

neighbouring mountain, furnished material for a title, and the town, with roystering indifference, adopted the suggestion.

The day on which McWilliams admitted to his inner consciousness that he was down on his luck was January 29th, 1866. It was something of a comfort to him, even in that condition, to know that fortune had deigned to notice him. He had drifted in on that stream of men fresh from the trenches of the hostile south, and, in common with his neighbours, had invested his savings in what was then mere speculation. He had leased a small tract of land on the hillside above the town, and started to drill for oil. This was in the early summer, or spring, of 1865. Developments in the immediate neighbourhood were so uniformly successful that McWilliams was looked upon as a lucky fellow and future oil prince. From the awakening of this sentiment I date the beginning of McWilliams's run of ill-luck, for at this time he was shamefully imposed upon by a young woman in Oil City.

The young woman was good enough in her way, but her way, unfortunately, was a little out of the orthodox line. Personally, and so far as any one knew, she stood without reproach, but her ideas of life, I grieve to say, were somewhat warped. She was anxious (but, for the sake of euphemism, let us say 'ambitious') to get a husband. I am inclined to the belief that she did not expect to love her husband when she got him, for she had had time enough on her hands to love two or three husbands. It would have been an easy matter for her to get married had she cared less for social distinction and a future free from trades-people's bills, but a praiseworthy desire to shine as the wife of an oil prince caused her to throw a drag net over the unsuspecting head of McWilliams. This net took the shape of a plausible argument to the effect that McWilliams's casual meetings with the young woman were compromising in their tendency, and that, unless McWilliams was enough in earnest to clear her name of reproach, he should leave the country until the society of Oil City forgot him. This was arrant humbug, as every liberal-minded woman in the oil country will attest; but, as I have said, McWilliams was easily imposed upon. Like a thorough-going oil man he refused to let anything stand between him and the oil well of his dreams, and in a straightforward, honest sort of way, he married the young woman out of hand.

Mrs. McWilliams ought to have been happy; but if the unsolicited testimony of disinterested witnesses may be allowed as evidence, it would seem that she was in a state of constant dissatisfaction and misery. With a wariness truly Scotch in its origin and tendency, McWilliams refused to launch into extravagance in living until the capacity of the Pithole lease should be known. This vexed Mrs. McWilliams beyond endurance; and it came to pass in early winter, when the lease failed to produce anything but the driest kind of dry wells, that the indignant wife, declaring that McWilliams had failed in his duty toward her, left the oil country to try her fortunes elsewhere. After paying his wife's debts, McWilliams—now penniless and friendless—seated himself on a stump on the hillside above Pithole and admitted to himself, with a dull feeling of satisfaction, that he was down on his luck.

McWilliams's luck had deserted him at last! The hopeful man had waited a long time for fortune's wheel to stop in front of him; and now that it had stopped a flying spoke had knocked him down. Most strong and healthy persons will resent a blow, even from fate. With a Scotch slowness to wrath—after picking himself up and seating himself on the stump above the town—McWilliams observed that his luck had treated him cruelly. Sitting there, watching the busy wells around him, the puffs of steam that floated away like snowy banners from panting engines; hearing the rattle of machinery and the clang of busy hammers, and noting with sullen brow the prosperity of hundreds of men beside him, McWilliams gave rein to his swelling temper and with sturdy arm aimed blows at fate.

The process of it was altogether unrecognized by McWilliams. This revolt at fate was in another form, but a renunciation of a religion, and the ultimate issue was neither argued with nor questioned. The subtle sophistry of unknown argument within him did not find its way to his lips. So far as can be learned his utterances were emphatic and commonplace. "Well," said he, "I guess I'm pretty low down now; luck's all gone to thunder, and no mistake. Luck? To the devil with luck! Who said anything about luck? There's no such thing. Hard work makes it—hard, steady, pound-ing work."

The debate within him sent out no bulletins to the public for several minutes. At length, when the sun suffused his thoughtful eyes with golden radiance from the western hilltops, McWilliams roused himself angrily, and with a little "To hell with luck!" strode down to the town.

Fate must have paused in surprise to see its grandchild, Luck, so grievously flouted by a hitherto harmless slave. She must have respected him then, for McWilliams was beyond her power. He had taken his destiny into his own hands.

The morning of the 29th day of January, 1866, saw McWilliams at work with a shovel on the edge of his lease. He was digging a water well. "Most likely find a quicksand or a coal bed here," he muttered grimly. "Drilled for oil and found salt-water on the upper edge. Things seem to go by contraries with me." Luck having no connection with this well, neither quicksand nor coals were found, but water, pure, fresh spring-water, in volume sufficient to supply half the town. Later in the day McWilliams put into the well a box pump of his own manufacture, and with the help of a dozen barrels and a few lengths of two-inch iron pipe established the McWilliams' Water Works.

McWilliams was pretty low down on his luck at this time; for he was less than a hewer of wood—he was a drawer of water. In Pithole in 1865-66 the drawing of water was much more profitable than it had been in ancient Palestine. In dry months water retailed at 10 cents a drink and \$1 per bucket; but in the closing days of January 60 cents per barrel was the ruling price. Even in the dry months there was little danger of a water famine, for, as the price of drinking water increased, the demand fell off to such an extent that O'Reilly, a saloon-keeper who had come to Pithole with a keg of liquor on his back and thirteen cracked glasses in his pockets, was enabled to buy a diamond pin as big as a walnut and to run as the popular candidate for mayor. At the time when McWilliams' broad back began to heave up and down with the motion of the pump-handle, water was cheap enough to drink, and yet not too expensive for an occasional cleansing of soiled linen; so that at the end of the first day's pumping McWilliams considered himself justified in looking forward to the time when he might put in a boiler and engine and steam-pump.

At the close of the second day McWilliams was so well satisfied with his defiance of fate, fortune and luck, that he determined to quit his boarding-place, and, for the sake of economy, take up his residence in an abandoned engine-house on his lease. This engine-house was all that remained of his attempt to strike oil; the derrick, boiler, engine and other machinery having been sold to pay his quondam wife's debts.

With the hands engaged in purely mechanical labor, the busy mind breaks away from the menial office of the body and soars into a world of its own. The unthinking hand plods on, the quiet eye performs its part; but the mind, roaming at its will, builds castles, towns and cities, paints pictures in bright array at close of day, until ambition, filled with light and hope, returns to cheer and soothe the wearied senses that in honest labor wore the hours away. Suddenly awakened from its lethargy, McWilliams's strong mind ran on before, and with a master hand built water works, laid lines of pipe, and poured into the owner's pockets a stream of gold. The practical outcome of this hopeful train of thought became apparent on the first day of February, when McWilliams, after working-hours, began to dig foundations for the new boiler and pump.

Those three (scape) graces, old grandmother Fate, her worldly-wise daughter, Fortune, and her impulsive granddaughter, Luck, watched McWilliams with curious attention that day. Here was a former slave, in defiance of their teachings, well started on the road to prosperity; here was a case that demanded attention. If McWilliams, by sheer force of will and energy, could get along without them, they surely could not get along without him. They must get him back in some way, and with this resolve they retired to work out their plot.

The fourth day of February, 1866, will long be remembered by men that drill for crude petroleum. It was the day on which Fate shot her last arrow at McWilliams. Leaving the clumsy pump and greasy water-barrels in charge of an indigent negro, McWilliams set off for Oil City to buy machinery for his new enterprise. Second-hand engines and pumps were not plentiful, but after a tiresome walk up Oil Creek McWilliams succeeded in purchasing what he wanted.

It was late in the afternoon when, on his return, he came in sight of the hills of Pithole. A towering cloud of smoke hung over the city. Holmden street was in flames. The Tremont House, the Syracuse House, the United States Hotel, the Buffalo House, and the Chautauqua livery stables were great blocks of fire.

McWilliams hastened forward. His first thoughts were for his pumps and water-barrels. Of course, in their eagerness to subdue the fire the citizens would seize upon his pump and use all the water without a thought of remuneration. In hasty or careless pumping they would destroy the well or pump it dry. Panting and breathless, McWilliams looked eagerly at the burning buildings. Only a dozen or so of frantic men seemed to be near them, and no water was being thrown on the flames. The well must have gone dry! McWilliams sat down upon a stump and groaned. Fighting against fate was a hard job, after all. After a few moments he rose and resolutely pushed on toward his lease. He would know the worst. The Scotch grit in him came to the surface, and he determined, with set teeth and clenched hands, that neither fate, luck nor the devil could swerve him a hair's breadth in his purpose. He would succeed; hell itself had no power that would make him pause.

But what was this as he climbed a slight rise of ground? Three thousand men were crowded upon his lease. Something unusual had occurred. It could not have been that the well had merely gone dry; no one cared about that. It could not have been that the negro had fallen into a quicksand and disappeared; no one cared about a white man's life, much less a negro's. What was it—what was fate's revenge?

The crowd pressed like madmen about the pump. Greasy drillers, with strong, rude motions, elbowed aside less stalwart men and trod on the toes of finely-dressed speculators from the East. Small men went down like straws in the crush and were carried out half strangled. Employer fought with workman for places at the pump.

"What new misfortune is this?" cried McWilliams, as a man dashed past him. "They pumped your well dry, and—" The runner was gone before the sentence could be finished.

The well had gone dry! This was enough to start with. What next? McWilliams forced his way into the crowd with fierce energy. Men recognized him and gave him room.

The pump-handle was flying up and down like a runaway walking-beam. Then McWilliams, crowding forward, suddenly stopped. Something there—there where his eyes were chained—sent the blood back upon his heart, and left his cheeks and lips like ashes. It was oil!

McWilliams's luck had run on to its uttermost limit; it had done its worst, and here was the result. McWilliams had pumped for water and found oil! The first of the wonderful surface wells of Pithole had been struck. Did McWilliams care? No; for in that trying moment, when the sun threw the radiance of that sparkling stream of oil into his staring eyes, the Scotch perverseness held its own. He had done with fate and luck forever.

"Fore God, Massa," shouted the negro, as he caught sight of McWilliams in the crowd, "I'se po'ful glad to see you. I pump dis yer ting for de fire, an' de mo' dey frows on de mo' de fire burns."

The negro was right. It will be remembered that the discovery of the famous surface wells was due to the fire on Holmden Street. In speechless amazement the firemen saw streams of water turn to fire and go blazing heavenward. When it became known that the water-well on the hillside was belching forth a torrent of oil, the fire lost all attraction except to the hotel proprietors and persons financially interested. For a full description of the scene I cheerfully refer the reader to the flowing English of the Pithole Record of February 5, 1866.

McWilliams received this gift of fortune with sullen thankfulness; much in the same spirit as that in which an angry, wilful child accepts a favour that it has fought for. He took what was given; but there was no concession in word or thought. It was a part of his resolution to take things as they come—he had already learned to part with them as they go; which was much the harder.

I need not detail the events following the discovery of the Pithole surface wells. Having served their purpose these wells fell away to nothing. They were but the heralds of that greater fall, in which Pithole itself went down into material oblivion. Flower and fern bloom and wave over its ruins now.

McWilliams sold his lease when prices sat on the very summit of their wild glory, and following the line of development into other fields bought cautiously and wisely. He gained the reputation of being a careful operator—a man who, leaving nothing to chance, pounded away until success, through sheer weariness, gave up her store of wealth. Fortune tried to play with him once or twice, but gave up in despair. Nothing could withstand the careful attention to detail with which he hammered away at his own chosen ideas.

Mrs. McWilliams returned with the intention of setting up a brilliant establishment. She went away again with a check for five thousand dollars in her pocket. In exchange she had given a written promise never to return. As I have suggested elsewhere, it was an easy thing to impose upon McWilliams. A month afterward she was lost in a storm, while on her way to Europe.

Last winter, while standing as an idle visitor in the correspondents' gallery in the House of Representatives at Washington, I heard a strong, steady, familiar voice deliver a speech on the tariff question. The honourable member went at his subject hammer and tongs, and by his dogged earnestness claimed the close attention of the whole house. Something in his gesture, in a forgetful moment, spun me back to the oil regions. It was McWilliams!

As he finished his speech he saw me and hastened upstairs to meet me. His grip was stronger and even more persistent than his speech.

"How's your luck, McWilliams?" I asked, when the first explosion of good-will on both sides were over.

"Oh, hang the luck," said he, "I never think of it. All the luck there is in life is that which you can pound out with your fist. It's hard work and plenty of it. But come down to Willard's; my wife will be delighted to see you."

"Your wife?"

"Yes; not the first one—she's in the bottom of the sea, poor thing—but Miss Child; she kept the school at Oil City, you know."

"What, the little girl from New England?"

"The same."

"You must have had luck with you there, McWilliams."

"No; not exactly. She said it wasn't luck; but that I kept at it so persistently, so perseveringly, she had to marry me. But come—come along."

And I went.

FROM *The Queen* we cannot forbear quoting fragments of a paper dealing with "Our Slipshod Cousin." We commend it earnestly to all whom it may concern.

The untidiest little varlet to be found within the four seas, the stamp of disorder was marked on our slipshod cousin from her birth. With an artistic sense of what is beautiful, and a wholesome sense of what is right, our slipshod cousin contrives to be always in the midst of ugliness because of disorder; and to be always doing mischief because of neglect of times and forgetfulness of promises. She will take infinite pains,