

CHAPTER IV

ADVENT AND ADVENTURE

BUT the General Freight Agent took care that Mrs. Mitchell, Bessie, and himself were in a box at the Burbank on the following Monday night, when the curtain went up on the Mowrey Stock Company's sumptuous production of *Quo Vadis*, which for more than nine days was the talk of the town in the city of angels, oranges, atmosphere, and oil. The Mitchells strained their eyes for a sight of their late-grown protégé, but it appeared he was not "on." However, in the midst of a garden scene with Roman lords, ladies, soldiers in armor and slaves decking the view, there appeared a huge barbarian, long of hair and beard, his torso bound round with an immense bearskin, his sandals tied with thongs, his sinewy limbs apparently unclad, savage bands of silver upon his massy, muscled arms, the alpine ruggedness of his countenance and the light of a fanatical devotion that gleamed in his eye contributing in their every detail to make the creature appear the thing the programme proclaimed him, "Ursus, a Christian Slave."

But the programme claimed something more: that this Ursus was John Hampstead.

Mitchell gaped and then rocked uneasily. The thing was unbelievable. If the man would only speak, perhaps some tone of voice — but the man did not speak, not even move. He stood half in the background, far up the center of the stage, while the talk and action of the piece went on beneath his lofty brow, like some mountain tow-