

A GOLD-DIGGER'S LAST SUNDAY.

BY MRS. GEORGE CUPPLES.

IN the year 1851—I was persuaded by my friend Joe Templeton, whom I had met accidentally in San Francisco, to accompany him to the mines. I allowed myself to be prevailed upon, contrary to my own reason, for I had never felt the gold-fever raging in my veins, as many others had; indeed, the sight of the number of returned miners would have scared many a braver heart than mine. If they by any chance reached the city with their "pile," or a chance nugget, it was only, with very few exceptions, to squander it in drink, or be cheated out of it in one or other of the many gambling houses. The majority, however, returned with their "pile" still a shadowy myth of the future, with their strength broken down, and the world all to begin over again. I laid this clearly before my friend Joe, but he would not listen—he was determined not to view the black side of the picture, and to look at the mines, only with rose-coloured spectacles. His final argument, however, had its effect. "My good fellow," he said, "no one would ever think of coming to California without visiting the mines; just you get it into your wise head that we are going on a tour through the Highlands in the old country, or anywhere else, as we used to undertake together, if it will suit your fertile imagination better. It's a shame to condemn the place unseen; there is certain to be a good side, like anything else, if you will only take the trouble to look for it." Thus he ran on, light-hearted, as merry an old Joe as ever he was in the days when we were lads together, and rather than lose sight of him, I consented to go for a short trial, though considering myself a fool, nevertheless. I left all the necessary arrangements to my friend, who was delighted with the task, only requiring me to give him "carte blanche" for the proper outfit and appurtenances.

After three days of travelling, partly by steamer and partly on foot, we found ourselves on the Yuba River, at the particular portion of the mining district called "Long Bar." Joe was not long in finding a Chinaman and an Irishman to assist us, and we were soon settled in our tent, and all the arrangements made for our search after the precious metal. It was perfectly wonderful to watch how quickly Joe adapted himself to his novel mode of life; how dexterously he fixed the tent and stowed away the utensils, and was "hail fellow, well met" with all and sundry.

It is not my intention, however, to touch upon the technicalities of mines, or the details of a "digger's" experiences; it would be out of place in this short sketch. Suffice it to say that before a fortnight was ended I, for one, had quite enough of the rocker, shovel, and pan, and I found, both by ocular demonstration and practical knowledge, that digging for gold was about the hardest and most monotonous labour that could possibly be conceived. Even Joe, who was determined to see nothing but the bright side, reluctantly confessed that there *might* be pleasanter pursuits. On the second Sunday, Joe, seeming inclined to spend it in bed, I wandered into the country, being sick of the noise of the camp. It was a sad sight to see the majority of the men keeping the day of rest in the way they did, though they never handled a shovel, pick, or rocker on that hallowed day. They spent it in a worse way than if they had been at work. From morning to night it was a round of amusements, cards and billiards, gambling at the drinking booths, or if any had dogs, away for a hunt. Singing and reading as they lay at the doors of their tents might be considered as the most harmless way of spending their Sunday.

I think it is at a time and place like this, that any good there may be in a man asserts itself, at least, I felt it so as I climbed the steep side of the wooded gulch, and at last placed distance betwixt me and the riotous scene. Every little flower or shrub seemed to recall to mind, as I strolled along, some lessons I had been taught in days gone by, and my thoughts wandered naturally to the quiet Sundays spent in the dear "old country." As I sat down to rest under a huge redwood tree, I thought of my friends at home, and remembered how happy and pleased my mother used to look as she walked with our father behind her three sons along the quiet streets to the church, when the air was filled with the sound of bells, when sea and hill lay hushed in sight, and the grand old Scotch city was still on every side, except for the

tramp of hundreds going on their way to worship. Perhaps we used to weary of the too great length of a sermon in those days, but what would I have given now, to hear the toughest scree at a Highland tent preaching, or to stand up at the longest prayer ever uttered by Cameronian or Covenantant. Yet what a noble prospect around me! The scene reminded me of many in the Highlands of Scotland. "The same wide growth of oak corpse, the same deep glens and corries, even the "chapparral" or scrub, was not unlike the general effect of the broom of our bracs here and there. But, in particular, there was one characteristic of the scenery that closely resembled the opening of a park round some gentleman's property, only the background was now savagely grand. The rapid Yuba rolled a greater volume of water by far than the Tummel or the Bran, the distant mountains towered in loftier peaks than the Grampians, and the redwood trees lifted their colossal stems overhead with immense cedar-like arms against the sky, here and there appeared a strange, prickly cactus spreading like a chandelier, the sight of which made me feel that I was in a strange land. I had walked a long way from the camp, and was just thinking of turning, when my ear was arrested by the sound of a man's voice in the distance. I listened eagerly, but all was still and quiet, only the noise of the water falling over the stones in the "creek,"—or what we would have called a mountain burn at home—or the scream of a black vulture far over head, broke the grand stillness of nature. I must have been mistaken, I said to myself as I turned to retrace my steps, when it came again, clear and distinct, sending a thrill through me that makes me shiver even now to think of it. "Alone, alone," was the cry, and echo caught the wailing sound and seemed to toss it mockingly from crag to crag. I hastened, as soon as I recovered my senses, in the direction from whence the sound had come, and on turning round a projecting piece of rock, I saw at a short distance off, a small tent, half hidden away among the brushwood. The usual miner's implements were lying about the door, and the rocker was standing close by the creek with the earth dried hard in it, showing that it had not been used for many days. On entering the tent, I was horrified to find a man lying huddled in the corner amongst his blankets, but so emaciated that I scarcely believed it possible he could have had strength to call out even in a whisper. At first I thought he was dead, but he must have sunk down exhausted, and soon after my entrance he was seized with the most violent ague fit I ever witnessed. "Oh, to gaze upon a face once more," I heard him gasp. "Thank God, He has heard my prayer." I had taken with me some brandy in my flask, and I now poured a little into his mouth, for I saw he was sinking fast; it revived him a little, and I took the opportunity of asking what more I could do for him.

"Four days have I lain here all by myself; oh, do not leave me! stay with me, else I'll go mad," he exclaimed wildly, clutching me by the arm and holding me with a firm grip. I assured him that I would not leave him, but he would not let go his hold of me. "I buried Dickson on Wednesday night, and now I'm dying myself; what was it I was to say to his mother," he continued, looking up to me with his hollow eyes, brilliant with fever. "Oh, yes, that he loved her, that he died loving her, and my mother must be told the same. No, no," he screamed, tossing his arms wildly over his head, "she cursed me, for I ruined her, and the father that was kind to me."

For a long time he lay quite prostrate, and I fancied the grim messenger was drawing near, but when I had moistened his lips again with the brandy he recovered so far as to be able in long intervals, and with great difficulty to tell me his history.

He was born of English parents, and reared in the lap of luxury. He was sent to Eton in due course of time with an unlimited supply of pocket money furnished by his indulgent parents, and then to Oxford. Three times before he was twenty-three years of age had his father paid his debts, almost ruining himself to do so, always believing that the son who was so penitent would be certain not to err again. Then there had come a time of hopeless dissipation worse than before, and to pay for them, he had forged his father's name. To replace the money thus procured, and supply the means for his escape, the mother had parted with her jewels, though she sent him from her with a curse instead of a blessing. He went straight abroad to the New El Dorado, and there his downward course had been rapid and easy. Never accustomed to work, but being an adept at *rouge et noir* and other games of chance, he soon got employment in the numerous gambling-