

112 The Gods Give My Donkey Wings

the scaffolding and set up a merry hammering, shouting to each other to buckle to with a will; while the carpenters alone excepted, all the men folk of the Thorp, under the leadership of the little, wizened, virile shoemaker, made off for the falls, the mighty blacksmith, with his sledge-hammer slung over his shoulder, forming the apex of the phalanx. Even as I was busy wiping my donkey dry after her dripping load, I heard the high, sharp click of a heavy hammer falling on hard stone.

Now as the Thorp was empty of men, and well-nigh so of women, and as the people had reached such a state of enthusiasm that my questionings, I felt convinced, would not appear out of place, I resolved to join the builders of the arch and give them a hand in a quiet way—for violent exertion is not for the good of a packman—to see whether I could not draw one of them into conversation. In this fortune favoured me, for a man, who as he worked cast many glances at the sun to mark its progress, took kindly to my inquiries, and as often as the overseer happened to be called to another part of the skeleton-like erection, he was graciously pleased to sit by me. No, the arch was not being builded in honor of the anticipated return