MC2397

POOR DOCUMENT

Treasure of the Three Kings.

By JAMES G. HUSTIN.

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"Hold on a bit, doctor. I want to say something—wait a bit—there, now I'm easier—did you say I was—dying?"

"Well, yes, Baybridge; you might as well know it, I suppose. You won't pull through this time, my poor fellow. I have warned you before."

"Never mind all that, doctor; if I'm bound to die what's the use of preaching? But I've got something—ugh—there it is again—I've got something to ask for."

"Well, Baybridge, anything in reason, but you must be quick."

"Oh, it ain't unreasonable, I reckon. I want to see my son."

"What, No. 35?"

"Yes, doctor. He works in the foundry gang, and I being in the brush shop haven't got to see him for two or three years now. Just after I got in this time it was that the warden let us meet. I've a patter I haven't seen him since."

"Well, Baybridge, your wish is natural, and does you credit. I will speak to the warden, and I dare say he will let No. 35 come up here and have an interview—at noon perhaps."

"Will I last till then, doctor?" asked the hoary old convict, turning his eyes anxiously upon the face of the physician, who stooped to examine them narrowly, felt his pulse, touched the clammy forehead, and answered gently:

"Yes, you'll hold out until sunset, I think, my man."

"All right, doctor. You'll see abat Nick?"

"Yes. Keep very still, and go to sleep if you can. Save yourself up, you know."

"Yes, doctor," and old Stephen Aybridge, the incendiary, the burglar, the would be assassin, turned his gray head upon the pillow of his prison bed and composed himself for the last sleep before the final one.

Twelve o'clock, midday, clashed out from the prison clock, and the convict gathered from the various workshops were marshaled in the courtyard and marched in past the kitchen grating, where each man received his liberal mess of wholesome food, and so to their cells for an hour of rest and refreshment.

"No. 35, the warden allows you to visit No. 104 in the hospital ward. Be ready in ten minutes," said the officer in charge, as a tall, stout fellow, who might have been good looking but for his close cropped hair and the hideous prison dress, filed by him.

No. 35 replied by a military salute, took his dinner and turned down the corridor to the right.

In ten minutes the turnkey who came to release him found his tin basin empty.

"Blessed if they don't snap up their victuals like dogs," muttered he, nodding to 35, who followed him without a word.

Stephen Baybridge had not slept, and as his breathing grew more difficult, the attendant had bolstered his grizzly head high upon the pillows, and now stood fanning him; but as his son came down the ward and stopped beside the bedside Stephen motioned the nurse away.

"There, that'll do. I want to be all alone with my boy here for awhile. How are you, Nick?"

"Well enough, father, but you don't look to be. What's up?"

"I'm up for—somewheres. The person I'm—enough, but that ain't what I wanted of you. Nick, have you heard from the old woman since I got you three year ago?"

"Yes. She's gone under."

"Dead?"

"Yes. A fellow come in and says, says he, 'Warn't Susan Baybridge your mother?' And I says, 'Yes.' 'Well,' says he, 'she was run over by an engine I was driving and I was drunk, so they sent me up her for five year.'"

"Old woman's dead, Sally's dead, Tom's gone no one knows where," muttered the dying man, and then fixing his eyes upon his son's face, said aloud:

"Nick, you're all I've got left of all the folks I ever had."

"Yes, father, I suppose I am," replied the young man, with a sort of patient indifference of manner.

"Well, Nick, you ain't the sort of boy you'd ought to be, but like as not that's more my fault than yours. You didn't get much of a bringing up."

"I was brought up in the streets mostly, except when I got a turn at the Reform or House of Crection," replied Nick, coldly.

"Yes, I know it. Well, it's too late now, and I ain't the one to preach what I never practiced," said Baybridge, uneasily, and then fixing a glance of anxious scrutiny upon his son, he asked:

"Saying you got rich, Nick, would you quit them ways that brought you here?"

"Of course I would. What's the use of taking another man's money if you've got enough of your own? I'd be as steady as a clock if I could afford it and was out of here."

"How long are you in for?"

"Fifteen year. Three is out now," replied Nick, sullenly.

"Twelve year to run if you can't get pardoned out. How old are you, Nick?"

"Rising 30, I reckon."

"Forty-two. Well, that ain't old, and maybe you'd be steadier after you was out. Nick, I've got a secret to tell you."

"About money?" asked the young man, his face at last lighting with real interest.

"About a fortune, Nick, a fortune fit for a king," replied the father, impressively.

"Well, let's hear it; tell away, old man; the time is short, anyway."

"My time is short, or I'd keep the secret to myself," gasped Stephen. "But seeing I've got to go, I thought—well, well, the long and short of it is, I've had a pal ever since I came here twelve years ago, a fellow that worked next to me in the shop, and walked next me in the gang, and sat next me in chapel, so of course we talked, rule or no rule, and I found out all about him. He'd been a Catholic priest, and he was took up for forgery, and got twenty years in this place. So much I knew all along, but about a year ago he took bad, and was put in the hospital here. I have a way when I tired of work of making myself sick having some of the stuff in the shop, and sick then, and came to the hospital, was in the bed next my pal. He and went off with it, but the to live he was mighty uneasy, the nurse was asleep, he could leave me a secret he dared to name. at the very night was called to consultal of a —stop and

said the

"Good-by, Nick. Maybe we'll see each other t'other side of Jordan; anyhow, remember, boy, that you said if you got pardoned out, or even if you stay your time out, that you'll lead a different life. Remember that, Nick."

Nick leaned over the bed and took his father's cold hand in his, while upon his dark face came a shadow of genuine emotion.

"About money!" asked the young man.

"I remember, father, and I promise you that if I'm able to do as you've been advising, I'll turn over a new leaf and be an honest man."

"That's it, Nick; that's the talk; now good-by, my boy; good-by, lad."

"Good-by, father, and good luck to you," and Nick turned away with more human feeling working in his breast than he had known in many a wicked year.

At sunset Stephen Baybridge died.

A few days later his son Nick, better known to the prison authorities as No. 35 of the foundry gang, contrived, while filling the mold for a casting, to pour a quantity of the molten metal over his left arm and hand, burning himself severely and putting all possibility of work for several weeks out of the question. He was at once removed to the hospital ward, and the same physician who had closed the father's eyes was summoned to attend the son.

"A bad burn, Baybridge. You will be laid up a week, at least. Your father used to make himself sick on purpose, and did it once too often. You can't suspect you of the same trick, though, with such a burn as this to show."

"It ain't like," groaned 35, writhing in agony as the doctor dressed his wounds.

Ten days later the burns had so far healed that 35 was informed he would be returned to his cell the next morning. The news took him a little by surprise, as he had calculated upon a longer convalescence, but he was prepared.

A foundryman with sand molds and molten iron at his command finds little trouble in manufacturing a key, and a better one, too, than those formed of knife blades, candlesticks, the metal frame of pictures, or a dozen other unlikely materials, by which prison doors have been unlocked and miraculous escapes effected. The story of Bruce's spider loses all its marvel as one reads our prison reports.

Besides the key, 35 had possessed himself of a short, stout bar of iron, which he wore bound upon his back when he was brought to the hospital, and had since secreted beneath his mattress. This he carried in his right hand as he effected his escape, and had any obstacle presented itself in human shape, the gleam of 35's dark eyes, and the feline readiness of every motion, suggested the course events might take and the consequences likely to ensue.

But by good or ill fortune, as one views the question from the side of convict or keeper, no one was in the way of the well planned and adroitly executed escape, and in the darkest hour of a black autumnal night Nick Baybridge reached the summit of the wall dividing him from the world.

A temporary staging left by the masons who were repairing the stone work helped him to surmount it, but no such aid was to be expected upon the other side, nor had 35 been able to provide himself with a rope, even if there had been any means of fastening it.

"Here's for luck!" muttered Nick in lieu of a prayer; and lowering himself from the coping by his hands he hung for a moment and then dropped upon a heap of broken iron castings full of sharp edges and jagged points.

"I'm done for," muttered Nick, grimly suppressing a groan of anguish as the sentry above his head paced slowly along the wall, and paused to listen for the sequel of the voice he had heard.

"I won't die here; I won't give them that comfort. I'll get to the water and drop over. As good one way as another."

So muttering between his clenched teeth, the man, brave as any brute, gathered his poor broken and bleeding body together and trailed it inch by inch along the pavement, leaving a dismal track behind him, toward the turbid tide rolling not 300 feet from the spot where he had dropped.

But the anguish and the exertion were too great, and half way he fainted, and lay there, his face upon the earth, half naked and wounded to the death—a horrible sight.

An hour went by, and brought the dawn. Before the dawn had grown to daylight a young girl came tripping along the silent street and paused at the beginning of the bridge.

"Just 5. It's time for father now," said she, listening for the sound of wheels. Then, as nothing was to be heard, she began to look about her, noticing the odd effects of familiar objects in the half light, and so came upon the prostrate figure of the dying felon in his prison dress.

The dress, the hour, the mangled form, grouped themselves suggestively in the girl's quick brain, and her second glance was toward the prison walls rising gloomy and forbidding close behind her. No unusual stir was apparent, and Louisa Wylie, snatching the gray plaid from her own shoulders, threw it over the figure at her feet, murmuring defiantly:

"They haven't missed him yet, and they shan't get him again if I can help it. Poor creature!"

Just then the rumble of wheels passing from the paved street to the wooden bridge was heard in the distance, and at the same moment poor 35 stirred in his swoon and moaned drearily. Both were sounds of promise, and Louisa hastened to lay the wounded man's head in an easier position, and then stood up looking eagerly down the bridge. A covered country wagon, drawn by a comfortable plow horse, was slowly approaching. Louisa could not wait, and ran to meet it. Two men were upon the seat, one a white haired patriarch, the other a good looking young gentleman, who, at sight of the girl, uttered an exclamation of great surprise, and made a movement as if to spring to the ground. The old man drew the reins, exclaiming also in astonishment:

"Why, Loo! how came you here?"

"I knew you would drive over the bridge on your way into the city with the market stuff, and I wanted to see you about something that wouldn't wait, and so I came out to meet you, father; but what I want now is that you should take up this man and—and hide him somewhere."

"What man? Hide him?" helplessly repeated the old farmer, staring about him in bewilderment, while the younger man sprang to the ground.

"What is it, Miss Louisa? Let me help you," said he, going close to the girl, who, pointing back at the prostrate figure, said, resolutely:

"I suppose he has escaped from the state prison, but he is terribly hurt, and perhaps dying. They shall not get him if I can help it, and I want father to put him in the wagon and carry him right home. I'll go, too."

"Sho, Louizy, I shan't do any such thing. What, lose all my marketing for the sake of helping a gallows bird to escape! I'd be well set to work doing that, shouldn't I!" exclaimed the old man, indignantly, and his daughter replied:

"Indeed you would be, father. No matter what he has done, he is wounded, suffering, dying before our eyes. Would you carry him back to the very prison he has killed himself in trying to escape? Oh, father, would you, could you be so cruel and unfeeling?"

"Well, but you see, Louizy, he ain't nothin' to us, and I've got all my green stuff in the back of the wagon"——

"Ask me, and I will help you, Louisa," said a low voice at her elbow, and Louisa, turning, fixed her indignant, honest eyes upon the face of the young man as she replied:

"Well, John Merton, I do ask you to help me, and I offer you my best thanks in advance for doing so."

"I think, Mr. Wylie, we might make room at the back of the wagon for the poor fellow, and if you don't mind going three or four miles out of the way I will take the risk of carrying him to my mother's house, since Miss Louisa is so resolved upon rescuing him. And any loss that you may experience in your marketing"——

The rest of the sentence was spoken softly in the ear of the old farmer, who, nodding twice or thrice in reply, stiffly dismounted from his driving seat, and, going round to the back of the wagon, began to unbutton the curtain and move round the various boxes and baskets stowed behind it.

Meantime the two young people had approached and bent over the convict, now conscious of his sufferings and his danger, and watching their motions with the keen, anxious eye of a trapped animal who sees his captors approaching.

"You are dreadfully hurt, aren't you?" asked Louisa, faltering for the first time as she saw the pool of blood oozing from beneath the crushed figure.

"Yes. Are you going to carry me back?"

"Won't you be better taken care of there than anywhere else? Do you mind very much where you go?" asked John Merton, restraining the girl by a warning look.

"Mind? Of course I do. I'd rather die here. Hide me away somewhere, and I'll pay you handsome," gasped poor 35, clutching with his one hand at the secret upon his breast.

At this proposition Merton smiled contemptuously, Louisa reproachfully.

"We do not want to be paid," said she.

"Even if you could pay us," added he.

No. 35 smiled dubiously at both speakers, but made no reply. Then, with Farmer Wylie's help, and even some assistance from Louisa, Merton got his charge into the wagon, and, with his foot upon the step, turned to say:

"Mr. Wylie, you had better go home with Miss Louisa to her rooms, and I will call there for you as soon as I can. It may be best for you not to have more to do in this business than can be helped."

"I reckon so; and make the best of it, I'm a loser by the hurt my stuff will take jolting six miles extra, letting alone getting in late for the market," grumbled the old man, but his daughter checked him.

"Oh, father, when a man's life and mortal agony are in question, can we care for a little more or less trouble and loss?"

"Well, I'll go home with you, Louizy, and, John, you come as quick as you can." And Mr. Wylie, taking his daughter's arm, plodded along in the direction of her lodgings, while John Merton drove rapidly yet carefully away in the opposite direction.

"And what was you coming to meet me on the bridge for, Louizy? Ain't you doing well at your work?"

"Oh, yes, father. I have more photographs to color than I can do, and my business with you was about just that. Mr. Waters is going to Havana next Thursday to take photographs of places and people, and he wants me to go, too. He says no one else does the work as well, and he will pay me handsomely, besides my expenses. But I must decide today, as he will have to look for some one else if I cannot go."

"Then he's bound to go, any way!"

"Oh, yes, and he will take some one to paint his photographs."

"Then it might as well be you as any one, for if you stop to home you'll lose his work," said the farmer, shrewdly; and Louisa answered, with New England self confidence and self respect:

"There's no trouble about that, father. I shall always get as much work as I can do, I think."

"But you can't go alone with this man," suggested the father, suddenly.

"Oh, no; Mrs. Waters is going, of course."

"Well, I don't see but what you might as well go, then, Louizy," said Farmer Wylie; and so was decided an important step in the matter of the secret confided by the Spanish sailor to his confessor, by the confessor to Stephen Baybridge, and by him to his son Nick, or No. 35.

An hour later John Merton called at Miss Wylie's lodgings, and after surrendering the horse and wagon to their impatient owner he informed her that their wretched charge had arrived at the cottage, terribly shaken and exhausted, both by his hurts and by the drive, and that although his mother had willingly accepted the charge he had put upon her, he felt that it was too arduous a one, and should, after a brief visit to the city, go home for the rest of the day.

Also he informed her that the dying man—for such he considered the convict—had expressed a very ardent desire to see the "young woman who spoke so pleasant" to him in his first conscious moments, and to whom he had something of the greatest importance to reveal.

"Some message for his friends, I suppose," said Louisa, thoughtfully. "I can hardly leave home today, for I must begin to get ready for my journey;" and then she told her plan to the young man, who listened attentively, and replied:

"All the more reason you should go home with me today, to bid my mother good-by; and I, too, have something important to say to you, Louisa, before you go. I went out to the farm yesterday on purpose to speak to your father and mother, and intended when I rode in this morning with Mr. Wylie, to ask you to go out to my mother's today. Will you come?"

"I could not go merely for pleasure, John, but I will go to see this poor dying man," said Louisa, coloring scarlet, but meeting the young man's meaning glance fully and fearlessly.

"Then I will call for you at 10 o'clock, shall I?"

"Yes, if you please."

But at 10 o'clock as they passed through the city streets to the horse cars every wall confronted them with placards announcing the escape of Nicholas Baybridge from the state prison, describing his person and dress, and offering a large reward for his apprehension.

"You must not tell until he is dead, John," said Louisa, anxiously. "He cannot live many days, and they should be spent in peace."

"They shall not be disturbed, Louisa," said the young man, and resolved to keep his word at any sacrifice, but none was needed, for, like many other very transparent secrets, the true story of No. 35's escape was never known, and the authorities wisely decided to identify him with the body of a man found floating in the dock next day, as poor Nick had fully intended himself to be found.

Arrived at the cottage, Louisa, after a brief conversation with Mrs. Merton, asked to be allowed to see the sick man.

"It's a shocking sight for you, dear," said tender hearted Mrs. Merton. "But he has done nothing but ask for you since John went away. He's sinking fast, poor fellow, and the doctor says—I would send for old Dr. Spear, though the man declared he wouldn't have any one—the doctor says he never will see sunrise again."

"Poor man! And such a horrible death. Let us go to him at once, Mrs. Merton, if I can say or do anything to comfort him," said Louisa, pale, but very resolute, nor did she shrink or falter when, standing beside the bed, she looked for the first time full at the disfigured face and head, the maimed and broken arms and heaving chest of the injured man.

"You were asking for me, they said. Can I do anything for you?" inquired she.

The convict opened his heavy, blood shotten eyes, and looked earnestly up into her face.

"It's come round curious, that you should be the one to get it, after all," said he.

"Get what?" asked Louisa, gently.

"What I'm going to give you. The old woman would have a doctor; I didn't want one because I thought he'd blow on me, and I ain't a-going back to the prison anyway. But the doctor said he wouldn't get round so as to report me before night, and by that time I'd be out of danger."

"Out of danger of arrest?"

"Out of danger of anything that we know about. The old man spoke solemn to me the other day when he lay as I lay now, but I didn't feel it then. You don't till it comes your own turn. He went off at sundown, the parson said. May be I shall, too. But, Lord, what a lark it is for me to be laying here in this clean white bed, with posy pots, and pictures, and easy chairs, and curtains all about me. I never slept in such a room in my life, and to think of only getting in here to die. Now, that's just my luck, just my confounded luck."

"I wouldn't talk in that way now," said the young girl, with a sort of kindly severity of tone.

"Why not? You ain't one of the overly pious folks that think a poor fellow is going straight to the bad if he says a strong word or so, are you?" asked 35, in a tone of some disgust, but added, impatiently:

"Well, it don't matter. I've got to go, and I can't take it with me, and you was good to me, and made that fellow help me, and you're the first decent woman I ever had a chance of doing a good turn to, or even speaking to. More than all, you're good looking—first rate."

He rolled his languid eyes upon her face with a look of critical admiration. Louisa met it as unblushingly as a bird upon a tree might have done.

"What are you talking about?" asked she.

"Well—about—this." And as he spoke, the convict, with movements whose agony betrayed itself upon his writhing features, drew from his bosom a little leathern reliquary in the shape of a heart. It was fastened about his neck by a thong, also of leather, hardened and blackened by much wear, almost to the texture of iron.

"Cut the line and rip open the bag. There's a fortune inside and it's yours. I give it to you, because you was good to me. O Lord! O Lord! I can't stand this. I'm going now, sure."

A terrible access of pain cut off all further speech, and Louisa hastily summoned assistance, but no assistance could now avail. Poor 35 lingered a few hours, at first in torture, then in the fatal ease that precedes death from internal injuries. During this interval he called Louisa to his side and feebly asked:

"Well, what was in it?"

"The little case? I have not opened it."

"Open it now—send the rest of the folks away," whispered No. 35; and Louisa, requesting Mrs. Merton and John to leave her alone with the patient for a few moments, brought the reliquary and a scissors to the bedside.

"Shall I cut it open?" asked she.

"Yes, and quick, too."

Without reply Louisa ran the scissors about the edge of the little case and opened it upon her hand.

"A lock of hair, a scrap of cloth, a bit of—evergreen, I should say—and a folded paper covered with writing," enumerated she, turning over the contents.

"The paper—read it out aloud—the other stuff is the priest's nonsense—read!" gasped 35, almost at the last now.

With a hasty glance at his cadaverous face Louisa obeyed. The paper was very fine and thin, and the writing very faint, so that it was with difficulty she deciphered and read out these words:

"Antonio Garcia, being in extremis, confessed to me that he, with others, caused the wreck of the Brazilian treasure ship, the Three Kings of Cologne, upon the eastern end of a small island or key, known as Los Demonis, within fifty miles of the island of Cuba, the Three Kings being bound for Havana. Garcia and four others secured the princely amount of the treasure, mostly in diamonds and other jewels, with some bullion, confined the rest of the crew and officers under hatches, seized one of the ship's boats, and escaped, leaving the vessel in a sinking condition. After much danger and delay they landed at a point forty-seven miles east of the town of San Juan de los Remedios, beneath a tall cliff called, in the language of the country, Il Cavallo Blanco, or the White Horse. Here, being in much doubt as to their treatment by the natives, and of the time when they should escape from among them, they agreed to hide their treasure in a grotto or cavern half way up the cliff, and not to be seen either from its base or its crest, but marked by a deep crevice in the face of the rock pointing like a finger from the summit downward, the said cavern being discovered by Garcia himself while searching for birds' eggs to assuage the extreme hunger of himself and his comrades. And the boxes of treasure are hidden under a large stone, like a bench, across the end of the cave. But the cave can only be reached by stepping from a boat at high tide to a projecting rock, and then scaling the face of the cliff. And said Garcia bequeaths this entire treasure to the use and benefit of the Holy Church, he being the heir of his comrades, who unfortunately died within a few days after concealing the treasure, and before leaving the island of Cuba."

Here abruptly ended the memorandum of the priest, evidently a mere abstract, taken down just after hearing the confession of the dying man, and designed to fix the information given by him beyond the chance of forgetfulness or mistake.

"And do you suppose it is still there, and do you mean to give it to me?" asked Louisa, as she finished reading and raised her eyes to the face of her attentive listener.

That face was already awful with the impress of death; the eyes that met hers had fixed in a glassy stare of admiration, too horrible for even the well strung nerves of the New England girl. She uttered a low cry, and fled from the room, convulsively grasping the scrap of crumpled paper, which had become her warrant of a princely fortune.

A week later Louisa Wylie sailed with Mr. and Mrs. Waters for Havana. In the same steamer, but not in the same party, sailed John Merton, the junior partner of a flourishing legal firm in Boston. He went, as he took occasion to state, upon professional business, and, in so stating, told the exact truth, his employer being Miss Wylie, and his business the investigation of Antonio Garcia's story and the discovery of the owners, or rather the heirs of the owners, of the ship Three Kings of Cologne.

Arrived in Havana, Mr. Waters went soberly to work at the business which had taken him there, and Miss Wylie devoted herself to his assistance as steadily and as conscientiously as she had ever done in her life.

Mr. Merton meantime busied himself with his own affairs, and at the end of ten days came to report progress to his employer.

"I find," said he, "that the ship Three Kings of Cologne was actually owned here in Havana, fifty years ago, by a wealthy firm styled Ramirez Bros. The ship was wrecked, and the treasure she contained absolutely lost, it is supposed. The sole survivor of the family of Ramirez is a young man, wealthy, handsome and unmarried, who neither needs nor misses the fortune of which Antonio Garcia robbed his grandfather."

"What will you do next?"

"Have you not been to see Ramirez?" asked Louisa, in some surprise.

"No, certainly not, until I know your desire."

"Why, you knew it beforehand."

"But the circumstances are different from what we imagined possible. This property, if indeed it exists at all, is fairly yours, all other claim being outlawed long ago, and Sig. Ramirez, as I said, neither needs nor misses this"——

"John, what are you talking about? Has ten days among these deceitful and intriguing people changed your honest and upright heart to"——

For the first time since he knew her the clear, round voice faltered, and the brave eyes filled up with tears, half of sorrow, half of shame. John flushed scarlet, and left the room without a word. An hour later he returned, accompanied by a superbly handsome and courtly gentleman.

"Miss Wylie, this is Sig. Ramirez, to whom I have given only a hint of the strange story you have to relate to him," said the lawyer.

"I am very glad to see you, sir, and hope that I have good news for you," began Louisa, and then, clearly and briefly, and without one word of sentiment or one suggestion of any other course possible for her to pursue, she repeated the story of Nick Baybridge's escape from prison, his constituting her his heir, the priest's abstract of Antonio Garcia's confession, and finally she ended by placing the paper in the hands of the young Spaniard, who had sat listening to her with his great melancholy eyes open to their fullest extent, and his face lighted with the most active emotion it had ever expressed.

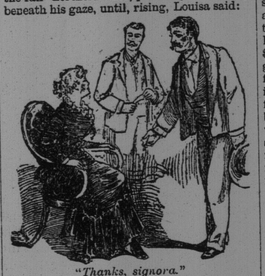
"And you have come to Habana to restore this property to me, its so doubtful owner or heir?" asked he, at length.

"No; I came upon my own business, but I, of course, determined to see you and tell you about the hidden treasure. This gentleman, Mr. Merton, a lawyer by profession, came on purpose to see to it," said Louisa, indifferently.

"My thanks, and something more, shall be laid at the feet of the Sig. Merton," said the hidalgo, with rather a patronizing bow to the lawyer. "But," added he in another tone, as his eyes traveled back to the young girl's handsome face, "but you, signora—I have no word of thanks for you."

"I assure you, sir, I do not wish for or expect any. The ship was yours or your grandfather's, and when I happened to hear what had become of the treasure, it was no great trouble to let you know, especially as I was here. I hope you will find the diamonds, etc., all safe."

"Thanks, signora," replied the Spaniard, his eyes fixed in unabated astonishment upon the fair northern face, painfully reddening beneath his gaze, until, rising, Louisa said:



"Thanks, signora."

"Now I will beg you to excuse me, as I have work to do before sunset," and left the room.

"Work! The lady works?" asked Ramirez, turning with a puzzled glance to Merton, who hastened to explain.

"Ah! what shame for her to work. And all this money in her hands, if she had closed them upon it?" exclaimed the Spaniard; and, after a moment's thought, he approached the young American, and, laying a finger confidentially upon his arm, asked:

"She is not married?"

"No."

"Or affianced?"

"No," said John Merton, closing his teeth firmly upon the monosyllable.

Sig. Ramirez nodded twice or thrice, and then asked some shrewd questions about the business in hand; nor was Miss Wylie again alluded to between the two men.

Another week went by, and Mr. Waters having nearly finished the business that had brought him to Havana, was talking of the return voyage, when Sig. Jacinto Ramirez sent to beg a private interview with Miss Wylie.

It was conceded at once, and Louisa learned, much to her gratification, that the information had indeed proved worth a fortune to the heir of old Ray Ramirez and his brother Jago, owners of the Three Kings of Cologne; for the precious freight of that unfortunate vessel had been so well hidden by the mutineers as to remain undiscovered until the moment when Don Ramirez himself, aided by two trusted slaves, removed the large stone like a bench across the end of the cave beneath which it lay concealed.

"The treasure is vast, signora," added the Spaniard, fixing his dark eyes upon those of the woman who had brought this fortune to him with such unconscious and disdainful honesty.

"But yet not enough. Signora, I value this fair hand far above all the magnificent gifts you have bestowed upon me. Will you add it to them?"

"Sir—why, did not you know"——

"What, signora?"

"Well, nothing yet; but if I ever marry, sir, it will be but one man."

"And that man, signora?"

"You should not ask such a question, Mr. Ramirez. It is not you."

"That is enough, signora."

"No; but you should not be offended, sir, although I know my manner is somewhat rude and blunt. That is my birthright, as courtesy is yours. Forgive me if I have hurt you, signor."

She came close to him, put both her hands in his, and raised her clear, bright eyes to meet his astonished gaze.

"How different you are from my countrywomen. Oh, signora, be gracious, and think, at least, upon my offer of hand, and heart, and life. You do not know me yet."

"But, sir, I told you that I love some one else, and never shall dream of marrying any man but that one," said Louisa, with decision.

"And he—does he—?" stammered Ramirez.

"Does he love me?" suggested Louisa, blushing rosy red. "I think so—I hope so."

"It is the notary," muttered Ramirez.

"Good-by, signor. I hope you will be very happy, and find a very good and true woman to be your wife," said Louisa, again offering her hand.

"Signora, I wish no wife but you," replied the Spaniard, raising the hand to his lips.

And so they parted, not to meet again.

That evening John Merton offered himself to Louisa Wylie, and was accepted.

"I would not ask until after Don Ramirez, for he had far more to offer than I shall ever have," said the happy lover at last.

"Had he John Merton to offer?" asked Louisa, with a smile.

They did not meet again, but on her wedding day, Louisa Wylie received from Don Jacinto Ramirez the gift of a wonderful parure of diamonds, and the deed of gift of $100,000, "a sum very poorly representing her due share of a certain property lost to the family of Ramirez but for her exertions."

So ran the deed, but Louisa, in accepting it, wrote with her own hand to Sig. Don Ramirez that it was only as a free gift, and not in the least as restitution, that she could accept it, and thank him for it most heartily.

"Men have died, and worms have eaten them, but not for love," and the signor was married last week to a charming New England girl whom he met at Newport.

Let us wish him happiness as great as that of our friends John and Louisa Merton, for we can suggest no question.

The Great Mackenzie Basin.

Senator Schultz's committee, appointed to inquire into the resources of the Great Mackenzie basin, report that the extent of the region is 1,200,000 square miles; that its coast line on the Arctic ocean and Hudson's bay measures 5,000 miles, over one-half of it being equally accessible to whaling and sealing craft; that the navigable coast lines of the larger lakes of the region extend for 4,000 miles; that river navigation is practicable for 2,750 miles; that within the region there is a possible area of 656,000 square miles fit for potato growing, 407,000 suitable for the cultivation of barley and 316,000 for that of wheat; that the pastoral area is equal to 800,000 square miles; that 150,000 square miles are auriferous, and that the evidence submitted to the committee points to the existence in the Athabasca and Mackenzie valleys of the most extensive petroleum field on the American continent, if not in the world.

The committee suggest that a bounded tract, 40,000 square miles in extent, be reserved from sale, and its value more accurately ascertained. They report that they have reason to believe that a comparison of the capabilities of this region shows that it exceeds, in the extent of its navigable waters, in the area of arable and pastoral lands, in valuable fresh water fisheries, in its forests, and its capacity to support population, the countries of Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Austria, and part of France and Russia. The committee recommend protection for the whale fisheries of the Arctic ocean. The furbearing animals of the region are also reported on.—Ottawa Cor. London Telegraph.

Oscar Wilde's Æstheticism.

Col. Vail, manager of Ragan's illustrated lectures, is the man who piloted Oscar Wilde through this country. The wonder is that he still lives. "Oscar Wilde was no fool, by any means," said the colonel. "He worked the United States 'for all there was in it.' He cleaned up $40,000 net, not counting the $5,000 he lost against Hungry Joe's bunco game in New York. Oscar was a genteel fakir. The 'Oscar Wilde' craze was his own invention. He worked the æsthetic craze for every dollar in sight. Whenever anybody used to call on him at his hotel he always struck an attitude, arranged the lilies and sunflowers, and did everything possible for effect before the visitor entered; but the moment the visitor left he became another man, and was one of the boys.

"His æsthetism was all assumed. When he returned to England he cut off his long hair, got down to business and gave the Yankees the grand laugh. The most amusement I ever had on the Oscar Wilde tour was in Denver, when Eugene Field got a wig and personated Wilde to perfection. Field in his make up took in the town and fooled everybody. His imitation of Wilde was very deceptive, and was a great hit. Nobody enjoyed it more than Wilde himself, who was in the party. Wilde had his long hair tucked up under a cowboy hat, and nobody recognized him, while everybody took Field for Wilde."—Omaha World.

A Trick of Gamblers.

A trick once attempted to be played here—not in the Citizens' Poker club, however—was neatly defeated. It was the old trick of sticking two cards together, giving a player to be fleeced the winning hand containing the double card. On the "show down" the next highest hand claims the stakes on the ground of a misdeal to the winner. The big hand in this deal was given to a Denver man. The betting was long and heavy, and the stakes ran up into the thousands. The Denver man discovered the thin card gently stuck to one of his aces, crumpled it in his hand, called for a glass of beer, slipped the card into his mouth and swallowed it with a gulp of lager. He never winced as the card scraped his throat, nor balled an eye as he reached over the table and pulled in an armful of chips. Nobody made any kick about the trick, either.—Hot Springs Cor. Chicago News.

The Progress of Evolution.

Visitor (to lunatic asylum, a century hence)—What a beautiful girl!

Superintendent—Yes, poor thing. She was a great society belle once—the pride of one of the most fashionable circles in the city. Her parents' hearts are almost broken. It is a pity, a great pity, that so lovely a casket should contain such a diseased mind. She is not dangerous; only a monomaniac; but the case seems hopeless.

"What is her mania?"

"She wants to marry for love."—Omaha World.