

But the Judge is not to be hurried. He asks his small customer what else her mother wants, and then he turns leisurely to the sun-tanned messenger.

'Tain't the foist time, Charlie, the Colonel has been bad like that. Oh, I know. I knowed the Colonel before you ever set eyes on him—yes Sir, I knowed him in Denver, when he was on'y Five-Ace Jack. But now he's the boss, and no mistake. Reckon he is doin' the big Bonanza business, and none o' your pea-nut consarns—'

Here Buckskin Charlie broke in with a number of words which showed that he was intimately familiar with Scripture, and might have led one to suppose that he meant to annihilate the dilatory Judge, but which, as it turned out, were only intended to emphasize his statement that the Colonel had branded 1800 calves at the ranch last year, and had also got up 2000 head from Texas. By the time this piece of information had been delivered and received, the wants of the small girl in front of the counter had been satisfied; and then the Judge, having gone out and borrowed a neighbor's pony, set forth with his impatient companion for Eagle Creek Ranch.

On the way they had a good deal of familiar talk about the boss, or the Colonel, as he was indifferently called; and the Judge, now in a friendly mood, told Buckskin Charlie some things he did not know before about his master. Their conversation, however, was so saturated with Biblical lore that it may be advisable to give here a simpler and a plainer history of the owner of the Eagle Creek Ranch. To begin with, he was an Englishman. He was born in Cumberland, and as a young fellow achieved some little notoriety as a wrestler; in fact that was all the work his parents could get out of him. It was in vain that they paid successive sums to have him apprenticed to that business, or made a partner in this; Jack Sloane was simply a ne'er-do-well, blessed with a splendid physique, a high opinion of his own importance, and a distinguished facility in wheedling people into lending him money. Such was his position in England when the rush to California occurred. Here was Jack's opportunity. His mother wept bitter tears when she parted with him; but nobody else was affected to the same extent.

As a gold-digger Jack was a failure, but he soon managed to pick up an amazing knowledge of certain games of cards, inasmuch that his combined luck and skill got for him the complimentary title of Five-Ace Jack. Whether he made money or not at this profession does not appear, for at this point there is a gap in his history. When his relatives in England—among whom, I regret to say, was a young lady incidentally alluded to in the first chapter of this story—next heard of him he was in Texas, employed at a ranch there. No one ever knew what had made the social atmosphere of San Francisco rather too sultry for Five-Ace Jack.

Then the Pike's Peak craze occurred, in 1859, and once again Jack was induced to join the general rush. He arrived at Denver just as the bubble had burst. He found a huge multitude of people grown mad with disappointment, threatening to burn down the few wooden shanties and canvas tents that then constituted the town, and more especially to hang incontinently an esteemed friend of the present writer, who had just issued the first numbers of the *Rocky Mountain News*. Then the great crowd of bummers and loafers, not finding the soil teeming with nuggets, stampeded off like a herd of buffalo, leaving a few hardy and adventurous spirits to explore the neighboring cañons, and find out by hard work whether or not gold existed there in paying quantities. Jack Sloane remained behind also—in Denver. He started what was called a whiskey saloon in a tent, but what was really a convenient little gambling hell for those who had grown reckless. Times grew better. Rumors came down from the mountains that the gulch and placer mines which had been opened were giving a fair yield; here and there—as, for example, in the Clear Creek Cañon—a vein of rotten quartz had been struck containing free gold in surprising richness. Now was Jack's time. He opened a keno and faro bank in a wooden shanty, and he charged only ten per cent. on the keno winnings. He was an adept at euchre and poker, and was always willing to lend a hand, his chief peculiarity being that he invariably chose that side of the table which enabled him to face the door, so that he might not be taken unawares by an unfriendly shot. He drove a rousing trade. The miners came down from the