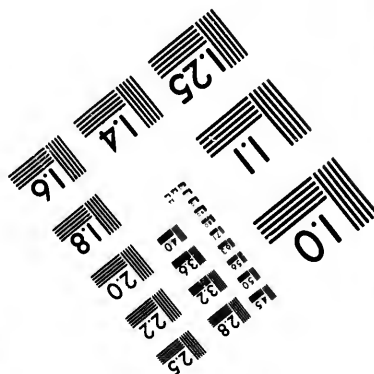
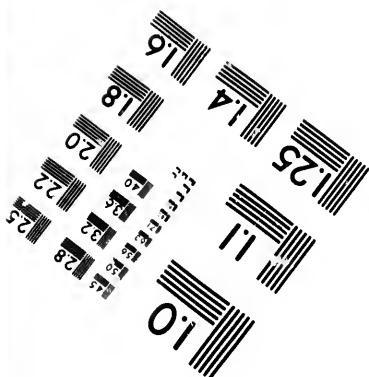
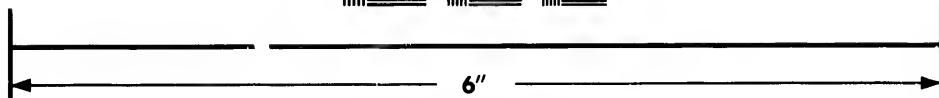
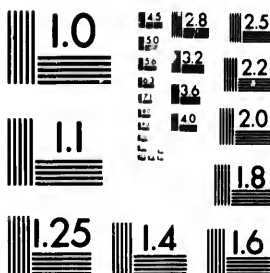


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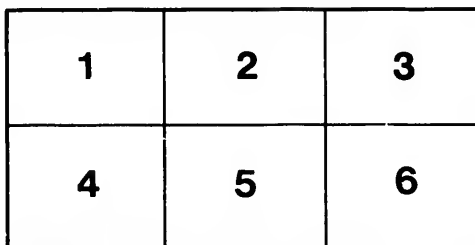
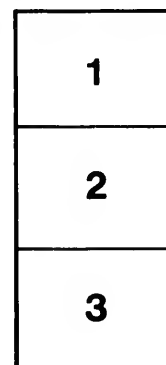
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# POLSON'S PROBATION

A STORY OF MANITOBA

BY

JAMES MORTON

TORONTO:

WILLIAM BRIGGS

WESLEY BUILDINGS.

MONTREAL: C. W. COATES.

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# POLSON'S PROBATION.

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## PROLOGUE.

### I.

THE case of *Hatton vs. Polson* was a peculiar one. By the will which had caused it, Henry Hatton, deceased, had bequeathed his estate of Laston to his nephew, Frederick Polson, but under these strict and highly virtuous conditions, viz. : (1) That he should not take possession until five years had elapsed from the date of the testator's death. (2) If, during this period, he should commit any act which would bring the shadow of disgrace or suspicion upon his name, he must forfeit all right to the inheritance, which would consequently revert to Julius Hatton of B—, Yorkshire, the oldest nephew of the testator, and his heir-at-law.

It was on account of the peculiar conditions of this will that the aforesaid Julius Hatton had brought an action to prove its illegality on the plea of the testator's insanity at the time the will was made.

This he endeavored to demonstrate by calling witnesses to show that his grandfather had been a man of very eccentric habits and notions (so much so, indeed, that at times his eccentricities could scarcely be distinguished from actual insanity), and that he was laboring under one of these fits at the time the will was written. Hatton's counsel pressed his case with great dexterity, but still the evidence was not sufficient to destroy the jury's belief in the deceased gentleman's sanity ; and cruelly regardless of the trouble and expense to which Mr. Julius Hatton had



been put, they rendered a verdict from which the judge imposed a sentence, allowing Frederick Polson to retain the estate under the conditions of the will, and condemning Hatton to pay the costs of the court.

When the verdict had been given, Mr. Polson, sen.—appearing on behalf of his son Frederick, who was confined to his bed by an attack of fever—left the court, smiling calmly, whilst Julius Hatton departed in another direction, with a wave of vengeful vows surging through his soul.

After leaving the court-house, Mr. Polson walked to the railway station, and there took the first train for London. He landed in the heart of that fog-blackened metropolis, and groped among its stony streets till he found a modest tenement he called his own. No sooner had he opened the door than there was a pattering of small feet, and a little girl sprang into his arms exclaiming, "It's daddie! It's daddie!"

These exclamations called out a matronly lady, and when Mr. Polson had set down his caressing little burden, he greeted her with a cordial kiss. After satisfying the storm of eager questions with which she saluted him, he managed to find time to ask, "How is Fred now?"

"A little better, I think," answered Mrs. Polson; "but how thoughtless of me! I have been keeping you here and I know that he is all eagerness to learn the result of the trial."

"Well, I won't keep him on thorns much longer."

Mr. Polson took off his hat and hung it on a peg, and after smoothing his hair a little, ascended the stairs and entered the sick-room. When he opened the door he was greeted with medicinal smells which came from several open phials standing on a table in a corner. The blind was drawn over the window to soften the light, and on all sides were indications of the presence of sickness.

As Mr. Polson entered the room, a young man, trembling and fever-worn, sat up in the bed and asked, in a weakly, eager tone, terribly in keeping with the hectic flush on his cheek:

"Well, father, which has won?"

"The right, I hope, my boy. At least, I think we are in the right," said Mr. Polson, smiling, as he seated himself on a chair by the bedside.

"Which means that we have won," said Fred.

"Of course. But still you know the conditions—for five years you cannot touch the estate, and meanwhile the rental derived from it goes to support charitable institutions. A queer idea, certainly; but of late years your grandfather was as eccentric in his habits as he was rigid in his morals, so, no doubt, he thought he would put you through the furnace of temptation before trusting you with the estate. Still, that clause allowing it to revert to Hatton in case you fail to obtain it is strange, since he always had an aversion to him, whilst you were quite his favorite. However, you must try to live as ascetically as possible for the next five years, and the estate will be yours."

"But my cousin Hatton, I am afraid, will take it rather hard," said Fred, who feared to make an enemy. "Don't you think I ought to divide a little with him?"

"Not unless you wish to see your estate wasted for evil purposes. From all I can hear of your cousin, he deserves even less than he has got."

"Indeed! What is wrong with him?" asked Fred with some surprise.

"From what I have learned of him, he appears to be simply a selfish schemer, as cunning in getting money as he is covetous. His chief business just now, nominally at least, is in connection with a loan company in which he has an interest. But I have heard that this is merely the blind under which he works a hundred petty schemes for making a penny here and threepence there. In short, his every idea is dressed with the dross of sordid pelf."

"Strange," murmured the young man, falling back on the pillow in a musing mood; "strange, that this man's destiny should be so linked to mine; and yet I have never seen him. Not so strange either, on reflection; for there has always been a coldness between us and the Hattons; and

luckily we have always lived long distances apart, so that there never has been any other than a sort of epistolary business intercourse between us."

"Still, you saw Julius in the court," continued Fred, possessed of an instinctive craving to learn all he could about this unknown cousin. "What did he appear like, personally?"

"To begin with, he has a head shaped something like the capital letter D—ear, me!" exclaimed Mr. Polson, involuntarily interrupting himself to add the last two syllables in a tone of surprise. "Talking of letters suddenly reminds me that I had forgotten to tell you that I have received a letter from Mr. Dysart, in western Manitoba, and he says he shall be very glad to receive you as a farm pupil, if you are willing to rough it and work with the ordinary men. He will not accept a premium, because, he says, he finds that those who pay regard themselves as privileged persons, exempt from obligations to work, and so by their idleness set a bad example to the laborers."

"And he is perfectly right," remarked Fred, emphatically.

"From a business point of view, certainly," added his father. "But still, in your position you cannot think of accepting a place under him on such terms."

"And why not?" asked Fred, raising himself on elbow. "It is just what I should wish. I despise the lily-fingered dandy who calls himself a man, and yet is afraid to handle a spade or drive a plow."

"Yes, yes!" said his father, impatiently, "that is all very fine in bookish philosophy; but you, with your prospective wealth, cannot think of putting it to a practical test, especially when you consider that your constitution is quite unfitted to stand such unnecessary hardships. The idea is simply absurd."

"If my body is weak that is one more reason why I should try to strengthen it by fresh air and healthful exercise. And if I am to manage an estate consisting of farms, I want myself to be a farmer; and to be a farmer, I must learn by working. I cannot learn to pitch hay by tossing

up straws with a walking-stick ; nor can I plow with kid gloves on my hands and a glass in my eye. No ; if I want to farm I must strip off my coat and grasp the plow-handles without mittens."

"Well, well," said Mr. Polson, alarmed by the excitement which sparkled in Fred's eyes and flushed his cheek, "we will talk it over some other time." And he deftly changed the subject. So, for the time, the matter dropped, and Mr. Polson hoped that returning health would produce a change in the mind of his son. In this he was mistaken.

Fred Polson was a thoughtful young man, and yet of a very excitable temperament. He was, unfortunately, rather too easily influenced by the teachings of others. Every new book he read, every enlightened conversation he heard, seemed to lend a fresh hue to his mind. Of late he had come to recognize with Tolstoi that labor was God's universal law—that only in work would true happiness be found—that idleness was always punished by the curse of *ennui*, accompanied often by broken health and corrupted morals. It was a desire to put this theory into practice, combined with the love of change and adventure, so natural to youth, that made him eager to emigrate to Manitoba.

The reader may perhaps ask why he could not work in England. I must confess my hero's weakness. He was a sensitive man, and shrank from provoking the gibes and laughter of the friends with whom he was wont to associate. How many are deterred from practising benevolent designs by the same failing !

When he had fully recovered his health, the discussion on his future life again raged furiously, and this time Fred had his way. In vain his father pictured the miseries of western life, the absence of friends, the risk to health in the severe climate, the danger and hardships to be encountered, and the greater safety from temptation at home.

"Speaking of temptation," said Fred, "is there less here in England, where every village has its pot-house and skittlerow, and almost every town its theatre or music hall, whilst the great cities are infested with gambling-

hells and the streets polluted with walking vice? Is there less temptation here, I ask, than I am likely to meet with on the thinly settled prairies of the West?"

As he could give no satisfactory answer to this interrogation, Mr. Polson let it pass, and finally, after a little further demur, gave a reluctant consent. So the next spring Fred Polson bade farewell to his family and sailed for America. And whilst he bends over the deck-rails, and mournfully watches the snowy foam which the ship tears out of the sea, we will return to Julius Hatton, the money-lender.

## II.

Mr. Polson, when he interrupted himself, was describing Hatton as a man with a head shaped like the written capital D. Well, perhaps the simile was not so wide of the mark either. He has a cunning head, rounded at the back, whilst the curve over the top of the letter is represented in him by a twisted wisp of sandy hair hanging negligently over a hard-lined brow. Let us add to this a pair of hard grey eyes, a hooked nose, two little ears nestling among his hair like sea-shells in the sand, a chin protruding like the double curve at the foot of the letter, and the D-shaped head is complete. Nor is it altogether as uncomely as one would think from an analysis of its separate parts; for there is a strange symmetry of crook and curve about it that gives it as a whole a fair pretence to regularity of feature. Perhaps in after years when the teeth have fallen out and the jaws have fallen in; when the eagle-pointed nose almost touches the upturned chin, and when the sunken eyes blink at the world from under shaggy brows of mingled sand and snow—then, perhaps, its component ugliness may be revealed; but now, at thirty, the face is passing fair.

This remarkable head is supported by a compact and sturdy frame of about the middle height, stout, but well proportioned; and as a shapely pedestal helps to set off a statue, so, no doubt, the body of Julius Hatton serves to relieve the uncomeliness of his head.

We left this gentleman fuming under a legal defeat, and must, I am sorry to say, return to him as he plans revenge for the same. He had by no means abandoned all hope of possessing the Laston estate. He comforted himself with the reflection that in five years many things might happen, and he determined in the meantime to keep a watchful eye on his rival; for though he had never seen him, he would still trace him by his name, so that if he were guilty of any delinquency, he would not fail to bring it to the light which "blackens every blot."

Winter passed and the spring came. Flowers blossomed, green grew the grass, and green leaves clustered on the trees where birds were carolling in joyful melody; but these things touched not the gold-bedizened soul of Julius Hatton, though it vibrated instantly to a dry half-business and half-confidential letter he received one morning from a partner in London.

"By the way, Hattonius," wound up his correspondent, who was a bit of a pedant, "I must not forget to inform thee that thy kinsman, Polsonius the younger, has sailed the western seas in search of the New Atlantis, where he intends to pass his time in tilling the fields and piping to the flocks, combining the pastoral qualities of Cincinnatus and Virgil without their public fame." Then, in more prosaic form, he gave Fred Polson's future address.

"Oh, indeed!" thought Julius, holding the letter in his hand. "So he thinks he will pass his five years free from the world's temptations, does he? Ho, ho, my friend, we'll see about that. Perhaps you won't keep out of my sight so easily after all."

And thus inwardly apostrophising his far-away cousin, he rose from his desk and paced thoughtfully about the floor of his dusty little counting-house.

"I wonder whether it would pay me to follow him. It would if I could wrest the estate from him somehow. Suppose I tried to make a double business of it, and bought a farm out there. I wonder if that would pay me. I should think it would; for when I have done with it, I dare say I can foist it upon the shoulders of some green

fellow-countryman at a considerable profit. Besides, I can do a little in the way of business, too. It is a new country, and plenty will be only too glad to borrow money even at a big interest, to start and stock their claims with ; and I can mortgage their farms as pretty safe security."

As he paced about the little den his mind seemed to grow big with selfish ideas, but a thought checked its growth and made him pause.

"But the bother is I may find it rather hard to bring disgrace to this fellow after all. Never mind" (he began to walk again), "I'll do it somehow." This premeditated deed required justification. Mr. Hatton soon found sufficient to suit him. "What right has he to the estate anyhow? I am the rightful heir, and in spite of the wills of cranky old crackpots, I will have it yet."

And as one small idea entering a mind will sometimes grow to the exclusion of appetite and sleep, so this thought of following his cousin would not let Julius Hatton rest till its fulfilment had begun.

Purposely putting inquirers on the wrong scent, he informed his friends and partners that he was going on a trip across the continent for the benefit of his health, and would probably remain abroad for a considerable length of time. Then, after taking all possible precautions to conceal his identity whilst abroad, he filled his greasy money-bags with gold, changed his name, and sailed away.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### THE DYSART SETTLEMENT.

It is spring in Manitoba. On the hillsides and by the woody bluffs dirty patches of snow are still keeping up a faint struggle for existence against the increasing power of the sun ; and every sloping hollow now resounds with the liquid melody of a rippling, snow-born stream.

In the higher places the prairie is composed of water-



soaked patches of last year's withered grass, bedecked by thousands of springing crocuses. Innumerable pools of many sizes and shapes surge and tinkle against their shores in the freshening April breeze. On the waves of the larger sloughs, flocks of quacking ducks are riding, after their journey from the south; and overhead long lines of their fellow-emigrants swing and curve as they speed toward the north. The trails, now transformed into long black streaks of mud, are sometimes swallowed by the watery pools, but emerge again on the opposite side to stretch out in a long line of gleaming blackness until entirely lost to view. Down the muddy, swollen river float huge blocks of ice, jostling and grinding their ragged edges as they tumultuously crowd along.

Such is spring in Manitoba, and such are some of the sights and sounds common to Dysart Settlement.

As it is necessary for the purpose of my story to show how Dysart Settlement lies, I must beg the reader to follow this brief description: On the north side it is bounded by the Assiniboine River, which winds its sinuous way through a deep and wide valley, hemmed in by steep banks, one of which is clothed with timber, and the other bleak and treeless. To the west it extends to a deep ravine, beyond which stretch miles of wild, uncultivated prairie. On the south side it is generally conceded to be bounded by the lake in front of Mr. Dysart's house. Eastward the boundary is indefinite, but it is usually accepted as ceasing with the limits of the Dysart farm.

Anyone standing in the heart of this settlement in the season I have described, would have seen on one of the various plots of plowed land—which blackened it in places like the squares on a checker-board—certain moving objects, which, in the distance, appeared like two horizontal blots followed by a short, perpendicular streak, but as they approached, gradually broadened to the sight, and finally resolved into real flesh, as a man harrowing with a team of horses.

Like the prairie, the cultivated land has its supply of water holes, the smooth surfaces of which, interspersed



among the pulverized earth, resemble bits of looking-glass stuck here and there in a dull, rough blackboard. Through these the horses plunge and splash, the harrows following and stirring up the mud, till the hole resembles a vat of yellow yeast. In the rear the driver, with legs protected by top-boots, trudges unconcernedly through the ooze to emerge with boots shedding a tenacious liquid.

This is new work for the young Englishman who is driving the team, and although his brow is covered with sweat, and his feet are sore with walking, the very novelty makes it enjoyable to him, and so he tramps along contentedly till the evening brings him release.

When he has unhitched, he takes his horses to the farm-buildings, and, after feeding and cleaning them, leaves them there. About a quarter of a mile from the farm-buildings is the owner's private dwelling-house, and toward this he makes his way.

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## CHAPTER II.

### THE DYSART HOUSEHOLD.

#### A FARM-HOUSE!

It is a large frame building, beautifully finished and painted. The gables and eaves are decked with wooden trellis work. The bow-windows jutting out from the sides relieve it of monotony of appearance, and the veranda in front, supported by slender pillars of fluted iron, topped by a gently-curved roof, adorns it like a delicate fringe.

On all sides it is hemmed in by gardens. Behind is the kitchen-garden, where edible vegetables are grown. On either side are the fruit plots, consisting mostly of trees of small fruit. In the front, separated from the house by a gravelled drive, and divided by a broad walk, is the flower garden, laid out in artistic plots; and beyond these, crowning all like a silver diadem, lies the beautiful lake. Its crooked shores wind in graceful curves, forming many a

pleasant nook and cove, and are fringed with a green growth of bushes, where all through the long summer days hundreds of joyous birds build and sing.

Such then was the outer appearance of our hero's new home, and a scene better calculated to wean one of his gentle breeding to the hardships of western life and physical labor could not have been found.

After Fred Polson had washed and changed he entered the dining-room and found the rest of the household assembled for supper.

"Ah, Polson," said Mr. Dysart from the head of the table, "you are just in time. Had you been a little later I am afraid you would have found even the scraps scarce."

Fred muttered a bashful apology, took his place at the table, and the meal began. As all these persons play parts more or less conspicuous in the following pages I will, while they are thus conveniently grouped, give the reader a description of their outward semblances.

Mr. Dysart was a stout man of middle age. His full face, adorned with long auburn mustache, though not handsome, was still prepossessing as the index of a feeling soul. One who observed him closely, however, could not fail to detect a certain melancholy look often succeeding the smiles accompanying the jocular sayings and merry tales with which he enlivened the supper table.

By his side sat a pale, delicate little girl, to whom he never spoke but in the tenderest tones, for she was to him the last remaining link of a happy marriage, blasted by the untimely death of his wife.

On Mr. Dysart's left sat a lady of some thirty years of age. This was Mrs. Bant, his sister-in-law and house-keeper. She was a widow of a year's standing, and was now at the table engaged in feeding her son, who had been born about the time of his father's death.

Mrs. Bant's black hair is brushed back from a smooth and narrow forehead. Her cold grey eyes glance from beneath a pair of fine dark eyebrows. Her straight, sharp nose hovers ominously above a hard, thin-lipped mouth, which is further protected from the attacks of

the rude and presumptuous by a prominent sharp-pointed chin. When she moves, her tall, supple figure bends occasionally with a sharp, imperious gesture. When she speaks in anger, as often she is said to do, her shrill voice cuts knife-like through the thin partitions, and flashing on the listener's heart causes it to flutter and tremble. On the whole Mrs. Bant's appearance indicates the possession of a ready supply of petulance; and if her acquaintances do not libel her, her appearance does not lie. Besides Fred there are two other farm-students present, and these complete the group.

Mr. Longstreet is a lanky young man, who is making a faint attempt to grow a mustache. He talks very glibly, and often very amusingly. Mr. Fane is a little older, and his mustache is full-grown. His talk is chiefly confined to horses and dogs, and occasionally he injects into the general conversation such expressions as "Now! you don't say so." "No!" "How awfully funny," etc.

The talk ran smoothly on general topics until it was interrupted by a loud howl from Mrs. Bant's first-born. As he was not quite weaned from the natural wildness of mankind, it was his custom to seize upon the bones left on his mother's plate, and gnaw with his new-born teeth at the little flesh that remained on them.

On the present occasion he had fastened his teeth in an unusually tough morsel, and he was desperately tugging at the bone with his hands when the flesh suddenly gave way. The bone whipped round, and careening against Mrs. Bant's cup of tea, upset the steaming contents on his lap.

The youngster howled. Mr. Dysart frowned on him and made a face, at which he redoubled his howling, and screwed two little dimpled fists into his tearful eyes. Mrs. Bant sprang from her seat, and hugging the boy closely, gave him a sharp smack on the ear. "You little wretch," she said snappishly; "I will teach you to behave better than that."

"Take the squaller out, Mrs. Bant, till he quiets down," said Mr. Dysart. Mrs. Bant sped toward the door, and closing it behind her, passed into the kitchen.

Here her conduct changed. She pressed the boy tenderly and kissed his hideously contorted face.

"Poor little lambie," she said soothingly; "would they hurt you? Ah! but mamma won't let them. Hushee, tearie—don't cry."

"Really, Mrs. Tomson," she added, addressing the cook, who was roasting her cheeks over a fire that obstinately refused to roast anything else—"really, Mrs. Tomson, the way Mr. Dysart frightens and abuses my poor child is simply shameful. (Hush, Georgie, dear, be quiet now.) Yes, *shameful*. Do you know"—here she lowered her voice to a whisper—"I really believe he has a *spite* against the poor baby. Anything his own child does he passes over without a word; but let poor little Georgie even look at him, he frowns and scolds."

"Really, mum," said Mrs. Tomson, without looking up from the stove, "if that's the case it's too bad, mum."

"The case, Mrs. Tomson!" cried Mrs. Bant in tones of displeased surprise. "Of course it is the case; and really if his conduct does not alter, I cannot remain in this house much longer."

"Lor, I wish you wouldn't," thought Mrs. Tomson, inwardly, but the worthy lady did not say so.

"Now, really, mum," she said consolingly, "you shouldn't take these things so much to heart. Master may be a bit fretful at times, but—there he is calling me to wipe up something; I must be off;" and the honest dame flurried away with a dish-cloth in her hand.

Mrs. Bant stayed behind to soothe her irritated pet and blame against Mr. Dysart till the cook returned with the dish-rag containing, by absorption, the greater part of the lost cup of tea. She then wreathed her face with smiles, and went back to her place with the quietened babe.

The effect of this little occurrence on the spectators was very varied. Mr. Dysart, as we have seen, was displeased, but on the face of his little daughter it gave rise to a look of sorrowful interest. Longstreet and Polson were rather embarrassed. Mr. Fane's shoulders worked sharply, and he pulled nervously at his long mustaches.

"My, but it's a spiteful little brat," he remarked, when Mrs. Bant was out of hearing. "Anybody would think"—(with a shrug)—"he had been fed on crab-apple juice from his youth up."

The others, willing to be relieved of their embarrassment, laughed; and when Mrs. Bant returned, good-humor was quite restored.

"So the storm has blown over and the sunshine returned," remarked Mr. Dysart, playfully chucking the child under the chin.

At this demonstration from one he feared, the refractory Georgie drew back quickly toward his mother, and screwed up his face preparatory for another howl. But little Ida smiled reproachfully at him across the table, whereupon his wrinkles relapsed and he gave her an answering smile. Mr. Dysart turned to his daughter and patted her gently on the head. "You, my little dear, are always the best peace-maker," he said smiling.

The meal ended without further interruption, and each sought his evening's occupation. Mr. Dysart, with a pair of dogs at his heels, walked toward the farm. Mr. Fane employed himself in trying to train a pup to dive into the lake after stones. Mr. Longstreet stretched himself on the sofa in the dining-room and smoked his pipe; and Fred Polson retired to the library to study one of the latest works on social reform.

He read thoughtfully, at times laying down the book to reflect on difficult or striking passages. In one of these musing moods the twilight began to deepen around him.

The room in which he sat was lighted by a large bow-window looking out upon the lake. The floor was softly carpeted, and the walls papered with a light design. The furniture consisted of several easy chairs, a desk, a table and an organ; whilst the glass-covered book-cases that lined the walls were filled with well-bound volumes, neatly arranged.

As I said before, the spring twilight was deepening around Fred Polson as he sat musing in this room. Forgetful of everything around him, he was leaning his forehead on his hand and speaking to himself.

"Yes," he murmured, "the system is surely wrong. The world is full of error, and too often we mistake the falsehood for truth. Yet who amongst us poor mortals can always distinguish between error and truth? The truth to which one generation clings is regarded as a lie by the next. For centuries we have been groping in the darkness, and even now we have but a very faint glimmer of the dawn. Our social, religious and political structures are alike swarming with error, and he who attempts to cleanse them is branded with the stigma of 'mischief maker' or 'fanatic'."

Carried away by his subject, he had raised his head, and his eyes flashed as he muttered the above words; but as he concluded, his brow sank again upon his hand and he asked himself in troubled tones, "What can be done? What can be done?"

He was startled from his reverie by the gentle touch of a little hand laid on his, and a soft voice speaking in his ear.

"Mr. Polson, are you ill?"

Fred lifted his head and saw dimly in the twilight the pale, sweet little face of Ida Dysart looking softly into his.

"No, my dear," he said with a smile as he lifted her on his knee, "I am not ill; but I am getting rather lonely, and you must sit and talk to me a bit."

Fred was naturally a lover of children, and this one was his special favorite. In her nature there was something very attractive to his emotional and imaginative character. The seal of heaven stamped upon her face, seeming to say, "I have claimed you, tarry a little, then come to Me," gave a peculiar pathos to her expression which diffused itself around her, and made others regard her with melancholy tenderness, whilst her strange questions and precocious speculations on the deeper mysteries of life showed a mind tenderly susceptible, and touched in no slight degree with the quickening fire of genius.

Nor was Fred Polson less attractive to her than she to him. His kind and sympathetic soul won her love; and his varied knowledge, ripened thoughts, and studious habits captivated her admiration.

And so on that calm spring evening she sat on his knee by the window looking out upon the lake. And as one by one the silent stars came out and sparkled in the water and the sky, she asked him wondrous questions about birds, flowers, stars and all the bright and beautiful creations of God; passing gradually from earth into the mysteries of the eternal and sublime. Carried away by the poetical influences around him, Fred answered her first questions with a glowing enthusiasm of description and opinion, but as her inquiries grew more exclusively religious, he became more embarrassed in his replies; for Fred was a pronounced freethinker, and yet he feared to instil his scepticism into this child's mind.

At last, fairly cornered by her questions, he made a graceful retreat.

"Come, come," he said, patting her head, "you mustn't bother your little brain with these things, you know. Come and play me a nice tune on the organ. That will be pleasanter."

He lifted her in his arms, carried her across the room, and seated her on the music stool before the organ. As he opened it the soft light of a waning moon glittered on the ivory keys.

Fred walked back to the window and looked out upon the night. The placid lake was sparkling with a vivid reflection of the twinkling stars above. In the mellow glow of the waning moon, the trees around it were sombre and indistinct. Faint shadows lay stretched in grey lines on the water, save where in the dusky coves the close bushes clothed all in gloom. No sound but the feeble chirp of a drowsy bird broke the serene stillness of the night.

Absorbed in contemplating this quiet scene, Fred could hardly distinguish from its beauty the faint notes of melancholy music stealing upon his ear. But slowly they swelled into louder tones; and as they grew in rhythmic glory, rolling out upon the night and mingling with the spheres, he turned around in an ecstasy of surprise.

The moon's expiring rays fell upon the little white



figure at the organ, shining like some illumined saint in the gathering dusk. The music itself seemed rather to emanate from the player than from the instrument, and her face was lighted with a meek glory that was not of earth. Her music, too, seemed to chime fitly with all the voices of nature around her, now sadly soft as the waning moon, now rising to the grandeur of the glittering stars, and anon falling in gentle and imperceptible cadences to blend with the silence and solemnity of the night.

Through every change of human feeling, through wails of agony, through gentle tones of comfort and gladdening shouts of joy, it passed, yet never seemed it out of place; and the soul of the listener was thrilled with the strains, till a tear-drop moistened his eye.

Slowly it died away—not with the sudden shock of sounds confined, but rather with the murmuring echo of a distant bell dying faintly over land and sea. Long after her fingers had ceased to touch the keys, the room seemed still to be filled with the echoes of that wondrous melody, and overcome with powerful emotion, Fred Polson bent his head and kissed the pale lips of the player.

“God bless you, my child,” he said.

And had anyone at that moment asked him whether he believed in a higher and better life than this, sceptic and freethinker that he was, he would have answered undoubtedly, “I do.”

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### CHAPTER III.

#### UNCLE NATHAN—A RUNAWAY.

It was the custom of Mr. Dysart's herdsman to bring two pails of milk from the farm to the house every morning. He had just performed this duty and was starting to return with the empty pails as Fred Polson finished his breakfast, and went to the back kitchen window to see him walk.

You ask, perhaps, what there was in a man's style of



walking to interest anyone. In most men's not much, I admit; but this was a very peculiar man.

He was of ordinary height, but very thin and wiry. His skin was as brown and hard as if composed of little leathern scales, beaten compact by patient hammering. His head, never at rest, moved from shoulder to shoulder like a living inverted pendulum. His neck was capable of contraction and expansion to an alarming degree, his head at times resting low between his shoulders as if it had grown there without a neck; and again at the least alarm it would shoot up into the air as if filliped by a hidden spring, drawing after it a lengthy throat somewhat resembling that which a tortoise thrusts from its shell.

His hands were long, slender and hard, with fingers as rough as rasps, and knuckles like oak knots. They were incapable of companionship, those fingers, and were constantly trying to run away from each other. One would move toward the sky, another toward the earth. One pointed north, another pointed south, whilst the thumb twirled helplessly amid the restless combination. His arms, when not too heavily burdened, swung about with lordly and dramatic gestures. His semi-transparent knife of a nose ended in an alabaster tip. His rough, sandy goatee tapered down to a keen edge at the bottom, and threatened to cut his throat in the nervous restlessness of its wagging.

This distorted bundle of agitated nerves was clothed in the cottonade smock common in the country, a pair of baggy top-boots, a hat turned wrong side before, and several pairs of overalls. I say *several* pairs, for our friend's system of patching, though rather expensive, was very simple. He started with a brand-new pair, and as soon as holes large enough to excite comment appeared in these, he bought another pair and put them on beneath the old ones. When the sun scorched his limbs through both these, he bought another pair, and this completed the pantaloon trio. When this trinity of trousers would no longer shelter him, he threw it aside and commenced to construct another.

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On this particular morning, as he ambled along with the two tin pails in his hands, he would swing them suddenly forward to meet with a crash in front of him. Shocked by this collision, he stopped and whirled them backward, as if to tear them asunder, and again they clashed together behind him. He started! This was too much for his delicate susceptibility; and whirling half around, he placed the buckets on the ground, and drawing his form erect, folded his arms, pursed his lips and puckered his brow in puzzled consideration.

From his station at the kitchen window, Fred Polson watched these proceedings with great amusement. In spite of his habitual thoughtfulness the spirit of mischief was stirred within him by beholding old Nathan's movements, and as soon as that worthy began once more to meander along with the colliding milk-pails, Fred stole slyly out, and ran on tip-toe along the foot-path after him. He drew near to the old herdsman without being observed, and after dodging about a bit to avoid the swinging milk-pails, stepped forward sharply and let out a strident yell, at the same time giving him a smart dig with his thumb. The milk-man's legs bent under him like a bird's, as he bounded into the air. His arms whirled wildly around, and the milk-pails ricocheted through space. His head sank into the recess between his shoulders; he spun around in air, and finally landed with his knees doubled under him, facing Fred Polson. He screwed up his mouth, wrinkled his nose and arched his eyebrows at the sight of Fred, who was vainly trying to stifle a laugh which bubbled over his face and convulsed his frame.

"Well, uncle," he said, after calming himself a little, "you look rather surprised."

Uncle bounded to his feet as if he had received an earthquake shock.

"Hallo, Parlson," he bawled in high-strung nasal tones, "whar air you sprung from?" And so saying he rushed first one way and then the other, and collected his scattered milk-pails.

"I think," said Fred, when uncle had shuffled back to

the footpath, "I ought to ask you where you have sprung from, if anything. You looked just now as if you had dropped from the sky."

Uncle replied with a grin that exposed a few teeth separated by generous gaps and made tiny creases around the corners of his mouth. "No more o' yer foolin' now," he said, "or maybe I'll get even with you some o' these days."

"Me fooling with you!" said Fred in tones of surprise. "Why, uncle, you must be dreaming!"

"O, git along; we've seen the likes o' you fellers before." And though he took the incident so good-humoredly, he stored it away in his memory, awaiting a season of retribution.

Fred accompanied him the rest of the way to the farm, but it was rather dangerous companionship, for though he tried his best to keep out of the way of the whirling pails, it was a difficult task. Uncle's walk was the gait of an ostrich, and his head, like that of Janus, seemed always to be looking both ways, in consequence of which he saw things very imperfectly. At one time the bottom of a pail would whiz past Fred's head, whipping his cheek with cold air; at another the two would swing toward him from front and rear, threatening to flatten him in collision; but by dint of diligent dodging, he escaped these erratic attacks, and arrived safely at the farm. He found that his first work for the day was to take a message to a neighboring farm. He preferred to go on foot, and at once started out. It was a bright June morning. Here and there a few early roses glittered with the dew, and greeted the traveller with pleasant perfume. From the recesses of the green and shady bluffs came the many-toned songs of the gleeful bird flocks. Across the three beaten tracks, divided by two thin lines of grass, composing the trail, a glistening grass-snake would sometimes glide; and, to spoil all the poetry of the scene, dark, revolving swarms of mosquitoes hummed a fiercely mournful melody around him, whilst the more audacious of their brethren settled on his face and neck. Sometimes his hand would swoop down on a

group of these like an avalanche on adventurous mountaineers, and it generally returned to his side with a palm speckled with the ensanguined remains of his tormentors.

Hurried on by these pests, his errand was soon performed. He was returning over a trail that ran for about a hundred yards along the very edge of a steep ravine. Treeless, shrubless, flowerless, the steep bank, composed of loose earthy shale, descended to cease abruptly where trees, shrubs and flowers decked a level and beautiful valley. Fred Polson paused to take a fair view.

"A nice-looking scene this," he thought, "and its beauty is strengthened not a little by the contrast this bare bank affords. But this would be an ugly place to be tumbled into when riding along some dark night, or with a—*but heigho! what's this?*"

These exclamations were caused by the sight of a horse rushing madly along the trail toward him, and dragging behind it a light vehicle in which a female form was sitting helplessly back, as if in a swoon. The horse dashed fiercely along toward where the road first began to creep along the edge of the ravine. At this point the trail turned abruptly, and Fred saw that if the beast rounded the corner at that wild speed the buggy would be thrown into the ravine by the swerve, and the occupant injured or killed, so he determined to try to stop it at all hazards. He ran swiftly forward and, passing the turn, stood ready to intercept the runaway. On it came, madly spurning the dust from beneath its feet, and at every bound the vehicle jumped forward, whilst every obstacle that it struck fairly lifted the wheels off the ground. As the horse came nearer, Fred shouted and waved his arms to frighten it into staying its pace; but still the beast rushed blindly forward. He stepped aside a little, and, as it snorted past, sprang at the rein and grasped it tightly. For a short distance the maddened brute rushed on, dragging Polson's feet along the ground; but his weight hanging on the rein soon checked its speed. It slowed up gradually, and Fred, regaining his feet, gave a few sharp pulls on the bit, which brought it to a stop. The

animal quivered in every limb. Its hide was reeking and patched with flakes of foam ; its eyes were bloodshot, and the hot breath poured in fiery snorts through its distended nostrils. But these things Fred Polson heeded very little. He led the horse to a small bluff, a little distance off, and there tied it fast to a tree.

This troublesome charge thus disposed of, he turned his attention to the helpless occupant of the buggy. She leaned on the cushioned seat-back, apparently still unconscious, for her eyes were closed and her head was sunk upon her breast.

Fred first looked around for some water to sprinkle on her face ; but as he could see none nearer than the creek that ran along the bottom of the ravine—and which it would take considerable time and trouble to reach—he contented himself by taking off his broad straw hat and converting it into a rude fan. Armed with this formidable article, spreading out from his hand like a turkey-cock's tail, he got into the buggy and tried to revive her by waving it before her face. But he found that the brim of her hat interfered with the operation, so that he was fain to act so unchivalrously as to take it off without her leave. He found that he had uncovered a head of splendid black hair ; and this discovery urged him to renewed exertions with his homely fan. So vigorously did he work that the wind he created tossed about the soft, dark fringe lying on her white forehead ; and his hat bent like a tuft of grass in a breeze.

Fortunately, before it was quite demolished, the lady began to show symptoms of recovery. Like the glow of dawn spreading over the morning sky, the color began to return to her cheeks. Like the light of stars brightening in the sky of evening, the gleam of consciousness slowly returned to her opening eyes. She lifted her head slowly and looked, at first in vague bewilderment, and then as sense grew more awake, in great surprise, at Fred.

"How is this?" she asked. "How came you here? Let me see—I think I remember. The horse shied at a piece of paper or something on the road, and then began to rear, and I was frightened ; and he got away from me.

And, oh! how he rushed along. I was so frightened I dropped the reins altogether—that is all I can remember. Perhaps you, sir, can tell me the rest?"

She spoke like one who was earnestly trying, under a cloud, to account for something she could not properly understand; and the last sentence sounded like an appeal to Fred for enlightenment.

Now, Fred Polson, as we have seen, was bold enough before an unconscious and speechless girl; but when that young lady had recovered consciousness, sight and voice, and actually began to question him with the latter, the boldness faded away.

He began to fidget and feel uneasy, for the position in which he stood—penned in the narrow confines of an American buggy with a young lady he had never seen before, and standing against the dashboard, holding one end of an old straw hat crumpled in his hand, while the rest expanded gradually outward from it like a kite—was not the most graceful, and to a man of Fred Polson's nervous temperament it was extremely embarrassing.

However, replacing his hat and pulling nervously at the trim with one hand, whilst with the other he fingered the dashboard, he stammered out a broken tale, relating what he had seen of the runaway.

"When I saw the horse running toward me," he said, "I stood on the trail and caught at its bridle—no its rein—its bridle, I mean—no it was its rein after all, I think,—and managed to stop it. You were senseless (excuse me, I mean unconscious) in the buggy, so I got up into it and—and you came to yourself again."

As Fred delivered himself of the last sentence he felt a little blush creeping over his face, for he knew that he was leaving something out; but, for the life of him, when he thought of the battered and rusty old straw on his head, he could not tell her how he had aided in reviving her. But she saved him from further embarrassment by a grateful look and an almost involuntary extension of her hand.

"You have saved my life," she said, grasping his hand

in a momentary impulse of enthusiastic gratitude. "How can I thank you sufficiently?" This question was asked with such expressive helplessness of the gratitude she felt that it heightened her beauty tenfold in his eyes; and at the same time giving him an insight of her nature, it helped not a little to set him at ease.

"Your words have already more than repaid me for the trifling service I have been able to render you—a service," he added, "which in reality was nothing more than the common duty of anyone toward a fellow-being in distress. But I must not leave you as you are. The reins seem to be broken; I will try to fix them up a little."

He jumped to the ground, and taking the broken parts of the line in his hand he deftly knotted them together.

"Not a very elegant job, I'm afraid," he said, looking at her with a smile, "but I daresay it will hold till you reach your destination."

"It is very nicely done, I am sure," she said. "And really it is very kind of you to take so much trouble."

"Oh, don't mention it," said Fred, as he untied the horse from the tree.

"Now," he said, when all was ready for a start, "you must not permit me to leave you like this. Let me have the pleasure of driving you the rest of your journey, wherever that may take you."

"I was going to Bendigo," she said, "but as it is, I must simply return home. I have already troubled you too much, I am sure, and I cannot think of trespassing on your kindness any further. Besides I am sure I can manage 'Brandy' now. He was very fresh before, but his run will have quieted him."

"Still, when a horse has once run away, he is liable to try very hard to do so again. You really must let me accompany you, for you will be doing me a service, as I notice that you came the way I intend going, and if you are going to turn back, it will carry me so much nearer my destination."

"Why, how stupid of me not to think of that before!" she exclaimed in self-reproach. "Of course you can ride



with me. Really you must think me very thoughtless and ungrateful."

Fred assured her that he understood her perfectly, got into the buggy, took the reins from her hands and they were soon whirling merrily along the dusty road.

At first there was an awkward silence between them, which was broken by the young lady, who fingered her hat strings and said nervously:

"Forgive me for my boldness, but may I ask the name of my preserver?"

This was just what Fred Polson wanted. He had been puzzling his brains for some means of introduction, and now the ice he had been vainly casting about for some way of cracking, was nicely broken for him.

"My name is Frederick Polson," he said. "I am learning farming under Mr. Dysart; and now to make the introduction complete, may I ask your name?"

"My name is Craggs—Alice Craggs," she said with a little laugh. "Not a very pretty name, is it?"

"Oh, I don't know. It is certainly poetical."

"Yes, very," she said with a tinge of sarcasm. "It rhymes with 'snags,' 'bags,' 'rags,' and other such articles."

"But rhyme is not always poetry," he said with a smile.

"Many of our greatest poets have sung of crags."

"Oh, yes!" she said. "'Horrid crags,' 'Bristling crags,' and 'craggs o'ertopped with snow.'"

"At least they pierce to heaven and leave vain man below," he added, rhyming on her quotations.

Under the influence of such conversation they became naturally more familiar, and at ease with each other. She boded beautifully through the folds of her timidity, and Fred's stiffness and reserve disappeared. He found a companion who talked with delicious feminine lightness and merriment on many topics; whilst she, for her part, was charmed with Polson's melodious diction, and astonished by the breadth of information he displayed on every topic they discussed. Those gifts, combined no doubt with his prepossessing face and youthful appearance, completely



gained for Fred the admiration and attention of his fair auditor, for woman is ever an admirer of eloquence and wit.

Absorbed in this discourse, and perhaps unwilling also to part so soon from his new acquaintance, Fred quite forgot to get out at the point nearest to the farm, but rode with the maiden to her father's door ; and was afterward rather astonished to find that he was about two miles from his former destination.

The farm-buildings of Mr. Crags, sen., consisted of a weather-beaten wooden house, and a few tumble-down one-story edifices composed of a jumble of logs, sods, manure straw, and other primitive material. These were stationed at the back of the house so as to break the force of the north winds, and were made up of an indistinguishable medley of stables, granaries and barns.

Against the western end of the house leaned a weary looking apartment which served as a kitchen, and this was its only offshoot. The rest of the house stood up in prime square dignity ; its windows looked mournfully out from the sun-blistered and weather-blackened boards which surrounded them. The loose round handles drooped dejectedly from the doors like the tired hands of a weary person. The cracked and rusty stovepipe on the house-top rolled out a lazy puff of grey smoke occasionally like a pipe in the mouth of someone half asleep.

In front of the house on a small, broken plot of land, some attempt had been made at gardening, but dingy hens made croaking cackles as they scratched among the weeds with which it was overgrown, as if searching in bitter sarcasm for the seeds that had been sown there. The growing fields of wheat extending to the south were mingled with a dark growth of noxious weeds, which threatened eventually to choke the whole crop. Over everything hung the disorderly signs of slovenly mismanagement. The paintless buildings rotting to decay, the shrivelling weed-straw fields, the littered farm-yard, the rakish-looking cattle—all seemed moving fast to ruin ; for stamped upon that place like a mark of Cain was the blasting curse of drink.

Fred Polson did not notice these things at the time, however, as his attention was absorbed by a masculine-looking, dark-haired woman, who lifted her hands in horror as she saw her daughter riding up, accompanied by a youthful stranger in male attire; and when she saw this young man calmly descend and lift Alice from the buggy, her mouth opened to receive and emit a breath of horror-tainted air, whilst her dark brow wrinkled like a corrugated thunder-cloud.

Alice, in her eagerness to explain matters and relate her adventures, did not notice these signs, but running hastily toward her mother, began to tell a breathless tale. As she proceeded the lady's frowning brow unbent, and when her daughter presented Polson to her as the gentleman who had saved her life, she even deigned to greet him with a friendly smile; to which Fred replied with a courteous bow and an answering smile, at the same time informing her that he was "glad to make her acquaintance."

"I do not know how we can be thankful enough to you," said Mrs. Craggs. "If you are not engaged already you must come and have tea with us next Sunday."

"Thank you," said Fred, "but —."

"Oh, yes, do," interposed the grateful Alice, appealingly.

There was no resisting that. "Thank you," said Fred, "I will come with much pleasure. But before I leave you now, you must allow me to put your horse in the stable for you."

"Oh, no, thank you!" said Alice. "I can manage that very well myself. I have often done it before."

Polson insisted, but still she would allow him to do nothing more than unhitch the horse from the buggy, and lead it away to the stable with her own hand. Fred lingered a little to talk to Mrs. Craggs, and then took his departure, promising faithfully to return on the following Sunday.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE VULCAN OF THE KNEADING-TROUGH.

As Fred Polson returned to the Dysart farm his brain was constantly photographing two soft brown eyes over-arched by a white brow, shaded with a luxuriant fringe of dark hair. Beneath these, on this mental picture, was a cherry-lipped sensitive mouth and a little round chin. It was a full-sized photograph, and the lower part was filled in with a graceful little womanly figure.

Abstracted by this artistic study, Fred wandered absently along, and after about a quarter of an hour of this sentimental meandering was surprised to find that he was travelling the wrong road. Hastily recollecting himself, he recovered the track and walked at a quick pace toward the farm.

It was customary for him to dine with the men, and as it was drawing near the hour of noon he hastened that he might be in time for the meal. When he reached the farm-house, however, he found dinner already over. He went into the house and looked down the row of bare deal tables off which they took their meals, but no sign of dinner-things remained on them. A few men lay dozing on the wooden benches which composed the seats, and others lounged in the shade of the buildings smoking their mid-day pipes.

The large substantial wooden buildings, painted red and roofed with shingles, told of the capital that had been expended in their erection. A few temporary and rickety-looking hovels were scattered around; and among these, separated by a few yards from the house, was the cook-shanty. Toward this Fred Polson bent his steps.

Externally, it was made up of rough boards topped by a shingled shed roof. Internally, most of the space was taken up by a huge stove, on the spacious top of which several pots fizzed and frothed, and sent forth various steams and odors, whilst from the cavernous oven came

forth divers sounds of hissing and spluttering, which, combined with hot puffs of escaping vapor, were liable to make a nervous stranger think that living serpents were being roasted there. Around the stove, like subjects surrounding a monarch, were scattered pots, pans, kettles and cooking utensils of various kinds.

The man who lorded it over this greasy domain had been roasted, basted and baked into a premature middle age. A slight sprinkling of grey—if it were not flour—in his hair and whiskers showed that youth was vainly struggling against its ever-encroaching foe, old age. The right side of his nose was adorned with a black finger-streak, looking as if some gigantic globule of ink had once dropped in the guise of a tear from his eye, and had never since been effaced. On his head he wore a greasy crown—the crown of a hat, that is—from which the brim had been torn off in a religious controversy long ago. An ancient jersey, perforated with a myriad of little holes in the breast, protected his back from weather and observation. His nether limbs were decked out in a pair of loose pants that had once been white, but were now bedaubed with so many coatings of grease, mingled with so many plasters of flour and dough, that though in hot weather they were unusually supple and shiny, when it froze they became as stiff as two ancient columns. His feet were partly enclosed in a pair of carpet slippers. I say *partly* because his toes stuck out at one end and his heels at the other; and, as he was never in the habit of wearing socks, this circumstance made his feet not the least obtrusive part of his anatomy.

When Fred Polson entered the shanty, this personage was engaged in kneading dough, and all that could be seen of him was the back of his trousers hitching up at the bottoms with every thump on the dough, so revealing two lengths of brown coagulated heel, which kept rising and dropping on the soles of his defenceless carpet slippers with pulsations as regular as steam piston-rods.

“I say, cook, would you kindly get me a little dinner?” said Fred.

"What's that?" growled a deep voice from the depths of the kneading-trough.

"I've been thrown late by an accident. Would you mind getting me a little something to eat?"

At this the Vulcan of the kneading-trough raised his head from its obscurity: it was bare, his hair dishevelled, and the perspiration on his face and brow vainly tried to escape from the flour which thickened around and imprisoned it. He looked with an air of grim defiance at Polson.

"Taint meal-time," he said gruffly.

Fred saw at once that only persuasion would cause him to grant his request.

"But, cook," he said smiling, "suppose now that you were unavoidably thrown late —"

"This ain't a boardin' house," was the growling interruption. "Meals are on at regular time here."

"I know that quite well. But suppose, cook, that you saw a young lady in a difficulty, would you hesitate to help her out for fear of being too late for dinner?"

At the mention of a lady the cook's countenance altered. His brow became smoother, and he actually smiled.

"Oh, it's a woman that has stopped you, is it?" he said. "How did that happen?"

Fred told him such of the incidents of his adventure as his modesty permitted; and while he did so the cook bustled about and got him some dinner. When Polson was seated on the softer end of a block of wood with a tin platter covered with meat and vegetables on his knees, and a pannikin filled with warm tea by his side, the man of grease and paste returned to his kneading, pausing, however, between intervals of dough-thumping and trouser-hitching to hold confidential conversation with his guest.

"I tell you what, young man," he said, in one of these cessations, as he drew the back of his hand over his face, "you'll have to look out for that Miss Crags, for I hears as some rich fellow has bought that section just over the creek from their house, and is coming to settle on it right away."

"Oh, indeed!" said Fred, suddenly interested, "I never heard of that before. What sort of man is he?"

"They say he's a young man and a bachelor, and is going to do big things. So you'll have to look out for the girl."

"Never mind the girl," said Fred, rather impatiently. "Think a little more about Mrs. Tomson."

The last remark seemed rather to startle the party to whom it was addressed.

"Now, see here!" he said threateningly, as he lifted one hand out of the kneading-trough and pushed it down the other arm to remove the dough. Fred saw that he had made a mistake and hastened to change the subject.

"By the way, cook," he said, as if suddenly recollecting something, "I saw in the *Free Press* that your great minister P—— has denounced the belief in hell."

The cook was an ardent Baptist, and was wont to measure the strength of his adherence to his own religion by his violent hatred of all others. Fred's statement had just the effect he intended. Mr. Scrogpot's anger was smothered at once in unbelief.

"Where d' you see that?" he said. "It's either a lie or a mistake."

"A mistake! No. Don't you think yourself that he is right?"

"Right!"—(thumping the dough as if it had been Fred's question)—"Right! Why if men goes on like that they'll soon neither believe in the Bible, nor heaven, nor God, nor the devil, nor nothing."

"But, cook, do you believe it reasonable that a merciful God could create men to degrade them into fiends?"

The cook lifted his head from the kneading-trough, screwed his neck around, and with his back still bent looked over his shoulder at Fred with a glance of mingled pity and contempt.

"Look here, young man, you've got some nice ideas in your head, you have. Did you ever read the Scriptures? The Scriptures says that 'the axe is laid at the root of the tree, and if it don't grow good fruit, it is hewed down and cast into the fire.' What does that fire mean but hell?"



"Yes. But, cook, you must remember there are many passages in the Bible that cannot be taken literally."

The cook ceased from his work, and raising himself erect, began to pace about the shanty, slapping the floor with his slippers in horrified agitation. "Whatever's the world a-comin' to? You don't believe the Bible now, you say. The devil's chariots are as thick as flies in the air, and darkness covers the people. That's what I'selhigher says, as you'll find in the Scripturs. If you won't believe one thing, let me show you another."

He paused in his walk, and took a dog-eared pocket Bible from one of the higher shelves. Then, after wiping his doughy fingers on his apron, he seated himself on a table near the window, opened the book, and began to read aloud for Fred's edification, spelling the letters of the more difficult words out separately, and pronouncing the words first distinctly apart, and then collectively :

"'And t-h-e-y they t-o-o-k took S-t-e-p Step h-e-n hen Step-hen, and s-t-o sto n-e-d ned sto-ned him.' No that ain't it. Wait a bit while I find it." He turned back a number of leaves. "'And w-h-e-n when t-h-e-y they c-a-m-e came n-i-g-h nigh u-n-t-o unto C-a-p Cap e-r er n-a-nay u-m um Cap-er-nay-um.' No that ain't it neither. Let's see where it is."

He turned over several more leaves, and this time was successful in his quest. He settled himself with an air of permanence, gave one solemn glance at Polson to impress the lesson on his mind, and then slowly and with many mispronunciations spelled out to him the story of Dives and Lazarus.

Fred listened with well-concealed amusement. When the cook had finished, he closed the book and replaced it on the shelf with a triumphant bang.

"Now, then," he said, "ain't that enough for anybody with common-sense? How would you like to be like Dives"—(pronounced like the verb)—"looking across a gulf and asking Lazarus for a drop of water to cool his tongue with? Ain't that hell for you? I tell you what it is, young man, if you don't want to be cast into the bottom of the

bottomless pit that burns forever with fire and brimstone (and the Scriptures says the fire is not quenched, and the worm doesn't die), you'd better drop some o' them new-fangled mermuggaty ideas o' yourn, and believe what the Scriptures tells you."

"Well, cook," said Fred, with a smile, "perhaps you are right. It is rather unfortunate for me in that case that I belong to the same class as Dives."

The cook growled a low assent to this remark and resumed his dough-punching with redoubled vigor, whilst Fred Polson returned to work.

I have not attempted to trace my hero through the troublesome gradations by which he obtained mastery over the toilsome labor of the farm; because I thought the account would be as wearisome to the reader as the reality often was to the learner.

At first he encountered many difficulties. His companions laughed at him as a "tenderfoot" and "greenhorn." The plow-handles blistered his hands into corrugations of little white watery mounds. The cold-blooded, cud chewing oxen exasperated him. In vain he lavished all the loud beauty of his voice on them, and left only a hoarse, guttural sound to irritate his throat. In vain he kicked, and struck wildly at them with the handle of a broken whip; he generally got twisted up in the lash himself. In vain he pulled them by the ears, and pounded their foreheads with his fist—it only skinned his knuckles, and the general result of these fits of rage was that he had to spend about a quarter of an hour in extricating the oxen from the harness in which they had meshed themselves in affright. From these circumstances he drew the motto, "Patience speeds faster than wrath." He was next promoted to the honor of driving a team of strong-smelling mules, which for hardiness, stubbornness and stupidity were without equine equal on the farm. They always came to a stock-still stand at the end of the field nearest to the stable; and it was only after many objurgations and several sharp strokes of



the whip that they would lay their lengthy ears back on their stubborn necks and move funereally along.

However, Fred rid himself of this difficulty by choosing a field with a haystack standing at the farther end from the barn. Under this arrangement the mules worked admirably; for the sight of a food supply hurried them one way, and the view of their place of rest drew them with equal speed the other. Thus impelled, the amount of land that he turned over astonished even the old hands, and he was rewarded for his diligence by being thought capable of driving a team of horses.

With these more intelligent beasts he got on better, and his perseverance was at last crowned by a complete mastery of his work. The toil which had at first seemed hard and burdensome became easy, and even pleasant, with familiarity. His hands hardened so that he could use any tool without pain. He no longer feared the effect of exposure on his skin. His muscles grew firm, and his limbs strengthened with constant exercise. His sleep was sound, his appetite keen, and he could stand forth at last, a true brother among earth's noblest sons—"the laboring men."

He often wondered how men could yawn through unhealthy days, with invulnerable time hanging lead-like on their souls, when there was so much to be done by which they could easily be relieved, and the performance of which would satisfy that gnawing sense of duty which calls upon all men to work.

Did he not feel better, stronger, more self-reliant than before? He had no longer to depend for the necessaries of life on crops shorn by other hands, or fields tilled by the labor of other men; but he could now with his own hand wrest a living from the rugged earth. He thought of how he used to ride with his rich squire-uncle in a carriage, visiting the poor of the village, his uncle yawning with *ennui*, and complaining of gout, indigestion, and the socialism and ingratitude of the poor, whilst he half-envied the cheerfulness of the coarsely-clad workingmen who doffed their hats as his carriage rolled by. Strange anomaly

they whose labor supplied this man with the means of living in corrupting idleness, empty pomp and enervating luxury, bowed to the receiver of their labor's effects. These were our hero's thoughts. His faith in the theories of Carlyle and Tolstoi had been strengthened tenfold by actual experience; and with youthful ardor he resolved that labor should henceforth be the guiding law of his life. So ran the current of his ideas at that time. Whether they were right or wrong I leave the readers to judge for themselves. Let it suffice for me to say that his propositions were thoughtfully arrived at, and his resolutions honestly made.

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## CHAPTER V.

### SILAS PANCRACK.

ON the following Sabbath, faithful to his promise, Fred Polson went to tea with the Craggs. Mrs. Craggs, dressed in her best apparel, received him at the door and ushered him into the house.

Fred naturally expected to see the interior present an appearance corresponding with outside surroundings; but this he was agreeably disappointed. The farm outside was managed by men, but inside the house woman reigned supreme, and her influence was visible over everything it contained. The stove, in the kitchen (the room in which he found himself) shone as if the brightness of the fire had entered into its spotless blackness. The orderly rows of pans flashed like helmeted lines on the wall, whilst the floor was white as the lather of the soap that had been used on it.

But what interested Polson most in this room was a human figure, seated on a chair by the stove, which Mrs. Craggs pointed out to him as "my husband." He was a portly, thick man of about fifty-five (though he looked fully ten years older), and in spite of the warmth of the day, was

seated close by the stove. As he obstinately refused to change his clothes for any occasion, Fred saw him in his every-day guise, the most striking part of which was a huge pair of boots that frowned up at him with enormous bulbous swellings and intervening creases, which when he walked opened and closed with groans and creaks. His pantaloons hung in bloated ridges about his legs, and his open coat and half-unbuttoned vest revealed a blue checkered shirt which bulged through the aperture. His left hand rested on the knob of a stout walking-stick, and his right, with the bundle of moppish rags that enwrapped it, reposed on his knee.

This hand had been hurt in an accident some years ago, and in consequence had been carefully bandaged by a surgeon. Then followed an accumulation somewhat similar to Uncle Nathan's pantaloons. When the first bandage had worn loose, instead of being cast aside it was covered by another. This, in its turn, had also suffered partial eclipse in time; and as this covering system had now been carried on for several years, his hand resembled an animated mop-head. It was picturesque, for rags of all colors had contributed to its decoration; and though many of the colors had grown faint, there was much variety still. When heated these rags emitted a strong spirituous odor, which undoubtedly attested the cause of his present useless and inert condition. His stubbled face may have once been expressive and intelligent, but as Fred Polson saw it, it had a sodden, lifeless look which the drowsy blinking of the half-closed eyes tended to increase. His head was covered with a broad-brimmed, greasy slouch hat, the bulges and creases of which made it a fitting crown for the rest of his slovenly attire. This gentleman replied to Fred's salutation with an owlish blink and a hoarse "Har do? Fine dee to dee."

Fred was at once interested by this broad specimen of English country dialect, and would willingly have prolonged the conversation, but he saw that Mrs. Crags was impatient for him to move on, and he followed her into the sitting-room.

The room was small but tastefully furnished. A plain carpet covered the floor. The plastered walls were adorned with two bright colored paintings and many neatly framed photographs placed in rows and pyramids. On a table in the centre of the room stood a vase of sweet-smelling flowers, dispensing a pleasant fragrance.

Seated on a couch beneath the window curtains was a young man with a newspaper in his hand. On their entrance he looked up quickly from his reading and a half-sarcastic smile flitted across his face, but it vanished so soon as hardly to be noticeable.

"Mr. Polson, Mr. Pancrack, our latest neighbor." Thus spoke Mrs. Crag.

Mr. Pancrack rose from the couch, and extending his hand greeted Fred with an oily smile and a polite "How do you do, sir. I am glad to make your acquaintance."

Fred, with a little more constraint, replied in similar conventional terms, and seated himself on a chair, whilst Mr. Pancrack resumed his place on the couch.

In the course of one of those formal conversations with which new acquaintances generally manage to politely bore each other, Fred Polson found time to examine the new arrival more closely. He was rather flashily dressed in a light checkered suit. Two large gold rings set with rubies glistened on his white and shapely fingers. From his golden watch-chain hung several weighty trinkets, and a diamond pin flashed in glistening solitude from the midst of a bed of white shirt front. On the whole, Fred judged him to be an ostentatious man, wishing to captivate by glitter; withal a cunning look mingling companionably with the kind of crooked regularity of his features, gave a deeper and more forbidding tinge to his expression. It was probably this combination of different phases that interested Fred Polson, for the man certainly excited his curiosity, and he determined to find out all he could about him.

"From what part of England do you come, Mr. Pancrack?" he asked.

"I come from the town of B——, in Yorkshire," replied Mr. Pancrack, taking an ivory-handled penknife

from his pocket and beginning to shave the ends of his already finely-pared finger-nails.

"From B——," echoed Fred, remembering the name. "Then you might know Mr. Julius Hatton, a cousin of mine who lives there."

"Hatton," said Mr. Pancrack, puckering his brow and thoughtfully paring the nail of the middle finger of his left hand. "Hatton! Let me see. Wasn't he a member of some financial firm? Oh, yes. I remember now. He went off on a European tour at about the same time as I left England for this country."

"Then you were not personally acquainted with him."

"I have met him, certainly, and spoken with him once or twice, but I know so many people, and my memory for characteristics is so poor, that I cannot say much of any particular one, except, of course, those with whom I was quite intimate."

"What sort of character does this Hatton generally bear among his fellow-citizens?"

"In the main, excellent," replied Mr. Pancrack, with more vehemence than so slight an acquaintance seemed to call for. "Of course, there are some envious people who try to blacken his good name by charging him with meanness on account of his carefulness, but still he is respected in the best society. The ladies are coming to join us."

The last sentence was caused by hearing a rustling sound on the stairway, and Mr. Pancrack hastily pocketed his penknife and brushed the slender nail parings off his trouser-knee.

The stairway door opened, and Miss Cragg, blushing and smiling, walked in, followed by a pale, slender young lady whom she introduced to Polson as Miss Shenstone. Alice was dressed in white, a color which set off to perfection her glossy hair and rich complexion. Miss Shenstone, on the other hand, was robed in a rather sombre-colored dress, which perhaps somewhat deepened the paleness of her thin, sensitive face, and a smooth wave of fair hair rolling high above her brow helped to give her an intellectual expression.

Mr. Pancrack politely vacated the sofa, and the two young ladies seated themselves upon it. A conversation started on weather, mosquitos, crops, and other tiresome topics common to the time ; but it soon drifted off on other lines. As the talk merged away to social chit-chat, popular fashions, and other matters dear to ladies' hearts, it became almost entirely confined to Pancrack and Miss Craggs. Fred Polson understood very little about these things, and Miss Shenstone seemed to be a quiet, pensive young lady, contenting herself with an occasional remark or explanation. Polson, not desirous of being drawn into a conversation in which he would only expose his ignorance, entrenched himself in silence, and so had an opportunity of studying more attentively the features of Miss Craggs. He discovered that she was slightly freckled, but in his enchanted eyes this seemed rather to enhance than decrease her beauty ; for besides appearing as tokens of a healthful condition, by a flattering analogy they also seemed to resemble bright specks of gold dust scattered among the roses in her cheeks.

In this interesting study and the indulgence of golden dreams built upon it—but unfortunately somewhat marred by the shadow of Pancrack—the time passed till tea was set on the table. At this juncture another was added to the group.

This was Alice's only brother, George Craggs, a youth about twenty years of age. His feet and hands were large, and he was rather clumsy in his movements ; but his was a sensible, prepossessing face, in which Fred thought he could read the outward signs of a frank and generous soul.

He seated himself in a chair away from the rest, and began to fumble nervously with his hands, caressing the head of a dog which had followed him in. Polson sought to relieve him of his embarrassment by talking to him and questioning him about the farm. This was a subject with which he appeared quite familiar, for he replied readily to Fred's questions and observations, and soon became so much more at ease that he even ventured to smile slyly across the room at Miss Shenstone, who modestly cast down her eyes.

Fred watched these signs with a sympathetic amusement which helped to offset a little the vexation he felt at the absorption of Miss Crag's conversation by the smiling, soft-tongued Pancrack.

At tea-time Mr. Crag, sen., did not appear, and the head of the table was quietly taken by his wife, who had, till then, been busy preparing the repast.

The appearance of a meal as it is set on the table has very much to do with making it pleasant or nauseous to the palate. There is a kind of mutual sympathy between the different senses, which makes the pleasure or disgust of one have much to do with determining the value of the object that causes it to another; therefore it is that which first pleases the sight or smell ever proves more agreeable to the taste than that which is repulsive to either.

So perhaps it was the daintily-arranged plates of cake and pastry, the polished cutlery, and the delicate china with which Mrs. Crag's snowy table-cloth was decked, as well as the pleasant taste of the dainties and the cheering draughts of tea, that loosened the tongues of the party, so that conversation, at first formal and constrained, soon became free and general.

As was natural, with a new arrival among them, the talk turned on the comparative merits of Canada and England. Pancrack, with the social usages, the customs and institutions of England still fast upon his mind, could see little good in either Canada or Canadians. Polson, on the other hand, with a mind ever ready to receive new impressions, admired the boundless freedom and vast resources of Canada, no less than the honesty, hospitality and toleration of the Canadian people.

"Fancy," said Pancrack in disgust, "a Utopia evolved from a people who cannot talk without a blaring nasal twang like a fiddle out of tune, their jaws constantly working to masticate a black amalgam of tobacco-leaf and syrup, the very spittle with which they spatter sidewalks, walls, floors and stones of a yellowish-black color like the slime of some silurian monster. Add to these the inventive



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blasphemy with which they disfigure their speech, and you  
ave the picture of a great and noble people."

"I don't agree with you," said Polson, decidedly. "You  
o not draw a true picture of the Canadian people at all;  
ut you do draw a caricature of the worst habits of the  
west class. It would be quite as unfair to say that the  
nglish people cannot speak intelligent English; that their  
ighest intellectual employment is to gossip the village  
andal around the smithy fire, or bawl and listen to doggerel  
ngs in an alehouse. This is not true of the English  
ople at large by any means, but it is true of the  
bits of a certain class, and so it is as fair, or rather as  
fair, from the Canadian standpoint, as yours is from the  
nglish."

Pancrack coolly sugared his tea, and looked on Fred with  
nigh pity.

"You seem to be rather Canadian in your leanings for  
Englishman, Mr. Polson," he remarked.

"I am not Canadian in my own views at all," was the  
ply. "But from what I know of the Canadians, it  
ould hardly be right if I failed to do them justice by  
eaking my mind when they are censured."

"Still, you must admit that the Americanism which  
erywhere pervades Canadian society is quite inconsistent  
th their professed loyalty to England. They have the  
merican coinage, American weights and measures, Ameri-  
n manners and laws, and even set up an American tariff  
ainst England."

"And what else can you expect? Canada has a popula-  
on of barely five millions. Divided from her by nothing  
ore than an imaginary line is a vast republic with a  
pulation of sixty-four millions. This republic absorbs by  
the greater half of Canada's outside trade. It sends  
ntinually into Canada its journals, its literature, its  
ctors, its preachers, its tourists and capitalists. What  
re natural, then, than that Canada should be permeated  
American influence? In fact, I believe if I were a Can-  
an, I should openly favor complete political union with  
e United States."



"Indeed!" said Pancrack, with genuine British bulldog contempt for the opinions of those who differ from him. "So you, a subject of Queen Victoria, and bred under the Union Jack, would sever those connections for the sake of union with a nation of lynchers, swindlers and political rogues."

"There again," said Fred, stung by Pancrack's contemptuous tone, "you mistake the exception for the general rule."

"But the exception proves the rule," interposed Pancrack.

"Yes; but it proves it by contraries—and so it is in this case. The American people, as a whole, are the very opposite of what you have described. Though sharp in their dealings, they are honest; and though a strong but misguided sense of justice sometimes drives a mob to rash acts, it would be grossly unfair to take the composition of this mob as representative of the majority of the people. As for political roguery, though I cannot deny that it exists, and perhaps in a large degree, there is yet hope for its eventual extermination; and I think you will find that the highest office the nation can give has, almost without exception, been occupied by honorable and deserving men. I wish, indeed, that England could show as bright a record for her monarchs as America can for her presidents."

"What you say, Mr. Polson, may be very true; but I, as an Englishman, should not like to see England's present form of government exchanged for that of the United States."

"No doubt. We fear great changes as we fear death because we know not to what they will lead us; and it is the hopes and doubts of consequences that form the differences of the great political parties."

By this time Pancrack had had quite enough of argument; and bowing concurrence with Polson's last remark he skilfully shifted the conversation to other topics. He had no wish to be outshone, and, like a skilful general, retreated from a quarter in which he was likely to be overmatched, and then made up for it by storming those

points where, from natural conditions, his opponent had little chance of competing with him.

Fred again had the mortification of being excluded from Miss Crag's conversation, because Pancrack absorbed her attention by prattling about the movements of those do-nothing celebrities in England, who excite interest merely from the height of false position and the discomfort they cause to the public body. As Polson saw that it would be useless for him to attempt to talk agreeably on these matters, he wisely improved the time by turning his attention to the conquest of Mrs. Crag, and discussed with her the price of butter, the prospect of the season's crop, how to kill weeds, the best means of fattening calves, and other subjects congenial to her practical and business-like mind.

The other four thus absorbed, George Crag tried to engross the attention of Miss Shenstone by expatiating on the merits of the collie dog whose head rested on his knee. He listened with attentive civility, and tried to smile in an interested way. This so encouraged the young farmer that his hand stole slowly under the table toward the little white one resting on Miss Shenstone's lap; but by the time he reached within a foot of it, her quiet smile had faded, and taking this for an intuitive rebuke, he drew his hand back, at the same time saying nervously:

"But you should see him after a jack-rabbit, Sarah. When the thistle-down is flying he turns white—that is, they turn white—the jacks I mean—rabbits turn white in the winter, I mean."

This rather incoherent talk so amused Miss Shenstone that she smiled more pleasantly than ever before, and George, highly encouraged, thrust his hand again beneath the table, and this time succeeded in seizing hers. It was at once withdrawn gently; but a close observer might have noticed a slight color tinging her pale cheeks.

"Dogs are no doubt interesting animals to some people, but, for my own part, I care nothing about them," she said in tones at once intended to hide her confusion, and show a proper, maidenly displeasure.

Poor George, inexperienced in the wily ways of woman, felt greatly mortified, and immediately turned the conversation on ponies, of which animals he spoke in so melancholy and lachrymose a strain that Miss Shenstone thought him to be a very feeling young man indeed; but he did not again that night attempt to press her hand.

After dinner, when the dishes had been cleared away, a self-denying and complimentary altercation took place between Alice and Miss Shenstone as to who should play the organ.

"Now, you must, Alice."

"Nonsense, Sarah; you are known to be the finest player in the settlement. It would be absurd for me to strum whilst *you* sat and listened."

"Oh, no; not at all."

"Yes, it would."

After a little more of this delicate sparring, Miss Shenstone capitulated, and, with a submissive sigh, seated herself on the music stool. At first her fingers wandered in a melancholy way over the keys, but soon she struck into a familiar measure which sent a thrill through the breasts of the listeners, and moved Pancrack to suggest singing.

To this proposal all readily agreed; but unfortunately there were only three hymn-books among five, and one of these (with the musical accompaniments) was required by Miss Shenstone at the organ. However, they compromised matters by sharing them. Pancrack and George Crags—who, for the sake of comfort, had seated themselves on the lounge—took one, and Miss Crags and Fred Polson used the other. Fred inwardly blessed the shortage and in bashful bliss drew his chair close to his companion.

If, in searching for the hymn, their hands met, a sharp electrical thrill shot through his breast. He was steeped in bliss. In singing, the words seemed to float away in dreamland in a golden haze, and he was left keeping up faint "Tra-la-la-la-la," in accompaniment to the music which made Miss Crags conclude that Mr. Polson was very poor singer. In the intervals between the singing

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however, Fred made up for this deficiency by the pleasant manner in which he discoursed on music, and hymnal and sacred poetry in general. It may, indeed, seem strange to the reader that a freethinker such as I have described Fred Polson to be, should know anything at all of such a subject; but before laying aside accepted truths he had taken care, first, to study every branch of Christian literature. To poetry he had paid especial attention, because he had found its sublime language to be most expressive of those longing feelings which more—far more than logical reasoning or subtle argument—tend to draw human souls to the religion of Christ. On this subject, therefore, he was perfectly at home, and Pancrack had the mortification of seeing her listen to another with more rapt and earnest attention than she had ever shown for the pleasant tittle-tattle with which he had regaled her ears.

In this manner the rest of the evening passed pleasantly for Fred Polson. The music, the singing, the influence of the summer night, and above all, the magnetic proximity of a fair young woman, had an intoxicating effect upon him; and when he rose to leave he squeezed Alice's hand with a little more warmth than the occasion required or strict decorum permitted, whilst she, probably equally affected by surrounding influences, actually ventured, though very timidly and slightly, to return the pressure.

As he walked home that night, the atmosphere for a few inches round Fred Polson was—in spite of the mosquitos that crowded into it—the very essence of paradise. He breathed in a golden world. Joyous feelings thrilled along every nerve and stirred the very foundations of his being. A thousand beautiful and airy pictures floated in drifting glory before his mental eye. He was in that most static state of mind—that of a lover who thinks himself loved.

When he reached Dysart's he found his little invalid and Ida reading the evening lesson to the household. Her sweet, soft voice gave to the tender words of theaviour an indescribable, enchanting pathos which chained the ears of all the listeners, and temporarily subdued the

noisiest and most irreverent into silence and complete attention.

When the reading was over, all, with the exception of Mr. Dysart, his little daughter and Fred Polson, left the room. As was his wont, Fred went and sat by the side of his little friend to pet and talk to her. Mr. Dysart, who was in an absent mood, took up the sacred volume, and turning over a few leaves began to read to himself.

"You look pleased to-night, Mr. Polson," said Ida, as he seated himself by her side and stroked her soft, fair hair. "Something must have kept you back, as you have missed the Bible reading. Do you know," she continued in a whisper, "I was reading about Jesus placing His hands upon the heads of the children and saying, 'Suffer little children to come unto me.' And as I read I thought I stood outside a beautiful gate, and through the golden bars I could see hundreds of little children all clothed in shining white and with wreaths of flowers on their heads running about and laughing and playing, oh, so merrily. Beautiful green grass, sprinkled with sweet-smelling flowers of all colors covered the ground; and they played 'Bo-peep' through great white arches and hid away in play-houses that shone like the sun. I could hardly see the doors for their brightness. And as I stood there outside and watched them, I longed so much to be like them that I could not help crying out, 'Will no one let me in?' And when I said that the door opened and Jesus came through, and looked at me so kindly, and placed His hand gently on my head and said softly, 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven. Enter in.' And I went through the door and heard a great snouting and clapping, and it all went away in a mist. Of course, that was only what I thought, but do you know, Mr. Polson, I don't think it will be very long before Jesus calls me away."

As she told her simple story her eyes lighted with hallowed fire, and the pale face was transfigured with holy insight, whilst the last sentence was uttered with prophetic and strangely pathetic fervor.

At another time Fred might have smiled at her child's

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paradise, and tried to laugh away her fears; but to-night his own spirit had been touched with heavenly fire, and vibrated in magnetic sympathy with hers. Happiness and melancholy kissed and subdued each other, for the intensity of her sweet sadness faded before the blaze of happiness which Polson had brought upon his face, whilst his exultant joy was modified in like degree by the touching yet soothing dependency of his little favorite.

His utterance stifled by mingling emotions, he spoke not a word in reply to her thoughts, but bending his head over hers he tenderly kissed her fair white brow, and so bade her a wordless good-night.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### THE LONELY SMITHY.

READER of this romance, hadst thou in the days whereof I speak wandered west of the creek which bounds the Dysart settlement on that side, thou wouldst have found thyself in a vast wilderness. Around thee would lie a land (if land such ground could be called) of sloughs and hills and stones. The foul-smelling ponds—where not hidden from sight by the rank, coarse grass to which their vileness gave birth—were partially matted by coatings of green, floating slime, which opened in places to reveal black depths of stagnant water that no sunlight might pierce. In the daytime an occasional shrill croak from one of the slimy denizens of the sloughs was the only sound to break the dismal stillness brooding around; but beneath the stars and clouds of night the croaking swelled into a hideous carnival. The short-grassed, gravelly hills were scabbed with the bleak backs of grey stones which always looked as if just emerging from the ground. Hadst thou stood on the top of the tallest of these hills and gazed below thee, thou wouldst have seen a little narrow hollow hemmed in on three sides by an oval wall of hills, and open



only to the east. Owing to its inclined position, the patch of ground in this hollow is fortunately free from the sloughs, which, like spots in a boa's skin, dapple the land in other places; but thou, my reader, wilt not notice these things so much as the little black building which stands upon this plateau.

This building is very low, and is covered by the slanting shed roof so common in the country. It is a hybrid structure, composed of house and shop. The house half is closely built, and has a fairly clean appearance when contrasted with the shop. A plain panelled door gives admittance from the south. The window, too, is covered on the inside with the torn-off half of a coarse brown sack, which is intended to do duty as a curtain. The shop half is smoke-blackened and weather-blistered. The large rough boards have shrunk in sun and wind, and left great hungry-looking gaps between. The building had once been clothed in tar-paper, but nothing is left of this now except a few ragged and fluttering scraps clinging to the laths which had once held it on over the whole surface of the building; and these blackened paper rags, though perfectly useless for protection, helped to give to the building a torn, ragged, scarecrow appearance. The inmates of this lonely shed were Gorman O'Neil, the blacksmith, and his widowed mother.

Gorman was a man of about thirty-five years of age. His Irish origin peeped from every pore and wrinkle of his face. His coarse dark hair stood up like bristles on his head, and jetted out in a peninsula of black spikes over his high receding forehead. His shaven but black stubbled face was ornamented by a short thick nose. A hard-lipped mouth went up one cheek and down the other; and these outstanding features were based by a crooked, uncompromising chin, which seemed to have been warped away from its original centre.

But to the ordinary beholder these features were cast in the shade by his eyes. One was of a very cold grey color, and looked out from under the black beetling brow like a snake gazing from beneath a rock. The other was sightless

and unseen ; it was covered by a dense white film, which gently stirred on the surface as the eclipsed eyeball rolled in darkness beneath.

In his native country Gorman had been a kind of policeman-detective. In his capacity of detective he had discovered an illicit whiskey-still in the lower quarters of the town of Tipperary. In his capacity of policeman he went with a posse of four men at his back to seize the still ; but the owners seemed to have been prepared for the raid, for when Gorman stealthily opened the trap-door leading to it, some half-dozen men, armed with blackthorn sticks, sprang out of the cellar and attacked the police.

The officers, taken by surprise, were driven at once through a narrow alley into the street. There they rallied bravely, and forming into line, faced their pursuers. Gorman, like a cautious leader, dodged about behind them, and urged them on to the fight by repeated jerks of his thumb.

"Arrah ! me bhoys," he shouted. "Swish into the spalpeens. Let 'em have it, an' show what ye can do in a shindy. Oi'll back ye up."

Thus inspired, the constables drew their batons and at a given signal dashed on their pursuers. Batons and blackthorns rattled against each other, and descended with sharp cracks on stubborn heads. The defenders of the still were for a time driven back ; but the scent of battle soon drew a crowd around them. The official dresses of the police at once condemned them in the eyes of the mob ; and when the civilians gave way, their sympathy showed itself in the showers of mud and stones—accompanied by howls and derisive jeers—which rained around the ears of the gallant little band.

For a time, in spite of vastly unequal numbers, the police held their own. They dashed here and there among the crowd, swinging their batons and using their fists with telling effect. Many a top hat hung woeful and limp ; many a hair-covered bump rose on battered heads, and many a bruised nose spouted a gory stream. During this fierce melee Gorman was necessarily parted from his wall



of defence. He saw that, as things were, he must either run or fight, and as he had neither speed for one nor courage for the other, he thought he would try the effect of eloquence in soothing a crowd. He mounted on a couple of brick-bats which had fallen near him. A youngster standing by saw him open his capacious mouth.

"Gintlemen and lathies," he began, "and"—(Whew, whew, whew! Splutther, splutther, splutther!) "You dirruty little spalpeen"—(gulp)—"I'll murther"—(whew)—"yer feyther aloive!" (Whew!)

These exclamations were caused by a handful of mud, aimed by the youngster beforesaid, which had landed neatly in his throat, as he began his oration. The crowd shrieked with laughter as he spluttered it out from his mouth, or, in drawing his breath, gulped lumps down his throat. When he had despatched it all, either to the interior or the exterior, his face looked something like that of a child fresh from a surreptitious raid on the jam-pot.

The anger consequent on this indignity, however, did what blows had failed to do—it raised his courage. He looked around first for the boy who had thrown the mud; but as that youngster had wisely disappeared, he tried to slake his vengeance by rushing wildly on the crowd, whirling his baton around him so fiercely that it looked like a wheel spinning around above his head.

This onset was greeted with jeers and hoots and a volley of stones. It was impossible for him to pass safely through such a shower, aimed directly at his head; and a sharp-cornered brick-bat struck him in the eye and laid him unconscious on the street. He was all spattered with mud, his clothes were rent in many places, and the blood was trickling from his eye.

For a moment the crowd looked on the unconscious body in silent alarm; and then, as if fearful of consequences, took to their heels and dispersed in every direction. Gorman's comrades, themselves much battered and bruised, took up the unconscious man, and bore him to the nearest hospital.

There he was restored to consciousness; but though his

eye was treated with the utmost skill, a thick film closed over it and completely blocked out the light. Thus he was rendered useless for police or detective service, and with so visible a mark of popular hatred upon him that it was no longer safe for him to remain in Ireland, by circumstance and chance he had found his way to the wilds of Manitoba, where, on the strength of three weeks' former experience in the trade, he had established himself as a blacksmith near the Dysart settlement. With him he brought his mother, an elvish old crone, who had in the Old Country gained a considerable reputation for witchcraft. This she tried, with some success, to re-establish in the New World.

Her pretensions were very much ridiculed in public, yet, nevertheless, not a few sufferers from toothache, love-sickness, and similar ills came slyly to consult her. In a large wooden box, bound with iron bands, she kept a strange assortment of herbs plucked by moonlight, philters, charms, and other appliances of the weird art. This chest was always regarded with awe by the beholders. It was looked upon as a receptacle in which the mysteries of earth and air were concealed, and seldom did a stranger venture near it; for laugh as we may at the absurdity of these things, we have all—even the most enlightened of us—a certain amount of superstition in our natures. Whether it has been bequeathed to us by our ignorant and credulous ancestors, or whether it is a part of the mystery by which we are everywhere surrounded, we cannot tell; but certainly the accursed thing is there, and neither reason, laughter, nor learning can wholly drive it away.

But to return to our story. One afternoon Fred Polson rode up to the smithy door, and after fastening his pony to a post, entered the shop, and deposited on the floor a sack containing some blunt plow-shares.

The smith unbent from the work of hammering a red-hot piece of iron, and looked at him seemingly with his blank eye, but in reality his sound orb was gazing at him across the bridge of his nose; for nature, as if to compensate him for the loss of sight in one quarter, had

given to the remaining eye the power of looking in every direction—but the straight one.

"Good-day, sor," he said.

"Good-day," replied Fred. "Can you sharpen this share and lay a new point on that one for me, right away?"

"If ye'll only wait till this is done, I'll do it immediately." And he plunged his hammer-head into the yielding metal with redoubled vigor.

When that job was done he lifted up in turn the share Fred had brought; and twisting his face toward the ceiling cast his oblique vision along the edges with a look of goosish expertness.

"Sure, an' Oi'll make as nate a job o' thim same, that they'll look as noo as a pair o' snowflakes."

Polson smiled at this far-fetched simile, and seating himself on a shelf beside the vice, told him to begin; and whilst the smith was engaged in working the bellows and putting scraps of coal on the fire, he critically examined the shop. The anvil, standing on a block of wood in the centre, the bellows, the brick-built forge, and the tools scattered on the floor or hung promiscuously on the walls constituted its only furnishings. These were sheltered by a sooty roof and bare, black walls which reached down to a floor corduroyed out of hewn logs levelled off with gravel.

Fred, struck by such peculiar flooring in a smithy, asked the reason of it. Gorman blew a blast into the fire that made the flame spring up like a lump of exploded powder and cast a cunning look around his temple at Polson as he replied:

"Faith, yez see it's on account of the wather that flows like a deluge from these hills whin it rains, an' it's the bottom o' me shop would be floated away if Oi didn't have some protection to hould it down. Thruer enough I could bank it round with durrut, but earth-banks is no duck backs, me bhoy."

Fred had to content himself with this explanation though it seemed hardly satisfactory; so asking no more questions, he sat in silence and watched the artisan at work.

There is something truly inspiring in the earnest work of the smith. In all ages, from the time when mythical Vulcan received the ringing homage of his dusty worshipper, down to the present day, it has been an honored vocation. He is the true alchemist, who turns common things into gold, for with his stern art he takes the unshapely metal and wields it into instruments whereby the daily bread is uprooted from the earth. Round the smithy are at night the working youth will congregate in social chat; they sit in a ruddy-faced ring, and the smoke from blackened clay-pipes curls up into the spacious chimney opening above them, and as wit and wisdom circulate in homely wording, it is not hard to believe that many a thought which philosophers might have prized, and many a jest witty enough to honor a Shakespeare's page, have been buried forever in the forge's glare. As children, we have peeped with something like reverential awe into the dingy den of iron, fire, wind and sparks. The roaring bellows, the crashing and ringing hammers, the stiff, white flame hissing upward, and the showers of living sparks, sprinkled around by the mighty sledge, give to it a peculiarly romantic charm, which even the smoke and dirt connected with it fail wholly to dispel.

Some such charm must the scene before him have had for Fred Polson, for enwrapped in observation of it he failed to notice how his work was being done.

O'Neil was wrenching, battering and twisting at the last share in attempting to lay a new edge on it. He pounded it thin as gold-leaf; he powdered it with borax till it looked like a snow-drift in miniature. Still the new edge could not weld on. As he grew angry, Gorman's blows descended hard and fast on the refractory share. His lips were set like his own vice; the sweat made little white patches down his face and fell in black beads on the floor. After thoroughly pummeling one side, he jerked it around vaguely to castigate the other.

"Divil take the craythur!" he shouted, "but Oi'll kill the cure it." So saying, he gave it a tremendous blow, and the share snapped in two. Gorman's first impulse was to

vent his wrath on the person who had brought such things into his shop.

"Be aff wid yer rotten ould iron," he said, flinging the broken pieces on the ground at Fred's feet. "O' howm wi' the pack, and let my eyes"—(he should have said, "my eye")—"see no more o' the pitchers."

This incident thoroughly roused Fred. He rose—rather descended—from his seat and, coolly confronting the irate blacksmith, said :

"Mr. C'Neil, you have broken that share, and you must either repair or replace it."

Mr. O'Neil wrinkled his brow, screwed up his nose, turned his head aside that his eyes might better express his horror, and looked astounded.

"To the mischief wid ye!" he burst out. "Do ye think as Oi'm responsible for yer rotten ould iron?"

"It was not the rottenness of the iron so much as your own carelessness and ill-temper that caused the break."

"Careless, am Oi? Ill-tempered, am Oi?" asked Gorman, in tones of utmost surprise. "Oi'll let ye see whither Oi am or not if ye stand blathering here much longer."

"Bah!" said Fred, contemptuously, as he picked up the shares. "I see it is of no use to try to reason with you; you are both careless and a fool."

Gorman gasped, stretched out his hands and lay back against the anvil for support; and by the time he recovered his speech, Polson had ridden away.

The blacksmith looked steadily after him for a long while with a wrinkled brow and screwed-up mouth, and his visible pupil dilated like a circular fan. At last the tension in his muscles relaxed, and he managed to shake his fist threateningly at Fred Polson, riding away in the distance.

"The divil take ye for an impident spalpeen," he hissed savagely. "But ye shall repint o' callin' Gorman O'Neil a fool."

"And pwhat is it has angered ye so much, me son?" inquired a shrill voice behind him.

An old woman had stepped softly out from the inn

uilding. Her long thin body was clad in a soiled grey robe, bound loosely around the waist with a black band. Her small ferret eyes were deep sunken in her head, her nose was long and sharp, her mouth possessed one tooth which hung out, like a dog's fang, over her lower lip, and her yellow-brown face was puckered and wrinkled into innumerable ridges. From beneath her close-fitting bonnet escaped a few dark-grey locks of hair, fumbled into cumbersome curls which helped to give to her face a strikingly weird and elvish expression. Such was old Bridget O'Neil—a woman who was regarded with not a little curiosity and fear by those who knew her, and whose appearance alone would have been sufficient to bring her to the horse-pond or the stake in by-gone days.

In reply to her interrogation, her son informed her that an impudent scalawag of an Englishman "had called him a durruty name," and ran away before he could accomplish his purpose of "flayin' the Fenian aloive."

His mother laid four long bones covered with wrinkled parchment—which served as fingers—on his arm, and scanned his face with her searching eyes.

"Beware," she said, speaking with the exact accent and prophetic style to which she rose in delivering her oracles, "Beware, for evil is between him and thy house. When I entered this place to-day, the earthen crucifix fell from the shelf and was shattered on the floor. This is an evil omen; therefore I say, beware lest evil befall thee from his hand."

Such a speech, uttered in so impressive a manner, might well have awed a stranger; but Gorman was in the position of the spectator who stands behind the scenes and looks on with the ease that comes from familiar acquaintance with the production of those "sights and sounds which excite and terrify the uninitiated audience;" and so he only answered with a little impatience:

"Och! To the devil wid such blather! D'ye think such a man could hurrut me. Be jabers! I think ye'd better warn the lickspittle list avil should befall him from my hand."



The old woman drew up her thin form like a pythoness and answered sternly: "Scoff not at the words I have spoken. But again I tell thee beware." And after uttering this Delphic sentence, she vanished like a Hecate into a cloud of smoke and steam which greeted her when she opened the door through which house and shop communicated—for, alas for this prosaic earth! it was washing day.

Gorman returned to his work muttering some very unfilial remarks about the ould woman being crazy and doty, "and as shaky in the hid as a igg when its grane" and began to discharge his anger in the congenial task of spoiling iron and steel.

He was thus engaged when Mr. Silas Pancrack rode up in a buckboard, bringing with him several breaking-shares for at that season he was engaged in converting the virgin soil of his own particular plot of prairie land into cultivated soil for the growth of grain.

Gorman's anger was by this time somewhat mollified, and he replied with a stretch of one corner of his mouth (which he intended for a smile) to Pancrack's affable smirk.

"My shares, Mr. O'Neil," the latter remarked, "just want sharpening lightly along the edges. It will not be much of a task for you, as I never allow them to get worn down very much."

"Faith, thin, yez are different than some folk as let 'em get worn so blunt there's neither sharpin' nor anything else wid 'em. There's a man here just now, only he's away—just because Oi happened to shplit one of his rusty ould horse-killers, he called me a fule—the impident varmint."

"Indeed! You don't tell me so. And who was the person who had the cheek to insult you like that?"

"Who? Pwhy, a slip of a gossoon that I could put in me pocket. A shtudent over at Dysart's he is, and wears a little black beard under his nose, and sthruts about on a pair of legs that look, be jabbers, as if they'd bend unth a bag o' whate like a willow-three unther a harp."

"Oh, you mean Mr. Polson, do you?" said Pancrack, with a look of pained surprise.

"An' Oi belave that is the spalpeen's name, now ye intion it."

"I am surprised to hear that he has insulted an old servant of the Queen. I should certainly have thought at a man like him would have shown more sense."

"Since," said the blacksmith, with a sounding blow on the anvil. "Pwhy he hasn't aven got *non-since*, or he would ave known bether than spake such worruds to a man who wouldn't have thought twice once of arristin' him for dynamither for such an explosion of spache."

Pancrack easily saw the bent of Gorman's mind, and immediately struck out on a topic which pleased him.

"I suppose you have arrested quite a number in your line," he said.

"Had Oi a five-dollar piece for ivery man, its not jumpin' oirn Oi'd be now, sor." This remark prefaced a long list of stories of imminent perils and hairbreadth escapes, in the British police-service, of which Gorman himself was the redoubtable hero. Pancrack listened with a very attentive face, and tickled the smith's vanity with occasional ejaculations of surprise or admiration interspersed at critical junctures.

As he told his stories, Gorman's active eye fluctuated constantly between his work and his listener. When drawing near the climax he would speak low and tap the anvil gently; but when he came to the struggle, the blows descended in a vindictive and ringing shower, and his voice rang out like a trumpet with a cold.

The natural consequence of this mixture of romance-making and handicraft was that he presented Pancrack with shares beaten out into dented and enamelled edges, with jagged little pieces sticking out here and there, like a remaining tooth on some old worn-out saw. Pancrack, however, could see no fault in them; so after casting his eyes quickly over them, he turned to Gorman with a forced smile and said:

"Really, Mr. O'Neil, you have made an excellent job. What is your charge?"

The smith took off his cap and scratched his bristly hair



with his black fingers, causing it to tremble where the reeds moved as the reeds shake above the passage of snakes. When they had shaken apart sufficiently to let the daylight on his mind, he said with an air of concession :

"Oh, well, as ye seem a thorough gentleman and a brick Oi'll only charge ye a thrifle." And he named a sum a little below the exorbitant standard from which he would have gone to be haggled down by his customers.

"That is very reasonable," said Pancrack, paying him the money.

"Faith! And yez are the straightest man Oi've seen since the last toime I looked in the glass; and the next toime ye go to Bindigo, Oi'll dhrink yer hilt in the finest gill of whiskey can be bought in town."

"Confound the stupid idiot!" thought Pancrack as he drove to his home, "he has spoiled my shares, I believe, but they will all need to be hammered out again before they can be used. But still I believe it will pay me to keep his good books even at that price, for before long I may need the services of just such a man."

And thinking over this and many other things, he drove slowly along, and emerging from the chaos of hills and sloughs, came out upon a flat piece of land on the west side of the creek that bounded the Dysart settlement. When he came in sight, two men who were breaking up the virgin soil began to swing the whip-lash and shout lustily at the slow-moving ox-teams they were driving. These, it may be guessed, were Pancrack's hired hands; and already they had blackened a considerable area with new thin layers of overturned prairie sod. On the edge of the creek stood a little shed-roofed house or "shanty," which contained one door, and was lighted by one window. A black pot turned wrong side up, an axe with a chip out of the edge, a disorderly heap of firewood, chips, bread crusts, bacon rinds and tea leaves lay scattered around it. A little back from the shanty stood a rude board stable-roofed with sods, and containing a door which could only be half opened because of the refuse which had been built up in front of it.

Short as Pancrack's residence in the country had been, he had already acquired in the district the reputation of a "hustler." In other words, he worked his men with very little intermission from daylight to dark. He fed them on bread and salt pork, which they had the happy privilege of cooking for themselves. He left them no time for those pleasures and pursuits which relieve and enlighten the spirit, or improve and cultivate the mind; but after causing them to tramp out and bury their souls in the dust of the plow-field, gave them no chance to rekindle the sacred light when the work in the field was done. He paid high wages, it is true, but he exacted in return the most labor and endurance it was possible to get.

Such are a few characteristics of the western "hustler," a character much blazed abroad, and held up by false admiration as something to which men should aspire, for even the money-gathering success of sordid avarice can soild men's faults that many mistake them for glittering virtues.

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## CHAPTER VII.

"SUCH IS HUMAN LIFE; SO GLIDING ON."

TIME passed very quietly on the Dysart farm. The scorching summer days burnt themselves out, and slowly faded among rosy and golden clouds. The beasts sweated and panted at the plow; and all flowers, vegetation and crops grew apace with the rapidity peculiar to the Manhattan summer.

For Fred Polson the monotony was broken by frequent visits to the Craggs, and he succeeded in establishing himself in the good graces of the family. He talked with Mrs. Craggs about different methods of suckling calves, and discussed the causes of the constant variation in the butter market. He discoursed with George about guns and ranchos; and even managed occasionally to rouse the old

man from his besotted lethargy into something like an intelligent comprehension of his past life.

But of his past life only would he speak ; to the present and all around him (except so far as it concerned strong drink) he was quite insensible. His broad English country accent, quite unmodified by several years' residence in Canada, greatly amused Fred ; and his face, when transformed by laughter, was a study for an anthropologist. At such times deep ridges, like fissures from an earthquake centre, would spread from his mouth to every quarter of his face, plowing up his skin into heavy furrows in which half his nose disappeared and his eyes were completely buried, and at the same time in the cavity thus opened for inspection three teeth like yellow pegs would appear. One hung in solitary majesty from the middle of the top jaw, and the others had their respective stations at each corner of his mouth in the bottom. Once in one of these conversations he was awakened to such unusual familiarity that he rose with ponderous slowness from his seat, and planting his stick firmly before him winked one eye cunningly at Fred, and said, "Cum along to the stable for a minute."

Fred nodded, and followed the old man across the yard, as he stumped along puncturing an irregular row of little round holes in the earth with his walking-stick, whilst his enormous boots creased and bulged with agonized creaks as they shuffled clumsily forward. All the time he hugged his heavily-bandaged hand as closely to his breast as if with it he were enfolding some favored child.

When they were inside the stable, Mr. Craggs closed the door, and with a mystic gesture beckoned Fred to follow him to the window at the other end, and when they were well within its light he turned around and caught him by the shoulder with the crook on the top of his walking-stick. "Thee art a pretty tidy sort of a feller," he said, drawing Fred toward him with the stick. "Thou wutner give awee a secret, wut?"

"Certainly not, if it is told me," replied Fred ; "but I cannot say that I very much want to know it."

"But thou wut when I show thee summut. Only keep quait, I dunna want that oud woman o' mine to know naught about it, or there'll bae nou livin' wi' her."

And having delivered himself of this injunction, he proceeded to unfasten with his right hand some of the bandages that encumbered his left. With wonderful dexterity he loosed the narrow strip of dirty calico which bound them together, and then very carefully unrolled a large piece of red flannel. Fred noticed that after he had unwound about three circles of this rag a hard substance seemed to be bulging out from his palm; and when the bandage was entirely removed this proved to be a small whiskey flask which he had cunningly kept concealed under his bundle of rags. He held the fiery fluid proudly up in the light of the window.

"There yer are, my mon," he said with an air of triumph. "What dun yer think o' that for a scheme for baulkin' 'em? Now, tak a reight good drink to my health."

"Thank you for your well-meant offer," replied Fred. "But as I am a teetotaler you must excuse me for not accepting it."

Mr. Craggs screwed up his mouth and shifted his heavy eyebrows just sufficiently to express a dull surprise, mingled with a little disgust.

"Well, thou be a mon, thou be," he said with a true drunkard's contempt for abstainers. "Hasn't thee got faith enow in thysen to drink a drop o' good liquor? Why then just look at me."

The bottom of the bottle was tilted up in the air, and the mouth lost itself in the depths of Mr. Craggs'; and by dint of much hard pulling and gurgling he managed to drain about half the contents. The operation made his eyes water, but he licked his lips after it, and patted his chest with the bottle.

"Hoth! That be better than all the wayter that was ever made. Young man, yo' dunna know what's good for yer; just tek a drop now."

But Fred was firm in his refusal, and with a sad yet

grateful sigh Mr. Craggs replaced it in his hand, and once more involved it in his mop of bandages.

"Thee mustn't tell the missis, nor none on 'em," he said. "It's the only safe place I've got to stick it in. If I put it onywh eer about the buildin's, her 'ud find it, if her hunted till her yed was grey."

Fred comforted the old man by reiterating the former assurances of secrecy, and they returned to the house together. After this interview Mr. Craggs always treated Polson with friendly deference as his sole partner in the secret on which hung the greatest interest of his life; but at the same time he regarded him with considerable contempt as a water-drinking teetotaler.

But whilst Fred was successful in enlisting himself in the good graces of the rest of the Craggs family, with Alice his progress was slower. Try as he would he could not become as intimate with her as he wished. Not, by any means, that she was difficult to approach. On the other hand, she was blithe and free as any bird, and her nature was clear as the sunlight. She had a bright smile and a pleasant word for every one of her acquaintances, and her worst fault was that she was amiable to weakness. Firmness she had not, and she too often lacked the courage to say a firm "No," when an unwise favor was asked of her. But though so open and accessible to all others, with Fred Polson, strange as it may seem, she was more reticent. She had for him as pleasant a greeting as for others; but in conversation there was a marked backwardness and constraint about her speech which he mistook for coldness. But love only grows the faster by gentle thwarting, and Fred still hoped in a vague way that she would yet be his.

How often it is that some men, possessing great accomplishments in other respects, cannot say the right word at the right moment; or worse, by blundering over some well-meant saying, delay, and sometimes totally wreck their designs. Fred Polson was a man of this kind. He could wax into actual eloquence on a great variety of subjects, yet when he found himself alone with the object of his desire he was quite at a loss to know how to broach

in suitable terms the subject that lay nearest to his heart ; and consequently the eloquent speeches which he had prepared so nicely beforehand, were replaced by the merest and dullest commonplace it was possible to compose about weather and wheat crops.

How he envied Pancrack his easy manners and polished address. He knew himself to be vastly superior to his rival in learning and attainments, and yet it stung him to see that Pancrack made far faster advance than he could. The smiling contempt with which he treated him also galled Fred bitterly ; and it was perhaps little wonder that he began in his heart to hate Mr. Silas Pancrack.

Worst of all, the money-lender became known to Mr. Dysart, and his smile of sinister conciliation might often be seen in the house by the lake. He persisted in patting little Ida on the head, though the child ever shrank instinctively from his touch. By fitting his conversation to their different hobbies, he made himself agreeable to the men. He kissed the jammy mouth of Mrs. Bant's yearling boy, and although the youth always knuckled his tearful eyes while Pancrack wiped his mouth with a handkerchief, he was so completely ingratiated himself with the mother that she declared confidentially to Mrs. Tomson that he was the only real gentleman she had met with in the country. In fact, Mrs. Bant's esteem rose to such a pitch that it soon began to assume an extraordinary demeanor. If, in the bustle and *deshabille* of housework she heard that Mr. Pancrack was approaching, she threw down her work and flew to her room ; and when she reappeared her dress had been changed, her hair arranged in most captivating style, and through the exquisitely regulated smile with which she greeted him gleamed rows of teeth that betrayed the recent use of powder. At table her eyes stole softly to Pancrack's face, and when he spoke her ears drank in his words like honey.

As the writer of this story is quite ignorant of the meaning of such signs as these, he leaves them to be interpreted by the reader's more intelligent comprehension. You must not, however, my dear reader, be so presumptu-



ous as to suppose that this lady was in love. At least, she would never have admitted it herself; because she took particular pride in exhibiting the icy firmness of her sentiments. Had you told her that she was in love with Silas Pancrack, her high esteem for him would have changed instantly to violent dislike, and to vindicate herself she would have heaped upon him the bitterest aspersions her asp-like tongue was capable of uttering. But no one accused her of this softness, and so perhaps she was taken off her guard, and silently allowed Silas Pancrack to melt through the artificial stratum of ice in which she had entrenched her heart.

Be that as it may, the work was certainly done unintentionally on the part of Pancrack, who merely acted from a desire to gain the good-will of all; for, like a prudent tactician, he thought it wise to make the best of friends with a household which might in the future materially aid in the furtherance of his secret schemes. No Silas Pancrack had more important work in hand than the conquest of Mrs. Bant.

I have not attempted to conceal from the reader the identity of Silas Pancrack with Julius Hatton, though I have used the assumed name in preference to the real one because by it he is known in the society among which he moves throughout this story.

We know the intention with which he had domesticated himself in the Dysart settlement, and we have seen the skill with which he foiled Polson's inquiries about his former life, contriving not only to conceal his identity, but at the same time making Fred believe that his cousin was all the while travelling in Europe.

He had taken great pains to study Polson's character and surroundings; but in spite of his vigilance he could yet see no chance of striking that decisive blow which, by blasting his cousin's character, would place him in possession of the Laston estate. He noticed with alarm the attention his rival paid to Alice Craggs.

"It will never do to let him fasten to a girl like that," he thought. "She is so innocent and harmless herself

At least, she would be sure to keep him out of mischief. Besides, a woman can see twice as far as a man on any subject that is likely to affect her home; and, of course, she would tell her all his circumstances—so she might soon smell mischief if any were brewing. Yes, I must keep him single, if I have to be his rival myself."

That anyone should for the sake of a mere point of policy—and a not very strong point at that—involve himself in the necessity of marrying a woman in whom he felt no special interest otherwise, may seem strange, indeed; but Silas Pancrack was one of that class of men who delight in intrigues. He prided himself on being quite incapable of such a weakness as love; but from the relation in which his grandfather's will had placed them, he regarded Fred Polson as a natural enemy; and if he could only injure or disappoint him in any way he felt that he should rejoice with exceeding great joy. He therefore lost no time in setting about to frustrate Fred Polson's designs on Miss Craggs.

At first his addresses were mere acting, prompted by scheming selfishness; but before long, in spite of himself, warmer feelings began to color his designs. He found that a young man, however world-hardened he might think himself to be, could not resort constantly to the presence of a beautiful young woman, abounding with womanly magnetism, without being touched a little by the power of feminine influence. The light in the eye, the smile on the lip, the blush on the cheek, are all drachms in the philter which softens, while it excites, the masculine mind; and if he will drink of these, he must not be surprised to find himself intoxicated by the draught.

Pancrack cursed his weakness, but in vain. He *would* think of the girl. Her face would come before him, even when engaged in deep monetary calculations. Why should a man be so disturbed?

"Poor weak thing!" he said, striking his hand on the region over his heart, one night as he was returning home through the deep ravine that separated his place from the Craggs. "Poor, weak, restless, juicy, pulpy thing! You should have



been made of sterner stuff. Oh, that you had only been a lump of gold, and I had had silver ribs! Then you might have clanked away all day long, and have made for me a music that would have driven out every weaker thought."

Just then a wolf brushed in the darkness past his legs, and his heart did indeed make music—but it was the music of a muffled drum.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

### A HUNTING INCIDENT.

#### HUNTING!

The love of it is so strongly engrained in the nature of every species of our race that it tinges with primitive wildness our highest civilization. From the breast of the Indian it cannot be eradicated, nor can the Tartar be tamed. When pressed from its natural channels, it finds vent in feverish gambling, wild speculation, exciting extravagance, and other sins of the city. With clubs, with spears, with axes and bows it has flourished in the past; and perhaps in some future age it may be found blasting rabbits with dynamite or shattering pheasants with "vril."

In common with very many of their fellow-beings, Fred Polson and old Anthony Scrogpot, the farm cook, shared this weakness; and between them they arranged for an afternoon's wild-duck shooting when work was not very pressing. On the day appointed, the cook hurried through his morning's work, and after speedily washing the dinner-things, prepared for the expedition.

"Now, Jim," he growled to his assistant as he bustled about, "quit that there readin', an' get them there sticks cut up—an' mind an' look after the 'tarriers' while I am away."

The last-mentioned animals were not dogs, but a bevy of cats in which he took special pride.

With these orders he took from a corner a ponderous double-barrelled gun of ancient make, and after purging the

barrels with a piece of rag tied on the end of the ramrod, loaded them with an ominous supply of powder and shot. He then kicked off his heel-less slippers and thrust his feet into an enormous pair of brown tan-boots, sprinkled with flour and blotched with grease, which he bound loosely to his feet with pieces of grizzly binding-cord. His pedal extremities thus rustically protected and adorned, he next drew from the depths of the stick-box a ragged jacket of faded grey. Having donned this vestment and pushed the greasy, battered crown of rimless felt down closer on his head, he felt himself to be completely attired.

"Well now!" he grunted to himself, "I wonder where that Polson is. I guess I'll have to go and fetch him, or he'll keep me waiting here all the afternoon for him." And so, though it was considerably before the time they had agreed upon to start, he sallied forth impatiently in search of his fellow-sportsman. One of the men, smoking his after-dinner pipe in the shade of the farm-house, saw him pass through the door. He rose, knocked the ashes out of the bowl, and placing the pipe in his pocket, stole slyly into the shanty where the cook had left his gun and ammunition. With a cunning smile he took the shot-bag from the bench on which it lay, and poured into the right-hand barrel such a dose of lead as almost half-filled the already overloaded gun. This charge he rammed tightly down under a leathern wad; and chuckling over his little villainy, placed the gun where he had found it, and had just lain down in the shade once more when the cook, accompanied by Fred Polson, issued from the house. In unsuspecting haste Scrogg fastened the ammunition bags to his belt, shouldered his heavy gun, and was hobbling by Polson's side toward the hunting-place, a chain of small lakes, the nearest of which lay within about a mile of the Dysart farm-buildings.

The prairie grass at this season was long and green, and rustled pleasantly about the hunters' feet. A cool breeze blew over their faces and kept the mosquitos away. The wind was heavy-laden with roses, which bloomed abundantly around—the sweetness of their breath only over-

matched by the glory of blushing beauty in which they grew. The great blue eyes of the sky peeped out on the world at times through rifts in the great masses of white clouds by which it was veiled.

Under these genial influences our friends went forward in high spirits, and soon came to the chain of lakelets, lying like ruffled mirrors in green settings of long prairie grass. On the surface of the nearest pond a flock of fine ducks were sporting, quacking and gabbling in noisy glee as they plucked their smooth colored heads beneath the water, and diving them again, shook off the drops in feathery spray.

"Mallards, my boy," muttered Mr. Scrogpot, naming the largest species of wild-duck found in the North-West. "Do you," he whispered excitedly to Polson, "go round to the other end of the slough, and I'll creep on 'em this way. And for goodness' sake don't frighten 'em, or you'll drive me crazy."

To please him, Fred good-naturedly went to the spot he pointed out, and the cook began to crouch gingerly along till he reached the edge of the belt of tall reeds that fringed the slough. Here he fell prostrate on two knees and one hand, and after cocking his gun, crawled cautiously over the oozy ground.

The passion of the sportsman was rampant within him; his limbs were nervous with excitement; he hardly drew breath for fear of scaring the game. He took off his hat lest the height of it should be more easily seen by the ducks. His body, parallel with the earth, went forward in jolts like an incarnate piston-rod; but his face and beard were lifted in excited perpendicularity, like the head of an alarmed baboon. His trouser knees were soaked with moving over the marshy ground, and the hand on which he hopped was coated with black slime. But what mattered that to him? The game was in sight.

He came at last to an open place within good shooting-range of the ducks, that, unconscious of their approaching doom, were still holding a gabbling carnival. Mr. Scrogpot, with breath tightly drawn and trembling hands, brought

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the gun to his shoulder. His conscience, however, made him pause.

"I guess I ought to wait a bit to give Polson time," he thought, "but this is too much for flesh to resist."

The sound of a loud explosion following these cogitations showed that Mr. Scroggpot's qualms had been dissolved in smoke. The shot tore up the water: the ducks rose with loud noise and swift whirring of wings, scattering a shower of feathers in their flight. The cook was knocked backward by the concussion of the gun, which seemed to have gone off at the wrong end. A few stars floated like specks of bright mist in the darkness which, for a moment, closed over his eyes. When this cloud had dispersed he sat up, and unbuttoning his coat, rubbed his right shoulder sympathetically.

"Good gracious!" he growled aggrievedly, "I never knew that gun to kick like that before. It's enough to smash a man all to atoms. I believe my shoulder is out o' jint as it is."

"Hello, cook!" cried Fred Polson, coming up at this moment. "What did you get? You made an awful row."

Mr. Scroggpot looked toward the place where the ducks had been, and to his bitter disappointment saw only a litter of feathers floating on the water.

"What did I get?" he said sourly. "Why, I got my shoulder nearly busted off my collar-bone, if you want to know."

"What!" said Fred, alarmed by the cook's despairing tone, "you don't really mean to say that you're hurt?"

"Aint I, then? You'd say different if you was all bruised up with the pain, and felt your arm a hangin' down like a rolling-pin. You're a bit of a doctor, so just take a feel of that there shoulder-jint. If it aint out o' jint, nothing in this world ever was."

Fred gingerly touched the injured joint, but found nothing wrong.

"Pooh!" he said. "It's only a slight bruise—the pain will be gone in a minute."

The cook was rather offended by this depreciation of his sufferings.

"Only a slight bruise, eh," he said. "Then I wish you had it, my lad. I guess a man should know what's wrong with himself better nor anybody else does, and I know my shoulder's out o' jint, so just you take a hold o' my arm and twist it in."

"All right, stand up," said Fred, and to please him he took hold of the injured arm, and gave it a twist and a sharp jerk. The cook howled, spat and stamped his foot, after which he calmed down and said with comfortable assurance :

"I knowed it was out o' jint, I tell yer. It's getting better already since yer yanked it inter the socket." So easily are some men made the dupes of their own fancies.

"That's right," remarked Fred, soothingly, "now you will be able to go on again. I saw the ducks alighting on another slough a bit farther on."

"Did they? Let's be movin' then! I'll have 'em yet! But say," he continued, as he picked up his gun, "would you mind changing guns for a shot or two? I'm kind o' scar't o' this for a time."

Fred, easily guessing that a trick had been played, consented to change, but insisted on firing the remaining charge before going farther. Pressing the butt firmly against his shoulder, he fired into the air; but as that barrel had not been tampered with, the rebound was quite gentle. However, to satisfy the cook a little, he contorted his face and rubbed his shoulder.

"You overload, cook," he said, "you overload. Wait till I load her myself, and she will be as gentle as a chicken."

He reloaded accordingly, and they proceeded on their hunt; but the ducks had been frightened and they proved very shy. Even the cook's wonderful feat of crouching and crawling failed to bring him near them; and the few distant shots they fired only drove the game from one slough to another.

They kept chasing them in this manner till Fred began

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to get disheartened, and hinted to his companion that they might as well return. But the sporting instincts of Anthony Scroggott were thoroughly aroused. A gambler's fever had seized him, and as the ducks escaped him time after time, the wish to redeem the fortunes of the day by one fell swoop strengthened within him, and filled with this resolve he obstinately refused to abandon the chase.

As Fred did not wish to return alone he had no choice but to accompany his bloodthirsty comrade. But the ducks led them a weary chase. When they saw them calmly breasting a patch of stagnant water, our hunters would sink to a dwarfish height, and begin to crawl toward them, but even before they could get within range there would be a warning gabble, a splashing of water, a swift whirring of wings, and several brown specks could soon be seen disappearing in the distance. The cook in his wrath would sometimes send a few ill-tempered pellets hissing in the rear, but all of no avail.

"Sakes alive," he said emphatically, "I'll blow 'em all to splinters if I get near 'em, if only for the sake of revenge." And so saying he reloaded his gun and followed to the next slough to be again disappointed of his "revenge."

This style of travelling took them unconsciously far away from their original starting-point, and brought them into a country thickly studded with little green poplar bluffs. Whilst these miniature woods greatly enhanced the beauty of the scene, they also harbored millions of mosquitos, which, taking advantage of the shelter from the wind that the bushes afforded, arose in humming swarms from under the hunters' feet and fiercely attacked their faces and hands. Fred Polson as he brushed them off grew more than ever impatient to return, but the cook persuasively insisted on trying his luck "just one time more."

Moving on with this intention they saw before them a narrow scrubby opening between two green groves. Looking forward they saw the bushes on the bluff on the right part suddenly, and a small but beautiful deer sprang into sight. Fred Polson's gun was at once brought to the shoulder, and without thought and with very little aim, he

Fred began



fired. The deer rose into the air and rolled backward, and as it was falling another shot was heard from the bluff on the left, and the animal fell pierced by another wound.

Immediately after an Indian issued from the bluff, and strode toward the fallen deer. Polson and his companion came up at the same time, the latter drawing a carving knife from a sheath strung on his belt, preparatory to bleeding and dressing the game. Fred thought he foresaw trouble with the Indian and at once measured him with a look.

He was one of those half-civilized, half-savage men so frequently met with in freshly-settled parts of the West. Half-hunter, half-farmer, his clothing was an incongruous mixture of the barbarous and the civilized. His hair was shorter than his race usually affect, and he wore a high hat of hard felt and a blue overall smock embroidered with bead-work on the shoulders. His wide pantaloons were made of white blanketing, but were not, as is customary with Indians, adorned with superfluous frills on the outside. His feet were encased in moccasins flowered with strings of high-colored beads. His face was brown, hard and wrinkled, and the creases were striped with fillings of black grease. His eyes were black and restless, and his high cheek bones and narrow, peaked forehead, gave him a sinister expression. Seeing the preparations the pale faces were making, he strode hastily forward and stood between them and the dying fawn. Lifting his hand with an Indian's majesty of action, he said in fair English, "White man not touch deer. It is mine."

Fred Polson looked at him in amazement. "I think you are mistaken," he said. "I shot first, and I have a perfect right to the game."

The cook had not been able to get a shot because a mosquito had stung his eyelid at the critical moment, but now that the deer was killed he was determined to assert his companion's rights. Casting a surly look on the Indian, he doggedly corroborated Fred's statement.

"Yes, that's so! He shot a month afore you. Why, you never fired at all till the deer was as dead as a door-



ail, and if you had you couldn't have tickled his hide with that rusty old flint-cracker." And Mr. Scrogpot wound up this roll of exaggerations with a glance of withering sarcasm directed at the Indian's old fashioned gun.

"White man," said the aboriginal, ignoring Scrogpot, "for three days I have hunted and tracked, and what I have hunted is mine."

"In that case," said Fred, "it would be hard to send you away empty-handed, so that if you like I will give you half. Whether you have hunted or not, the game belongs to him who kills it, but still in fair play you can take half."

"Car—carwin," said the Indian in his deep guttural, "no, that not do. I'll have all or none."

"Then you'll git nothin'," broke in the cook, "and if you don't get out o' the way, I'll shift yer." And as his wrath was now fairly roused, he pushed the Indian aside, and placing one foot on the body of the deer, he began to sharpen his carving-knife on his big, brown boot.

The Indian glared at him for a moment in anger and surprise; then turning to Polson, he said in tones of scorn: "White man, your friend is a moonyass, a fool. I take no thought of him, but you, will you let me have my deer or not?"

"As I said before," replied Fred, quietly, "you can take half if you like, but no more. I think that is a fair offer, and if you will help us to skin and dress it, we will cut it up at once."

In sullen anger the Indian turned to depart, but as he moved away he looked back over his shoulder and said: "The white man yet know that Indian can remember wrong."

And leaving this trail of threatening words behind, he went his way.

"You can talk all you like!" shouted Mr. Scrogpot after him as he pulled the knife from the deer's throat, and brandished it in circles through the air, "you can talk, but we ain't scar't o' all the dirty Injuns that was ever made. If you come anear me again with yer talk I'll give yer a dose o' gunpowder to swaller."

The noble red man (*i.e.*, the dirty brown man) went on his way heedless of these fiery words, and Polson and his companion—the latter in a state of high excitement—began to strip the delicate animal of its skin. But Fred did not accept the Indian's threat with the high-flown belief in his own imperiousness shown by his companion.

"Do you think," he asked, as he severed the skin from the flesh with the sound of a rag softly tearing, "that there is really any danger in the Indian."

"Danger!" and the carving-knife gashed a hole in the skin, "I'd like to see the dirty nichie that would try any tricks on me. I'd soon shorten his hair for him."

As Fred saw that it would be useless to attempt to draw cool speech from so hot a fountain, he worked away in silence, but mentally determined henceforth to be on his guard in dealing with Indians.

When they had stripped and dressed their victim the question arose, "How shall we get it home?"

"I think," suggested Fred, "it would be well to leave it here with one of us to guard it, whilst the other goes to the barn and gets a horse and cart."

"Leave nothin'!" said the enthusiastic cook. "You just carry them two guns and this hide, and I'll soon show you it's no trick to carry a thing like this a mile or two." And without waiting for an answer, he swung the deer upon his back, and grasping a hind leg with each hand, grunted, "It's nothin' at all," and told Polson to "come along."

Fred flung a gun over each shoulder, and hung the skin over his right arm; and thus burdened they walked toward the farm. As Mr. Scrogpot hobbled along, he perspired and panted under his load; but, proud to be the bearer of such a trophy, stubbornly scouted Fred's offer of assistance.

When they arrived at the farm, the men had already had supper, and were loitering around the house, amusing themselves in various ways. As they had had but a poor meal, they were grumbling much at the cook for his absence; but when they saw him arrive with a deer on his back, dis-

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pleasure was forgotten in curiosity, and they clustered eagerly around him. Disdaining their numerous questions, he strode in lordly silence into the house, and flinging his burden on the table with a force that made the tinware ring like bells, turned to the men, who had followed him, and said with a triumphant air :

"Now, you fellers ! Who says I can't shoot ?"

By this time, indeed, our friend had assumed such complete ownership of the carcass that he really believed he had killed it himself ; but Fred Polson, who, though the hero of this story, possessed all a sportsman's love of praise, coming in at this moment and hearing Mr. Scroggott's exultant question, spoiled the pleasure of his little delusion by exclaiming : "Ah, cook, that is hardly fair ! You must remember that I shot that deer."

This remark, and the laugh from the crowd that followed it, put the worthy guardian of the pots a little out of countenance.

"You never a-mind if yer did," he growled. "I *should* have shot it anyway if the blamed musketur hadn't jumped inter my eye just when I was goin' for to fire."

Such a statement, coming from such a source, admitted of no refutation, and was, indeed, received by the men with such approving remarks as, "And so you would, cook !" "You bet your beef you would !" "Bully for you, old grease-pots !" Indeed, the popular enthusiasm surged around the cook to such an extent that the men followed him in a body into his shanty, where, as he mixed some cake-dough, he gave them a glowing account of the adventures of the day. When he had mixed a thick batter, he took up a portion in his left hand, and after clenching it into a hollow fist, slowly squeezed out the dough between his forefinger and his thumb, his hand acting like an animated sausage mill ; and as it thus rolled out, like a chrysalis issuing from its husk, he cut off portions with a guillotine-like movement of the fore-finger of his other hand, and the batter thus severed splashed and sprawled on the bottom of a greased tin. In the various phases of excitement through which he passed in relating his adven-

tures, his hand would sometimes tighten till the batter spouted out like water from a hose ; and at others it would slacken so that only a few miserable drops dripped on the tin. When those cakes were drawn from the oven, it would have puzzled a Euclid to define their different shapes and sizes, though not a few resembled deer variously maimed, incapacitated and deformed.

I see the reader closing this chapter with a weary yawn or an impatient sniff ; he can see nothing in it. Have patience, my friend. There have probably been events in your own life which, though seemingly unimportant in themselves, have yet developed into circumstances which have effectually influenced the current of your ways. That mighty river, placid, broad, spanned by huge bridges of stone, its bosom riven by navies of commerce—whence came it, think you ? From some little trickling spring in the hillside far away ; and to none is it more interesting than to him who traced it from the place where it could hardly claim the tribute of a passing look. So these apparently trivial things I have related may yet quicken into circumstances important enough to claim your closest attention.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### A PLOT IN EMBRYO.

“RIPEN your plans and let them wait for opportunities. When you have secured one chance, if it is not sufficient for your purpose, hold it in hand till others arrive ; and when you have all complete, let them culminate in action.”

Such, briefly expressed in his own language, was the policy that Silas Pancrack pursued toward Fred Polson. He saw with some apprehension that beneath Alice Craggs' pretended indifference to Fred there lurked a feeling stronger than mere regard ; but he comforted himself with the reflection that the wheat-crop on which the family

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depended for safety from the dreaded mortgage seemed to stand a good chance of being choked out by the weeds; and he rightly foresaw that this would place them in his power, if he only cultivated his opportunities rightly.

Mrs. Craggs, with the worldly wisdom with which she was so largely endowed, tacitly but decidedly encouraged Pancrack's visits, and gave him every opportunity in her power for forwarding his suit with Alice. "For," she said confidentially to her neighbor, Mrs. Shenstone, "if Alice married Mr. Pancrack he might pay off our debts, and set us on our feet again."

Her neighbor shook her head. "Good never came of a marriage for money," she said.

"I suppose," said Mrs. Craggs, snappishly, "you would like to see her tied for love to that little Polson, who seems to be as poor as a church mouse. I tell you, Martha Shenstone, that ice doesn't melt away quicker in summer than love after marriage. I married for that, and see what I've got."

"But you are mistaken," said Mrs. Shenstone, who had been more happily mated. "You are mistaken, I am sure. It is better for a couple to be poor, if they love each other, than to own all the riches in the world, whilst one perhaps is only coldly dutiful to the other; and had not drink ruined your husband you would have thought so, too."

"Ah," said the other with a sigh, "it was different once. When I married him, a finer young man could not have been found in our part of the country. He was kind and industrious. He went often to the alehouse, it is true, but he was then strong to resist temptation, and never drank to excess; but sickness weakened him, and to drown pain and care he began to drink. He became weaker than ever under its influence, and at last sank into the thing he is now, useless for work and always craving for drink. Ah, the drink! The accursed drink—it did it all."

There was a vein of sentimental remembrance in this speech rather foreign to the nature of the worldly Mrs. Craggs. It seemed as if her soul had been touched by a

glimpse of her former self, ere kindlier feelings had been stifled by bitter years of strife with a jostling world and harassing care over a besotted, loveless mate. A volcanic sentiment sometimes forced its way through the hardened crust of worldliness beneath which it was imprisoned, but ever as it died to dust and cold ashes again, the earthy crust closed over the wound and the woman remained mercenary and selfish as before.

But though Pancrack received so much parental encouragement, he wisely declined to force matters till the family was more completely in his power. Patiently, in pursuance of his policy, he awaited his opportunity, and it came sooner than he expected.

In the middle of the summer, whilst Mrs. Crags was still anxiously beating off creditors until the harvest should be gathered, a firm of implement manufacturers, to which they were heavily indebted, became bankrupt, and pressed for instant payment. In this dilemma Mrs. Crags was forced to capitulate, and reluctantly resolved to mortgage the farm to meet the debt.

One fine morning Silas Pancrack sauntered into the farm-house. He found Mrs. Crags alone in the dining-room—her dress tucked up, her arms bare to the elbows, and a black spot on the tip of her nose—busily scouring knives on a leathern cleaning-board. Without ceasing from her work, or discomposing herself in the least, she bade him "Good morning," and told him to take a seat. He sat down on the lounge, and after exchanging some local small talk, shifted the conversation round to the distresses of farmers generally. This brought him easily to the point he wished to arrive at, and he soon found a chance for saying, with a very sympathetic look at Mrs. Crags:

"I hear that you, too, are in trouble like so many more, and I came round chiefly this morning to see if I could be of any service to you."

"Oh, Mr. Pancrack! how kind you are! But I don't think you can help us."

"I don't know. If money can be of any service—and

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it pretty nearly always can—I can let you have it on better and cheaper terms than you could get it anywhere else.”

“If you can do that, we might trouble you, of course; but tell me how you could do it.”

“Well, you see, Mrs. Craggs, I am connected with a loan company, and I think I could make arrangements with my partners to lend you the money at five per cent. interest—you couldn’t get it at less than eight of anyone else. Of course, the company would require a mortgage on the farm, but that would be a mere matter of form; and I would take care that you were never pressed for payment.”

Mrs. Craggs pursed her lips, and rubbed the knife she was scouring so fiercely that when she lifted it again it shone like silver. After about a minute of this violent exercise she rubbed more gently—as if she had reached a conclusion by the friction—and, without turning her head, said:

“If I accepted your kind offer, when could you let me have the money?”

“Oh, any time you please. I can let you have it tomorrow, for the matter of that; but, of course, it would be necessary to get a lawyer to draw up the mortgage; and I think it would be better for us both to go to Bendigo and have it done—a lawyer would charge so much mileage for coming out here.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Craggs, with a sigh and a gentle pressure on the knife, “I suppose it must be done, and the sooner the better.”

“In that case, then, you will meet me in Bendigo tomorrow?”

“Yes, if the weather is fine, I will come.”

“But about Mr. Craggs, I suppose he is the nominal owner, and—”

“Oh, leave him to me; I’ll settle with him.”

“Very well; my best regards to your daughter. Good morning.”

“Good morning, Mr. Pancrack; and thank you very much for your kindness.”

“‘My best regards to your daughter,’ he said,” mused



Mrs. Craggs, when he had gone. "I wish my daughter would only give her best regards to him."

When she had finished the knife-cleaning, her first business was to interview her husband. This was a quite formal and summary affair.

She found him sitting in his usual position by the kitchen stove—his walking-stick between his knees, his head sunk in slumber on his breast, his grey coat collar sticking up at the back under the rim of his hat, which in front was tilted over his eyes. Mrs. Craggs promptly seized him by the collar and shook him so vigorously that she churned from the depths of his chest a deep voice which asked drowsily :

"Leave me alone, conner yer. Yoe perleecemen are always botherin' a poor oud cripple. I anner drunk, I tell yer ; I'm only a bit slapey."

"You old *idiot!*" exclaimed his loving wife, and she shook him more fiercely than before. This time Mr. Craggs aroused sufficiently to push back his hat, rub his eyes, look up and ask in sullen humility :

"What dun yer want wi' me?"

"Solomon Craggs," said his wife, sternly, "I'm going to mortgage this farm, and I want your consent ; so just say 'yes,' or 'all right,' and have done with it."

"What dost want to mourgidge it for?" asked Mr. Craggs, who had but a vague conception of what a mortgage meant.

"For money, of course," said Mrs. Craggs, pettishly. "I want money to pay the debts, don't I?"

"Money," thought Mr. Craggs ; "what is money? O—ah—money's the stuff you buy whiskey with. All right"—and he was passing into dreams of glory.

"Now, then," snapped Mrs. Craggs, "don't sit dreaming there. Say 'yes,' quick, or I'll shake you out of your coat."

"Yaas," drawled Mr. Craggs. Mrs. Craggs released his coat collar, and he drowsed to sleep amid whiskey-dreams again.

But whilst Mrs. Craggs obtained an easy compliance from

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her lord, with her son it was different. That young man was a devoted friend and admirer of Fred Poison, and more than shared his dislike for Silas Pancrack; and this he showed so plainly that a much less acute observer than Silas must have noticed it. Still, Pancrack showed no signs of consciousness of the fact; on the other hand, he treated him with such marked suavity and courtesy, that George, who regarded such conduct as the mask of hypocrisy, could hardly endure it. When, over the tea-cups that night, the young farmer heard of his mother's intention, he stormed into a great passion.

"Five per cent.," he sneered, in answer to his mother's remarks on the cheapness of the loan; "five per cent.! What if it is cheap? I would rather borrow it at twice the interest than be beholden to that smooth-tongued hypocrite."

"George, George," said his mother with a frown of reproachful surprise, "what do you mean? I'm sure that Mr. Pancrack is a very nice gentleman, and is always very civil to you."

"So he may be," said George; "but I tell you there's something about the man I don't like, and never shall."

"No matter what you like," said Mrs. Craggs, angrily; "if it pleases me to use him, you've got to put up with him; and what's more, you'll have to come with me to-morrow and be a witness to the mortgage deed."

The hands that have whipped our babyhood bodies, and the tongues that have scolded our childhood souls, very often have a terrifying influence over us late on in youth. The scars that are left on a young heart are not easily effaced. So, at least, it seemed to be with George Craggs, for on hearing his mother's angry commands he dropped his eyes humbly on his plate, and just managed to mutter in very mumbling tones:

"All right; do as you like; I don't care." And even these timid sentences he drowned in a nervous gulp of tea.

## CHAPTER X.

## A QUARREL IN BENDIGO.

THEY called it a town! A collection of wooden buildings of every shape, color and size, split apart into blocks by streets raised in the middle like blunt, broad-edged wedges of solid earth, fringed here and there by bits of sidewalk laid down by private enterprise; four elevators (for the storage and shipping of grain) towering in cumbersome grandeur along the edge of the railway, and seeming to frown contemptuously on the cluster of small buildings huddled about their feet; a railway station, and a few box-cars standing on a switch—such, to the eye overlooking it in general survey, was the outward inanimate composition of the small western town of Bendigo.

A buggy, containing a farmer's wife and her son, moving slowly along the blunt wedge in the centre of the street; a team of oxen creeping lazily toward one of the elevators with a wagon load of wheat, and a driver lying half-asleep on the sacks with a pipe in his mouth; an occasional pedestrian walking along the shady side of the street; a few men (dressed in styles that varied in all shades between the farmer in overalls and the merchant in broad-cloth) sitting under the veranda of the Cowboy Hotel, smoking, expectorating, talking and reading newspapers—add to these a few curs which, with tails erect and grinding growls, formed a belligerent group in front of the hotel, and you have a mental picture of the inhabitants of the town of Bendigo visible at the time of which I write.

The couple in the buggy referred to were Mrs. Crags and her son George, who had come in for the purpose of drafting the mortgage; and one of the men reading a newspaper in front of the hotel was Silas Pancrack, who had arrived beforehand to meet them.

When he saw his victims drive up he immediately rose to greet them. He assisted Mrs. Crags from the buggy,

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and shook hands with George, the latter thrusting out his hand in sullen, bad grace in response to a sharp look from his mother. Soon after they were all seated in the lawyer's office, where the mortgage bonds were duly agreed to and signed. While this was going on, a buckboard containing Mr. Cragg, sen., and Uncle Nathan, of the Dysart farm, arrived in the town. As the reader will wish to understand how the farmer came to follow so closely after his wife and son, it will be necessary to offer an explanation. When the whiskeyed head of the household found himself alone, his mind at once began to ruminate over the question, how should he obtain a supply of whiskey? for to this end all his faculties tended. Of his family's whereabouts he knew or cared nothing; but this he did know—and it grieved him sorely—that the whiskey bottle, hidden in the stable, from which he was wont to replenish the phial wrapped in the flannels around his hand, was getting mournfully low, and he felt it to be his inexorable duty to fill it at all hazards.

His wife was going to mortgage the farm, and he knew that that circumstance would, for a time, furnish him with unlimited credit. He had heard also that someone from the Dysart farm was going to Bendigo on the next day; and as Bendigo and whiskey were synonymous terms with him, it impressed itself sufficiently on his mind to cause him to grasp his opportunity and his walking-stick when he found himself alone on the day of which I speak.

He arrayed his short, thick body in a coat with a sleeve specially made for the purpose of passing over the bulbous bundle in which his left hand was encased, whilst the tails hung out a little back from his legs like steep eaves; and having completed his holiday attire by drawing his slouch hat closer on his head he drained out the last of his whiskey with tearful eyes, and wrapping up the large bottle, carefully placed it under his coat, and bore it as tenderly as a much-beloved child across to the Dysart farm. He found Uncle Nathan, the herdsman, hitching up a very rickety-looking old mustang to an equally rickety old buckboard. When he saw old Cragg approaching he

went fidgeting around to the opposite side of the pony, but he was followed.

"Good-mornin', Mr. Nathan; you are going to Bendigo, I hear." It must be stated in explanation of the unusual purity of Mr. Crag's English that it was a holiday with him and he had on his best attire—circumstances which made him feel rather vain, and caused him to assume that stiff dignity of language which seems almost instinctive with the dignified and pompous.

"Yah, I was thinkin' about it," grunted Uncle, hooking up a twisted trace.

"You will allow me to ride in with you, I suppose, sir?"

Uncle fidgeted with the harness, muttered something about having a load, and wound up by evolving the ambiguous consent, "Oh, yah, I guess."

The fact was, Uncle did not much relish the idea of having Mr. Crag for a travelling companion; but as he stood in great awe of that gentleman's pompous indignation, he feared to refuse to take him, and so old Sol Crag proceeded toward Bendigo, blissfully unconscious of the fact that his wife had preceded him.

When he arrived in town he lost no time in puncturing with his walking-stick a track toward the Cowboy Hotel. The men loafing around greeted him with such salutations as "Waal, Sol! Whar on airth hev yer been this long while back?" "Good-day, Mr. Crag, I am glad to see you." "Well, Solomon, still in the land of the living?" etc.

The boys jeered rudely at his coat-tails, and the dogs barked at him. To the men he replied with a grin that exposed his solitary-looking teeth and threatened to split off the top of his head; the boys and dogs he kept at bay with flourishes of his walking-stick.

"Hi! Sol," howled a noisy urchin in his rear, "yer tail's a-droppin' off."

Mr. Crag turned slowly round, and resting his hand on the knob of his stick, scanned the presumptuous youth severely.

"Young man," he said solemnly, "you shouldn't call me

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Sol, you should call me Solomon." And having delivered himself of this grave remonstrance, the wise man went on to his fountain of strength.

He had not been long in the bar-room before a small crowd gathered around and began to chaff him.

"Say, Sol," said one, "don't you drink too much o' that stuff, for I seen the old woman carryin' a big horsewhip when she came in just now."

Mr. Craggs turned in comic dignity, with his walking-stick tucked under his left arm, and a tumbler half-filled with whiskey in his right hand.

"Tell me no lies," he drawled, "tell me no lies. My wife is not here."

"What'll yer bet on it, old cock?"

"I do *not* bet," said Mr. Craggs, with an indignant moral emphasis on the negative.

This dignified assertion was followed by an awkward silence, during which Mr. Craggs stood stiffly near the bar with his walking-stick under his arm, occasionally smoothing the majestic pucker on his brow by a condescending sip of the toddy. However, in a few moments the liquor he imbibed penetrated the tightened muscles of his virtue, causing them to relax, and turning to the person who had formerly addressed him, he said in a tone of affable condescension:

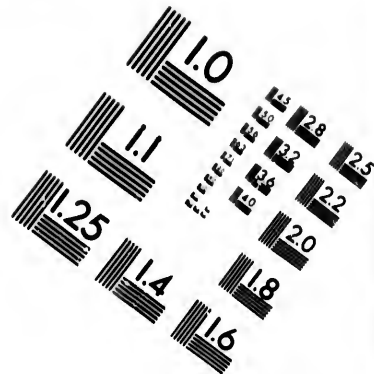
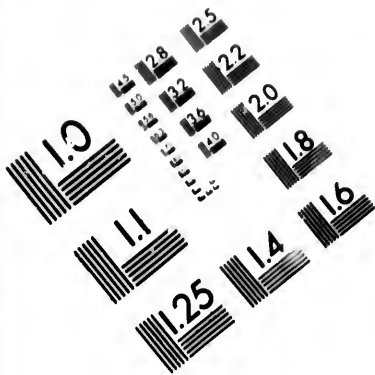
"I will not bet, but I will toss you for the best three out of five that my wife is not here, and let the loser pay for drinks."

The man addressed hardly saw much connection between tossing for drinks and the presence or absence of Mrs. Craggs, but still in expectation of some amusement he closed with the offer. The coin was tossed up by an impartial spectator. It was Mr. Craggs' first guess.

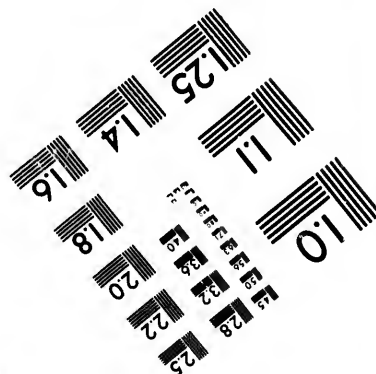
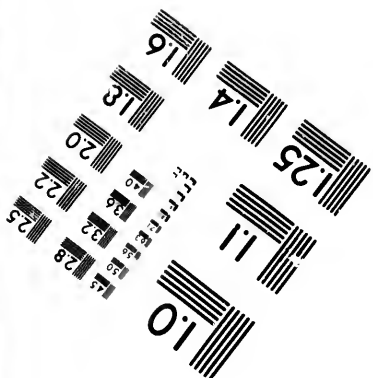
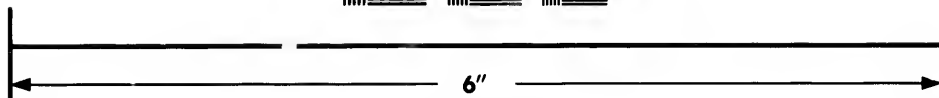
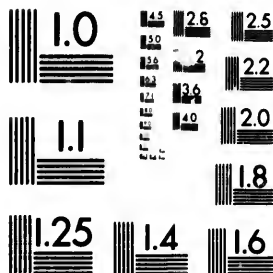
"Teels!" he shouted, whirling his stick and forgetting his dignity as the silver came whizzing down toward the floor. "Teels! Ho Hoth, look out!" This last exclamation was aimed at someone who touched the falling coin with his foot. "Teels foriver! No, it's yeds!" Which emphatic dialectic and disappointed ejaculation was







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greeted with a roar of laughter. Mr. Craggs did not fail to attribute his ill-success to the disturbance the coin had received in falling; and in the subsequent tosses, while the coin was whizzing in the air, he swept a sacred circle round it with vigorous strokes of his walking-stick, his action reminding one of a boy batting at a pebble which he always missed. However, by this means he kept the gambling space as clear as if it had been encircled by invisible ropes. The game, if such it may be called, grew very exciting. At the fourth toss he and his opponent were equal. Only one more trial was needed to decide it. Up for the last time flew the whirring coin.

"Yeds! Ho Hoth! Yeds!" yelled Mr. Craggs, as his stick swished frantically around the circle. "Let me look! Let me look, I say!"

And falling on hands and knees he bent down near the coin so that his whiskey-bleared eyes might better make out the inscription. Having satisfied himself he rose quickly erect.

"It's yeds! Ho Hoth! I've won! I've won!" His triumph he emphasized with a thump of his walking-stick which stove a knot-hole in the floor. But though Mr. Craggs rejoiced in his victory it looked as if he were not going to divide the spoil, for his opponent having had, in the old man's excitement, all the fun he bargained for, made toward the door to escape the expense of his losing.

He did not get far, however, before his coat-collar was hooked by the inevitable walking-stick, and much against his will he was dragged back toward its owner.

"You cannot escape me, sir," said Mr. Craggs, majestically. "You have lost the game, and you must pay for the liquor, or—" He finished the sentence by executing an ominous parabola over his captive's head with the walking stick.

"'Scape yer," said the loser in a tone of offended pride, which was, however, not unmixed with some tremblings of real fear. "Why, who wanted ter 'scape yer. I was only jest goin' to the door to see if the old woman was a' comin' round anywheres." And, with this meek apology, he

reluctantly laid on the counter the money necessary to replenish a little of Mr. Crag's inexhaustible thirst. With the aid of this supply, supplemented by several others obtained on his own credit, or extracted from the drunken generosity of the loafers, he passed rapidly through different stages of merriment, talkativeness, restlessness and pugnaciousness. From the majestic he descended to the affable, from the affable to the familiar, from the familiar ascending again to the uncertain, and from the uncertain he rose into the loudly defiant.

Ah, Solomon! Wrapt in thy drunken unconsciousness, little drest thou of the storm that is gathering even now around thy devoted and sadly intoxicated head. In thy mood of defiance—sport for the men, and terror for the boys—little thinkest thou of the petticoated fate that is moving toward thee to destroy thy whiskey-built illusions of majesty and pugilistic power. Already it is emerging from the lawyer's office; and, alas for thee, it spitefully stabs the gravel with the point of a stout black umbrella, which it ever carries abroad for offensive or defensive purposes.

By this time Mr. Crag had reached a talkative, pugnacious state, and was standing on the platform in front of the hotel holding forth to a group of spectators, composed of several sniffing dogs, some grinning boys, and a few smiling men. Grasping his stick defiantly in the middle with his right hand, and the bundle of red flannel on his left shaking as if it contained a sleepless baby, he was loudly challenging the crowd to open battle.

"Ye behoud in mae," he was saying, for in drunkenness he forgot his dignity and resumed his native dialect—"Ye behoud in mae a mon not to be skeert by a yer big words an' idle blow—a mon o' genius, hintellect, eddication an' high-braedin', as 'll feight ony mon, kid or dog among yer fer twenty rounds an' a bottle o' oud Scotch, though he is a poor oud cripple; for I tell yer agen, I'm a mon that's skeert o' nobody."

At this juncture someone among the crowd whispered, "Mrs. Crag," and, as if touched by some subtle magic, all

dispersed in different directions to watch from the most convenient hiding places the scene of conjugal felicity that would probably ensue. The dogs followed their masters, and Mr. Crags was left alone.

As that worthy's dimmed and blinking eyes could not see the figure of his wife coming up the middle of the street, he immediately attributed this sudden flight to his own bombastic challenges, and proudly erecting his stooping form he put the hand containing the walking-stick to his mouth, and gathering his breath gave vent to a loud "Cock-a-doodle-do."

"I knowed you'd a' be skeert on me," he shouted, waving his stick in the air. "Thrae cheers for the Queane, an' the oud bird that's cock o' the walk yet. Whoop!"

On hearing these exultant noises, Mrs. Crags turned her eyes toward the quarter from which they came, and beheld her husband shuffling in a triumphant "Ta-ran-ta" on the hotel platform.

Her first impulse was to faint, but, as she wore her best dress and the street was rather dusty, she changed her mind and assumed bolder tactics. She advanced sharply toward her husband, the frowns and puckers with which her face was corrugated resembling in miniature the rolling clouds of a looming and thunderous sky. Pausing in front of him she pointed her umbrella fiercely at him as if she would thus more surely direct the lightning of her wrath toward him.

"You old wretch!" she cried with a little of the condensed thunder growling in her voice. "What are you doing here?"

At another time this would have awed Solomon into a state of shapeless dumbness; but on this occasion his courage had been raised to too lofty an elevation to be dislodged by any chance thrust, no matter from what quarter it came. Indeed, so elated was his mood, that on seeing his wife and hearing her fierce question, his eyes even gleamed with a dim and watery joy; for was not this a convenient occasion for the exercise of that superiority to which he thought his recent victory entitled him?

"What am I doin' 't' he echoed in tones of lofty surprise. "What have I *done*, yoe meanen? Woman, behoud yore lord wi' pride!" (And he actually filled his baggy waistcoat with the expansion of his chest.) "This very day wi' my own hand have I skeert off moor than a dozen ghosterin'\* blaggards—Ah, the hounds! They darena face oud Sol Craggs!—and henceforth I'll be your lord and protector, an' whoever cums near my wife, I'll—I'll—split his yed!" And this latter declaration he emphasized with such a blow of the walking-stick that, as it cleft the cranium of his wife's imaginary molester, it drew his tottering form off the platform after it, and he would have fallen on the street had not his wife clutched his coat-collar.

"You idiot!" she hissed, and as the hidden thunder convulsed her, she shook him fiercely, and punched him in the ribs with her umbrella. "Come along with me now and make no noise or I'll shake you to pieces."

And squeezing his coat-collar viciously in her right hand she thrust him along before her, prodding him behind with the umbrella all the time, as if he had been a refractory calf.

"Tell me," she said, enforcing the question with a sharp dig in the back, "who brought you into town?"

"Old John Brown, he brought me into town,  
As we go rolling along."

As Mr. Craggs attempted to trill these answering lines his voice was half choked by the tightening grasp on his coat-collar.

"Silly fool!" hissed Mrs. Craggs, giving him another severe shaking. "Can't you tell me who brought you in? Was it Jackson?"

"Don't thrust so hard, Mrs. Craggs," said the old inebriate, as the lady enforced her last question with a sharp push of the umbrella. "Uncle Nathan is hitching up; let me return with Uncle Nathan." For under that severe

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\* Boasting.

treatment he was rapidly becoming subdued into a state of semi-sobriety.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Crag, "it was old Nathan then, was it?" And toward that unhappy individual she made full sail, propelling her consort before her.

Just in front of a long wooden feed-stable opening on the street, poor Uncle was indeed hitching up; for he had caught a glimpse of the pleasant connubial interview in front of the hotel, and being a man of meek disposition (who knew Mrs. Crag's temperament well, and feared, with too good reason, the wordy wrath which she would wreak on him for bringing her husband in) he had hastened to make his escape. But, alas! he was too late.

When he saw Mrs. Crag making toward him, he bobbed his head down on the opposite side of the pony, and with fingers working like cat's hairs in a thunder-storm he tried hurriedly to fasten the last trace, but in his nervousness and haste he bungled so that it got wrapped round some other part of the harness, and while he was snatching and jerking in frantic endeavors to extricate it, Mrs. Crag came upon him.

"Hi, sir!" she cried. "Don't be in such a hurry, if you please. Here's something you'd better take back with you, since you were so fast in bringing it in. What right have *you* to bring *my* husband into town to make him drunk, I'd like to know?" And still holding up her husband with one hand, with the other she gave Uncle Nathan a vicious poke with her umbrella.

"Please don't, mum. You'll knock the wind out on a feller," deprecated Uncle in a half-offended tone, at the same time rubbing his back against the sorry-looking pony, as if trying to create a magnetic sympathy. "He axed me to bring him in, mum, and of course I never says no."

"Of course *you* never say no," repeated Mrs. Crag, sarcastically. "*You* wouldn't care if he was to turn everything upside down or set the place on fire. What would *you* think if *you* had a wife, and I were to bring her in here and make her drunk every time she wanted to come. *I'm* husband in *our* house, remember, and I won't have

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this wretched old woman brought into town whenever he wants to come, so now help me to get him into the rig, and take him straight home; and mind I don't catch you bringing him in here again."

With a meek but emphatic "No, mum; I'll bet yer wont," Uncle Nathan came to her assistance, and with great difficulty they succeeded in rolling Mr. Crags into the buckboard—a patience-trying task. When they got his head up, his legs were down; when they got his legs up, his head was down; when they got both head and legs up together, his form seemed to collapse toward the middle, and he slipped from their hands. In vain Mrs. Crags tried to awake him to a state of self-helpfulness by sharp prods of the umbrella; for beyond extracting a grunt and a "Hi! ish't a hailstorm?" she might as well have poked at a padded whiskey keg. At last, however, by dint of the combined leverage of the walking-stick and the umbrella, he was rolled like a log into the conveyance.

Uncle Nathan lifted him into the seat, and after propping him up with his walking-stick to make him look as natural as possible, he drove this modernized statue of Bacchus in a squeaking rig along a jolting trail "far from the madding crowd."

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## CHAPTER XI.

### THE TEMPTER AND HIS TRIUMPH.

MRS. CRAGS, having disposed of this much of the flame of her wrath, turned to blast with the remainder the hotel-keeper who had supplied her husband with the liquor; but her task was not so easy as with the submissive Uncle Nathan, for Mr. Rooney prided himself on his imperturbability; and when he saw her coming he leaned his back against the polished rows of liquor kegs, and crossing his legs he placed a straw in his mouth and began to chew it as an evidence of coolness.

"Good-day. Fine day, marm," he said (but without removing the straw) as Mrs. Craggs entered the saloon.

"Yes, a very fine day for you," said Mrs. Craggs in freezing tones, as she glared at him over the bar. "A fine day for you, no doubt, since you've made my husband stupid drunk and bamboozled him out of every cent he possessed, besides giving him drink on credit; but precious little pay you'll ever get for that, and you needn't think you will."

"Say, marm," drawled Mr. Rooney in long-drawn nasal tones, which seemed to be strained through the straw which quivered in his mouth, "we ain't used to that sort o' talk here."

"I'll soon make you used to it, then," said Mrs. Craggs in piercing tones, raising her voice and her umbrella threateningly together; "especially if I catch you making my husband drunk again. What right have *you* to supply Solomon Craggs with whiskey?"

"Good right as anybody," replied Mr. Rooney without changing his posture; but the straw shifted very nervously in his mouth.

"I'll show you whether you've got a right or not, for you needn't think you can scare me by leaning there like the piece of dirt that you are, with a straw growing out of you. I'll show you about your rights. If I hear of you giving him any more drink you'll just taste the strength of this." And she gave him a parting poke in the chest that sent him back between two of his whiskey kegs, which, as they were thrust apart, came in contact with several others on the shelf, and two of these fell down on the floor and rolled about Rooney's feet. But he did not stir to replace them. His face had changed from red to white, the straw had fallen from his mouth, and he lay back with hands outstretched and eyes wide open, watching the rustling march of the retreating virago.

"A reg'lar devil in petticoats," he muttered.

Mrs. Craggs having thus discharged her wrath, went her way, determined to leave for home at once; but another trouble awaited her. Among those who had slyly watched

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the interesting proceedings between Mr. Craggs and his wife was Silas Pancrack ; but he observed it with an air more business-like than amused.

"The old fellow looks rather helpless in that state," he thought. "I wonder whether this weakness for drink is hereditary. It would be an interesting analysis of human nature to test the question by the instance before me. That youth was rather troublesome to me to-day."

He paused thoughtfully for a few moments, as if pondering deeply. "Yes, I will try it at any rate," he concluded at last.

He was standing near the corner of a building from which he could take an occasional peep at the trouble of the Craggs family without himself being seen. Several others, intent on the same business, were standing near. Turning carelessly to a young man loitering among them, he remarked with a smile :

"Quite a pleasant conjugal scene that. Strange what differences there are in families. There is the old man rolling about under the influence of the jollifying glass, helpless as a football, whilst the son, if whiskey poured from the sky like rain, would just make for the nearest possible shelter, and stay there, like a modern Noah, till the deluge dried."

"You seem to have a rather high opinion of George Craggs' temperance qualities," replied the other, sneeringly ; "but I dare bet you a dollar that I make him drunk in less than an hour's time."

The person who made this proposal went by the name of Tom Dundo, and belonged to that beggarly Bohemian aristocracy commonly designated in the west as "bummers" or "loafers." His thin, shaven face had a pasty, weary, dissipated expression ; and his watery eyes always looked as if just awaking from slumber. His cuffs were blotched with yellow and daubed with ink, and when he lifted his hand a dirty arm could be seen passing into the darkness beneath them. His fingers flashed with gaudy rings bedecked with gems of paste. A split under the arm-hole in his glossy black coat, the absence of three

buttons leaving deep creases and heavy bulges in his vest, and his finger-marked pants frayed at the bottoms, sufficiently betokened him to be a bachelor.

He seemed to be the happy possessor of a knack of living without labor and without means. True, he often talked about his expectations of certain enigmatical allowances from his friends in the "old country"; but these, though they procured him credit, did not pay his debts. Nevertheless, he could often be found at the bar with a drink in his hand, or at meal times could be seen at the hotel table regaling himself on the best. For chance acquaintances coming in from the country he always had a joke and a smile; and in the process of cracking the one and beaming with the other, generally managed to edge imperceptibly toward the bar, drawing the unsuspecting acquaintance after him. And as decoys have their use in seeming uselessness, the reader may be able to conjecture how it was that Tom Dundo was such a favorite with hotel-keepers that he could live without labor or means.

On such a man Pancrack pitched as a fitting tool for the working out of his plans, and circumstances seemed to be shaping themselves to his aid.

"Stake your money," said the usurer. "I'll bet you you can't tempt him."

Dundo thrust his hands into his pockets and worked his fingers around them as if searching. By diligent groping he managed to pull out a piece of broken chalk, a broken eye-glass, and some "crumpled duns." These articles he replaced in his pockets with a despairing shake of the head.

"Fact is, I haven't got a cent about me just now," he said; "but if you like to trust me I'll take the wager."

"Right you are," said Pancrack; "go to work."

"But I can no more treat than I can bet without money," said Dundo, with a grin. "But if you'll lend me a quarter, I'll pay you back if necessary when we settle the wager."

With a generosity strangely unusual to him, Pancrack pulled out a fifty-cent piece and handed it to the loafer.

Dundo thanked him, and went off in search of his prey.

Whilst Mrs. Craggs and Uncle Nathan were trying to lever the older Craggs into the buckboard, the younger Craggs had been loitering about one of the stores quite unconscious of the parental troubles. After seemingly eyeing things with his mouth for a considerable time, and then closing that organ to masticate a cracker and dispose of a handful of candies, he had passed out into the street, and was sauntering along when a hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice overflowing with pleasantness accosted him :

"Well, Georgie, my boy, you're quite a stranger. How have you been keeping yourself this long while back?"

George was rather surprised by this hearty address from a man from whom hitherto he had received but scant attention ; but with a nature ever susceptible to the influence of kind words, he turned around with a smile, and holding out his hand to that which grasped his, said :

"I'm very well, thank you, Mr. Dundo. How are you?"

"Oh, same as ever, alive and kicking. But say, you look dry ; come over into Choat's and have a drink."

"No, thanks, I'd rather not."

"Oh, nonsense, you're not a teetotaler. Come along. Why, it will cheer you up, man." And so saying, he half led, half dragged the reluctant youth toward the smaller of the liquor-selling establishments of the town of Bendigo.

But in this short space of time a conflict between heaven-light and hell-fire raged hotly in the young man's soul. A voice within spoke loud and clear, "Touch not the cup. Before you stand the crowd of jovial companions who, in the high spirit of intoxication, beckon you on. There are the song, the jest, the shout of mirth ; but beyond this siren-music lies a road all strewn with wrecks of helplessness and misery, and ending in ruin and total despair. The ruined father and the hardened mother warn you ; the tender voice of a loving sister draws you heavenward. All good and holy influences whisper you to pause."

The bright heaven-flame blazed upward in his nature, and shot resolve into his heart. His lips tightened, his hands

clenched, and his foot rested firmly on the ground, as he stopped resolutely within a few yards of the hotel door.

"No, Mr. Dundo," he said, "you must excuse me; I won't drink to-day."

Dundo laughed outright. "What! Has the good young man turned teetotaler and joined the hallelujah band of weak-kneed water-eaters? Hi! one of you fellows bring me a couple of wings to clap on his sides, and a small one to stick in his back to steer him with, and I'll rig you out an angel in a jiffy."

The group of fellow-loafers standing in front of the hotel answered this sally with a shout of derisive laughter. Under the cold-water influence of these sarcasms, the celestial flame which had for a moment strengthened George's weak nature, burned down, and an evil voice whispered within, "Think of the jibes and sarcasms that will follow you if you turn away. Contrast this with the genial compliments and smooth smiles that will surround you if you go on. Taste but one glass to drown their jeers and brighten their smiles, and all will be well."

The hell-born fire was searching through his nature now, and relaxing every resolute indication. The lips lost their firmness and fell loosely apart; the clenched hand loosened and dangled at his side; the foot, before firmly planted, now raised at the heel, the knee bent, and the toes rested lightly on the ground. The strength was departing from the soul, the fibres of being were weakened, and it painted itself, as all intense feeling must, in outward and physical indications. Dundo noted the change and was not slow to take advantage of it.

"Come, old fellow," he said, patting him on the shoulder, "you'll stay on earth a little longer yet, and you might as well make yourself sociable while you are here, so come in without further parley."

George made no reply, but still paused irresolute. The warning heavenward voice was growing very faint now. The smoke from hell-fire was smothering its light, and the clamor of evil voices was drowning its utterance.

In the doorway stood the portly, rosy-cheeked hotel-



keeper. "Come along, young fellow ; don't be backward," he said. "A drink or two will do you no harm. Look at me." For this worthy prided himself on being a living advertisement of the virtue of strong drink.

The last spark of George's manly resolution went out entirely. He looked at the hotel-keeper ; he thought of the jeers that would follow him if he turned. "I will take just one glass," he thought, "and go." Hell-flame laughed as it leaped in glee !

"All right," he said, with a hollow attempt at a cheerful smile. "Come along."

"You're the stuff," said his tempter, clapping him on the back, "I knew you wouldn't be mean."

They passed into the bar-room, led by the portly landlord, and after them the group of bums filed in. For they smelt prey ; and where the carcass was these vultures never failed to gather.

With a wink to the hotel-keeper, Dundo ordered two glasses of port wine. George tossed off his in nervous haste, and wanted to discharge the reckoning and go ; but Dundo would not hear of this.

"No ; I'll pay for this. You can stand the next," he said.

They wrangled for a short while over this, and then George gave in ; but by this time the drink he had taken began to show its effect on a system unused to it. His spirits were wonderfully raised, and he became woefully generous. The loafers who had followed them in were variously employed in looking at the pictures on the wall, standing staring around the room, or sitting on the window-sill ; but all cast occasional longing glances toward the two drinking at the bar.

"Come along, boys," shouted George, after a couple of glasses, "and order what you like. May as well be jolly for once, eh, Dundo ?"

"Nothing like it, my boy. Life is short."

One by one they edged toward the bar ; not in haste, for they were too experienced in the business to betray their pleasure, but with an easy and careless air they moved toward their shrine. The boy was now entangled in a



very devil's web. With smiles and compliments they drank to his health; and with pats on the back—like kicks which send a ball down hill—they encouraged him to further extravagance. Soon all his small stock of money had disappeared, and he too had recourse to credit. There he stood, a very dove among vultures who, as they plucked out his feathers, seemed to rejoice in the sorry sight they made of him. He began to grow noisy and hilarious, the one excited figure in the company; for his companions had been too long inured to liquor to be easily affected by it, but contented themselves by paying with hollow applause for the drink with which his generosity supplied them, but turning away occasionally to exchange smiles at his ludicrous antics and foolish sayings. In the midst of this one-man Babel—for it was really a confusion of tongue and brain—the poor dupe heard these words: "George, what is the meaning of this?"

A mother's voice was speaking in tones of mingled pity and sorrow, for her love for her son sprang like a fountain from the rocky worldliness of her otherwise selfish nature. The words struck him dumb, as if an enchanter's wand had touched his lips. He stood motionless—seemingly helpless.

"George, come home with me."

The landlord busied himself dusting a shelf under the bar; the loafers looked furtively in every direction but toward the mother and son. At the last words George, suddenly sobered, saddened and shamed, turned slowly around, and with head sunk down and shuffling gait moved toward the door. When he reached the outside, his mother grasped his arm, firmly but gently. "Come with me."

That was all. No punching with the umbrella; no loud talking to landlords now. The sight of her son in drunkenness had touched those tender fibres of the soul which, however thickly choked and encrusted it may be by worldliness or sin, must ever abide in the nature of woman; and they responded in softened words and gentle actions. Sorrow, shame, indignation and pity, clustering together in passionate vehemence, had by their combined warmth dried up the fountains of tears and speech.

Watched by curious eyes, she led the dazed, staggering youth to the vehicle standing ready for them; and after helping him in, seated herself by his side, and in sorrow and silence drove away.

Two spectators at least watched their departure with interest.

"I've won my bet," said Dundo. "And what's more, I've procured a drink or two for myself every time that fool comes to town; for, once get him started, he can't help treating."

"The seed is sown," thought Pancrack, as he fingered his watch-chain daintily, "and in such fruitful ground it will surely grow."

Ay! Grow to bitter and poisonous fruit. For if from the most moderate root of indulgence this upas tree grows and spreads, how much more likely it is to flourish when, at the first breath of temptation, the soul puts forth its leaves to breathe the bitter air and drink the poisonous dew!

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE MEETING OF THE (WHISKEY AND THE) WATERS.

By what strange perversity of fate is it that accidents and misfortunes never come singly, whilst pleasure is too often divided from pleasure by long hours of sadness and unrest? The locusts and the flying ants travel in swarms; but the butterfly flaunts its lonely beauty in the sun, and the nightingale sings her solitary song beneath the moon. One drop of rain will not fall by itself from the sky; others must accompany and follow it. A parting beam thrown from the setting sun must sometimes suffice us for a day; but one small isolated cloud can never contain the destruction-dealing fire. It must either strike from the looming mass or from that crinkled aggregation of fragments which shuts out the cheerfulness of day.

Here, O misanthropic or hypochondriacal reader, is a

subject for thee to expand upon ; but forget not that from long continuity the sunshine will cease to be pleasant, the glitter of beauty will be sore to thine eyes, and the song that seems so sweet to thee now will grate upon thine ears. Thus doth God, for thy good, balance all things with even hand.

But to our tale.

Whiskey, like the sun, possesses at once the two opposing qualities of attraction and repulsion. On those who imbibe, it exerts the former influence ; on those who altogether abstain from it, the latter. Uncle Nathan called himself a "moderate drinker"—in other words, he stood treat with his friends after the manner of the proverbial "good fellow," and sometimes got roaring drunk and very obstreperous withal, from which state he would have to be drubbed into sobriety. After these castigations it would be noticed that for several days he would take to work with more than usual diligence as an atonement for his offence ; and during these temperate periods he was un-failingly pointed to as a living example of the beneficial effects of "moderate drinking."

Over such a companion old Crags' whiskeyfying influence was almost instinctive. Into Uncle Nathan's little wry mouth the neck of the bottle—which Mr. Crags had managed to keep concealed through all his troubled tumbling—was soon inserted. Through Uncle's nervous and bony system the fiery liquid crept with vivifying influence. Along that great sympathetic nerve, uniting the human stomach and the human brain, it telegraphed, "Down sense—up folly!" As the vapors formed into a rain of nonsense on the roof of the brain, the influence permeated his skull, and caused Uncle Nathan's ginger hair for a moment to stand up. Then it slowly flattened again, and the owner relapsed into weakness. His eyes grew watery, his trembling hands tried vainly to pull the pony astray, and his voice mournfully quavered out the opening lines of an original spring idyl :

"When the bulrush is a-springin', and the turtle-dove is cooin',  
An' out upon the prayerie the young gophers is a-wooin'."

"Why don't you jine in? Sittin' thar like some blamed sign for a rag store." And he pinched the lethargic Mr. Craggs on the ribs.

The old toper opened his eyes, and staring stupidly, mumbled: "Leave me alone, I say. I'm walking quietly along the Queen's highway. Can't you see I'm a poor oud cripple?" He dreamt that he was in the Old Country and had been touched by a policeman.

"You're a cripple with bones in yer legs anyway," jeered Uncle Nathan, "or how d'ye manage to walk so mighty much. Drat that hoarse, he will go crooky." And with his shaking hands he tried to pull the pony off the home trail, but the hard-mouthed beast would go right.

Their way led through a steep ravine, through the bottom of which ran a creek of considerable size. At the point where they crossed a ford had been made of stones piled into the stream. Over the ford was about half a foot depth of water, and on either side it sloped gradually down into deeper pools. This was the most dangerous point on the journey, and here Uncle Nathan concentrated all his perverted strength in a determined effort to make the pony go as he wished.

"Be careful on your drivin'. If you upset you'n mak' me spill the whiskey," said Mr. Craggs, sobering a little in fear of such a catastrophe.

"Confound yer, can't yer go shtraight," said Uncle Nathan, jerking the rein as the animal splashed straight along over the ford.

At last he succeeded in pulling the animal so far out of the path that it slipped off the causeway. The vehicle naturally followed, and as its two outer wheels slipped over the edge of the ford it upset, and its occupants were pitched into the water, Mr. Craggs sinking with a hoarse "pomph," and Uncle making a sharp gash in the water as if a knife had cut it.

A ring of grease, some red flannel dye in the water, and above all, a knotty walking-stick spanning the grease—like "the buoy that betrays where the anchor is hidden"—sufficiently betokened the spot where Solomon Craggs had

disappeared. A tremulous, nervous flickering on the surface, a few gingery hairs tossed thereon, and a leaky straw hat marked the place where the body of Uncle was engulfed.

Only for a few seconds, however, did these appearances last. Beside the straw hat a thin head shot up, watery eyes blinked, and from a goatish beard tinkling water-drops fell upon the stream. Next, like a hippopotamus rising from the deep, a thick head, to which a slouch hat tenaciously clung, bulged slowly up beside the walking-stick, and at arm's length from it rose a hand holding aloft a bottle half filled with whiskey, and handling it as tenderly as a diver might the body of a child whom he had just rescued from drowning. As soon as Mr. Crag's eyes had dried sufficiently to allow him to see, and he had spluttered out enough water to be able to speak, he exclaimed :

"Hooray, ol' man ! There's none on't spilt now !" And grasping his walking-stick, which was floating near, he beat it upon the water as if he were thumping a floor.

Uncle's first impulse was to scramble out, as quickly as he could, and with great stumbling and splashing he managed to reach the shore. Like most nervous men, he was very excitable. He heard the distant rumble of an approaching wagon, and bawled with a force that almost dried his beard :

"Help, here ! Help ! Drownin' ! Drownin' !" And then he turned to adjure his companion, who, like some huge fish with its head in the air, was flapping about helplessly in the water.

"Confound yer fer an old fool, can't yer come toward the side an' git out, instead o' stayin' thar to ketch yer death o' cold an' git drowned."

Mr. Crag's only reply to this was to draw the whiskey bottle toward him and toss off a neat draught, saying in cool contempt before he did so :

"To your very good health, Uncle Nathan ; and may you learn to be less skeery about them as known how to look after themselves."

Whether the fat in which old Sol's body was swathed

kept out the water and made the whiskey work more freely within, whilst the thin, withered frame of Uncle Nathan absorbed water as a dry clod drinks the rain, and so (by mingling with and diluting into weakness the liquor inside) made him sober, are questions I cannot answer; but certainly the thin man was suddenly sobered, whilst the drunkenness of the stout one seemed to increase.

He beat the water merrily with his stick, and the floating mass of rags on his left hand rested as easily on the surface as if it had been in a sling. Pleased by the unusual buoyancy of his physical man, the old man actually began to dance a jig, but he found the movement of those voluminous boots too much impeded by the water which filled their crevices, and so contented himself by shuffling down into greater depths.

Uncle Nathan, as he saw his companion's stature above the water growing shorter, began to rush about the shore in a frenzy of helpless agony.

"O mercy!" he groaned; "he's goin' to git drowned, sure. Help! Help yere, quick"—(shouted as the wagon rattled nearer). "How that old woman will pound me wi' that umbriller o' hern, if they have to go to the expense of a funeral! O, Jerusalem, he's up to the shoulders! Hurry up, yere! Hurry up! Now he's up to the p'int of his ears! Swim, yer old widgin, swim! O, Jericho, he's a' sinkin'! Hold on to yer stick and float, yer stoopid old idgit! O, heaven above us, he's sunk! O, that umbriller! that umbriller!"

Whilst Uncle was still rushing about the shore, bewailing and wringing his hands, the wagon he had heard arrived on the spot, and a young man jumped out.

"Whatever is the matter?" he asked, coming to Uncle's side.

"He's drowned! He's drowned!" wailed Nathan, "and I'll get all the punchin' for it. Look at the p'int of his stick a-stickin' up thar."

"What! Is there someone in the water?" asked Fred Polson, quickly, for it was he. "Let us try to get him out at once. Whereabouts did he go down?"



"Just whar you seen that stick bob up."

Fred watched, and indeed saw the brass-capped end of a walking-stick thrust above the water and then withdrawn.

Without further hesitation he jumped into the pool. Up to his breast in water he stood. There was a bubbling and turbid trembling on the surface about a yard away from him as if a whale were nesting beneath it, but the water was thick with the mud disturbed from the bottom, and its contents were a mystery. Fred was puzzled for a moment. He could see nothing, and hardly knew the best thing to do; but suddenly the point of the walking-stick again appeared through the troubled space. He grasped it firmly with his hand and pulled. Whatever held it gave way, and with a sudden jerk it flew up out of the water, and to Fred's joy he saw that it terminated in a hook at the farther end.

He thrust it into the water again, and began to probe its depths in search of the human fish. After a little ineffectual groping he felt a sudden strain on his arm. It had caught in something. He drew it carefully toward him, and the head of Solomon Crags reappeared, spluttering and gasping for breath. Fred, very much surprised, pulled him up toward firmer standing-ground, and as soon as he became sufficiently conscious, the old man felt in his inside pocket for the flask of whiskey. He held it up in the sunlight.

"Joe Johnson be praised, it's safe," he gasped. "Lead me ashore, young man, before any more water gets into it."

Fred willingly complied, and, taking him by the arm, began to pull him toward the shore. But it was a difficult task, and he puffed like a small steam-tug drawing a laden and anchored ship—though in this case the anchors were only made of leather, and the lading was light enough to mount to the highest portion of the man and reign over it. However, with the assistance of Uncle, he succeeded in landing him, and laid him dripping on the grass like some troglodyte just drawn from its watery cavern of ages.

Meanwhile, Uncle's nag—a lymphatic, cold-blooded crea-



ture—stood motionless on the spot at which it had arrived when the vehicle upset. A broken shaft was the only damage apparent; and Fred and Uncle—whose excitement had considerably abated—unhitched the beast and drew the buckboard out themselves, and then, with a little trouble, patched together the broken shaft.

“Now,” said Fred, “if you will help me get the old man into the wagon, I will take him home—I have more room than you,—and you can go to the barn and get your wet clothes off.”

“Oh, thanks. All serene; you’re welkim to the job,” said Uncle, bending his goatee to his breast, and then jerking it up as a sign of relief. And then, bracing his quivering nerves together, he proceeded to the task of aiding Fred to hoist into the wagon a bundle of wet rags, a damp body, and a dry old soul. They got him in at the back end, and after dragging him along the wagon bottom, Fred managed to prop him up on the spring seat by his side. When they arrived at the Craggs’ farm they found only Alice at home, for Mrs. Craggs and George had not yet returned. On hearing the wagon, she thought it was her mother coming back, and hastily shaking the flour off her hands (for she had been mixing dough) she went to the door. When she saw Fred Polson she blushed, gave a little scream, and would have beaten a retreat, but the sight of her father sitting wet and half-dazed on the seat aroused the kindly instinct of kinship, and forgetful of self she stopped to exclaim:

“Oh, Mr. Polson! What has happened to father?”

“It’s nothing much,” answered Fred, reassuringly. “He was upset in the creek coming home from Bendigo, and has hardly recovered yet.”

“I’se all right, woman,” murmured Mr. Craggs. “Young man, jusht help a poor oud cripple to get down, will yer?”

Alice was too well acquainted with her father’s ways to be at all surprised at finding him drunk. A pout, a frown, and a look in which pity and annoyance were mingled, were the only signs that expressed her displeasure.

And though she was dressed in plain grey and wore a white apron, and her face, bare arms and clothes were all flecked with spots of flour and dough, in Fred Polson's eyes she had never appeared more beautiful. For were not these so-called disfigurements the token of toil; and in his view labor ennobled the lowest and elevated the highest of every sex and class. Was not her expression also the symbol of a soul clear as the daylight, above all affectation and sham? Her face a mirror reflecting every inward feeling?

So thought Fred as he helped the drunken old father down from the wagon and into the house. After placing him in a chair by the stove he turned to leave whilst Alice tried to make her father comfortable. Yes, ye frivolous misses and aged prudes who sicken at the scent of a faded flower, and compassionating no fault in others, entirely overlook your own—she tended this drunken old man, deeming it no disgrace to breathe in those spirituous odors, if with them was mingled the human breath of him who first gave breath to her. Occupied in these filial duties she forgot Fred Polson till she heard him closing the door, then rising in self-reproachful impulse she hastily followed him.

"Oh, Mr. Polson!" she cried, stepping out of the door as he was about to mount into the wagon, "you must really not go away without allowing me to thank you for all your kindness and trouble." And with a tear in her eye she held out her hand in gratitude toward him. He turned around, and taking the hand tenderly in his, looked into her face with wistful earnestness.

"Miss Craggs," he said with uncalled-for tenderness, "or Alice (may I call you so?), nothing I can do for you or yours, can ever be otherwise than a great pleasure to me."

A slight blush crept over her face at the emphasized *you*, but she only answered courteously, "I know that you are very kind, Mr. Polson, and I only hope that some day we may find opportunity to repay you better." With this speech she gently attempted to withdraw her hand from his, but he held it with quiet firmness.

"No, Alice, not yet," he said with a smile. "You speak of repaying me, when but with one word you could—"

He paused abruptly, and his face reddened; for suddenly the absurdity of the situation flashed on his mind. She, with sleeves rolled over the elbows, with spots of flour upon her face, and threads of dark hair straying loosely over her forehead and ears stood before him; and he, with slouched hat and half-buttoned jacket, and pants all saturated and shrunken after his recent bath, and with water still dripping from the bottoms over boots that uttered a liquid squeak with every movement of his feet—he, in this plight, stood to plead his love to her.

His hesitation, however, was but short, for deep-souled feeling is stronger than sense of appearance; and something within him seemed to whisper, "Now is your time. Slight it not." But in those seconds of hesitation all the strength of his passion was aroused, and when he again opened his lips his speech flowed warm and passionate like a long-pent torrent suddenly freed.

"Oh, Alice, you cannot be ignorant; you must have known how I have loved you since first I saw your face. I know that, clumsy at concealment as I am, the very look of my eyes, the tone of my voice, and the touch of my hand must have betrayed my passion long ago. Yet these have told but a very little of the tale, for if you only knew how my whole heart goes out to you, you would almost love me in very pity. But, oh, Alice! Only say that you *do* love me, and you will make me 'happier than words can say.'"

Looking down toward earth under their drooping lids her eyes told no tale; but the spots of flour lay like snowflakes on the red ground of her blushing cheeks. With maiden coyness she withheld her speech, but her hand—ah! her tell-tale hand—how it betrayed her! Even as she tried to withdraw it, it seemed instinctively to answer his pressure, impelled by a nervous force she had not the power to control.

Confused in mind, pleased by his confession, yet angry

with herself for such poor dissembling, she looked up as if searching for some escape. "Let me go, please, Mr. Polson," she said again, striving to disengage her hand. "There is mother coming back. What will she say if she finds me here?" And as Fred turned to reconnoitre the enemy's approach her hand slipped from his, and she disappeared into the house.

As it proved, there was indeed a vehicle coming along the trail from Bendigo; and Fred, feeling that he could carry his suit no farther at that time, got into the wagon and drove away ruminating in very uncertain pleasure.

"I believe she loves me," he thought. "At least she looked and acted as if she did. But how was it she didn't say so? She had plenty of time to say such a little word as 'yes,' but she didn't."

Ah, Fred! Little thou knowest of the nature of woman, or thou wouldst surely have learned ere this how much sweeter is the blushing "no" than the ice-cold, ice-clear "yes."

"Pshaw!" says an impatient reader, in closing this chapter; "What a writer is this! He makes Fred Polson rescue the father as if he had come on purpose to do it; and then gives a love scene between a young lady in a grey dress daubed with flour and a young man in wet overalls. What highly romantic surroundings!"

True, O reader, it might better have pleased your æsthetic taste had it happened in some green grove amid the songs of birds unnumbered, or under the moonlight shadows of the sighing branches, flickering fitfully as the broadcloth clasped the silk, and mustaches dyed and waxed were sprinkled with the hue of powdered cheeks. Yet, recollect how many of earth's sweetest scenes are enacted in homeliest guise and dreariest places. Such is the transfiguring strength of love that to its heaven-touched hearts the deserts bloom like Paradise, and homeliest garments gleam like angel wings.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## THE PROPOSAL OF ANTHONY SCROGPOT.

At the Dysart homestead the wheels of life ran smoothly, uneventfully along. Mr. Dysart attended to his daily duties assiduously. Mr. Longstreet, when not pretending to work, fished lazily in the lake or smoked on the sofa as he devoured French novels. Mr. Fane shrugged his shoulders with clockwork regularity, and said to every newcomer—

“By George, you should come and see my new race-horse, sir; one of the finest fillies, sir, that ever wore hoofs. She is neat in the pasterns, tender in the mouth, and has a pair of galloping quarters that would astonish you, sir.”

Mrs. Bant scolded her child, confided her troubles to Mrs. Tomson, the cook, and secretly mused on the excellences of Mr. Silas Pancrack.

Steeped in his love dreams, Fred Polson grew less talkative and more studious and visionary than ever.

Little Ida's wasting form grew so thin, and her face so ethereal and white, that it seemed as if already touched with a ray of the eternal light. Her talks with Fred grew constantly stranger and ever higher reaching. Whispers from that clear river that flows by the eternal throne were wafted to her ear; visions of the crystal sea and fruitful trees of Paradise revealed themselves to her eyes. Her soul was bathed in the splendor of ethereal light, and she seemed already to breathe in the element of Heaven.

Often, as the deepening twilight killed the beauties of the sunset sky, and birds were singing their vespers among the flowers and trees, her music floated out over the calm, clear lake and blended with that evening sky which, so often to trouble-tossed souls, seems like some messenger bringing peace from the realms above. And when the music had ceased, and the mystery of silence encompassed the earth, Fred would row her out on the lake, its breast shivering and sparkling beneath them, and pierced with

unnumbered reflections from the silent and countless stars. So she grew conversant with heavenly things and longed for the day when the angels should call her home.

But though saddened by this silent and melancholy decline, the Dysart home was not without its comical elements. The antics and gestures of Uncle Nathan, when he came with the milk, were a constant source of merriment to Messrs. Longstreet and Fane. They teased him unmercifully about his trip to town with Solomon Crags; and he, when vexed, tried to avenge himself by making hawk-like clutches at their clothes with his outspread fingers or aiming his whirling milk-pails at their heads.

Another butt for their small sarcasms was the courtship of Mr. Scrogpot, the farm cook, and Mrs. Tomson, the house cook.

On one of these occasions Mr. Scrogpot put on a wrinkled straw hat and a buttonless cottonade jacket, which he bound together by a belt buckled around the waist; and he even took the trouble to exchange his doughy heelless slippers for a pair of dusty laceless boots. Shouldering his gun, he told the men that he was going out to see if he could bag a duck; and by a circuitous route arrived at Mr. Dysart's house. After resting his gun upright against the wall he knocked meekly at the door. Mrs. Tomson, chubby-faced and smiling, opened it, and welcomed him with a feint of pleased surprise.

"Lors, Mr. Scrogpot, be it you? Come in and take a chair, and have a cup of tea."

This was exactly what the man of grease wished; but to show that he was above the weakness of visiting for such worldly objects, said:

"Thank you very much; but I just called to see if I could borrow a bit o' bakin' powder. However, as I am pretty dry, I wouldn't mind but I did take a cup o' tea with yer."

"Come in, come in, an' sit down an' drink it while I get the bakin' powder for you."

Mr. Scrogpot, shaking his head in a dubious manner, shuffled into the kitchen and seated himself in a chair by

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the stove. Mrs. Tomson poured out a cup of hot tea, and after flavoring it with sugar and cream, handed it to him, at the same time plying him with questions as to how things went at the farm—quite unnecessarily, for she was well acquainted with all the passing events that made up the tittle-tattle of the farm and household; but this was the only manner then present to her mind in which she could maintain the conversation.

Mr. Scrogpot took the tea and poured some of it into the saucer to cool, and after placing the cup on the stove made a little fringe of batter along the ragged ends of his floury mustache by dipping it in the tea as he took a hot sip from the saucer. Whilst Mrs. Tomson was ransacking a closet in search of the baking powder, the cook wiped his mustache, and looking around him, noticed with approval the row of shining pans hanging along the wall, the well-arranged crockery on the shelves, the white dish-clouts on the nails, the polished stove and clean floor. "She'll do," he thought.

When the plump old dame returned he engaged her in a conversation on the best modes of culinary economy; and so by cautiously steering toward his object, launched out at last into speculations on the profit that might attend a well-conducted bakery business in the town of Bendigo.

"But, certingly, Mrs. Tomson!" he concluded, "an old feller like me couldn't manage a business like that of himself, could he?"

The perennial redness of Mrs. Tomson's face happily concealed a blush as she replied:

"It would be a bit hard for you, Mr. Scrogpot, but then I s'pose you could hire a help o' some sort."

"Hire," repeated Mr. Scrogpot, drearily gazing into the fire, "yes, I guess I should have to hire, for nobody 'ud take to a poor, scraggy old sinner like me."

"Oh, you don't know," said Mrs. Tomson, stirring with added vigor some batter in a pan, "what might happen if you was only to try. There's many a good toon played on an old fiddle, as the sayin' is."

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed Mr. Scrogpot, gruffly,



"that's a bit of encouragement anyhow. Is that a cake you're mixin', Mrs. Tomson? Let's see if I can give you a hint or two." And he rose and went to her side.

By this time the batter had thickened into dough, and Mrs. Tomson poured it out on the baking board to receive its due modicum of kneading.

"Now, just let me show you how to punch that right," said Mr. Scrogpot. And standing behind her back, he took one of her bare wrists in each hand and so pushed her little round fists gently down into the sticky dough.

"Lor', Mr. Scrogpot!" she exclaimed in tones of startled reproach, "whatever are you doin' of, an' me a lone widdler. Suppose the missis was to come in now. Goodness-mercy, let go o' my hands!"

"Don't take on so now," said Mr. Scrogpot, humbly releasing her wrists. "I was only just tryin' to show you how to punch that dough. You've got it too thin. There! There's some of it running over onto the floor. There it goes—on yer dress. Now it's all about your feet. You'll never be able to stand up in that slippery stuff—let me hold yer!" And he gallantly placed his left arm as far around her waist as it would reach.

"Get away, you bad man," she said, giving him a playful cuff which daubed his whiskers with the doughy slime.

A man of another profession would probably have been offended by this mark of indignity; but Mr. Scrogpot was too well used to the flour-and-water plasters to take much notice of it, and he only proceeded more vigorously with his suit.

"Well done," he said; and the lines of dough between his beard and mustache expanded and contracted as he spoke, like white elastic prison bars suddenly placed before his mouth to prevent him from swallowing sweet Mrs. Tomson.

"You can handle the dough like a good 'un. You oughter to make a good baker's wife. Now, hadn't yer?"

The lady became rather confused.

"Mr. Popsrog, let go of your waist with my arm, please. 'Taint proper. Whose baker's wife are you talkin' of?"

"Why, you angel, my own! Whose else? You wouldn't be no other baker's but me, would yer?"

"Why, yes—of course I won't," said Mrs. Tomson, her mind wriggling helplessly in this Cupid's net.

"I told yer," said Mr. Scrogpot, triumphantly. "I knowed you wouldn't have nobody but me." And he folded as much of her as he could grasp in his arms; and sealed—literally sealed—the contract with a kiss; for their lips were glued together for a time by the dough on his whiskers; and after they had pulled them apart, each bore away a shiny imprint as a memento of those blissful moments.

Moreover, on either side of Mr. Scrogpot's cottonade jacket were five finger-prints in the same characters, which when dried to a crusty firmness formed the foundation of innumerable jokes at his expense by the wits of Dysart settlement.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### WITH THE FALLING OF THE LEAVES.

"There is a reaper whose name is Death,  
 And with his sickle keen  
 He reaps the bearded grain at a breath,  
 And the flowers that grow between.—*Longfellow.*

THE aged men and women from whose forms and faces the flowery beauty of youth has long since faded, and on whose heads are the sere fruits of long toil full ripe for the gathering; they whose hands are weary, whose eyes are dim, and whose spirits long for rest—"the bearded grain."

Youth, exuberant, beautiful, exhaling joy as a sweet odor, as yet bearing no fruit or grain; but clear as a fountain, happy as the spring-time, shedding sweetness and gladness all around—"the flowers that grow between."

Of these two classes the former can be spared with satis-

fied resignation, the latter we mourn with sorrow unutterable—for the one is ripe for the harvest, the other as yet hath borne no fruit. But how deep must the pathos be, when flower and fruit are mingled on one stem, and that falls before the Reaper's scythe!

Such thoughts as these, formulating unconsciously in his mind, made Fred Polson note with intense but silent sadness the rapid decline of Ida Dysart.

Total unconsciousness of every evil thing, overflowing sympathy with the joys and sorrows of all around her, her very melancholy tempered with childish glee and winning grace—all these tokens of the flower in its innocence and purity were hers.

An eager questioning after knowledge, an imagination piercing far beyond the narrow boundaries of her daily life, a spirit strangely impressed with the depth and grandeur of religion, yet withal an eager searching of its dogmas and traditions, and an earnest yearning for knowledge of its higher mysteries—the spiritual fruitage which to others comes but in riper years—was already hers in abundance.

Mr. Dysart sorrowed deeply as he observed the symptoms of his child's decay. In vain he consulted many physicians—all told the same tale. Her constitution was naturally weak, and the decline had gone too far before being discovered. She could not last many months; change of air and scene would too probably only hasten the end. But summer passed into harvest-time, the roses faded, the leaves began to grow yellow on the trees, and a swirling ocean of brown grass rustled in the prairie wind. In the great western harvest-fields was heard the rattle and click of the self-binders, as they gathered into sheaves the golden grain; and the white stubbles were decked with thousands of graceful-headed shocks. In places they stretched furlong upon furlong, in regular and even lines, like the ranks of some noble army arrayed to do battle with the forces of Famine and Want. The golden palace of the setting sun grew ever more gorgeous with the vari-tinted cloud that followed him to his repose. The air became milder and more temperate after the scorching heat; and

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all the people were gladdened because the autumn was at hand.

Still little Ida lingered on; still her touching and simple melodies floated out on the evening air, and still she loved to be rowed over the shining water under the quiet stars. By that mysterious sympathy, working only in the heart that is heaven-attuned to nature's beating, her life was passing away with the passing of summer's bloom. As the singing of the birds in the thickets grew fainter—for many were fled to their southern homes—so her own simple melody grew lower, sadder and sweeter; for she loved all beautiful things in nature, and the peace and beauty of their passing away did much to reconcile her to her own.

Sometimes, as her father watched her, the tears welled into his eyes, but she, in the quiet joy of her innocent faith, knew not what it was to weep. Only when she noticed it she would say softly: "Father, why do you weep, when I am so happy?"

A silent embrace and a passionate kiss was her father's reply, in a grief too great for words.

One calm and beautiful evening as Fred Polson returned from the harvest-field, he heard an organ strain of unusual brilliancy and joyousness pealing through the parlor's open window. It was little Ida at her favorite practice.

She had, they told him, been much better than usual that day, and had manifested such good spirits that they thought her on the point of rallying. Fred, pleased with these tidings, went, as soon as he had washed and eaten, to join her in the parlor.

She had ceased playing, and was sitting on her father's knee toying with his watch-chain as he playfully jested with her; but as Fred entered, she looked up at him with an eager smile.

"Oh, Mr. Polson! I'm so glad you've come," she said. "I do so want to go for a row on the lake. You'll take me, won't you?"

"That depends on what your father says, my dear," answered Fred, with a smile.

"I suppose we must humor you, Ida," said Mr. Dysart, with a sigh. "But we must put your things on first, and Fred can be getting the boat ready." And he bore her off in his arms, whilst Fred went to loosen the boat from its moorings.

Soon Mr. Dysart returned, carrying Ida wrapped in a white shawl, and placed her on the seat of the stern of the boat. He kissed her, and told Fred to row very carefully.

The night was calm, clear and beautiful. Above, as yet, only a few stars twinkled in the twilight expanse of the sky, and the full-orbed moon, rising in silent majesty, clothed the dying foliage on the trees with softened tints of shining gold. The lifted water dropped in silvery spray from the oars as they were raised in air, and the soft note of liquid song fell upon the ear as they plunged with musical regularity into the smooth and shining bosom of the lake. Ida, dispensing with the shawl, had let it fall from her shoulders, so that it lay in careless yet graceful folds around her on the seat. Her delicate white dress seemed to sparkle like glowing silver in the moonlight, and as she sat silently musing there, it seemed to Fred Polson as if her pale face were transfigured into unearthly transparency—so saint-like, so far above human sense she seemed, that he was startled when she spoke in a soft and human voice—

"Mr. Polson, I feel so happy to-night. Do you know that I sometimes think those stars above us are stepping-stones to heaven; and I believe I soon shall climb them."

"You have strange thoughts, Ida, my dear," said Fred, rowing gently. "But I don't think you will climb your silver stepping-stones for a long, long while yet. We cannot spare you, my love."

She answered nothing, but with hands clasped upon her knees, looked earnestly upward at the starry sky. What were her thoughts I cannot say, but I sometimes think there are moments in the lives of all when the mystery within converses with the mystery without. Sometimes the external spirit voices itself in nature; and beholding the skies, and seas, and everlasting hills, our own souls

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reply with the silent songs of newly-awakened depths and intensities of feeling. Oftener, perhaps, it speaks in those silent phases of human passion when the voice is struck dumb by grief or gladness unutterable. Sometimes in song, sometimes in speech, but oftener still in silence we hear it; but at times it comes to all—and, perhaps, in such mysterious converse was Ida buried then, for her eyes seemed to drink in the heavenly light of the stars, and her face gathered upon it the sweet and solemn beauty of the night.

When at last this reverie had ended, her eyes wandered for a while over the shining waters around her, and then, with head slightly bowed, and thin, white hands meekly clasped upon her lap, she sat voiceless and motionless, like the effulgent statue of a meek child-saint seen down some dim-lighted cathedral aisle.

A strange, indefinable spell of silence and sadness seemed to have fallen over Fred; for though he longed to arouse her by some simple question, his lips could frame no word.

With silent lips and sorrowing heart he rowed her where the shadows of the half-naked trees flickered in tremulous trellis-work over the oar-rippled surface, and his musical dip sometimes awoke to a feeble chirp some sleeping bird, or scattered the clusters of floating leaves far apart on the water. And ever by shaded shore, or under open night, in moonlight or in shade, the little white figure on the seat was shining in a softer or brighter silvery light.

After reaching the farther extremity of the lake, he turned the boat and rowed gently homeward. Beautiful and fitting as silence seemed under those fair and silent stars, some indefinite feeling combined with that stillness saddened Fred Polson's heart, and he determined at all risks to break the spell.

"Ida," he said softly, "why are you so quiet?"

Still the little white figure remained motionless, voiceless.

"Perhaps she is too deeply absorbed in reverie to hear

me when speaking so low," thought Fred. "If so, it would be a pity to disturb her; but, perhaps—"

He could not utter the thought even to himself, so utterly did it sicken his heart.

With a heavy heart and slow, soft-sounding strokes he rowed toward the landing-place. The white moon robed her in sparkling silver, and the gentle lake reflected her image with a sweetly softened grace; but, oh! for the music of her childish voice to chime with these and show that all was not mere shadow and uncertainty. Yet, what a wonderful radiance of peace shone from that sweet face of hers! The head so gently bent as if in prayer, the little hands so meekly crossed! Peaceful she seemed, not alone with that restfulness which comes from the absence of motion and thought, but with that deep-seated spiritual peace which seems itself a motion and a thought—the peace that springs from lives of love and gentleness fostered by innocence and purity of mind; the peace that manifests itself in the kind word and the good deed—truly the peace which passeth understanding.

So gently through the gentle night Fred rowed that sweet form toward its home, and when the boat touched upon the shore, her father, who had been waiting there, went to lift his little daughter out.

With a cheerful "Come, Ida," he raised her in his arms and bore her a little space upon the shore, but her hat fell off, and the moon shone full upon her pure white face and soft fair hair. At that moment she awoke, and opening wide her half-closed eyes, looked up in her father's face and faintly faltered:

"Kiss me, father; I am going to be so happy now."

As the warm kiss was pressed upon her lips the eyes were closed again, and in soft, inaudible breathings the gentle spirit of little Ida passed over the starry stepping-stones into the glory of the eternal day.

Under the trees by the lake she loved they buried her. The sky was swathed in cold, grey cloud, and a chilly wind sweeping the leaves from the trees strewed them like mournful emblems over her early grave. A few lone birds

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with ruffled feathers piped mournfully in the half-naked branches, and the dying grass rustled sadly around the feet of the mourners, as if all things in nature were sorrowing for the death of one who had loved them so well. Gently, amid the softly-falling leaves, they lowered the body to its last resting-place; and after a few heart-felt prayers they left her to rest in the dumb, cold earth which knoweth not sorrow nor joy. Yet there was no violent weeping for little Ida—rather a deep abiding sadness, strangely mingled with gladness and hope, for they felt that she at least was free from ill, and her memory only stirred their hearts to purer ambition and warmer love. No impure thought or hateful passion could dwell side by side with the recollection of that gentle life which had passed from earth as softly as the dew-drop dissolves upon the rose.

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## CHAPTER XV.

## WHICH SHALL IT BE?

WITH the exception of her father, no one was more sorrowfully impressed by little Ida's death than Fred Polson. The beautiful evening on the lake with that voiceless star-like figure before him would remain forever imprinted on his mind. How often, too, would those soft and guileless eyes look into his, and the sweet voice sound in his ears with its wonderful questionings and strange child thoughts. How deeply she was imbedded in his affection he had never known till now, and so strongly encompassed with a silent sorrow was he that for a time he almost forgot to think of Alice Cragg. But as the keenness of his grief faded into fainter hues her image revived in his mind.

Slowly he resumed the visits which had been so sadly interrupted by his little favorite's death, but try as he would, never after the day on which he had brought her

drunken father home, could he find an opportunity of speaking to her alone. Mrs. Crags or Silas Pancrack was always in his way, and even Alice herself, though treating him civilly, and even cordially, seemed to shun any chance of cultivating a closer intimacy. Naturally, the latter was the thorn that pricked Fred most sorely.

"I thought so," he groaned to himself, as he returned home one night after watching her for an hour as she listened with a vacant smile to the persiflage of Pancrack, and occasionally cast a timid glance toward him. "I thought so. I was mistaken in thinking she ever cared anything about me. She felt grateful to me for bringing her father home on the day I proposed to her, and did not like to hurt my feelings by a direct refusal. Yes, she likes Pancrack better, no doubt of it, and she only looks now and then at me out of pity for my state, and so makes matters worse. A curse on this idiocy—how it torments me! But how can I cure it? Work, work—study and work—yes, that is the grand panacea!"

So does a lover foster his misery by trying to persuade himself that he wishes to put it away when, in reality, he is clasping it to himself as part of his very being; and so also does he try to exaggerate his wretchedness beyond hope, whilst beneath it all hope is constantly struggling to thrust itself upward.

The human mind is so constituted that it easily distinguishes between the false and sincere in the words and actions of those with whom it is closely acquainted; it was, therefore, no difficult task for Fred to see that Alice, in her inmost heart, did not relish his rival's attentions. But because his own visits were apparently discouraged he tried to persuade himself that he was the wretchedest of mortals, and so was sweetly tormented with self-created misery. Nevertheless, like many other persons who are half purposely, half circumstantially self-deceived, he tried hard to be sincere to himself. He worked and studied earnestly, but though these curtains of care made her image fainter and less frequent in his mind, they did not entirely close it from his view.

Meanwhile, matters worked well together to the satisfaction of Mr. Silas Pancrack. Fred's absence naturally displeased Alice, and to revenge herself for what she thought to be uncalled-for neglect, she lent a more willing ear to the wiles of Silas. But though that gentleman did indeed succeed in beguiling her at times, she nevertheless felt in her heart a lurking repugnance to him. Still, in their present circumstances, she felt that she would be acting cruelly toward those who had the highest claim to her love if she in any way offended the man who had helped them in their need, and in whose power (in a financial sense at least) they now were. The warm, keenly sensitive nature is never so acute in its reasoning powers as the cold, hard and worldly one. Affection sometimes overwhelms sense, the feelings sway the judgment; and so, often, at unguarded moments, does susceptibility plant a nettle that grows to sting it in after days; and this, in her gentle civility to the mortgagee, was poor Alice unconsciously doing now.

As Pancrack's visits became more frequent, Mrs. Craggs' encouragement of his suit grew ever more obvious. She asked him regularly to tea every Sunday, and left him alone with Alice on the slightest pretext. Poor Fred was invited but seldom, and when he came was received with forbidding calmness, and closely watched, whilst for his rival there was always a pleasant smile and a welcome word.

The fact was, Mrs. Craggs felt that they were treading along a dangerous path, and thought the only hope of escape from their pecuniary difficulties lay in a marriage between Pancrack and Alice. She was by no means pleased by the chilling coldness with which her daughter received his attentions, and one day, after his departure, she took her severely to task.

Alice sat on the couch busily knitting a stocking, and her mother sat working the sewing machine. For a long time it hummed away at an even pace, then for a few seconds spurted into terrific rapidity, and then stopped with a sudden jerk.

"Alice," she said, straightening the ruffled cloth under the needle, "I wish you would show your appreciation of Mr. Pancrack's attentions a little more warmly."

"Really, ma," said Alice, blushing and knitting swiftly in nervous alarm, "I am sure that I always try to be quite civil to him."

"Civil, yes! But if you knew the position we are in, you would know that mere civility is not enough."

"Whatever do you mean, ma?" And as she asked the question the knitting needles stopped and her eyes widened in sorrowful surprise. Mrs. Craggs turned sharply around toward her, and rapping the table of the sewing machine with her thimble, spoke energetically.

"It means simply this, child, that unless you marry Silas Pancrack your parents may be made homeless outcasts at any moment; but if you act the sensible part you will be a rich man's wife, and we shall be comfortably provided for. So take time and reflect on that." And the imperious woman turned again to her work, while the wheels rattled noisily around.

Alice's knitting had fallen on her lap. Her head was bent to hide the tearful moisture that bedewed her eyes. Sensitive even to weakness, her mother's words had at once saddened and overwhelmed her; for though she had received Pancrack's attention as a matter of course, marriage had never for a moment entered her thoughts. Now that it was so bluntly forced upon her mind, his figure seemed suddenly to grow hideous in her eyes, and by its side appeared the image of Fred Polson, rendered doubly fair by the contrast.

When she thought of all Fred's noble qualities, his patient meekness and willing self-denial, his ardent love of truth, and his generous, if sometimes mistaken enthusiasm—when she thought of these, and compared them with his rival's money-loving selfishness and hardened indifference to the sorrows of others, she thought her position wretched indeed. She felt that for once, if she would follow her highest instinct, she must cast off the noble and cling to the base. For a long time she sat thus,

her work unheeded, her pretty brow ridged with snowy wrinkles, and her little hands clasping each other in convulsive instinct, a spiritual war raging within her.

Selfishness said, "Heed not thy parent's words, but believe that the better part is to follow the promptings of thine own heart. Mingle not with the base and selfish, lest it also contaminate thee, but choose rather thy soul's desire for his happiness and thine own."

Unselfishness replied, "Deny thyself for the love thou bearest thy father and mother. Cast off thy selfish desires, and sacrifice thine earthly happiness for that holier joy which shall last with thee through endless eternity."

And these latter—as with noble natures such thoughts ever will—decided that inward contest; for deep in the inmost soul of humanity is hidden the worship of the suffering and the sorrowful. Not toward him who is clothed in purple and fares sumptuously, nor toward him who with cap and bells jingles his jests or plies his sarcasms in the ears of the laughing crowd, does human homage turn, but it bends in reverence to the head crowned with thorns, and the hands nailed upon the cross. It follows, ready to do battle against infidel or idolater, the form of the humble-hearted Mahomet, who, whilst leading his countless hosts, yet clouts his own cloak and mends his own shoe. It has canonized in every age "the noble army of martyrs" who have ended lives of unselfishness and suffering in smoke and blood, that their torturers might have light.

Some spark of this feeling it was (fanned undoubtedly by her mother's words) that led Alice to choose what was for her the thorny path. The thought of the advantages she might gain by sharing Pancrack's wealth never for a moment influenced her; for in their possible union she only foresaw for herself a life of duty unwarmed by a spark of love. She made up her mind that henceforth she would endeavor to receive her miserly suitor with a certain show of welcome, which, hateful though it seemed to her, she deemed also a fitting part of the domestic martyrdom she had so unselfishly undertaken.

In carrying out this intention, however, she was quite unaware of the birth her action was giving to the monster Rumor.

People did not fail to mark the smooth constancy of Pancrack's addresses, nor the apparently welcome manner in which they were received, and before long whispers of an engagement began to grow rife in the settlement. But Rumor is never content with the small possibility at the fountain-head. She distorts and exaggerates till all likeness of truth is swallowed in gross caricature. So the engagement soon swelled into an actual wedding in the tattle of the neighborhood, and the obliging gossipers even went so far as to arrange the date and choose attendants and bridesmaids.

This story, in all its exaggerated details, soon reached the Dysart household, and was naturally eagerly poured by the talkers into the sorrowful ears of Fred Polson.

Here was fuel for his misery indeed; and though his belief was enveined with some qualms of doubt, it was yet sufficient to plunge him a little deeper in that gulf of despond into which, of late, he had fallen. He became more than ever reserved and dreamy, toiling in bitterness of spirit through the day, and when his work was done roaming in moody and solitary rambles to that anywhere or nowhere which is the goal of the disappointed lover. His altered mood naturally called forth a few remarks from his fellow-boarders.

"Why," said Mr. Longstreet, "the man's completely crazy, or he must be meditating the murder of his rival or somebody."

"And now that you speak of it," remarked Mr. Fane, shrugging his shoulders, "I was thinking myself that the fellah reminded me of the ghost of a suicide coming back to haunt him."

"Poor, dear young man," said Mrs. Tomson, with a sigh, "It's that there do!lorooks that he's got. And he'll ketch cold besides if he rambles so much o' nights. Deary me, why don't he let me put a mustard poultice on his back?"



Why did Mrs. Bant smile so bitterly on hearing these trifling remarks? And why did Silas Pancrack so industriously jot them all down in his pocket-book?

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE SHADOWS IN THE SMITHY.

FOR a time we must beg the reader to turn with us once again to the little smithy among the marshes and the hills.

In the cold, dark autumn evenings the forge groans and roars, while the light of lurid fires bursts through crevices in the walls, to expire in the moaning darkness all around. And the chill wind creeps over those green-clotted pools, and rattles the dry reeds around them, and whispers through the brown tufted grass, and creeps along the side of that weird-looking structure, and flaps its blackened paper shreds with a strangely dreary sound. But the door is fastened close, and inside the flame flares up with red and cheerful glow, as the smith with bare arms and uncovered head sweats at his evening toil.

In these dark evenings, too, strange figures may be seen creeping ghost-like through the misty dusk—outside trailing themselves like monstrous things generated by the night, but metamorphosed into human beings in the forge's sparkling glare. The smith will pause from his toil to speak to some of these; and, as the flaccid bellows sink and resign their breath, and the fire flickers down to blue and twinkling jets, their whispers seem to mingle with the night wind. And in that misty light—which yet seems half of darkness—the giant shadows of the heads of the whisperers nod laughingly on the sooty walls. And he who watched those nodding shades might have heard the stealthy opening of a door, and then would come a silent slippered footstep, and, behold, on the farther end of the smithy, appeared another shadow which—magnified, distorted and restless as it was—yet



appeared like that of a woman, gaunt and bent with age. One lean, long finger on the wall is raised, flickering threateningly in that weird light, and her head is bowed as if listening—listening.

But soon the whispering ceases, the big nodding heads on the wall are drawn apart, the shadow of the old woman slowly disappears, the smithy door admits a gust of cold and darkness, and the human visitant has passed again into the blackness to be transformed once more into some strange goblin of the night.

Then once more the fire blazes up cheerfully, the bellows groan and snort behind it, the sparks fly, the shadows are chased away, and the smith resumes his toil. Like the clanging of a bell, rung by some huge gnome or sprite, the ring of his hammer goes out into the night as he beats on the hissing iron. How it glows as he turns it over! Now with an angry spit at the touch of the hammer, it belches a glowing circle of living sparks of fire. Bang! bang! Spit! spit! With ringing, monotonous rhythm the work goes on.

But see, the smith pauses; and with hand resting on his hammer and neck outstretched, he looks toward the door, for a low, rapping sound has disturbed the mighty poetry of his toil. For a moment he listens thus, and the sound is repeated. Laying down his tools, he wipes his hands on his apron, and walking forward, opens the door. To his surprise, the smithy light plays over a slim female figure, closely robed in a grey cloak, the upper part of the face hidden by a veil, and the lower features concealed by a woollen muffler.

"Can I see the Dame O'Neil?" in clear, silvery tones.

"With plisure, mum. Just come this way, if ye plase;" and Gorman, all obsequious, led the unwonted visitor to the door leading into the house.

"Ye'll foind the deem in there, mum," he said, holding open the door.

"Thank you." And with a slight bow the lady passed into the house, and Gorman closed the door.

But he by no means meant thereby to exclude himself

from a knowledge of the stranger's interview with his mother, for it was his nature to pry into every mystery that happened to cross his path; and such an unusual occurrence as the visit of a strange lady at that time naturally whetted his curiosity.

His one eye—preternaturally sharpened by double service—seemed as if specially designed by nature for bombarding key-holes; and in the present instance he lost no time in pressing it into its favorite usage, and this is what he saw and heard:

When the strange lady entered, the old woman sat by the fire with her chin on her hand, gazing into the glowing embers. No light, except such as came from the open stove-front, illuminated the place, and this, falling in red glares and flickering shadows over the old witch's leather-brown wrinkled face, and dirty, dark-grey hair, clothed her in a weird and grisly glamor. All around her, however, was homely and peaceful. A huge black cat lay purring at her feet, and an old clock behind her told out the time with a dismal ticking, like the cracking of human joints.

The stranger, as she entered, noted all these things instantly, and surveyed the littered, unswept floor with a look of feminine disgust. The old woman did not seem to be aware of her presence and, advancing quietly, the lady touched her gently on the shoulder.

With a start in her limbs and a curse upon her lips, the old hag looked up; but on seeing the stranger she immediately composed herself, and rising to her feet, bowed respectfully and said:

"Beg yer pardin, marm. Take a sate on that there box."

And then, as the lady remained standing, she moved toward her, and whispered in her querulous, wizard tones—

"Is there anything I can do for you, my dearie?"

The stranger hesitated for a moment, and seemed to be scanning the old witch through her veil, and then she said in clear, unshaken tones:

"I came to see you because I have heard that you are

skilful in dealing with affairs of love and bringing them to such an issue as your clients desire."

The old woman lifted a corner of her upper lip and exposed the one wolfish fang which remained in her head—a grimace she intended for a smile.

"Ay, ay, my dearie! If that's yer throuble, I think that I can help ye."

"I don't require your help," said the lady, scornfully. "It is a friend whom I wish to save from being inveigled into a marriage that will make her unhappy."

"Oh, that's it, is it, my dear? Then sit ye down and tell me all about it."

With a shrug of disgust the stranger seated herself on a trunk by the old woman's side, and for a time they whispered together in tones so low that Gorman, listening at the key-hole, could only catch now and then a stray unintelligible word; but by the wicked expression of his mother's face as the firelight flickered over it, he knew that the conference boded trouble for someone. He noticed also that the stranger would place a trembling hand on the old hag's arm at times, and once, when she lifted her veil for a second to whisper in the witch's ear, he saw the dancing fire light up a face white with terror and hate.

"And," he caught their whispers, "show me some way in which I can do it without their knowledge."

"Ay, ay, my leedy," croaked the old crone; "an' I think I can give ye a dhrink that'll make him of another mind if ye'll only give it him quiet."

The old woman rose, and after lighting at the fire a splinter of dry wood to be used as a torch, she tottered over to the mysterious iron-bound box which contained the magical appliances of her mystic art.

"Sit ye still there, my dearie," she said, as the stranger seemed about to rise, "an' I'll soon foind ye the potion."

A huge key grated in the wards, and as it unlocked, the lid was thrust up a few inches by the pressure of the rubbish stored within. The old woman lifted it back, and then, holding the torch aloft in her left hand, began to

rummage among its ghastly contents. She took out two shroud-like garments, yellow with age; a grinning human skull; two white, dry bones which wondrously resembled human joints; two dried snake-skins, a wolf's jaw, an owl's beak, a pig's eye, a toad's leg, a bundle of herbs tied up in a raven's wing, and several mysterious-looking phials, one of which she selected for her present purpose.

"Here ye are, my dearie," she said, turning around with a little black bottle in her claw. "Here's the philther that'll—An' phwativer is the matter wid ye?"

The latter exclamation was caused by seeing her visitor lying in a faint on the chest on which she had been seated. She lay on her side, her hands hanging helplessly down; her short-drawn breathing, fluttering the flimsy veil over her face, was the only sign of life she gave. That weird-looking room with the fitful firelight flashing amid its darkness; the ogre-like figure of that old hag as the smoky torchlight fell upon her coarse, grey locks; the sinister gleam of her solitary fang, and, above all, the ghastly contents of her trunk of mysteries, had proved too much for the lady's already highly-wrought nerves.

Those yellow shrouds had dazed her eyes, the rattling bones cracked in her ears, and that skull, grinning mockingly at her when the firelight played upon it, had stolen away sense and feeling. For a moment her brain had swum in a giddy chaos—the old hag was dressing her in a shroud, the bones were crossed upon her breast, the skull pressed a chilling kiss upon her lips, the owl's beak pecked at her eyes, the raven's wing brushed her cheek—and then, with a low, inaudible groan, she had fainted away.

The old woman walked slowly toward her, and without hesitation lifted her veil. The face thus revealed was sharp in outline and deadly white. As Gorman, through the key-hole, saw the firelight flash over it, he consumed a low chuckle of triumph.

"And, be jabbers! ye're no shtranger to me," he muttered to himself.

But his mother, at least, did not seem to recognize her, for, looking into her face, she only said, contemptuously—

"Feented away, poor fool, have ye? Thin it's mesilf as 'll soon bring ye round agin."

So saying, she extracted from her medical collection three stalks of some dried herb, and the leafy ends of these she thrust into the glowing embers. She withdrew them in a steaming smoulder, filling the room with a pungent, disagreeable odor. Holding the smouldering leaves under the stranger's nose, the old woman watched her face keenly. Soon the color began to return, and she opened her eyes. Her lips parted, her breath came freely, and she lifted up her head.

"Dear me! How is this? What has happened?" she asked.

"Just a bit of a feent, my leedy; but ye're all right now."

The woman's eyes roved curiously around the room, and again alighted on the weird litter against the trunk.

"Oh, I remember now," she said. "Let me get away from this place at once."

She rose to her feet and drew down her veil, but before she could move the old hag's yellow, bony hand was laid upon her arm, a gleaming fang flashed on her eyes, and the croaking whisper hissed through her ears:

"Not quite so fast, my dearie. Ye're forgetting phwhat ye came for. Take this wid ye, an' use it as I tell ye"; and thrusting a small vial into the stranger's pocket she whispered a few words under her breath. The lady shuddered and nodded, and taking out her purse dropped a few green-gleaming bills into the old witch's hungry claw, and then moved toward the door.

As she passed through the shop, Gorman was innocently blowing his bellows and poking his fire, but he politely left his occupation to usher her through the door. He also untied the pony which had stood patiently waiting outside, helped her into the knotty side-saddle, and bade her a civil good-night.

For a time he stood watching her as she rode away—a dark speck in the thickening night-mist, which a newly-risen moon had transformed into rolling masses of molten

silver. Then, returning to his shop he laid away his tools, locked the door, and banked the fire for the night. And the old hag munched and mumbled to herself as she tumbled into her mysterious trunk the ghastly relics of an art decayed.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### ARRANGING FOR A HUNT.

"HURRAH for a deer-hunt, you fellows! A herd was seen in the valley yesterday."

With these words, loudly and volubly uttered, Mr. Longstreet burst on the members of the Dysart household as they were enjoying an after-dinner rest.

Mr. Dysart sat at the table looking over a file of dusty papers. Time had not yet erased from his face the mark of sadness imprinted there by his little daughter's death, but in close application to business he was striving to bury the memory of his sorrow.

Mrs. Bant was working cunning figures in embroidery on a silk pattern, and at the same time exchanging complimentary nonsense with Silas Pancrack, who, under pretext of business, had called at that hour as was often his wont.

Poor, moody Fred Polson sat by the window reading "Childe Harold," and Mr. Fane lay on the lounge shrugging his shoulders and smoking his meerschaum. On hearing Mr. Longstreet's excited declaration, the latter swung his feet to the floor and sat up.

"You don't say so! Who told you?"

"Why, O'Neil, the blacksmith; and he had seen a man who had crossed the valley this morning and seen six of them grazing on the flat this side the river."

"Oh, it was O'Neil told you, was it?" said Mr. Dysart, looking up from his papers. "Then I'm afraid you can't depend on its being altogether true."

"Still you know," said Mr. Fane, sagely shaking his head, "it's worth looking after. I will go and get my rifle and cartridges, and we will start out at once."

"But not in such a pell-mell fashion," said Mr. Longstreet, who was a more methodical sportsman. "Let us go in some order. They were seen near the mouth of Bend-arm creek, so that we two can beat along the valley, and Fred can hunt down the creek toward the river—that is, if he'll go. What do you say, old bookworm?"

"Eh! What's that?" said Fred, looking up with a start. "What is it you are talking about, anyhow?" for his love-lorn sympathy had been so deeply engrossed by the mournful verse of Byron that he had not heard a word of their conversation.

Mr. Longstreet explained to him their project, and he, grasping eagerly at any prospect of excitement, readily consented to join them. The passion for slaying fellow-creatures is always strong in the human breast, as is manifested by the eagerness with which they fly to the battle or the chase; and our sportsmen were soon hotly and eagerly discussing the chances of the hunt.

After the entrance of Mr. Longstreet, Mr. Silas Paucrack had relaxed his vigilant attention to Mrs. Bant and divided it with the sportsmen. He occupied his favorite position—his right leg crossed over his left, so that the raised bell-bottom of his trouser-leg exposed to view the whole of a patent-leather shoe; his chair evenly balanced on its two hind legs; his left hand on the back of his sandy head, and the jewelled fingers of his right toying with his flashy watch-chain. As he sat thus, listening to the sporting trio, the rocking of his balanced chair increased to an agitated pace, and the sarcasm deepened in the smile which continually played over the crooked symmetry of his regularly irregular features; and he, at the same time, acutely fermented their excitement by a fitting sentence thrown in at timely intervals.

But, alas! they were doomed to disappointment; for while they were yet talking and contriving, Mr. Dysart, whose attention had been distracted by the calculations



in which he was engrossed, looked up with a face expressive of something suddenly remembered.

"Oh, by the way, young men," he said, "I am sorry to have to disappoint you; but I am afraid you will have to postpone your hunt for a time, for you know the threshers are coming this afternoon, and we must have all hands to help."

These words passed over the hearts of the hunters like a cloud obscuring the sun. The shadow of gloom settled on their foreheads, and sad silence knit their tongues. When in company Silas Pancrack hated silence, and he was the first to break the present spell.

"Well," he said, "I suppose it can't be helped; but can't you let your arrangements stand over till Saturday? All the people around are busy either stacking their grain or threshing just now, so that the deer are not likely to be disturbed in the meantime."

"Yes, I suppose we must let it go till then," said Fred, with a sigh. He did not like to agree with Silas Pancrack, but he felt that truth compelled him to do so in this instance.

"Well, I hope that nobody shoots them or scares them away," said Mr. Fane, tugging at his mustache and twisting his neck in nervous agitation.

Mr. Longstreet was sulky and did not speak at all, but it was tacitly understood that he agreed to the Saturday adjournment; and so the matter ended.

A strange man was that Silas Pancrack, for when he passed beyond sight of Mr. Dysart's house that day, he rubbed his hard, red hands together with a sound like the grating of two rasps, and chuckled loud and long:

"Ha, ha! Ha, ha! The fog-brained blockheads! Fortune favors the cute, and all things work together for the good of him that loves—money. O Laston, sweet Laston! How fair are thy woods and streams! Truly this heart is turning to gold; and when I survey thy broad domain and call it mine, perhaps it will tinkle in a merry march against my silvery ribs."

And thus Silas Pancrack, in Midas-like exultation,

chuckled on his homeward way, whilst Fred Polson sweated under the dusty straw-carriers as they poured over him a merciless and never-ceasing stream of straw, chaff and dust. Half-buried in the straw which tumbled around him, his eyes ached and watered with the smarting stings of the specks of dust and chaff. The rubbish blocked up his ears and nostrils, and when he opened his mouth to get relief, it came crowding into his throat and almost stifled him ; but he worked on without complaint. Mr. Longstreet was sulkily helping to lift sacks of wheat into the wagons, as it came pouring out of the machine ; and where the laboring engine puffed, grunted, and jerked backward and forward, under a cloud of steam and smoke, Mr. Fane might be seen, all grimy with smoke and sweat, poking forkfuls of straw into the voracious and insatiate fire.

And so, amid the roar of steam, the rattle and hum of the howling thresher—where the sheaves were being torn by its humming teeth, where the tossed and shaken straw was vomited from its noisy interior, where it spat the rattling grain into the bushels—men were sweating and toiling through the weary afternoon, that beings of the Pancrack stripe might live in tyranny and ease.

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A SHADOWY CONFERENCE.

AGAIN, in the dusky evening of that same day, dark shadows were nodding on the walls of the lonely smithy in the western wilderness. The forge is silent, the bellows limp and unblown, and only a livid jet of flame twinkles where the fire is wont to roar. Over this smouldering jet a pair of wrinkled brown hands are he'd, and at times rubbed impatiently together as if they would strike the feeble heat into a more vivifying warmth. The blue light and the twinkling shadows, playing lambently over the

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supple form of the man by the forge, render the lean, coppery face—cunning and cruel in expression—more hideous still. The leather-sheathed hunting-knife, and the two bison horns, containing powder and shot, hanging from his buckskin belt, proclaim the Indian hunter. Sometimes he turns and looks with greedy, avaricious eyes on the two men in conference by the anvil, and then for a while he gazes at the shadows on the wall with a changed and reverent expression. For this man is yet a child in soul, and though he regards the men with some contempt as mere tools to glut his avarice, the shadows to him are full of a vague and fearful mystery. Symbols of the Great Spirit they seem—things without flesh or substance—which shrink not at the touch, yet feel no pain, which daily dog our feet with shade; ever-present emblems of death, only disappearing with us into the silent grave. But he is disturbed in these wandering musings by the voice of one of the shadow-makers addressed to him.

“And you wish to return to your own people—your own tribe?”

A dignified bow of assent, accompanied by a guttural “Yes,” was the reply.

“Do as I wish you to, and I promise to get you a pass that will restore you to your people without difficulty.”

The black eyes glitter with a pleased light.

“What does the white man want of me?”

“Come nearer and you shall hear.”

The Indian cast a suspicious look toward the burnished barrels of his gun—where it was reared by the forge, glimmering fitfully in the twinkling light—and then moved nearer to the others on toes as soft and treacherous as those of a cat. The smith leans in a hearing attitude with his black hands resting upon the anvil. The head of his fellow-whisperer is bent toward him, and a supple, brown finger is lifted to a small brown ear as the Indian listens attentively. Thus three huge shadows nod in distorted proximity on the gloomy walls, and the tall, listening shade of a gaunt old woman towers like a living malediction above them all. As the dusky conference

proceeded a name was constantly mentioned which caused the Indian's eyes to flash with anger and hatred.

"Yah, I will do it all most willing," he said at last. "And to-morrow night come I will make ready."

The shadow of the old woman lowered ominously on the wall, and violently shook a scraggy finger of ghostly length, and then withdrew. Soon the conference ended, and the shadow-makers separated. One, as he rode away, chuckled, "All goes well." Another, as he glided through the maze of black, still pools, with their fringes of tall dry reeds quivering like wrath-stirred harp-strings in the night wind, pressed his cruel lips together till the blood fled from them in the memory of bitter hate. The third let himself down through a secret trap in the floor of his shop into a dank, reeking cell—foul with nauseous fumes—where the vapor was clinging in yellow blotches to the wall, and casks of all sizes were heaped on a littered floor; and from one of these he drank to (and of) the vile trinity he worshipped: "Mischief, Money and Whiskey."

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### COURTEOUS MRS. BANT.

#### DISSIMULATION!

"It protects me from disagreement with others' views; it blunts the keen-edged arrows of feminine sarcasm; it is my shield against the amorous attacks of insidious man; it is the weapon with which I lay bare my enemies' intentions, and lay waste their sagest plans. What its sting is to the bee, what its wing is to the bird, is this to me. With it I am powerful in the battles I wage; without it I am helpless as the child I bear."

That is a woman's excuse.

"Mrs. Tomson, I am going out for a short visit to a particular friend. Whilst I am away would you please look after little Georgie, and rock him in the cradle if he

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is inclined to be cross. And be sure not to burn the cake I've put in the oven."

"Oh, yes, mum, I'll look after Georgie, the sweet little dear; no fear as *he'll* be cross. And the cake's beginnin' to rise beautiful, mum."

"Thank you." And Mrs. Bant, dressed in a riding habit, passed through the kitchen door.

"Lor' bless me," grumbled Mrs. Tomson, to herself, "I wish she wouldn't go away an' leave me wi' that little varmint o' hers. He's the peskiest, screamiest little lump as ever cut teeth. An' she'll find fault with that cake if it aint light; and I do always have to give her cakes to Anthony to soak for his cats, and make some more myself and pretend they are hers to please her. What a indigestionatin' worrit she is."

And good-natured but sorely tried Mrs. Tomson began to make another cake, and sometimes shout a soothing word to Master Georgie, who, from his couch in the next room, kept uttering now and then a tearful, premonitory plaint.

Mrs. Bant walked to the farm to get her pony, but as the men were still busy with the threshing, she found nobody there but the cook. He, however, though he uttered many gruff grunts about being busy, was kind enough to lead forth and saddle her beast for her.

She thanked him, mounted into the saddle, and scampered away over the rustling prairie grass.

It was a cool "fall" day, roofed by a clouded sky broken by gleams of blue; and as Mrs. Bant rode fast in the face of the chilly breeze which swept out of the river valley, a red spot appeared on either cheek, which, in that unusual place, reminded one of two drops of blood spilt on a snowball from its victim's stricken nose. Her spirits rose with the scampering speed, and when she had tied her pony to a post in the Crags' farm-yard, and knocked at the door, the smile with which she greeted the astonished Mrs. Crags was not altogether unreal.

Mrs. Bant had nothing more than a nodding acquaintance with Mrs. Crags. They had met and exchanged

formal salutations at balls, church meetings, and different public assemblies; but Mrs. Bant usually carried her head too high to allow an ordinary farmer's wife to venture on closer intimacy, and therefore it was with no little surprise that Mrs. Cragg beheld her standing at her door attired in a riding habit, a smile on her face, and a short switch in her hand.

"What!" she exclaimed. "You, Mrs. Bant! Why, who would have thought—" Then suddenly recollecting herself she subdued her surprise into a forced smile, and added in a tone of apologetic cordiality: "I beg your pardon, but it is so seldom that I have the pleasure of seeing you here. Pray come in and sit down awhile."

"Thank you, I will," said Mrs. Bant. And holding up her riding skirt in her left hand she followed Mrs. Cragg into the house. She wished to propitiate Mrs. Cragg, and knowing enough of woman nature to be aware that a lady does not like to have the disorder of her kitchen intruded on at an unforeseen hour, she had taken the precaution to knock at the front door, so that Mrs. Cragg ushered her straight into the parlor.

"Yes," said the widow, as with charming ease she seated herself in a chair, "I fear that I am a very rare visitor; and even when I come it is only to trouble you by begging favors. I heard that—dear me, what a charming room!"

As she supplemented these exclamations by a look of admiring ecstasy at the really comfortable furnishing of the room, Mrs. Cragg, standing with one hand resting on a small mahogany table, was evidently pleased with the compliment; for she smiled and bowed.

"Yes," she said, "we have tried to make it pretty and comfortable. It is my daughter's favorite retiring place."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Bant. "But where is your daughter, Mrs. Cragg? It was really her I wished to see; for I heard that she had some beautiful patterns of embroidery, and as I am now engaged in embroidery, I wished to see if I could borrow some."

"She is upstairs at present," said Mrs. Cragg, "but will



be down presently. I have no doubt that she could lend you her patterns. I will go and call her."

"Oh, no hurry! no hurry! I can wait."

But with the obliging disregard which usually follows such entreaties, Mrs. Craggs went into the passage and called out:

"Alice, make haste down. There is a lady wishes to see you."

"All right, mother. Coming in a minute."

When Mrs. Bant first knocked at the door, Alice had been busy scouring a milk tin, but on hearing the knock she rushed (as is the custom of young ladies at the alarm of a stranger's approach) upstairs into her armory to change her dress. After a quarter of an hour's bustle and confusion she came softly down stairs, fully accoutred in cleanliness and beauty, and shyly turned the knob of the parlor door.

As she nervously entered, Mrs. Bant rose from her seat to greet her, and pressing both her hands in enthusiastic cordiality exclaimed:

"My dear Miss Craggs, how beautiful you look! It is a pleasure to see you. Come, sit by my side; I have something to beg of you."

Alice, overwhelmed by these flatteries from a person who was little better than a stranger to her, was confused for the time into utter silence, but blushing allowed herself to be led to a seat by Mrs. Bant's side.

Under the pressure of that lady's questions and observations her tongue soon loosened, and the current of talk flowed freely. She had by no means liked Mrs. Bant's melodramatic reception of her at first; but her weakness for being on amiable terms with everyone soon overcame her aversion, and in a few moments she was chatting in a most friendly manner on feminine affairs with the subtle and honey-tongued widow.

Whilst they were thus amicably engaged the door opened and Mr. Silas Pancrack came in. On seeing Mrs. Bant his eyes dropped in confusion, and he drew back a step.

"Er—excuse me, ladies. I was not aware—that is—"



"Oh, never mind, Mr. Pancrack," said Mrs. Cragg, "take a chair, and make yourself at home with us."

The respite that this little speech afforded gave Pancrack time to collect himself, and he immediately resolved on the course he should take. When he entered so suddenly Mrs. Bant's face had flushed as if scorched, but under her icy self-control it withered in a moment into its customary paleness again.

Pancrack moved gently toward them, and with a graceful apology for his intrusion greeted them politely, and seated himself by Alice's side; but though he thus appropriated her, he nevertheless addressed most of his subsequent remarks to Mrs. Bant.

"I suppose," he said, "that your huntsmen are quite ready for the chase to-morrow, Mrs. Bant?"

"I don't know," she replied with a laugh, "but they seem very sullen at being delayed."

"Well, they need be sharp, for I hear that several Indians are coming down to-morrow to look after them, too. The deer have got up into the Bend-arm creek, so that if Fred Polson meets with them (the Indians, I mean) when he is walking down it, he will have to be careful; for they are all well armed."

"Oh, really! you do not think that they would harm anyone, do you?" asked Alice, clasping her hands in nervous anxiety.

Pancrack was rather chagrined by this apparent interest in his rival's movements, but he had sense enough not to show it.

"No," he replied, "I don't suppose they would hurt anyone unless they were first provoked." And then he glided away to another subject.

But though all was outwardly smooth and pleasant among them, Mrs. Bant's heart was tortured by a biting fire of jealousy, and before long she politely declared that she must really return.

"You know," she said in answer to their pressing invitation to remain to tea, "I left little Georgie at home, and he is very fretful just now. I am afraid he may cry himself

into hysterics before I get back. No, thank you—you are very kind, I am sure, but I really cannot stay longer. I will try to make amends for my rudeness by calling some other day."

"But you must not go without the patterns," said Mrs. Crags. "Alice, go and get them."

Alice tripped away up stairs, whilst Pancrack politely volunteered to bring Mrs. Bant's pony to the door, and so the two matrons were left alone. Mrs. Crags led her guest into the passage, and while they were waiting for the return of Pancrack with the pony and Alice with the patterns, Mrs. Bant placed her hand caressingly on the shoulder of her hostess and said with a propitiatory smile:

"Mrs. Crags, your daughter interests me very much, so that I trust you will not think me presumptuous for what I am going to say. I have before now heard Mr. Polson's name coupled with hers, and judging by his moods and actions I can well think him to be deeply in love. Now let me respectfully advise you in your daughter's interest not to discountenance his suit, for really he is an excellent young man in every respect. In morals he is exemplary, in intelligence far above the common; besides this he is gentle-natured, patient and industrious, and to crown all, I have heard on good authority that in four or five years from now he is likely to come into possession of a rich estate in England."

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Crags. "A rich estate in England! I was not aware of that."

"Mr. Polson never speaks of it himself; but I have it on excellent authority, and—but, sh"—(with a nudge)—"your daughter is coming."

Mrs. Bant thanked Alice and her mother very warmly, and eagerly pressed them to return her visit. Then mounting the pony which Pancrack had brought to the door, she kissed her finger-tips with her smiling lips, and rode in a gentle canter away.

"What a charming lady!" said Mrs. Crags, as they stood watching her ride away.

"Isn't she really pleasant?" echoed Alice, with enthusiasm.

A contemptuous smile rested on Silas Pancrack's mouth for a second, and then, after crawling slowly to one side, it slipped suddenly into a wrinkled curve at the corner of his mouth, where it was buried like a chip swallowed by a whirlpool. But he said nothing.

Behind the curtain!

A woman is urging her pony so fiercely over the prairie that tufts of withered grass are spurned upward by his heels, and still the stinging switch is laid on. Her hands are clenched on whip and rein as if paralysis had seized them. Her small white teeth grind like files against each other—her bloodless lips are pressed over them like features turned to stone. Sun, cloud, wind, grass! Why do you not unite your latent powers to purge her of the demon from which she is vainly striving to fly?

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## CHAPTER XX.

### A MIDNIGHT ERRAND.

ON the evening of the day in which happened the events chronicled in the last chapter, as the twilight thickened over the bleak, stone-scabbed hills, and rank clotted marshes that surrounded his lonely home, Gorman O'Neil drew from its shelter, by the side of a low sod building at the back of his smithy, a rickety, creaking, jolty old cart—the gaping cracks in its woodwork and the elongated splits in the spokes looking at him imploringly, as Dives might have looked toward Lazarus when begging for “one drop of water.”

After propping it on a block of wood, he wrenched off the wheels and began to grease the axles with some rancid butter which a customer had given him in lieu of cash payment.

“Yez mustn't be squakin' fur more grase to-night, me darlint,” he muttered, as he plastered the axle with a

pungent composition which smelt strong enough to propel the cart without any other aid.

When he had daubed the inside of the wheels to his satisfaction, he replaced them in high glee.

"And, be jabers!" he said, "they slip over the butther like a gossoon down a slide."

Thus far satisfied, he led out of the stable a beast that looked a fitting companion for the cart. This animal was commonly called a mule, and combined, with the diseases of the horse, the stupidity of the ass. One of the long, ungainly props that served him for legs had a string-halt, and, like his master, he was blind in one eye. His ribs stuck out like the leathern creases in Gorman's bellows when the wind was out, and his brown, prickly hair stood on end like the fur of a fighting cat.

To-night this beast was in an obstinate mood, and in vain did his owner try to back him between the shafts of the cart. He always managed, when thrust back toward it, to steer his hind quarters just outside the shafts, and at best he only condescended to place one leg inside. As this game went on Gorman jerked and fumed, sweat, cursed and kicked—but all in vain. The beast's dignified obstinacy grew more gravely reproachful with every threat, and at last the blacksmith gave up in despair.

"Arrah, you ould fool!" he said, shaking his fist in the mule's long and serious face. "Ye're as stupid as the jackass, the father av ye; but I'll be masther av ye yit, or my neem's not Gorman O'Neil."

He led the beast toward a post near the door of his shop, to which his customers tied their horses, and fastened him to it; then, taking the shafts of the cart in his hands, he drew it forward and hitched it to the mule. This task successfully performed, he brought out from the smithy a large rough tarpaulin and flung it into the cart, and then went into the house to light his pipe and put on his overcoat. He found his mother sitting near the window in the twilight, and with one knee clasped between her hands rocking her body disconsolately to and fro, without moving the chair.

"Ah, Gorman, me son!" she said mournfully, as he entered. "It's at home ye'd betther stay this noight, or avil will surely befall ye."

"Shut up yer lip, an' hide yer tooth, ould woman," said Gorman, impatiently, as he tried to light his pipe with an ember. "How! hu! how! To bleeses wid yer chattherin'; but ye've made me burn a howl in me finger." And he jumped around the room shaking his finger as if a viper had been clinging to it.

"Oh, wirra, wirra, Gorman?" continued the aged Cassandra, after he had calmed down. "But it's worse than a burnt finger ye'll have if ye go out from home to-noight."

"Oh, go on thin wid you!" said Gorman, blowing on his finger and thrusting a large bottle into the pocket of his great coat at the same time. "Do yer think its mesilf as can't look after mesilf? Just you attind to that foire to-night, and lave thim as understands their business to look afther their business." And with this filial and philosophical address, he left his mother whining her croaking prophecies as she rocked in dreary undulations in the chair.

He untied the mule, loosened the reins, mounted into the cart, and gave the beast a lash with the lines.

"Git up, you omadhawn!"

The "omadhawn" jerked up his string-halt leg, and held it poised in a stiff angle in the air as if fastened there with a cord. For a time he remained thus, but under pressure of Gorman's oaths and threats the leg at last dropped slowly down and the other three shambled forward. At first he moved very slowly, but as the stiff leg loosened with exercise he mended his pace and gradually worked up into a jog-trot; but Gorman soon pulled him in again—for what with badger-holes, rocks and sloughs it was a dangerous place to travel in the thickening night, and cautiously he threaded his way over the bare, gritty hills and between the sullen, reed-fenced marshes. A silence like the shadow of death lay over the land. No bird sang, no insect chirped, and even the very frogs had forgotten to

croak. Silent were the black clouds above, and silent was the dumb earth below ; while the tramp of the mule's hoofs, magnified by this awful stillness, sounded in Gorman's ears like the frightened heart of nature beating in the black bosom of the night.

Darkness was descending thick and dismal, and the smith's heart, never very courageous, began to sink within him, till he half repented that he had not taken his mother's advice and stayed at home. But he smelt mischief before him, and as the needle moves toward the loadstone, so he drew toward that. Soon, too, the jolting of his cart ceased, and it began to run more smoothly. This revived him not a little, for he knew that he was on a well-beaten trail at last, and there was very little danger of losing his way.

So he jogged easily along through the gathering darkness till they came to the top of the hill leading down into the river valley, and here Gorman's heart began again to fail him. Cautiously the mule stepped down the steep and crooked path, winding between the huge trees, to the naked branches of which a few yellow leaves yet clung desperately. Like giant sentries the boles loomed through the misty darkness, standing in regular order by the side of the road, and overhead the great boughs stretched to meet like the hands of two armies of gigantic skeletons striving to clasp each other. As they passed between these menacing rows the mule's cautious footsteps, though falling with a sound no louder than that of raindrops, seemed to make strange, whispering echoes among the silent trees.

Suddenly the animal stopped still on a piece of level ground, and as the echo of his footsteps ceased, intensest silence fell like a thick mantle over the forest. Gorman's heart was beating fast ; he could not find courage to awaken the echoes by urging the mule along. For a moment they stood thus, no sound stirring save the occasional falling of a leaf and the frightened breathing of man and beast.

"An' be jabbers," thought Gorman, "it's well I gave the



whales a good latherin' o' grase, for the divil's own noise would they have made else."

As he thought thus the mule's ears dropped on its neck, it raised its mouth on high, and a loud "Hee-haw! Hee-haw!" went echoing through the forest.

Fancy yourself, my reader, sitting silently conning these lines in the quiet of your home, when suddenly, swift as an eagle descends on its prey, the thickest darkness falls around you and your ears are deafened by the crackling of unnumbered thunder-peals—fancy this, and even then you can form no conception of the terror that seized Gorman O'Neil at the sound of that mule's startling, if familiar, cry. He jumped up, grasping the sides of the cart, his limbs shaking with terror, and his hair on end. For some time he crouched quaking thus, unable to speak; but when his fear had calmed sufficiently to allow his anger to rise, he vented it timorously on his refractory mule.

"May the divil hamsthring ye for an ould fool!" he shouted under his breath. "Do yez want to split me ears wid yer infernal howlin'? Pwhy, its ikkerin' yet. Get along wid ye, ye stiff-legged spalpeen."

As the animal had now recovered from the twitch of stringhalt which had stayed it for the time, it moved reluctantly forward in response to his urging.

Without further mishap they reached the bottom of the hill, and emerging from the woods, passed over the raised road along the marshy flats and rumbled across the wooden bridge that spanned the turbid river. Then for a mile or two they travelled over a rough trail leading along the valley bottom, and twisting about with the curves of the river by the side of which it ran.

After journeying for some time along a rutty road, lined with clumps of shrub and long, dead grass, a number of twinkling lights in the distance broke on his view.

"Faith, thim same must be the loights of the Indian resarve," muttered Gorman, standing up in his cart and casting his one-eyed glance eagerly over them. "But where's the two lights that Bearfoot was to hang out as a signal? Niver a wink can I see av wan."



For some time he looked for the two lights in vain, but as he drew nearer he saw them gleaming like twin stars not far from the river side. With some difficulty he pulled his mule off the beaten track, and drove over the whispering grass straight toward them. As they burned larger and stronger on his sight he saw that one shone through a small, dirty window, and the other was a lantern hung over a rude door, made of rough boards and swung on hinges of deerskin. Bones, chips, bacon-rinds and tea-leaves were strewn in front of the door, lying as they had been ejected by the occupant of the hut.

Gorman sprang from the cart, and leading the mule over the slippery rubbish, knocked at the door with one hand whilst still holding the bridle with the other.

Within a dog barked fiercely and sprang against the door with a force that made it rattle. Gorman jumped back in alarm, whilst a hoarse Indian voice shouted at the dog, and quietened it. Then the door was opened slowly, and the Indian face that we saw in the smithy peered cautiously through.

"Ah, Smokeface! It is you," he said. "I have got all things ready you wanted. I have made the people scared by my stories, and the woman is alone with the dead. Wait a bit and I will lead you there."

"Thin it's hurryin' ye must be, my hearty, for the baste is full of ristlessness."

The Indian grunted "Ugh," placed on his head a tall black hat, put out the light and wrapped a blanket around him (for the night grew chilly), and bidding his dog stay behind, quietly closed the door.

"Follow me, Smokeface. I will walk."

He placed himself before the mule and glided stealthily ahead—a strange, semi-civilized figure moving through the darkness—his head o'ertopped with a tall, shining European hat, and his feet shod in beaded moccasins; his machine-made cottonade clothing swathed in the rough woollen blanket which had been his forefathers' chief defence against wind and weather. As he moved in the darkness some paces ahead, all that was visible of him to

Gorman's crooked eye was the white blanket lifted by the light wind which had arisen, and this he followed as the northward-steering sailor follows the polar star. They seemed to be drawing very near to the river, for Gorman could hear its water lapping and gurgling in the darkness. Nothing of it, however, could he see, for they had entered on a rough road cut out between numberless wands of tall, bending willows which seemed to sigh and nod in gentle grief as the night wind stirred their leafless branches. For some twenty yards or more they passed through these dark, waving shadows, and then emerged into a smooth-turfed, irregular-shaped opening, in which they beheld a light gleaming in yellow dimness through a small window a short distance away.

The Indian stopped, turned around, and motioning to Gorman to halt, came to the side of the cart, and laying his brown finger on his hard, thin lips, said, in a low voice :

"This is the place, Smokeface. Make fast your mule to that tree, and then we will go in together."

"Right yez are," said Gorman. And sliding cautiously from the cart, he led the beast to the tree his guide had pointed out, and there, with trembling hands, he tied it, and then slipped back to Bearfoot's side.

"Follow me. Come quietly," said the Indian. And with a cat-like step he glided toward the door.

The hut was built so near the river that one end actually jutted out over the stream. In many places the rain had washed off the plaster between the logs, and the light was gleaming through every hole, so that in the distance it looked like a black square flecked with faint stars, whilst amongst them the little window, spotted and yellow, resembled an old horn-lantern spread out flat, and the doorway was covered only by a coarse blanket which lifted and swayed on the breeze. The Indian, motioning to Gorman to follow, raised it softly and stepped inside.

It was a mean, dismal-looking place—a fit habitation for bats and lizards, rather than a human dwelling-place. From the rough logs which composed the wall the bark

had been stripped in places, whilst in others it clung loosely. The sides were blotched by clumps of poisonous fungus, spattered here and there like patches of loathsome spawn. The straw which covered the roof was black with smoke and age; and the bare, black earth that made up the floor was relieved only by tufts of dry grass in the corners, which had been allowed to grow and wither there. On the river side the water had washed away the earth from beneath the wall, leaving an ugly gaping crevice, through which they could see the yellow river flecked by great round patches of hurrying foam swirling below; for there was a whirlpool in that spot, and its choking gurgle sounded on their ears like the rattle in the throat of a drowning man. The whole scene was rendered doubly dismal by the flickering, uncertain light which came from a small fire of sticks burning in the middle of the floor.

But, though all these things were weird and horrifying to look upon, far more saddening was the sight of the human forms that dreary place contained. On one side of the hut, stretched on a bed of willows and withered leaves, lay the figure of an Indian huntsman cold in death. He was dressed in all the panoply of the chase and war. His cheek and nose and chin were dashed with glowing vermilion spots. Over his bare breast mystical figures had been wrought in spots of blue, and still over his left arm was the blanket held like a shield, and his right hand yet grasped the tomahawk, whilst his rifle was lying by his side. From his knees to his feet ran the jagged yet graceful fringes of his buckskin leggings; and his brightly beaded moccasins glimmered in the firelight in many-tinted glows.

His was a noble, soulless figure lying there surrounded by his instruments of war and the pots and pans which were destined to go with him to the grave, to serve him on his long, last journey to the land of the hereafter. By his side a woman was seated on the ground, her elbows resting on her knees, and with face buried in her hands. Her long, coarse black hair lay in loose strands over her shoulders, and partly concealed the hands

clasped over her face. Under the ragged and gaudy-colored dress her lean frame shook in painful deep-drawn sobs, interspersed by snatches of a mournful dirge which, roughly translated, ran :

“ In the morn when leaves were falling  
Homeward from the chase they bore him,  
With his gun and knives and weapons  
Lying all unused around him,  
And the sun that shone upon them  
Then within the black clouds hid him,  
Made the sky to weep and murmur  
For the red brave who had fallen ;  
And the grass they trod beneath them  
To the mourners sadly whispered :  
' He no more will tread above us,  
He no more will rest upon us,'  
To the land of ghosts they bore him  
To the hunting-grounds of shadows.”

How much longer these sadly broken lines and the sobs that rhymed them might have continued, it were hard to say ; but at this point Bearfoot, who had grown tired of waiting, came softly forward and touched her lightly. So deeply locked in her grief was the mourner, that she heard him not nor felt his touch, but still continued—

“ When the snow lies thick above you,  
In the moons of frost before us,  
I will come to you, my loved one.”

By a wearied diminuendo her sobs had gradually worn down to the very softest of sighs, and her voice had become little more than a whisper. Probably she would soon have ceased altogether, but Bearfoot, rudely impatient, would not wait. Grasping her shoulder he shook her roughly. Like a black slumberous cloud which suddenly opens and darts out flashes of fire, that woman's hands dropped from her face, and she sprang to her feet sweeping the wild coarse hair from her features. With black eyes flashing she turned on the Sioux, who cautiously retreated a few paces toward the wall of the hut.

“ Go away !” she screamed in the Indian dialect, as she

gesticulated wildly. "You touch his body and I will kill you—kill you like this."

And snatching a knife from the dead brave's belt she stabbed viciously through the air.

"Be quiet, squaw," said Bearfoot, holding up his arm in alarm. "Nobody will hurt you or touch him. I have just brought with me a white medicine-man who will cure you of all your sorrows, and make you dance with joy." A shade of doubt darkened the woman's sharp, shrivelled features and her fingers tightened suspiciously on the haft of the knife.

"You lie," she said; "no white man or red can cure me of my grief, for they cannot bring *him* to life again." And she pointed with the knife to the noble figure lying so calmly behind her.

"No. But he can give you that to drink that will make you as happy as though he were alive."

During the foregoing dialogue Gorman O'Neil had been standing—a terrified spectator and mystified auditor—against the blanketed doorway; but at a signal from Bearfoot he stepped forward into the dim light. The sight of his face seemed to reassure the suspicious squaw, for the knife soon dropped idly from her hand, and with reverent awe she gazed on his white sightless eye—whilst its naked fellow was regarding her with frightened curiosity around the bridge of his nose.

To her untutored mind this man seemed like one marked by the gods for their service, and that white-clouded eye was a visible token of the high honor wherewith they had crowned him. This distinguished him from other men; this marked him as one deep skilled in the mysteries which only the faithful know. Those black smithy marks on his hands and face seemed also, in her credulous eyes, to be further tokens of his high calling. Bearfoot noted carefully the expression on her face as it changed from suspicion to belief.

"Do you believe *now* that the white man can drown your grief?" he asked. "If not, wait awhile and you shall see more."

Then turning to Gorman he said in English :

"Now, Smokeface, show her one of your white man's tricks to convince her."

"Arrah! But just ye wait a minit, an' Oi'll scare the divil out av her."

And Gorman, who had come fully prepared to astound if necessary, drew from his coat pocket a great serpent fire-cracker, and laid it neatly on the ground with body ruffled into ferocious curls and neck malignantly curved. Then, lighting a fuse, he swung its spluttering bulbous head three times around in the air, muttering this (to the squaw) mysterious incantation :

"Shillelaghs an' splinters wint flyin' through the air  
Whin we slaughtered the Orangemen at Donnybrook Fair."

He bent and touched the serpent with the light. Immediately it leapt forward in a sinuous gleam of fire. Swiftly round the hut went the curving terror—to the end, then back again toward the terrified squaw. She screamed, and fled with hands beseechingly uplifted toward Gorman. Then it mounted the leafy litter on which the dead man was laid, and quickly its gleaming coils traversed the unconscious body. Swift from the tattooed breast, down the frill-adorned legs and over the beaded moccasins it glowed, then moved again toward the gaping crevice which showed the foam on the gleaming water, and plunging through this like a streak of curling light, it disappeared with a hiss in the gurgling whirlpool below. With terrified eyes the woman watched it pass away; then turning, she knelt at Gorman's feet.

"Ah!" said Bearfoot, with his cunning smile, "you believe in the white man now. Drink that which he will give you, and no sadness shall touch you for many moons." Then turning to Gorman—"Give her the brandy, Smokeface."

O'Neil motioned the woman to rise up, and pointed to a broken cup lying on the floor. She went, and bringing it over held it out before him. He took a flask of brandy from his pocket, filled the cup as full as the broken side



would allow, and then with an imperious gesture and a screw of his crooked eye, bade her drink it.

She hesitated for a time as if still in doubt. Then curiosity, mingled with fear, conquered her suspicions. As the burning draught scorched her throat her eyes watered and the cup dropped from her convulsive hands.

Only for a moment or two did these signs of suffering last, and then the effect of the liquor on that savage mind began to be seen. She stooped and picked up the cup, and with slaving lips and wild-staring eyes, held it out imploringly for more, but Gorman shook his head. Then, again, she knelt at his feet, and in her wild Indian tongue besought him for just "one little drop."

"No," interposed Bearfoot. "The white man cannot spare his medicine for nothing; but if you will let us take away that body with us that we may make it ready for the happy hunting-grounds, he will yet, perhaps, give you a little more."

"Take it," she screamed; "take anything; but let me taste again the fire-water—the fire-water." And as she held the cup eagerly above her head, Gorman poured into it a little more of the shining liquor. She drained it at one gulp and again held it out for more.

"No, squaw," said Bearfoot; "no more now. But if you will be quiet till we have changed your husband's clothes, you shall drink again."

"Be quick, then," she cried. "Be quick, and I will help you."

An ordinary person would have been horrified by the woman's wild and fiercely thirsty expression. The fiery liquid thrilled every nerve of her savage, unrestrained being. Her red, inflamed eyes glared like fiery sands in a land where no rain ever falls, and as she reeled in drunken confusion her black hair fell in dusky shades around her, and her lean hands clenched till the lengthy, untrimmed nails cut red semicircles in her palms. All human feeling had vanished for the time from her being, and all the wild, savage brutality of her nature glared before them; but still those two men—the soul of one calloused by years



of intrigue and espionage, and the other cast by nature in a flinty mould—stood unmoved. After watching her with grim amusement for a few seconds, Bearfoot shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and turning to his skinny-eyed companion, said :

“Smokeface, go and get the clothes, and I will make ready the water for washing him.”

“Faix, an’ Oi’m thinkin’ it’s gettin’ toime we was at it,” said Gorman. And lifting the blanket he went out.

Bearfoot took up a zinc pail that had been lying on the floor, and to the handle of which a rope was attached, and carrying it to the river end of the hut, cast it through the gaping crevice into the yellow, foaming whirlpool below. The water swallowed it with an angry gulp, and the rope jerked on his arm as if a salmon had bitten; but he wrenched out the pail, and with much slopping landed it about half full on the floor of the hut. At the same moment Gorman re-entered with a bundle, done up in brown paper, under his arm.

The woman, after vainly trying to walk, had sunk—a heap of gaudy rags and distorted humanity—on the earth, close to the dead man’s head, making at once an interesting picture and horrifying contrast. The expression of the dead, brave and noble; that of the living, degraded and brutalized; the panoply of the corpse, calm and stately; the rags that clothed the animate being, quivering in sympathy with her quaking frame.

But little heed took the villains of the mournful effect of their malicious cunning. Bearfoot, with ruthless sacrilege, took one of the pans from the dead man’s side, and after pouring a little of the yellow river-water into it, placed it over the feeble fire, while his companion, without fear or compunction, began to strip the dead. But the woman no sooner saw him begin his ghoulish work than she roused herself from her stupor, and with screams, gestures, and wild Indian ejaculations, essayed to rise. Bearfoot sprang toward her and thrust her back.

“Ugh, squaw! Ugh!” he grunted. “Keep still or the medicine man will give you no more fire-water.”

"Ah, the fire-water! I forgot," she mumbled, falling meekly back to her old position. "Give me fire-water now, white man, and I will lie very still."

Her head wagged stupidly as she asked this, and though Gorman did not understand the language, he recognized the appeal, and thinking to quiet her he took up the cup and again the red, dead-looking liquid flowed. He handed her the cup, and with an eager, shaking hand she lifted it to her lips. After eagerly drinking its contents her eyes closed, and she sank back in a dazed stupor against the corpse.

And then the ghouls, without one touch of reverence, continued their sacrilegious work. The fitful shadows played over them, but struck them not. The firelight faintly flashed and crackled, but did not arise to wither and consume them. The river gurgled angrily and beat the shore with fierce and foaming waves, but did not rush from its channel to overwhelm and sweep them away. O God, how canst Thou be passive when looking on deeds like these?

They plucked the dark plumes from his hair, and left them to float hither and thither on the draught. Some clung to the spawn-patched wall, some rolled over the floor, and others drifted down to the river and floated away on its yellow tide or were sucked into its remorseless gulf; and with ruthless hands they clipped off his long, black locks and cast them on the glowing fire, where they smoked, hissed and curled together in a burning wave like a mass of fiery serpents clinging together, yet each striving to free itself from the other.

Then they stripped him of his fine attire, and loosening the parcel which Smokeface had brought in, they shook out the different parts of a mean suit of white man's working-clothes, and rolling him about as though he had been but metal or wood, barbarously clad him in these; but before they placed the clothing on they took from the fire the water which the Indian had placed there to warm, and dipping into it a rag, washed the red war-paint from his face and hands and breast. Soon they so transformed it

by their ghoulish skill, that, where they had found the figure of a noble brave well fitted to honor the halls of the dead, they left a cropped, deformed, wizened thing, shrunk inside ill-fitting clothes, from which the very worms might recoil.

When their task of foul transfiguration was completed, they tied the dead man's apparel in a bundle, and after weighting it with a stone, cast it through the yawning crevice into the hungry jaws of the swirling pool to be swallowed with an angry snap.

The splash aroused the squaw, and emerging with an effort from the ragged bundle into which she had shrunk, she developed into human form in time to see one man seizing the corpse's heels, and the other grasping the shoulders.

"Stop!" she screamed, pointing a lean finger at them and vainly attempting to rise. "Leave him alone, or I will kill you. Rise, Wanomin! rise and strike them, or they will throw you into the water."

Bearfoot dropped the heels he had seized, and at the same time motioning to Gorman to produce the liquor, shouted out:

"Be still, squaw, I tell you again; and you shall have as much fire-water as you can drink. But listen before you have it and hear what I say. When to-morrow they ask you about him" (he pointed to the corpse), "say that an evil spirit came out of the water and dragged him down through there." And he pointed significantly to the gap through which the gleaming whirlpool could be seen wheeling its restless rounds. The squaw, whose attention was now entirely diverted by the bottle which Gorman held so alluringly before her, wagged her head and hastily replied:

"Yes, yes; I will tell them all you say, but give it to me, medicine-man—give it to me." And pouncing out greedily, with her hand she caught the bottle and snatched it from his grasp.

"Arrah! you grady ould baste," he said; "yez can kape it, for it's a small item ye can foind inside, Oi'll

assure ye av that. And now, me bhoy," he added, "let us haul out the corpse while the ould lady's swiggin' the whiskey."

Bearfoot grunted assent, and each once more seized an end of the body, and so they bore it through the blanketed doorway. When they had deposited their ghastly burden in the cart they heard wild screams in the hut, and running back to the window, looked through. The squaw, frenzied by her last drink, had crept to the fire, and screaming a hideous war-song, wildly swept the empty bottle backward and forward through the embers scattering them in a glowing circle around her. Some dropped through the gaping crevice, and expired with sharp hisses in the whirlpool. Others lay glowing on the floor, and a few had fallen on the litter on which the dead man had lain. The dry matter of which the bed was composed caught the fire at once and began to smoke in half a dozen places, and then the smoke flashed into as many jets of flame. The spectators at the window looked at each other with faces blanched with terror. For a moment they stared thus, and neither spoke a word; then Gorman wrung his hands in whining lamentation:

"Oh, wirra, wirra-ra! But it's all in a bleeze; and the ould squaw is soaked wid whiskey—she'll burn like a torch. Pwhativer shall we do?"

Bearfoot, though equally terrified, had more presence of mind, and was not long in resolving how to act.

"Let us go in and pull her out, and leave her here," he said. "And then let us get away fast, fast. It will take those damp old logs some time to burn so that the blaze can be seen in such a place as this, and we can get away safe. Come, let us pull her out."

They rushed into the burning room, seized the screaming squaw where she sat by the scattered fire, and thrusting a cloth into her mouth to drown her screams, dragged her—kicking, scratching and biting—from the hut. A cloud of fire and smoke pursued them through the door; but heedless of smoke behind or darkness before, they dragged her in cruel mercy over the rough and stony ground to a spot of bare earth, and there they left her.

Then, heedless of her maniacal gibbering, they loosened the mule, jumped into the cart beside the corpse, and trotted along the rough road between the bending willows. Looking back they could see the red flames flashing through the window and pouring a lurid light through every chink in the perforated walls, and could hear the sharp crackling of the fire mingling with the dull roar of the water; but soon a sharp turn in the road hid it from their view, and they proceeded at a sharp pace toward Bearfoot's hut.

When Gorman had deposited his brother ghoulish at his own low homestead, he went on his way encompassed by an army of terrors. By his side lay the ghastly ill-clad corpse, and as it jolted with dull thumps on the bottom of the cart, it sounded like a muffled hammer vengefully beating on his own terrified brain. The heavy clouds frowned sullenly above him, and beneath the swirling grass hissed in the rising breeze, as though each blade were a serpent's tongue. The white stars, too, that sometimes darted lances of light through rifts in the sky, glared fiercely at him as one who had dared to do so foul a thing in their sight. When he rumbled over the bridge the wheels seemed to raise a muttered thunder in the damp and heavy planks; and below, the sullen and turbid stream, moved by the wind, wrinkled into one far-stretching frown of angered majesty as that tumbril of the night passed over it. As he ascended the hill, the trees on either side tossed their stern and naked heads as though they would fall upon and crush him.

Every blade of grass, every star, every cloud, every drop of water, every blade of grass seemed to-night to have found a voice and to be calling to him, "Go back! go back!" But the spirit of evil within was stronger than the power of nature without, and though a dew which was not of the night lay like new thawed hail upon his brow, and though his hands were trembling to the beating of his heart, that spirit still urged him on his way.

The top of the hill was reached, and the terror of trees was succeeded by the terror of clouds, under the frowning

canopy of which he sneaked guiltily along toward his destination. Not by the slimy marshes and long, whispering reeds does he go to-night—not there, though the stagnant depths would have hidden his ghastly burden forever, and the frogs would have sung their nightly dirges over it—still not there did he go. But on the edge of a deep ravine he found a shallow burying-place, with the new-turned soil lying moist and fresh around it; and there, too, lay the shovel and pick just as the workman had left them ready for the hand, as if some dark fiend with which he was in league had prepared all things thus for this man's evil purpose.

Then with trembling hands he took his lifeless human freight by the heels and pulled it rudely out of the cart. It fell with a dull thump on the earth, and rolled over on its back as if instinct with life. As the guilt-struck Gorman started back, he saw, even in the darkness, the rough, calm face looking up to the clouds as if appealing to them for revenge. But only for a moment was it thus; for the evil spirit urged on the ghoul to his ghastly work, and rolling the body over and over like a log, he dropped it at last into its shallow resting-place. It fell upon its side with one arm stretching stiffly upward.

Gorman took up the shovel, and the pebbles and sand pattered on the rough clothing, and sealed up the rude, expressive face. The ridges in the trousers were filled, and the earth rose higher above him, till only the thumb of that outstretched hand peeped through; and thus in a rude, half-kenneled state he left him.

The work was done and the horrors again encompassed him. The wind that howled over the edge of that bleak ravine drove the ghoul in terror homeward, and even the sullen marshes were shuddering as he passed by them. The black depths were stirred by the wind from their very foundations, and the green waves on the surface writhed like snakes in conflict around him.

Homeward with face blanched with horror, with nerves tingling with fear, he went, and entered his humble abode just as the day had begun to dawn.



His mother sat still where he had left her on the previous night, but the anguished rocking was ended now. Calmly she sat with neck outstretched, and one stiff, lean finger pointing toward her son. The terrible stillness gave Gorman a voice.

"Mother, mother! Are ye slapin', or what ails ye?"

But no answer came, though the finger continued to point, and the neck was still stretched forward. He went nearer.

The cold light of dawn stealing through the window just touched the grey elf-locks that fell over her face, and lighted faintly the immutable and wrinkled features. Her eyes were covered with a film, and her lip was lifted in a frozen arch, revealing in hideous glitter her one long, wolfish fang. Gorman touched the skinny hand outstretched toward him. The touch pierced his finger like an icicle, and sent a frosty thrill through his frame. With terrible force the fact came home to him—*she was dead*.

The cup of his terror was filled to overflowing, and with a cry of fear and anguish, he fell on the floor in a swoon.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE MAD SQUAW.

ON that same cold autumn morning on the Indian reserve the smoke ascended from the family fires, and the dogs barked to greet the day. Little brown-skinned children huddled around the flames, and the women went forth to work and the men to hunt.

But what is that darker and wider smoke that is wafted toward us from the river side—from the spot where the home of brave Unabica, who is dead, used to stand?

"Let us go and see," they said.

They found a heap of smouldering ruins on the water's edge, and as it spluttered and crackled the ashes heaved with the pressure of the heat, and burning lumps fell into



the river, some to be hissed into death in the whirlpool, and others to float as black particles down the turbid waters.

And near that fuming mass—on a bare black spot of earth around which the fire had singed—they found a shivering human form, with the gay, many-colored rags in which she was clothed trembling around her in the morning breeze like a peacock's ruffled plumes when the wind passes over them.

"It is Laughing-wind, Unatica's squaw," said one of the assembled crowd. "But—but—" He finished the sentence by pointing to her face.

Yes, a sad change had come over it. But a few days ago it had been (though delicate) girlish, buoyant and laughing, darting a ray of sunshine on every heart it met. And now it was so aged and repulsive—the merry eyes bloodshot, weak and watery, the mouth moving in meaningless, incessant chatter.

"She has gone mad, I think," said one. "But let us ask her what she knows about the fire."

As they approached her she waved her hands toward the smoking ruin and screamed shrilly:

"Too late! too late! He is gone. They have taken him."

"Yes," ran the murmur among the crowd, "she means that brave Unatica has gone up in the fire to Gitche-Manito to hunt for him among the clouds and stars. Happy is he!"

Thus satisfied as to Unatica's fate they turned again to the wretched squaw, and vainly endeavored to extract from her some information regarding the origin of the fire. In return to their eager questions she only gabbled unintelligible sentences, cuddled closer in her rags, and glared at them fiercely through the black strands of her disarranged hair.

Bearfoot, who had joined the crowd, leaned with his hands on the muzzle of his rifle, and regarded her with an air of hypocritical sadness.

"I fear that we can learn nothing from her," he said

with a sigh and a mournful shake of the head; "and as we can do nothing we might as well go away. I am going over the river to the Bend-arm creek to hunt for deer."

He spoke the last sentence very distinctly; but all were too sadly impressed by the awful evidence of the frailty of human reason before them to heed his words, and he went on his way alone.

Her relatives took possession of the unhappy squaw, and vainly endeavored by all means in their power to restore her to her former senses. That night of suffering and debauch had shaken the throne of reason so that it never could be replaced.

Hereafter a superstitious awe surrounded her. When she limped from house to house, as was henceforth her custom, mothers who saw her approaching would turn to their noisy children, and, with finger on lip and whisper raised high, would say:

"Hush! Here comes the mad squaw."

Then the noise of childish merriment ceased as by a spell; and, while they huddled together in a corner, their little, black bead-like eyes looked fearfully toward the door through which the human mystery must enter. As the bent form—with long hair hanging like a veil over her face, and bony hand cleaving to a walking-stick—approached the house, the mother with trembling hands spread out her little store, and respectfully bade the mad woman rest and eat.

And then, in awe-struck tones, she plied her weird guest with questions as to the coming years, her own destiny, and the future lives of her children, and received strange enigmatical replies, of which, though she knew not the meaning, she felt the awful import; and afterward whispered it accordingly. And when this western witch had finished her errand of mystery there she muttered a blessing or a curse upon the house, and then hobbled on her way to carry her superstitious awe into another home.

But this might not be continued long, for with the waning days the sibyl's form grew weaker, and in her

mystic strolls she leaned more heavily on her stick. Sometimes strange fits would shake her withered frame, and then, casting down her stick, she would fall at the feet of her friends, and clasping their knees in an agony of want implore them wildly—

“Fire-water! Fire-water! Give me fire-water, or I shall die.”

But no one would fulfil for her that wild request; and when the agony was over she would sit for hours on the floor and moan and mumble strange things to herself. And though much that she said was meaningless or unintelligible, at one verse she sang more often than any other, her friends would sadly shake their heads, for well they felt that it contained a mournful and pathetic truth:

“When the snow lies thick above you,  
In the moons of frost before us,  
I will come to you, my husband;  
I will meet you, my beloved.”

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE DEER HUNT.

ON the afternoon of the day after Gorman O'Neil's night adventure, Mr. Dysart's pupils went on their projected hunt for the deer in the valley. Mr. Longstreet chattered an incessant stream of hunting talk, and Mr. Fane, squinting down his shining rifle-barrel, shrugged his shoulders till they rubbed against the back of his skull, and said:

“If I don't pop 'em every time with this, I'll give up hunting and go into the millinery business.”

Fred Polson said nothing, but went silently on his way to explore in solitude the depths of the Bend-arm creek.

Though usually a keen sportsman, to-day he took little delight in it. His mind was troubled with a foreboding of disaster he strove in vain to define. Nor was this all

The attention paid by Silas Pancrack to Alice Craggs was a matter of notoriety, and speculations as to their marriage in the early future were rife. These speculations, he knew, might be entirely baseless; but the lover dwells in so sensitive an atmosphere that the very stirring of the wind is often sufficient to heighten his passion and augment his misery. As Fred's hopes grew weaker his love grew stronger, and he began to ask himself whether he had acted rightly in abandoning his courtship on mere suppositions.

The passion, which satiety would probably have benumbed into weariness, struck its roots and flourished in the rock which seemed to have risen like a barrier between them; and as the dry leaves which strewed the banks of Bend-arm creek crackled beneath his tread on that cold autumn day, Fred Polson mentally resolved that come what might he would try once more to win the heart of her he loved so well.

Such a mood and such thoughts did not naturally tend to make him very alert in his hunting that day. He saw no sign of deer or bear. A few squirrels played among the trees, and a nimble rabbit flitted sometimes across his path; but of these he took no heed. Only once did he discharge his rifle that day, and that was when a pheasant, or tree-partridge, flew swiftly through the air above his head. He fired with hasty aim, and the bullet went up and the bird went on.

"So that is all," said one who had listened. "But that is enough." And the completing sentence slipped through the jaws of a sinister smile. But softly though it was spoken it did not die; the waves of air that it set in motion stretched out in far-reaching pulsation, and some of these, perhaps, stole imperceptibly through Fred Polson's ears and woke a melancholy music on the harp-strings of his soul. For however high may have been his resolve as he started out that day, when he marched homeward under the naked and sighing trees, and over the sere and withered plain, a gloomy sadness pervaded him, of which, though he could guess not its origin, he strove in vain to free himself.

Mr. Longstreet and Mr. Fane arrived home that night in great wrath. Neither sight, nor track, nor sign of deer or any other game had they seen in all a long afternoon's wandering; but at the mouth of the Bend-arm creek they had met a man who dwelt in the valley, and he had told them that no deer had been seen in that part for years. So they heaped execrations on Gorman O'Neil, and, tired and footsore, went to bed.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### UNCLE NATHAN'S EXCITEMENT.

#### DISCOVERY!

Poet, welling with the music of new spring harmony! Philosopher, laboring with the birth of great ideas! Orator, with the word-fire flashing from thy lips! Inventor, with the one thing yet needful dawning on thy brain! Explorer, with the streams and fruitage of the new-discovered country breaking on thine eyes! Have ye not all found your nerves tingling and your hearts throbbing in the birth-throes of glorious discovery? If so, please excuse poor Uncle.

On the day after the fruitless deer-hunt—*i.e.*, Sunday—Uncle Nathan, who had been out herding cattle, burst into the Dysart farm-house in a very nervous and distorted state. Excitement shot forth from every pore and knuckle and hair of his restless frame. His sharp, sandy goatee bristled with it; the wrinkles in his brow were puckered into shining hills by it; the cold, white point on the end of his sharp nose gleamed with it; his lengthy fingers curled and twirled with it; his eyes snapped, and his mouth opened in geometrical shapes with it. Over the frame of Uncle Nathan excitement was king.

"Say, some o' you fellers," he shouted, rushing in before the door was properly opened, "come along of me. I've found it."

The men were lying all around the room, some on the benches, some on the tables, others on the floor. Most of them, I am sorry to say, were engaged (regardless of the sanctity of the day) in smoking tobacco and reading novels; but even there this careless profanation was leavened by a few more serious-minded ones who studied the Bible, or pored over the sermons of Talmage and Spurgeon.

On hearing Uncle's entrance and exclamation, Bible readers, novel readers and smokers lifted their heads simultaneously and looked toward him, for, as a common butt for their jests and pranks, they seldom failed to extract from him some amusement.

"Say, Uncle, what's up?" asked one. "You look something like a cat in a lime-kiln."

"Oh, Uncle's all right," drawled another. "He stood out with a wire down his back in the last thunder-storm, and has just come in to tell us something about the weather, ain't yer, Uncle?"

"What is it you've found anyway, Uncle?" queried one of the smokers.

Uncle replied by seemingly thrusting his long neck down into the depths of his stomach, and jerking his thumb over his shoulder—

"Just some o' you fellers come along and find out."

"What say, Bill?" said the smoker, turning to a brother of the pipe who lay beside him, "if we gae wi' him. We've got naethin' else to dae; and we might as well see what the auld fool has on his brain, as lie here."

"All right," said Bill, rising and knocking the ashes out of his pipe; "come along. Goodness knows we are bad enough in want of some excitement to stir us up, or we shall soon be all as stupid as a pack of sick sheep." And with this graceful speech he and his companion followed Uncle into the barnyard.

"Say, boys," he said, suddenly spinning around toward them, and at the same time see-sawing his two hands through the air, "git a mool and kyart."



"A mey-ule and car-rot," said McGrath, a Scotchman. "And what ar-re ye wanting wi' that, tell us?"

"Doncher fret yerself," said Uncle, jerking his thumb into his goatee; "but git somethen'."

"All right. But we wou't bother about a mewl," said Bill, an Englishman; "we don't want to be kicked into Bendigo or chewed into dish-rags; but we'll get the old blind pony and the little cart."

That he needed a vehicle to convey his discovery tended not a little to heighten the curiosity of the two men. "He must have found a dead bear or buffalo, or perhaps the skeleton of some antediluvian monster, since he needs a beast of burden to draw it home," they thought. And so thinking, they hitched the pony to the cart in hasty eagerness.

Whilst they were doing so, Uncle, in his impatience, sought relief by performing a variety of acrobatic exhibitions. He would fold his arms, draw his form up straight, pucker his brow, purse his lips and stand for a moment as grave as a Roman father; and in the next, he would fling his arms abroad as if he were trying to cast them away altogether. At the same time he would twist around his neck till his goatee almost swept over his spine, whilst his wiry fingers twirled in unnumbered shapes and ceaseless motion; then his head would shoot up and his arms re-fold as he froze into a statue of austerity again.

But the cart was soon ready, and they told him to jump in; but he, ever suspicious of tricks, eyed the conveyance with his head on one side, and said he would walk ahead and show them the way.

"Oh, but we shall want to trot," they said.

"Wal, I guess I can keep about even with that thing, anyway."

"All right; do as you please. Jump in, Sandie."

So Uncle, swinging a ponderous pair of top boots, walked before; but he was not allowed to proceed far in peace. They set the pony on the trot, and in spite of Uncle's boast, and notwithstanding the most extraordinary exertions, he soon fell to the rear.



As he saw them passing he clutched frantically at the back of the cart, and they urged the pony on the faster. As the pace increased, Uncle's strides threatened to rend his body in twain, but he still clung desperately to the cart. His heavy top boots swung through space like the pendulums of two swift and gigantic clocks, and it was evident that he must soon either drop behind or do himself serious injury. The drivers, however, kindly relieved him from the necessity of this evil choice by bringing the pony to so sudden a stop that it reeled back on its haunches, and in consequence Uncle shot forward with such tremendous impetus that he was jerked on nose, knees and elbows into the body of the cart.

His two companions laughed loudly at his sudden entrance, while Uncle rose, rubbing his bruised elbows and knees.

"Can't yer stop yer foolin', you fellers, an' git on," he said, remonstratively, as he danced about the floor of the cart to deaden the pain of his bruises.

"All right," said Bill, laughing; "we only wanted to help you into the cart, you know. It was hard work for you running there. Git up, there!"

They went on their way without further incident, but the monotony of the journey was greatly relieved by the amusement afforded by Uncle's constant grimaces and excited restlessness. He was first at one end of the cart and then at the other. Sometimes he would sit at the back with his legs dangling down like a school-boy's on a tall seat; and when a mischievous spurt of speed threatened to precipitate him from this position, he would crawl along to one of the front corners and seat himself there with his hands clasped over his knees; then pulling himself to his feet he would seek another position.

However, he guided them faithfully, and they soon found themselves skirting the barren edge of the Bend-arm creek. There his restlessness became so extreme that it seemed as if every joint in his body must crack asunder to give his nervous spirit scope. At last he could no longer contain himself, but jumping from the cart, he rushed

along in front of them like a bloodhound that has scented its prey.

"I believe the old crackpot's going crazy altogether," said Bill.

"It looks kin' o' like it," said McGrath. "But look ye, the body's stoppit."

"So he has," said Bill, casting his eyes eagerly forward. "But never a thing can I see."

Uncle, who by this time was fifty yards ahead, had certainly stopped, and was wildly waving his hands beckoning them to come on. Their curiosity quickened; they urged the pony to a trot, and soon, to their horror, discovered the cause of his excitement.

Before them was a new-made grave filled with earth, but uncovered by the turf, which lay in scattered clods around it. And—most awful sight of all—out of the earth a hand was sticking, as if it had grown there with a human body for its root. But the fingers were shortened and torn, and the skin and flesh hung in shreds around it as though some wild beast had been gnawing there.

"I was out herdin'," said Uncle, jerking his thumb in the direction of the mangled limb, "an' I scaret off a wolf from that."

"Guid mercy!" exclaimed McGrath with a shudder. "What shall we dae wi' it?"

"I guess we'd better do nothing till the coroner has seen it," replied Bill. "You stop here and see that nothing touches the thing, and I'll drive back to the barn and see the boss and get him to send for the coroner."

"What!" said Uncle, elevating his close-grown sandy eyebrows. "You ain't going to leave it, are you? Dig it out, boys, dig it out."

Strange to say, a new pick and shovel lay near at hand, and Uncle picked up the former and began to set them an example by raising it on high to strike it into the grave; but Bill thrust him back.

"Stop a bit, old fellow," he said; "you may get into trouble from the law if you do that."

The name of the law had always a powerful effect on

Uncle, and at the mention of it he laid down his pick, uttering some unintelligible exclamation.

Bill explained to him as best he could the necessity for a coroner's inspection; and at last succeeded in satisfying him so far that he meandered off toward the herd—grazing a short distance away—turning and pausing many times as he went.

McGrath lay on the grass, a little distance from the grave, and smoked his pipe with as much composure as he could muster, while Bill drove hurriedly back toward the farm.

It was necessarily some hours before the coroner—a doctor in Greentown, some fifteen miles away—could arrive on the spot. When he did so, it was drawing toward evening, but still he ordered the body to be exhumed without delay.

Accordingly they cleared away the soil, dragged out the corpse, all plastered and encased with the cool, moist earth, and the doctor proceeded with his examination.

The sun was setting amid a flurry of red clouds with edges indented like sails of torn crimson. The angry orb, peering from these fitting pavilions, flashed on the faces of the little group till their reddened visages made them appear like a ring of demons. Nevertheless, its light helped the doctor in his investigation, for it showed him a little wound on the temple. He felt it carefully.

"There has been foul work here," he said; "this is a bullet-wound. But we can do nothing more to-night, so I propose, with your permission, Mr. Dysart, to take the body to your farm, and let it lie in an outhouse for the night. To-morrow we will hold an inquest and take such further proceedings as the law requires."

Mr. Dysart, who was among the group, readily consented to this proposal; and placing the body in a cart, in solemn silence they returned to the farm.

On the next day, accordingly, a jury was summoned and an inquest held, which resulted in finding that the deceased had been killed by a bullet entering the left temple; and they further ordered a strict investigation of the case.

The coroner immediately telegraphed to Markon (the nearest judicial town) for a detective to help them unravel the mystery and throw what light he could on the Indian's death.

There was much clandestine whispering and sage head-nodding in the Dysart settlement, and many were the causes suggested and the accidents conjectured; but in spite of the mental exertions of those who walked many half-miles to converse with different neighbors about it, in spite of the theories of the wise and the babble of the foolish, the mystery remained a mystery still.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### ENOCH THE CHIEF.

THE chief of the reserve to which the murdered Indian had belonged was best known to the white men by the patriarchal name of Enoch. In youth he had been noted for his bravery and prowess in all that pertained to war and the chase; but the inroad of civilization had cramped his spirit so that as he grew older he became avaricious and reserved. He owed his elevation to the position of chief rather to his knowledge of English and his skill in traffick- ing with the whites, than to the esteem in which he was held by his people.

At night this important personage was seated in his cabin smoking a long wooden pipe by the stove. The room was small, the walls composed of bare logs with layers of plaster between; but the roof was boarded in, and the furniture betokened a wealth rather above the average of the Indian tribesman. An unlighted lamp stood on a polished table in the middle of the room, and against the wall were to be seen two decent chairs. The fire burned in a good iron cook-stove, which had, however, from want of polishing, grown rusty and spotted with grease.

But though Enoch boasted these civilized possessions, he

utterly scorned their use. His aged squaw sat on a low stool, and in the light that came from the open stove-front beaded his moccasins with barbarous devices, while he himself sat on the floor near by with his blanket-clad leg, picturesquely crossed, and the long wooden pipe between his lips, smoking gravely in the gloom. His raven locks, unshorn and streaked with grey, fell over his shoulders, and when the firelight flashed upon his face, it was reflected in a hundred little jets by the shining grease with which his wrinkled features were covered.

A very gentle rap was heard on the door.

"Come in," grunted Enoch in the Indian tongue, no more changing his position or expression than if he had been a speaking statue.

The door opened softly, and a man, muffled to the eyes, entered. Enoch gravely pointed to a chair, but neither spoke nor removed his pipe. The stranger took the chair, and without removing his hat or unmuffling his face, drew it forward, and seating himself near bent his head, and for a long time whispered in the ear of the old chief.

The Indian sat immovable, only taking his pipe from his lips at times to grunt or nod his head.

When the stranger had finished, his silent auditor shook his head solemnly, and holding up his fingers, counted several of them deliberately as if thus naming a price. The visitor took some silver coins from his pocket, and holding them between his hands, rattled them in the old man's ear. "Music hath charms," it is said, and this was the sweetest music in the world to him. Slowly his countenance changed as he listened, and an expression of avarice supplanted its stolid composure. His eyes glistened greedily, and he began to count quickly on his fingers.

"It shall be done as you say," he said at last.

"All right."

The stranger pocketed his coins again, and rose and left the room. When he had gone the squaw (whose embroidery had ceased whilst the interview lasted) looked inquisitively at her lord, as if fear alone prevented her from questioning him, but he, quite heedless of her silent appeal, smoked on gravely and silently as before.

The next day a buckboard containing two men stopped at Enoch's door, and one of the occupants alighted. He was a man of about thirty-four years of age, of slender and supple build. His small feet trod with a softness that could only arise from habit. His thin white fingers looked as if made for opening doors without notice, and turning keys without noise. His ample ears standing straight out from his head could miss no sound, however faint. His nose lay on his face like a knife with a blunt edge and a broad back. His set chin and thin-lipped mouth bespoke firmness and determination. His small grey eyes were sharp and piercing; above them a high but narrow forehead receded under short red hair. Such to the outward eye was the man commonly known as "Jack Snipe," the smartest detective in the west.

He found old Enoch at the back of the house—clad in a red shirt and a pair of shabby pantaloons, his brown arms bare to the elbows—scraping a deerskin he was preparing for tanning. After receiving a dignified bow in response to his civil "Good-day," the detective said :

"I believe you are chief of this reserve."

Again the dignified bow.

"One of your people has been found murdered over the river."

Enoch's brow bent in horror.

"And I came to ask you if anyone is missing from your reserve?"

"Yes," said Enoch, breaking silence in fair English, "Bearfoot gone away."

"At what time did he go?"

"He went on the morning of last Saturday."

"Did he mention to anyone where he was going?"

"Yah, I hear him say he was going to hunt deer on Bend-arm creek."

The detective slipped out a pocket-book with magical quickness and jotted down several notes, whilst Enoch, standing with knife in hand, watched him with a cunning wink.

"I want you," said Snipe, still holding the pocket-book



in his hand, "to tell me all that you can about this Bearfoot. What was he like to look at?"

Enoch described him in a broken, confused manner, which left his hearer little wiser. However, he contented himself with the little he got, and went on:

"Had he any particular likes or dislikes?"

Enoch shook his head. "Not many likes," he said, "but many not likes."

"But was there anybody he disliked very much?"

Enoch stroked his brow thoughtfully before replying.

"Yah, I think I heard him say he would like to hurt one leetle Polson that lives over there." And he pointed with the knife to where the tall buildings of the Dysart farm showed faintly in the distance.

The detective jotted down another note.

"Do you know why he hated this Polson?" he asked.

"Ugh! He was out to hunt deer one day and Polson shot his deer, and took it away from him. This make Bearfoot very mad."

The detective paused for a moment as if undecided as to what he should say next.

Should he question him at greater length, or shorten the interview? He rather distrusted the Indian's manner, and so took the latter course.

"Do you think you should know this Bearfoot if you saw him again?" he asked.

"Oh, yah," was the positive reply. "I know him very well—I never forget."

The detective looked around him. A buckboard was drawn up beside the house, and two rough-coated native ponies were grazing a short distance away.

"I see you have a rig and ponies," he said. "Will you follow us over to the Dysart farm and see the murdered man, and tell us whether it is Bearfoot or not?"

"If you come," he added, seeing that Enoch hesitated, "you shall be well paid for your trouble."

This decided the matter, and the old chief evinced his willingness to come as soon as he could prepare. The detective drove away trusting him to follow.



## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE CLOSING SNARE.

BETWEEN the arrival of Snipe and that of Enoch at the farm, some time must necessarily elapse, and the wily detective did not neglect to turn it to account.

Mr. Dysart was engaged in an animated political discussion with Mr. Scrogpot, who loudly held forth the merits of Radicalism.

"I tell ye what it is," said the cook, pausing with one hand deep down in the dough, "If I had my way with yer r'yal fam'lies, and House of Lordses and mestablished churches, I'd make a great big cannon and jam the whole lot down inter it, an' then charge it with dynermite, an' blow the hull kit out inter the Atlantic Ocean. That's what I'd do with 'em." And he began to ~~tear~~ the dough asunder, as if he were demolishing the hateful aristocracy.

"But, cook," remonstrated Mr. Dysart, hardly knowing whether to be horrified or amused by such sentiments, "you are rather too sweeping in your assertions. We must have rulers, and if you do away with these, what will you give us in their place?"

"Nothin'," with a grunt from the depths of the kneading dough, "leastways nothin' o' that kind. It's a pity if a country can't get along without such a downright useless crew."

"Oh, cook, you are altogether—"

"Excuse me, Mr. Dysart, but may I speak to you alone for a moment?"

The knifish nose and keen grey eyes of Snipe had appeared at the door, and it was his voice that thus interrupted the discussion.

Mr. Dysart nodded and left the shanty; and the cook, angered further by the interruption, battered the dough with his fists, muttering some inaudible and irreverent remarks about "jail-birds" and "detectives."

When they had walked a few yards from the shanty, the detective stopped and said quietly :

"I believe you have a pupil named Frederick Polson?"

"Yes," said Mr. Dysart. "And a very good fellow he is, too, though he is a little astray in some of his ideas. What about him?"

"Nothing in particular. I merely wanted to ask you what are his habits?"

"Oh, the worst that can be said of the fellow is that he is a bookworm, and rather too fond of moping about by himself."

"Indeed! Where was he about last Saturday?"

"He went on a bogus deer-hunt, somewhere round Bend-arm creek. But surely," he added, a sudden light breaking on his mind, "you don't mean to say that you suspect Fred?"

"I suspect no one, Mr. Dysart," said the detective indifferently, as he coolly inscribed something on a page of the note-book. "I merely gather evidence and act accordingly."

"But, my dear sir, Fred Polson is the most harmless fellow in the world. He wouldn't hurt a fly."

"Glad to hear it," said the detective; but he spoke in so indifferent a tone that the assertion seemed rather hypocritical. "But," he added with more interest, "here comes old Enoch to identify the body."

The old Indian drove up with his team of shaggy ponies hitched to a rickety-looking buckboard. Alighting near the pasture-fence, he tied his ponies to one of the posts, and advanced to meet the two white men.

Enoch, attired in his best, was quite the Indian gentleman. His moccasins were beflowered with many colored beads; and his white blanket trousers, when filled by the breeze, stretched like full-bellied sails from his legs. His buckskin coat was gorgeously striped with tassels. His glossy black hat towered up from his head like a short smokeless funnel above an upright engine brown with rust and smeared with grease.

With the grave dignity so natural and becoming to the

western Indian, he exchanged salutations with the two white men ; and then unslung his lengthy pipe, and without abating that dignity one jot, begged for a little tobacco.

The detective handed him a small black square, deformed by jagged tooth-marks—a mixture of tobacco leaf, molasses and chemicals, compounded for the defilement of the lips and teeth of the living, and the floors, walls and sidewalks of the material world.

Enoch took the tobacco, and cutting some up, rubbed it fine in the palm of his hand, and filled the bowl of his lengthy pipe ; then he handed the small triangle that remained back to the detective. The old chief next borrowed a match, and applying it to the leafy mixture in his pipe, raised a dense black smoke.

"Good," he said, with a cough in his lungs and a tear in his eye. "Very good and strong! And now, if you are ready, we will see the man dead."

The detective nodded and said, "Come on"; then led the way, with Mr. Dysart and Enoch following behind.

"Shall I help you carry that pipe?" asked the white man. "You know it might fall on your toes and smash them."

"No danger," grunted Enoch, with a downward glance. "Not hit so easy. Indian's foot not so big as white man's."

Mr. Dysart wore "tens," and he carried them in silence the rest of the way.

In a small log outhouse, roofed with sods, and with daylight streaming through the unplastered chinks, they found the body. It lay on a bench near the wall, unwashed, unkempt as it had been brought from the grave. The detective pointed to it.

"Do you know him?" he asked of Enoch.

The old Indian walked up to the corpse, and taking the pipe from his mouth, pouched out his nether lip, and blew into his eyes a cloud of smoke that made them smart and suffused them with water. Through this nebulous medium, he surveyed the body from head to toe ; and then, replacing his pipe with unruffled serenity, turned to the detective

and said: "Yah. This is Bearfoot, I know him well. You look inside his clothes, you find strips with big X marked on them."

The detective at once unbuttoned the vest, and examined the lining carefully.

"There is no mark here," he said sharply.

The Indian's eyebrows elevated in surprise, and he came nearer.

"No. Gone," he said. "But look at this." And with the mouth-piece of his pipe he touched a square spot on the clothing, hedged in by the cut ends of pieces of white thread, and contrasting strongly by its cleanliness with the grease and dirt with which the rest of the garment was coated.

"That looks queer, I admit," said the detective.

He then turned down the rim of the trousers, and there found a similar mark.

"I never noticed that before," he said. "The labels have been cut off."

He searched more minutely, but discovered no further marks of erasure.

As they turned to leave the place, Enoch pulled his pipe from his mouth, and struck his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"Almost not remember!" he exclaimed. "You brought poor Bearfoot from Bend-arm creek. Did you see new pick and shovel lie anywhere?"

"Yes," said Snipe. "Both were found near the grave. It is supposed they had been used in digging it. They are here."

He pulled the articles mentioned from beneath the bench on which the dead body lay, and held them up before Enoch's eyes.

"They are mine!" he said, flashing into his eyes the pleasure of one who has found something he had quite given up as lost. "I bought them in Bendigo last Friday; and as I come home in the dark night, I lost them out of the buckboard, where the trail passes over deep ravine."

The detective's magical pocket-book was out and open

before he had finished speaking, and he hastily noted down the Indian's statement.

"Sorry," he said, replacing it, "but I'm afraid we can't let you have those tools back till after the trial. We shall need them in the evidence, and the government will recompense you for the loss of them in the meantime."

With grave stoicism the old chief bowed his assent; and after begging a little more tobacco, mounted his rickety buckboard in dignity, and drove away.

Snipe watched his long streaky hair flying back from his shoulders like the mingled plumage of the raven and the swan, as in dust and the shine of the setting sun he drove swiftly into the hazy distance.

"Queer old fellow, that," he muttered. "Pretty cute too, I'll bet. I'll have to keep my eye pretty well peeled, dealing with him."

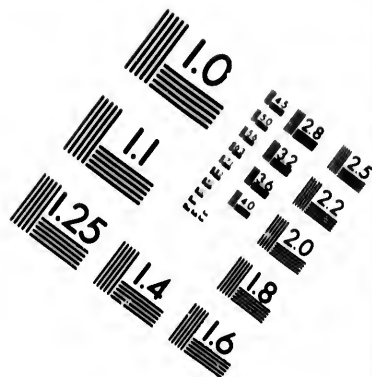
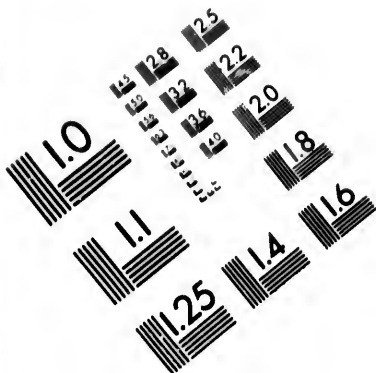
Thus soliloquising, he bade "Good evening" to Mr. Dysart, untied his horse, and drove back toward Bendigo where he was staying.

All the time Mr. Dysart had been silently standing in the back-ground of the conference—dull and gloomy in spirit, and filled with apprehension for the fate of Fred Polson. For, though he and his pupil differed in their opinions on nearly every possible point, he still understood Fred's good qualities, and at the bottom of his heart liked and esteemed him most highly; and these feelings were in nowise diminished by the fondness Fred had exhibited for the loved one who was no more. That his pupil had been guilty of murder he did not for a second believe; nor could he even realize the idea that he could be seriously suspected.

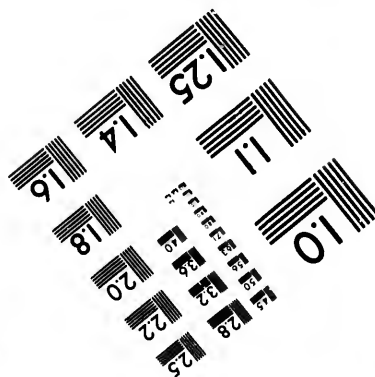
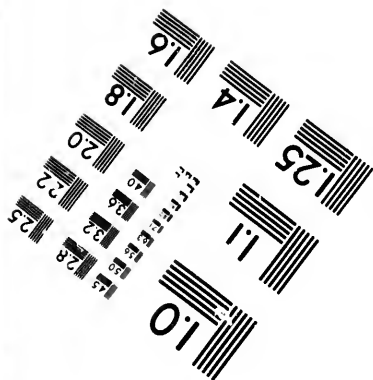
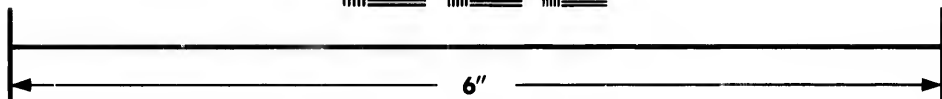
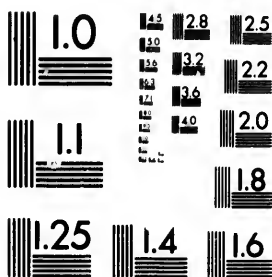
"Dear bless me," he muttered, as he entered his house, "I don't know what on earth can make me so morbid-minded. Liver must be out of order, I think. Well, I must cheer up, and say nothing to Polson, anyhow. It would be cruel to distress the fellow unnecessarily."

Meanwhile the detective drove swiftly toward the town. Wrapped in thought on the case he was handling, he took little notice of things around him.





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Suddenly he was aroused by the clatter of heavy hoofs, the rattle of a wagon, and a loud, "Whoop there!"

At the shout he looked up quickly, and saw coming toward him at runaway speed a team of farm-horses hitched to a heavy wagon which bounced along behind them; and in the rattling conveyance stood a young man, who shouted out drunken oaths, and fiercely lashed with the reins the infuriated beasts tearing along before him.

Snipe turned his horse's head sharply to avoid collision, and only just in time; for as it was, the wagon chipped the hub of his buggy wheel, and almost jerked him out.

"Drunken fool!" he shouted angrily. "If I could get at you, I'd let you taste this whip."

But the unchecked horses—drenched with sweat, with distended nostrils, and infuriated by the intensity of their own exertions—dashed madly on; and still the driver applied the lash and vented his fiendish yells.

"Who was the crazy crank I met on the trail, with a team of runaway horses, about half a mile out?" asked Snipe of the proprietor of the Cowboy Hotel.

"Oh, I guess it was young George Cragg," was the unconcerned reply. "He is sowing his wild oats just now—having a high old time of it."

"Pretty dangerous seed," thought Snipe, looking around at the kegs and bottles with which the shelves were studded. "After what I have seen I don't think I will sow any to-night."

And adhering to this resolution, he went straight up to his bedroom, where, when he had been supplied with a light, he sat down and wrote out a *résumé* of the evidence he had collected, and the gist of it all he summed up in the following manner:

#### THE TWO HUNTS.

##### 1. THE HUNT IN THE SUMMER.

- (1) In a deer-hunt in the summer Polson meets Bearfoot, and they quarrel.
- (2) *Bearfoot does not forget it; but is heard to drop threats of vengeance.*

## 2. THE HUNT IN THE FALL.

- (1) In a deer-hunt in the fall they meet again.
- (2) After the hunt Bearfoot's body is found on the edge of the creek in which Polson was hunting.
- (3) A pick and shovel were lost about the creek the night before, and these are found near the grave.
- (4) *The labels have been cut off Bearfoot's clothes. Polson carried a hunting-knife.*

The detective looked thoughtfully over this brief summary, and folded it up.

"The evidence is sufficient. To-morrow we must arrest him."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## A PLEASANT EVENING.

## HAPPINESS!

Well it is that there are times in this life when all spirits are soothed in pleasantness, and all hearts beat as one; when prejudice, hatred and care are laid aside; when friend meets friend with heightened love; when enemy greets enemy in unison of indifference, and certain portions of the natures both of the virtuous and the villainous dwell in harmony together.

At the time when the detective was drawing up his fatal chart they were spending a merry evening in the Dysart household. In response to an invitation from the proprietor (subtly inspired by Mrs. Bant), Silas Pancrack had come to supper and prolonged his visit to a late hour.

After the meal was over they all assembled in the parlor, and with music, songs and games made the time pass pleasantly. Fred Polson and Silas Pancrack buried their secret dislikes for the nonce; and in the kindly influences that surrounded them, even became so far amicable that whilst Mrs. Bant played on the organ, Pancrack stood on one side and turned the music leaves

while Fred sang on the other. In this genial atmosphere of music and song the miser's filigreed soul forgot its evil purposes, and Fred's hatred was for the time hushed in sleep.

Mr. Dysart, adhering to his purpose of "cheering up," enlivened the company with a fast-rolling stream of jests and stories. Mr. Fane raised many a laugh by his odd sayings, and the shrugs and twists which accompanied them, whilst Mr. Longstreet contributed a voluble fund of drollery. So amiable, indeed, were they that each one kissed the not too inviting mouth of Mrs. Bant's only son; and when his mother bore him off to bed—screaming and kicking with arms and legs among his clothes, like a tentacled mollusc—all declared him to be an angel.

The night was chilly, and a warm fire burned in the polished heating-stove, whilst the lamp-light shed a cheerful glow over all. It was a scene of homely comfort. The pictures on the walls seemed to be smiling in benevolent sympathy on the beaming faces that spoke of happiness within, and even the very dogs dreaming on the rugs around the stove seemed to be imbued with sleepy content.

From this scene of light and warmth Mr. Dysart stepped to the outer door and looked forth into the night. It was moonless, starless, dark as pitch, and a chill wind sent him back to the parlor with the cold air fluttering around his clothes.

"You can never get home to-night, Pancrack," he said, as he shook the cold out by the stove. "You will lose yourself for sure if you try, so you had better make up your mind to stop where you are. We are pretty well crowded, but we can find you a bed somehow."

"Let us see what it looks like," said Pancrack, and he walked to the door and looked out. In a moment he returned.

"I am sorry to have to put you to any trouble," he said, with a polite, conciliatory smile, "but I shall have to take advantage of your kind offer. I am a very bad traveller by night, and I should have some trouble in finding my way over the ravine."

"Oh, that's all right," said Dysart, "we can easily accommodate you. There's a spare bedstead in your room, Polson. We might throw a few rugs and coats on that and make it answer for the night."

Anyone who had watched Silas Pancrack closely might have noticed a transient gleam in his eyes at this announcement, but it was immediately buried in one of those earnest entreaties (which mean nothing) not to put themselves "to the least trouble" on his account; "anything would do" for him; he was "used to hard beds," etc., etc.

At another time Fred Polson might have tried to avert the fulfilment of a proposal which promised him Silas Pancrack for a room-mate, but to-night the influence of social intercourse had worn the iron from his soul, and though it had not been replaced by any friendly feeling, it was sufficiently subdued to cause him to offer a ready, if indifferent, acquiescence.

. . . . .

Fred Polson, why sleepest thou so soundly this night?  
 Does no guardian spirit whisper in thine ear to warn thee?  
 Does no friendly finger press open thy fast-closed lids that  
 thine eyes may see through the shadows a form that is  
 blacker than the night moving toward thy bed. Seest not  
 how softly it lifteth thy garments, how slyly into thy pocket  
 a dexterous hand is thrust. Not to rifle thy goods, for thou  
 art poor; but to sow in the darkness a poisonous seed  
 which shall grow to bitter fruit for thee. Back into thy  
 fitting element of blackness and shadow, dark form—back  
 ere thy victim wakes! For see, he moves! Now, he  
 sleeps; yea, he sleepeth still.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE ARREST.

PRESENTIMENT ! Premonition !

We hear much of these, and though, no doubt, in certain very impressive times, and under peculiar influences, the soul may be touched by the shadow of approaching fate, yet it is nevertheless an undeniable fact that most of the great events of life, whether their tendency be for good or for evil, come to us as surprises.

On the bright October morning that followed the dark evening of the last short chapter, no shadow lay upon Fred Polson's soul. Though he bore—as each man must—within his breast a share of misery, it was for the time completely subdued by kindlier influences.

That only deserves the name of enjoyment which leaves behind it a pleasant memory of itself. The bleared eyes, the feverish hands, the aching heads that follow the night spent over the wine-flagon and the gaming table, are fitting reflexes of the soulless mirth by which they are produced. But the evening spent in pleasant intercourse of friend with friend, the after-ring of sweet music, and the echo of soothing song, the indulgence of elevating untarnished pleasure, kind words spoken and kindly acts done—these still dwell with us in memory to heighten our happiness, to soothe our sorrows, and to make our path through a rugged world more pleasant to our feet. In such pleasure had Fred Polson indulged on the previous evening, and on this bright fall morning he yet seemed to feel, as it were, the music of a sweet melody ringing in his soul.

At the breakfast table Mr. Dysart watched him uneasily, and noticed the light of happy feeling that overspread his face.

“Poor fellow !” he thought. “How soon that happy expression may be changed !” But, determined not to alarm

him by any unusual act or word, he sent him, as was his custom, to his work on the farm.

"I think, Polson," he said, "that you had better go on with digging the holes for earthing the potatoes."

Fred nodded, shouldered his spade, and went, cheerfully whistling, to his work. With the energy that is born of good spirits, he took off his coat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, and began briskly to throw out the damp black earth.

Ah! there is a pleasure in honest labor well pursued, that you, ye worthless idlers and diletanti, whether ye be clothed in faultless broadcloth or fluttering rags, can never know. Ye dressed-up dolls of men, with eye-glasses dangling in languid *ennui* on your breasts—and you, their lower brethren, ye vagabond hordes of tramps knowing no abiding-place; if it is for happiness ye seek, is not kind mother earth beneath your feet, and laboring with her, shall ye not find it?

The happiness of work is perhaps earth's truest happiness, for the laborer toils in harmony with nature, and is blessed with her perennial benediction. Inspired by this noble pleasure, Fred Polson toiled on till the sweat-drops gleamed upon his brow. As his spade clove the sweet-smelling earth, and threw it in heaps around him, his eyes beamed with an invisible joy, and he forgot all things but his toil. So engrossed, indeed, was he that the sound of approaching wheels did not even cause him to turn his head.

"Frederick Polson! In the Queen's name I arrest you as a murderer." The tones, though tinged with nasal twang, were deep and solemn; and at the same time a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder.

Had that bright blue sky above him suddenly wrinkled itself into a crawling mass of thunder-tinted waves, and had all converged toward some hideous centre, which vomited forth a mingled mass of hail, fire and snow upon his head, it could not have astonished Fred Polson more than those few quiet words.

He turned to face the speaker; the spade dropped from his hands, and his forehead was pursed into a corrugated



strip between his hair and his wide-distended eyes. His muscles convulsed till his fingers snapped against his palms, and his mouth opened with a horrified gasp. That terrible news, striking like pangs of ice into a soul permeated with happiness, chilled the current of all warmer and pleasanter emotions, and left him, for the time, like a petrified statue of speechless surprise. The sheriff's officer—a man who understood only the world and its ways, knowing nothing of deeper things—coolly turned a quid of tobacco in his cheek as he awaited Fred's recovery, and thought to himself:

"Mighty coot feller this! If I wasn't up to the tricks of the likes of him, he'd kind o' make me believe he was as innercent as a lamb—he acts that thar surprise so well. But ho, ho, my bird! I'm up to them sort o' things more than you think."

When Fred had sufficiently recovered to move a muscle, he gasped:

"Arrested! Murder! Whatever do you mean?"

"I arrest you, Fred Polson, for the murder of one Bearfoot, a Sioux Indian, belonging to Enoch's reserve," drawled the officer in official rigmarole.

"Bearfoot?" said Fred, regaining the use of his speech, but more astonished and horrified than ever, "I never heard the name before."

"Can't a-help your ignorance," said the officer. "My orders was to arrest you on that charge, so you'd better jump into the rig and come along quiet."

"But stay," said Fred. "This is so sudden. Before I move give me time to think."

"Look a-here, mister! You needn't think I'm foolin' or bluffin' you. If you don't believe me, here's my warrant." He held it out before him.

"So you'd better say nawthen," he added, "and come along. You'll hev lots of time for thinkin' in the rig."

By this time Fred had sufficiently recovered from the first shock of surprise to be able to look the matter squarely in the face, and his first thoughts ran in somewhat disjointed train.

"Arrested for murder! I wonder however it came about. I do hope the news won't get over to father and mother before my innocence is proved. Whatever will Alice think? Surely she won't believe it. Whatever will my companions think of me? I can never face them with this horrible charge hanging over me. Perhaps I had better go with this fellow and see a magistrate, and have matters explained. They can never convict an innocent man, that's one comfort; and—"

During this soliloquy the officer had grown very impatient, and he cut it short with:

"Now, Mister, make up your mind whether you're goin' to come with me quiet-like, or whether we shall have a tussle about wearing the handcuffs."

"You needn't trouble yourself," said Fred with cold civility. "Give me time to put on my coat, and I will come with you."

The officer nodded, muttering a mollified "Right y'are," and jumped into his buggy standing near—an elegant conveyance for the accommodation of two, softly cushioned, and shaded by a rubber hood. In this luxurious vehicle Fred seated himself by the officer's side to be driven to acquittal or disgrace. The man saved him the pain of passing the farm by taking a short cut across the prairie to get on the main trail leaning to Greentown, the next station east from Bendigo on the line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and the seat of justice for the county.

A pale face and a trembling hand were the only visible remains of Fred Polson's recent agitation, otherwise all was calm and self-controlled. Confident in his innocence he had repressed his struggling fears, and spoke to the officer on all subjects but that which lay nearest his heart. The sheriff's sleek and well-fed beast drew them along at an easy trot over a smooth trail passing between large fields of stubble and plowed land, interspersed with wire-fenced pasture fields and tracks of wild, uncultivated prairie. Here and there was a farmer working on his land. In one place a gang of threshers were tearing down wheat-stacks amid dust and smoke, and sending the grain in wain-

loads to the barn, and sometimes they passed a wagon load of wheat, which some hardy rustic was driving to market. But these sights were too common to them to afford much entertainment, and the travellers beguiled the time by talking and arguing on every conceivable subject but that which had brought them together. Fred's well-stored mind and good command of language gave him an easy mastery over his opponent on all controversial points. As the officer listened to him he was astounded to find judgment so cool delivered by one whom he had just arrested on, probably, the most serious charge that can be brought against any man.

"Wal," he thought, "this is the coolest customer I ever did meet with. Why, he talks as if he was goin' to the meetin' of a farmers' institoot instead o' bein' on the way to be tried for his life. Oh, he's a hard un, he is."

Ah, Mr. Officer! you judge of the secrets of the pool by the ripple on its surface. Little you know of the agony that tears your prisoner's heart at times. Watch for a while that heart-wringing procession which passes sometimes before his mental view, and then you will know but a little of what he endures. See that aged pair—the father moaning in sorrow inconsolate, the mother weeping like Rachel for her children—moving in sorrow to the grave. Watch that fair girl who shudders at his name and loathes his accusation, whilst she bewails his fate. Look upon the relations, the friends, the companions he has loved; note the hush of sorrow and shame that falls over them at the mention of his name; and watch the goblet in which it should be pledged pass silent and untasted round the board. Behold this, oh, man of the world! Shade thine eyes from the sights that dazzle thee! Look deep into the bosom of the lake, and ask yourself whether your first surmise was correct. The human mind is so constituted that when in face of danger—even though firmly believing that it can be easily averted or overcome—it will sometimes look on the darker side, and gather, as in a focus, all the worst possibilities of the case. Thus it was that, although Fred succeeded fairly well in

keeping up his courage by the conviction of his innocence, the shadow of coming calamity would at times over-pall his spiritual sight, and he saw himself tried, condemned and led to the gallows amid the execrations of his enemies and the tears of his friends. Nay, worse; sometimes he saw all hearts chilled against his, and himself standing alone, unfriended and uncomforted on the shores of the eternal world; and his anguish, though hidden, was such as no pen can describe. Fortunately for his feelings he knew no one in Greentown, nor was it known that a man had been arrested for murder, so they passed without notice to the magistrate's house. There, however, to his horror, he found Snipe, the detective, seated with the justice of the peace at a table littered with writing-paper. The detective greeted him courteously, and the magistrate bade him be seated.

The examination was very brief, and in spite of his earnest protestations of innocence, resulted in Fred's being sent up for trial at the next assizes. This was a result he had little expected, and for a moment it bore him down with sorrow and shame, but confident in the righteousness of innocence he overcame his fears, and rising to his feet grasped the chair-back with his hand and said: "With such evidence as you have, with circumstances working so bitterly against me, I cannot blame you for your decision; yet, nevertheless, I believe that one day you will repent it. For I know that I am innocent, and I believe that in the end the truth will be made manifest."

Rumor spreads apace. A murderer is arrested—is here! On the platform of the station a crowd is collected, and as two men come forward, necks are craned and eyebrows bent, and fingers of all descriptions (ringed, white, black, pasted with flour, cracked with lime, odorous with chemicals, greasy, wet, dry, straight and crooked) are pointed at them, and voices in many keys murmur and mutter, "It is he." "It is him." "Don't look much like a murderer, does he?" "Carries his head pretty straight anyway." "Looks pale though." "Walks pretty firm all the same." "Smart-looking young fellow, if he was better dressed." "Wonder if they'll hang him."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## WHAT SHALL WE DO?

ON the day of Fred Polson's arrest life ran its usual course on the Dysart farm. It was his custom on working days to dine with the men at the farm-house, and though his absence was noted, it was not much commented on. There was the usual accompaniment of sounds—the clashing of knives and forks, and the mastication of crackling crusts. Suppliant dogs sat behind the benches, looking up at the eaters with imploring eyes, and sweeping with their bushy tails clean discs on the dusty floor. The cook, as usual, pattered noisily about as he served the men with food and drink or engaged them in fiery polemical discussions.

"Here's your tea, Hart. Have some more pork, Bill? I wonder where that Polson's got to. If he don't come soon, he'll go without his dinner. Fetch some more beans in, Jim."

Jim—the cook's assistant—was a miserable-looking lad, dressed in a baggy shirt that hung loosely about his body, like a half-filled balloon, and a pair of pantaloons which swelled out in bulgy Oriental majesty, whilst the rim above the belt stood out in an eccentric circle round his body, like a saucer around the bottom of a cup, and the bottoms were turned up half-way to the knees to accommodate the brevity of his legs.

This youth went slowly on his errand to the cook-shanty, and some time later returned with a dish of steaming beans, and the declaration that he "couldn't see Polson nowhere; but a feller had passed who had told him he had seen him driving toward Greentown with a stranger."

"Let him drive," said the cook, cutting up a pie with fierce gashes. "He'll get no dinner from me to-day, anyway."

Mr. Dysart, as was often his custom, strolled into the cook-shanty that afternoon, to have a chat with his culi-

nary chief. Leaning his elbows lazily on the lid of a large boiler on the top of the stove, he began to stroke a cat which jumped up and rubbed its purring head against his arm.

"By the way, cook, where did Polson go after dinner?" he asked.

"Never come to dinner," said the cook, dipping his hand into the hot water in which he had placed some dirty dishes to be washed. "Drat that boy!—puttin' such bilin' water as that to wash dishes in! It's fit to scald the ile out of a feller's finger joints. Jim says he saw a feller that told him he saw Polson dr'rin' with a stranger, Greentown way."

Mr. Dysart started up from the indolent attitude he had assumed, as if he had come in contact with a live wire.

"You don't say! How sudden!" he exclaimed. "What time was he seen to go?"

"Couldn't say; but must have been some time before dinner."

The master hurried away from the shanty toward the stable, leaving the cook in a state of surly surprise.

"What's got into the man anyway?" he muttered. "There's nothin' so much surprisin' in a stoddent takin' a trip to town when he has a notion. I think he's a bit crazy. But there's no accountin' for the actions o' these Catholics anyway. They're always a-schemin' and plottin' at something. If I had my way, I'd burn all the priests in a Guy Fawkes fire. Hi, Jim! Fetch in an armful o' sticks."

Mr. Dysart hurried over to the stables, where he found his groom currying a pony.

"Hitch up the ponies to the light cart at once, Wilson," he said, "and get ready to go with me to Greentown right away."

"All right, sir." And soon he was ready.

As fast as whip could urge a horse they rolled along that day; but all in vain. For when they reached Greentown, they found that Fred Polson had been taken about an hour



before on to Markon, the centre of the judicial district, there to await his trial.

A young man with a weary, dissipated look on his face went up to Alice Craggs as she was hanging out clothes on the line to dry.

The wind blew the dark hair back from her forehead, and fluttered heavily among the damp garments hung out around her, whilst her white apron was playing in the air like a streamer on the wind. As she daintily pegged the clothes on the line, she reminded one of some sweet household deity—the one fair sight where all things else bore the impress of ruin and decay.

“Say, Alice,” said the weary-looking young man in a languid tone, “great news for you. Fred Polson has been arrested for the murder of an Indian.” At first she could not comprehend the full meaning of his words, and she only opened her eyes in surprise and ejaculated in tones of astonishment, “Murdered! Mr. Polson! What did you say?”

“I thought I spoke distinct enough,” said the youth in an offended tone. Then raising his voice, “Fred Polson has been arrested, and taken to Markon to be tried for the murder of an Indian near Bend-arm creek.”

For a moment Alice stood like one bewildered, her face convulsed with the play of strong emotions. Then, as the truth dawned fully upon her, the color was chased away by a deadly paleness; she shivered like a wind-struck aspen leaf, and but for her brother's timely assistance would have fallen to the ground.

For a few seconds George held up her head, hardly knowing how to act, and then lifting her bodily, bore her into the house and laid her on the sofa. At a call from her son, Mrs. Craggs bustled into the room with a black-lead brush in her hand and a shiny black spot over her right eyebrow.

“Dear me, George! What is the matter?” she exclaimed. Then, seeing Alice lying on the sofa, “What! Fainted! Wait till I get some water. Whatever made her faint?”



"Oh, I was only telling her that Fred Polson had been arrested for murder."

"What, him! No, it can't be! You don't say so! But she is such a silly, emotional creature, she faints at anything. I shouldn't have been in the least surprised if it were quite true, considering what a mopish, bookish sort of a fellow he is."

"But, I tell you, it *is* true," said George, indignant at hearing his important news so often scouted.

"Is it really? Good gracious, whoever would have thought it!"

By this time she had in her excitement sprinkled Alice's face till the poor girl looked like a statue of "the sleeping beauty" that had just been exposed to a thunderstorm.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Craggs, fanning her energetically with a newspaper. "Is she never going to come round? This comes of reading so much poetry and novels and stuff."

This last declaration, I may here remark, is quite characteristic of a class of people who always trace the blame of the faults and weaknesses of others to some taste with which they have no sympathy.

Under the combined and vigorous application of wind and water, Alice at last began to show symptoms of recovery. Her eyes opened slowly, and she breathed freely once more. She looked around in some astonishment, unable at first fully to comprehend the situation. Then memory came cruelly to her aid.

"It is not true! It never can be true!" she said passionately, raising herself on her elbow, and speaking to George, who had stood an interested but helpless spectator of her treatment and recovery. "Tell me what made you deceive me with such a story. It is no subject for amusement."

But George, whose rising anger subsided before her earnest passion, only shook his head gloomily and answered:

"You'll find it's true enough by and by."

Alice sank down again, and covered her face with her hands. "Oh, I never can believe it," she said with sobs.

By this time Mrs. Craggs had fully recovered from the surprise which the news had given her, and so was quite prepared for the role of the successful maternal prophetess.

"Silly girl!" she said sharply. "It's true enough, you may depend upon it. What would George want to tell you a lie for? It's just what I've always expected of him anyhow. What did he mope about by himself so much for? And why did he sit so much in corners with never a word to say, if he hadn't got some dark scheme in his head? I'll tell you, you had better stop thinking about such a fellow as that, and think of someone better."

Alice's sobbing burst out afresh. "Oh, mother! How can you say so? I am sure you know better."

But Mrs. Craggs persisted in her belief—a belief which, if she could only succeed in instilling it in her daughter's mind, she knew would drive from her heart the image of the only man she feared as a rival to Silas Pancrack; and so, for the sake of gaining this mercenary end, she was willing to act as a self-constituted counsel for the prosecution against one who had never harmed her in word or deed. To such lengths will mercenary motives and selfish desires, when thoroughly indulged, lead even the best-intentioned.

Over poor Alice dark days had fallen.

In vain she sought for one word of friendly sympathy in her faith in Fred Polson's innocence. True, her brother said that he could hardly believe him guilty; but always ended by shaking his head gloomily, and declaring the case looked bad.

Her father—muffled and swathed, blinking and owlish as ever—sat by the fire, his clothing reeking with liquor, or pottered unsteadily about the farm-yard supported by his stick. Her mother sharply rebuked her for her weak and foolish beliefs, and Silas Pancrack, without jarring her feelings more than he could help, gently hinted in his smoothest way that circumstances, trivial-seeming in themselves, sometimes led men to evil-doing; and the sensitive and finely-balanced mind was always easiest led by passion to either right or wrong extremes—that Polson's was in some respects a strange nature, that there were in him

hidden depths into which no one had seen, and none knew what they might contain. But in spite of this, he hinted that it would give him much pleasure to see Fred acquitted, and he had little doubt that his studious brain would suggest a good defence.

So Alice remained in sorrow and suspense. The subtle poison dropped from Pancrack's tongue into her ear, though it could not excite her to suspect poor Fred, did much to allay her anxiety; and almost unconsciously to herself she found that she looked forward to Silas's visits with pleasure, as the one person to shed now and then a ray of comfort on her path, where all others were either indifferent to or against her.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THOUGHTS IN A PRISON.

OF that dark period in Fred Polson's life, between his arrest and his trial, I shall say nothing by way of narrative, but simply content myself with pieces culled from the written diary with which he beguiled many lonely hours. I do this because I believe that his own words will convey to the reader far better than mine could his feelings, sufferings and thoughts.

"To be the scorn of every outstretched finger; to be regarded by every eye as a thing attractive by its loathsomeness; to see friends and acquaintances drifting away in the distance behind; to see strangers and enemies gathering around and before; to hear your name uttered in horrified whispers, coupled with the ignoble stigmas of 'murderer' and 'assassin'; above all, to be the victim of your own agonizing thoughts and doubts—this is bitter indeed; and glad was I when the prison doors closed upon me, shutting me out from the cold virtues of the outer world, and leaving me among those who, if they neither pitied nor sympathized with me, at least did not despise me.

Nor can I murmur at my treatment here. A comfortable cell has been provided for me. Of my food and drink I cannot complain. The officials are most civil and obliging, and I have full liberty within the prison walls. But alas! all these material consolations afford but faint comfort to a trouble-tossed soul.

"Alice! I often wonder what she thinks of me. Why am I thus torn by doubts of her confidence in my innocence? I could not believe that she herself would doubt me; but Pancrack—that mean and hardened wretch—he will be ever by her side; and who knows what treacherous doubts and suspicions he may implant in her mind—poisonous weeds which will cling around and choke her better beliefs. I know he hates me, and will rejoice in my disgrace. And why does his accursed face, with its evil expression, ever trying to peep through a layer of hypocrisy—why does that face haunt me so?

"Surely I have never seen it before; and yet, I constantly imagine I have. Through dark and sleepless nights that face is at my side, and it seems to be laughing at my distress and mocking me with a malicious and triumphant smile. Surely, Alice can never cling to him. But oh, these doubts—this horrible suspense! I will write to her at least, and ask her, only in kindness, to end it by blessing me with her faith or blasting me with her doubts."

He then passes into a maze of thoughts and fears which, for the sake of brevity, we will omit, and pass on to the next incident.

"To-day I learned that I still have a friend. As I sat in the prison-yard, watching the clouds drift over the sun, the sullen doors ground open with their unwilling sound, and admitted—not, as I expected, another criminal—but my old friend and master, Mr. Dysart. After shaking me warmly by the hand, he assured me of his firm belief in my innocence, and his determination to stay in the town and stand by me till the trial was over. He wished me to select an advocate to defend me; but I told him that if he would be kind enough to find a lawyer to do the questioning, I would speak for myself—believing that truth and in-

nocence would give to my words more weight than all the legal lore and professional blandishment that could be engaged in my cause. He hardly agreed with me in this, but promised to do as I desired; and after I had thanked him as warmly as I could, he took his leave, promising to call again on the following day.

“Wonderful is the influence that emanates from man to man. By that mysterious telegraphy by which all human beings are bound together, we learn to love, to hate, to envy and admire. By the words that day spoken to me I felt greatly consoled. To feel that I was not altogether friendless—to know that I could yet command sympathy and aid was a precious knowledge; and coming to me at such a time, it poured over my spirit like a light shed in a dark place. My spirits rose. I resolved to turn my troubles to the advantage of soul and mind, and, confident in my innocence, move toward the event with a calm and courageous heart.”

We now pass over the details of several days, and content ourselves with a few thoughts gleaned in that period, believing they will prove instructive and beneficial to whomsoever will thoughtfully read them.

“I have gone among my fellow-prisoners, and have interested myself in ascertaining their former lives and the causes that brought them here. Many and various were these. Some few seem to have taken to crime as ducks do to water; others have been pushed to it by the hard hand of poverty; but many seem not to have known where the paths of good and evil parted. At first all was blurred and misty, and it was only when they had gone too far to retrace their steps with ease, that they discovered their mistake, and, making no effort to save themselves, drifted down to durance vile. At first it was only some little trick, half comical, half cute; then, encouraged by the laughter and admiration that drowned all censure, they ventured on bolder strokes. Nor are these men ashamed of their crimes to-day. The world had admired them for their ‘cuteness,’ and why should they not be proud of it. Beware! O admiring public,

when your heroes are let loose on you again! For it is much to be feared that they will again soon provide you with fresh themes for admiration—and regret.

"Others again I met of gentler sort, who by their kind and social proclivities had been induced to spend their money over the wine flagon, or had lost in gambling—drink's twin sister—to a ruinous extent. With the best intention they had falsely abstracted money, hoping to pay it back with redoubled interest when some lucky hit had been made. All had been lost, and with it all honor and good repute and hope of a better life.

"Ah! beware of the parting of the paths! Keep the eye undimmed by excess, unlogged by aught impure or vile. Suffer not one little speck to impede your sight, but clear in honesty, temperance and chastity let it shine; and be sure, it will direct your feet aright.

"Into that dangerous borderland between the right and wrong stray never. The wine-cup—touch it not. The gambling table—pass it by. The impure thought—cast it from thee. Thy pride—subdue it. The sharp trick—practise it not. The profane oath—unuttered leave it. The unnatural habit—conquer it. The kind word—speak it. The unselfish act—do it. For thus, and thus alone, can you hope to continue in that narrow path wherein only, with life's duties well done, and life's battles well fought, true happiness is found."

The next extract opens in a sadder and more sentimental strain.

"Many days have now passed since I wrote to Alice, and still no reply. Does *she* then doubt me? It is hard to believe; but why then this inexplicable silence? Perhaps, owing to some accident or delay, she has never received my letter, or I have never received hers. Heaven grant that it may be so. Meanwhile Mr. Dysart still continues my friend, and visits me daily. He has further assured me that all my former companions (according to a letter he has received from home) believe as firmly in my innocence as he. This, among all my troubles, is so great a comfort to me that I feel like thanking for it that God



whom I begin to think I have been foolish to doubt so much."

As will be seen by the foregoing extract, Fred was slowly undergoing a change of heart. Not by sermons, homilies or readings was this alteration being wrought, but by the working of an inner consciousness which, tried in the furnace of affliction, set the noble spirit trembling toward the throne of God.

"The time for the trial draws nigh, and as it approaches my spirits seem to grow more calm. I have no presentiment, can form no opinion as to how it will end; but, however it be, I believe I can tranquilly accept my fate. Only two things trouble me: the grief my downfall may bring upon my parents and friends, and the mysterious silence of Alice. These trouble me often—the latter, I fear, as much as the first. I know that it should not be so, but so the fretful dictates of a weak nature will have it."

But a change has come over him, and these thoughts disturb him less.

"From whence this great calm that has so soothingly stolen over me? Is it from the pages of that Holy Writ, by which of late I have been comforted so much? Perhaps it is! For the tender words of the lowly Toiler of Galilee have stolen like sweet subtle music through my ear, and vibrate unceasingly through the innermost recesses of my being. And the wondrous light of that celestial land—where neither sun nor frost doth blight, nor tear-drop ever falls—has surged in strong waves around my soul; and as its billowy splendor has rolled back through the gates of heaven, it has left with me a beautiful, undying calm."



## CHAPTER XXX.

## THE TRIAL.

## BLOOD!

The sight of the crimson stream dyeing the sand of the arena, or the tremulous drops trickling out in the last life agony, was a scene our fathers loved in ancient days. The red tongues of flame singeing slowly into the quivering flesh, wrapping themselves like snakes of fire around the tortured limbs, or sheeting the body in a cloak of flame; the body and newly severed head dripping gore upon either side of the fatal block, or the strangled trunk dangling in hideous convulsions from the gallows-tree—these were the attractions that drew the thousands from home and labor in mediæval times, and in these more highly civilized days of ours we still show an hereditary taint of this morbid weakness of our forefathers.

See the crowds surrounding the walls of the prison where some condemned soul is being launched into eternity, and note the hush of expectation that precedes the raising of the black flag. Watch the eyes of the millions eagerly scanning the newspapers that they may miss no detail of the horrible crime or ghastly execution. Listen to the conversation that moves in mystic whisper from lip to lip, and note how often the name of the murderer is breathed.

So it is, so it has been, and so, I believe, it will be, as long as this earth shall last. For, though the sights which provoke it are to be regretted, and should be repressed to the greatest possible extent, this is after all no mere vulgar curiosity.

Wonderful is the chain which binds man to man from the uttermost parts of the earth, and a strange and fearful thing it is to watch the visible workings of a brother soul trembling on the verge of eternity. How eagerly the eyes are fixed upon the face of one condemned, as if they would learn in

its changing expressions and varying shades of color some tidings of that mysterious land whither he and they are journeying. Show us a man about to die, and lo! he is encompassed with a mystery. Already we feel that he is not one of us; and with softened footsteps and bated breath we await the passage of the spirit to its fit abode. We yearn, we vainly strive to pierce beyond the veil; and when we have done our utmost the wearied mind falls back to earth to worship or wonder anew.

On the day of Fred Polson's trial the court-house of the western town of Markon was crowded to overflowing. The rough cowboy—with unshorn hair and unkempt beard, dressed in buckskin slashed with fringes, and a wide-brimmed hat shading his sunburnt face—sat shoulder to shoulder with the sleek townsman, clothed in all the tawdry gauds of fashion, strong-smelling of effeminate perfumes, and with a smile of placid self-satisfaction resting on his well-shaved face. Beside this oddly-contrasted pair, and all about them, surged a motley crowd, bearing on their faces the expressions of varying character, and on their persons the marks of various trades as they had emerged from their callings that day.

There was the farmer clad in a suit of rough and dingy overalls, his hands embrowned by sun and vein-knotted with toil, and the marks of constant battle with the elements engrained on his face; there was the stableman with bents of hay and bits of straw sticking in his woollen blouse; there sat the baker with the dry dough on his fingers, and near him the miller with the white dust on his clothes. There, at the back, stood a sturdy smith, his leather apron twisted like a rough-rolled window blind about his belt, and his hat pushed back from the hair which the dry sweat had matted on his brow. There sat a clerk with a little round, brimless hat on his head, and pen sticking like a black-tipped horn from his ear; there a grocer just fresh from making up parcels. There sat the sawyer just come from the mill, and speckled with sawdust from head to foot; there the landlord, exhaling odors of strong liquor, close by the druggist fragrant with chemicals. There,

too, was the speculator, with nervous face and keen, all embracing eye, calculating the value of the judge's desk and the lawyer's cloaks. There was the dandified negro barber, with white cuffs splashed and stained; and there stood the Chinese laundryman with long queue twisted on his head, with almond eye a-blink and snub nose erect, and hand wrinkled like a withered cabbage-leaf. There were men of all occupations in life, from the idle "gentleman" to the lazy "loafer," and mingling with these a busy, simmering and useful mass.

Yet varied as were their conditions and circumstances, they were all bound for the time by one common brotherhood of interest. All awaited with eager desire the sight of the emotions of a brother-man under trial for his life. There were several minor cases to be disposed of before the trial, for which they so eagerly waited, began. Meanwhile the crowd chaffed impatiently among themselves; and many talked in an undertone on various topics of interest.

As the day wore on—for some of the smaller cases involved much technical explanation and occupied considerable time—the impatience of the crowd increased almost beyond the bounds of restraint, and remarks such as these rose distinct and audible from the general hubbub of mutterings and whisperings:

"Will they keep us here all day?"

"Is the case never going to commence?"

"Can't the judge knock off some of the other cases till to-morrow?"

"I'd go home and come back after supper, if I wasn't afraid o' losing my seat."

"Well, we've hung out so long, I guess we might as well hang out a bit longer."

On what mysterious clothes-line or scaffold the last speaker intended to carry out this suicidal idea, it would be hard to say; but certainly he was soon rewarded for his patience by hearing it declared that the next case was the trial of Frederick Polson for the murder of Bearfoot, otherwise known as the "single Sioux."

The spirit of expectancy laid its fingers on the lips of the crowd, and a silence deep as death fell over it, as the prisoner was brought in between two guards. His face was pale and bore the mark of suffering, but its expression was calm and unruffled. He returned the stare of the crowd with a steady look, evincing a humble courage unmixed with defiance or contempt.

With cool, unflinching steps he moved forward, and bowing to the judge and counsel, took his place on the prisoner's stand; and there in tranquil silence bared his head and waited for the trial to begin.

He was dressed in a dark suit of neat-fitting clothes which had been provided for him during his imprisonment. The hair was brushed back from his lofty forehead, and the aspect of quiet resolution with which he awaited the ordeal gave even to his slight form and emaciated features a look of gentle yet surpassing dignity.

The opinions of the crowd on his appearance were favorable, but guarded, as the expressions of men not wishing to form a judgment too hastily.

"Don't *look* much like a murderer anyway." "Smart lookin' feller." "Yah, I'll bet he's coot enough for anything." "Wal, he takes it pretty cool for a sure thing." "Hush-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh-sh."

This diminuendo of "hushes" was the result of the calling of the name of the first witness, "Nathan McLachlan."

Our worthy friend "Uncle" had been sitting in a corner at the back of the court-room, waiting in an agony of nervous horror for the calling of his name. When he heard it, he jumped up as if an express train had touched him on the rear, and with folded arms and elevated eyebrows, and lower lip pushing out the upper, looked helplessly toward the judge.

The "boys" of Dysart farm had arrayed him for the occasion in a pair of brown top-boots, blue overalls, a fine black swallow-tail coat, and a tall top hat. This remarkable medley, fitted on his nervous, rough and restless frame, gave him a most grotesque appearance. When he paused

in that tragic attitude, an ill-suppressed titter ran through the court; and the shadow of a smile even flitted over the grave and venerable face of the judge himself. But such untimely levity in a dignitary of whose profession gravity is a leading part, was soon suppressed; and thinking he divined the meaning of Uncle's appealing glance, he sent a guard to conduct him to the witness-box.

When Uncle saw this officer coming toward him, his alarm and astonishment knew no bounds. Screwing his face into a contortion in which protest was mingled with surprise, he stood his ground for a second; then, as the officer came unrelentingly on, he flung out his arms, a top-boot swung in a circle through the air, and Uncle made a dash toward the door.

In spite of the solemnity of the occasion, the sight of the swallow-tails, blue overalls, box-hat and top-boots struggling doorward proved too much for gravity, and an explosion of laughter in many keys rang through the court.

The judge frowned and looked over the top of his spectacles.

"This is disgraceful!" he said in stern tones. "Remember for what purpose we have met, and the place you are in. A court of justice is not a theatre."

This rebuke somewhat quieted the assembly, and as the laughter ceased the officer could be seen leading Uncle Nathan toward the witness-box. The latter in his heroic dash for liberty had found great difficulty in forcing his way through the crowd, so that the officer following in the wake of his flight, soon caught up with him. Seizing him by the coat-collar, he drew his head toward him and whispered in his ear: "No fooling now. Come along with me quietly. I only want to lead you to the witness-box to give your evidence."

Uncle, thus reassured, with many contortions of face followed his guide. He laid his hat on the floor near his feet. Mr. Clifton, counsel for Polson, examined him as gently as he could; but all the time Uncle's fingers were working convulsively, and his restless head bobbed constantly up and down.

"Let us hear your statement first of all," said Mr. Clifton.

Uncle's lips pressed nervously together as he looked at the lawyer with a mingled expression of terror and perplexity.

"Tell us all you know about this—how you came to find the Indian's body, etc."

The look of perplexity partially disappeared as Uncle replied slowly: "Oh, yah. Was out herdin' cattle—let's see"—(He lifted his hand, and was lost for a moment in contemplation of his restless fingers)—"last Sunday mornin' bout four or five; I seen a wolf chawin' away at somethin'. I thought maybe it's a jack-rabbit he's got a hold of, as I went to scare him off, and I seen a hand, somethin' like a man's, pokin' up, he'd bin chawin' at, so I went to the barn and got George and Bill."

"And that is all you know?"

"Why yah—I guess."

"Do you believe the accused to be guilty of the murder?"

"No. I guess not." Then with a bend of his body, "Aint sort o' chap to do that."

"That will do," said Mr. Clifton, and sat down.

Then, to Uncle's dismay, arose that terror of timid witnesses, Herman Soratus Blutgun, the counsel for the prosecution. This gentleman was tall and very stout. His heavy beetling brows hung out over a pair of eyes lighted with a perpetual glare. His round, uncompromising head had made some attempt at growing bald on the top, but had apparently been intimidated from proceeding in its design by a stiff black tuft, rising like a stunted steeple in spiky solitude above his forehead.

When this ponderous individual arose, with a parchment in his hand like a policeman's baton, poor Uncle shrunk so within himself that the swallow-tails, top-boots and overalls seemed to be merging into one common garment. Mr. Blutgun fixed his fierce gaze upon him, and in a tone like rumbling thunder demanded:

"Witness, answer me. You say you were herding cattle near the place where the body was found. What brought you to that spot?"



Uncle's hair was bristling, and his knuckles were cracking audibly ; but with a desperate effort, the overalls, boots and coat-tails revealed a separate identity, as he jerked out the short reply :

"Got to herd 'em somewheres, I guess."

After this tremendous effort he shrunk within himself again, his head looking over the top of the witness-box, and the tip of his sharp, sandy goatee pointing threateningly at Mr. Blutgun, who was standing a little below him.

"That is no answer," said the prosecutor, sharply. "Were you there by any pre-conceived arrangement with the prisoner?"

"Naw," said Uncle, with a snarl. Desperation was making him bold.

"You will swear positively that you have had no collusion whatever with the prisoner?"

"Eh! Hum?"

The prosecutor repeated his question in plainer language.

"Naw, not I."

"What makes you think him not guilty then?"

At this question, launched at him like a thunderbolt, Uncle again sank into the desperation of fear. In his agitation he gave a despairing kick with his left leg, and the stove-pipe hat lying near his feet went whirling out into the midst of the audience.

During his examination the crowd, tickled by his ludicrous gestures, had been in agonies, trying to keep down their inappropriate laughter ; but at this sudden violation of the Rugby rules, it exploded with a loud roar. Poor Uncle, quite overwhelmed, looked first at the convulsed audience and then at the grave, angry face of the judge ; and finding himself between two fires of wrath and ridicule, crouched into dwarfish dimensions near the floor, with his short, rough hair bobbing about in a line with the edge of the witness-box. When the noise of the laughter had subsided sufficiently to allow him to be heard, the judge called out, in tones of offended majesty :

"Return the witness his hat, please ; and cease this disgraceful uproar. This is the second time this scandalous



noise has been made. If it happens again, I will give orders to clear the court."

But even a judge's mandate cannot check the outburst of human emotion, as a machine might be stopped with a brake; and it was several minutes before order was restored so that the court could proceed.

Meanwhile Uncle received his hat again, and holding it under his arm, once more stood erect, or as nearly as it was possible for him to do so.

"Witness," said the judge, frowning, "remember where you are."

"Eh?" grunted the witness in sharp nasal twang.

"Remember your place, sir, or I will fine you for contempt of court."

Uncle's two middle fingers clapped against the palm of his hand, his underlip overlapped the right corner of his mouth, the bark-like wrinkles on his brow twitched into another shape, and he turned toward the attorney. That gentleman repeated impatiently the question to which he had yet received no answer.

"What makes you think the prisoner innocent of the crime he is accused of?"

"O nawthen." It was the easiest way out of the difficulty, and he took it.

"O nothing," repeated Mr. Blutgun, sarcastically. "A very sufficient reason truly. Witness, you may get down."

Uncle, highly relieved, scrambled down to the floor, and there twitched himself around once to make sure that no one was pursuing, and then worked his way through the crowd to the back of the room.

Maxfield and McGrath, the two hired men from Mr. Dysart's, were the next witnesses.

They testified briefly to the finding of the body.

Doctor Cutter followed. He declared that Bearfoot had met his death by a bullet entering the left temple and penetrating the brain, and that, when discovered, the body had evidently lain underground for about a day.

The next witness called was Anthony Scrogpot, farm-cook. Besprinkled with flour, he hobbled up to the wit-

ness-box with a look of sullen doggedness on his face, which seemed to say, "You won't get much out of me, sirs."

Mr. Blutgun tried the effect of his brow-beating eyes and thunderous voice in vain.

"Did you and the prisoner go out hunting together one day in July last summer?" he asked loweringly.

"Well, what if we did?"

"No impertinence, sir," said Mr. Blutgun, sternly knitting the hair on his beetling eyebrows into one straight line. "Tell the court what happened on that occasion."

"You needn't think you can scare me by lookin' like that. I know what happened better 'n you do. Polson shot a buck deer 'jumpin' out of a bluff; and a dirty scalawag of a nichie came out and wanted to lay claim on it. But I soon showed him different, though."

"Did the Indian you saw there resemble the murdered man at all?"

"Don't know whether he assembled him or not. Didn't take much notice."

"Was there any altercation between the Indian and Polson?"

"No altercation as I see; but we had a few words among us."

"What were they about?—the words I mean."

"Why, as I was tellin' you afore, the copper-skinned hound wanted to claim the deer his, because he'd been huntin' it; and Polson was for sharin' up and givin' him half. But he wanted the whole hog or none, so I told him to git out or I'd soon shift him. (And I would too.) He didn't pertend to take much notice, though he was scared; and he sneaked off sayin' he'd let Polson know about it some time. And that's all as I knows."

"Were those Bearfoot's *exact* words?" asked Mr. Blutgun, thumping the table with his parchment as he emphasized the "exact."

"Something like it. Can't say exactly—I was busy skinning the deer."

"And was that *all* that passed between them?" Mr.

Blutgun compressed his lips, and fixed his eyes on the witness as if he would burn the truth out of him.

"All," was the imperturbable, growling reply. "I guess it was. And enough I should think."

"In your position you must have a good opportunity of witnessing the ways of the men on the farm. Did Polson seem to you to have grown moody, and fond of loneliness lately?"

"Well, what if he did? He always was a great 'un for thinkin' and studyin' over books and that sort o' rot; but as for murderin'—the first man as I hear say as he'd do that, I'll trounce him, or my name's not Anthony Scrogpot."

With a stern frown from the judge and a baffled glare from Mr. Blutgun, this grim witness was dismissed.

The old Indian chief Enoch was next called. Arrayed for the occasion in paint and feathers, with blanket-edged trousers floating wide, the buckskin coat embroidered like his moccasins, and his long pipe slung by his side, he stalked up to the witness-box like some fossilized relic of a by-gone barbaric age, imbedded amid the surroundings of modern civilization.

With cool, unbending dignity he took his stand, and waited for the examination to begin. After a few preliminary questions, Mr. Blutgun asked:

"Did you, on the Friday preceding the day on which the murder is supposed to have been committed, buy a spade and pick from the hardware store in Bendigo?"

"Ya-as," answered Enoch, slowly, in deep guttural tones, "and I lost them that same night, where the trail goes over Bend-arm creek."

"How do you know that you lost them in crossing the Bend-arm creek?" asked Mr. Clifton in cross-examination.

"Ugh! Saw them in just before going down the hill; looked when I got to the other side, and they were gone."

"And you did not go back to search for them?"

"No good. Night so dark, I couldn't see this." And he held up one of his yellow, wrinkled hands.

"Still," continued Mr. Clifton, "it seems to me rather strange that you made no attempt to find them. You are not a millionaire."

"Ugh! Ugh! No good, I say," said Enoch, grunting and shaking his head. "Bearfoot going to Bend-arm creek the next day, and I tell him to find them, and bring them back; but Bearfoot never come back."

"No wonder, with such a burden to carry," said Mr. Clifton, sarcastically.

The old Indian saw that he had made a mistake, and hastened to repair the error.

"Me not mean he carry them all the way; but just find them, and leave them at a farm-house till I send for them."

After that he plied him with a subtle cross-examination; but the old chief remained quite unruffled, and he failed to gather from him any more evidence favorable to the defence.

The next witness called was the governor of the jail, who said that in searching the prisoner's clothes he had found in one of the pockets several large cotton labels with a large X marked on each one, which he believed to be the sign with which Bearfoot distinguished his clothes.

At this point the prisoner—who had hitherto been standing calm and self-possessed, as he lent an attentive ear to the evidence—was observed to start as if in surprise. His lips parted slightly, his eyebrows raised, and his hand tightened nervously on the hand-rail he was grasping. He looked as if he would utter some exclamation; but in a second he regained his self-composure, and said nothing.

The last witness for the prosecution was Snipe the detective. His evidence was merely a corroboration of the others, with a few hints thrown in from his own observations.

The evidence for the defence (as is ever the case when there is no guilt to defend) was necessarily very light.

Mr. Dysart testified to the prisoner's excellent character and good temper.

Messrs. Longstreet and Fane gave evidence as to the deer-hunt being projected among themselves without Polson's connivance.

Fred merely contented himself with a quiet denial of the charge.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## THE WAR OF WORDS.

TWILIGHT had begun to fall over the court-room ere the evidence was all concluded. The audience, forgetful of time and business, eagerly awaited the end. In the pause between the finishing of the evidence and the beginning of the prisoner's speech of defence, the air of the court-room was humming with whispered speculations.

Under the grey wing of the closing day, the prisoner, looking on the audience, saw all individual differences melting into sober indistinctness. He heard his name float up to him in mutterings and whisperings, a hundred times or more ; and eyes—eyes—eyes gazed on him from every point. Of the face of friend or foe nothing could he see. He only discerned a general humanity casting at him the sound of its voices and the light of its eyes.

The judge, like a phantom, robed and spectacled, sat silent and still in the darkening shades behind him. The jury, with heads resting on hands, or with necks intently stretched forth, sat in petrified stillness, like so many statues of attention. The tops of the lawyers' heads could be seen, as they bent over and pretended to examine the papers they held. And above all this hubbub and silence—this simmering curiosity and statuesque grotesqueness—the prisoner stood erect, the full light of the dying day falling upon his brow. He—he alone in the twilight and indistinctness—stood distinct and definable. Above the heads of the jury a western window welcomed the lingering light of the dying day, and shed it like a halo around the prisoner's head. The calm, unconscious dignity which suffering, allied to virtue, gives—the beauty of truth and righteousness,—shone on his countenance with wonderful radiance ; and the voices of the people were hushed, and the light of impertinent eyes was quenched, as with body slightly bent and voice subdued, he began :

"Gentlemen of the Jury,—I do not appeal to you for mercy—I look to your sense of justice. You have heard the evidence brought before you ; and if you look back on your past lives, you can perhaps remember some little incident in which circumstances proved too strong for your denials ; and the rod that should punish only for guilt, fell upon innocent shoulders. That which applies to small things is applicable with equal force to greater ; and for this reason I wish to call your attention to a few flaws in that chain of evidence which chance has so cunningly forged around me.

"I go hunting down the Bend-arm creek on a certain day. The next day, on the edge of the creek, the body of an Indian is found. Does that prove that I murdered him ? Are not Indians naturally a migratory people ? Here to-day, they are miles away to-morrow. Do such people make it a practice to carry their dead with them ? No ; they bury them where they die—bury them often, I daresay, carelessly and in haste. But this one was killed by a bullet in the head. Well, are not Indians constantly handling firearms ? Are not many of their guns and rifles cheap, old-fashioned weapons, palmed on them by trading companies—arms that often refuse to discharge when wanted, and explode at unforeseen moments ? What is easier to imagine than an Indian returning to his tent with flint-lock full cocked ? He places the butt on the ground, and rests for a moment on the muzzle talking to those to whom he has returned. Something causes him to start in surprise. A bit of his dress catches the trigger, or the shaking of his rifle causes it to discharge. His friends sorrow for him, but they recognize the uselessness of delay. They bury him where he is, and pass on. Perhaps they are travelling northward to the bush, or southward to the Moose or Turtle Mountains. At least by this time they may be easily out of hearing of this case, and hence their silence.

"But it is said that this is a particular Indian named Bearfoot who bore me a grudge. A man may often be temporarily annoyed, but no man worthy of the name



would bear a lasting spite against one who had acted justly toward him; and I ask you whether from the evidence you have heard, you can judge my conduct to have been otherwise toward this man. Had I been of such a malignant and hasty disposition that I could wilfully murder another, how was it that on the occasion of which Mr. Scrogspot has narrated, I wished to pacify this man by yielding to him half of my rightful booty?

"Then again, has it been clearly proved that the body is that of Bearfoot? It is said that every man in the world has his double, and this should be peculiarly true of the Indians. The Indian wears no hair on his face, a certain type of feature is common to them all, the distinction between one and another is often very slightly marked and resemblances are strangely minute. Among white men all colors of eyes and hair are common, but an Indian with red hair or blue eyes would be a curiosity indeed. Besides, in death the features always undergo a certain change, and a body that has lain underground for some days is not likely to retain the same expression that it wore in life. It is said, however, that Bearfoot started out from the reserve with the intention of going to that spot. Well, an Indian is a changeable being and loves to wander. How easily, on the way, might he have been informed of better game to be found elsewhere, and turned his steps in search of that. One point would naturally lead him to another, and that might lead him on to one still more distant. If he journeyed about in this fashion, who can say where Bearfoot is now?

"But here," said the prisoner, and his fist tightened and his brow knit in the earnestness of denial, "here I come to a part of the evidence which, I confess, puzzles me sorely. It is unexplainable by any ordinary hypothesis, and can only be attributed to that malice which delights in the creation of morbid sensationalism. Certain labels were found in my pocket corresponding to marks taken from the dead man's clothes. Gentlemen, I emphatically deny having had any knowledge of the possession of these things till I heard them mentioned in court just



now. I know not from whence they came. I have no idea who placed them there, or what could be the object of so doing further than I have already stated. I must simply say that if I were indeed the murderer and carried about with me these significant proofs of guilt when they could so easily have been destroyed by fire—if I had done this, I should simply deserve to be hung for my folly, and those who can accuse me on such grounds are charging me with subtle acuteness in cutting off the labels in one breath, and with childish simplicity in preserving them in the next.

“A shovel and a pick are said to have been lost by the side of a trail that crosses the ravine about half a mile distant from the spot where the body was found. It is true that I passed over this trail on the day I went deer-hunting, but I decidedly deny having seen anything of the tools mentioned. And I ask whether it is likely that a murderer, even if he did know of the presence of the pick and spade, would walk a mile to get them whilst the body was lying exposed to discovery—is it likely he would do this, or stand digging a grave in the full glare of day within half a mile of a public road, when he could have easily rolled the body into the ravine and covered it with leaves among the bushes? It is further urged against me that I am fond of studying deep subjects and love loneliness. Is that any indication of criminality? I think not; for if you will study the police-court statistics you will find that it is not the educated and thoughtful man that is most given to crime, but rather the ignorant and illiterate one. The thoughtful man knows too well that society rests on too firm a basis to be sinned against with impunity, and even the comparatively few crimes committed by educated men are seldom or never of a violent nature.

“Perhaps at a time like this I may be pardoned a little egotism; and I ask you, gentlemen, whether from anything you have learned there is anything in my nature that indicates a tendency to crime? If not, what could cause me to throw away my good name and peace of mind so suddenly? A fire is not lighted by placing a match

against a green log—you cannot even singe the bark. First you want the shavings and then the kindling-wood. The fire must be lighted by patient degrees. So it is with the criminal. The evil within a virtuous man does not flare up from the mere dropping of a spark, but small things lead to greater, until the evil fire prevails and the virtue is burned low. I ask you to think well on this.

“And now, gentlemen of the jury, one last word to you. As there is a Power above us which seeth our inmost hearts, I am innocent. Ere you do that which may embitter all future remembrances, I ask you to look in my face and say whether I speak the truth. But I ask you again to halt at no half-way decision. But whatever be your verdict, do not—oh! do not condemn me to a life of slavery in the companionship of crime. In the words of a great American patriot I ask you ‘to give me liberty or give me death.’”

In this last appeal he rose to a passionate dignity which touched every heart. In that mysterious twilight hour in which the heart is strangely softened to outward influence, he had spoken. As he stood with the light lingering lovingly about his head, the eyes, set thick as dim stars in the dull shades below, had watched intently the play of changing passion on his face; the crowd had heard the ring of strong sincerity in his voice, and seen the truth-light flashing from his eyes. A silence like that of a slumbering cloud had held them while he spoke. In those thickening shades necks were stretched forward, hands were held against ears, and breath was softly drawn; and when he had finished there burst from all lips one simultaneous cry, “He is innocent.”

When the burst of passion which the speech and the hour had excited had died away, the judge ordered the lights. Whilst these were being turned on and the blinds drawn, the whispering and murmuring recommenced. The speculator offered to bet long odds on the prisoner’s acquittal, but found no takers; and the cowboy swore with many oaths that he would whip both judge and jury “if that young feller” was hung.

When the glaring gaslight had driven out the dusk much of this sentimentality disappeared. The judge was no longer a phantom, but a model of grave human deportment. The jury had changed from stony statues to business men and farmers of various sizes and shapes. Among the spectators the light of human eyes had withdrawn into human heads, and the sound of human voices was connected with the movement of human lips and other expressions of the flesh. The prisoner alone retained some of that romantic impressiveness with which the twilight had invested him. After the excitement to which he had risen in his speech he recovered his former calmness, and stood in fearless dignity awaiting the result.

Mr. Blutgun, counsel for the prosecution, generally gloried in an opportunity like that before him. To see the pale wretch trembling under his thunderous inuendoes and unanswerable arguments, to watch the jury file in with the unanimous verdict, "Guilty," and then to hear the judge pronounce the fatal sentence—this was his supreme glory.

But to-night he felt rather uneasy. The prisoner's speech, and the impression it had created, had considerably discomposed him. His case did not look quite so clear as it had seemed from the evidence; but still he nerved himself for the effort, and when he arose, the eyes were glaring fiercely as ever under his beetling brows, and the black spike above his forehead bristled in uncompromising defiance.

He began by flattering the jury, whom he declared to be the pick of the intelligence of the community, irreproachable in life, morals and talents, etc. But Mr. Blutgun's flatteries were somewhat like a crocodile's caresses, and both he and his listeners evinced unbounded relief when he descended from the eulogistic to the argumentative.

He warned the jury to beware of such characters as that of the prisoner before them. The noisy and blustering criminal was little to be feared; but who knew what horrors the still and silent waters contained? By the

theories (and they were only theories) which he had spun in his defence, the prisoner had shown himself to be possessed of a fertile imagination, rich in contrivances to elude the truth. He set aside actual facts by substituting flowery theories, and when he could not even do that, he contented himself with emphatic, unfounded denials.

"As for his declarations about the improbability of certain actions after the murder, allow me to tell you, gentlemen of the jury" (and here Mr. Blutgun broke into a profuse perspiration), "that when a man has done such an atrocious deed, he is often no longer his own master. He rushes about seeking the wildest means for the concealment of his crime, and in his frenzy he often forgets the things which most concern his own safety.

"The prisoner's excuse (if excuse it could be called) for the labels found in his pocket was a very lame one. What reason had they to doubt that the body found was that of Bearfoot? Did not the labels taken from his clothes, and found on the prisoner, conclusively establish his identity? He considered the chain of circumstantial evidence complete. There was the previous quarrel between the murderer and his victim. On the same day both had gone forth to hunt in the same place; and the next day, by a marvellous accident, the murdered body was found on the edge of the ravine. He would not say that the murder had been committed in cold malice. More probably there had been a quarrel; and in his anger the prisoner had done the deed he was now making such strenuous efforts to conceal.

"And, gentlemen," thundered Mr. Blutgun, striking the table fiercely, "I, like the prisoner, appeal to your justice; for I know that in this instance justice means that society will henceforth be spared from the ravages of a criminal whose passion is so fierce and uncontrolled that it does not hesitate to launch a soul all unprepared into eternity."

Such is a very brief outline of the lengthy speech delivered by Herman Soratus Blutgun in the interest of justice—and his own pocket. But I am sorry that I cannot reproduce the sweeping flourishes, the vocal thunderings and facial contortions with which it was delivered.

Yet with all his vocal thunder Mr. Blutgun did not seem to make a very deep impression on anyone but himself (manifest in his case by the profuse perspiration induced), for the simple reason, perhaps, that there is more power in one little word of earnest truth than can be found in whole columns of blustering rodomontade.

In saying, however, that the speech impressed no one but the speaker, I made a mistake. There was another whom it affected most cruelly, and that was the prisoner himself.

Yes, though he still preserved his outer calmness, those words of blustering condemnation struck like leaden hammers on his susceptible soul. Unused to such loud upbraidings, he was too much agitated to detect their fallacies, and he almost felt as if he had really committed the crime imputed to him. And worst of all, his sympathetic nature made him imagine that his own feelings must be but a reflex of the opinions of his friends; and he asked himself how, even if he escaped, he could ever associate with them again. Would not suspicion snarl around him, like a cur chained to his heart, through all his future life? And people would murmur to each other in undertones when they saw him, "That man was tried for murder once, and his innocence was never clearly proved."

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE ACQUITTAL.

HE was recalled from these bitter reflections by the voice of the judge summing up the case.

Judge A——, when exercising his judicial functions, was so cold and unimpassioned in his utterances that people sometimes wondered whether he was really a man at all, or only a sort of incarnate paper-mill, absorbing all the rags and tatters of varying evidence and argument, and rolling them out again in irreproachable sheets. Juries, as a rule, did not like him because these bodies are in the



habit of looking to the judge for some definite direction as to their verdict ; so that if a mistake is made, they have some one with whom to divide the blame.

On the present occasion Judge A—— quite excelled in his particular capacity. Here, as ever, he tried to balance equally to a fault ; for if he found himself unconsciously making one side appear heavier than the other, he at once hastened to equalize the balance by adding a little extra weight to the rising side of the scales. So nicely, indeed, were his disquisitions adjusted, that they seemed to the jury like a perfect square with a straight line drawn exactly through the middle ; and they were asked to decide which of the divisions was the larger.

Thus addressed by the judge, the jury retired to consider the verdict. For a long time they wrangled over the various points in the case, but could come to no decision. They had all fairly well determined in their minds what the verdict should be ; but they were mostly strangers to each other, and each wanted to impress the rest with a show of minute inspection and lofty deliberation.

At last an old farmer (the only one who had remained silent up to that time) arose, and said :

“Now look 'ee here, misters, I carnt stop jauglin' here all day. I've got a team of oxen to home as wants waterin', they do. This is jest how the case stands—this young feller's guilty or he aint guilty. In plainer words—he popped the nichis or he didn't pop him. Now it 'pears to me as that there's some doubts about the case, an' of so it'll be better to let him off ef he did do it than hang him ef he didn't. So —”

That decided it.

The people in the court-room were in a fever of impatient curiosity. What would the verdict be ?

They betted among themselves. From their own excited imaginations they engendered the wildest scraps of improbable evidence. The pietist talked with the atheist, the cowboy whispered to the citizen ; the sleeves of the blacksmith and the miller exchanged colors as they grasped each other's arms excitedly ; the speculator nervously handled



his dollars in the covetous eyes of the miner. In that half hour of general excitement and wild speculation all minor distinctions were lost and forgotten.

As the jury entered, the wagging tongues were hushed into silence, and every eye fixed itself upon them. Even the prisoner—who had waited till now with seeming indifference and calm—was seen to look anxiously toward these men who bore his doom. What would it be?

It was one of those moments of glorious uncertainty in which the human mind delights, and the audience looked toward the foreman of the jury as if he were some ancient magician about to unlock a mystic cabinet which should reveal to them a sight of happiness or sorrow.

The jurors filed solemnly into their box and seated themselves in silence.

"Well, gentlemen, what is your verdict?" asked the judge.

In reply the foreman handed him a little slip of closed paper.

The audience was itching and shifting in feverish anxiety, and as the judge scanned the billet all eyes fixed themselves involuntarily on his face, hoping it would tell some tale. But it remained rigid and immovable as ever; and holding the slip of paper in his closed hands, he asked in unimpassioned tones:

"Is this your unanimous decision?"

All bowed, and when their names were called they ratified the verdict individually by rising in turn to each.

"Then," said the judge, "I declare the prisoner 'Not guilty.'"

That verdict shook the court like a lightning shock, and a loud, irresistible cheer was the thunder-peal which followed it. Some of the more enthusiastic sprang upon the seats and waved handkerchiefs and hats toward the prisoner, who, with a smile lighting up his expressive features, bowed quietly in return. Mr. Blutgun scowled at the jury, and the spiky tuft above his forehead sank like a flag to half-mast. He was vanquished.

The judge frowned like a wrinkled iceberg and sternly called out "Order!"

When he had succeeded in restoring silence, he turned to the prisoner, and said in his mechanical way :

"I congratulate you sincerely on your escape, and trust that your future life will be such as to fully justify the jury in the verdict they have rendered. It only remains for me to pronounce you completely acquitted of the serious charge that has been brought against you. You are now free to go wherever you please."

When Fred descended from the prisoner's box into the court-house, his friends crowded around him to congratulate him on his acquittal. The first to greet him was Mr. Dysart, who pressed his hand and said :

"You see! I told you we'd pull you through."

Messrs. Longstreet and Fane each grasped a hand, the former jabbering out a stream of congratulations, and the latter shrugging his shoulders with an emphatic "Bless you, my boy, but I'm glad to see you out of it."

"And so am I!" roared the worthy cook as he tendered his congratulations.

"Say, Polson," said a sharp nasal voice; "they let you off; eh! Shake hands."

Uncle Nathan came twisting and bobbing through the crowd, his hatchet-like goatee a-bristle with sympathy, and grinning till he exposed an ample range of molars. Grasping him by the wrist he thrust him backward and forward as if he had been a reversible lever, till Fred's equilibrium was well-nigh lost.

His private friends disposed of, it was poor Fred's turn next to be overwhelmed by his public well-wishers. They came on him in a swarm, and he found his hands grasped by a variety of fists before he could find time to speak. When the enthusiasm had considerably abated, his friends again took possession of him.

"See here, old fellow," cried Mr. Fane, grasping him by the arm; "you come along to the hotel and we'll have a rousing good dinner to celebrate the victory."

The crowd, trying to get out, pushed and jostled around them, and in the tumult Fred was borne away from his companions. When the stream of humanity disgorged

them from the doors, they found the streets without lighted only by the store-lights glimmering at unequal distances. Between these were gloomy spaces, and overhead the night was dark and cold; yet the streets were peopled by a swarming crowd, excitedly talking of the trial as they jostled along.

His friends sought in vain for Fred Polson among this darkened throng; and when these had all dispersed and the shoutings had died into murmurs indistinct, and the lights had gone out in store and household, with only a few stars shivering in misty sleep between dark blanketings of clouds—they were searching still.

But all in vain. As a drop of rain sinks into the ocean, or a grain of sand is buried in the desert, he had disappeared among the multitude; and though his friends sought far and wide for him, and all inquired anxiously after him, while the hearts of distant relations ached for a word from him, nor sight nor sound of Fred Polson revisited that winter's light.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### MR. BLUTGUN'S MESSAGE.

MR. BLUTGUN'S family never needed to ask him how a trial had gone. If the condemnation had been severe and villainy was to swing from the rope's end, he seated himself comfortably in his arm-chair, and drawing a circle of bullet-headed little Blutguns around him, gave them a saintly harangue on the horrors of evil-doing—which was his way of inculcating a love of virtue in their young breasts. But to-night Mr. Blutgun's mood is not saintly, for as he enters the door he sees an inoffensive cat lying over the threshold.

"Bah! The cat's always lying in the way. I will see this household better ordered." And the next instant poor puss takes a wingless flight along the passage, and lands

with an injured "meow" and an angry "spit" at the other end.

The little Blutguns, who had been playing in the parlor, on hearing their father's voice huddled demurely in a corner and whispered to each other, "He isn't going to be hanged."

This seemingly unfilial remark, however, did not apply to their father, but to the prisoner who had been tried that day.

Mr. Blutgun jerked the door open and looked scowlingly around for something to find fault with. Such a search is never wholly fruitless.

"A nice mess you've been making here," he growled. "Where is your mother? She ought to look after you better than this. Charitas Tomboy, pick up that broken doll. You, Diogenes Joseph, take away that whip-top that you've been boring holes through the carpet with, and you, Soratus John, clear away those slovenly whittlings."

Whilst the children were tremblingly clearing away the relics of their innocent play, a pale-faced, meek-looking little woman entered through an opposite door. Mr. Blutgun's eyes pounced on her at once.

"A nice state of things this is, madam," he angrily muttered. "I'm only away for a few hours, and I come back to find the house all littered like a pig's-cote. By this time you should know how to take care of a family better, Mrs. Blutgun."

"Dear me, Soratus," said his wife, in frightened tones. "I wish you wouldn't carry on so. The children have only been playing a bit, and we will make it all tidy again in five minutes. But," she added to divert his wrath, "here's a telegraph message just arrived for you."

Mr. Blutgun took it and tore it open savagely, as if it had offended him.

"Oh, yes," he crunched; "I forgot. Enough to make a man forget anything in such a place as this. Where is the messenger? Gone back I suppose!"

His wife answered that he was waiting to see if there was a reply.

"Reply! Yes, I suppose there must be. A man never has a moment's peace in this place." And he sulked away into his study to write the answer.

Whilst her husband was away, Mrs. Blutgun took it upon herself to comfort and admonish the frightened children.

"Papa's very cross to-night," she said; "so clear away these things and get quietly to bed, like good little dears."

The children obeyed the injunction with unwonted alacrity, and afterward retired between the bed-clothes to frighten themselves to sleep with whispered suggestions about ghosts and the "bad, bad man" who had put papa in such a temper.

Below, Mrs. Blutgun, sad and silent, seated herself by the fire, and with four bright knitting needles fortified herself against her husband's splanetic attacks.

Mr. Blutgun's reply to the telegram sped on the spark along the wire, and found its way to a private room in a hotel in a small western town. The recipient unfolded it eagerly. It contained but one word—

"Acquitted."

The paper was scattered into a hundred ragged shreds which fell like snow-flakes on the floor. Spiteful feet trampled on them fiercely as if they would drive them into the carpet and out of sight. An angry brow frowned above and two clinched fists came together with a crack.

"And this is all. Never mind, I bide my time. For love and gold I must conquer. Let me remember—for love and gold."

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## OH, THE LONG AND DREARY WINTER!

FROST!

It bound the furrows in the fields like great black bands of iron so that the plow the husbandman had left in them could not be torn from their grasp. It shrivelled the grass into twisted tufts of faded brown. It cracked the trees of the forest with musket sounds, and it turned the waters of the river into crystal. It silvered the breath tossed from the horses' nostrils, and sent the cattle shivering to their sheds. It bit the ears, it nipped the nose, it stung the cheek. In the wind it went through human garments and tickled the body with its icy fingers till the whole mortal tenement shook. It covered the heads with caps of fur, it clothed hands and fingers in mittens of skin and wool, and encased the feet in threefold socks enveloped by moccasins of deerskin or shoes of rubber. It set the woods ringing with axes and reddened the stoves with fire. In homes at night it drew the family circle around the heated plates of iron in thankfulness and warmth, and outside it clothed the heavens with steel and made the pale stars tingle in the sky.

Snow!

It stretched like a floor of powdered marble far as the eye could reach. It descended soft as angel wings, or hurled itself down on the breath of the freezing blast. It crunched like sand in the grasp, it groaned and creaked beneath the tread. Over its surface, like streaks of polished marble, the sleigh-tracks glittered in the winter sun. When the winds were high it rose in a hissing mist like an ice-fiend in its wrath, and it encircled houses and buildings with cold and gleaming walls. It buried the fences so that only the tops of posts peeped through, and huddled into creeks and hollows. It spread its spotless mantle over every leafless bluff and withered patch of scrub.



It shot through niche and crevice into house and stable and barn, as if it would shame them by its purity. It glittered beneath the sun, it gleamed beneath the moon, and its myriad points of light pierced the eyes like sparks of fire. In the forests it covered the branches with soft and feathery crests. On the plain it crusted to the thickness of an inch or more over pits of white and frosty powder—a treacherous covering, which bore the man and sank the beast.

The wind!

Friend, dost hear it as it howls above the chimney-top or whistles through the key-hole? If so, wrap thy good cloak about thee, and drinking in the ruddy blaze, thank the good Lord that thou breathest not in the storm. But thou, poor wretch, choked and stupefied by the blast that howls at thy nostrils, staggering vainly toward thy home—dream not that from that overpowering slumber which oppresses thee thou shalt have an earthly awakening, but clasp thy stiffening hands in prayer, for so surely shalt thou enter better into a calmer world.

Such are the three elements that make the bitterness of the northern winter; nor, you may guess, did they spare our friends in the Dysart settlement. The wagons and plows lay idle in the sheds. The sleighs were drawn out from their summer shelter, and their creaking runners bore fodder from the marshes and logs from the forest. Others wended toward the markets with loads of grain for sale. Work was still plentiful in those short-lived days.

Yet was the winter not wholly unkind:—No pestilent insect life dare swarm in its sharp, clear air. No drowsy sluggishness dwelt in the frosty atmosphere. No nerve-shaking thunderstorms abode in the snowy clouds. No pelting rains drenched the earth, and the cold snow shook from the feet like sand.

Glorious it is when the days are calm, to sit clothed to the eyes in fur behind a fiery team that bear you, like storms incarnate, over the boundless plain. Ha! how the snow flies up from beneath the spurning hoofs. With

what delicious ease we glide along, as though riding through the air!

The power of such pleasure seemed to have touched even the brass-tiled heart of Silas Pancrack, for he had bought a highly-polished, softly-cushioned cutter, and a span of fine black horses to draw it. He committed this act of extraordinary open-handedness in a fit of good-nature over the disappearance of Fred Polson. The sudden transition from the news of his acquittal to that of his disappearance had so rejoiced the heart of Silas that for once his hilarity seems almost to have overwhelmed his solid reason; but ashamed to do anything without a selfish motive, he invented for his action an excuse.

"His rival had gone; but, curse him! he might return. Meanwhile let me prepare all kinds of traps to lure Miss Alice from him. And the estate also. Certainly, Polson had broken the critical clause in his grandfather's will by showing himself capable of being suspected of an act which would bring him to disgrace in the courts. Fortune favors the brave. Ha! ha!"

Thus exulting, Silas emerged from his shanty door, and after gazing awhile at the rabbits and prairie-chickens with which the outer walls were adorned, went to the stable to tell his hired man to hitch up the horses to the cutter.

A strange place for the home of the possessor of a hundred thousand was Silas Pancrack's shanty. Its furniture consisted of a rude bed propped upon pieces of rough scantling, three travelling trunks, some bedding rolled up in a corner, some cracked and broken-handled crockery huddled precariously on a rickety shelf, a half worn-out broom sticking behind the door, a black pot standing near the stove half full of greasy dishwater, and with a ring of boiled oatmeal sticking round the sides like glue. Add to these a greasy stove flaked with spots of rust outside and half choked with ashes within, and you have the furniture of Silas Pancrack's western home.

The floor was grimy near the stove and dusty beneath the bed; and in other places it was rough as a rasp with

the imprint of heavy boots. The bare-raftered roof was blackened with smoke. The boards in the wall had shrunk with the heat, leaving gaping cracks through which the black tar paper could be plainly seen, and through these crevices the blizzard played strangely mournful tunes, whilst the inmates sat shivering in coats of fur by the rusty stove.

Unfortunately for Silas, his hired man was a sportsman, and he festooned the outside of the shanty with irregular lines of prairie-chickens, pheasants and white-furred rabbits. These were frozen like so many furred or feathered stones, and hanging loosely on nails by pieces of twine, when the wind rose they thumped against the shanty walls as if a hundred carpenters had been hammering there.

His stable, hidden among snowdrifts, stood a little way back from the shanty; and these were all the farm buildings that Pancrack as yet possessed.

"Never mind," thought Silas, "they will serve my purpose well enough, and when I have done with them I daresay I can dispose of them to some poor greenhorn who wishes to try the beauties of a life of single blessedness on the prairie. I am getting tired of this bachelor life myself, and I think I'll see what progress I can make toward changing it to-day."

And with this resolve he helped his man to harness his impatient steeds and hitch them to the glittering cutter.

Mrs. Crags had promised him that Alice should go for a drive with him that day, and with loose rein he slipped over the steep ravine and sped softly toward her home.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## SILAS PANCRACK POPS THE QUESTION.

WITH the Craggs family, things had gone from bad to worse.

The weedy, backward crop had been nipped by a summer frost, and in consequence was fit for nothing but fodder. To other homes the bountiful harvest had brought gladness and plenty; but to this it had only borne additional misery for the present and hopelessness for the future.

When the rank and worthless harvest had been taken from the fields, the black stiff stubble of spinach stalks lay like huge palls around the house on every side. On the brightest days, when all others were rejoicing in the light, the shadow of gloom hung over that home. The house's dingy exterior, the squalid buildings and rickety sheds, were perhaps but a fit expression of the spirits of the human beings who dwelt in that place.

Alice pined secretly over Fred Polson's fate. George's face showed marks of dissipation, and he moved about with the sullen silence of one laboring under the pressure of an overpowering curse. The old man, swathed in hulls of flannel, leather and cloth, lived a tortoise life by the side of the stove; and Mrs. Craggs vented her troubled spirits on the heads of the rest. She indeed was the only one who felt the stress of their financial position very keenly, and she strongly resented the indifference of the others.

So far Pancrack had been true to his promise; the money raised by the mortgage kept off the bailiffs for the present at least, and the mortgagees did not press for the interest. But Mrs. Craggs knew well that this could not last for many years.

She was acute enough to see that Pancrack's generosity was backed by selfish instincts, and she knew that if he failed to make a match with Alice, the mortgage would be

foreclosed, and she and her family left homeless. Nor, you may depend, did she neglect to force this point of view strongly on her daughter's notice; and poor Alice, in spite of her inmost predilection for Fred Polson, began to think it more than ever her duty to accept his rival if he proposed for her hand.

Inwardly, Mrs. Craggs had rejoiced over Fred Polson's disappearance, since it removed the usurer's strongest rival; but outwardly, before Alice, she feigned a quasi-sympathy.

"Poor young man," she said in melancholy tones. "He was always of a high-strung, nervous disposition; and the agitation of that trial, together with his not being able altogether to prove his innocence (which he didn't, you know) upset his brain; and it's my belief that rather than face his old friends with such a disgrace hanging over him he went and committed suicide in some lonely place, and the snow coming soon after, covered up his body so that it couldn't be found. But it will come to light in the spring, never fear."

Alice's large eyes distended in horror as she listened to this tragical supposition, and as she thought of the probability of its truth, her guileless features writhed in an agony of attempted self-control, and then failing utterly she hid her face in her hands and the swelling tears gushed forth.

"Oh, mother," she sobbed, when sufficiently relieved to speak, "how can you think of such terrible things?"

"Silly girl," said the tearless Mrs. Craggs, pettishly, "did you never hear of anybody killing themselves before, that you make such a fuss? Of course he is dead—or why can nobody find him? And how is it that he never returns, or writes to his friends or anything? P-choo!"

Poor Alice had far more sentiment than philosophy, and when these hard questions were put to her, her only answer was to cry afresh.

But Mrs. Craggs did not object to wading through tears to the accomplishment of a purpose. She wished to crush out any small hope that Alice might yet entertain of Fred

Polson's return ; and again and again repeated to her the arguments on which she founded her belief in his non-existence.

So persistent and unvaried were her mother's statements that Alice began at last to really believe them. Sensitive natures like hers are perhaps the most easily led to wrong conclusions, for they are ever too ready to believe that which conforms most fittingly to the present state of feeling. Alice's troubles and perplexities had made her of late more than usually despondent, and the melancholy idea of Fred's death suiting so aptly the mood of her own soul was pondered on and wept over until at last it grew like a tree of mournful shade in the recesses of that wonderful part of her nature which *thought*, and she accepted it as an unquestionable truth. Like a melancholy tune, which from constant repetition keeps on sounding in the ear, this sorrow dwelt ever with her, and even comforted her in the acceptance of the path which she seemed doomed to tread.

"For," she reasoned, "now that he is gone, what matters it whom I marry? If I accept Mr. Pancrack I shall at least save mother and father from ruin, and besides he is always very pleasant—I really don't know why I dislike him so much—it is very ungrateful of me—I must try to suppress it."

"He is well-to-do too—(these are a woman's thoughts)—and I shall be the mistress of a fine household, and have dresses, and music and books."

So Silas P. (not indeed without an inward groan at the expense) had bought the flashing cutter and the dashing team with which he meant to draw the affections of Alice Crags from Fred Polson to himself ; and for the reasons I have mentioned, Alice had quietly consented to accompany him in a drive along the river. But though she had fully intended to fulfil her promise, when he drove up to the door to claim it, a strange reluctance seized her, and retiring to her bedroom she asked her mother to make some excuse for her on the ground of having a headache or some similar ailment.



"A headache!" exclaimed Mrs. Cragg. "It has come on very suddenly then; but a drive in the fresh air will be just the thing to do it good. So put on your clothes like a good girl, and don't keep Mr. Pancrack waiting."

Alice would fain have demurred, but her mother impatiently prepared her wraps and began to help her on with her furs.

"You know, my dear," she whispered, as she rolled an enormous muffler in many folds around Alice's neck and chin, "you must not disappoint Mr. Pancrack too often or he may loose off from us altogether; and fancy if he foreclosed the mortgage, whatever would become of us all?"

Alice was silent; touched by this appeal she made no further resistance, but muffled and clothed so that only her eyes, nose and mouth and a little of her cheeks could be seen, moved toward the door.

Pancrack sat in the cutter, checking his prancing team with a tight rein; but when she appeared, he sprang out and greeted her with a nod and a smiling "Good afternoon."

She answered his salutation as pleasantly as her agitated feelings would permit and stepped into the cutter. With courteous care he wrapped the rugs and fur robes around her feet, and then took his seat in the cutter beside her.

When he loosened the reins the horses dashed forward like whirlwinds unchained, and the cutter flew behind them in a rapid, continuous bound, as if it too were instinct with life.

"I do hope," said Mrs. Cragg, as with hand bent over her eyes she watched them disappearing in the distance, "that he comes to the point to-day, and she accepts. I think she never could be so silly as to refuse."

"I wish," muttered George Cragg, laying down a forkful of straw which he was carrying to the stable, "I wish Alice was out of that cutter, and it would upset him and break his neck. I do. The brute!"

And George Cragg curled his lips bitterly, and taking up

his bundle of straw, scattered it among the lean-ribbed, bow-backed cattle.

I have read of travellers in raptures over the glories of a fast drive over a European road, but had these gentlemen ever tasted the delights of a Manitoba sleigh ride, they would probably moderate their ecstasies.

Exhilarating, is it, to bump over ruts and jolt over stones with shocks that threaten the stability of the human frame, that tingle the nerves into palsy and thump the brain into coma? Pleasant, is it, in early morning to watch the frosty hedgerows flit by, to see the wretched farm-boy go shivering along with raised back and pocketed hands behind a slow-moving herd; and to find yourself in the process of watching spattered by patches of mud spurned over you by the whizzing wheels?

I think I can show you a brighter picture. Instead of dirt let us have snow beneath us. Instead of a blaring horn give us the music of tinkling bells. Instead of the narrow hedgerow give to us the white unspotted plain, bounded but by the blue walls of the clear winter sky. Then, among the powdered snow which forms a gauze of flying mist before you, will the cheeks tingle and the spirits rise.

And perhaps this pleasurable experience influenced Alice Cragg, for as the horses dashed forward with manes on the wind, and tossed the frosted breath from their nostrils in glee, she felt her spirits rise. As the narrow runners of the cutter hissed over the frosty trail, and the snowy plain went swiftly glimmering by (as if it moved and they stood still), there grew upon her that thrilling ecstasy which this motionless motion gives, and her repugnance to Pancrack for the time quite vanished away.

The day, though calm, was bright and keen, and she felt the cold air shivering in frosty sparkles over her face. Pancrack looked unusually well. His black fur coat was buckled up to his chin and hid his short thick neck. His fur cap, drawn down to his eyes, concealed the stubby hair and dry, care-nicked forehead, so that only his face—show-

ing to the best advantage in the animation it derived from the exercise of holding in the horses—was visible.

During the first part of the drive little was said on either side. It taxed all Pancrack's energy to hold his fiery steeds, and Alice cared not to intrude the sound of her voice on the silver music of the bells, ringing clear and shrill amid the vast silence that encircled them.

So they dashed along toward the valley and down the steep hill between the swinging colonnades of trees, and over the gleaming flat down to the ice-cased rive. Over the ice lay a carpet of snow, flat as if scraped off by some great levelling stick, and straight along the middle a sleigh track had been made—a trail which was the favorite drive of the idlers. Along this they sped amid flying snow from the horses' hoofs, the steep, cracked banks, with patches of snow hanging here and there upon them, frowning grimly at them from either side, whilst the trees and willows that lined the brink cast a flitting trellis-work of shade and shine over them as they flashed along.

But now the horses were becoming quieter and Pancrack began to cast about for some means of starting a conversation which should lead them to that ticklish topic he wished to broach.

"It is a beautiful winter day," he said.

"It is indeed."

"It is quite cold, but still there is no wind."

"Yes."

"If it were not for the wind I think that Manitoba in the winter would be a beautiful country to live in."

"I think it would be much better, at least."

"Confound it," thought Pancrack, "I must get off these hackneyed subjects or I shall never come to the point. I must start on another tack."

Poor Alice, all the time, was fearfully apprehensive of the result toward which she felt sure he was driving, and trembling between returning dislike for the man and a sense of the martyr's duty, it was only with great effort she managed to give her short replies.

There was a silence, during which the horses came to a

walk and the shadows played gently over them. The bells tinkled but faintly, and the cutter moved noiselessly over the snow. The dumb river was gliding through its cavern of ice, two feet or more below them. The only sound in nature to mingle with the soft tinkle of the bells was the chatter of a squirrel or the sound of snow falling from the branches of some laden tree. The willows bowed their drooping heads toward them, and the trees stretched out their vast white-crested arms as if in friendly greeting. It was a scene favorable to the awakening of sentimental feeling, and after a little meditation, Pancrack again opened out.

"You are fond of sleigh-riding, are you not, Miss Craggs?"

"Yes, I like it very much."

"You should come out oftener. I notice you have not looked well lately. It would improve your health."

"Really, do you think so? I was not aware that I appeared at all ill."

"That is because in your unselfishness you do not take that interest in yourself which others take in you." And holding the reins loosely in one hand, he looked at her with a significant smile, at the same time thinking inwardly, "That's the style."

Alice felt his gaze, and a blush rushing up from the folds of her woollen muffler drove the frosty sparkles from her face. In her confusion she could think of no reply to his observation, and Pancrack continued in a softer tone.

"Do you believe, Alice—you will allow me to call you so, won't you?—that I take a very deep interest in your welfare?"

By this time she had partly recovered her self-control, the blush had half withdrawn itself, and she answered with a little agitation:

"Since you are kind enough to say so, I should be very ungrateful if I refused to believe it."

"But from what you have seen of my conduct toward you, don't you think that my interest has a deeper motive

than mere friendship?" He was bending with his mouth very close to her ear now, and speaking very softly.

"Tell me, Alice; don't you think so?" he added, gently attempting to seize her hand; but as gently she drew it away from him. There was nothing in the movement, however, to indicate contempt or dislike, but rather a natural action of maidenly modesty—for Alice was just then in a very trying position. She could not act with such untruthful hypocrisy as to give this man to understand that she loved him; on the other hand, if she rejected him what misery might she not bring on the heads of those nearest and dearest to her?

Absorbed in these perplexing reflections she quite forgot to answer Pancrack's soft-spoken question, but he, thinking her utterance only stifled for the time by the emotion he had raised, only pressed his suit the more ardently. As much as his hardened nature would admit he already loved this woman; and seated so near to her, with his hand upon her arm and his eyes looking into hers, the smouldering passion was fanned into a flame.

"Alice," he said, all the little moral life that was in him breathing forth in the earnestness with which he pronounced that name—"Alice, my darling, will you be my wife?"

She felt the hand laid upon her arm trembling with passion. She saw his eyes striving to melt themselves in the light of hers, but she remained passive and calm, and without the least show of emotion answered—

"I will."

The utter absence of feeling in her tone stung him, but he did not mean to relinquish her for all that, and continued as warmly as before:

"And you love me, don't you, Alice?"

She had now decided on her course of action, and her answer was ready. It was the reply to which she had long since schooled herself, and the words came readily from her lips:

"Mr. Pancrack, though I feel highly honored by your proposal, and under the circumstances accept it with grati-

tude, yet I know that if I answered 'yes' to your last question, I should only be cruelly deceiving you. But I can say that I esteem you highly, and feel most grateful to you for the service you have rendered my parents; and if, knowing this, you still care to take me as your wife, I will try to make your life as pleasant for you as lies in my power, and more than this, I will try to learn to love you."

This logical and dispassionate speech naturally disappointed Pancrack not a little, but he was too much master of himself to show it. He grasped with an affectionate squeeze the mittened hand she proffered him, and lighting his face with a glowing simulation of hope, he said:

"And I know that you will succeed. In the meantime I am gloriously happy in knowing that you are mine, and not to be stolen from me." And he pressed an ardent kiss on her lips. In her position it would have seemed like ridiculous affectation to refuse him the privilege of these caresses, but she received both pressure and kiss as indifferently as if she had been but a marble statue.

Pancrack was not altogether exaggerating in describing his happiness, but still it was quite as selfish as it was sentimental; for in fact he lived in constant fear of Fred Polson's return, who, he thought, with the character for heroism his conduct under trial had obtained for him, might even prove a more dangerous rival than before. Silas knew well that if Fred should return and succeed in winning Alice from him he would be provided with a living safeguard against future temptations; for though the usurer boasted in his own mind, he was by no means sure that his rival's temporary disgrace totally disqualified him for the possession of the Laston estate.

So to-day Silas Pancrack felt doubly triumphant, as with one hand grasping the reins and the other holding the passive, wool-clothed hand of his betrothed, he drove her back toward her home.

Inwardly the poor girl felt sick and weary-hearted, but externally she still preserved a statuesque passivity, and



replied to Pancrack's numerous questions and observations, if not with warmth, at least with kindly civility.

Most men would have been chilled into utter silence by this cold docility, but the harder the ice froze around Pancrack's lips, the more readily his words seemed to slip forth.

In glowing language he pictured to her their future establishment. It should be in a city, of course; and she should have a carriage to ride in, and servants to wait on her, and every luxury at her hand. And still she only replied with:

"You are very kind, Mr. Pancrack, I am sure."

"Yes, indeed."

"I quite agree with you, Mr. Pancrack."

"Really, Mr. Pancrack, you must not think of putting yourself to so much trouble and expense on my account."

This formal mode of address rather annoyed him, and he said:

"I wish you wouldn't keep calling me 'Mr. Pancrack,' Alice, it sounds so distant. Can't you call me Ju—I mean Silas, now?"

Alice forced up a smile.

"Well, perhaps it will sound better," she said; and henceforth "Silas" was uttered quite as mechanically as "Mr. Pancrack."

Probably these listless replies would have considerably dampened Silas Pancrack's flame had love been its only feeder, but the selfish instinct was rejoicing too—he felt that he had in a way vanquished Fred Polson, and this thought was for the time fuel sufficient to keep the flame of satisfaction blazing to its brightest height.

So they rode up the hill between the close ranks of the forest trees. The sun was still bright and the squirrels were chattering in the snowy branches. Occasionally a fluffy white rabbit flitted across the road. Lithe little chipmunks darted gaily here and there, and the beautiful ermine, like a moving tuft of snow, sped slyly beneath the bushes. All the life of the winter forest was astir and

happy in the light; her affianced lord was pleading softly by her side, and still poor Alice felt sick at heart.

The journey was only a short one, but it seemed endless to her. She had tried her best to be straightforward, yet she felt as if forced to act an unnatural part. The mask of hypocrisy galled her and she longed to cast it aside, but duty she felt forbade her to act otherwise whilst with him.

At last they reached the dingy house she called her home, and as he handed her from the cutter, Pancrack imprinted a kiss on her seemingly indifferent lips; but even Pancrack could not help thinking how much better than that passive calmness would have been a gentle murmur or a playful rebuke.

We well know that it is the little petty troubles rather than the great calamities which make life bitter to so many poor mortals. If the truth were really known, there is more pathos probably in toothaches, headaches and neuralgias than in pinching famines or scorching fevers. The small things expand from inward vexation, the great ills are subdued by outward sympathy—and so Alice's coldness was a very crumpled rose-leaf in Silas Pancrack's sybarite bed, and the more he reflected on it the more did his vexation increase. Under the sting he whipped and checked his horses very unjustly as he drove toward his home.

"The cold-hearted minx," he thought, "she replies to me with less feeling than one of Mr. Edison's phonographic dolls, and receives my caresses like a wax figure in Barnum's museum. I wonder whatever is the cause of it? It can't be Polson—he has been away quite a while now; and unless she differs widely from most of her sex, by this time she has forgotten all about him. Besides that, I can cut a far better show than he can any day; and Byron—a great lady's man—has told us that,

"Women, like moths, are ever caught by glare,  
And mammon wins his way where devils might despair;"

—"no, not devils, but it doesn't matter anyhow. There's something wrong with her, and I can't think what it is,

unless it's that confounded brother of hers poisoning her ear against me. Never mind—gold can make and gold can mar. I must simply supply Dundo with an extra loan, and hint to him to push matters on a little faster."

The foregoing is what Mr. Pancrack thought ; but what he did not think was that Mrs. Craggs, peeping through the window, had seen the sly kiss he had pressed upon her daughter's lips. The matron's worldly heart exulted at the sight ; it betokened the fulfilment of her wish, and when Alice entered the house, unmindful of her marble look, she hastened to bestow her congratulations upon her.

"So you have made it up," she whispered, stopping her as she was about to go upstairs to take off her wraps. "I knew you would, like a good sensible girl."

And in her rapture, for the first time in many years, Mrs. Craggs actually kissed her daughter. But even this unusual demonstration wrought no change in Alice's fixed features, and evoked no answering word from her bloodless, tight-drawn lips.

Quietly she ascended the stairs and entered her own room. Then, closing the door behind her, she cast herself—still clothed in fur and wool—upon the bed ; and quick as the lightning shocks the storm-cloud, the statue changed into a woman, and the mask was dissolved in a rain of tears.

She cried long and unrestrainedly, and when thus her bitterness had been relieved, she knelt by her bedside and thanked God that He had given her strength to do what she deemed to be her duty.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## HOME SCENES IN WINTER TIME.

ERE we proceed with our tale, let us take a look at some of our friends and see how they are wearing the winter out.

The surroundings of the Dysart household have undergone marked change. The lake on which Ida had loved to be rowed in the soft summer evenings is now hard and immovable as some rock of imbedded crystal. The trees where the birds she loved had sheltered and sung are now naked and cheerless, and howl piteously like living things in torment when wrestling with the wintry blasts, while the birds themselves are singing in another clime. Over the little grave, beneath the leafless trees, the wind-blown snow has drifted and put to shame with its whiteness the marble headstone against which it softly leans.

Within doors warmth and cheerfulness prevail. In the evenings, when the blinds are drawn and the lamps are lighted, reading, music and various games pass the time happily for the family; while in the kitchen Mr. Scrogg sits by Mrs. Tomson's side, and as she knits socks and mitts for him by the stove, he, with stockinged feet in the oven, plans for them a happy life in a little bakery in a neighboring town.

This, reader, is a picture we love to contemplate, the warm little room with its rows of crockery and bright tinware shining in the lamplight. A cosiness is there which seems to me to surpass the cold grandeur of stately drawing-rooms or the elegant fripperies of gilded boudoirs. That couple growing old in toil; past the age when passion rages, calmly happy with each other, and happy, too, in looking forward to an old age of honorable independence, sustained by a quiet and not an idle life. This, it seems to me, is better far than the vain desire for idleness and

luxury ; and truly, I think, that in this respect at least, the wise and great may often learn a valuable lesson from the ignorant and lowly.

His old friends often talked of Fred Polson and wondered whether he would ever return, and when someone hinted that perhaps he never could, a deep silence would fall over them, and for a time his name would be mentioned no more.

Mr. Dysart had inquired after him far and wide, and every mail was eagerly scanned for some news of the missing one ; but frosts bit keener and the winter deepened, and still no news of Fred Polson came. Strange to say, even Mrs. Bant, who had never before shown herself anything more than indifferent to him, now began to manifest a deep interest in his fate. With the opening of the mail-bag she always inquired eagerly if there were any news of him, and each negative drew from her sighs and groans of disappointment and distress.

It must not be supposed, however, that Mrs. Bant had conceived a posthumous passion for poor Fred ; on the other hand, I doubt not her grief was greatly owing to the fear that Silas Pancrack had lost his strongest rival for the hand of Miss Craggs. The lady could no longer conceal from herself the humiliating knowledge that she had become desperately enamored of the smooth-tongued usurer. True, she would have sharply denied it had anyone been daring enough to task her with it ; but though many had suspicions of the truth, no one did so, and so Mrs. Bant's passion was allowed to grow in unquestioned and fostering silence.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## GORMAN'S CAT.

THE clotted marshes around the little black smithy in the western wilderness have thickened to leaden-hued beds of impenetrable ice, and the winds whistle shrilly through the palisades of dead stiff reeds. Among these foul and frozen pools is a black mound on which the winds would not allow the pure white snow to rest; and this is the grave of Widow O'Neil. The only adornment of that blackened tomb is a frozen snake, with head erect and forked tongue protruding, which some maligner of the dead has placed there as a fitting memorial of her weird and gruesome calling.

The gravelly, stone-scabbed hills, kept bare by the wind, are all unmarked by change, and exist in a state of perennial barrenness. Around the little shop the snow has drifted high, but not so high as to save it altogether from the fury of the winds, which lash the ragged shreds of tarpaper against its sides like cruel whips, and, through the gaps between the shrunken boards, mourn in a dreary monotone.

Not constant now is heard the ringing of the hammer on the anvil. Only at times, when a horse is brought to be shod or a sleigh to be mended, do the dusty bellows screech into the hot heart of the fire. Gorman spends most of his time in bed, only occasionally venturing forth to fetch groceries from the town or fuel from the bush. Since his mother's death he lives wholly alone—at least, he says he does—but the superstitious will tell you that he is haunted by a ghost.

They will tell you how, coming suddenly upon the shop, they found the door locked, and heard voices conversing strangely within. One voice had the Irish brogue of Gorman, but the other was strangely deep and soft—not like that of a man. So they said, and solemnly shook their



heads, hinting of a weird inheritance which the witch-mother had bestowed upon her one-eyed son. And they also say that they have heard strange sounds upstairs and in the cellar. Whence come these?

The writer will not attempt to pry further into this weird subject, but will merely relate an incident from which the reader may or may not gather a little light.

One day Mr. Fane brought over his racer to be shod, but found the door securely locked. He thumped it severely with his fist, and, to use a common phrase, "let off a shout." This was immediately followed by a rattling, scuffling sound within, but still no one appeared to let in the impatient Mr. Fane.

"Open there!" he shouted, shrugging his shoulders vehemently, and kicking the door with his moccasins to the imperilment of his toes. "Open, or I'll batter the blooming door in."

"Whisht, me darlint!" said a pacifying voice within. "Hould your pace a minute. It's busy I am puttin' the things in the cillar."

"I should think then," said Mr. Fane, ceasing his efforts with a contemptuous shrug, "from the row you are making, that you had fallen down it neck and crop."

In a few seconds the key turned in the lock, and Gorman, in a rather dishevelled state, presented himself at the door. He turned his head sideways that he might get a look at the visitor with his one remaining eye. His black bristly hair gave him the appearance of perpetual fright. His coarse flannel shirt was ruffled and creased, and his apron was folded negligently around his belt. Add to this a pair of trousers worn and bagged at the knees, and feet loosely encased in an old pair of Mennonite boots with the tops cut off, and you have a picture of Mr. Gorman O'Neil, blacksmith.

"Ah, it's you, sor, is it?" he said, recognizing Fane. "And if it's the horse ye want shoein' just lade him into the shop, and whin Oi've got the foire lighted, I'll hammer on his boots like a strako o' grased lightnin'."

Mr. Fane, observing that he wished them fixed on a

little firmer than they had been when shod before, drew his reluctant beast into the shop and tied it to a ring, whilst the smith took some chips and paper and lighted the forge. Then he distended the panting bellows, and soon the red flame flashed through the smoky pall and all was roar and fire.

As the smith hammered on a red shoe, Fane twitted him about his visionary housemate.

"Say, Gorman!" he asked, pulling at the ends of his mustache, "who's the lady you were talkin' to while I was waiting at the door?"

Gorman's hair, which had subsided partially as he worked, rose erect again like lying grass lifted by an opposing breeze, and he squinted crookedly at the red shoe lying on the anvil.

"Divil a leedy iver put foot in this place." Bang! bang! bang! came in quick succession from the descending hammer, and this was Gorman's manner of emphasizing his unfilial denial of the gentility of his departed mother.

"Really," continued Fane with an incredulous smile, "you don't expect me to believe that, do you?"

Gorman ceased his exertions, held the shoe up on end with the tongs, and stared doggedly at his interrogator.

"Sarch the house if ye like, sor, and niver a lookin'-glass will ye foind in it."

And after this unique negation he hammered away a little more nervously than before, whilst Fane laughed in his sleeve and shrugged, "That's a good un!"

The pause that followed was suddenly disturbed by a crash as of a barrel falling over in the cellar below, and Mr. Fane exclaimed:

"There! I told you. You've got her stowed away in the cellar."

Gorman dropped the shoe on the anvil, and made for the trap-door in great consternation.

"It's that thavin' baste of a cat," he said wrathily. "Sh-sh—the divil take you for a spittin' thafe. Pwhat's that thricklin' noise ye're makin' in there? It's the crame ye've upset, is it? Arrah—ye whiskered varmint! Just

wait till I get me revolver; Oi'll put a stop to your mischief, mister."

And he hastened into the dwelling-room in high dudgeon, and quickly returned with a gleaming six-shooter in his hand. He raised the trap-door just slightly, bent his head and listened.

"An' it's lappin' at it ye are yet, ye spalpeen," he shouted. "Stop it, or be jabbers I'll put a bullet into your stupid head."

And, as if to make good his words, he thrust the muzzle of the revolver under the slightly-raised trap-door, but strange to say the trickling noise suddenly ceased. The unseen puss had apparently been frightened, and Gorman dropped the door, and, somewhat mollified, placed the revolver on a shelf.

"An' it's shoot the thafe I would," he remarked to Fane, who had watched the scene with mingled interest and alarm, "but I'm scared o' spattherin' his brains over the butther."

Gorman O'Neil's cream, it must be remarked, was of a rather fiery tinge, and his butter was generally kept in barrels or tubs; but undoubtedly it was a cat.

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## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### SLIDING DOWN THE WHISKEY GRADE.

THE morning was cold, but clear and calm.

Far around the settlers' houses were raised like floating islands on the misty verge of the sky. Wherever the opposing bank of a river or creek met the eye countless snow-banks rose step on step beyond each other, and stretched, like the white walls of castellated pyramids, far away to a distance touched with mystery.

Nothing seemed substantial, nothing firm. All was shadowy, shifting and indistinct. Men were dwelling in the sky, and houses tottered like fairy palaces on the

trembling brinks of precipices of snow. From the scattered chimneys wreaths of smoke—tinted blue in that strange atmosphere—curled upward in softly swelling folds toward the measureless expanse; and the winter sun, rising in the embrace of two curved arms of light, shed a frosty glamor over all, whilst the barking of dogs and the shouts of men were carried far in jarring discordance.

George Craggs went into the stable to put the harness on his team. Like the rest of the Craggs' farm-buildings it was sadly dilapidated. The harness lay in a slovenly heap on the earthen floor. The broken-down stalls were made of rough poles nailed to anything that afforded a convenient resting-place. The straw ceiling gleamed with a gilding of frost formed from the animals' breath. Where the plaster had been knocked from the chinks between the logs the holes had been filled with twisted wisps of straw. The walls were without a window, and the door was minus a hinge. The horses themselves were covered with coats of long, shaggy hair, covering loosely their protruding ribs, and evidently were not too familiar with the curry-comb or the oat-bin.

On two of these forlorn-looking beasts George Craggs placed a set of harness, and then drawing them out into the farm-yard hitched them to a load of wheat which he was going to take to Bendigo.

"A mirage and sun-dogs!" he muttered, looking at the sky. "I wonder what it means. Not a storm, I hope."

However, in spite of the hope, he put on a shaggy fur coat, and encased his feet in several pairs of socks overlaid by buckskin moccasins, and with hands muffled like a boxer's and head buried in a fur cap he looked like some fragile object about to be despatched by rail, and carefully padded in fur and wool to save it from injury.

The burdened sleigh creaked along the hard and frosty track till the driver drew rein at a whitewashed log-house by the side of the trail. Here dwelt with her parents Miss Sarah Shenstone.

Ostensibly he called to ask if there were any errand he

could do for them in town, but his real object was to see and speak to the young lady. He was fortunate enough to find Miss Sarah sitting with skirt tucked up peeling potatoes by the side of the stove, from which occupation she looked up to greet him with a little blush and a sly smile. But to speak to her was not so easy, for her mother, who disapproved of George's dissipated habits, frowned sternly on any attempt at intimacy between them; and after receiving a few letters to post he turned to leave with part of his purpose unaccomplished. But Sarah, seeing her mother's back turned, softly rose and followed him to the door, where she detained him by laying a gentle hand on his arm.

"George," she said softly, "promise me that you will not touch the drink to-day. There's a good fellow."

This unexpected appeal made him start like some criminal suddenly discovered in a guilty act. He little thought that *she* was cognizant of his weakness, and the knowledge flushed his face and left him for a moment speechless. Under the gentle gaze of her unreprouchful eyes, however, he soon recovered himself, and holding out his hand he gratefully pressed hers.

"I promise," he whispered, and then hurried away.

For some time she gazed after him earnestly.

"Poor fellow," she thought. "What a pity he should have taken to that; but perhaps he will get over the habit."

"Sarah, come in and shut the door; you are making the house as cold as ice standing there." And so ended poor Sarah's reverie.

No doubt at the time he made it George Crags earnestly intended to keep his promise, but it is the drunkard's misfortune ever to be strongest when farthest from temptation. The evil spirit then lies dormant, and chuckles perhaps at the firm resolves he hears; but once within his own domains he rouses all his fellest energy and grapples with his dupe, and in that dread combat only the strong-willed or heaven-aided may hope for victory. As we have



seen, George did not belong to the former class, nor, I am afraid, did he seek to be classed among the latter.

Bendigo in the winter looked like some grotesque moulding of lumber, bricks and stones placed in a setting of trampled snow. The sleigh-beaten streets ran like streaks of white between clumps of houses, stables and stores, and the frost-clouded windows on either side gazed blankly and sadly on the passer-by; whilst the frowning elevators by the railway side looked contemptuously over the rest as they gulped in load after load of grain or discharged it into covered cars on the track by their sides.

When George Crag's load had been thus absorbed he ran his lean-ribbed steeds into a feed-stable, and then made off toward a temperance restaurant to get his dinner.

A stronger man would have bravely faced and battled with temptation, but George was weak. His mode of nursing a virtue was not to battle with and slay the evil thing, but rather to dodge about and avoid its clutches. Evil is the coward cur that flies from the fearless eye but bites the flying heel, and so our very efforts to shun an enemy are often the means by which we bring it upon us.

So it was with George Crag in this instance. As with eyes peering cautiously around him he turned the corner of a street, he came face to face with his arch-tempter, Tom Dundo, the loafer. Times had apparently improved with him, for he wore a handsome fur coat, which, as he walked, he left open at the front, and so exposed a glittering gold watch-chain. A large cigar was tilted at an angle from his mouth, and he looked less shabby but more jaunty than ever. As his eyes met George's, however, his look changed from the careless to the conciliatory.

"Hello, Georgie," he drawled, holding out his mitted hand, "how'd 'ee do to-day? Thought you were lost or dead. Haven't seen you in town for quite a while back. Come and have a drink at my expense, and we'll talk over the noos."

"No, not just now, thank you," said George, looking



nervously down at the ground. "I want to go to dinner."

"All serene. You dine at the 'Cowboy,' don't you? Come along, and I'll wait in the bar till you've finished your dinner."

George, fearing the quizzing that he knew would follow, was afraid to tell him that he intended to dine at a temperance house.

"What does it matter?" he thought. "I can just go in and get my dinner, and then slip out through the sitting-room, and he will never see me." So he went along with his tempter, who jerked up the end of his cigar to a still higher elevation in an effort to suppress a triumphant smile.

Leaving Dundo in the bar, George went into the dining-room and hurried through a hasty meal; but what was his disgust and dismay in passing into the sitting-room to find the dreaded tempter lying there on a sofa reading a newspaper.

Still hoping to evade him, George slipped a coin into the hand of the landlord and drawing his cap over his ears walked softly toward the outer entrance.

But creatures of the weasel type are not easily caught napping, and Tom Dundo was one of these. His bleared eyes made up in watchfulness what they lacked in brightness, and he detected poor George's attempt to slip out of the room before he was half-way across.

"Hi, there, George!" he said, raising himself to a sitting posture, "don't run away like that. Come and have a drink and a little talk. There's a good fellow."

That last expression was the very one that Sarah Shentstone had appended that morning to a nobler appeal, and it struck a chord of remembrance that for a time nerved him to resistance. He stopped and looked straight at Dundo.

"Thank you, but I cannot," he said.

Then seeing the loafer's scornful smile, he added in a hesitating manner, "The fact is, I promised that I would not touch drink to-day."

Had he but stuck to the polite firmness of his first sentence, the tempter might have been driven away, but that hesitating apology ruined him. Dundo laughed outright.

"Well, well! What eloquent teetotaler have you been listening to lately, young man?"

The landlord was in the room, and three or four men were seated around the large heating stove, smoking, expectorating and looking generally very much bored by a world they tolerated in a sort of pitiful contempt. Two of them belonged to Dundo's class, and hearing his little controversy with the "tenderhorn," they condescended to rouse themselves sufficiently from their apathy to regard him with a rather embarrassing attention. Thus made the centre of unwished-for scrutiny, George's small stock of courage began rapidly to give way, and in response to Dundo's jeering inquiry he shambled out a few apologetic, half-articulate words.

"Oh, no, nobody's been preaching to me. Only they kind o' made me promise, you know."

"Come now," interrupted Dundo, "don't take any notice of them, but just have independence enough to show that you still have respect enough for an old friend to take a drink with him when he asks you to. So come along, old man."

Dundo had risen from the couch and gone toward George; and he made this speech with a hand laid persuasively on his arm.

It was unfortunate for George that at that moment the door leading into the bar was opened wide. He could hear the billiard balls rattling on the table, the rattle of shaking dice reached his ears, and he heard also the oaths with which the winners greeted their gain and the losers cursed their ill-luck.

Then the evil powers within began to grapple with the good, and he felt himself weakening, yet made no attempt to escape. The appealing words he had heard that morning sounded fainter and fainter in the ear of memory. The holy influences that should have restrained him

gradually fainted from his mental sight, eclipsed by other sights and other sounds.

On a slight draught, occasioned by the opening of an outer door, the smell of the maddening liquor was borne to his nostrils. A great tidal wave of evil desire surged through his soul and drenched out every good remembrance. His head hung, his lip quivered.

"Come along," he said to Dundo.

It was like inviting the devil to do his will with him; nor are such biddings ever refused. A minute or so after he and his victim had disappeared into the bar-room, Dundo's myrmidons followed him, and well they helped the poor wretch to scatter the wild-oats which yield the baleful harvest.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE VOICE OF THE STORM.

Who is that staggering along the street with watery eyes and palsied hands, and sensual lips that hurl out curses on the air like flakes of fire churned up from the nethermost pit? Is this he who but a short time since was steady-footed, self-controlled and wise-resolving? If so, what has wrought this change? You ask this of the spirit invisible that surround and dwell within you, and they reply:

The devil who dwells in an element of liquid fire, which, thrust down the throats of men, too often gives them no rest till he has claimed his own. A monster, whose food is misery, whose drink is tears, whose voice is a mingling of the groans of the dying and the wailing of the bereft, whose whisper is as the sound of a sea of its victims' blood, breaking on the shore that is strewn with their bones. A thing which men hug and cling to; for its face indeed is fair like that of Sin, but like hers its end is also serpent-

like and foul, and hideous with the yelping of its deathly hounds—Ruin, Destruction and Despair.

"You don't mean to go out to-night, Craggs, I should hope," said a merchant passing him on the street; "it looks as if there's going to be a pretty bad storm."

"You get out of this!" shouted the drunkard, "and mind your own business. I guess I can look after myself, can't I, you meddlin' old fool." And he leaned against a wall to curse him, but the man passed on without saying another word.

Rising with muttered oaths, George Craggs staggered along to the feed-stable at which he had put up his team.

"Come," he said to the stableman, "gimme my team out and lemme be off. Old Paper-cap wanted me to shtay in town, so he could fleece me out of a few dollars, I guess; but I'll show the old fool I aint 'fraid of no shtorms. Don't shtare there, but gimme the team out, I tell yer."

"But, George," said the stableman, who knew him well, "there is going to be a storm, and really, old fellow, you're hardly fit to go out to-night. Better come and lay down in the hay-loft awhile."

This allusion to his incapable state was just the red rag to arouse George's rage and obstinacy to the highest pitch. He leaned against the end of the stable abutting on the street, and cursed the stableman so loudly and long that to quiet him he at last yielded compliance to his wishes.

"You'd better gimme that team out pretty quick now," said the half-pacified drunkard, "or if you don't, I'll burn your stable down and ever'thin' in it. I'll show ye who you're going to put up in a loft, mister. You think I'm drunk, do yer? I'm a sight soberer than you ever was or ever will be; an' I'm going out home to-night in spite of fifty storms or fifty devils. Yah!"

So in a husky voice, with drunken loquacity, he rattled on. Women passing along the street hurried by with averted faces on which horrified loathing was plainly

written. Men regarded him with amusement, pity or scorn. All shunned him.

Soon the liveryman had hitched up the team and received his fee, and standing unsteadily in his sleigh, lashing wildly at his horses, the drunkard rode shouting out of the town.

"You should never have let that fellow go," said a man coming up to the stableman, who stood watching his customer drive away. "If a storm rises (and it looks very much like it) he may get frozen to death."

"Couldn't help it," said the other, shaking his head. "I wanted him to stop, but he threatened to burn the place down, and he might do it too—a drunken man is not to be trusted. So let him take his choice."

The air indeed was full of the signs of an approaching storm. All around the horizon a mist was thickening, and the blue of the upper sky could scarcely be seen through the shrouding tinge of grey. The bleared sun, now hastening toward his setting, shone in a circle of mist, enclasped by angry arms of fire. He looked indeed like some mystic potentate on his throne, curtained thinly by the mist as with a veil, a flaming sceptre in each hand, a crown of fire above his head, and a gleaming footstool beneath his feet.

Over the close-packed drifts the loose snow was racing before a menacing wind. The rolling grains of white rustled over the crust beneath with an eerie warning sound. Sometimes they spurted into the air over the edge of some high drifts, but for the most part they crept along the ground—now thicker, now thinner—sometimes opening out and leaving wide clear spaces between; but anon closing in again and continuing relentlessly on their way like packs of white wolves uttering no cry, but with sound of the breathing of ten thousand nostrils sweeping over the snow. The fleeting mass changed and shifted ever, like the billows of a sea of pallid spray—a thing to fill the eye and ear with wonder, and to chill the heart with nameless dread.

But portentous as these signs were, they seemed only to

drive the drunken youth to more desperate frenzy. He lashed the poor horses wildly, and sent them galloping against the rising blast. More than ever intoxicated with this furious driving amid wind and snow, he jumped wildly about the bottom of his sleigh-box, waving the whip above his head, shouting out delirious oaths and singing Bacchanalian songs. But this could not last long. The infuriated beasts, in spite of the bitter cold, were bathed in sweat. They panted wildly with each stretch of their flying legs, and their nostrils were distended almost to bursting. Ears were set back, manes were flying on the breeze, and the bits with which the driver checked them were covered with blood.

In spite of his mad urging the horses began to flag. Their gallop became slower and slower, until at last it subsided into a jaded trot. Nor, notwithstanding lashes and oaths, did this continue long, for soon the trot descended into a tired walk. In vain did the drunken driver wildly curse and ply his whip. The poor beasts were past the stage when that could affect them, and they received the leather-stings with a sullen apathy, which seemed to say, "You have done your worst; you can do no more with us."

And see! The stormy sun is sinking low: already its flaming footstool has dipped beneath the western verge, and the wind is rising ever fiercer. With fangs of ice it grips his freezing cheek, and the quick needles of the frost pierce through and through his nose, and leave the skin white and bloodless. The white pellets of snow hurled against him strike like frosted bird-shot on his face; and he is half sobered by the stinging agony.

With stupid, drunken eyes he glares through the gathering storm, as if he would fain find some place to shelter him. But he sees none; and again the hot oaths are vomited on the storm, and the stinging lash falls on the quivering, foam-flecked hides of the horses. But all, in vain. And now the sun, bristling red and angry-faced, has sunk below the horizon, sending a fiery sword of flame far up into the winter sky. And when that had withdrawn,



the storm king spread his black robes over the dusky firmament, and sent his frosty breath hissing over the snow-covered plain. The loose white snow rose in a rushing and blinding mist, darkness fell over the land, and the storm had possession of the night.

Now for the first time did George Crags begin fully to realize his danger. Twenty feet high in the air blew the blinding snow; and all around him it formed an impenetrable curtain of death-dealing cold. The wind roared against the side of his sleigh, and the cold penetrated even through the thick fur coat he wore. He was encompassed by myriad armies of relentless foes. They shut out the sky above him, and on every side enclosed his vision in a circle as fatal as furies ever spun. Blinded and choked, the wretched horses stumbled and staggered forward, with difficulty keeping on the narrow trail.

The now fully sobered driver turned his frozen face to the wind, but, choked by the blast that met him, he turned from it in utter despair.

"My God!" he groaned bitterly. "What a fool I have been! What a *fool* I have been! Whatever shall I do?"

Thus groaning inwardly, he turned the horses' heads around and went with the wind; but black darkness had fallen, and nothing could he see. Then the bewildered horses got off the trail, and began to wander aimlessly before the wind.

"Oh, for the sight of some settler's house!" he prayed. "If I am lost like this, whatever will they think of me at home? And Sarah, too,—she is thinking of me now, perhaps; and I promised her not to touch it. Oh, what a *fool* I have been!" And crouching in the bottom of the sleigh, with the white snow drifting over him, he writhed in an agony of remorse and self-reproach.

The horses plunged wildly on, sometimes sinking to the girth in drifts, and sometimes walking easily over the brows of storm-beaten hills; but still no shelter was found. The dark night was wearing on, and the light-footed snow

was dancing its ghastly measure to the music of the howling blast.

The wretched youth lay shivering silently in the sleigh—the cold had even dispelled repentance. He felt his feet and hands growing numb as the frost bit into them; and, come what may, he felt that he must get out and walk. But that resolution was fatal. No sooner had he jumped out than he found himself half buried in an enormous drift. Ere he could extricate himself horses and sleigh went relentlessly on, and left him there. In vain he shouted till his throat was hoarse: a stone's splash in the ocean was more than the sound of a human cry in the howl of that bitter storm.

He struggled out of the drift and began to rush madly about, hoping to find some tracks that might lead him on the trail of the departed team. But vain, vain were those maddened searches, for the darkness was thick about him, and the sharp snow stung his eyes into blindness. Yet still he plunged wildly along, breaking through the frosted surface with every step, and sinking deep in the quicksands of snow beneath. For how long he walked thus he knew not—all count of time seemed to be swallowed in that anguished eternity which only the despairing know. It was the effort of desperation. Hour after hour through that bitter, endless night he struggled through the snow. His breath came in a short, sharp panting, like the sobs of a child when its tears have ceased to flow, and the blood throbbled in his head as though it would burst through his skull. His stiffened limbs ached till he could hardly move them a foot at a time. And so, with powers exhausted and senses benumbed, he sank down at last and pressed his arms upon his breast in a throe of helpless anguish.

"My God! my God!" he cried, "Save me! save me!"

And then, in strange contrast, the hands folded peacefully like those of a tired child, the weary eyes closed, the breath was more gently drawn, a look of peace stole over his suffering face; and so he lay down and slept.

That night a jaded team of horses (their shaggy hair

encased in snow), dragging an empty sleigh, stopped at a settler's door. Looking out into the storm he saw them, and bringing out a light, put them in the stable cleaned them down well and fed them.

"Some poor wretch has perished to-night," he said to his wife.

In two households that night lights are gleaming through the window panes, like eyes that are watching for one who never returns.

In one, a young woman sits by the side of the stove far, far into the morning hours. With a pale face propped by two small hands, she listens patiently ever to the voice of the storm. Howling around the corner and whistling through the keyhole, out of its weird, unfathomable mystery—from its heart of frost and its robes of snow—it shapes to her ear, and sings ever in dreary repetition the refrain,

"He will not come. He will not come."

In the other, a sister is waiting for her brother, a mother for her son. Often they go to the door and look out into the night; but the wild wind leaps in like an angry wolf, and sends them back shivering to the fireside with the snow upon their faces. Much they try to comfort themselves with many suggestions as to what safe course he has taken, but the shadow of painful uncertainty darkens it all. And the wind, as it rocks their crazy dwelling to and fro, and rattles down the chimney, and hisses beneath the eaves and groans through the gaping crevices, sings also to them its prophetic song,

"He will never return. He will never return."

## CHAPTER XL.

## AFTER THE BLIZZARD.

HUSHED is the wind, clear the sky, and motionless the snow. A peaceful sun rises on a peaceful world; but the footsteps of the storm are everywhere seen.

Doors are blocked by hard-packed drifts; farm-yards are filled with snowy crags and curved white precipices; houses are surrounded by walls of crumbled marble; while out upon the plain the undulating drifts stretch like the whitened waves of a frozen sea, far as the eye can reach on every hand.

The storm is over, and men are glad that it is so. The farmer, digging out his snow-imprisoned cattle, pauses sometimes in his labor and hums a merry tune. Dogs snap and bark in canine glee, as they roll in the snow or bound about their masters' knees. Children, with merry shouts, come forth to play for awhile in the calm clear air; and the teamster whistles cheerily as he hitches his horses to the half-buried sleigh.

But the people of Dysart settlement do not share the general cheerfulness. It has reached their ears that George Crag started out from Bendigo yesterday afternoon, and has not since been seen; and men, with gloomy brows, go forth to search.

They have sought far and wide, but all in vain. They have searched the deep ravine, where the towering cliffs of snow stare at each other across a steep and narrow chasm; they have threaded the darkened wooded mazes where only the howling wolf or the savage bear may find a home. Along the buried trails, in many a slough enclosed by scrubby brushwood, where the snow lies many feet deep, they seek; and many a rugged snow-drift they probe, but all in vain.

And now the sun is low, the hearts of the searchers are

weary, and the work is incomplete. But see! What is that shaggy fur object into which the snow has drifted? It lies in a sprawling heap; and the snow is gathered in a little knoll by its side, and is all mingled with the curly fur.

Lift it up, bear it away; but look not closely upon it. It is bent and stiff, and it grates harshly with every jerk of the sleigh.

All around is white and clear and pure. But why lies such a shadow of blackness on the path as that wrapping of snow-engrained fur is borne over it? In the home there is sighing and weeping, as that stony thing lies by the fireside with the frosty sweat breaking out upon it; but sighs will not warm it, tears will not soften it.

They have bared a little space in the snow not far from the house; and you can hear the loud clang of their axes as they fall on the iron ribs of the frozen earth. The stony splinters fly like hail around them. Chip, chip, through weary hours, and at last the grave yawns to receive its own.

The raw, mournful wind is blowing from the east, and upon it the solemn words of the burial service float like the faint echoes of a far-off bell, to be lost in the misty distance; and it lifts the white robe of the preacher till it floats out like an angel's wing.

A few mourners shiver around the grave, and watch the dark casket as it is lowered in its iron-ribbed receptacle. Then the service is closed, the last "Amen" is said, and under the pitiless steel-blue sky no sound is heard to jar with the rattling of the stony splinters of earth rattling on the coffin-lid. So the grave is choked with earth and snow, and that youthful tragedy is closed forever.

Yes, it is over with him; but is he the only victim?

Wealthy distiller! Opulent brewer! Well-to-do trafficker in this accursed thing! Indolent loafer openly backing it! Indifferent moderationist coldly abetting it! This young man is but one of thousands being slain through your agency every day.

## CHAPTER XLI.

## THE DIARY OF A HERMIT.

READER, I think I hear you asking, Where is Fred Polson all this time? Listen :

"I hear the dull roar of the wind making dismal music among the iron branches of this winter forest, and the hungry wolves are howling in savage chorus in the gloom; yet here within my little cabin all is bright and warm and cheerful, and with a not unthankful heart I add more fuel to my blazing fire, and draw nearer to remember and reflect.

"Am I a fool, or am I a coward, that I thus shelter myself from the world, where, perhaps, the kind hearts of friends are bleeding for a word from me? This is the bitterest reflection of all: I may be giving needless pain to those who love me. But why did I come here? I can only think that there are occasions in life when that frail organ on which our judgment, our very virtues, depend, is, in times of great perturbation, shaken into a wonderful region—the borderland between madness and reason—a land in which the real gives place to the frenzied ideal, and all substance is shadow, all reality unreal.

"In such a place was I after that dreadful trial. I was acquitted, yet I seemed to bear with me the shadow of doom. Warm-hearted friends were ready to receive me, yet I felt like a weed flung on the wayside to be the scorn of every trampling foot. She whose love I had chiefly prized seemed to ignore my unhappy case; and that being so, I felt as though all the world must doubt me, and I must gain for my reason some quiet resting-place, or I should surely go mad. And so I sought this forest solitude. I assumed a new name, let the hair grow long upon my face; and here I have learned to think as I have never thought before. Here, alone with God and nature, I have learned to love more deeply the beings whose presence I



shun for a time, but for a time only. For when my day of trial is over, and my purposes are complete, I will return to fight my share in the great universal war that is constantly waging; and who will say that I shall fight the worse for this rest? Nay, it is not altogether rest, but rather it is a time for searching into the unfathomable mysteries which prompt men to deeds of good or ill; so that hereafter I may be strengthened and rectified in my words and deeds by knowing that there is an eternity which snatches them from me as they are spoken or done, and writes them in letters of unalterable fire which shall last for evermore.

“Over my cabin-roof spread the leafless, wrinkled branches of an aged tree. To the outward eye, in the glare of day when the winds are still, it seems lifeless as a thing of stone; yet often at nights, when my lamp is out and I am warmly ensconced in my blankets, and the wood is crackling on the fire which checkers the walls with dancing shadows and lights, then the breeze stirs those mouldering branches. The huge joints crackle and loosen themselves; the great tree heaves, as it were, a long-drawn sigh, and lifting up its voice, sings to me this mystic song:

“‘I am old, I am old! Nor know I when my birth-time was. Time and chance have thrown me in strange places, and made me the witness of unnumbered varying scenes. Through long ages have I bloomed and faded, yet I do not die. Nay, sometimes I think that I, too, am immortal in a lower sense than you, and perhaps shall never die—or die but with this world, to which I have clung so long. Yes, we are old companions, this world and I. Ere the omnipotent Hand had drawn it from chaos or sowed it in space, I was. And when, in the womb of that vast cloud of fire we whirled through the illimitable void, I was there. Grand and majestic was our progress then. As the rugged mass of vaporous fire glided through those unpeopled vacancies it lighted up the reign of night with a hot and sulphurous glare; and in its blue and ghastly splendor the meek stars twinkled faintly in pale eclipse. For many cycles we rode thus; but slowly the cloudy

chaos was rounding into fairer forms. Piece by piece the flurred edges crumbled off, and still dancing around their mother-cloud, formed into worlds round and fair; and of these this earth was one.

“ Bearing me, yet dormant, in its breast, it journeyed its appointed way; and lo! as it went, the fire sank deep into its centre, and the vapor above was changed into sea, and for years, which the mind of man cannot comprehend, it swung through space a world of wrinkled waters. But land appeared at last above it, only to sink many times again, and again emerge. And upon this land life grew in strangely monstrous forms. Great reptiles crawled from the oozy deep, and basked them in the sun; and above them flew the scaly creatures of the air, their bat-like wings shutting out the light, like clouds; and the writhing monsters of the deep lashed the sea into waves when the winds were still.

“ But the waters again covered the land, and the things that dwelt on the earth perished. A blasting frost-breeze swept over the earth, and when the waters again departed to their places the land was covered with unbroken fields of ice. Slowly, before the sun, these glaciers were driven to their northern intrenchments, and the land once more was dry.

“ Then I, so long dormant, put forth my life and grew, and flourished a goodly tree; and beneath my shade strange beasts came to rest, and my strong branches swayed with the weight of things—half reptile, half bird; half feathers, half scales—such as the world may see no more. And the mountainous pachyderms bellowed beneath me till my leaves quivered with the noise; whilst on high their winged fellows shrieked till they rent the rainy clouds.

“ But in time these monstrosities disappeared, or developed into higher forms of life, and one day there came to rest in my shade a creature stranger to look upon than any other. Erect was his form and white his skin, but his dark hair clung around him like a towzled mat, and his savage eyes glared through the tangled tresses. Around

his middle he had girt the skin of a wild beast he had slain, and bound it around him with its own sinews. In his hand he carried a sinew-sling, and I saw that it was loaded with a smooth, round stone. Long he knelt, patiently he waited in the shadow of my bole; and at last my far-spreading roots ached beneath the tread of a huge furred monster, with a great horn growing out of its forehead. I saw the savage thing beneath me glare fiercely as he aimed his sling. Then, with a whizz, it cut through the air, and the stone sank deep in the monster's brain, and I trembled in every leaf as its dull weight tumbled on the earth. With a shout the strange creature who had slain it jumped upon his prey, and taking a piece of sharp flint from his girdle, laboriously stripped it of its skin and cut out some pieces of flesh, which he wrapped up in the hide and bore away, and I saw him no more.

“‘Him, indeed, I saw not; but many of his kind thereafter reposed in my shade. Women, with babes wrapped in the skins of beasts, came to croon their lullabies beneath my branches. The merry youth sported nimbly among my branches, or chased each other in savage glee up and down my ragged bole. And I saw that the men cast away the old things and got them better. The sling gave place to the bow; and they fashioned for themselves metal weapons of many shapes, and clad their bodies in more seemly guise.

“‘Then of these I saw no more, for one day a little bird came to sing among my withering branches, and my life, enclosed in a little germ, fell upon it, and found lodgment among its feathers; and then it spread its wings and bore me far away. In another land it ruffled its feathers in flight, and I, so shaken, fell upon the ground, and, striking my roots downward, grew again and flourished a goodly tree. There I bloomed and faded many times, and died and lived again, and saw the progress of many generations of men. I saw them peacefully tilling the ground with spade and hoe, and I saw them, iron-clothed, bleeding in the martial ranks of war, as in the madness of hell-born folly they strove to wound and kill each other. I saw them kneeling beneath the stars, and prostrate before the

sun and raving under the moon. I saw the smoke of their sacrifices blackening the sky, and the blood reddening the ground. I saw them make to themselves images of wood, and iron and gold, and bow the head to the work of the hand.

“Yet were they not wholly vile. Though ignorant, their souls overflowed with wonder; and in many shapes they sought to do homage to the mystery of mysteries which surrounds their children still. Living in error, they yet longed for truth; and the wise among them they made rulers of the land. So, through cruelty, bloodshed and ignorance, they crept up toward knowledge, beauty and truth. The marble carvings of cunning hands adorned the magnificent structures they raised, and the walls were beautified with paintings such as earth may see no more. Orators, with words of fire, inflamed the hearts of multitudes; poets sang more sweetly than now; and men skilled in working wood and iron made cunning devices for works of peace and war, which later days may never recover. But peace dwelt not with the people, and liberty was a stranger among them; so that the bloody hands of war and tyranny destroyed the works of intellect and taste.

“And I, as I looked upon these things, was wafted by the tricks of chance among many peoples and many climes. Beginning in far Cathay, I saw the wave of empire rolling westward ever, and I saw the chain of destiny drop its links on every continent as it passed, until it has almost surrounded the world, and, indeed, only awaits the consummation of its encircling plan, when this young continent, strong in unity, enclasps east and west with hands of friendly power.

“I have seen nations blotted from the earth as you snuff out a candle's light, and not even their ashes remain to tell that they had been. I have seen the sceptre handed from race to race, and have noted that the brave and truthful ever prevail. I have seen faith succeed to faith, and have known that the best and wisest races have ever accepted that which sheds most light and freedom upon the

paths of men. I have seen the teaching of Christ develop in the human mind to wider scope and more tolerant principle; and thus it is expanding still. Yes, I have watched the march of mankind from the black ages which are forgotten, even to this present twilight state; and perchance (for surely I shall live again) I shall yet hear the joyous tramp of this God-like army, when, in the glorious days to come, it shall march into the clear calm light of peace which shall nevermore pass away.

“How came I here? I cannot say. For I am old, and I have dwelt in many lands. I have shrivelled under Indian suns, and have shivered among Siberian snows. The white squirrel of the North has chirped among my frozen branches, and the twining boa-constrictor has squeezed my rugged trunk. My offshoots and progeny have cleft the raging brine of many seas, and have sheltered untold millions of the human race. When your forefathers feasted at the Christmas-tide, they roared up the spacious chimneys, and licked up the frosty air with tongues of fire; they lighted up the smoky rafters of those ancient halls, and glowed ruddily on the hardy faces of those who danced in drunken revelry around them. But these things are no more, for the olden strongholds of tyranny and cruelty have crumbled to dust, and freer and happier days have come.

“And I am here! Again thou askest why? Time and Chance, I reply. Time and Chance! In this land have I seen men with feathers on their heads and paint upon their faces, driven westward before the all-conquering march of the bearded nations I had known before. And when I had dwelt here many years, and seen the white people settle in the land, one day there walked beneath my branches one of those painted men from the forest, and as he passed under a germ instinct with my life fell upon his head, and in his raven tresses he bore me for many days.

“For miles he wound his sinuous way through gloomy forests, and with the weapons he carried found food for himself on the journey. Under the spreading trees he lighted the fires with which he cooked his simple meals,



and when the night was coming on he would pause by some bubbling water-course, and after eating his supper of roasted flesh, washed down with water from the stream, he would make his bed of sweet smiling boughs and sleep beneath the shady trees. Nor did the howls of the wolves or the hisses of the snakes disturb the soundness of his repose.

“Thus journeying he carried me along by far-gleaming lakes and thundering waterfalls and jagged rocks. Never was he short of food; once, with straight aim, he slew a monstrous bear, and his sharp arrows often severed the heads of birds flying swiftly above him.

“But at last this rugged journeying ended, and he emerged on an open plain where rusty herds of shaggy bison were grazing, and a sea of grass waved in a sweeping wind. Through this plain ran the deep valley of a winding river, and here the wanderer found his family encamped, and rested after his travels. His swarthy children clung around him whilst his dark-eyed wife washed his travel-sore feet and combed out his matted hair. And, as she loosened his coarse tresses I fell once more upon the ground; and when they had passed on from that spot I struck down my roots again and grew and flourished a goodly tree. And from thence did the wing of a bird again remove me and drop me in this place; and thus am I as thou seest.

“This is my history. Now hear the words of wisdom which the experience of unnumbered years has engendered even in me. Look upon my gnarled form and crooked boughs! Thinkest thou that their beauties and defects are but the growth of yesterday? Nay, for ages have these limbs been moulding to their present state. Many long ages ago was the crook made in that rugged arm that swings above thy hut. View then my strong, undecaying bole. The germ of this symmetry and strength was formed ere the foot of man had fallen on the earth. Look well, then, to the training of thy life moments while they are given to thee. Think, too, into what horrible deformity the vice thou fosterest now may grow in the bottomless deeps



of eternity ; and so guard thou each little drop of time, that when the leaves and flowers of thy mortal bloom have faded, thou mayst rejoice in the thought that the seed thou hast sown on earth shall grow to a blessed harvest in the fields of never-ending joy.'

"Then the fire in my cabin burned low, and the hand of sleep stole over me. But in my dreams that wondrous tree song murmurs still, and it has filled my heart with happiness and inexpressible peace. What though the heart I love turn icily against me? Is there not a nobler love than this? Yea, the love that comes from God to every doer of His will, the love that binds man in charity with his brother, and abides with him through all the stormy changes of life. What though the world think ill of me? Can I not so live in it that its opinion will surely change? And even though it never should, will not the All-father's approving smile more than outbalance its scorn?

"Yes, there is hope and peace and happiness abundant yet in store for me ; but, like Him I have learned to adore, I must earn it by the humble heart, the meek spirit, aye, and the agony of bloody sweat."

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## CHAPTER XLII.

### PANCRACK'S CONDOLENCE.

ILL news travels fast. As Pancrack was driving to town the day after the storm, the first person he met informed him of George Crag's fate. Strange to say, though he had wished for this catastrophe, the news, meeting him so suddenly and unexpectedly, gave him no pleasure, but rather filled him with a tormenting uneasiness which his coward conscience vainly tried to reason down.

"Hang it all!" he muttered to himself, "why need this business trouble me? The fellow was a fool to start out on such a night, that is all ; and he has paid for his folly

with his life. It is surely no fault of mine. But I suppose, for decency's sake, I had better go back and look after the women."

He turned his horse's head accordingly, and drove slowly back toward the home of the dead.

It was twilight when he entered the farm-yard, and all things wore a gloomy look. The unfed cattle were moaning in the wretched shed. George's favorite dog was whining piteously as he prosecuted a fruitless search around the buildings. The dingy house looked black and mournful in the gathering dusk, and the white-blinded windows shrunk among the shrivelled boards. Through the half-opened door—where the twilight shades without were struggling with the darkness within—came the sound of woman's weeping.

For once it seemed as if Pancrack's fantastic wish were almost realized, and his gold-hardened heart was making music against his ribs. But it was the music of dirges and passing bells, and to ease its terrible chiming he paused for several moments outside the threshold before entering that mournful home.

When at last he passed into the inner room he found himself in semi-darkness—a darkness which did not hide, but rather by its uncertainty intensely magnified and distorted, the forms of the saddened inmates. The old man of tortoise life and torpid feeling sat in his accustomed place behind the stove; but his head was bare, and his thin grey hair floated over his stooping shoulders. The chin of his drooping head rested in tearless, stupid sorrow on the top of his walking-stick. Like someone thoroughly bewildered, yet trying to rouse himself from the mental doze to the proper pitch of apprehension and sorrow, he stared intensely at something gently thawing on the other side of the stove. Pancrack looked toward it, too, and a white face peered at him through the gloom with fearful distinctness. His hard features paled, and shuddering, he turned his eyes from it, and leaned against the wall to recover his composure.

No one in the room noticed him. Alice sat on the sofa,

weeping as if her heart would break, and (strange sight to him) her mother sat near her on a chair, sobbing, with a handkerchief over her eyes. The rock had been touched by the rod of affliction, and the springs in the desert were unsealed at last.

When Pancrack had sufficiently recovered to resume his *role* of consoler, he walked softly toward his affianced bride and seated himself on the sofa beside her.

"Alice," he whispered, taking hold of her hand.

It was quickly withdrawn, and uncovering her tearful eyes, she for the first time became conscious of his presence.

"Oh, Mr. Pancrack!" she sobbed. "You should not have come here. We are all so miserable to-day."

"I am well aware of it, my love, and I have come to see if I can do anything to help or comfort you," said Pancrack, again taking her hand; and this time it remained in his.

"You are very kind, I am sure," said Alice, ceasing to sob. "But then, what can you do? Can you restore life to him?" And she pointed across the room.

Pancrack's eyes did not follow the motion of her hand, but nevertheless it seemed to bring the white face with awful vividness before him, and some of its pallor shuddered into his cheeks. Her tears and the darkness of the room prevented Alice from noticing the change; and with an effort he calmed himself.

"No," he replied, in a voice of mournful resignation, "I cannot do that, however much I should wish it. But is there not some little thing that I can do to help you in your distress?"

"No; you cannot prevent or lessen our sorrow for the poor boy who has gone. And why should you trouble yourself with our sorrows? Oh, Silas! go away now, and come to us some happier day."

"But, Alice," he said in a tone of soft reproach, "you must remember how deep is the interest I have in you. A week from to-day, and we should have been man and wife. Of course, as it is, the wedding must be postponed; but

do not think that my interest in whatever concerns you is less strong on that account."

There was a pause of some seconds, which was broken at last by the sob-checked voice of Mrs. Craggs.

"I am sure—you mean well—Mr. Pancrack, and will help us—all you can. But we are so upset—by this terrible—affair, that we hardly know what to do. Poor George! Poor George!"

"It is Heaven's" (he could not bring himself to say God's) "will, madam, and we must strive to bear it patiently."

At another time such a remark from Pancrack would have astonished them, but they were then too much engrossed by their sorrow to notice its incongruity. Such remarks, however, seldom dry a tear; and the usurer, listening to the renewed sobbing, ventured on another and more practical course.

"We must make some arrangements about the funeral," he said.

Mrs. Craggs dried her tears at once: business absorbed sorrow, and she was soon deeply engaged in conversation with her prospective son-in-law as to ways and means of managing a burial in a Manitoba winter—a by-no-means easy task.

"It is late," she said, when they had completed the arrangements. "You can hardly go home to-night; you must stop with us. You can sleep in his bed. Poor boy," she added with a deep sigh, "he will never want it again."

Again the white face peered at him through the gloom, and the guilty shudder shook his frame. Sleep in his bed! Never!

He excused himself on the plea of urgent business, and promising to return early on the following day took his leave.

As he passed out the old man was still sitting silent and motionless by the stove, and from the other side the white face was returning his steady stare. Which of those twain was the living, which the dead, it would have been

hard for a chance-comer to say—so thin sometimes seems the veil between life and the beyond.

As Pancrack drove home that night a white face rode beside him, and whispered in endless repetition in his ear "This deed is yours." It peopled his lonely shanty with myriad reflections of itself, and would not let him rest. In dreams he would rise from his bed, and walking the cold floor with bare feet would wave his arms and shout, "Go away! go away! I did not do it. It was yourself."

But in spite of the haunted chamber in his heart, Pancrack was assiduous in his attentions to the bereaved family. He superintended the funeral arrangements and hired a man to take George's place on the farm. He visited them daily with unfailing constancy, and though Alice never really overcame her instinctive inmost dislike of him, she scoured it as a traitor whenever it raised its head, and reasoned with herself that even if he had not gained her affection, he had at least strengthened ten-fold his claim to her esteem.

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## CHAPTER XLIII.

### A SLAVE OF THE CUP.

IN the Eastern story we read of the "Slaves of the Lamp," how when Aladdin rubbed it the horrid-visaged genii started from the earth bound by a spell to do his will. To-day society is cursed with legions of similar bondsmen—"Slaves of the Cup"—and when King Alcohol is sparkling in the glass they rise with blasted images and darkened minds to do his bidding. Ay, and he has power to conjure up millions, and build gorgeous palaces, too; but the wealth is snatched from the aching hands of labor and the hungry mouths of starving families, and his palaces are built with his victims' bones and cemented with their clotted blood. Drag these wretches from the beds of sickness and the low dens of vice and rank them

(a writhing, maudlin cursing army) side by side, so that the world might look upon their faces and listen to their speech, and the nobleness latent in all humanity would arise and sweep from the earth the curse that had made them so. Listen to the wind as it comes to you resonant with the lashing of their rags, and laden with the stench of their breath, and hot with curses, like a blast from the infernal pit; look at the bleared and blinking eyes wherein both soul and reason are obscured in watery eclipse; see the earth-bent faces blotched with disease and bloated with excess; and ask yourself if this is the fruit of freedom?

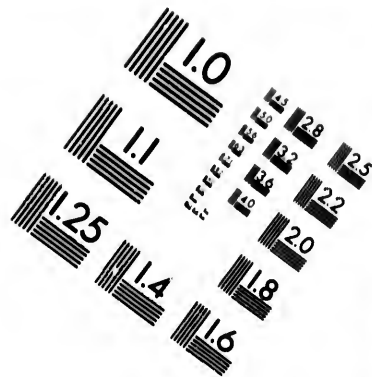
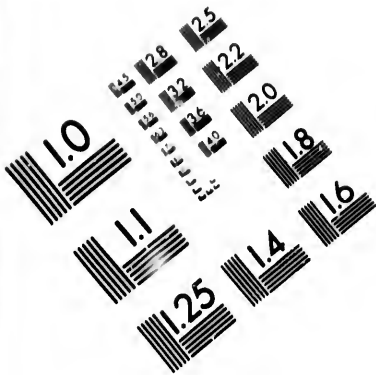
It is marching—this army is marching! You can hear its terrible tramp as it moves on in spite of the cries of wretched imploring women and ragged half-starved children, who are pitifully calling, "Come back!" "Come back!" But they look round only to curse the more and march relentlessly on, for Drink is their marshal and master, and he is leading them on to the City of Destruction.

In the ranks of these "slaves of the cup" old Solomon Crags was marching. The fire-fever burned in his throat and constantly craved for fuel. The shocking death of his only son did not quench the flame: for about three weeks it subdued and hid it, and then like a smoke-smothered fire finding a new vent it burst out with consuming fury.

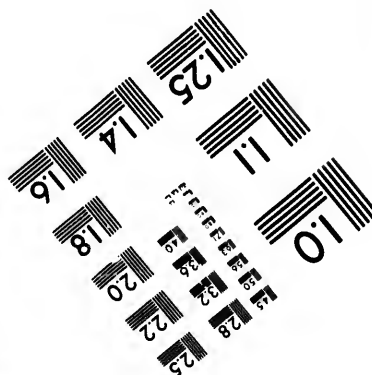
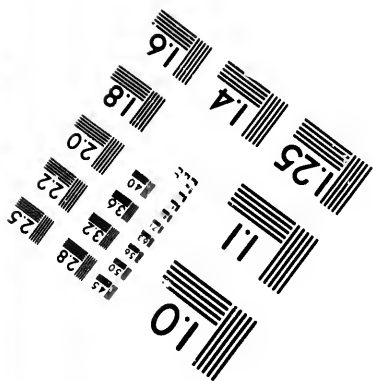
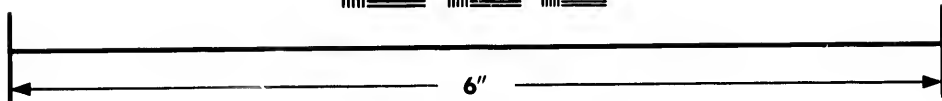
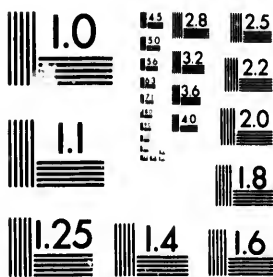
When he had begged from his neighbors until they would give him no more he would stand by the side of the trail when he knew the farmers to be coming home from market, and by feigning illness succeed in prevailing on the generosity of the passers-by so as to supply himself with liquor for a considerable time. But this chronic cramp soon began to wear a suspicious look, and after a while people commenced to make it a point either to evade him or refuse his requests point-blank, and a whiskey famine again threatened him. In his extremity he appealed to Pancrack.







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The usurer was one of those men with whom remorse for injury done to others lasts but a short time; and though for a while he was grievously tormented with visions of the pale frozen face in the dusky room, it passed away so completely that when his victim's father begged money to procure a like debasement he softened his stingy heart sufficiently to give him a patient hearing.

One day he brought over his team and cutter to take Alice out for a drive, but as she pleaded some indisposition he fastened the horses in the wretched shed and was about to enter the door when something stayed his steps by catching in his coat collar. In some surprise he looked round and saw old Solomon hanging to the other end of his walking-stick. He had been waiting in a dark corner that he might get an interview with Pancrack unobserved by his wife.

"Sh—sh!" he said, in a hoarse whisper, mysteriously winking his eye, at the same time releasing his captive's coat collar and holding his stick aloft to enjoin silence. "Dunner speak a word, mon, but cum thee here. I've got summut to show 'ee." And he drew him back from the door into the shaded part of the building.

He let his walking-stick rest against his leg and fumbled in his breast as if anxiously searching for some object. At last he grasped something hard, and after a short struggle disentangled from his voluminous garments a large flask.

"Here yer are, mon," he whispered, holding it down against his side in awful secrecy, "tak' a good lung pull, it 'll help yer to yer coortin'."

Pancrack had no objection to whiskey, and with a propitiatory smile he grasped the neck of the bottle which the old man thrust slyly toward him. "Thank you," he said; "to your very good health."

And without even looking at it he put the neck to his mouth and tilted the bottle in the air. Just one little drop rolled like a liquid pellet along his tongue.

"Why, it's empty," he said in a disappointed tone.

"Empty!" exclaimed Mr. Craggs, dividing the heavy

furrows on his brow into smaller wrinkles to express surprise, "yo' dunner mean ter sa' so. An' that theer bottle was half-full yisterday. It must ha' got turned upside doon when I was aslape, an' I niver noticed it. An' it's the last drop I've got onywheer; an' I'm ser subject to thease yedaches. I shall die fer sure if one on um cums on afore I get ony more; an' I've got no money neether. Oh, what shan I do? What shan I do?" And Mr. Craggs twisted his moppish left hand and thumped the ground with his stick in a throe of intolerable distress.

Pancrack looked on in a rather perplexed manner. He saw that it was a covert appeal to him for money, and between his dislike for giving and his wish to escape he halted in a quandary.

"It is a bad job," he said at last; "but wouldn't Mrs. Craggs let you have a little? She must have some of the mortgage money left yet."

At the mere mention of his wife's name Mr. Craggs' attitude altered entirely. He ceased to beat the ground with his stick, and his head shook as if suddenly smitten with ague.

"Dunner mention it, mon," he said in a horrified whisper. "If that oud woman o' mine should know as yo' 'n bin talkin' wi' mae about gettin' moor whiskey she'd knock the yeds off us boath afore she'd let yer marry Alice."

Pancrack said nothing, but looked at the old man in puzzled surprise.

"Yis," continued the old toper, "that her would. We are boath in the same box now since yo' 'n bin drinkin' wi' mae." And Mr. Craggs sighed profoundly.

"But look thee here, young feller," he added in a conciliatory, confidential manner; "I tell yer what it is. If yo' 'n just lend me a dollar or two now I'll pee yer back later on, so I'll have somethin' to cure me when I get the yedache, and the oud woman 'll never be the wiser for it."

"Yes, of course," said Pancrack, glad to purchase his escape from the tangle in which the old man was trying to involve him. "Why didn't you mention that before? But mind, you mustn't breathe a word to anyone that I gave you this."

And so saying he pulled two dollars out of his purse and dropped them into the old toper's eager hand. A whiskey-tear of gratitude stood in the old man's eye as he rubbed the money in the palm of his hand as a smoker does his tobacco.

"Yo're the stuff," he said, "and may yer never need a friend or a glass of oud Scotch; an' I wouldner want to sae my daughter marry nobody else. So goo on wi' yer coortin'—my blessin's on yer yeds."

"It isn't much," thought Pancrack afterward, "but with the poison that the saloon-keepers stuff into him it may work wonders. The old fool is a nuisance anyhow, and if he would only kill himself the world would be benefited by it." With which philanthropic view he consoled such highly virtuous qualms of conscience as possessed his manly bosom.

As a consequence of this unusual generosity Solomon Craggs might have been seen on the following morning stumping along the trail toward Bendigo. There had been a rise in wheat lately and many farmers were at that time busy hauling in grain to the market, and the old man had started out in the hope of being caught up by one of these. Nor was he disappointed, for soon he heard a sleigh creaking along behind him, and the driver being a stranger to him had no hesitation in giving him a ride on the top of the wheat sacks into Bendigo.

There he ran his usual course.

First stage—All treating, friendliness and familiarity.

Second stage—Querulously affectionate and disposed to gamble.

Third stage—Quarrelsome, pugnacious and profane.

In the last stage on this particular day Mr. Craggs' violence was considerably enhanced by the firm refusal of the bartender to supply him with any more drink without money.

"Yer wunner, wunner yer," shouted Mr. Craggs. "I'll soon show yer whether yer wun or not. Look out fer yer yeds theer."

There was a general stampede into the street as with a



"whoop" Mr. Craggs swung his walking-stick in fierce circles round the bar, shivering to atoms half-a-dozen glass tumblers that stood on the counter, knocking the backs off two chairs and breaking a looking-glass. His vengeance satisfied there he rushed out shouting into the street, where he ran into a citizen who happened to be passing by, and after demolishing his top hat and otherwise damaging him, fell sprawling on the street, shouting out terrific challenges to all within hearing.

"Yah, yer puddin'-yeds! Here's the oud rooster that 'll whop ony mon o' yer yet, though he is an oud cripple. Cum along yer slim kyoots an' I'll polish yer off."

Whilst delivering these defiant threats, he was picked up by the village constable.

"Oh, I am the flower that blooms in the spring, tra-la," sang Mr. Craggs as the officer held him shakily erect.

"Are ye?" said the constable grimly. "Then I'd better put ye in the hot-house. Ye might freeze if ye stopped out here too much."

And he locked him up till he became sober and then sent him home.

But unfortunately for Solomon Craggs that was not the last of it, for a few days later he received a summons to appear before the magistrate at an early date on a charge of assault and battery committed on the body of the aforementioned citizen.

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## CHAPTER XLIV.

### A SOLOMON COME TO JUDGMENT.

WE were in the court-room in Bendigo on the day fixed for the trial of Solomon Craggs. A fair-sized crowd was gathered before three magistrates seated on a dais at the farther end of the hall. The spokesman of the conclave—a short fat man, whose bald crown seemed to have raised itself like a bare hill-top above a scanty growth of hair which clothed the sides—rose from his seat and called out:

"Solomon Craggs, stand up."

"Reight yoe are," said a guttural voice that I knew well.

Then there was a sound of slow and muffled movement, intermingled with the strident squeaking of heavy boots and the intermittent thumping of a walking-stick on the floor, and Mr. Solomon Craggs presented himself to public view and stood before the magistrates.

His dress, with the exception of some slight exaggerations, was the same as ever. The greasy slouched hat flapped defiantly in the magistrates' faces. The moppish bundle of red flannel hung by his side like the end of a brobdignagian cleaning-rod. His antique lengthy coat of grey frieze came down below his knees. His loose, baggy trousers of corduroy vied with his boots in the creases and convexities which his movements created in them. For the rest he stood leaning on his stick, whilst the stubbly bristles on his face rose like porcupine prickles grown to protect him in emergency.

The chairman of the magisterial board recited the charge and asked the usual question—

"Guilty, or not guilty?"

"I was *not* drunk," was the grave reply, with a lordly stress on the "not."

"Answer the question, sir; are you guilty, or not guilty?" asked the magistrate sharply.

"Didn't—I—say—I—was—*not*—drunk," replied Mr. Craggs, distinctly articulating every syllable, and this time further emphasizing the negative with a thump of the walking-stick.

Amused by this peremptory reply the magistrates melted into indulgence, and proceeded to call the witnesses without questioning the old man any further.

The first person to stand up was the plaintiff, the gentleman whose hat had been demolished by the defendant's walking-stick. He gave his evidence in a simple and straightforward manner.

The next to appear was the village constable, who related how he had found defendant lying in a helpless con-

dition on the street. "And such a picture he was, gentlemen," he said, turning a quid over in his cheek, "and sprawled out on the road like a old bull-frog, and when I h'isted him e-rect, he actially began to sing—"

"Say no more, say no more," said the defendant, cutting short these personalities with a majestic sweep of the walking-stick, "I'll *be* guilty, though I *was not* drunk; for I'm a poor oud cripple, I am, an' when I fall down on yer slippery straet, I conner rise wi'out help, I conner."

"An' yoe," he added, specially addressing the constable, "if yoe'd sae as folks didna steal my whips an' hoss-rugs out o' my sleigh whenever I cum to town, instid o' runnin' about to arrest mae—a poor oud cripple as conner get up when hae tumbles down—yoe'd be earning yer trifle moor honestly, yoe would. But say no more, say no more; I'll be guilty." He uttered the last sentence with such an air of lordly resignation that the court was again convulsed. After hearing with grave disgust the laughter he had excited, Mr. Craggs turned again to the magistrates, and asked in sepulchral tones:

"How much are yer gooin' ter charge me?"

The magistrates consulted for a moment, and then the chairman spoke, "Mr. Craggs, the court has decided to exercise its leniency by fining you only five dollars."

Mr. Craggs groaned resignedly, then suddenly thought of the liquor that sum would buy.

"Fifty more drinks o' whiskey gone, ho hoth!" he cried, striking his stick on the floor with such energy that it raised a splintery bump on the board, at which magistrates and spectators laughed anew.

"Here some o' yoe fellers," said Mr. Craggs appealingly, "cum and pull my purse out for me, for I'm a poor oud cripple wi' a bandaged hand an' conner get into my left side pocket."

Someone went to his assistance, and Mr. Craggs paid the fine. The crowd, myself among them, left the court. I had not gone far, however, before I felt my shoulder grabbed by the knob of a walking-stick, and a whiskey-flavored voice whispered in my ear—

"Cum along, lad, and have a bit of a drink. I've got fifty cents left yet, though they have robbed me, the scoundrels. I mun be gooin' soon though or they'n nab me again, they wun, the rapscallions."

Declining his generous offers as politely as I could, I escaped from the grasp of his walking-stick, and took care afterward to keep out of his way. But with others his offers proved more acceptable, and he soon stood at the bar the centre of a group of admiring loafers, who, as they swallowed his little store, expressed most strongly their admiration of his conduct under trial.

Under such hopeful auspices the old tippler soon forgot all his misfortunes, together with his good resolution to return home ere further mishap befell him; and for several hours afterwards he amused the crowd with his drunken antics and bombastic speeches.

The death of his son, the grief of his family, the esteem of the respectable world and his own awful future were all as nothing to him while the drink-fiend tickled his throat.

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## CHAPTER XLV.

### FIRE, FROST AND SNOW.—THE PRELUDE.

A DISMAL night closed over a miserable home. An empty chair stood in a corner telling a mournful tale by its vacancy, and on the couch rolled about—groaning, mumbling and cursing—a drunken thing swathed in ill-fitting clothes. A walking-stick lay by his side; his slouched hat had fallen on the floor, and his bare head, thinly covered with hair, moved in blinking uneasiness on a hard pillow.

Lying at full length in a neighbor's sleigh, Solomon Crags had been brought home and carried to the sofa, where he had since lain in a condition of stupor.

The sullen matron spoke not a word, but in cloudy silence

knitted out the weary hours. She waited until his dormant senses were sufficiently awakened to feel a wound before launching her thunders on his head. And Alice, overwhelmed and equally silent by sorrow and shame, tried vainly to execute a piece of embroidery. The work was constantly dropping on her lap, with her fingers suspended motionless over it and her eyes looking out into vacancy—thinking, thinking. Then, recollecting herself, she would resume her work, but ever with the same result. Again it would fall upon her lap, and again her eyes were lost in the immeasurable regions of thought.

They were alone.

Pancrack's daily visit was over and the laboring-man had gone out to spend the night with a neighbor. The lamp-light shed a cheerful glow throughout the room, and the fire crackled warm comfort in the stove. Beneath it a lazy old dog slumbered contentedly, with his natural enemy, the cat, making soft rolling music by his side. On the stove-lid a polished copper kettle spouted forth an expanding column of steam, the while its vaporous interior murmured a soothing melody composed by fire and water. In every pause of its singing the clock on the wall ticked on like a watchman crying, "All is well."

Yet all these incentives to cheerfulness and comfort had no brightening influence on the hearts of the inmates of that house. Their silence was not that of a deep contentment which a sound would break, but rather the ominous quiet of a brooding cloud, wherein were concentrated memories of sorrow, sensibilities wounded by shame, and the bitter prescient instinct of disaster to come.

And so the daughter's thoughts would go back to the man she loved, and then they would wander to the hard-eyed usurer she vainly tried to like, and who soon must claim her for his bride. In imagination she foresaw a life of splendid misery stretching out before her—all things well without, but the heart within gnawing with ceaseless pain through all; and already, in prospect, she felt like a lark chained to a vulture in a cage of gold. Then she looked

upon her father, degraded and brutalized, and the cup of sorrow was further embittered by the dregs of shame.

And the mother—what thought she? I cannot tell you.

Alice's guileless face is a glass through which all her thoughts, passions and perplexities can be plainly seen; but her mother's is the rocky battlement which shuts out the light, and holds in darkness the secrets of her soul, till such time as they burst from her lips in hot anger, or flow, perchance, in kinder accents. Only this I know—to-night, with dark brows bent, she sits and knits like a silent Fury spinning out the threads of Fate. Nor do the white streaks with which her hair is tinged tend to soften the harshness of her expression, but rather, like snow upon the raven's plume, they give her a fiercer and more wintry aspect.

Thus amid cheerfulness and light they sit involved in sorrow and gloom. The daughter fitfully thinks and the mother unceasingly knits, and so the weary hours roll by till the time of repose has come.

Then Alice lays her half-finished work aside and silently retires, while Mrs. Craggs, with the nearly-knitted stocking still in her hands, winds up the clock, fastens the doors, closes the fire, and taking no more notice of her prostrate husband than if he had been a log, mounts the creaking stairs to seek the unconsciousness of sleep.

#### THE SCENE.

Outside the night is clear, but dark. The frost strikes a chill into the bones, making the flesh to quiver. No clouds obscure the moonless sky, but a veil of darkness is thrown over it like an immense concave pall, with but a few scattered stars to pierce its blackness. Inside the old drunkard slumbers uneasily for many hours; the fire burns out in the stove, the frost creeps in through every crack and key-hole, and strikes through the iron plates wherein its enemy, the fire, has been fortified, scattering the few expiring embers to ashes cold and grey. Then it creeps over toward the couch where the sleeper is lying,



and strikes with such bitter chill that he wakens shivering and sobered. He lifts his head and looks at the darkness. For a time his mind is as blank as the atmosphere around him; then slowly instinctive thoughts force themselves into the dull atmosphere of his intellectual chambers. First, it strikes him that he is cold; secondly, that he is hungry; and thirdly, that it is dark. "Smash their eyes!" he mutters, "they've put me into the lock-up again, have they? If they have not taken off my matches I'll strike a light and look around me. A nice way to treat a poor ould cripple, this is. I'll appeal to the Queen against them—I will."

Uttering this threat Mr. Craggs struck a match, and by its aid was enabled to see that the dungeon in which he was cast very much resembled his own kitchen. All thought of appealing to the queen of that establishment immediately vanished, and his hungry instincts led him toward the cupboard. With drunken carelessness he dropped the still-blazing match upon the couch, and rising with difficulty poked into the darkness before him with his stick, and with stumbling steps moved toward the cupboard. But, as ill-fate would have it, his foot caught against a stick of firewood lying on the floor and he fell heavily forward on his face. Sprawling over the floor with arms and legs wide apart, he lay there in stupid contentment, making no attempt to rise.

Whether or not the wife and daughter sleeping above heard the noise of his fall I cannot say; but probably if they did it was so common an incident in the house that they took no further notice of it, but went to sleep again.

Meanwhile the lighted match which the drunkard had dropped on the sofa is slowly and silently doing its work. Slowly, from the spot on which it has fallen, the hot teeth of the fire bite into the covering of the couch in an ever-widening radius of sickly, spluttering flame. It takes the color, strength and beauty from the cloth, and spreads it over the ceiling of the room in a pall of stupefying smoke.

The smoke filters through the air-holes round the pipe of the stove, and ascends into the room above, where a woman is dreamlessly sleeping. It creeps noiselessly to

the bed of the sleeper, and stealing up her nostrils with the breath she draws it sinks into her brain; then it pierces to her lungs, and with the irritation she slightly coughs and gently opens her eyes, and as the smoke stings them into tears the lids are dropped again with a moan, and for a time she utters no other plaint, for stupefaction has seized her.

Below is being enacted a scene of horror unutterable. There is a smell of liquor-soaked clothing burning fitfully in flashes of spectral blue, and an old knotted walking-stick crackles savagely as its rugged fibres are riven asunder by the fire. A face, spiritualized into deathly whiteness by the weird light, works convulsively amid the flame, and groans and curses mingle with the ascending smoke. But, hark! The shrieks of a woman pierce far out into the frosty night.

"Mother, mother! Wake, wake! The house is burning!"

Is that a spirit of the night, in long white robes with dark tresses flowing free, who is shaking frantically at a door which a now unconscious wife had locked against a brutal husband? With what maddened, half-choked frenzy she grasps the blistering door-knob, while the smoke enwraps her like a garment of blackness, and through it the fire from below flashes at times on her half-crazed face. Then from within that fast-locked room shrieks, wilder than she has ever uttered, join with hers, and together the cries go thrilling through the blinding smoke. One desperate wrench she gives, then falls back crazed, half-strangled and blinded by the smoke, and rolls helplessly down the stairs, alighting on a patch of flaming floor. The pain awakens in her a desire for air and life, and bounding out of the fire on hands and knees she gropes to find a door. Like a dim undertone to her half-stupefied senses come the groanings and cursings of despair and the crackling of relentless fire with which the house is filled. With breath drawn in choking gasps and eyes stung into blindness she searches for the door. The flame comes ever nearer. At last she feels the panels, but the demon is close upon her.

Under his hot breath her long black tresses singe with a single hiss, till only a brown frizzled mass is left around her head. The hand she lifts to turn the knob is scorched, but the door opens and the cold air rushes into the arms of the fire and drives it surging inward as the girl creeps out into the frosty air, and with feelings benumbed and every power exhausted sinks unconscious on the snow.

In the house the shrieks have become fainter, the groans have died down to stifled moans. In the lower room a wreath of blue fire dissolves into blackness among the smoke.

Such was the drunkard's end.

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## CHAPTER XLVI.

### MR. LONGSTREET'S ALARM.

MR. LONGSTREET was unwell that night: a burning headache tormented him, and instead of driving him to sleep drove sleep effectually from him. He got up and dressed, and with bared brow walked out into the frosty air. As he ascended a knoll his eyes turned in the direction of the Crag's homestead. He stopped suddenly.

"What does this mean?" he muttered, forgetting his headache; "the house must either be haunted or on fire. There is no flame outside, but what makes the windows flash like that. It can't be lamp-light; the house *must* be on fire."

And thus assuring himself Mr. Longstreet, who was very impulsive and liable to lose his head at critical moments, ran as fast as his legs could carry him toward the house, and roused all the slumbering inmates with loud cries of "Fire! fire! The house is burning to the ground!"

Immediately there was a scuffling sound, as of people dressing in confusion upstairs. Mr. Dysart's sash flew up, and he threw out a cash-box and a suit of clothes. Mr.

Fane tried to raise his window, but it was frozen down, so he broke the glass with the butt of a gun; then he threw out and almost broke the neck of a pet puss which had the privilege of sleeping with him, and this was followed by a revolver and a fishing rod. Mrs. Bant and Mrs. Tomson screamed; and Mr. Longstreet, who happened to be standing under the window of the latter, was almost deluged by a shower of bedclothes and wearing apparel which the worthy lady ejected in her fright. Mrs. Bant snatched up her screaming infant and bore him wildly downstairs.

In less than ten minutes after giving the alarm Mr. Longstreet, who had moved round to the veranda, found himself confronted by the following tableau :

Mr. Dysart, in a pair of trousers and a fur cap; Mr. Fane, in a buckskin coat, a shirt reaching to his knees and a pair of untied moccasins on his feet; Mrs. Bant, in a long night-dress, with a child scratching and screaming in her arms like one possessed; and the cook, wrapped in a blanket like an Indian in a blizzard, crying, "Lawks-a-mercy! We'll be all burned to death in bed!"

"Where on earth *is* the fire?" demanded Mr. Dysart of the astonished Mr. Longstreet.

"Why, at Crag's' to be sure! You didn't think I meant this house, did you?"

"At Crag's'!" echoed Mr. Dysart, in a tone of anger and relief. "Then why in all conscience didn't you say so at first and not make all this fuss? However, we must help these people, and at once. So just you hurry over to the farm and rouse the men, and get the team hitched to a sleigh. We shall have to get dressed, but by the time you are ready to start we shall be there."

Mr. Longstreet performed his errand speedily, and after rousing up several of the men got out a team, and by the time the master and Fane arrived was ready to start.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

## A LIGHT IN THE NIGHT.

A SLEIGH-LOAD of men, hastily dressed and some but half awake, were drawn at a gallop toward the burning house over snow that hissed around the ripping runners.

Still they saw no light save that which played redly and fitfully over the gleaming windows. But suddenly through the crumbling wall a great red spear of flame, like a spurt of blood from a wounded artery, shot forth into the night. With a rush it broadened to a two-edged sword of destruction, then with a roar spread into a widening sheet which poured over the side of the house like an inverted cataract of fire; and the red fierce swellings, where it wrestled with knots and damp, were the bubbles, and the vapor that issued from its lips was the spray, of that flaming cascade.

By the time Mr. Dysart and his party arrived on the scene the house was completely wrapped in a cloak of fire. The heat was so terrific that the snowbanks around the building were sinking in a rapid thaw, and streams of water were trickling off on every side; nor could they approach within many yards of the building. With faces which from their ruddy hue seemed to have absorbed the color of the flame, the men in the sleigh gazed in helpless, horrified fascination at the burning pile before them. A terrible thought filled every heart and stifled every tongue.

At last Mr. Dysart spoke, in a voice just audible amid the crackling and roar of the cruel flames.

"Where are the people?" he asked. "If they are alive we must make some effort to save them."

One of the men shook his head. "If they're alive they're not in there."

"Anyhow, they may have had to get out in their night-clothes, and we had better hunt around in case they are anywhere in the buildings," said Mr. Dysart.

All jumped out with alacrity. Some made toward the

buildings, others ran round to the front of the house. Among the latter was Mr. Fane, and he was the first to espy a woman lying in singed nightclothes on the snow, five yards from an open door, through which snake-like tongues of flame were licking out to reach her; but happily, Providence had chained them to the wood they were consuming, and with their utmost stretches they fell ever a few feet short of the prostrate figure, and retreated with angry gusts and cracks to vent their disappointed greed on the fast-crumbling walls.

Fane dashed into the heat and smoke and, with panting breath and singed eyelashes, returned with the form of the unconscious girl in his arms. Immediately the others surrounded him in a confused group, all eager to offer their services, but none knowing what to do.

"Hallo! What's this?" said Mr. Dysart, joining them. "Good gracious, it's Alice! Hi, McGrath! run to the sleigh and fetch the horse-blankets to wrap her up in. Here, Longstreet, you drive home with her as fast as you know how, and leave her in the charge of Mrs. Bant. We must stay here and see that the fire doesn't get to the out-buildings. That seems to be about all we can do now."

The men got some straw from the stable and scattered it in a soft litter over the bottom of the sleigh-box, and after placing the unconscious girl gently on it, wrapped the horse-blankets more carefully around her, and Mr. Longstreet lashed the horses into a gallop—the rest remaining till the flames should expire. Though the time of waiting seemed long, in reality it was but short; for on that tement of dried-out wood the fire soon did its worst.

For a time the house was involved in a roaring, rolling sheet of flame. As foaming waters roll down some rocky precipice the overlapping flames poured up the sides of that burning pile, and as the stream rolls more smoothly along the river-bed, so over the roof a smooth red current flowed unceasingly toward the ridge, and there the tops of the blaze broke off and floated upward in fragments to dissolve beneath the stars. Sometimes they shot swiftly upward and were licked into the darkness like a meteor flash,



and again they floated gently as soap-bubbles blown from a pipe.

Far around the snow was reddened with twinkling flashes, while a pool of water, melted by the heat, formed at the feet of that little group of watchers, and reflected the flashing fire and the reddened features of the silent knot of men.

Before, their faces were almost scorched with the heat ; behind, their backs were shivering with the cold ; yet their position never changed. They were spell-bound by a horrible tale that the fire was whispering to them. The flames blazed over the roof and, tossing conceited heads, seemed to clap their hands joyously and laugh at the sullen smoke-palled stars ; while ever and anon red tongues would sneeringly thrust themselves out toward the watchers, and seem to whisper to their horror-bound souls : " We have slain them ; they are ours."

So through long weary moments they stood like iron pillars, motionless and speechless. But suddenly the upper part of the wedge of fire fell with a crash which sent a shudder through that human group as a wind shivers through the stilly leaves of some giant tree, and so for the first time they found their tongues, and began to search for easier places in which to spend the remainder of the night. A shower of sparks flashed toward the sky like a wide swarm of burning gnats, the fire grew lower, and the night wore on.

The winter dawn, stealing over a pile of smoking ashes, reveals the forms of men busily searching among them. They have found a few blackened bones and laid them out on the snow ; two fire-bleached skulls have been shaken from the ashes. Another scene in the awful tragedy of Drink has been enacted—the curtain is drawn.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

## THE SHORN LAMB.

FROM a hideous nightmare the sleeper has awakened to far more dreadful reality. To the smoke and the heat, the scorching flames and piercing shrieks have succeeded the consciousness of weakness and enduring pain, the hopelessness of friendless despair.

Youthfulness, beauty and family love have been reft from her in a single night, and she is left alone in the world without a single heart to cling to. Yet no tear moistens those singed eyelashes, no moan save that wrung out by physical suffering escapes from those blistered lips. It is the tearlessness, the silence which ensues when the well-springs of feeling have been frozen by misery and despair.

Yet Alice was not without friends, for He who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb had placed her in her days of suffering in kindly hands. Even Mrs. Bant, who had once under the guise of hypocritical friendship hated her as a rival, now that she saw her thus cruelly torn from all her former ties and left with blasted beauty and bitter suffering, softened toward her. Not that she actually showed her much kindness in look or voice—for her stern nature would not tolerate such "weaknesses"—but in a perfunctory manner she saw her supplied with such comforts as she needed most, and at least refrained from exhibiting any dislike.

Perhaps, had Alice known the truth, she would have found that she owed the lessening of the housekeeper's hatred more to her blistered face and fire-shorn hair than anything else. All women are naturally more or less jealous of the admired beauty, but when the beauty is stricken into homeliness this feeling often changes into kindest pity. Pity, however, was not the sentiment that

mollified Mrs. Bant's hatred in this instance, but rather it was a bit of consoling logic with which she was wont to comfort herself.

"Mr. Pancrack will come here to visit her," it ran, "but she will now have no further attraction for him—for he loved her for her looks alone—and whilst his affection loosens from her may I not contrive to direct it to fasten upon myself."

However vain and selfish these speculations may seem, there was considerable truth in her description of Pancrack's affection for Alice—"he loved her for her looks alone"—an affection that saw no deeper than the surface, and scorned, where a beautiful skin was lacking, the infinitely richer treasure of a true, loving heart—a passion to be dissipated in a moment like the floating vapor which a breath of chilly air changes into falling drops of water. Such was the love of the usurer, Silas Pancrack.

He had slept serenely through the night when the whiskey-born fire had devoured the home and the parents of his affianced bride, but early in the morning when he looked over the ravine—near which his shanty stood—toward their house, he saw pale columns of smoke ascending, and dimly descried the forms of men working among ashes and ruins. For a long time he looked to assure himself that he was not deceived, and then the true solution came home to him.

"I know how it is," he said, striking his knee with his fist; "the old fool came home drunk last night and they left him to sleep it out downstairs, and he maundered about, knocked the stove over perhaps, and set the house on fire. I wonder how they came out of it? I must go and see."

And without waiting to hitch up his horses he ran swiftly down into the ravine and up the other side, and in a few moments arrived breathless near the smoking ruins. With horror he noticed a man with a pitchfork raking among the ashes, and saw him lift out a bleached bone and fling it to fall rattling on a small pile heaped near. With a shudder he turned his eyes from these, and in a trembling voice asked the men what had occurred.

They told him briefly what had happened, and he at once went on his way to Dysart's to inquire about Alice.

The first person he met was the doctor who had been hastily summoned from Greentown, and who informed him that she had recovered consciousness, but was yet too weak to be disturbed, and he had better not see her that day. And thus far satisfied he went away to return on the following day.

The door was opened for him by Mrs. Bant, who arrayed in a blue silk dress, had never looked more enchanting. Her white, thin firm-featured face did its best to look charming with an expression of sorrowful sympathy, and the melancholy smile with which she greeted Pancrack lighted her features as much as it expressed her solicitude.

"Ah, Mr. Pancrack!" she said with a sigh, "I fear your lady-love is yet very far from well, but still I think you may see her to-day; but be sure to say nothing that will be liable to agitate her."

"Depend upon it, I will take your advice," said Pancrack. "But please show me the way to her room."

His affection was not yet chilled, and he was all eagerness to be by her side. Mrs. Bant observed his impatience, and as she turned to guide him smiled a bitter yet half-sarcastic smile. Walking softly on tiptoe she led him upstairs to the landing outside the room in which Alice was lying. Here she paused, and bending toward him whispered in his ear:

"You had better wait here a little while I go and prepare her to receive you. Too sudden a surprise might harm her."

Pancrack nodded, and Mrs. Bant, opening the door, walked softly into the room and closed it behind her. Alice was awake, and Mrs. Bant, with a forced smile of sickly sympathy, asked her how she felt.

"A little better, thank you," was the murmured reply from the figure lying with half-closed eyes in the bed.

"That is well," said Mrs. Bant. "And you must do your best to look cheerful, for a visitor has come to see you."

A half-audible lethargic "Oh," was the only response to this announcement.

"Yes," continued Mrs. Bant, without seeming to heed the patient's drowsiness. "I have brought someone you will be glad to see. But you are too dark in here. Let me open the curtains a little more." And moving toward the window she opened the curtains sufficiently to let a ray of sunlight fall over the sufferer's face.

"There!" she said, "that is better. And now I will bring him to you."

She walked to the door, and opening it gently, placed her finger on her lips and signed to Pancrack to enter. He did so accordingly, and she walked away, closing the door behind her. He heard her footsteps moving away, but had he looked back a moment later he would have seen that the keyhole appeared sufficiently luminous. But he did not do this, for another scene engrossed him.

The room in which he found himself was darkly draped on every side, so that the walls and corners were tinted with sombre hues. This twilight in the daytime seemed to have been cunningly prearranged to set off more vividly the dazzling beam of light which streamed in between the dark half-opened window curtains and fell over the face of the patient in the bed. It flickered over the medicine bottles standing on a table within her reach, and gave to their contents a ghastly gangrened hue. It slew the darkness where the darkness should have been and left untouched the places pining for the sun. Upon her poor burnt face the light flashed back from the polished bed-head, and surged over her from the snowy counterpane—all combining to bring out more vividly the disfigurements under which her physical beauty had been totally eclipsed.

When Pancrack entered, Alice seemed entirely unaware of his presence, though half-awake; and he stood and gazed on her face with terrible revulsion of feeling. All the apparent affection with which he had sought her presence rolled back before the cold wave of disappointment and loathing which surged through his veins. His brutish nature could not see in those leprous blisters the badges

which bravery and love had stamped upon her face. The bat sees with the bat's eyes, and to Pancrack these were only emblems of debasement and misery. Like a pillar of fire suddenly turned to ice Pancrack gazed on her face, and as he gazed all his mean, heartless love turned to soulless brutal loathing; and as the ice that had stiffened his frame in the chill of sudden disappointment melted in the hot breathings of evil wrath, he turned, thinking to leave the room and see her no more, but even as he shifted she noticed his presence.

"So you have come to see me," she said, in low painful tones. "How kind of you it is! Come nearer, please; my voice is weak and I cannot speak very loudly just now."

With a gesture of reluctance Pancrack went nearer, and standing by the side of the bed just took, and then dropped, the poor scorched, trembling hand she held out to greet him.

"Don't disturb yourself on my account," he said, in tones of feigned sympathy slightly tinged with the scorn he tried to conceal. "You must take care of yourself, and try to get better, you know. I just called in to see how you were, but I can't stay to talk to you just now. You have suffered great hardship, but I hope you will soon get better."

She shook her head bitterly.

"I have little cause to wish to get well again now," she said sadly.

"Tut, tut!" said Pancrack, impatiently. "You just talk like that because you are sick, but wait till you are well again; things will look different then; and now good-day, and take care of yourself. I have pressing business and must go."

"But stay," she said, holding out a little withered hand. "Promise me that to-morrow you will come and see me again. I have something very important to say to you."

"All right, all right! I'll come!" he said hurriedly, with his hand turning on the door-knob. "And now try to get to sleep." And, mumbling this charitable advice, he left the room.



There was a time, not long past, when such speeches as these, uttered so flippantly to her in a time of suffering, would have thrown Alice's extremely sensitive nature into paroxysms of uncontrollable grief; but now despair seemed to have benumbed sensation, for when he had gone she lay motionless, silent, expressionless, as though he had never been there. Kindness perhaps might melt her, but *her sorrow could not be augmented.*

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## CHAPTER XLIX.

### REVELATION AND REMORSE.

WHEN Pancrack passed out upon the landing he felt sickened and dazed. The sudden reaction had weakened both judgment and volition. He felt like one just waking from a horrible dream, who knew not yet how to distinguish between the realities around him and the visions of the night.

In this state he was passing down the stairs when he was suddenly met by Mrs. Bant, lightly tripping up. Her face was lighted by the most bewitching smile she could assume; but on seeing Pancrack it softened to an expression of deep concern.

"Mr. Pancrack," she said, pausing, "you are not well; you look very ill. Come to my sitting-room and rest a little, and I will give you a drink of tea to restore you."

Pancrack murmured a half-audible "Thank you," and followed her down the stairs. That proved a dear cup of tea to Silas; but to show how it was so it is necessary to go back in our story and explain a little.

Mrs. Bant, with the keenness of feminine jealousy, had always watched intently the relations of Pancrack and Polson, and from the peculiar glances and expressions which the former could not sometimes repress, she had intuitively divined that some secret lay between them. She inquired cautiously of Fred Polson concerning the

events of his past life, and heard with particular interest of the attempt made by his cousin, Julius Hatton, to deprive him of the possession of the Laxton estate.

In the town of B—, Yorkshire, from which Silas Pancrack pretended to have come, Mrs. Bant had a friend in business, and to him she wrote inquiring as to the whereabouts of two men named, respectively, Julius Hatton and Silas Pancrack. She was informed by her correspondent that he had never heard of such a name as the latter, but the former was well known, and had started on a European tour the previous spring. He also gave details as to Hatton's appearance and habits, which left no doubt in Mrs. Bant's mind as to his identity with Silas Pancrack. She also noted the frequency of the usurer's visits to O'Neil, and in a midnight interview with that grimy personage had, by bribes and threats, drawn from him the details of the conspiracy which had overwhelmed poor Fred Polson.

All these scattered strands of knowledge she kept within her breast, for with them she intended to weave the snare with which she should entrap Silas Pancrack.

The details of the conversations of evil-minded persons are not edifying, and therefore we shall pass lightly over the scene in Mrs. Bant's sitting-room that afternoon. Suffice it to say that subtly and gradually, with a winsome skill which deprived it of half its terror, she unfolded piece by piece to Pancrack her knowledge of his double existence, and his share in the scheme to blacken Fred Polson's name.

The man was stupefied. He shifted about in his chair with a pale face and trembling hands; and all the time the widow, sitting on the other side of her little round table, smilingly sipped her tea and made sympathetic remarks or expressed her admiration for the acuteness with which Mr. Pancrack had acted.

"If you ever possess the Laxton estate, Mr. Pancrack," she said, "you must remember some of your old friends in Dysart Settlement."

"Oh, yes, certainly," mumbled Silas as he fidgeted about. "But—but—you know—."

"There is something you wish to say, Mr. Pancrack. Don't be afraid to speak out; you have a sympathetic listener."

"Well," said Silas, rousing himself a little and resting his elbows on the table as he looked across at her, "what I wish to say is, you seem to have got hold of a tale which, if published, would do me considerable injury and could do you no good; and you don't know how grateful I should be if you would but promise to keep it secret. I would do anything for you."

"Mr. Pancrack," she said, becoming suddenly solemn, and placing her tea-cup in the saucer, "your request sounds almost like a reproach. You need have no fear of me. I esteem you too highly to wish to incur your bad opinion by divulging our mutual secrets."

One of her hands lay on the table. He quietly raised it to his lips. "You are kind," he said.

He then rose to depart. Mrs. Bant followed him to the door, and as he passed out reiterated her former assurance.

"You may depend, Mr. Pancrack, that so long as our friendship lasts I shall never say anything to injure *you*."

He turned in the doorway, and taking both her hands in his, pressed them and looked into her eyes. The lids drooped modestly before his gaze.

"You are very beautiful," he said, and left her.

When the sound of his footsteps had died away, Mrs. Bant turned to the window of her room, and leaning her hands upon the sill watched, with a smile of sinister triumph, his form as he drove rapidly away.

"Ha, ha!" she laughed, "how meekly he plays into my hands! A little farther, a few more steps, and his promise will be secured. And then pleasures shall be mine and wealth uncounted! They say this man is hard and mean, yet I can sway him like a little child. I shall dress in the finest attire and ride in beautiful carriages drawn by strong swift horses. I shall have servants to wait on me, too; but he, my husband, shall be the humblest lackey of them all. The mistress of Laxton Hall shall be courted, admired and feared wherever she is known."

And as these thoughts of pleasure which contains no happiness and power which commands no reverence glittered before the prophetic eye of her ambition, the sweet-toned song of the canary in the cage above her head was stifled in her ears to the boding raven's ominous croak.

When Silas Pancrack had passed out into the open air he felt like one just emerging from the phantasm of a hideous dream. Alice's disfigured face was mingled with Mrs. Bant's sinister smile, and for a time he vainly tried to disentangle the two. But as the illusions began to melt away and his mind grew clearer the season for reflection and repentance came.

"Hang it all!" he muttered, striding about his shanty, whilst the frozen chickens on the wall drummed a dreary chorus, "whatever possessed that woman to pry into my secrets like that? She must want me to marry her, and I don't know whether that might not be best in the end after all, for it would certainly ensure her secrecy. But then there is Alice. What am I to do if she insists upon forcing her claim and sues me for breach of promise? But no, she won't, I know that. She only promised me to please her mother, and now that she is gone she has less reason to care about me still, and if it wasn't for the money she would throw me over with pleasure. Still she is easily persuaded, and I daresay if I go to her and talk to her rather nicely about the unsuitableness of our union under present circumstances, she would consent to break off the engagement, and if she doesn't, why" (Silas paused and ran his fingers nervously through his short red hair)—"why, I shall have to skip the country—that's all. I certainly can't marry her. But I suppose" (here he stopped suddenly and his face brightened) "I can leave the country anyhow and escape this other woman with her harmful secret and her fascinating ways. I might, if I can get Alice to break the engagement, pretend to play into Mrs. Bant's hands a little to gain time, so that I can learn whether that Polson's dead or not. It will keep her quiet, and anyhow I would rather marry this wily widow—for she's good-looking though she does frighten me—than lose

the Laxton estate after all the bother I've had. Confound the women! What a lot of trouble they give me."

And in the bitterness of the last reflection he ground his teeth, clenched his hands, and struck his heel on the floor with such force that the jumbled collection of greasy-ringed pots and baking-pans strowed over it moved and rattled as if their iron frames were instinct with shivering life.

And on the crest of that wave of remorseful passion which swept into his eyes came the white frozen face of George Cragg, and the singed bones and smoking skulls of his parents rattled hideously in the caves of memory, and crowning these, like a baleful star in the house of death, came the sneering visage of the Drink-Fiend. Mockingly pointing to the relics of those it had given to the fire and the storm, it bowed to Pancrack with a bitter satire which seemed to say, "Behold! I have done your will."

From the rusty grease-blotched stove the miserable fire, struggling and spluttering among the damp green wood, hissed and spat at him when he walked toward it. The wind sighed mournfully through the crevices between the shrunken boards. The frosty little window looked on him like a dim and sorrowful eye from the outer day, whilst the frozen rabbits and prairie-chickens dangling without the walls banged against them in the wind till they sounded to the gloomy mind within like the drum-beats of a legion of fiends surrounding him; and so the forces within combined with the elements without and gave him no rest through all the long, long day.

## CHAPTER L.

## THE ENGAGEMENT ENDED.

IF Silas Pancrack had but known he need have felt very little uneasiness regarding his engagement with Alice Cragg. She was fully as anxious for its dissolution as he was. His conduct during the brief interview they had on the preceding day thoroughly convinced her that he no longer cared for her, and since her own regard for him had always been more forced than real, she felt it to be her duty to free him at the earliest possible moment.

Strange though it may seem to Byronic misogynists, the thought of the wealth she was parting with never caused her a moment's regret. She had shown her willingness to ally herself to it for her parents' sake, and now that those parents were no more she gladly accepted poverty and the freedom of heart it conferred.

"I can work when I get well again," she thought; "and perhaps I shall be able to earn a little to help repay these kind friends for the trouble I have caused them."

When Pancrack, with a trembling hand and a nervous face, entered the sick-room he found Alice sitting up in bed to receive him. At her request, Mrs. Tomson, the kind old cook, had placed her thus.

With a propitiatory smile of feigned concern Pancrack took her proffered hand and said he hoped she felt better.

"Yes, thank you," she answered with formal civility, "I do feel a little better."

"That is good news," he said. "I trust that it will not be long before you are quite well again."

"I fear it will be a long time yet; but still I must try to be patient."

"Hang it!" thought Pancrack; "what is the girl driving at? She is twice as cheerful and resigned as she was yesterday. I'm afraid that she has made up her mind to get well again so that she can hang on to my money and



me. I wish I could think of some way of dropping her a little hint to the contrary."

For a time there was silence on either side. Pancrack stood by the side of the bed vainly trying to think of some means of breaking gently into the subject he felt half-ashamed to broach. Alice leaned against the pillows, her poor blistered face absorbing the light like a blackened glass, and one thin scorched hand lying on the white coverlet. In her weakened state her always impressionable nerves were very easily agitated, and it was some time before she could control herself sufficiently to say the words she had prepared.

"Mr. Pancrack," she began at last in a tremulous voice; "I wish to speak to you on a matter of very grave importance to both of us. When you so kindly honored me by asking for my hand, I—I was far otherwise than I now am. I had, I was told in those days," (she smiled faintly) "some pretension to personal beauty, and that, no doubt, attracted you toward me; but now I am as you see. What little property belonged to my poor parents—".

She had proceeded thus far with a great effort and in broken tones, but the mention of "parents" recalled to her mind associations that completely overwhelmed her. The tears gushed into her eyes and her voice broke into sobs. Pancrack, utterly astounded by what she had said, looked on helpless and half-dazed, unable to utter a word. But in a moment, with a resolute effort, she wiped away her tears, and thus relieved continued with more spirit.

"I was about to say that what little property belonged to my poor parents is, by right of mortgage, already yours. I have therefore no longer anything that can commend me in your eyes. I am poor and disfigured, and if our engagement continues I shall only stand in your way to a more fitting union. If I did this I should deserve to be pointed out as a living emblem of ingratitude, for no one can ever forget your kindness to us in our distress. So I freely absolve you from your engagement, though I am still willing to carry out my pledge if you very much wish it. But I think it will be better for both if it is cancelled."

Exhausted by this long speech she sank back among the pillows and closed her eyes.

Pancrack, too mean himself to easily comprehend self-denial in another, stared at her for a moment with an open mouth, unable to utter a syllable, and then strode to the farther side of the room, rattling his watch-chain in his hand.

"Well, this is a terror," he thought. "The sickness must have really touched her brain, or surely she would never throw away a fortune of her own free will, and that without a word of persuasion. I expected to have to do a pile of fine talking or pay a pretty penny for my freedom from this engagement, and here she flings it at my feet like a bone thrown to a hungry dog. Well, I shall be a fool if I don't take advantage of this delirium, anyhow."

So thinking he walked back to the side of the sick girl.

She had opened her eyes again, and looked inquiringly into his face as if waiting for an answer. In the pure light of those guileless eyes Pancrack felt utterly out of his element, and he grew confused like a fish taken from a dirty stream, writhing and gasping in the clear light of the sun.

"Er—Miss Craggs," he said, still shaking his watch-chain. "Do you—I mean—yes—that is—do you really mean what you say?"

"Yes," she answered simply. "Do you not think it will be better for us?"

For once Pancrack's confusion came to the aid of his hypocrisy, and though in his heart he greatly rejoiced over this easy release from one of the horns of his dilemma, he had little difficulty in trying to show that he consented to it in deference to her wish.

"Of course," he mumbled, looking at the carpet, "if you wish it, it will perhaps be better so."

"I do wish it," she said earnestly; "but I wish it more for your sake than for mine. Yet I do not mean to imply that I esteem you the less on that account. On the other hand, if the separation is *greatly* against your desire I shall comply with my promise to you."

The last sentence puzzled the usurer not a little. He wished to retreat with honor and a show of self-denial, but to do so it was necessary to admit that "the separation was greatly against his desire," and to accept the consequence which that admission must entail. However, with a mixture of evasion and frankness he crept out as best he could.

"You are very generous and thoughtful, I am sure," he said, still looking at the floor. "In return for your consideration for me is there nothing I can do for you?"

She shook her head gently. "Thank you, you have already done more than enough for me and mine." (Pancrack winced.) "I can provide for myself henceforth, if God wills."

"But is there nothing I can do for you? Cannot I get you a respectable situation; or, if not, will you not allow me to advance you a little money to enable you to study for the certificate of a public school teacher, or to learn any profession in which you may gain a competent livelihood?"

"Thank you," she said; "I have already decided on my future work, and it is quite independent of either of your kind proposals; nor do I think I shall need any assistance."

"At least," he said, "if you will not accept my help, we will part in peace and friendship."

"Certainly. And I hope that your future will be as happy and prosperous as you deserve to have it."

Hardly well pleased with the last qualification, he took her scorched hand in his palm, then dropped it as if it had burnt him, and without another word left the room to be seen of her no more.

When the door closed behind him Alice heaved a great sigh of relief, and all the world seemed to grow brighter and happier around her. It was the first feeling approaching to pleasure that she had experienced since that terrible night, and under its happy influence she sank among the surrounding pillows into a refreshing slumber, sweetened

by dreams of hope and love which were not unmingled with the face and form of the lost Fred Polson.

Pancrack walked down the stairs far more lightly than he had gone up, for a great load was lifted off his mind. He was clear of one horn of the dilemma, but at the bottom of the stairs the other met him and gored him through and through. Mrs. Bant greeted him with her most winning smile.

"Well, how is it?" she asked, in those whispering tones which melted his soul into weakness.

"All is ended there," he said. "I am now yours, and yours alone."

And so the siren wooed him to the rock, and the weaver wove her skilful meshes about him, while the victim struggled vainly in the prison-house, which sometimes he loved and sometimes he hated.

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## CHAPTER LI.

### MRS. TOMSON IS SURPRISED.

THE long winter was drawing to a close. The sun rode daily through a wider space in the heavens, and beneath his rays the snow plains broke fiercely on the eyes with myriad little crystals of reflected light. Cattle might be seen contentedly chewing their cuds, as they sunned themselves beside the farm-buildings; and doors, which colder days had kept latched and close, were now opened to admit the air and light. Sleighs, which had heretofore creaked and groaned on their travels like tortured things, now moved softly and noiselessly over the melting snow; and great balls clogged under the horses' hoofs as they plunged through the rotting trails.

Alice Cragg, slowly recovering, remained still at Dysart's. Mrs. Bant seldom saw her, and Mr. Pancrack visited her no more; but her old friend, Miss Shenstone,

came often to see her, and the people of the district, with whom she was a great favorite, constantly enquired about her. One kind female friend yet remained to her in the house in Mrs. Tomson, the cook. The kind old dame had taken a warm fancy to the poor sick girl, and when work was not very pressing would spend many a half-hour knitting by her side, and talking to console her. Alice, in her lonely condition, naturally felt very grateful for this company and attention; and in return for her kindness flattered the old lady's vanity by asking for her counsel and advice on practical household matters. Among these questions one day Alice startled her by asking where she thought she might best procure work as a dressmaker when she got well again.

"Dressmakin'!" echoed the old lady, pausing in her knitting and looking over her spectacles. "Whatever will you want with dressmakin', dearie, when you are married to that rich Mr. Pancrack? You'll want somebody to make dresses for you, more like."

"No, Mrs. Tomson," said Alice with a smile, "you are mistaken; I am not going to marry Mr. Pancrack at all. It is all over between us."

"Dearie, dearie me!" said Mrs. Tomson, dropping her knitting and lifting her hands in surprise, "d' ye ever hear o' such a thing!" Then, as if the real cause had suddenly broken on her mind, she added in tones of high-strung wrath: "I know how it is. The villain! the scamp! just to go and leave off from such a good little dearie because she got her face burnt and had trouble. The mean rascalion, if I had him here, I'd——." And the indignant old lady finished the sentence by stabbing through the air with a knitting-needle.

"But, Mrs. Tomson—Mrs. Tomson, hear me!" said Alice, interrupting the old dame's threat. "It was not Mr. Pancrack's fault at all that the engagement was broken off. It was my own wish."

Mrs. Tomson's wrath at once changed to surprise, not unmingled with a little disgust.

"Lord bless us!" she exclaimed. "You don't mean to

say that you have gone and throwed away a fortune of your own free will? Such madness I never heard on before."

"Yes," said Alice, smiling at the old lady's genuine disgust, "I am afraid I have been guilty of that sin."

"An' he'd have built you a fine frame house," continued the cook, enumerating the advantages of wealth as they appeared to her; "and kept a servant or two to wait on you; and you'd ha' had a fine top-buggy to go to Bendigo whenever you wanted; and a drawin'-room and carpets, and a pe-anner, and books, and silk dresses, and pictures, and a cooking-range, and—oh, dear o' me, whatever was you athinkin' of?"

"Well, well, Mrs. Tomson," said Alice, in a conciliatory tone, "it is done, and it can't be undone; and as I shall have to earn my own living, I want a few instructions from you how to go about it."

"Well," said Mrs. Tomson, resuming the knitting she had neglected in her bursts of indignant surprise, "there is some queer folks in this world, there is, and I must say, dearie, you are one of 'em."

And in this manner the old dame accommodated herself to an action so peculiar in a young lady of the nineteenth century.

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## CHAPTER LII.

### PANCRACK GOES FOR A SLEIGH-RIDE.

SILAS PANCRACK waited and struggled with passion and weakness; but though the winter was dying in the sun, and the piping of the jay proclaimed the coming of the spring, he did not attempt to flee. Quietly, however, he was making his preparations. Piece by piece he was slyly disposing of his property; and he only waited for the coming spring to tell the truth as to Fred Polson's fate, before taking his departure.



He was constrained both by circumstances and his own weakness to pay many visits to Mrs. Bant ; and, like many another, he excused his weakness on the plea of his necessity. "For," his coward conscience would whisper, "she has you in her power ; she knows your secret and your real name, so pretend for a time that you really love her, and when your purposes are completed leave her." A part at least of this suggested programme it was not hard for Pancrack to carry out, for when in her presence his affection was, to all appearances, genuine enough.

In the fulfilment of his purpose, he fattened for sale the fine black horses he was wont to drive. Sometimes he drove them out for exercise, but invariably rode alone ; for, considering his late well-known engagement, he could not, in common decency, ask Mrs. Bant to accompany him as yet—even though his attentions to her had already become well known.

On a warm thawing day in March he took out the horses for exercise as usual. They were unusually fresh and spirited that afternoon, and their dark coats shone like ebony mirrors—the effect, no doubt, of the good feeding and careful attention they had lately received. They sniffed the air and pawed the snow impatiently, whilst being hitched to the cutter, and their necks bent in proud and graceful curves. Every muscle tense with life and springing with action, it was with difficulty that their driver restrained their impetuous ardor. The bells jingled a merry music on the air, and the cutter glided smoothly over the soft half-melted snow.

Again he sped along the trail over which he had driven Alice Craggs on that well-remembered day not many weeks ago ; but in that short space of time what changes had occurred ! Her mother had been then his most urgent friend, her brother his bitterest enemy, and her father, sunk in slothful turpitude, had cared not how he fared ; and now father, mother and brother had passed away, and she, his quondam love, lay like a blasted flower in the home of a stranger.

He passed by the spot where they once had dwelt. Only

a firm-packed drift of snow, dotted with bits of charred wood, marked the place where the house had stood. The straw hanging from the jagged ends of the empty sheds fluttered idly in the wind, and the snow had drifted in heaps into the miserable hovels. No living thing dwelt there now. Not even a squirrel's chirp mingled with the sad sighing of the wind; not a weasel's eye lighted the mid-day gloom. Through the chinks between the ragged logs the sunlight streamed and flickered sadly over the drifted snow and sagged manure-heaps inside. In the days of its life that place had been branded with the blasting curse of drink, and when the brand had burned deeper in the human souls of its inhabitants and their lives had withered away, its ugliness lay yet upon it, exaggerated fearfully by the pale and deathlike solitude around it.

In a finer nature such a scene must have awakened a train of sad reflections; but Pancrack, golden-hearted, silver-souled (for are not these substances heavy and hard), trotted his horses carelessly by with his coat-collar over his ears, and a large cigar in his mouth.

If the sight of the place awakened any feeling within him at all, it was one of remorse for the pains he had taken to attain an object he no longer prized. The faces of the dead mocked him with thoughts of the money he had spent to make them so; their voices whispered tauntingly in the ear of his memory, and laughed at the disappointment that had ended his accursed plans.

As if to escape from these harassing thoughts, he touched his horses with the whip, and they dashed away toward the banks of the Assiniboine Valley. Down between the iron ranks of rugged trees he sped, where the swift shadows kept gliding over him like the grated bars of some giant prison. Out from the leafless vista, over the open flat, galloped the spirited steeds; nor did the driver attempt to restrain their speed till he came to the short precipitous bank leading down upon the frozen river. Here he tried to check them with a fierce and sudden jerk; but one rein broke in two with the strain, and in a frantic endeavor to grasp the broken end he let

the other line slip from his hand. Like a swift-gliding serpent it trailed along the snow by the cutter's side.

The horses, thus freed from all restraint, snorted with pleasure and tossed their heads; and leaping down upon the river they swerved to the trail that led along it, with a force that almost lifted the cutter in the air.

Pancrack saw that he was powerless to check their speed. He might with great risk have seized the rein trailing by the cutter's side; but with this he could only have turned without stopping them, and so he determined to sit quietly behind them till their pace slackened from exhaustion.

"If they will only keep the trail," he thought, "I shall be quite safe; and they must soon quieten down at this speed."

But in the latter reflection he was mistaken, for over the soft thawing snow the cutter was drawn without an effort, and the horses with little more than their own weight to bear might last for hours.

Glorying in the intoxication of their new-found freedom, the well-fed beasts galloped with tight-stretched flanks along the level river, drawing the cutter after them in jerks and bounds. They made, indeed, a beautiful but fierce picture as they rushed in the madness of liberty between the steep banks of that silent channel. Their black manes were tossed aloft, and like steam engines incarnate they sent the hot breath through their dilated nostrils in snorting clouds, silvered by the glowing sun. Pancrack, seated helplessly behind, was half-blinded by the balls of sodden snow spurned into his face from their flying feet. The glittering snow flashed on his aching sight like a fast-rushing river of glaring light, and the gloomy patches of trees that darkened the banks in places flitted by like swift-flying ravens on a summer day.

Mile after mile was the maddening chase kept up. When at last the trail turned off the river the flying horses left it, and still keeping in the river channel they dashed along over the untrodden snow. Pancrack, at first so cool, was now pale and frightened, and grasped

his seat as a drowning man clings to a plank. The soft snow through which the beasts were now plunging fell over him like showers of cold spray, and they, inebriated to frenzy with the pride of their strength, showed no sign of abating their speed, as with foam-flaked hair, between banks like enclosing precipices, they galloped madly along.

Thus for mile upon mile, hour after hour, the flying horses maintained their wild race. Pancrack's eyes blinked in the cascade of light which streamed by, and he shivered in the chilly spray which fell around him, plugging up mouth, nose and eyes, and creeping like powdered ice down his neck. But it came to an end at last.

A gnarled leafless tree had fallen from its rooting-place in the crumbling banks and lay across the ice-bound river. With a bound the horses cleared the trunk, but the runners of the cutter smashed as they struck against it, and the shock threw Pancrack out among the branches. Swearing at the abrasions in his skin and the rents in his clothes, he extricated himself from the twigs, and shading his eyes with his hand looked after the team. They were still tearing along in the distance, dragging the broken cutter behind them, but a bend in the river soon hid them from sight.

"Baste their skin!" he growled. "A pretty fix they've got me into now. Where the mischief am I, I wonder? And how am I to get out of this!"

Asking himself these questions he looked round for a convenient place of exit. The crumbling banks of dry red clay were steep as walls, but the gnarled roots of trees stuck out from them here and there and afforded a ready grasp for the hand, whilst the cracks with which they were cleft gave an easy footing to the climber. To the right was a patch of dark-looking forest, but on the left were only a few scattered trees towering above a willowy underbrush, and in this place he resolved to climb up.

His heavy fur coat encumbered him greatly, but not knowing what was before him the luckless Pancrack did not care to leave it behind. He first clambered to a little

ledge about half-way up the bank, then seizing some curling tree-roots above his head, he stuck his foot into a crack and raised himself within reach of a willow bush growing on the edge of the bank. Grasping this with his hand he pulled himself up beside it, and panting and perspiring lay down to rest. When he rose he looked out from the willows among which he stood, and saw a vast gleaming flat stretching out to the tree-studded hills which enclosed that side of the valley. To his joy he beheld in the distance a thin column of blue smoke curling up from among the branches, and inspired by this sign of a human habitation he lost no time in starting out to cross the wide flat.

It was unfortunate for Pancrack that he had an unconquerable habit of always looking toward the ground. In conversation he addressed his voice to the listener's ears, but his eyes to mother earth. A spotless sky might smile in winning fancy above him, stars might flash their silver lights from the depths of space, the moon ride in gentle majesty, inviting the eye to gaze upon her peaceful beauty, and clouds might fly or storms might lower, but the usurer's eyes always sought the grass or—as still better suited his nature—the dust and stones.

To-day he went along in his usual way, only occasionally looking up to keep his guiding pillar of smoke in view. It was one of those bright days when the surface of the snow is bedecked with myriad little diamond crystals, each instinct with a spear of vivid light, which pierce unwary eyes till the lids itch and the sight is obscured. As Pancrack trudged slowly along, sweating with the fur coat on his back, and breaking through the softened crust with every step, his eyes itched and burned, and he aggravated the uneasiness by vexatiously rubbing them with his hand. Still he did not look up, but stared steadily at the glittering snow, which flashed back his gaze in rays of burning pain, nor did his white eyelashes in the least protect him from that piercing glare. Slowly big drops of water began to issue from his eyes, and these as they lay on his face added their reflection to the general glare and

twinkled redly on his sight ; and as the relentless shafts of light continued to pierce his weakened orbs, they seemed to flash through into his brain and blind him into dizziness.

Now he looked up for relief, but far around the snow seemed to flash toward him like a sea of surging fire, and the very air he breathed glimmered with the excessive brightness. In vain he rubbed his aching watery eyes. The action brought him no relief. The cruel crystal granules pierced him with their silvery spears till his sight began to grow dim and his bloodshot orbs gave to everything a ruddy hue. Red, like trembling drops of blood became the twinkling snow-grains, and faintly red, as if flushed with a setting sun, grew the shaft of smoke toward which he dimly struggled ; even the trees seemed to be dancing and shaking in ruddy bewilderment to his sight.

Then the redness disappeared, and a faint grey twilight took its place. Eclipsed was the smoke, vanished were the trees, and all the wide snow plain swam round him like a glimmering mist. For a time he floundered blindly through this visual fog, then his foot struck sharply against a stump hidden by the snow. He fell, crushing through the damp half-melted surface, and the black rushing night of blindness and stupefaction seized him, and left him unconscious in the snow.

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## CHAPTER LIII.

### BLINDNESS AND DELIRIUM.

SLOWLY Silas Pancrack's stupefied senses came back to him, but the shade of a thick twilight lay over his eyes. He raised himself on his elbow and dimly discerned a form standing near him. Was it a man, a bear, or a tree ? At first he tried vainly to answer this question for himself. If it were a tree it had moss and hanging shreds of bark upon its trunk, and only two boughs extended from it. If



it were a bear it must be standing erect, with its forepaws resting on a pole. If it were a man, he was clothed in fur and bearded. Terrified by the mystery and indistinctness that enveloped this thing he did not dare to speak. But his suspense was of short duration; it was dispelled by the sound of a deep, unpleasant voice grating on his ear.‡

"What is the matter with you? Are you hurt?"

"My horses have thrown me out of the cutter and run away from me," whined Pancrack, "and I am left here helpless and snowblind."

"Get up," said the other, "and take hold of my arm. I will lead you to my hut. You cannot remain here."

Overjoyed to find at once relief and companionship, Pancrack rose up, and after standing unsteadily for a moment found the use of his limbs. He groped around till he touched the stranger's arm, and grasping his coat-sleeve walked along by his side.

"How far is it to your house?" he asked, as he stumbled along.

"Not far."

"How did you come to find me?"

"I was out hunting."

Discouraged by these curt answers, Pancrack asked no more questions, but trudged along with faltering steps by the side of his mysterious guide. He noticed that the snow had become softer to the tread, and that shadows flickered across his pain-blurred eyes. From these signs he rightly concluded that they were passing through the bush. Sometimes his feet struck against a fallen tree or caught in a clump of scrubby underbrush, and he would have fallen but for the grasp he maintained on the coat sleeve of his silent guide.

They halted before something that appeared to Pancrack's dusky sight like a patch of black on a hillside, relieved by one little glimmering square of light. There was also a space of a dingy brown color let into the dark patch, which in a house might have been taken for a door. The proprietor jerked on a piece of twine hanging where the knob should have been, and Pan-

crack felt a rush of warm air overspread his face as he entered the woodland home; but when the door closed again he could see nothing—a thickening twilight enveloped his sight.

It must not, however, be supposed, because things were invisible to Pancrack's weakened sight, that the place was in complete darkness. It was imperfectly lighted by a little window which the trees intercepted from the sun, and their waving shadows danced gently over a clean lumber floor. Three sides of this primeval dwelling had been dug out of the hill, and were lined with boards to keep the earth from caving in. The front side was made of logs, built one on top of the other, with the chinks between them plastered with clay. In this wall the doorway and the window had been cut. The roof was composed of rough poles, laid flat across the whole width of the hut; and upon these a layer of dry grass and willow brush, overlaid with sods.

In the middle of this simple cabin stood a small polished cooking stove; a little square table, strewn with writing paper used and unused, stood under the window; at the farther end of the hut a bed composed of skins and blankets was made up on the floor; on a shelf, on one of the side walls, were placed a few simple articles of crockery; and on a similar shelf, at the opposite side, lay a few well-worn books of an abstruse and philosophical character. The only seat that the hut contained was a section of a log sawed level at both ends. An open box held the hermit's stock of groceries.

When they had entered this rude abode the denizen of the forest broke the silence to say to his guest:

"Let me help you to take off your things."

Pancrack thanked him; and was soon divested of his coat, hat, mitts and overshoes, and placed on the log which did duty for a chair.

"Now," said his mysterious host, who seemed to grow more talkative in his own abode, "you must feel hungry, I know. Wait a little and I will get you some supper."

"Thank you," said Pancrack, "I am rather hungry;

but I would rather have my eyesight restored than eat the best supper ever cooked."

"Perhaps so," said the other, "but we must cure what we can and leave the rest to time."

Pancrack rubbed his aching eyes, but said no more; and his host placed some fuel on the fire, and put a kettleful of snow on the stove to melt and boil. Soon his ears caught the sound of hissing and frizzling, and the scent of frying meat stole agreeably up his nostrils. Before long these signs of the approaching feast were joined by the cheerful song of a boiling kettle, and the gurgling sound of water pouring into a pot told that tea was preparing.

"Now," said the host, placing on Pancrack's knees a tin platter containing a knife and fork, some roasted venison and a roll of new bread; "try to eat this, and when you have done I will help you to more. I will place this pannikin of tea down beside your feet, so that you will know where to reach for it when you want to drink."

"Thank you," said Pancrack, "I shall do very well." And despite the pain in his eyes, he ate with a hearty relish.

The denizen of the woods did not join him in this repast, but after drinking a pannikin of tea, leaned back against the opposite wall, and with arms folded on his breast stood in the deepening twilight watching intently the face of his guest, with deep and varying emotions working on his own.

"What shall I do with him?" he asked in thought. "He is here, blind and helpless and completely within my power. I could slay him and cast his body on the river to freeze, and no one would know that I had done the deed—but, ah! that All-seeing Eye! What is this that whispers to me, 'Do good to them that hate you'? No, I will not hurt him. I will try to behave kindly to him; but I will try, if possible, to learn from him some truth about his own career. I feel that his fate is somehow inextricably involved with mine; and I doubt, with but too good reason, that evil and he have joined hands before now. I will, however, do nothing precipitately. I will abide my time, and if possible let him give the cue to con-

fession, and then encourage him to unburden himself in some way."

When Pancrack had finished a substantial meal and things had been cleared away, a shooting pain seized on his darkened eyes. He fidgeted about till the out-pressed tears rolled down his cheeks; he moaned and complained much, and at last his host suggested that he should lie down on the bed and turn his face to the wall, as he wished to light the lamp.

Pancrack, too glad to change his posture, readily acquiesced; and his host took him by the arm, led him to the bed and told him to lie down on it. It was strange that in leading him he would never take his guest's hand, but always grasped his sleeve, or told him to hold his.

The snow-blind man lay on the bed moaning, "Oh, my eyes, my eyes!" and pressing his hands over them as if to shield them from further harm.

His host took a lamp from the book-shelf and lighted it with a piece of paper. He turned up the wick, and the light shot like a lightning stroke through the room. Pancrack sprang to his feet as if pricked by a sabre's point, and still shading his eyes with one hand, held out the other deprecatingly toward his host and screamed:

"Put it out! put it out! It streams through my fingers and stabs my eyes like a knife!"

"I beg your pardon," said his host courteously, "I was not aware that it would hurt you. Your eyes must be very bad indeed. If you like I will fold some tea leaves in a handkerchief and wrap round them. It will ease them for a little while; and in the meantime I will make a poultice that I think will prove a sure cure."

"Anything! anything!" exclaimed the other pacing about in agony, "if it will only give me relief from this."

"All right, keep at that end of the room," said his host. "I shall have to open the front of the stove to get light to see with whilst I make the poultice."

He opened the stove-front accordingly; and the merry fire-light played fantastically over that end of the cabin, making great ghosts of the hermit, shifting in monstrous

disproportion on the bare log wall as he moved about, working to ease an enemy's pain. He first took a white handkerchief and placed in it some tea leaves, which he bound carefully over Pancrack's eyes.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the sufferer, "that is a little easier, if it will only last."

"I cannot promise you that it will, for when the tea leaves get dry their cooling power will be gone; but by that time I hope I shall have a more permanent remedy ready for you."

It was part of Pancrack's hypocritical way usually to affect a courtesy he did not feel; but in his suffering he dropped the mask, and without a word of thanks to his host, went to the other end of the cabin and lay rolling uneasily on the bed.

His host, however, did not heed him, but knelt in front of the fire with a soup-plate full of soaked bread-crumbs, in which he mixed a powder that he took from a small medicine box.

The manufacturing of the poultice was a long process, and before it was finished the tea-leaves had become dry, and Pancrack's agony recommenced. He rose from the bed and began to pace across the narrow room, moaning fretfully and exclaiming against his fate:

"How they itch! How they burn!" he would mutter. "They scorch into my brain like balls of red-hot metal. Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I never suffered like this before."

From these exclamations it will be observed that Silas Pancrack, in common with the majority of those whose hearts are flinty as adamant against the sufferings of others, had but a weak, puny, complaining soul in the hour of his own distress; for the man who builds up his money-gathering propensities at the expense of his moral nature neglects the cultivation of those qualities which would sustain him to bear patiently his own trials and help him to sympathize with those of others. The world, perhaps, admires the millionaire rolling along in his gilded carriage, his body bedecked with jewels and his mouth-corners wreathed with the smiles of that showy philanthropy which

costs no jot of self-denial ; but God and his angels, I think, will reserve their love for him who, suffering himself, yet strives to give no pain or anxiety to others, and who, when his own burden is removed, willingly sacrifices his pleasures that others may find peace.

When the man in front of the fire had prepared his poultice, he went to the complaining Pancrack and took off the handkerchief. He then replaced it with the poultice, which he bandaged several times round his head and carefully tied up.

"Now," he said, "if you feel easier you had better lie down on the bed and try to go to sleep. If you wish to recover your sight you must by no means take off the poultice till the pain is entirely gone."

"All right," said Pancrack, "I'll try to follow your advice. The pain is a little easier already ; but I don't think I can go to sleep, all the same. However, I'll try."

He groped his way on hands and knees across the floor, and reaching the bed, lay down upon it. His tired physical nature soon sank into an uneasy muttering slumber, which clouded his mind but gave it no rest. No rest—for through the weary moments the troubled brain was working still, and of its travail strange expressions were born from his babbling lips. In the nickering firelight, seated on the rough log stool, with elbows on his knees and his chin upon his hands, sat the owner of this lonely home, and his ears drank in the muttered ravings of his guest with a keen and bitter interest :

"Place it safely, Gorman— He will come that way to-morrow— Ah, Alice ! you're changed— Away, you are hideous now !— Not guilty— What ?— I've spent so much— Laxton— Will it never— Does he live to cross me yet ?— Mrs. Bant— My darling— You wily fortune hunter !"

As, amid the sighing of the wind and the crackling of the fire, these muttered and broken sentences came indistinctly to his ear, the face of the listener overspread with a swift and vivid light. It was the expression of one who,



after long and despairing groping in a darkened maze, suddenly finds the clue that leads him to light and freedom. He rose from his seat and paced the floor in strong agitation.

"I see it now," he thought. "Suddenly, by providential accident, the truth has been revealed to me, and I now know the origin of that mystery and misery in which but lately I was involved. But how shall I learn the whole truth from him? My mind is inventive and I may easily forge some tale which, by coinciding with his, may evoke an evil sympathy and draw the facts from him. I could do so; but is it right to resort to falsehood for any end? Oh! no, no, no!"

He paused in his walk, and then, as if moved by a sudden thought, paced the floor rapidly again.

"I *must* learn the truth somehow; but it must be drawn out by the truth, and not by shallow falsehood. Reason, if carefully followed, is often a true guide. Why cannot I take down this man's incoherent babblings and afterwards piece them together and deduce from them the story of which they are offshoots?"

The thought checked his strides, and moving gently toward the shelf he took down a note-book and a pencil. He next lifted down his lamp; then, placing a piece of stiff paper in the guards to make a shade on the one side, he lighted it, and drew cautiously near to the dreamer.

Placing the lamp noiselessly down, with the shaded side toward the bed, he sank on one knee and, with his pocket-book placed on the other, bent eagerly forward and strained every nerve to catch the faintest word that might come from the unconscious sleeper's lips. For a time, however, he ceased to utter a sound, and the woodman employed the time in jotting down in shorthand, as well as he could remember them, his guest's former ravings. Hardly had he completed this before the sleeper turned uneasily again, and began to mutter in half-terrified whispers, which came to the ear of the listener like a voice begotten of the darkness in which it floated:

"Be careful— Get at the body, Bearfoot— Go at

night— Alice, why are you so cold?— Just drop it in the grave— Polson, we have you now— Lots of whiskey, Gorman— George Cragg, you killed yourself— Ha, ha! Mrs. Bant; but I'll escape— The house is burnt— Polson can take her— Blisters and burns— Aha! that black shadow; it crosses my path again— Away, you wretch, away!— I'm the rightful heir."

His dream seemed to gather coherence and passion as he proceeded, and when he uttered the last sentence he swept his arm around as though he would drive an enemy away, so that his hand struck against the listener's knee.

The slight jar on his arm at once aroused him from his uneasy slumbers. He was at first terrified by the appalling darkness that surrounded his shrouded eyes, and his terror was increased by the sound of human breathing so near him. For a moment he could not collect his senses sufficiently to speak, but his host came to his relief by breaking the silence for him.

"Do you feel any easier now?"

"I'm afraid I've been talking a lot of foolishness," said Pancrack, too eager to excuse the babbling of which he had a dim consciousness, to notice his host's last question. "I had a dream that I was being murdered for money by a woman or an Indian, or something of that sort."

"I heard you at it," was the reply, "and that brought me to your side. But if nothing worse happens, you won't take much harm. So just roll over and go to sleep again. I must make up the fire." And so saying the host moved away, and Pancrack, satisfied that nothing had been overheard, tossed about a little while and then fell into a sound slumber.

Fred drew the lamp away and placed it on the table. Then drawing up his improvised chair he sat down and, with the aid of a pen and a large piece of paper, began to set in order the incoherent notes scribbled in his book. He first placed the events hinted at in their proper sequence, and then, with brow resting on his hand, paused and began to reflect. For a long time he sat thus, his brow knit, his teeth clenched in the energy of intense

thought; but still he failed to grasp those threads which should give him the clue to this verbal puzzle. At last he rose in despair, and walking to the door passed out into the faint moonlight. The night was chilly and the shadows of the trees waved gently in the glimmer of the snow. He walked into an open space, and there gazed up at the sinking moon. The crescent was yet but three days old, and its edge of ivory white gleamed sharp as a knife against the blackness of the globe which it enclosed.

"Like my mind," thought Fred, "a little crescent of light on a great blurred bulk of darkness. Truly in our loneliness that planet and I are a sympathetic pair." This remark caused him to gaze so long at it that at last a strange illusion seized him. He thought that the crescent of gleaming light which enclosed its hemisphere rolled off from the parent orb, and expanded gradually into a long, attenuated spear of light, which struck upon his eyes and scintillated into his brain. It was but a foolish illusion, born of the glimmer of the snow and the shine of the moon, and cemented by overwrought fancy; but, strange to say, when he reached his cabin directly afterward much that had been dark seemed suddenly to have grown clear. He sat down to his work again, and for half an hour or more wrote with feverish haste. His head sank earnestly near the paper, and the tight hand moved as if inspired by some motion independent of the writer's will. He appeared to see neither the paper nor the words before him, for his brain seemed to have expanded into a stage on which strange scenes were being enacted, and until these were recorded his fingers knew no rest.

When the task was finished he threw aside the pen and stretched himself like one relieved of a burden. The glow which had mantled his face departed, and the brightness faded from his eyes. He was his rational self once more. He picked up his writing and compared it with his shorthand notes. Some things had been overstated, but for the most part it was such as the most logical and acute induction could have inferred from the indistinct and incoherent mutterings he had heard. He revised it carefully and

placed it in a drawer. "I think it will do," he muttered. "At least I will read it to him in the morning, and possibly such truth as I have collected will frighten the rest from him. He seems to be sleeping soundly now, so that it is not likely that I shall learn anything more from him. I will just sit down again and have a good think over these things."

He put out the light, drew his rude seat near the stove, and opening the front looked thoughtfully into the glowing fire. For a time Pancrack's broken words babbled in his brain, and then, in fancy, he saw them flash from his eyes to be sucked into the dancing blaze, and thence roar up the stove-pipe to be dissolved in black tufts of smoke beneath the stars. And when that fitting wrapping had left them they pulsated through the boundless realms of air, to be drawn into the lives of men like the seeds of a cursed plague which swells forever more.

His brain thus purged by his fancy, Fred looked at the coals with clearer thoughts.

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## CHAPTER LIV.

### THE TABLES TURNED.

THE hermit of the wood, sitting by the fire that night, looked back over that eventful period since he had left his native soil. How short it had been, yet how much older he felt for having lived it! Back went his thoughts to the father and mother he had left at home, and a pale procession of the ghosts of memory passed through the flickering fire before his eyes. There was the white face of little Ida—now lying cold in her silent grave under the snow—beckoning him upward to higher thoughts and nobler aspirations; and with her face came the sound of music floating out on the gentle evening air. Then dimly, as in a mist, appeared the faces of many friends eager to welcome the wanderer back; and then, clear as one lone star

in heaven, came the face of his suffering love. Those gentle soul-filled orbs, how they awakened his half-dormant affection! That changeful, expressive face, with what tender reproach and eloquent pleading it came before his vision. Where was she now? he asked himself. Lonely, suffering, disfigured, perhaps beyond the power of healing; and even perchance thinking of him as one numbered with the dead. He must go to her and comfort and remain with her.

So he sat, and thus his thoughts ran through all the weary night, while but a few feet removed from him the enemy who had wrought him so much ill lay slumbering in unconscious peace.

Firelight flickering on his thoughtful face, wind sighing through the groaning branches, the meek, placid starlight gleaming through the panes—none of these brought rest to him. Sometimes when a chill struck him he rose to replenish the waning fire; but else he sat and gazed at the glowing coals, and thought, thought, thought, through all the long dim night. At last the grey dawn marched over the forest, and hushing the soft wind that had sighed out the night, stole into the little cabin and filled it with light. The fire grew pale, the ashes at its feet looked like the grey corpses of the flames, and the thoughtful watcher arose, and began to sweep the dusty floor and prepare a simple meal.

His breakfast of boiled oatmeal and fried flesh he ate alone, for his guest had not yet awakened. As he washed up the few things he had used in his meal the noise of the rattling pans seemed to arouse the slumberer, for he stretched his arms and grunted, "How horribly dark it is! But hey! What's this thing? Oh, the bandage, of course." And with his finger and thumb he tried to remove the covering from his eyes; but it was tied too firmly to be easily shifted.

"Wait a bit," said his host, seeing his motion, "and I will help you off with it."

"All right, thank you. No hurry," said the other rising from the bed.

The denizen of the woods, stepping across to where Pancrack stood stretching and yawning near the bed, loosened the bandage by untying the knot at the back of his head.

"Now," he grunted in a deep guttural, "you may take it off." At the same time he retreated to the opposite wall, and stood leaning against it with arms folded on his breast and the light of the window falling full upon his face. Pancrack hastily snatched the bandage from his eyes, but for a moment he was dazzled with the sudden rush of light, and was forced to shield his sight with his hands.

"Julius Hatton, look at me."

The words were spoken quietly in a voice that he recognized only too well, and the hands dropped from his eyes. Through the watery film that suffused his dazzled orbs he saw a man standing against a wall, with folded arms, looking calmly at him, and in spite of the beard upon his face, the change in his dress, and the dim medium through which these were seen, he knew who it was.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned, "it is Polson."

Then a dim memory of the night's delirium rushed into his mind, and staggering backward he leaned against the wall, breathing in terrified gasps.

Surprise had choked the villain's utterance, and for a time neither spoke, but leaned against opposite walls of the hut regarding each other with varied expressions of intense interest. Both were pale—the one with astonishment and terror, the other from want of sleep and the effort with which he suppressed the excitement he felt. Polson was the first to speak.

"Yes, Julius Hatton, it is I," he said, "and I am not dead, as you supposed and wished; but I have lived to learn the story of your villainy, and the origin of that misery of mind which drove me to this spot."

Hatton (for we will now return to his real name) hung his head and shuffled with his feet, but for a time made no reply. The interval, however, gave him time to recover from the surprise which had shocked him, and helped him to think upon some means of self-defence. He had spent



his life in trying to evade the truth, and he did not mean to be run down by it now.

"You call me Julius Hatton," he said, looking sullenly at the ground, "and you hint at some villainy or conspiracy in which he was engaged. I don't know what you mean by it all."

"Don't you?" said Fred. "Then listen to this." And from the drawer in the table he drew forth a paper from which he began to read a statement set forth somewhat in the following manner:

"Under the instigation of one Julius Hatton, *alias* Silas Pancrack, a certain Gorman O'Neil was sent to place the body of an Indian in a shallow grave on the edge of Bend-arm Creek. Another Indian, named Bearfoot, at the same time disappeared from the Reserve, and this body was supposed to be his. The Chief of the Reserve was bribed to identify it as such. Bearfoot had, in all probability, been smuggled away somewhere by Hatton or O'Neil—."

And so the statement ran on; but since the reader already knows the incidents it attempts to relate, it is unnecessary to recount them here. Suffice it to say that the inductions drawn so nearly coincided with the truth that Hatton's face paled as he listened.

"Where did you learn all that?" he asked when Polson had finished his statement.

"Never mind where I learned it. I am convinced of its truth, and though the statement is necessarily imperfect, it still contains the names of those from whom in time the whole truth can be extorted."

"Well, what does that prove? How can it affect me?" asked Hatton, looking up for a second, but quickly casting his eyes down again.

"As I said before, these proofs in themselves are incomplete, but fortunately they contain the names of those who were connected with you in this conspiracy, and I have no doubt the golden pincers with which you sealed their mouths would draw their lips asunder again."

"But, provided you can prove all that you hint of, how can that injure me or benefit you?"

"In the first place, I can bring against you a suit for defamation of character and attempt to obtain money under false pretences; for it is apparent that you have neglected no means by which you could blacken the character of an innocent man, and thus obtain an estate that should rightfully have been his."

"Well, what do you want me to do?" asked Hatton in an aggrieved tone.

"I have thought the matter over," said Fred, leaning back against the wall with the statement in his hand, "and I will give you your choice. If you will write out a full confession of this conspiracy and sign it, at the same time relinquishing all claim to the Laxton estate, you may leave the country quietly and nothing shall be said of the matter till you are well away."

"And what if I refuse to do this?" asked Hatton sullenly.

"If you refuse," replied Fred, deliberately, "I shall take action at once, and leave no stone unturned until I have completely unearthed this conspiracy; and then, as I have said before, I shall prosecute you. Any of these charges is sufficient to place you in prison, or at least to ruin you as a business man."

"I don't know about that," said Hatton, still obstinately trying to shuffle out of it.

After this he paused and reflected for a moment, and then, managing with an effort to look toward Polson, said, with an air of concession:

"I tell you what, it's no use letting matters come to strife. I could cause you a great deal of trouble, and perhaps you could injure me; but there is an easier way out for both of us. I have thought of leaving this country for some time past, and if you will only give me two weeks to get rid of my property and get clear of the country, I will write the confession you ask for and yield to all your claims. But I must ask you not to move abroad till I am gone—it will save collision and trouble if you do not."

Fred had some hesitation about yielding to the last demand, for he thought that the rascal might be only asking a respite in order to brew more mischief. But, on second thought, he concluded that with such evidence against him as he possessed it would be impossible for the usurer to do him any serious harm.

"Very well," he said, "we shall settle it as you say. I have lived here so long that I can easily hold out for two weeks more."

Then taking out some paper and laying it on the table, together with pen and ink—"Now," he added, "if your eyes are sufficiently recovered you may write out this confession while I get you some breakfast."

Hatton nodded and seated himself at the table, and by the time Fred had prepared his breakfast had drawn up and signed a brief confession.

"There," he said, handing it to him, "will that suit you?"

It was not a very elaborate, and perhaps not a strictly truthful, document, but it was sufficient to incriminate Hatton, and that was all Fred desired. There was, however, something unexplained, and holding it in his hand he looked toward Hatton with a puzzled brow.

"But," he said, "wasn't there a fire, and didn't Alice get burnt, and wasn't George Craggs killed or something?"

"Oh," said Hatton, scratching nervously on the table, "that was no fault of mine, so of course I didn't put it in. George Craggs drove out of Bendigo drunk and was frozen to death in the night, and some time afterward the house was burned down while they were sleeping, and Mrs. Craggs and the old man were burned to death. Alice was pretty badly scorched, but they managed to save her, and she is now lying convalescent at Dysart's."

"Good gracious!" cried Fred, with a look of horror. "How did all these things happen? Tell me all about them."

And he leaned forward with his hands on the table and drank in eagerly the details of those terrible disasters which Hatton, with down-cast eyes, brokenly and not too truthfully related.

Fred spoke not a word, but when he had finished the narrator seemed relieved.

"Now," he said, "you know all that I can tell you; and I must really beg a little breakfast of you, for that long sleep has made me as hungry as a hunter."

"And, by-the-way," he added, rising from his seat and recovering some of his usual assurance as he looked round the hut, "I must say you've got your little crib nicely fixed for winter quarters; and, I say, wherever did you learn the art of oculist? My sight is completely restored already."

Fred gave his strange guest a meal which rude as it was, he devoured with great gusto—for emotion with Hatton was too transient and superficial to disturb his appetite.

He then gave Hatton directions for finding his way to a little village near a railway siding about eight miles off, where he could catch the first train going east. The usurer thanked him, and dressed for the journey. His heavy fur coat he hung over his arm, since its weight if put on would impede his footsteps. He went to the door, but there halted and turned round as if he had suddenly remembered something.

"Oh, by-the-way, if you want to know what really became of Bearfoot," he said, "go to Gorman O'Neil's and hunt his place from top to bottom and you will find out. It will save you the trouble of publishing that confession."

"All right," said Fred; "I have no wish to make the confession public if I can clearly establish my innocence without doing so."

As he opened the door to let Hatton out, the latter held out his hand with a sickly conciliatory smile.

"Not with you," said Fred, coldly rejecting the proffered hand.

"Keep in sight the landmarks I told you about," he added, "and they will bring you safely to the station, which is only about sixteen miles from Bendigo. And remember that in two weeks time I go out into the world to make the story of your conspiracy known."

Chafed and chopfallen, Hatton plodded along a footpath leading up the hill and out of the forest. After a mile or two of trudging through the unbroken snow he found a sleigh track, which he followed until he came to the little village by the railway side.

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## CHAPTER LV.

### JULIUS HATTON'S FLIGHT AND MRS. BANT'S PURSUIT.

WHEN Julius Hatton returned to the Dysart settlement he explained to the people the episode of the runaway, and added that he had found refuge for the night in a farmer's house. (Be sure he said nothing of the snow-blindness nor of any other of the incidents that had made his adventure so remarkable.) He also offered a reward which brought his runaway team back to him on the following day.

Mrs. Bant welcomed him back with hysterical gladness, nor was this altogether feigned, since she knew that had he never returned, the wealth she coveted would be beyond her grasp. As well as he could he soothed her agitation with endearing words and fervent promises, and the attention he paid her became more marked than ever. With every meeting his ardor seemed to grow in vehemence—a circumstance which the widow attributed solely to the success of her own wily artifices.

One day, when sitting together in Mrs. Bant's room, Hatton's passion reached a climax. He vowed he would keep their engagement a secret no longer. "To-morrow," he said, rising and striding about the carpet in the restlessness of eager love—"to-morrow our engagement shall be known to all. The world shall never say that I was ashamed to own my love for Helen Bant."

"But Silas—Julius," said Mrs. Bant, who sat on the sofa pretending to crotchet. "There is poor Miss Craggs; you must remember your recent engagement to her."

"Miss Craggs!" he said, stopping and stamping violently on the floor. "What do I care for a hundred Miss Craggs? I only know that I love *you*, and all the world shall know it, too."

And filled with this mighty intention, he seized the widow in his embrace and kissed her with such warmth that the vehement pressure left the imprints of her sharp nose and pointed chin like dimples in his face.

Mrs. Bant passed a sleepless night in picturing the effect that the announcement of their engagement would have, and with an expectant, beating heart awaited the morrow. It came; but Julius Hatton did not. She began to make anxious inquiries, but no one had seen or heard anything of him.

It finally transpired that he had driven into Bendigo on the night after his interview with Mrs. Bant, and early on the following morning purchased a ticket for Winnipeg and boarded the east-bound express.

He had quietly disposed of his farm-stock and property to a speculator, who immediately offered them for sale again at a much higher figure. This gentleman had been informed by Hatton of his intention to leave the country, but had been willing to keep silent for the sake of the financial advantage of the bargain.

Great was Mrs. Bant's distress and wrath when she heard this story. She shut herself up in her room, and for half an hour the violence of her sobs shook the sofa on which she lay.

"The villain! the traitor! to treat me so," she kept saying, in gasps drawn between violent fits of sobbing.

To the beholder there was nothing touching in her grief, but to her it was terribly poignant, as the grief of disappointed ambition and covetousness always is, for it contains no softening element of sympathy or compassion. For a long time she lay on the sofa, her thin form writhing in agony.

But it did not end there: she vented her private woes on the public ear. Henceforth she allowed no one near her to dwell in peace. She boxed the ears of her pampered infant



till they were swollen by the slapping, and so lustily did the child scream that his voice became worn down to a mere chirp. She scolded the new cook—for Mrs. Tomson was now no longer an inmate of the Dysart home—until the meat appeared on the table charred to fritters, and cakes and dainties assumed monstrous shapes, that gave evidence of the great perturbation in which they were made; and she vented the sorrows of her lonely state and hard treatment on the rest of the family to such an extent that they would slink out of her way whenever they saw her approaching.

Uncle Nathan, bringing the milk from the farm, would peep nervously into the kitchen, and, catching sight of the housekeeper, make a desperate dash forward and throw the contents of his pails into the milk-pans; and whilst he was still being called "a stupid old idiot" for the quantity he had splashed over on the floor, he would catch up the empty pails and, holding one aloft on his arm like a shield to cover his retreat, would slide through the doorway and depart at a run toward the farm. Mr. Fane would shrug his shoulders and pull at the ends of his moustache in a half apologetic manner as he turned his back toward her. Mr. Longstreet would thrust his fingers into his waistcoat pockets and, with thumbs stretched abroad, would lift up his eyes and look as if earth had no more charms for him.

No one, however, was more irritated by the housekeeper's conduct than Mr. Dysart. With an eye of disapproval he had noticed her conduct toward Hatton, and her behavior since his departure had added to his annoyance to such an extent that he determined to speak his mind to her about it whenever a fitting opportunity should occur.

One day, whilst he was reading his newspaper in the dining-room, Mrs. Bant sat at the other end of the table combing her child's hair and, at the same time, soothing the screams he emitted whenever the comb caught in a tangled tuft, with complaints of her own grievances, addressed through him indirectly to Mr. Dysart.

"Be quiet, Georgy, dear," she murmured, after jerking a number of hairs from the youngster's scalp; "you

mustn't cry in *this* house, you know, or people will be angry with us. You and poor mamma must bear wrongs and annoyances without a word of complaint, or we shall be shunned and looked down on wherever we go, shan't we? But we won't live always like this, will we? We will go where people will be kind to us and pity our loneliness, won't we? So don't cry, dearie. Hush-sh!" etc.

Mr. Dysart, with a poor pretence at reading, listened to these whimperings for some time; but after awhile his patience was pressed beyond its limits, and laying down the newspaper on the table he addressed himself as firmly and decisively as he could to the widow:

"Mrs. Bant, it is painful for me to have to tell you that your conduct for some time past has annoyed me exceedingly. Only my remembrance of your distant relationship to me has prevented me from speaking to you about it before. But now, let me tell you, once and for all, that if these complaints and fault-findings do not cease you must leave this house."

Mrs. Bant burst into tears at once.

"And this is how you treat me, a poor lonely widow," she sobbed. "I cannot speak in this house but I am frowned at and shunned as if I carried the plague."

"But what do I care?" she added, striking into a fiercer key and looking defiantly at him through her tears—"what do I care for you or your threats? Pay me my wages and I will leave this house at once. I hate the place! I hate you all!"

As she hissed out the last declaration all the snakish qualities of her wily nature seemed to have concentrated in her eyes and tongue—with such hatred they glared and with such venom she spoke.

"Very well," said Mr. Dysart, composedly, "I will pay you your wages. But you need not be in such a hurry. You can remain here till you have found another place."

"Not another minute," cried the angry woman, rising and stamping her foot; "no, not a minute would I remain here if I had my will. Send a waggon to carry me and my baggage to Bendigo and I will leave this very day."

"As you please," said Mr. Dysart, with a cold bow. "But remember, I give you leave to stay a while if you wish it."

"But I do *not* wish it," returned Mrs. Bant. "I want to be gone from you as soon as possible, for I tell you I hate you all."

"Come on to the parlor, then," said Mr. Dysart, "and I will give you your wages."

Great was the amazement but small the distress when it was learned that Mrs. Bant was leaving so suddenly. The cook prepared a sumptuous feast to be eaten after her departure, and Mr. Longstreet whistled a hornpipe air as with unusual celerity he hitched to the waggon the team which was to bear her away. Strange to say, the only person who felt a pang of regret at her departure was the convalescent Alice Cragg, to whom she had been too indifferent even to complain.

That very day saw the wily widow with her child and other portable effects safely landed in Bendigo, and next morning the east-bound train whirled her swiftly away in pursuit of Julius Hatton; for this, indeed, had been the object of all her scolding and complaints—she had wished to secure a dismissal that she might be free to follow her betrothed husband and force him to keep his word.

And when after her departure they entered her private room they found that the pictures had been stripped from the walls and the carpets from the floor, the muslin curtains had been torn from the window and the ashes lay cold in the bottom of the stove; and amid all this nakedness and desolation two poor little hungry singing-birds chirped piteously in a gilded cage.

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## CHAPTER LVI.

## GORMAN'S CAT ONCE MORE.

"AN' phwat do yes want wid me?"

"Your name is Gorman O'Neil, is it not?"

"Sure it is, and a rale good ould Irish name it is, too."

Gorman turned his head on one side and leaned it over like a goose, that he might get a better look at the questioner with his one rolling eye; but to-day the effects of the glitter of melting snow, combined with an overdose of whiskey, had rendered that orb rather hazy, and no gleam of recognition glinted from it to his muddled mind.

"Faix! an' I couldn't tell ye from me great-grandfather's first pair o' brogues."

This answer, since it allowed him to carry out the plans he had already formed, satisfied Fred Polson, and in reply to Gorman's last remark he said:

"You are suspected of distilling whiskey illegally, and I have come to search your premises to see if this is so."

Gorman was standing in the door-way of his smithy. His black bristly head was bare, his body was adorned by a ragged waistcoat with the blackened bowl of a short clay pipe sticking out of one pocket, and the fronts of his greasy trousers were half hidden by a tattered leathern apron hitched slightly to one side.

At Fred's declaration he opened his eyes till the bristles on his brows almost touched the roots of the electrified shock on his head, and he thumped the door-post in vehement negation.

"Nivver a dhrop o' whiskey ivver come into this house, me son."

"Perhaps not," said Fred, "but, nevertheless, I must do my duty. You must let me search the house and then I can clear you of suspicion by saying that I could find no trace of a still."

"And pwwhy should I let you sarch me house?" asked

Gorman, inclined to be obstinate. "Pwhere's yer certifi-  
kit?"

"Look here," said Fred, "I don't want to stand here  
bandying words with you all day. Either say whether  
you will let me search the house quietly now, or would  
you prefer that I should go back and fetch some men to  
force it?"

"Oh, to the mischief wid yer evictions," said Gorman.  
"Gim me toime," as he scratched among the bristles on his  
head. His face suddenly brightened, and with a wink of  
the naked eye and a flicker of the clothed optic, he said:

"Phwell, me boy, ye can sarch if ye loike, for it's sure I  
can't that nothin' ye'll foind. So follow me. Shtiddy now!"

Gorman at once metamorphosed himself by turning his  
eye and his apron from Fred's view, and presenting him  
with the spectacle of a pair of leather apron strings dang-  
ling down behind his legs. Following these guiding rib-  
bons Fred was led through the shop and into the house.  
A stick lay here, a dirty pot half full of slops was standing  
there; a soiled print shirt lay in one corner, and a pair  
of matted socks looped with yawning holes adorned an-  
other. Old Mennonite boots, rumpled moccasins, bits of  
iron and wood, pieces of ragged bark stripped off the fire-  
wood and countless other atoms of rubbish strewed the  
floor. Fred scrutinized the room carefully, but could dis-  
cover naught except these.

"Pwhat can ye see here, sor?" asked Gorman triumph-  
antly.

"Nothing of any importance," said Fred. "But," he  
asked, pointing to a rude wooden ladder, "what does that  
lead to?"

"Ascind and see," said Gorman with a dignified wave  
of the hand.

Fred climbed up the rickety ladder far enough to thrust  
his head into a smoky little attic containing a substantial  
bedstead of rough timber covered with horse blankets.  
With the exception of a chest near the head of the bed,  
the room contained not another stick of furniture.

"Now, are ye satisfoyed?" asked Gorman, when Fred  
had descended.

"Not quite," he replied. "Most houses have a cellar. Where is yours?"

"Divil a cillar have Oi. Hunt all over this floor av ye loike, an' see whither ye'll foind a thrap-door."

To have discovered even the boards of the floor among all that dirt and rubbish would have entailed considerable labor, and Fred did not try. He merely looked round and said:

"I can see no trap-door here, certainly; but as I passed through the shop I saw a square piece of boarding in the floor. What is that for?"

"Arrah! An' pwhat should it be for but to cover over a hole that I kape bits o' rusty ould on: in, an', be my faith, there's a big tom-cat in it, too, as 'll scrat the oyes out o' ivver a craythur as looks in."

"Indeed!" said Fred. "I should like to see this curiosity."

"It 'ud be the last thing ye ivver would see, thin; for divil a oye would be left safe from his claws."

"Nevertheless I will venture to face this monster," said Fred, moving toward the shop.

Gorman was half-drunk, and when in this condition was not in his most combative mood, or he might have tried to resist Fred's determination with force; but as it was, he merely contented himself with expostulation.

"Oh, wirra, wirra!" he groaned, crossing himself as he followed Fred. "Pwhativer are yez goin' to do? No sooner will ye open that thrap-door than two claws as big as a hin's 'll fly out at ye an' sthick into yer eyeballs and dhrag out both yer oyes. Oh, whisht! But there's oyes lyin' thick like half-dried grapes among the ould oirn under that."

"Well, I will give him a chance to add mine to the number, anyhow," said Fred. And stepping down into the shop he lifted the trap-door.

Gorman, standing on the door-step leading into the house, covered his eye with his hand, exclaiming:

"Arrah! He's sphringin' at ye! Dhrop it agin, or by the powers he'll have us both."



But Fred did not drop it. On the other hand, he flung it right back. He saw a few boxes at the foot of the ladder leading into this vault, but farther in all was in darkness. As he peered intently into the gloom his ears were greeted with a very human grunt from the darker recesses of the cellar.

"That cat you speak of," he remarked to Gorman, "has a very peculiar 'meouw.'"

"It's a strange baste altogether," said Gorman. "An' ye'll foind it out, too, if yez stand starin' there much longer. Shut the door, ye omadhoun! Shut it!" he exclaimed with a sudden spasm of awakening energy. "Do yez want to have the both of us slaughthered."

And he moved toward the door in terrified excitement, as if he would close it himself; but Fred stood on the lid which was turned back on the floor.

"No," he said firmly, "this door shall not be closed till I have found out what is in the cellar."

Gorman, who was none too brave at the best, shrank back before Fred's firm demeanor; and the latter called into the cellar:

"Hi, there! Come to the light and show yourself."

There was another grunt, this time followed by a shuffling sound which alarmed Gorman into a shout—

"Kape back, ye spalpeen, or it's your murtherer I'll be."

But the shuffling still continued, and there issued into the light streaming through the trap-door a strange wild figure. His hair was long, matted and covered with cobwebs; his clothes were all damp and soiled with earth; his heavy brown hands shook like withered aspen leaves; his coppery face was all bloated and dead-looking; and the eyes that he rubbed whilst looking up at his deliverer gleamed dull in the light like two clots of blood.

Gorman O'Neil shrank back against the wall of the smithy in a cold shiver, and Fred looked down at the poor wretch in pity and utter amazement.

"Come up the ladder," he said gently.

Grasping the sides of the ladder with trembling hands

and with steps as faltering and unsteady as they, the man came to the top of the ladder and stood looking around him with dull bewildered eyes. He seemed a fitting inhabitant of that sooty, dimly-lighted place—his face indented with deep wrinkles like the closed bellows, and his eyes as lustreless as the silent forge.

"How came you in there?" asked Fred when he had closed the trap-door.

"He put me there long ago," said the Indian, in a husky guttural tone, at the same time pointing a dirty finger to where Gorman, quaking with terror, leaned against the sooty wall of his miserable shop.

"And how long have you been there?" asked Fred.

"Not know," said the Indian, shaking his dusty head, "but long time. So much fire-water make me not remember."

"And how have you been kept alive?"

"He bring me on top sometimes," said the Indian, still pointing toward Gorman, "and give me plenty eat, and then fill me up with fire-water and put me down again."

"Well," muttered Fred, "this beats everything yet. I can understand now what Hutton meant when he said, 'Search O'Neil's house and you will learn the truth.'"

Then turning again to the Indian he asked, "What is your name?"

"The white man call me 'Bearfoot,'" was the reply.

Fred's face lighted up triumphantly, and turning on the trembling blacksmith he said in tones of righteous wrath, "So, you villain, this is the tool with which you and your employer tried to bring about my death. Look at me again. That is it. You remember me now, I suppose. If not let me tell you that I am the Polson you tried so hard to prosecute, and woe betide you if you fail to tell me the truth about this affair."

As Fred spoke thus passionately all the disguise of voice and expression he had formerly assumed was cast aside, and as the blast of terror had cleared the drunken mist from Gorman's eye, he recognized the speaker, and all his coward spirit quivering through his frame he fell on his knees before him.

"Oh, murder! Oh, mercy! Oh, Howly Mother!" he exclaimed; "have mercy on a poor lad who was persuaded to an evil dade by the voice o' the tempter."

"Get up, fool," said Fred in disgust, "and tell me who this tempter was."

"Whisht now," said Gorman slowly rising, "who should it be but that same black-hearted Fenian, Pancrack."

"The pot calling the kettle black," said Fred. "But you need not trouble on his account, for Pancrack is now far out of the country, and you can expect to get nothing more from him. However, if you will tell me the whole truth about your dealings in this affair I shall promise at least not to bring you under the law."

Gorman, who, as an ex-officer of the law, knew what an edged tool it was to play with, was greatly relieved by this promise and answered readily.

"Faix! an' I'll do that same, thin. Ye see, it was that scoundrel Pancrack"—and he went into a lengthy account of the usurer's nefarious scheme, taking care, however, to represent himself as an injured person, persuaded by the false pretences of Pancrack to participate in an evil deed, and once within his power unable to resist his orders without fear of exposure. "An'," he concluded, "if ye'll search that ould haythen Anoch's shanty, maybe ye'll foind under the floor av it the pick and shovel with which you was supposed to dig the grave."

"But," said Fred, "you said it was your intention to send this Bearfoot over to his people across the line as soon as you had done with him. How was it you did not do so?"

"Faix, an' there was the rub," said Gorman, who had now recovered some of his confidence, and spoke of his achievements with a certain touch of pride. "Just at the toime we was goin' to pack him off the Yankee Government issued a decay stoppin' all Indians from outside p'intns from interin' their counthry. An' coorse we moight have managed to smuggle the thafe over the loine, but thin he would have wanted to go on to the Resarve among his pable, an' there'd have bin no ind o' questionin', an' Hiven

ounly knows what he might have tould about us. An' we couldn't let him go back where he came from nayther, for it's *did* he was supposed to be; so we thought we'd just kape him in the cillar for the winther, an' burn the timper out av him wid ould rye, and turn him out in the spring under an ashoomed name."

"You're an out-and-out rascal," said Fred. (Gorman grinned as if he had received a compliment). "But nevertheless I have promised not to prosecute you, and I will keep my word. However, in a week's time I shall make the story you have told me known to the world, so that before that time comes I would advise you, if you value your own safety, to put as many miles between this country and yourself as you can."

"But me shop—me tools," said Gorman, in great concern. "Pwhativer am I to do wi' thim? Yez wouldn't have me run away and lave thim behoind, would yez?"

"You have a week," was Fred's cold reply. "Plenty of farmers will be ready to buy your blacksmith's stock—so use the time as you like. But remember, I have warned you."

"But there's a mawl, an' a cart, an' a ilegant cutther," continued Gorman in tones of mournful remonstrance.

"Oh, yes, that reminds me," said Fred, cutting him short, "I must have your mule and cutter, because I am going to take this Indian back with me to my present home, and he is not fit to walk far. I have not the money to pay for it just now, but name what you consider a fair price, and write back to me when you are away from here and I will send you the money. You need not fear that I will either deceive or betray you."

Gorman's one clear eye twinkled—here was an unexpected chance to realize a little money, at any rate—and he mentioned an extravagant price, which he named "very motherate."

"All right," said Fred, eager to finish with him at any price. "And now go and hitch the animal up for us, please."

"That same Oi'll do, sir," said Gorman, making his exit

with alacrity; and he even consoled himself amid his misfortunes by this reflection, "An' it's the last toime I'll have to hitch up that sto-pid ould baste, annyhow."

On that day the mule must have been a little more tractable than usual, for Gorman soon reappeared with him dragging his "ilegant cutther"—a structure composed of an old soap-box nailed on two pieces of scantling (with front ends chopped into rough curves) which served as runners. A piece of loose dirty board, with two jagged broken ends resting on either side of the soap-box, made the seat of the sprightly conveyance which Gorman drove to his smithy door.

All this time the Indian had been standing like a post in the middle of the house floor. His heavy hands hung listlessly by his side, his dull eyes were half closed, and his head was bent as he drooped like a drowsy horse. Fred leaned against the door-jamb till the cutter—if such it might be called—approached, and then moving toward the Indian he tapped him heavily on the shoulder.

"You must come with me," he said, in gentle but authoritative tones.

The Indian lifted his drooping head, opened his drowsy eyes, and grunted, "Ugh! yes, I will come."

All the wildness, all the fire of his fierce nature had been consumed in the dampness, the darkness and the spirituous flame of his terrible prison, and meek as a whipped dog coming at its master's call he followed Fred Polson's steps.

Gorman pursed his lips, pressed his elbows against his side and squeezed up his shoulders with the expression of one pulling tightly on the reins, whilst the two got into the soap box. He knew that he could not make the brute flinch back by pulling on its iron mouth, and he thought his action exhibited an impatient spirit which needed restraint. "Ah, now—gintly, gintly me darlint, don't fret; ye'll be off in a minute," he kept saying.

"Now, sor," he said, as he handed the reins to Fred, "just be careful wid him, an' it's a daisy ye've got. For spade he's a sojer whin ye bate the retrate, for gentleness

he's a sick lamb, for ilegance he's a lady, and for intilligence he's a Solymon among mules. Whisht, but he's a *daisy*. Whoo-oo-oo!" And Gorman emphasized his eulogy with an enthusiastic peroratory whistle.

"Not a very pretty daisy, anyhow," remarked the new owner, surveying the tall and ungainly structure of disproportioned bones which stalked along at anything but a martial rate before him. And so equipped and companioned Fred Polson returned through the slushy departing snow toward his lonely forest home.

A week later the lonely smithy was deserted.

All around it the snow-swelled marshes rippled sullenly in an April breeze. At night again the frogs sent up their myriad-voiced croaking; and now no hammer's ring, no forge's glare disturbed their dolorous piping, but only the hissing of a brood of snakes that, like a fitting poisoned crop from the foul seed sown below, had nested on the witch's grave, mingled with the dreary chorus.

Through the warm summer days the rustling grass swirled round it, and the sunbeams peered into its loneliness through the crevices between the shrunken boards. The grass grew long on the smithy floor, and in the house mice and moths found a home while the lizards and toads crawled in the cellar beneath. In the morning its shadow stretched out over the dismal pools, and at evening its gloom rested on the stone-scabbed, mangy hills. The very curse of wickedness clung to the spot and no tenant came near it. And when the winter came again it shivered and howled in the frosty blasts as it was lashed by the blackened rags of paper which clung around it still.

Far away east, in the slums of a mighty city, a one-eyed man sneaks from place to place picking up a wretched living by a course of treachery and fraud. In low dens of vice he makes his home, and there he hides through all the garish day, but, bat-like, appears abroad in the twilight searching for his prey.



CHAPTER LVII.

"LO! THE POOR INDIAN."

WHEN Fred Polson took Bearfoot with him to his hut he was undecided as to what course he should pursue, but it was soon resolved upon. He kept the poor Indian with him for about a week ; and then, since all the snow had disappeared, he turned out the mule to graze, locked up his cabin, and taking Bearfoot with him walked to the little railway-siding we have mentioned before, and from there they went by train to Markon. When Fred arrived in the town where his trial had made him so notorious, he was not without fear of being recognized ; but fortunately his beard and rough clothing saved him from the inconvenience which this might have caused.

The once rascally Indian, now subdued into childishness, followed without question or resistance wherever he wanted to go. Like a mere bundle of telegraphic nerves, controlled only by some outward agency, his frame vibrated responsively to every touch his liberator gave.

Fred took him before the police authorities, and commanded him to tell what he knew of the conspiracy in which he had been employed. This he did with as little human expression as a key groaning in a rusty lock. The officer who examined him took down his evidence and said :

"Mr. Polson, you need hardly have taken this trouble, for really very few believed you guilty ; but still, no doubt, this will have the good effect of converting the obstinate few."

"But," he added, pointing with his pencil to Bearfoot standing listlessly before him, "we must do something with this man. He is in a state of harmless idiocy, and unfit to take care of himself."

"Yes, I quite agree with you," said Fred. "Is there no asylum or institution in which he could be placed ?"

"Yes, I daresay there is. Leave him in our charge for

the present, and after a while no doubt we shall find a place for him."

As a result of this interview Bearfoot was placed in an asylum where he earns his living by sweeping floors, cutting sticks and doing other little chores around the place. But the visitor could hardly think that the drooping spiritless being, who so querulously begs for a little tobacco or craves for a drop of the liquor that has cursed him, was the once fierce and passionate Bearfoot, the exiled Sioux.

The police followed up the startling evidence they had gained by searching thoroughly the house of the old chief Enoch.

He sat and smoked serenely whilst they pried up the boards in his floor, and brought to light the real pick and shovel which, as a piece of evidence against Fred Polson, he pretended to have lost on the road from Bendigo.

"Ugh!" he grunted, blowing out a puff of smoke when he saw them. "The white man is good—he has found what I have searched for long, long times."

"And, you old rascal, it would serve you right if the first use we put them to was to dig your grave and bury you in it alive."

"Um!" said Enoch, looking thoughtfully up at the ceiling through a cloud of smoke. "That would do white man no good. Better leave Indian alone and he give you some money."

The money was not accepted; but, nevertheless, Enoch was left alone. "He is only an Indian." That was his impregnable excuse and defence, and it saved him from further persecution.

He lives still—rich after the manner of his tribe—and still a rogue. His reward is that which all rogues must meet at last: no one honors him, and no man trusts his word.

## CHAPTER LVIII.

## THE RETURN OF THE SPRING.

It is spring in Manitoba !

Again the whirring wings make music in the sky as they speed toward northern climes, and the soft air vibrates with the liquid melody of rippling creeks rushing down to a brimming river; and that, too, has its music in the thunder of the rending ice-blocks as they jostle tumultuously on the yellow breast of the foaming current, or crack and grind against either shore. Yet this is but the low undertone which gives additional softness and sweetness to the glad music that dwells on land, in water and in air. All the awakening life of insect and bird is on the wing, and a gentle beauty breathes in the balmy breeze. It is a time to soothe the weary spirit, to fill the heart with love and hope and peace.

On such a day sat Alice Craggs in a rocking-chair under the veranda in front of Mr. Dysart's house. She was yet convalescent, and too weak to undertake any physical labor; but nevertheless the scars which the fire had left upon her face were healing fast, and already much of her former beauty had returned to her. True, the shadow of desolation which had been cast upon her soul had not yet wholly departed, but Time, the kind healer of suffering hearts, was daily making her burden lighter to bear.

Mr. Dysart had kindly offered her the situation of house-keeper which the departure of Mrs. Bant had left vacant, and she had gratefully accepted the offer.

"For," she reflected, "may I not thus be better enabled to pay back a little of the kindness they have lavished upon me. I can at least use my little influence toward making their lives more comfortable and keeping peace, if that is ever necessary, between them; and if any fall ill I shall be here to attend on them, as they have on me."

And so she accepted the situation, though with some

hesitation on the ground of youth and inexperience. But to this Mr. Dysart refused to listen, and her active duties were to begin when her strength was sufficiently restored.

To-day she sits musing with an open book upon her lap, not, I am afraid, meditating upon the book, for the sweet influence of the spring has lulled her into other reveries. Her eyes look out over the lake with its silvery ripples plashing gently on the verdant shore, and her ears faintly drink the music of the bird-songs carolled from the green-  
ing trees. For the time the shadow of sad memories has departed from her and floated far away into the over-  
arching blue.

Memory reverts to the days of a former summer, and often the image of one who visited her then returns to her now. Why does the smile brighten on her lips when she thinks of his tenderness toward her? Why does the tear suffuse her eye when she thinks of the persecution he has suffered? and why does she shudder and turn pale as she reflects upon his probable fate? Ask not me, reader, but ask of the glad sunlight that shines around her. Ask of the rippling waters and the singing birds. Question the balmy breezes and the budding flowers. Ask of all things instinct with the spirit of love, and they will tell you that this is LOVE.

In that twilight realm between the dreaming and the awaking she hears a footstep and sees a human form. How well she knows them both, and she thanks God that even in a day-dream He has brought him again before her. shadowy and indistinct though it seems, as something that is only a part of the gentle elements around her.  
"Alice!"

At the sound she starts like one newly-awakened from deep sleep and utters a little joyous cry; for lo! in living reality, and not as a thing of dreams, the form of Fred Polson stands before her, and he regards her with an eager, tender smile. He is dressed in a light-colored suit, round which the sunlight seems to cling. He is "in his best," tidied as when he used to visit her on those happy Sundays less than a year ago; but the expression of his face is older, much older.

"Alice, do you know me?" he asks again.

Poor Alice feels that her cry of joy has betrayed her, and her pale face flushes red as she tries to ask, in tones of formal interest mingled with unconcealed surprise:

"Mr. Polson! Can it be really you?"

"Yes, Alice, it is I," he said, going toward her and tenderly taking one little injured hand in his. "Have I changed so much as to cause you to doubt it?"

"Oh, no," she said, "you have really changed very little—far less, I am glad to see, than I have."

"Yet, believe me, Alice," he said, still holding her hand, "your change has but bettered your beauty in my eyes; for are not these marks," he added, pointing to the scars on her face, "the outward tokens of a brave and beautiful spirit made visible."

Alice knew not what to reply; but she thought of how those scars had been gained, and in the train of sorrow it recalled she sighed and looked down.

"Alice," Fred continued, "do you know why I come to you to-day? You remember what I said to you by your parents' door once before. We have both seen and suffered much since then; but believe me, dearest, that throughout it all my love for you has remained unchanged—nay, when I heard of your trials of late it increased tenfold. It may seem strange that after so long and mysterious an absence this is the first subject on which I should speak to you; but I do so because it is the subject that lies nearest my heart and on which my happiness most depends, nor till I had relieved myself of this could I have well spoken to you of anything else. I find that you, too, have suffered, and more than I, and I ask you to let me comfort your loneliness. Tell me, my darling, do you love me?"

All this time her hand had never been withdrawn from his, but her heart was beating fast. The blushes flashed like dancing flames along her cheeks and her eyes sought the ground. But his head was bent very close to hers and he spoke very softly and earnestly.

"But, Fred," she answered, without looking up, "you must remember how very much I am changed. I am disfigured in feature and penniless in purse; and—and—in short, I am not fit to be your wife."

"But," he exclaimed earnestly, as he fervently pressed her hand, "I tell you, you are more beautiful to me than ever. Money I neither ask nor care for. I love you not for the mere form of your features or the color of your cheeks—though these will yet again vie with the fairest—but for the loving and beautiful soul that these express. I do not ask you to share with me a life of luxury and ease; but I ask you to help and strengthen me in living a life of useful labor among my fellow-men. I ask you to join hand in hand with me that we may better comfort the suffering, strengthen the weak and battle with evil temptations without and selfish desires within. Speak to me, Alice. Will you be my helpmate in this, or shall I go forth to do these things alone?"

As he spoke his face and tone glowed with passionate enthusiasm, and when he had finished she lifted her head and her eyes looked into his. All girlish timidity or affectation had passed away before the manly nobility of his speech, and the face that now greeted his, though faintly flushed, was very calm, and placid as the twilight star were the eyes that gazed into his. No words she spoke; but if ever eye uttered speech to eye, hers most plainly said, "I love you."

And there in the soft spring sunshine they plighted their faith.

Long they sat and talked in loving unison, each telling the story of trial, suffering and love. All nature seemed to rejoice in their joy. Far in the distant east the sweet spring sunlight is laughing among the crocuses on the verdant-tinted hills, and the soft winds murmur to the silvery waves as they kiss the lakelet's flowery shore. Fair is the soft blue sky which smiles above them and fair are the fresh green blades springing beneath their feet. Near at hand, where the green-boughed trees swing over a



little grave, the birds are singing clear and loud, but it is no mournful dirge—rather is it a pæan of soothing joy, as if, indeed, the sweet little spirit had risen from the body entombed below and is pouring itself from those bird-throats in song. And so, hymned by the approving song of nature, which is the voice of God, they are serenely happy in pure and virtuous love.

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CHAPTER LIX.

A CLOSING SCENE IN THE DYSART HOUSEHOLD.

It was a happy party that assembled round the supper-table in Mr. Dysart's house that night. Fred, in spite of what they called his "cranky ways and ideas," was beloved by all, and great was their joy to see him among them again. The kind and worthy master sat at the head of the table, beaming pleasantly over the rest. His merry jokes and funny stories kept them in constant bursts of laughter. Mr. Longstreet talked volubly of the horrors he would have visited on Pancrack and O'Neil had he been in Fred's place, and Mr. Fane punctuated his threats with approving shrugs and such remarks as :

"The rascals! They really ought to be flayed, you know."

"Glad to see you have turned the tables on 'em, old fellah."

"Pass the cakes, Longstreet. Oh, I'll polish 'em all off before you've finished talking!"

Alice, silent and shy, sat by Fred's side, for their relations were already understood, and Mr. Dysart had smilingly insisted on seating her there. Long they lingered over the dessert, for then it was that Fred told them his story.

"But one thing I must not forget," he said, as he drew toward a close. "As I wandered about Bendigo waiting for a chance to ride out here, a pleasant smell of new-baked bread attracted me towards the window of a small store

filled with loaves, buns and cakes, and looking up I read, painted in large letters over door and window :

ANTHONY SCROGPOT,

BAKER AND CONFECTIONER.

CAKES AND PASTRY SUPPLIED FOR PARTIES, PICNICS,  
BALLS, ETC.

FRESH BREAD DELIVERED TO ANY PART OF THE  
VILLAGE.

ALL ORDERS AND CONTRACTS PROMPTLY ATTENDED TO.

"You may depend upon it, I lost no time in making my way into the store. There was no one in the place when I entered it, and so I rapped on the counter.

" 'Wait a bit there!' growled a voice from a back room. 'Drat me if I'm not all plastered over with dough.'

"I looked in the direction from which the sound came, and through a half-opened door caught a glimpse of a pair of white dough-spattered duck pants hitching up and down beside a kneading-trough, whilst a pair of slippers flapping on the floor beat time to the thumping of the dough. In another minute the door opened altogether, and our former cook, looking quite neat in his new dress, but with the usual sweat-drops on his brow, flour in his beard and ragged bits of soft dough clinging to his hands, came into the shop.

" 'Anything I can do for you, sir?' he said, with a smirk among his whiskers like a split in a flour-sack, but without rubbing his hands after the fashion of the commercial tribe (he was afraid of working the dough off, I suppose). 'Anything in the way of fresh bread, cake or— Good sakes, if it ain't Fred Polson!'

"His hand flew over the counter and the next second mine was immersed in dough.

" 'Why, where in the universt hev' you sprunged from? We all thought as you was dead long ago; but, chucky,

you were reshurrectined and came to life again after all. But jest come along in here and see the missus, and let's have a bit of a talk.'

"With a little wrench we got our hands separated, though his was a trifle lighter and mine that much heavier by the operation, and in a bustling, excited manner he led me into a neat, clean room at the back of the store, where a stout old lady wearing spectacles sat knitting by the stove.

" 'Missus, do yer know this feller ?'

" 'Lawks! if it ain't Mr. Polson come back !'

" And will you believe it, the old lady actually jumped from her seat and almost stove my ribs in with a hug and nearly split my cheek with a kiss. When their receptive enthusiasm had cooled down a little they would insist on hearing my story; nor would they let me leave them till they had stuffed me with confectionery and was enough to appal me with terrors of dyspepsia and nervous debility for a week to come."

When the laughter and comments on this episode had subsided, Mr. Longstreet said, "You seem in a story-telling mood to-night, Fred, and you might, whilst you are about it, just as well entertain us with the little narrative of how you beguiled Pancrack's lonely hours in your shanty in the wood."

"Oh, yes!" remarked Mr. Fane, "and that reminds me that you have never told us how you came in possession of that shanty."

"Well," said Fred, carefully peeling an apple, "I can tell you that in a few words. When that trial ended my mind was all in a whirl, and my chief desire was to get away from everybody. I went down to the station and caught a freight train going west. The conductor kindly gave me a passage in his caboose. Fortunately he didn't know me. He questioned me, however, about the trial, and I answered him as well as I could. Still, it made me feel uneasy, and when we reached the first railway-siding west of Bendigo I got off. There was a small hotel there, in which I met a man who was complaining much of having

been suddenly called to go away East for the winter. He said that he had a nice little shanty in the bush fixed up and furnished for the winter months. He asked me if I knew of anyone who wanted to buy such a place. This appeared to me to be an excellent opportunity of living in seclusion until my mind should grow settled again, and I eagerly asked him what he wanted for it. He named a very moderate price, which I paid him on the spot, and the next day, after loading myself with provisions from the grocery-store there, I went out and took possession of my woodland home."

He had hardly finished this narration when Uncle Nathan shuffled into the kitchen with two pails of milk. Mr. Dysart's new cook was a buxom, jolly woman of thirty, and poor Uncle was a constant butt for her merriment. When on this occasion he had set the milk pails on the floor in two different corners, he paused and stared at the stove with his mouth gravely pouted as if meditating on his future actions. He then turned the back of his right hand under till it looked like the inverted claw of a prodigious hen; and stooping his body, he pressed up his shoulders till they touched the lobes of his ears and completely concealed his neck. In this attitude he made the tour of the kitchen. He finally halted before the dining-room door which stood slightly ajar. This, and the sound of voices that came through it, seemed to afford him food for reflection, for he drew his form erect, his head shot out, drawing his wiry neck after it, and folding his arms across his breast he pursed his lips, wrinkled his forehead, jerked up his sandy goatee, and gazed at the door like one in lofty contemplation.

The cook tittered, and stole slyly up behind him with the handle of a broom pointing toward his back. A sudden touch made Uncle start as if he had been hit by a musket-shot. With a wild-cat spring he brushed aside the partly opened door, and landed in a sitting posture on the floor of the dining-room.

At first all heads were turned in alarm, but this motion

was immediately followed by a roar of laughter, and a chorus of voices calling :

"Hello, Uncle! Where did you spring from?"

Uncle's only reply was an elevation of the eyebrows, like the raising of two mounds of sand, and a threatening lift of the bristling edge of his thin goatee, whilst with his hands spread out on the floor he managed to maintain an upright seat.

"Get up, Uncle," said Mr. Dysart, when the laughter had subsided. "Here's some one you know."

Uncle sprang up like a jack-in-a-box, and with a jerk of his head cast his eyes wildly round the table. His eye caught Fred Polson's face.

"Hallo, Parlson. That you? Tho't you was killed, runaway or som'thin'."

And so saying he sprang toward Fred's chair, and seizing him by the collar with one hand, with the other inflicted on him a merciless hand-shaking, with a circular twist which threatened to screw our hero's shoulder out of joint, and, indeed, so much affected him that a tear stood in his eye; but whether of emotion or physical pain I will not say.

This action performed, Uncle was for making his exit almost as speedily as he had entered, but Mr. Dysart said :

"Stay, Uncle. Take an apple before you go."

There was a heaping dish of this rosy fruit standing on the table. Uncle darted back, and his open hand swooped like a huge clam toward it. He seized on one in the middle of the heap as an eagle grasps an acorn; but alas! not with an eagle's dexterity, for the quick push with which he seized it was too much for the crowded plate, and the apples went rolling all over the table.

This accident so agitated Uncle that he dropped the one in his hand, and it landed neatly on the corn that crowned his little toe. With a "whoop" of pain he sprang through the door in frantic flight, and skirmishing round the kitchen caught up the empty pails and dashed outside.

Soon after, the clashing of the tin pails growing fainter

in the distance as he banged them together in nervous agony, announced that Uncle was returning to the farm.

No other incident disturbed the harmony of the evening, and after supper Alice and Fred were left to a pleasant *tele-a-tete* in the little front parlor. Once more the rolling organ-strains mingled with the twittering of the birds in the calmness of the dusk, and died in lingering melody over the placid lake. But other fingers played that music now. White and still were the little hands that had charmed him once. Closed and dark were the bright child-eyes that had looked so gravely questioning into his, and still as the dumb earth in which she lay was the sweet voice once vibrant with peace and love. And yet, as Fred Polson looked toward the place where the trees were growing green above her grave; as he listened to the music and the bird-song; as he gazed on the tender glories of the sunset sky just flushing the peaceful water, in his heart he thanked God for the evil as well as for the good, for the tears as well as for the smiles, that had brought him to his present inexpressible bliss.

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## CHAPTER LX.

### THE BLISS OF THE WEALTHY.

JULIUS HATTON sat in his new counting-house in a seaport town in the south of England. When he returned from Canada he found his business affairs in a flourishing condition (for usury is a cancer that ever spreads), but for certain politic reasons he deemed it expedient to remove his establishment to a distant town. Here his business gave promise of enlargement to a greater height of prosperity than he had ever dreamed of before; and this, together with a knowledge of the evils he had escaped, consoled him for the loss of the Laxton estate—for he had learned that the executors of his grandfather's will did not consider Frederick Polson at all disqualified.



Still Julius Hatton had been in remarkably good humor since his return. He lived well and had even begun to grow stout. His clerks remarked that his European tour had benefited him wonderfully.

On the day of which I speak he sat alone in a little office at the back of his counting-house, sometimes reckoning up profits with greedy eyes, and anon pausing and humming a tune as he rapped the desk with his fingers. Around his feet were two or three overcrowded waste-paper baskets which had emptied part of their contents on the dusty floor, adding disorder to dirt. Before him on the desk were scattered papers of all sizes and all degrees of age—some yellow, some thumb-marked and a few of them clean. Yet among all this litter Mr. Julius Hatton seemed perfectly happy. As he thought of his adventures during the past few months a smile lighted up his face, and he rubbed his hands with a chuckle of self-congratulation.

"Ha, ha! I got out of it finely, didn't I? Polson might have made it hot for me, but I twisted my tongue round the crack-pot, and I believe he was only too glad to give me the slip. Then the wily widow—she thought she had me, but I left her nicely, didn't I? Just to think what a parcel of fools I have lived among. Ha, ha, ha!"

And in a fit of humorous inspiration he tapped the desk with his fingers as if it had been a piano, and hummed:

"And if she'd have thee murmur 'Yea,'  
Why then's the time to leave her."

The door opened, and a pen-nib closely followed by a clerkly-looking head peeped in, and a squeaky voice called out:

"A lady wishes to see you, sir."

"What is her name?"

"She won't give it, sir. Says she wants to see you alone."

"All right. Tell her to come in."

The clerk disappeared and the door closed.

"Um!" muttered Hatton sharpening a pencil ready for business. "Won't give her name, eh? I suppose it's some would-be-respectable wife of a drunkard who wants to get a mortgage on the sly. Well, she's welcome. I deal with plenty of her kind, but she mustn't object to paying pretty dearly for the privilege of secrecy."

Again the door opened very quietly, and a tall thin lady stepped softly into the office and closed the door behind her. Her face was veiled, but something in her demeanor filled Julius Hatton with strange uneasiness.

"Take a seat, madam," he said with awkward courtesy. "Anything I can—"

The veil was flung back, and Julius Hatton, leaving his sentence unfinished, sprang from his seat and retreated in terrified amazement to the farther end of the room.

The face thus suddenly revealed was that of Mrs. Bant, and it looked more cruel and waspish than ever. Her thin steely lips were pressed in a little white strip between her sharp nose and pointed chin. Her hard white cheeks were hollow like those of a stone figure on a tomb, and her black eyes glittered with vindictive triumph. She glided smoothly and noiselessly to within a few feet of where the craven Hatton, with pale face and wide, terrified eyes, pushed his back against the wall as if he would willingly force a retreat through it.

"Aha! you know me now," she hissed in a tone terribly audible to Hatton, but too low to be heard by the clerks on the other side of the partition.

"However did *you* get here?" he managed to gasp at last.

"Ho, ho!" She laughed a very bitter little laugh. "How did I get here? You thought you would escape me, did you? But you must know, Julius Hatton, that I am not a woman to be played with a little and then cast aside like a child's doll. I have followed you here to make you keep your troth."

Hatton looked at the ground and rubbed his hands helplessly together, but said nothing.

"You were very cute, weren't you," she added sneer-

ingly, "to run away so quietly? But unfortunately for you I knew your real name and occupation, and so I followed you to England."

"But how on earth did you find me here?" faltered Hatton, his curiosity sufficiently aroused to prompt him to speak.

"Oh, you need not think that was so very difficult, Mr. Hatton. The directory is a very useful guide in a man-hunt, and I knew that you were too fond of money not to return to your old practice. There are many Julius Hattons in England and many money-lenders, but, as it happens, there are not many Julius Hattons *among* the money-lenders. However, I have already visited two of your name in that profession in different parts of the country. In these I was mistaken, but now I have found you."

"Whatever do you want with me?" asked Hatton with a whine.

"I want you to fulfil your promise and marry me."

He groaned. "But I tell you I was crazy when I asked you," he whined. "I hardly knew what I was doing. I don't want to marry you."

Mrs. Bant's offended pride rose at these remarks.

"You don't want to marry me!" she said; "but I tell you, Julius Hatton, you *must* marry me. Or if you refuse to I will sue you for breach of promise; I will expose your doings in Canada and ruin your name and business forever."

"But I tell you it's no use," he said in sickly protest. "We should never get along together, and it would do you no good to expose me. As for breach of promise, I tell you what I will do. If you will promise to say no more about this matter and leave here quietly, I will give you a thousand pounds."

"A thousand pounds!" she echoed scornfully. And then suddenly changing her tactics she repeated it in a broken voice.

"A thousand pounds! As if that scrap of paltry pelf could atone for broken promises! As if money could soothe my blighted heart and ruined hopes! As if—"

At this point her feelings seemed to completely overcome her, for she sank on an office stool and covering her face with her hands began to sob aloud :

"Oh, Julius! How can you—how can you be so heartless and cruel? To teach me to love you so and then to desert me like this. Oh, dear, oh, dear! I wish I were dead and buried."

The rising tone of her lamentations alarmed Hatton, who walked toward her and bending over her whispered entreatingly :

"Hush, hush! Be quiet or the clerks will hear you."

At the sound of his voice she ceased to sob and looked up winningly into his face. The tears, by softening the harshness of her expression, improved her beauty, and she laid her hand tenderly on Hatton's arm as of old.

"Oh, Julius," she said softly, "you did not mean it, did you? I might have known you were only testing the strength of my affection. You love me yet, don't you, dear?"

And these tactics proved successful. With winsome smiles and tender words she melted his stubborn will, and before their interview was ended he said :

"When you leave here go to your hotel, get your child and what baggage you may need, and go to London, without, if possible, allowing anyone to see your face. In a week's time (during which I shall make known my intention of marrying a lady whom I met on my recent tour) I shall follow you and we shall be married quietly by special license; and when the ceremony is over I shall bring you back here as my wife." And so it was.

They live in a large house in the middle of the town, surrounded by every luxury which cruelly-accumulating wealth can supply. Their horses prance along the street like things of flesh and fire; their emblazoned carriages glitter in the sun; their footmen in gorgeous liveries sit behind; and a coachman, gleaming with buttons of brass, sits before. Their house is furnished with a splendor cold from its very stateliness; their entertainments are sumptuous and resplendent. What though the

coins they handle are dampened with the life-blood of wretched beings who toil to support this pomp? Are not their glaring charities ostentatious and magnificent? And so the poor duped world for a time will say, "What happy people are these, and how good! How much more generous Mr. Hatton has become since he married that beautiful lady! and how fond they are of each other!"

So thinks the shallow outer world, but let us prick through the glowing rind of this Dead-sea fruit, and taste of the bitter ashes within.

A man and woman have been chained together by most holy vows, but coldness has increased with knowledge, and their former pledges of love have beaten back upon their hearts like flakes of snow, encrusting and isolating them from each other. But their minds are active still. In his is the eager desire to amass and hoard wealth, thwarted and embittered by the woman's overmastering pride and love of display. And in the spirit of the woman is locked the sting of bitter disdain for him whom neither persuasion nor reproach can raise above the sordid level in which his nature is imbedded.

From this loveless union little children emanate in time. They are fed on the richest viands, and clothed in gaudy splendor, yet often when guests are absent they huddle together in corners and out-of-way places and speak in terrified whispers of "pa" and "ma"; and many, many bitter tears they shed. For it is in seasons when home should be most hallowed by love and kindness that the father casts aside his worldly mask and the sullen family face appears, and then does the mother throw off the social hood and the brow of frowning scorn is seen.

Even so with united hands and sundered hearts they tread life's weary way; for in them it is made manifest that "The desire of the covetous is death: and by the breath of their own nostrils the wicked are consumed." And well have they realized with the wise king of old, that "The treasures of wickedness profit nothing; and that their gathering is but vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death."

## EPILOGUE.

AND THIS IS THE END.

## IMAGINATION!

I can fancy many of my readers exercising theirs in picturing the future lives of Fred Polson and his wife.

You, my masculine friend, see Fred prominent in the world of politics or commerce; you see him as the wealthy landlord of Laxton estate, with riches rolling at his feet; you see him served on every hand by servants coming readily at his call; you see the well-kept stable stocked with the finest steeds; you see him foremost in the hunt and a lion on the race-course; you see him hobnobbing with the great, and far above the lowly—you see him, in short, in that fool's paradise which lies beyond the borders of toil.

And you, my reader of the gentler sex, what see you?

A mansion most daintily and beautifully furnished; gorgeous silken raiments and galaxies of mirrors reflecting Mrs. Polson's beauty on every side. You see the gilded carriage rolling up the gravel drive, and the obsequious footman standing by the door; you see the brilliantly-lighted ball-room, where wealth and beauty dazzle the eye and intoxicate the sense; you see the rich banquet of which flattering guests daintily partake, and you glory over the charity which consigns its scraps to the poor; you see walls adorned with costly paintings, and niches filled with voluptuous sculpture, and you hear the notes of piano and organ vibrating through the frescoed halls. All that can dazzle the eye, enchant the ear, and ravish the mind, you see; and *some* of these things, perhaps, are theirs. But, my reader, such is *not* their reward.

Laxton Hall truly is theirs, and the banner of England floats proudly on the breeze that blows over its pinnacled turrets. The fair green fields, the blooming gardens and the bosky woodlands are also theirs; but here let us pause.



No pampered menials clad in gaudy livery tread those spacious halls; no sleek, well-groomed steeds snort through idle hours in the roomy stalls; no dainty-faced lady's-maid trips down the oaken stairs, or coquets with the lily-fingered page; no apathetic lap-dogs rest on a mistress's knee; no jealous mastiff warns the stranger from its doors. Yet think not that the place is wholly desolate. Of laborers there are plenty; idlers there are none. The flowers in the blossoming garden fill the air with beauty and sweet perfume. The lawns around it are soft and green. The well-kept walks are level and dry. On all sides everything is orderly and trim, and kept so from the rental fund of the estate.

I do not say that all Fred Polson's plans for the improvement of his people were entirely successful. He met with many disappointments, as all true reformers must; and, as is ever the case, these failures were glazed over and magnified by the scoffers as further examples of philanthropic folly. Yet he was not disheartened, for well he knew that no man can attempt to wrestle with human obstinacy and ignorance without some overthrow. Yet he did his best, and his doings were not wholly without effect. The rhetoric of a noble life and virtuous actions must always find its hearers, nor can its teaching ever be wholly futile. The charity which costs no self-denial may evoke a thankful word, but the altar of self-sacrifice yet claims the truest worshippers.

And she who presides over this home—What of her?

See that plainly-dressed little woman with the quiet, expressive face. No golden bracelet clasps her wrist, no pearly string surrounds her neck, no weighty jewels dangle from her ears nor gaudy silks enwrap her form—yet is she clothed with a beauty these cannot give. The ornament of a meek and loving spirit adorns her. "Her eyes are homes of silent prayer;" the touch of her hands is instinct with soothing sweetness, and the soft tread of her feet brings music into many a saddened heart. And when she goes among the afflicted ones whom she welcomes to her home, the groans of anguish become faint, and murmuring

lips cease to complain, and a gentle smile rests upon the sufferer's face when the meek glory of her eyes falls on it. Her life is very full, and happy (as it could only be) in its fulness. With her own hands she toils among her assistants, disdaining not the meanest work—if any useful labor may be called mean—and so learns to live in fellowship and sympathy with those whom Providence has placed beneath her. What though the home labor has wrinkled her shapely hands? Are they not fairer in the sight of heaven for that? What though her brow will sometimes ache, and her feet sometimes be weary? Does she not possess that peace of heart which is the perfect rest? What though at times she is called upon to wait upon her servants' wants? Did not her Lord even so? And surely for all these things she better enjoys that pleasant evening hour when her husband, sitting by her side, speaks to her so softly as "Wife," and little arms twine round her neck and a sweet voice murmurs "Mother."

Much more I could say of the life of this man and woman, but let it suffice that you have seen them thus. Their happiness is not of the transient pleasures which wealth can supply or ease can give, but it consists in that peace of mind which the world can neither give nor take away. Their ease is the rest that can come only from toil; their plaudits are the silent prayers of grateful hearts; their coronet is the glory of good deeds which shines about them; their songs of triumph are the harmonies of hearts in perfect peace; and these things they have won by their labors of love.

And, my dear reader, believe me that if we, too, do this we also shall dwell in peace below, and when these voices are silent and these hands are still, better shall we be able to meet the shining spirits who will greet us as equals and friends when we pass through the gates of the Eternal City.

THE END.

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