

[FOR THE CRITIC].

HOW I SECURED A BONANZA.

(A Story of the Nova Scotia Gold Fields.)

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

"I can't do it, Mr. Spendall. I've been working the past ten years expecting every day to come on just such a property, and now that I have found it, I am bound to have it all to myself. Of course, Mr. Rambler will share in the profits, but the mine is to be in my name. Still you are a decent fellow (confound his impudence, I thought, but held my tongue), and I will give you a real good show. I intend taking up 50 claims only, and you shall be the first to read my description. You will thus be enabled to take up the claims directly East and West of mine, and, as I am certain that the lead runs a long way, the chances are that your property may prove richer than mine."

Our host, who had been listening with open mouth, now came forward and eagerly asked, "Won't you let me in, Dave?"

"Got any money?"

"No, but the old woman has some laid by."

"Well, you get twenty-five dollars and I will take up some areas for you."

Mrs. Brown had retired and the old man hurried into her bed room. There was a sleepy response to his first summons, then a long subdued conversation took place; then awaking to the situation Mrs. Brown's voice ran shrill and strong. Brown beat a hasty retreat, and as he opened the door we caught the words, "you ought to have more sense you old fool!" the balance being lost by the closing of the door. He reappeared and said he guessed he'd change his mind.

I agreed to give him a small interest with me. His gratitude was genuine and took a practical form.

"Boys, you must have something to eat before you go," and off he went, lamp in hand, to make a raid on the larder. Raw salt cod, bread and butter, vinegar and milk, were tempting delicacies, and they rapidly disappeared before our combined attack. Still he was not contented. Cautiously re-entering his wife's bed-room he returned with a bottle of Scotch whiskey, which he placed triumphantly on the table. Dave grew eloquent over the liquor, and we were soon boiling with enthusiasm. I felt we were playing for great stakes and was anxious to be off. If we were not at the Mines' Office by ten o'clock, it was almost certain that Jake Rehm would be, and the property would become his. If we all arrived at that hour, Dave relied on his superior shrewdness to get his application in first.

Harnessing his pony to a light wagon, Dave and Ralph drove off, leaving Pops, and me to follow as speedily as possible after the rapidly receding vehicle. The mist was still falling, the roads were deep with mud, and we went splashing along in the darkness; but I had given rein to my imagination and heeded nothing, now that gold, unlimited gold, was to be mine. What could I not accomplish? I could now purchase a valuable law library and convert my dingy "den" into a gem of an office. The noble science, as expounded by Austin, could now be followed in all its integrity, and the miserable "bread and butter law" with its main eye to costs could be eschewed. I had never been a success at putting the screws on delinquent debtors. "A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind," and it was like "driving a nail into my own coffin" to force a levy on the poor wretches who pleaded so pitiously for more time. Home—oh how attractive it should be. Cost and calculation should be eliminated, and the little ones, with their gentle mother, should have every luxury that money could buy. So I dreamed on, making greater and greater strides, until I found myself debating which palatial residence on the North West Arm (the fashionable quarter of Halifax) I should condescend to purchase. The gold fever was now at its height, sending the blood rushing through my veins, and filling my brain with most fantastic visions. "Gold fever indeed!" I fancy some cruel medico is exclaiming, "that bottle of Scotch might have produced very similar symptoms." But this is the age of doubt.

Suddenly Popsy relaxed his hold on the reins, and with a sharp cry fell back on the seat. For a moment I feared that he was dead, but he soon revived, and said that he had been seized with violent cramps. Quickly unscrewing my brandy flask I poured out a cupful and pressed it to his white lips.

Clinching his teeth, he exclaimed, "no, no, take it away, I promised my wife that I would never touch it, and I won't, if I die for it. A warm cup of tea is all I want."

It was now three o'clock in the morning, and everybody would be in bed.

Hailing Dave, I was informed that Brandon's was the nearest place where we could expect to gain admittance. The horse was joggling along without a driver, so taking the reins and supporting Popsy as comfortable as possible I drove on. The poor fellow was suffering intense agony, but although he knew that the brandy would give him instant relief, he heroically remained firm in his first determination, not to touch it. After what seemed an interminably long time we reached Brandon's. Dave had driven ahead and roused the inmates, and assisted me in helping Popsy into a long low-ceiled kitchen. The kettle was steaming on the stove, and a cup of good strong tea, combined with the warmth of the fire, soon restored our patient to his usual health. I had heard of Brandon, and was surprised to find him quite a young man. He had left his home in Halifax and had disappeared for years.

(To be Continued.)

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