown owl that slept in the oak in the lane rustled through the garden, screaming, "Who-o?. Who-o?" and in a minute, from the little stream at the foot of the garden, came an answer from the bullfrog in such loud tones that Patricia felt it must be heard all over the village, "Miss PAT-ty, Miss PAT-ty!"

She pulled the bed clothing over her ears in order to shut out the sounds, and at last fell asleep from exhaustion, to waken just as the clock struck three; and, yes, even the clock knew it, for it was saying over and over, without pause or change, "Miss Pat-ty stole-a-cup, Miss Pat-ty stole-a-cup, Miss Pat-ty stole-a-cup."

And so the trouble grew during all the next day, and Miss Patty found her guilty secret pictured in cup-shaped sunrise clouds, announced by the morning call of the chanticleer, and even denounced at church; for the minister, who always searched out hidden sins, looked directly at Miss Patty and gave out his text as "For ye make clean the outside of the cup"; while in the Bible class the lesson was on the hiding of the cup in Benjamin's sack.

The cap-sheaf, however, was added to her mental suffering, when at supper time Bumble jumped on her shoulder and knocked her tea cup from her hand. Had her education been classical, Miss Emory probably would have said, "*Et tu, Brute*," but as it was she remarked sadly, "Even you know how wicked I am, don't you, Bumble?"

In short, to Miss Patricia's Puritan tenderness of conscience, accentuated by early training and by her lonely life, the concealment of the accident and the taking of the pieces of the cup seemed a crime hardly to be atoned for by years of expiation.

About the time that Miss Patricia was confessing her sins to Bumble, a bronzed, stalwart man was sitting in the renovated parlor of the old Hilliard house, saying one word to ten that were flung at him from the lips of the impetuous young chatelaine. It was Captain Theron Hilliard, who, in his East Indian banishment, had received the half-jesting invitation of his Western niece to visit her in the rehabilitated homestead, and who, moved by the unaccountable impulse of the long exiled, had hastened home on the first steamer, arriving only that morning. During the day, however, the two had become fast friends, and to-night Miss Powers was telling him, with full assurance of his sympathy, about the dear little woman who came to see her the day before, and whom she wanted to get for a chaperon in place of her father's homesick Western cousin. "You ought to see her, Uncle Theron," the speaker concluded; then, breathlessly,—"why, you must know her, for she was mamma's dearest friend; and her name is Emory, Patricia Emory."

"Patricia Emory! Do you mean to say that she is living here and not married?"

"Yes, uncle, and she's like a piece of china, so delicate and dainty, and oh, she was going to tell me about a funny cup. I'll show it to you — why, it's been taken out, — and oh, look! it's been broken, for here is a bit on the floor."

Captain Theron took the piece of china and looked at it.

"Child, tell me," he said, "is this a piece of the cup you had in the cupboard?"

"The very same, uncle, and it belonged to my mother, but, why, — why, where are you going?"

"Just for a quiet stroll," said Captain Theron, putting on his hat and setting out at a rapid pace down the hill.

As the bells rang out the curfew, Miss Patricia lighted her bedroom candle, then she blew it out. She simply could not go to bed.

Almost stealthily she opened her reticule, pulled out the broken pieces, and laid them, one by one, in the light of the Argand burner, on the table. Her next movement was to go to the closet, bring from it a pasteboard box, — a box into which she had not looked for years, — and to take from it and place on the table an

other and a much-mended cup and saucer, apparently the mate to the one that now lay in pieces before her. Then, after an ineffectual attempt to fit together the tiny fragments of the broken cup, she hurriedly mixed a bowlful of corn-meal dough, molded a part into the semblance of an upturned cup, and, sitting down, arranged the pieces, one by one, on the dough model. It was when she had finished and bent to scrutinize her work that something on the white surface caught her eye, causing it to brighten curiously. For there, on this cup of Katharine Hilliard's that Miss Patty had never seen until yesterday, woven skilfully out among the forget-me-nots, was her own name in tiny specks of gold! Yes, and there were other letters,—a motto, perhaps. With fluttering haste Miss Patricia found another lamp, lighted it, and, placing it where she might see the lettering distinctly, read this strange inscription: —

"Patricia, dear Patricia —
O dearest, answer kind —"

But what question Patricia was to answer the cup did not reveal, for the one bit of china bearing the all-important words was missing.

It was because of this extra lamp that the altruistic Mrs. Tuttle, seeing the unusual illumination at so late an hour, feared illness for her gentle little neighbor, and determined to investigate. To reassure her mind without being discovered was an easy matter, for Miss Patricia's kitchen occupied an entire ell, with windows and doors opening both in the rear and at the front. To one of the rear windows, accordingly, Mrs. Tuttle stole, shawl over head, there to discover Miss Patty apparently mending broken china. "On Sunday night, too," mused the unseen onlooker, "an' her always pretending to be that pious she wouldn't pull the bastin's out of her dress Sunday mornin' so's to wear it to church. Well, I'll never believe in folks again only jest as fur —"

But the extent of Mrs. Tuttle's faith can only be conjectured, for at that moment, happening to glance across the room, she saw a dark bearded face staring into the window opposite, and with a wild scream of "Miss Patty, Miss Patty, he's goin' to murder you! O Benajah Tuttle, save your darlin'!" she turned and fled.

Filled with visions of constables, prisons, and scaffolds, Patricia

tremblingly opened the door. A tall, imperious-looking man strode in, and, pointing to the mended cup, said, "Where did you get that cup?"

"That is a broken cup Theron Hilliard gave me; I mended it," said Miss Patricia so faintly that she hardly heard herself.

"And this?" — pointing to the one which she had fitted over the dough.

"Oh, I didn't mean, — I was there," faltered Patricia, "and I took it off the shelf and broke it, but I'll pay for it. I was going to the first thing in the morning."

"Patricia Emory, sit down. I'm going to tell you of a fool who wanted to tell a girl he loved her, and thought he would do it in an original way. So when he was in a foreign land he had two cups made, one for his sister, and the other for the girl he loved. Both cups were painted with forget-me-nots, but on the one intended for his sweetheart, twined in and out among the flowers, was a verse telling of his love, and asking her to marry him. Now listen. Though he didn't know it then, the sister's cup must have got broken on the way home. They were both done up in the same kind of wrappings, and in his haste for an answer, he mixed them, sent the broken cup and got the answer he deserved. For as it was St. Valentine's eve, what must he do but send with the cup a rhymed note, and so ruin his happiness and hers, trying to be smart. Let's see, how did it run?"

But while the man's mind was still struggling after the first line of his old-time valentine, Miss Patty, her eyes shining brightly through the tears, was repeating softly those enigmatic words that stood out distinctly even through the mist of years.

"Dear friend,

I send this valentine
In hope that when you've read this line
It bears, the trifling gift you'll prize;
But if the message you despise,
Just cast aside the good Saint's token,
And simply say, 'The cup is broken.'"

"But, O Theron!" pursued Miss Patty, quite ignoring the persistent third person of her visitor's narrative, "how was I to know? There was no message on the cup, and when you called

and I told you it was broken you just looked at me and walked away without a word.

"Then your father died, your sister moved away, the house was closed, and if I hadn't been a thief — yes, a thief, for I didn't know the cup was mine, I should never have seen — "

"And if you had concealed the evidence of your crime I might never have understood," said the man, "for see, on the floor in the old parlor I found this." And grasping in his strong hand the trembling fingers that still clasped, unconsciously, the dough-mended cup, he fitted into its place the fragment of china that made the boyish message complete.

"Patricia, dear Patricia, I love you more than life.
Oh, dearest, answer kindly, will you be my own sweet wife?"

It was soon after Theron Hilliard had received the long-delayed answer to his St. Valentine message that Mrs. Tuttle, carrying the broom and tongs, and Benajah Tuttle, armed with the pitchfork and barn shovel, cautiously approached Miss Patricia's house in quest of the supposed assassin.

At the rear window the couple stopped and peeped in. There, on the kitchen settle, sat Miss Patricia, her head comfortably resting on a man's shoulder, while Bumble was prancing up and down in front of them, buzzing his head nearly off with excitement at such a strange proceeding. For a full minute Mrs. Tuttle stood staring in at the window before her usually quick mind grasped the situation, then she turned, and grasping the bewildered Benajah by the shoulder, said sternly: —

"Come right along home, Benajah Tuttle! What do you mean by gettin' out o' bed and comin' down here a-speerin' in on Miss Patty when she's got a beau. Didn't ye know Theron Hilliard got home last night?"

A KLONDIKE AT HOME.

In the news columns of the daily papers we read that more and more men are starting for the frozen gold fields of Alaska, there to endure the most terrible hardships and suffering, for the chance of being the one in a thousand to be favored by fortune. There is no doubt that there is a considerable amount of gold to be gotten with infinite toil in the Klondike region. Some of the reports place the amount taken out during the past year as high as $3,000,000. But it clearly shows that strange characteristic of human nature to discard the things close at hand for those that are far away, that so many neglect the greater opportunities at home.

Thousands of American citizens are now investing their hard-earned savings in the numerous Klondike companies, most of which have nothing more favorable to offer than the mere fact that they are about to send out an expedition to discover and purchase claims. None of them have any tangible property to offer as the basis of their capitalization, while there are enterprises at home that offer far more chance for large gains, and certainly an infinitely lesser degree of risk.

None of these, to our mind, is so worthy of investigation by prudent investors as the **United States Tunnel, Mining, Milling, Drainage, and Transportation Company's Enterprise,** which is located in Clear Creek and Gilpin Counties, Colorado, the richest mining district of the world. This company is incorporated under the laws of West Virginia, with a capital stock of **$5,000,000,** divided into **5,000,000 non-assessable** shares of **one** dollar each.

NOT A MINING SCHEME.

This enterprise differs from the ordinary mining scheme as day from night. In a mine gold may or may not be found, and upon that chance the profits depend; but the profits of the United States Tunnel depend upon the improved facilities it will offer an entire district of great and proved wealth.

Every one would rather own stock of the Manhattan Elevated Railway Co. of New York City, carrying 500,000 passengers day in and day out, than stock in the balloon company which intends starting for the Klondike. You *know* what the one will do; the other, as the French say, may or may not arrive.

In the same way, how much better to invest in a corporation depending on an entire district, in which mines have been producing for the last fifty years, ever increasing, and to-day having a larger output than at any time in its history, than in a single mine, however roseate the prospect *may* be.

Clear Creek and Gilpin Counties, in Colorado, produced precious metals in the past five years valued at $29,253,635, according to the official statistics, 70% of this being in gold. Most of this was taken from the mines on Bellevue Mountain by sinking shafts, and thereby extracting the ore. The **United States Tunnel, Mining, Milling, Drainage, and Transportation Company** owns the **United States** patent for a tunnel through this mountain, which taps or crosscuts mines that produced 45% of this valuation, or $13,500,000.

Instead of working from the surface of the mountain, these mines can conduct all operations from the tunnel at a tremendous saving in expense. Whereas it now costs $8.53 per ton to produce the gold, a careful estimate shows that, worked through the tunnel, it would cost only $4.77 per ton. Of course, the various mines would gladly pay fair royalties to take advantage of this enormous saving.

Thus, shafting must now be constructed at large expense, for the purpose of hoisting the ore to the surface. Though the veins grow richer as they grow deeper, the expense of hoisting becomes larger. The richest veins also contain the most water, which must be pumped or drawn to the surface. In fact, mines must frequently be abandoned, not because the ore supply has given out, but because at a certain depth the expense of hoisting ore and pumping water is too great for profitable operation.

SAVING ON TWO ITEMS.

The saving to the mines now operated, on the tunnel, on the two items of hauling and hoisting alone, would be sufficient to afford an annual income to the company, based on the average yearly product for the past five years:—

	INCOME.	PROFIT.
For Hauling	$613,200	$306,600
For Drainage (there is gravity drainage in the tunnel) .	50,000	50,000

A KLONDIKE AT HOME—Continued.

which alone is sufficient to pay a dividend of 7% on the par value of the stock. As an example of the contracts with various mines this company is now making, we may instance that with the managers of the Fairmont-Shaftes Mines, which had a product of $270,000 in 1896.

The tunnel strikes this mine about 700 feet further than the present advance, and a contract has already been signed with the managers, calling for the payment of $15,000 per annum to the tunnel company for royalty and drainage.

INCREASED OUTPUT.

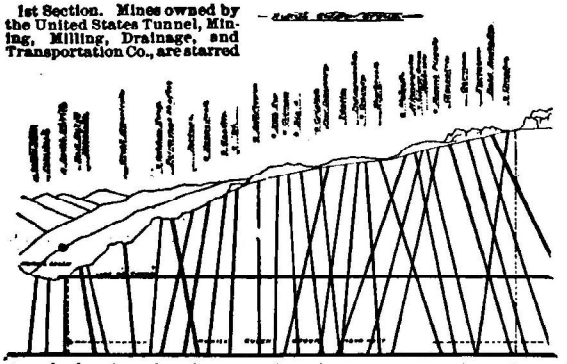
With the completion of the tunnel, mines that have been abandoned will resume work, because of the increased facilities offered. Experts say the output will be increased fivefold.

ADDITIONAL PROPERTY.

The company also owns a mill site, consisting of 53 acres of patented ground immediately adjoining the town of Idaho Springs and close to the Colorado Central Railroad. On this site it is now erecting a fifty-ton stamping mill, and it is proposed to build, besides, smelting works, hydraulic and electric light works for the purpose of supplying power and light to the mines on the tunnel. The company also owns water privileges covering the water rights on South Clear Creek and Chicago Creek giving 200 horse power, which is sufficient for all company purposes. The income from power supply and milling, counting on an annual production of but three thousand tons daily, will be: Power Supply, $100,000 (profit, $50,000) Milling, $821,250 (profit, $273,750), or a total additional profit from supply of power and milling of $323,750, which is sufficient to pay an additional further dividend of 6⅔% on the par value of the stock. With the additional item of $100,000 for royalty for use of the tunnel as a base for mining operations, the annual amount applicable for dividends would be $780,350, sufficient to pay 15% on the par value of stock. Of this there is **no element of uncertainty or risk.**

WORK ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED.

The tunnel begins at Hukill Gulch, half a mile from the town of Idaho Springs (36 miles by railroad from Denver), and runs through Bellevue Mountain, under the rich group of mines at the head of Virginia Cañon, across the most productive part of Russell District, through the very heart of Quartz Hill, and into the midst of the best mines of Gunnell and Eureka. The entire distance is three and a quarter miles, and from mouth to terminus the tunnel runs through continuous gold-producing territory, found in true fissure veins. Of the gold-bearing veins directly crossed by the tunnel, 114 have been already developed and patented, and as many more have been discovered and worked. Work on the tunnel was begun in 1895, and has been continued since. Five hundred feet has been already completed, and a railroad tramway has been laid the full distance. The tunnel can be driven at the rate of twenty feet a day, the entire year. With the improved appliances now being built, it will be completed in two and a half years, or, should it be deemed advisable to work from both ends, in half that time. Profits commence as the work progresses. Mr. James C. Fagan, the superintendent and resident director, in a report dated August 1, 1897, says: "From present indications we should be able to pay a dividend July 1, 1898."



BIG CHANCES FOR A BONANZA.

The company also owns fifteen mines, each 1,500 feet on the lode by 150 feet in width, located on the line of the tunnel. Ore rich in gold has already been struck in several of these mines, and as the whole group lies directly within a well-known belt of productive lodes, with many producing mines to north, south, east, and west of them, there can be no doubt that they will prove good paying mines. The Omaha, Wabash, Big Four, and Gazette are particularly promising. They have each shafts from 15 to 20 feet deep, and the veins thereon are from 4 to 5 feet wide, and assay from $7.00 to $21.00 in gold. The tunnel has already cut two blind lodes which assay well in gold and will pay well for working. The mines are there and are now being worked. The ore is there in great abundance; indeed, there is enough to last 125 years. From the reports of our experts and the opinion of all experienced mining men, the profits from the treatment of the company's own ores are expected to be not less than $750,000 per year, with chances for further gains.

100% BETTER THAN KLONDIKE.

In investing in this company the stockholder is thus *assured*, beyond all chance of risk, a considerable dividend on his investment, and the additional *probability* for enormous gains. In the Klondike mining companies, and in fact all *other* mining investments, there is always an element of chance. This is entirely eliminated in this investment. In other words, it is surely **a safe, legitimate business, perhaps a bonanza.**

RELIABLE, TRUSTWORTHY MANAGEMENT.

The president of the company is Mr. Edward A. Quintard, the well-known President of the Citizens Savings Bank, New York City, and the directors are E. A. Quintard, William L. Wood, Cashier Bank of Jamaica, Jamaica, N. Y.; Alexander K. Hart, President Long Island Electric Railway Co., Brooklyn, N. Y.; William E. Lown, President Tidal Oil Co., New York City; James C. Fagan, Idaho Springs, Colorado; Homer A. Hoit, New York City; and E. W. Jackson, Banker, Middletown, Ct.

The gentlemen composing the Board of Directors are all men of unquestioned integrity and large business experience in successful ventures, and afford absolute guarantee that the affairs of the company will be honestly, skilfully, and economically conducted for the benefit of all the stockholders.

They have all paid for considerable blocks of stock, which shows that they personally feel assured of the merit and reliability of the business.

WHERE THE MONEY WILL GO.

All money received for stock is to be used for the rapid completion of the tunnel, erection of smelting and concentrating mills, larger stamp mills as needed, electric light works, etc., etc. A new air compressor has just been purchased, and is now being put up on the property.

SPECIAL LIMITED OFFER.

For the purpose of quickly obtaining more money to rapidly complete the work, the company offers a limited amount of treasury stock (par value one dollar a share) at only fifty cents a share. The fullest investigation is invited, and prospectus will be sent to any address on application. Any inquiries will receive immediate attention, but as the amount of stock to be sold at the special price is strictly limited, it is advisable

NOT TO DELAY.

HOW TO SUBSCRIBE.—For every two shares you wish to purchase, remit $1 by money order, bank check, or draft; thus $5 will buy ten shares, $10 will buy twenty shares, etc. Make all checks and drafts payable to William E. Lown, Treasurer. Stock certificates will be sent you by return mail. Write your name and address very plainly. Address **UNITED STATES TUNNEL, MINING, MILLING, DRAINAGE, AND TRANSPORTATION COMPANY, 35 Wall St., New York City.**

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By Charles Stuart Pratt.

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>
> ***"In 'A Celestial Crime,' by Charles Stuart Pratt, the publishers of The Black Cat have found one of these stories that last. Although involving the reader in a web of mystery, it introduces him, not to characters of the police court, but to men and women of culture and distinction. Balancing a theme of crime, it presents a counter theme of romantic devotion. With a growing swiftness of action it retains throughout purity and grace of English. Through a series of dramatic scenes as logical in their sequence as a flight of stairs, but leading to wholly unexpected results, it mounts to a climax startling, unforeseen, unparalleled in the history of crime, yet based upon facts of unquestionable scientific accuracy. Altogether, 'A Celestial Crime' presents the strongest and most enthralling case of circumstantial evidence that has ever come to my notice."***

The publication of the $2,600 prize stories was begun in the July number of THE BLACK CAT. As the back numbers will shortly be out of print, all those desiring these remarkable tales, which appear exclusively in this magazine, should send us their subscriptions at once.

If you are already a subscriber, make some friend happy by presenting a year's subscription, which costs only 50 cents. Address, THE SHORTSTORY PUBLISHING CO., 144 High Street, Boston, Mass.

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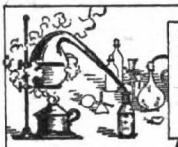

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