

OUT OF DROWNING VALLEY

CHAPTER I

SCARLETT

ON the rocky bluff that commanded the entrance to Drowning Valley Charles Edgerley Scarlett sat bareheaded in the rain and gazed with a set mouth at the prospect lying below him.

As far as his hawk's eye could see stretched miles and miles of gray rocks emerging from sodden moss, broken here and there by a small stream marked out by dead trees that might never have been alive, and arched by a somber sky that spat rain or snow at intervals. He was not a day's march from civilization, but, except for the smoke of his partner's cooking fire, he might have been the only living thing in an uninhabited world—and he would have been better pleased if he could have thought so! The valley below him had no good reputation; had in fact so bad a reputation that men took their lives in their hands when they entered it. But it was not the valley which was troubling Scarlett as he scanned its quiet depths. If he could trust his instinct, and he usually could, there lurked in that blank desolation