

[FOR THE CRITIC].

HOW I SECURED A BONANZA.

(A Story of the Nova Scotia Gold Fields.)

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

His parents both died, and as no trace of him could be found, his sister had taken possession of the property. One day, to the surprise of everyone, he had turned up as an employee in a travelling circus, and claimed and had at once been given his share of the property. Since then he had been on a protracted spree, and his wild eyes and haggard countenance showed that he was still keeping it up. During his wanderings he had joined the United States Regular Army, and was with the first troops that arrived on the field after the Custer massacre. He had a number of Indian curios, relics, he said, of that sad event, but I must confess that they reminded me most vividly of Niagara. He gave us a cordial welcome, placed cigars and every kind of liquid, both temperate and the reverse, before us, and asked us to help ourselves. Setting the example he poured out a goblet of liquor and drained it to its last drop. We mixed hot drinks and slowly sipped them, while our host gave us scenes from "Ten Nights in a Bar Room," a play in which he had taken a leading part while belonging to an army amateur theatrical company. The performance was too real to be pleasant, and it was a relief when he had finished, and proceeded to give us a recitation from Shakespeare. I shall never forget the scene: The low room, from which the plaster had fallen in places, dimly lighted by a sputtering candle, Ralph and Dave sipping their grog and occasionally applauding, and Popsy hugging the stove and casting occasional disdainful glances, in no humor to enter into the sport; while Brandon stood in the centre of the room, and with disheveled hair and frantic gesture, poured out a flood of eloquence. Finally he broke into song, and in a fine clear voice sang several patriotic airs. We joined in the chorus, and with uplifted glasses concluded the entertainment by drinking the health of our host.

Poor fellow—he forcibly recalled the scene in "Cato" where Captain Hawtree asks old Eccles whether, if he were sent to Jersey or Guernsey, or some place where liquors were cheap, he could drink himself to death in a year; and old Eccles in his inimitable manner replies, "I don't know, but I'll try."

As he refused all remuneration we left a liberal contribution under a plate and continued on our way.

Dave did not wish to reach Halifax before half past nine, so we loitered along expecting that Jake Rehm would pass us on his road to the city. He did not, however, and our mining friend was convinced that he must have reached his goal by water.

Sleepy, tired out, and covered with mud, but buoyed up with hopes of speedy fortune, we finally drove into Dartmouth, and directing our driver where to send the game, hurried aboard the ferry.

Strangers visiting Halifax on a dismal, foggy day, are sure to pronounce it the dreariest hole in Christendom. The melancholy offices and reading-rooms of the hotels, the dull deserted streets, and the dingy, smoky atmosphere, all combine to make it a perfect purgatory, and if the visitors leave before a change of weather takes place, they are apt to give the city a wide berth in the future.

It was on just such a morning that we landed from the ferry and immediately separated. Ralph and Dave to visit the Mines' Office, and I to hurry to my den in search of cash. It was a scarce article, but I managed to scrape together twenty dollars. Repairing to the Provincial Building I expected to find a crowd of eager men around the doors of the Mines' Office, instead, "darkness there, and nothing more," its gloomy corridors were deserted.

Entering the office, my friends and the clerk were the only occupants. Dave was at a desk with a bunch of blank applications before him. He was evidently in great difficulty, having written and torn up several papers. I was on nettles, as it was five minutes of ten, and I could not write my application until he had finished his. I glanced nervously at the door expecting every moment that Jake Rehm would come in. Dave finally finished his application and handed it to Ralph who copied it in his firm bold hand. It was for fifty acres in the "Lake Catcher" gold district, commencing at a tree marked D. V. (I found out afterwards that the initials were most appropriate) near the gulch at East Chezzetcook, thence, etc., etc., the usual form. I now seized a pen and wrote out two applications for thirty acres each, commencing at the angles of property applied for by David Victor. My hand trembled with excitement and I could scarcely write. The clock was on the first stroke of ten as I finished, so hastily folding ten dollars in each application I sprang to the clerk's desk. Still no one came, and at the last stroke of the clock our applications were tendered, receipts were given, and the Bonanza was ours!

A week went by, during which my gold fever had almost vanished, but I still had lingering hopes that the property might prove valuable.

Dave had lingered around rather suspiciously for a day or two, and then had returned to Chezzetcook to open up the lead and procure some rich specimens, and much of my enthusiasm had oozed out with his departure.

At last he returned, and the moment I saw his woe-begone visage, and heard the mournful tones of his voice, I knew that a climax had been reached, and prepared for the worst.

"What news, Dave?"

(To be Continued.)

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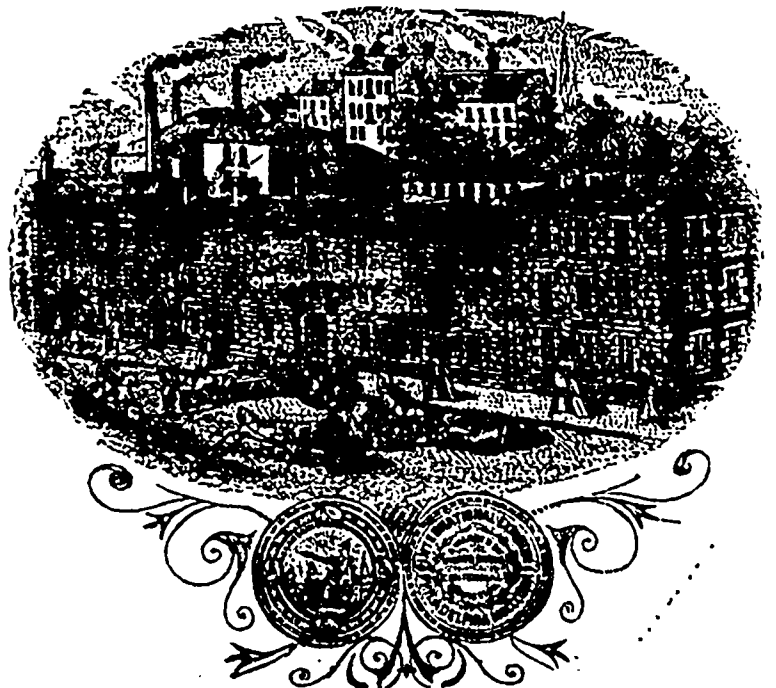
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