

will go back into the town to the hotel, or anywhere, and put off your sailing till the afternoon. The *Sunflower* comes by at about two, or three at latest, and'——

'But why,' said I, interrupting his hesitating speech, 'am I to wait till then; or what earthly benefit, Gregg, could I confer upon yourself by simply upsetting all my arrangements, and arriving several hours later than is necessary? If you can give me any reason'——

'Ah,' rejoined my nautical acquaintance, insensibly resuming his old quaint recklessness of manner and diction, 'that's jest what I can't do. There's a saying I have heard among Texan trappers, that a nod's as good as a wink to a blind mustang.'

I could not help laughing at having this scrap of ancestral philosophy presented to me in transatlantic garb; and as I contemplated Gregg, whose momentary embarrassment seemed to be at an end, I conjectured that—unless, indeed, he were the agent of an opposition packet-company—his objection to my pursuing my southward journey by the first available boat was 'the mere whim of a liquor-soddened brain. Presently, up came the two steamers, almost simultaneously. The upwardbound boat, the *Empire City*, as Gregg had opined, was the first to come snorting and splashing up to the landing-stage. A fine steamer she was; very full of passengers, for in that season of sultry heat most of the Upper Ten Thousand of the South are glad to take flight from New Orleans; and, with her snow-white awning and gay flags flaunting in the warm breeze, the lively music of her German band ringing blithely out, and the flutter of muslin and many-coloured silk on her hurricane-deck, she looked a floating temple of pleasure.

The upward-bound boat having taken in her wood and provisions, and such goods as were awaiting transmission towards the North, dashed merrily off again, the bubbling water spurting upwards like a fountain as her sharp prow cut razor-like through the strong rush of the tawny river. Then, before the echoes of the last air of Offenbach's had died away, I saw close to us the thin blue line of wood-smoke that streamed behind the down-going steamer. She was heavily laden, and deep in the water; but even with the advantage of the Mississippi current her progress was not very swift, and there were but few passengers visible, though this, during the hottest month of summer, was not surprising in a boat going South. The steamer was gaudily painted, and was further embellished with a splendid figure-head, bright with gold-leaf and colored, and her funnels, and awning, and flags, were of the newest and most brilliant; but I thought that her engines worked slowly, and that there was something lumbering and clumsy in her way of getting through the water.

'Do you know that boat?' I asked of Gregg.

'The *Proserpine*,' he replied, half sullenly, half defiantly, as I fancied.

'The *Proserpine*?' I answered incredulously. 'Surely not! Why, she was an old boat, worn out, and given up as incurable and useless. Who in his senses would have dragged her out of dock again, and furnished her up? It seems as bad as painting some venerable grandmother into the semblance of a girl of sixteen.'

'She belongs now to Harman Brothers, said Gregg, with his eyes fixed on the ground.

I heard this announcement with the utmost surprise. My former employer's firm had been always averse to that wild game of speculation that reaches its apogee west of the Atlantic. Safe, prudent traf-