

SO MUCH OF LIFE BEHIND ME LIES.

So much of life behind me lies,
My heart grows faint with sorrow,
That each to-day the swifter flies,
And sooner comes each morrow.

I marvel much that once I deemed
Time's azure wings were leaden;
And on life's boundless ether seemed
Youth's ecstasies to deaden.

While now my precious days glide on,
Than all fleet symbols faster;
With fortune gay, scarce quicker gone,
Than glooming with disaster.

It is not that my life has brought
Of its young dreams fruition;
Its warp, alas! is thick inwrought
With crossings of ambition.

Not that my days have all been good—
I mourn them few and fleeting;
Meagre, I own, their gains that would
Be worth their poor repeating.

And this a double worth bestows
On hours as yet unskandered;
Priceless to him the sunset grows,
Who the long day has wandered.

A wanderer and a loiterer I,
For whom life's shadows lengthen;
Above me shine the summits high,
Around me fetters strengthen.

I cannot reach their golden crests,
The while I strive receding;
My soul, impatient while it rests,
Weeps o'er each moment speeding.

So much to do, so far to climb,
So little learned at fifty!
Ah! youth is prodigal of time,
Age only makes us thrifty.

The silver gleams that in our locks
Are sunset's pale foreglances,
Teach us that deeds, not beating clocks,
Mark fifty Time's advances.

What's then to do, since Time will run,
And graves and earth's ambitions?
This first, this only, is well done—
To live for Heaven's fruitions.

A CALIFORNIAN GAMBLING-HOUSE.

THE Plaza Grande of the city of San Francisco is alive with busy crowds, passing and repassing in all directions; some chaffering and bargaining, others looking on in idle curiosity; merchants and brokers gravely discussing prices, seeking customers, or cheapening newly arrived wares; weather-beaten gold-diggers, their stalwart frames encased in soiled worn garments, lounging carelessly along with their well-filled leathern money-bag in their girdle; new-comers, just landed from the shipping in the bay, confused and bewildered by the novel sights and sounds around them; Californian Spaniards, in their gay serapes, and heavy, ringing spurs; long-tailed Chinese, with loose blue jackets and bare throats, independent of cravats and neck-ties; swarms of smart trim seamen from the American men-of-war riding at anchor off the port; French, Americans, Germans, English, Argentines, Spaniards, South-sea Islanders, negroes, and mulattoes, all intent upon their various objects of business or pleasure; gold the magnet of attraction; gold the aim and end for which all, of every hue and of every clime, have left their distant homes.

The first wild excitement, however, was past, in which numbers had madly rushed to the mountains, to see and to dig for themselves; most had already been there, and had returned completely satisfied, having altogether failed to find gold, whilst they had spent the little they took with them; and having now arrived at the conviction that there are other ways and means of making money in California, less laborious and uncertain than gold-digging.

Numbers had now settled in the towns as merchants or factors, labourers or artisans, boatmen, porters, policemen, pedlars, cooks, clerks; in short, anything and everything by which to make money rapidly, and then—to go back to their homes? No, to return to the diggings; for, as they said, they "had not known how to set about it on their first attempt."

Of all who resorted to California, there was but one class of men whose object was neither to work nor to trade, neither to buy nor to sell. They came furnished with playing-cards from the United States, where entire manufactories are employed in preparing such articles, punctured, which their owners can distinguish by the touch, without turning them up. These men did nothing from the moment they stepped on shore, aye, nor on board the ship that brought them over, but handle their cards and count or weigh gold.

These were, and are, the licensed gamblers, whose central force is found in San Francisco, but whose ramifications extend to the diggings around in all directions—men who, with deceit and fraud for the foundation of their business, enter California in the firm determination of amassing wealth by all means and at all risks, and not be turned aside though robbery and murder lie in their path.

England is reproached for sending her criminals to Australia; but they are saints compared with these dregs of the American people, amongst whom it is remarkable that there is scarcely one Englishman or Irishman. The most reprobate of these gamblers, and, indeed, the only ones who are a match for the quick-eyed Spaniard, so peculiarly cool and self-possessed in games of hazard, are the Americans.

From the splendid saloons of San Francisco, with their gaudy pictures and decorations, and hundreds of tables laden with gold, down to the miserable tent in the most distant mountain, where the serape, or blanket-cloak, thrown over a few boards roughly nailed together, serves as a gaming-table through the night, and at morning dawn does duty as bed and coverlet; wherever there is gold, these men are to be found, ready to rob the poor miner of the hardly earned reward of his

toil; while the Spanish cloak hides both their well-filled money-bag, and the six-barrelled revolver and sharp bowie-knife, ready for attack or defence, as occasion may require.

We have not now, however, to do with the diggings; we are standing in the Plaza of San Francisco, and the twilight has suddenly spread its veil over the landscape, though the sun has scarcely disappeared behind the low coast range, and sunk into the sea to rise upon India's distant shores. But what are these large buildings, dividing Kearney Street from the Plaza, in which all seems suddenly alive and bustling? The mighty folding-doors are thrown wide open, and the brilliant light of a multitude of astral lamps dazzles the eyes of the crowds who are flowing into the halls. To the right and left, lie similar buildings, all built of brick, with iron balconies and window-shutters, to set at defiance the frequent conflagrations, which have three times already reduced this row of houses to ashes.

From each there issues a stream of light; from each proceeds wild noisy music; all are thronged with eager multitudes; and the spectator hesitates which to choose as the scene of his observations. The largest and most splendid, however, is this one, over whose entrance the name of *El Dorado* sparkles in bright gold letters; and though still half undecided whether to venture into the lion's den, our foot once over the threshold, curiosity overpowers our scruples, and the next minute we find ourselves in the middle of the room, astonished and almost bewildered by all we see around us.

We are in a vast saloon, the ceiling of which is supported by two rows of white louvered columns. A profusion of lamps render it almost as light as day. The wall are adorned with voluptuous pictures, designed, together with the noisy music, to attract loungers and sight-seers, who, once tempted within the doors, are pretty sure eventually to yield to the seductions of the gaming-tables. These tables are scattered about the room, with ample space between each to allow a number of men to sit and stand about them, and yet leave space for those who would walk up and down; the crowds who are still pressing in at the doors not being, generally, attracted to the tables until they have fully gratified their curiosity by gazing at all there is to see, and listening to all there is to hear.

To the right of the saloon, behind a long counter, stands a girl, a real, living, pretty, modest-looking young girl, in a close-fitting black silk dress, her slender fingers adorned with rings, supplying her many customers with tea, coffee, and chocolate, cakes, preserves, and confectionary of all sorts; whilst at the opposite corner of the hall, a man is stationed at a similar counter furnished with wine and spirits.

Lounging upon the tea-table are four or five tall uncouth young men, fixed in profound admiration of the young lady on the other side; swallowing one cup of tea after another, at a quarter dollar apiece, by way of excuse for remaining there; and, for the same reason, munching up a most unwholesome quantity of sweet-cakes and pastry.

A few steps behind them stands a group of backwoodsmen, enjoying, at a cheaper rate, the pleasure of gazing upon the pretty damsel who presides over the good things; and determinedly resisting all attempts to dislodge them from their post of observation.

The pretty tea-maker becomes by degrees the centre of attraction to the whole room; all who have once seen her return a second time, and few turn away without leaving behind at least their quarter-dollar for something eatable or uneatable, were it only for the pleasure of listening to the few words she must speak in telling them the price of her wares. And wherefore is this? The maiden has certainly a very pretty pleasing face and neat figure, but is by no means a perfect beauty, and we might, in other towns, meet three or four equally pretty, or prettier girls in walking along a single street; but here it is not so. At home they have seen many such, as neat, and fair, and attractive, but not since they came to San Francisco. There were, at the time of which we speak, very few respectable women to be found there, and these few rarely, if ever, appeared in the streets.

But hold! what is this? What is going on at this table, attracting such crowds of gamblers and idlers? They seem to be playing very high here, and every one presses as close as possible, the hindmost standing on their toes to get a glimpse over their neighbour's shoulders. At the table, amongst the professional gamblers and their accomplices, stands a young lad slowly shuffling a pack of cards by way of occupation until the game begins, and then eagerly watching it with his little sharp gray-eyes, while involuntarily continuing to shuffle.

The game bears some resemblance to that of "lansquenet"; the card thrown on the left side is for the banker, that on the right for the player; and the stake is doubled if he throws two above and two below, thus giving each player opportunity to stake on two at once. The boy, in whom we have begun to take an interest, is at most sixteen years old; he is tall and slender, yet his features would have something of a childlike innocent expression, were it not for the glittering sunken eye and sternly compressed lip. He has thrown down his pack of cards; his felt hat is pushed up from his high pale forehead, his left hand is thrust into his bosom, his right hand is clenched and resting on the table, in the centre of which piles of dollars form a wall round a heap of nuggets and gold-pieces, and little stitched-up bags of gold-dust; while three or four larger lumps of gold and stamped bars of the same precious metal are laid on the top, but more for show than for use. His stake, perhaps twenty or five-and-twenty half "eagles" (five dollars), lies upon the horseman (or queen), and his eyes are fixed in feverish excitement on the hands of the dealer. This latter, and an American, sits cool and collected beside him, with the card that is to be taken off already in his grasp, and examines once more the stakes laid down—if all is in order. The uppermost cards are the ace and the queen. The boy has won, and a smile of triumph plays upon his lip.

"I shall pay you back to-night what you lent me, Robertson," he says in a hoarse and trembling voice.

"It seems likely enough," replies the gambler, with an ambiguous smile. You are in luck to-night, Lovell; you must follow it well up."

"I will leave that upon the queen, and put this upon the deuce," says Lovell.

Here and there are similar sums laid or altered, and again the cards are thrown—both stakes are lost.

"Confound it!" mutters the poor boy half inaudibly, pulling out of his pocket a little sack of gold-dust, at which the banker does not even deign to look. The sack might hold about two pounds; and the Spaniard who stands opposite to him, now throws a couple of ounces on the other card.

"You mistrust that gentleman's luck, senor, do you?" said the banker with a smile, holding the cards composedly in his

left hand, as he fixed a searching look upon the Californian. "Quien sabe?" replies the other with indifference, but—his card has won.

The young gambler muttered a curse between his closed teeth, and with a trembling hand he hastily felt in his pockets for more gold—in vain—not in this, not in that. "Gone—stolen!" he murmured to himself, and his glaring eye wandered suspiciously from one to another of those who pressed round him. Their countenances expressed nothing but indifference or ridicule.

"Come, stranger; if you do not play any more, make way for others," said a long-bearded fellow clad in a dirty ragged blouse and superannuated felt hat stuck sideways on his tangled locks. "It seems to me you're done."

"I shall stay here as long as I like," answered Lovell shortly.

"Pray, sir, make room, if you do not play any more," echoed the gambler who sat next him. "Our table, you see, is quite crowded."

"I have been robbed!" cries the young man, throwing an angry glance on the wearer of the smock-frock—"meanly, shamefully robbed."

"Well, don't stare that way at me, my boy, if you please," says smock-frock coolly.

"I stare at whom I like," replied the boy in great excitement; "and if he can't stand it, he may look another way."

"Make room there will ye?" said the miner to those who stood by; and seizing the young gambler with the gripe of a giant, he lifted him up and threw him behind him.

"Have a care—have a care!" shouted several voices the next moment; and two or three hands were raised to throw up the revolver, which the exasperated youth, regardless of consequences, was pointing at the head of his aggressor. Before they could wrest the weapon from him, however, he had twice pulled the trigger; one ball smashed the shade of an astral lamp, the fragments of which fell on the heads of those below, scattering them, laughing and swearing, in all directions; whilst the other harmlessly struck the ceiling, bringing down only a little plaster. The mark it made was not the only one of the kind to be seen there.

"Much obliged," said the miner in the smock-frock coolly to the bystanders; and without troubling himself further about the youth, who was struggling desperately with those who held him, and actually foaming with rage, he took a packet of gold out of his blouse, and set it on the card nearest to him.

As it was feared that the enraged boy might have other weapons about him, he was taken in charge by some sturdy Irishmen, who volunteered their services for the purpose, and dragged him to the door, where he was made over to two policemen, who had hastened up on hearing the shots, and who led him safely away.

The idlers lounging about the saloon had all, meanwhile, thronged eagerly round the spot whence the shots proceeded, to see as much as possible of the fight they supposed to be going on; and the gamblers at the nearest tables found it necessary for a few minutes to use actual force in keeping back the crowd; even the tea-table was for the time forsaken.

There was, however, too much that was new and interesting on every side, to allow the spectators to fix their eyes long on any one point. From another part of the room there now arose a tumultuous noise of altercation and laughter. What had happened there? "Bravo! Capitally done! Hurrah!" cheered the throng, and one indignant voice, vehemently protesting against something, was again and again drowned in the general shout of approval. A singular incident had occurred here, leading to a strife in which the crowd immediately took upon itself the office of judge and jury, decided promptly, and enforced the decision.

A man tidily and respectfully dressed in a black frock-coat and dark trousers, had come regularly for some evenings—this was the seventh—always at the same time and to the same table; had for awhile looked on at the game, and at last drawn a linen bag out of his breast-pocket and staked it on a card. On the first evening the card had won; and he shook the bag out upon the table to count the money. There were twenty-eight Spanish dollars, upon which the banker quietly counted out to him the same sum, and the gentleman walked off with his gains without venturing on a second cast.

On the second evening, he came again, staked as before, and lost. Quite coolly, however, without even a look of discontent, he opened the bag, shook it out—it contained exactly the same sum as on the last occasion—then rolled it together, and thrusting it into his pocket, left the saloon. On the third, fourth, and fifth evenings the same thing occurred. The gamblers had got used to the man, and amused themselves with his odd ways. Again he lost, and behaved exactly as before, always taking the bag away with him.

On the sixth evening—and so exactly had he kept his time that the gamblers said, laughing to each other: "It can't be eight o'clock yet; the eight-and-twenty dollar man is not come." He appeared again, staked as usual, and once more lost. The bar-keeper, who dispensed his wines and spirits just opposite to this table, could not forbear laughing aloud as the stranger shook out the money in his cool business-like way, as if paying a regular debt for some employer, rather than gambling and throwing away his own money.

The seventh evening came—it was a full minute past eight o'clock, and one of the gamblers said laughing to the other: "We have used him too badly; we have frightened him away," when his comrade pointed over his shoulder, and there was the man in the black frock-coat making his way to his customary place, where some who had happened to meet him there before, readily made room for him, and where he quietly took his seat, paying no sort of attention to the whispered jokes and laughter around him. Until precisely a quarter to nine, he gravely watched the play, and then brought out the well-known linen bag, setting it upon the deuce which was that moment turned up. Two cards were drawn, without the deuce appearing—now the ace fell on the left; and on the right—a scarcely perceptible smile played on the banker's lips—the deuce. The stranger turned pale as death; but without uttering a word upon his change of luck, he stretched out his hand for his linen bag, and was untying it, as usual, to count the dollars, when the gambler said laughing: "Let it be; I know how much there is in it. Eight-and-twenty. Am I not right?"

"No," said the man quietly, and shook out the silver upon the table, shook the bag again, and after the silver came a roll of closely-wrapped bank-notes and a folded paper.