

THE SATURDAY GAZETTE, ST. JOHN, N. B., AUG. 13, 1887.

THE CIRCUS BLACKS. A Story of Modern San Francisco and Ancient Rome.

The first time I saw Pussy Black she was tobogganing in a butler's tray down the golden stairs of the Mansion House at San Francisco. As tobogganing was not at that time a fashionable amusement in the States, I concluded that Miss Pussy had evolved this novel amusement from the depths of her own mischievous consciousness. Being a sad and promiscuous flirt, even at the age of ten she had doubtless done the Dellah by the head water in order to obtain the butler's tray. However this may have been, her tobogganing was scarcely a success. She bumped, bumped, down half a dozen stairs with a delighted grin on her small countenance. Then alas! A yell and a shriek, a vision of long red legs and flying hair, a rapidly descending confusion of youthful anatomy; and another bump. This time it was Pussy's head that came in contact with the hard floor at the foot of the stairs. I asked the youngster where she was hurt as she lay back in my arms with closed eyes, and she touched one dimpled hand to her forehead. The chambermaid brought water, and I bathed the poor forehead, and then I kissed the place to make it well. Then I kissed it again, because I somehow thought that Miss Pussy liked being kissed by a grown up moustache. I kissed her a third time because I rather enjoyed the performance myself. A coquettish smile appeared on Pussy's rosy mouth, and my vanity took alarm. I felt that the little flirt was deliberately leading me on. I turned the injured innocent over to the tender mercies of the chambermaid, and sallied forth to keep a business appointment connected with the mining interests that had brought me out to California. A few days later, I was at a party given to celebrate the birthday of a little girl who was the only daughter of one of the richest mining men in San Francisco. It was a good old-fashioned American party, where old and young mingle in the Virginia reel and around the festive bowl of lemonade. I came across a very agreeable woman of handsome middle-aged presence, who knew her California like a book, and told me who all the queer people were. Sure of her own pedigree which was of the best South Carolina brand, she could afford to be cynical on the subject of Pacific Coast ancestry. She watched the new arrivals through an imposing tortoise-shell eye-glass and checked them off one by one for my benefit, in a vein of genteel sarcasm. "Aha! Here come the Circus Blacks," said Mrs. Penderlip, calling my attention to a group proceeding towards us from the door. "What snubber diamonds Mrs. Black wears! I can see that from the market, with a pipe in her mouth and head tied up in a red kerchief! I've bought many a cauliflower of her myself." "Why do they call them the 'Circus Blacks'?" I asked. "Everybody knows them by that name—partly, because they act and dress as if they belonged to a circus, and I have heard a legend to the effect that Mrs. Black once travelled with a circus. Black first saw her when she was performing her great bareback feat on a couple of wild steeds at Sacramento, where he kept a tailor's shop. He got into mines after he was married, and that's how he made his money." At this moment the Circus Blacks swept by us in solemn and stately procession. There really was something about them that suggested the "grand entree" of a well regulated circus company opening the performance, the crack of the ring-master's whip being represented by the sarcastic click of Mrs. Penderlip's eye-glass. Mrs. Black was a short, stout man with a stubby beard. His bald spot just came up to Mrs. Black's magnificent diamond necklace. Mrs. Black was unquestionably a fine figure of a woman. Plump, black-haired, rosy-cheeked, in her yellow satin train almost covered with point lace, and with the upper portion of her vigorous frame dressed chiefly in diamonds, she looked a very goddess of bullion. Behind Mr. and Mrs. Black walked two little girls. One was about fourteen, dark, plain, and scowling, dressed in pea-green silk, with her hair in pig-tails, and a horrible red, coral necklace resting on her coral-bone, like the mark of the hangman's rope. The younger girl was blonde, smiling, and coquettish. The real Valenciennes petticoat arrangement, which she wore over a light-blue silk slip, stopped short above her knees. Her infantile and very bare bosom sustained several rows of costly pearls. Her hair in her ears she had large, single diamonds, which gleamed against her yellow locks. I am only a man, and consequently not posted in details of female attire; but I gathered the impression that the younger Miss Black was, to put it mildly, insufficiently clad. I was pleased for her sake that the room was warm. Apparently my views were shared by Mrs. Penderlip. "Just look at Pussy Black!" she exclaimed, in a horrified tone. "She looks like a ballet-girl or a circus-rider. The story about her mother must be true. They say blood will tell. Those long, silk stockings fit like tight-f." Miss Pussy Black turned her pretty head at that moment, and caught my admiring eye. She smiled, in sweet and not displeased surprise, and I recognized the interesting young heroine of the amateur tobogganing episode. When the royal progress of the Circus Blacks was over, when Pussy's papa was taken to his whisky straight, in company with other mining millionaires in a retired corner of the "palatial mansion," when Pussy's mamma was discussing servant's wages with the proudest matronage of glorious California, I looked for Miss Pussy with intent to claim her hand in the giddy waltz. I found her sitting in a corner with a dozen youthful dancing and flirting, and frizzes, about her. She was queening it with a right good will, and there was not a female creature within twenty feet of her. She had learned this early to dispense with chaperones. Miss Pussy affected indifference toward me at first with a coquetry that was quite mature; but her vanity was presently kindled by the thought of being the object of grown-up attentions, and the little dancing-school boys were sent about their business. We danced and flirted, and pulled those snapping-turtle things which do perennial duty at children's parties, and exchanged notes and even pledged each other in champagne. I hinted to Miss Pussy that I should like to make the acquaintance of her mother in order to be able to call upon herself. Pussy only opened her blue eyes wide, and said, demurely, "Oh, you needn't mind ma. I have plenty of gentlemen calling on me. Ma's generally out shopping in the daytime. If she's in we can sit in the hall. The chambermaid in the hotel lets me do everything I want to because I gave her my turquoise ear-rings. I was tired of 'em. They weren't fashionable any more." When I returned to my hotel, I found a telegram summoning me to the East. I left San Francisco the next day. Before I went I sent to Miss Pussy Black the finest box of soap-plums that the City of the Golden Gate could supply. Following so closely on the heels of a children's party, this gift would have been indeed a fatal one to most infants. But observation had convinced me that Miss Pussy had the stomach of an ostrich, and I was certain that she was the sort of child to come up smiling after every round of sweetstuff. Eight years passed before I again saw Miss Pussy. It was at Rome. I came up from Naples and went to an hotel-pension behind the Pantheon, which was a famous resort for genteel widows and spinsters who were spending their declining winter days in the Eternal City. At my first dinner I counted no less than twenty women of uncertain age, sand-wiched in among forlorn young girls and sickly men. The black looks that were cast upon me by three lean, British spinsters who sat opposite me did not improve my appetite. They all wore soiled, white, knitted shawls, and wrangled among themselves on the subject of church architecture. At my left was an American maiden lady who had dyed yellow hair. I heard later that she was going over to the Church of Rome. At my right sat a portly dame with a Roman profile and iron-gray hair. Her face was singularly familiar. She raised her small eye-glass and gazed with quiet sarcasm upon the corpse of a puny little bird which retired from his joys and sorrows upon her plate. Her gesture reminded me of certain California festivities in which I had once participated, and I recognized the lady who had told me the tale of the "Circus Blacks." "Is this Mrs. Penderlip?" I asked, at length. She turned and looked at me with ready amiability, after the European table-d'ote manner. "I have met you somewhere," she said presently, "but I cannot recall time and place." I reminded Mrs. Penderlip of the half-hour that we had had eight years before at the house of the California mining man, and I asked what had become of the "Circus Blacks." "They are at Rome," said Mrs. Penderlip, "and in high feather. They move in court circles, thanks to Pussy's beauty, and her flirtations with poverty-stricken noblemen. I see a good deal of them. I never even recognized them in California. I couldn't know you. But over here it is different. Money is all that counts with the Italians. They think all Americans are plebeians. Mrs. Black is very glad to have me vouch for her pedigree. I never say anything about the bareback act or the market-stall or the tailor's shop, and it wouldn't make any difference if I did. I like Mrs. Black's opera-box and her good dinners (the dinners at this house grow worse every day), and she thinks me an excellent chaperone for Pussy. Even girls like Pussy Black have to be chaperoned at times in this scandal-loving city. The New York and Boston women turn up their noses at the Black's, but there isn't a girl in the American colony as handsome as Pussy, and with her money she ought to marry well. The other daughter, Ella, is married and lives at San Francisco. Now-a-days, the tops are all getting to be bottoms, and the bottoms tops." Mrs. Penderlip had evidently mellowed with age. She informed me, presently, that she had met with financial reverses,

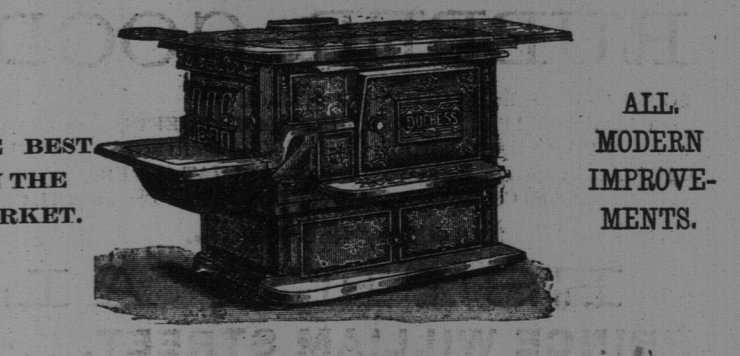
and was practicing social amity as a profession. Mrs. Penderlip, a few days later, offered to take me to call on the Black's, assuring me that Pussy renounced all with pleasure, and had expressed herself as delighted to renew the acquaintance. "They live at the Hotel d'Angleterre," said Mrs. Penderlip, as we crossed the piazza of the Pantheon. "That sort of people never have a home." We had just entered the vestibule of the hotel, and were giving our cards to a flunky in red plush and gold lace, when a tremendous rattling and russing was heard, a swishing of silk draperies, a clanking of spurs and swords, and tearing headlong down the length of the wide crimson-carpeted stairs, with the flowering camellia trees on either side, came a lovely, graceful girl, dragging a long, dark-blue train after her. She was covered with jet ornaments that made a noise as of falling hailstones. Her beautiful face was shaded by a cavalier's hat, with long, drooping, dark-blue plumes. It was Pussy Black. She took her stairs as readily as of old. Behind her skipped one of those superb specimens of Italian military manhood that decorate the thoroughfares of Rome, and do so much to make the Eternal City attractive to American young women. He was a handsome youth, and, with his long, black and yellow legs, his shining accoutrements, and his neatly corseted figure, he reminded me of a brilliant dragon-fly hovering over an exquisite flower. Pussy greeted me cordially, and was extremely sorry that an engagement for a walk with Count Castelnuovo, whom she presented to me, would prevent her remaining at home that afternoon, but her mamma—she no longer said "ma"—was upstairs, and would be charmed to see me. Then she danced off into the sunlight, under the arched doorway, accompanied by her count, and all the old gentlemen came out of the reading-room, with their Galgani and their Times in their hands, to see the pretty American girl whisk herself into the street. Mrs. Black was very grateful to me. She had acquired artistic tastes since her arrival at Rome, and was studying sculpture. I won her affections by praising a bust of her husband which she just finished. I ingratiated myself with Mrs. Black by sympathizing with his desire to give up all this foreign nonsense, and go back to dear old California. He hated absinthe and vermouth, and his wife wouldn't let him drink whisky. She said that was "low." Mrs. Black was a perfect goddess to the starving artists who infest Rome. They regarded her in the light of a valuable Alderney cow that gave milk freely, and her rooms were filled with charity pictures. The Blacks had been presented at the Quirinal, and went to all the court balls. King Umberto had pronounced Pussy bella, as indeed she was, and Queen Marguerite had smiled graciously upon the whole family. Pussy had in her train a large number of young men belonging to the Russian, Italian, and French nobility. The few American men who represented "society" at Rome at winter rather sneered at her. Some Englishmen residing in the city considered her "a very old girl, you know," although they all admired her beauty. But they were frightened off at last by her sharp little tongue. Pussy had a keen eye for a fortune-hunter, and she did not take kindly to the British variety of that class. Judge of my delight, my surprise, and my hope, when Pussy Black singled me out from among her circle of adores to be the trusted companion of her daily walks, her favorite partner at the balls, her general utility man, and her cavalier at the Campagna hunts. After several weeks of this kind of treatment, I arrived at the conclusion that Miss Black returned the love I felt for her. There came an evening so full of tender glances, of sweet and subtle smiles, of delicate and wonderful wifery, that my whole life and destiny seemed to lie in the hollow of a girl's dimpled hand. It was a beautiful little hand. Cased in a long glove, the dainty hand lay lightly, like a white flower, upon the black coats of Pussy's partners. The Quirinal ball-room had never seen a lovelier presence than Pussy Black as she appeared that evening. There were clouds of white tulle about her, caught up with white water-lilies, and lily buds peeped lovingly from under the golden knot that lay low on her graceful head. Not one of the princesses, duchesses and contesse who glared at her with veiled, well-bred contempt from under their haughty eye-lids could compare with her for beauty or charm. They were mortally jealous of her. Princess Ghigi went so far as to refuse Pussy's hand in the grand chain of the lanciers. On the other hand, some of the most magnificent male grandees of Rome laid themselves beneath the little, white-slipped feet of the Californian girl. Pussy seemed to say to me with her eyes, "All this triumph, and success, and homage are for you." She danced the cotillon with me, and Count Castelnuovo, who led it, looked stilettes and vendetta. The supreme moment of my life came when I found myself alone for a moment with Pussy in a little, pale-blue satin alcove, lined with shining mirrors, that gave back the reflection of her slender white figure. I had just cloaked her with a marvelous hooded mantle of white feathers, and her blue eyes looked up into mine, like forget-me-

nots springing from under a snow-drift. Coquette as she was, there was no coquetry in that glance. Just then a loud laugh in the corridor broke the silence. I hurried Pussy out of the alcove, and found Mrs. Black waiting with Count Castelnuovo at the head of the stairs among the palm-trees. Mrs. Black looked brilliantly handsome and rather vulgar. She wore an uncommonly self-satisfied expression. "Mr. Bruce," said the ex-circus rider, imperiously, "will you give me your arm, and let Count Castelnuovo escort my daughter." Pussy reminded me of a beautiful, great white bird as she skimmed down the stairs before me in her feather cloak, with Count Castelnuovo playing the part of a hungry, fortune-hunting hawk. I had barely seated myself at Mrs. Penderlip's side at the pension dinner-table, on the following evening, when that good lady put up her eye-glass, and looked at me inquisitively. "I suppose you've heard the news," she said. "The old news? The Wall street panic? That happened two weeks ago." "No. Pussy Black's engagement to Count Castelnuovo." The blow fell with cruel force. I kept my countenance, but I was badly hit. "I thought Mrs. Black was playing for a title," said Mrs. Penderlip. "She announced the engagement to all her friends this afternoon. I heard it discussed at Mrs. De Haven's tea. Mrs. De Haven is a New York woman. She has never been willing to know Mrs. Black, but, of course, a titled son-in-law will make a great difference. I told Mrs. De Haven today that there was no truth whatever in the story that Mrs. B. had been a circus-rider, or that her mother sold cabbage. I said I had known Mrs. B. since she was a child, and that her mother was a very lovely woman, and a perfect lady. You see, pursued this worldly old person, "I heard this morning that the Wall street panic cuts my income down one-half. It would be quite impossible for me to exist in America on my reduced capital, so that I shall have to end my life in Europe. I can make an excellent living as a pedagogue-teacher for newly enriched Americans." Mrs. Penderlip's eye-glasses fell on her plate with a sardonic crash. "Between ourselves," she continued, picking them up, "this engagement has been the saving grace of the Blacks. Their social race was almost run, and I have it on good authority that their names were to have been stricken off the court list before the next ball at the Quirinal. Mrs. Black had the discretion to send an arm-chair made of a piece of a California 'big tree' to his majesty, and she favored the queen with a floral offering in the shape of a goose of white camellias, swimming in a sea of gore represented by red ones." I finished my dinner in silence, and strolled down to the Corso and pa the Hotel d'Angleterre, where I left a card for Mrs. Black. I tried to feel gay and festive, and I hummed to myself as I walked, a celebrated American melody, "A Climbin' up de Golden Stairs." But the rollicking tune sounded like the funeral dirge of my affections. For was not my acquaintance with Pussy Black closely connected with stairs? And had not Pussy climbed to a title on the golden stairs of her father's California mine? I smiled grimly at the whimsical bitterness of my thoughts, but my heart was heavy within me, for the one love of my life was the future Countesse Castelnuovo, the child of the "Circus Blacks."—C. Adams in the Epoch.

It was a dapper little man with snapping black eyes and a brisk step that walked into the doctor's office. "My dear sir," he began in a mild, suave voice, looking the doctor straight in the eye, "it gives me much pleasure to introduce my wonderful discovery to one who has devoted his whole life to the amelioration of many ills that afflict mankind. I have here," drawing a package from his coat-tail pocket "an infallible preventive of all diseases." "Hold on there!" exclaimed the medical man; "it would be suicidal on my part to countenance anything that would prevent disease, and if any more cranks like you come around here trying to spoil the profession, I'll make them swallow some of their own medicine." Wasting. [From Drake's Travellers Magazine.] Sorens I hold my hand and wait. Your care for bluff, nor fall, nor pat; I rave no more 'gainst luck nor fate, For, lo! the stakes will settle that. I stay my haste, I feign delay— I forward quake yet show no sign; A diamond sequence smiles my way, And tells me that the pot is mine. Since yesterday till early day, This little game I've bucked in vain— And watched the dollars go astray With sinking heart and aching brain. What matter if the cash has flown? I wait with joy the coming bet: My hand shall reap what has been sown, And though I cannot show a pair, All bluffs will I accommodate. With each new bet my spirit soars— The ending plainly I foresee: Not flush, nor full, nor even "four," Can take the pot away from me. Dame Fortune long has proved unkind, But now at last she deigns to smile, And in my bosom sits enshrined. For, lo! I gather in the pile. SAK. T. CLOVER.

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