

GOODWIN CHARLES CARROLL

THE COMSTOCK CLUB

Charles Goodwin
The Comstock Club

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=24937461

The Comstock Club:

Содержание

CHAPTER I	4
CHAPTER II	29
CHAPTER III	39
CHAPTER IV	54
CHAPTER V	60
CHAPTER VI	70
CHAPTER VII	84
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	86

C. C. Goodwin

The Comstock Club

CHAPTER I

"The pioneer! Who shall fitly tell the story of his life and work?

"The soldier leads an assault; it lasts but a few minutes; he knows that whether he lives or dies, immortality will be his reward. What wonder that there are brave soldiers!

"But when this soldier of peace assaults the wilderness, no bugles sound the charge; the forest, the desert, the wild beast, the savage, the malaria, the fatigue, are the foes that lurk to ambush him, and if, against the unequal odds, he falls, no volleys are fired above him; the pitiless world merely sponges his name from its slate.

"Thus he blazes the trails, thus he fells the trees, thus he plants his rude stakes, thus he faces the hardships, and whatever fate awaits him, his self-contained soul keeps its finger on his lips, and no lamentations are heard.

"He smooths the rugged fields, he turns the streams, and the only cheer that is his is when he sees the grain ripen, and the flowers bloom where before was only the frown of the wilderness. When over the trail that he has blazed, enlightenment

comes joyously, with unsoiled sandals, and homes and temples spring up on the soil that was first broken by him, his youth is gone, hope has been chastened into silence within him; he realizes that he is but a back number.

"Not one in a thousand realizes the texture of the manhood that has been exhausting itself within him; few comprehend his nature or have any conception of his work.

"But he is content. The shadows of the wilderness have been chased away; the savage beast and savage man have retired before him; nature has brought her flowers to strew the steps of his old age; in his soul he feels that somewhere the record of his work and of his high thoughts has been kept; and so he smiles upon the younger generation and is content.

"May that contentment be his to the end."

It was an anniversary night in Pioneer Hall, in Virginia City, Nevada, one July night in 1878, and the foregoing were the closing words of a little impromptu speech that Alex Strong had delivered.

A strange, many-sided man was Alex Strong. He was an Argonaut. When the first tide set in toward the Golden Coast, he, but a lad, with little save a pony and a gun, joined a train that had crossed the Missouri and was headed westward.

The people in the company looked upon him as a mere boy, but, later, when real hardships were encountered and sickness came, the boy became the life of the company. When women and children drooped under the burdens and the fear of the

wilderness, it was his voice that cheered them on; his gun secured the tender bit of antelope or grouse to tempt their failing appetites; his songs drove away the silence of the desert. He was for the company a lark at morn, a nightingale at night.

Arriving in California, he sought the hills. When his claim would not pay he indicted scornful songs to show his "defiance of luck." Some of these were published in the mountain papers, and then a few people knew that somewhere in miner's garb a genius was hiding. Amid the hills, in his cabin, he was an incessant reader, and with his books, his friction against men and in the study of nature's mighty alphabet, as left upon her mountains, with the going by of the years he rounded into a cultured, alert, sometimes pathetic and sometimes boisterous man, but always a shrewd, all-around man of affairs.

When we greet him he had been for several years a brilliant journalist.

He had jumped up to make a little speech in Pioneer Hall, and the last words of his speech are given above.

When he had finished another pioneer, Colonel Savage, was called upon. He was always prepared to make a speech. He delighted, moreover, in taking the opposite side to Strong. So springing to his feet, he cried out:

"Too serious are the words of my friend. What of hardships, when youth, the beautiful, walks by one's side! What of danger when one feels a young heart throbbing in his breast!

"Who talks of loneliness while as yet no fetter has been welded

upon hope, while yet the unexplored and unpeopled portions of God's world beckon the brave to come to woo and to possess them!

"The pioneers were not unhappy. The air is still filled with the echoes of the songs that they sung; their bright sayings have gone into the traditions; the impression which they made upon the world is a monument which will tell of their achievements, record their sturdy virtues and exalt their glorified names."

As the Colonel ceased and some one else was called upon to talk, Strong motioned to Savage and both noiselessly sought some vacant seats in the rear of the hall.

Colonel Savage was another genius. He was a young lawyer in New York when the first news of gold discoveries in California was carried to that city. He, with a hundred others, chartered a bark that was lying idle in the harbor, had her fitted up and loaded, and in her made a seven months' voyage around the Cape to San Francisco. He was the most versatile of the Argonauts. Every mood of poor human nature found a response in him. At a funeral he shamed the mourners by the sadness of his face; at a festival he added a sparkle to the wines; he could convulse a saloon with a story; he could read a burial service with a pathos that stirred every heart, and so his life ran on until when we find him he had been several years a leading member of a brighter bar than ever before was seen in a town of the size of Virginia City.

He was a tall, handsome man, his face was classical, and all his bearing, even when all unbent, was that of a high-born, self-

contained and self-respecting man.

Strong, on the other hand, was of shorter stature; his face was the perfect picture of mirthfulness; there was a wonderful magnetism in his smile and hand-clasp; but when in repose a close look at his face revealed, below the mirthfulness, that calm which is the close attendant upon conscious power.

As they reached their seats Alex spoke:

"You were awfully good to-night, Colonel."

"Of course; I always am. But what has awakened your appreciation to-night?"

"I thought my speech was horrible."

"For once it would require a brave man to doubt your judgment," said the Colonel, sententiously.

"I was sure of it until I heard you speak; then I recovered my self-respect, believing that, by comparison, my speech would ring in the memories of the listeners, like a psalm."

"You mean Sam, the town-crier and bootblack. His brain is a little weak, but his lungs are superb."

"I believe you are jealous of his voice, Colonel. But sit down: I want to tell you about the most unregenerate soul on earth."

"Proceed, Alex, only do not forget that under the merciful statutes of the State of Nevada no man is obliged to make statements which will criminate himself."

"What a comfort that knowledge must be to you."

"It often is. My heart is full of sympathy for the unfortunate, and more than once have I seen eyes grow bright when I have

given that information to a client."

"The study of that branch of law must have had a peculiar fascination to you."

"Indeed, it did, Alex. At every point where the law draws the shield of its mercy around the accused, in thought it seemed made for one or another of my friends, and, mentally, I found myself defending one after the other of them."

"Did you, at the same time, keep in thought the fact that in an emergency the law permits a man to plead his own cause?"

"Never, on my honor. In those days my life was circumspect, even as it now is, and my associates – not as now – were so genteel that there was no danger of any suspicion attaching to me, because of the people I was daily seen with."

"That was good for you, but what sort of reputations did your associates have?" asked Alex.

"They went on from glory to glory. One became a conductor on a railroad, and in four years, at a salary of one hundred dollars per month, retired rich. One became a bank cashier, and three years later, through the advice of his physicians, settled in the soft climate of Venice, with which country we have no extradition treaty. Another one is a broker here in this city, and I am told, is doing so well that he hopes next year to be superintendent of a mine."

"Why have you not succeeded better, Colonel, financially?"

"I am too honest. Every day I stop law suits which I ought to permit to go on. Every day I do work for nothing which I ought

to charge for. I tell you, Alex, I would sooner be right than be President."

"I cannot, just now, recall any one who knows you, Colonel, who does not feel the same way about you."

"That is because the most of my friends are dull, men, like yourself. But how prospers that newspaper?"

"It is the same old, steady grind," replied Alex, thoughtfully. "I saw a blind horse working in a whim yesterday. As he went round and round, there seemed on his face a look of anxiety to find out how much longer that road of his was, and I said to him, compassionately: 'Old Spavin, you know something of what it is to work on a daily paper.' I went to the shaft and watched the buckets as they came up, and there was only one bucket of ore to ten buckets of waste. Then I went back to the horse and said to him: 'You do not know the fact, you blissfully ignorant old brute, but your work is mightily like ours, one bucket of ore to ten of waste.'"

"How would you like to have me write an editorial for your paper?"

"I should be most grateful," was the reply.

"On what theme?"

"Oh, you might make your own selection."

"How would you like an editorial on – scoundrels?"

"It would, with your experience, be truthfully written, doubtless, but Colonel, it is only now and then in good taste for a man to supply the daily journals with his own autobiography."

"How modest you are. You did not forget that, despite the impersonality of journalism, you would have the credit of the article."

"No, I was afraid of that credit, and I am poor enough now, Colonel; but really, that credit does not count. If, for five days in the week, I make newspapers, which my judgment tells me are passably good, it appears to me the only use that is made of them is for servant girls to kindle fires with, and do up their bangs in: but if, on the sixth day, my heart is heavy and my brain thick, and the paper next morning is poor, it seems to me that everybody in the camp looks curiously at me, as if to ascertain for a certainty, whether or no, I am in the early stages of brain softening."

"A reasonable suspicion, I fancy, Alex; but what do you think of your brother editors of this coast as men and writers?"

"Most of them are good fellows, and bright writers. If you knew under what conditions some of them work, you would take off your hat every time you met them."

"To save my hat?" queried the Colonel. "But whom do you consider the foremost editor of the coast?"

"There is no such person. Men with single thoughts and purposes, are, as a rule, the men who make marks in this world. For instance, just now, the single purpose of James G. Fair, is to make money through mining. Hence, he is a great miner, and he, now and then, I am told, manages to save a few dollars in the business. The dream of C. P. Huntington is to make money through railroads, so he builds roads, that he may collect more

fares and freights, and he collects more fares and freights so that he may build more roads, and I believe, all in all, that he is the ablest, if not the coldest and most pitiless, railroad man in the world. The ruling thought of Andy Barlow is to be a fighter, and he can draw and shoot in the space of a lightning's flash. The dream of George Washington, he having no children, was to create and adopt a nation which should at once be strong and free, and the result is, his grave is a shrine. But, as the eight notes of the scale, in their combinations, fill the world with music – or with discords, so the work of an editor covers all the subjects on which men have ever thought, or ever will think, and the best that any one editor can do is to handle a few subjects well. Among our coast editors there is one with more marked characteristics, more flashes of genius, in certain directions, more contradictions and more pluck than any other one possesses.

"That one is Henry Mighels, of Carson. I mention him because I have been thinking of him all day, and because I fear that his work is finished. The last we heard of him, was, that he was disputing with the surgeons in San Francisco, they telling him that he was fatally ill, and he, offering to wager two to one that they were badly mistaken."

"Poor Henry," mused the Colonel; "he is a plucky man. I heard one of our rich men once try to get him to write something, or not to write something, I have forgotten which, and when Mighels declined to consent, the millionaire told him he was too poor to be so exceedingly independent. Here Mighels, in a low

voice, which sounded to me like the purr of a tiger, said: 'You are quite mistaken, you do not know how rich I am. I have that little printing office at Carson; paper enough to last me for a week or ten days. I have a wife and three babies,' and then suddenly raising his voice, to the dangerous note, and bringing his fist down on the table before him with a crash, he shouted, '*and they are all mine!*'

"The rich man looked at him, and, smiling, said: 'Don't talk like a fool, Mighels.' The old humor was all back in Mighels' face in an instant, as he replied, 'Was I talking like a fool, old man? What a sublime faculty I have of exactly gauging my conversation to the mental grasp of my listener!' But, Alex, do you not think there is a great deal of humbug about the much vaunted power of the press?"

"There's gratitude for you. You ask *me* such a question as that."

"And why not?" inquired the Colonel.

"You won a great suit last week, did you not – the case of Jones vs. Smith?"

"Yes. It was wonderful; let me tell you about it."

"No; spare me," cried Alex. "But how much did you receive for winning that case?"

"I received a cool ten thousand dollars."

"And you still ask about the influence of the press?"

"Yes. Why should I not?"

"Sure enough, why should you not? If you will stop and think

you will know that three months ago you could not have secured a jury in the State that would have given you that verdict. There was a principle on trial that public opinion was pronounced against in a most marked manner. The press took up the discussion and fought it out. At length it carried public opinion with it. That thing has been done over and over right here. At the right time, your case, which hung upon that very point, was called. You think you managed it well. It was simply a walkover for you. The men with the Fabers had done the work for you. The jury unconsciously had made up their minds before they heard the complaint in the case read. The best thoughts in your argument you had unconsciously stolen from the newspapers, and the judge, looking as wise as an Arctic owl, unconsciously wrung half an editorial into his charge. You received ten thousand dollars, and to the end of his days your client will tell (heaven forgive his stupidity) what a lawyer you are, but ask him his opinion of newspaper men and he will shrug his shoulders, scowl, and with a donkey's air of wisdom, answer: 'Oh, they are necessary evils. We want the local news and the dispatches, and we have to endure them.'

"I am glad you robbed him, Colonel. I wish you could rob them all. If a child is born to one of them we have to tell of it, and mention delicately how noble the father is and how lovely the mother is. If one of them dies we have to jeopardize our immortal souls trying to make out a character for him. They want us every day; we hold up their business and their reputations,

beginning at the cradle, ending only at the grave."

"What kind of character would you give me, were I to die?"

"Try it, Colonel! Try it! And if 'over the divide' it should be possible for you to look back and read the daily papers, when your shade gets hold of my notice, I promise you it shall be glad that you are dead."

"But what about that unregenerate soul that you were going to tell me of – has some broker sold out some widow's stocks?"

"No: worse than that."

"Has some one burglarized some hospital or orphan asylum?" suggested the Colonel.

"Oh, no. Old Angus Jacobs, you know, is rich. Among strangers he parades his thin veneering of reading, and poses as though all his vaults were stuffed with reserves of knowledge. Well, while East last spring, he ran upon a distinguished publisher there, with whom he agreed that he would, on his return, write and send for publication an article on the West.

"He came and begged me to write it, confessing that he had deceived the publisher, and asserting that, he must keep up the deception, or the integrity of the West would be injured in the estimation of that publisher.

"I went to work, wrote an article, became enthused as I wrote, wrote it over, spent as much as three solid days upon it, and when it was finished I looked upon my work, and lo, it was good.

"Then, at my own expense, I had it carefully copied and gave the copy to old Angus. He sent it East. To-day he received a

dozen copies and a letter of profuse praise and thanks from the publisher.

"I saw the old thief give one of the copies to a literary man from San Francisco, telling him, cheerfully, as he did, that he dashed the article off hastily, that most of the language was crude and awkward, but it might entertain him a little on the train going to San Francisco."

"I never heard of anything meaner or more depraved than that," indignantly remarked the Colonel, "except when I read the funeral service over an old Dutchman's child once, in Downieville. Speaking of it afterward, the old Hessian said:

"'Dot Colonel's reading vos fine, but he dond vos haf dot prober look uf regret vot he ought to haf had' – but here comes the Professor."

Professor Stoneman joined the pair, and when the greetings were over the Professor said:

"I am just in from Eastern Nevada: went to Eureka to examine a mine owned by a jolly miner named Moore. It is a good one, too – a contact vein between lime and quartzite. The fellow worked, running a tunnel, all winter, and now he has struck, and cross-cut, his vein. It is fully seven feet thick, and rich. I asked him how he felt when at last he cut the vein.

"'How did I feel, Professor,' he said, 'how did I feel? Why, General Jackson's overcoat would not have made a paper collar for me.'

"There are a great many queer characters out that way. Moore

is not a very well educated man. In Eureka I was telling about the mine – that Moore ought to make a fortune out of it – when a man standing by, a stranger to me, stretched up both his arms and cried: 'A fortune! Look at it, now! Moore is so unspeakably ignorant that he could not spell out the name of the Savior if it were written on White Pine Mountain in letters bigger than the Coast Range. But he strikes it rich! His kind always do.' Then he added, bitterly: 'If I could find a chimpanzee, I would draw up articles of copartnership with him in fifteen minutes.'

"And then a quiet fellow, who was present, said: 'Jim, maybe the chimpanzee, after taking a good look at you, would not stand it.'

"I was sitting in a barroom there one day, and a man was talking about the Salmon River mines, and insisting that they were more full of promise than anything in Nevada, when another man in the crowd earnestly said:

"If my brother were to write me that it was a good country, and advise me to come up there, I would not believe him.'

"Quick as lightning, still another man responded: 'If we all knew your brother as well as you do, maybe none of us would believe him.'

"That is the way they spend their time out there. But I secured some lovely specimens: specimens of ore, rare shells, some of the finest specimens of mirabilite of lead that I ever saw. It is a most interesting region. But I don't agree entirely with Clarence King on the geology of the district. You see King's theory is – "

"Oh, hold on, Professor," said the Colonel, "it does not lack an hour of midnight. You have not time, positively. Heigh ho. Here is Wright. How is the mine, Wright?"

"About two hundred tons lighter than it was this morning, I reckon," replied Wright.

"But tell us about the mine, Wright," said Alex, impatiently. "How is the temperature?"

"How is your health?" responded Wright, jocularly. "If you do not expect to live long, you might come down and take some preparatory lessons; that is, if you anticipate joining the majority of newspaper men."

"No, no; you are mistaken," said Alex. "You mean the Colonel. He is a lawyer, you know."

"It is the Professor that needs the practice," chimed in the Colonel. "Just imagine him 'down below,' explaining to the gentleman in green how similar the formation is to a hot drift that he once found in the Comstock."

"I will tell you a hotter place than any drift in the Comstock," said the Professor. "Put all the money that you have into stocks, having a dead pointer from a friend who is posted, buy on a margin, and then have the stocks begin to go down; that will start the perspiration on you."

"We have all been in that drift," said Alex.

"Indeed, we have," responded Wright.

"I have lived in that climate for twelve years. One or two winters it kept me so warm that I did not need an overcoat or

watch, so I loaned them to – 'mine uncle,'" remarked the Colonel.

"But, do you know any points on stocks, Wright?"

"No, not certainly, Alex. I heard some rumors last night and ordered 100 Norcross this morning. Some of the boys think it will jump up three or four dollars in the next ten days."

"I took in a block of Utah yesterday. They are getting down pretty deep, and there is lots of unexplored ground in that mine," said the Colonel, quietly.

The Professor, looking serious, said: "I have all my money the other way, in Justice and Silver Hill. They are not deep enough in the north end yet."

Alex got up from his chair. "You are all mistaken," said he, "Overman is the best buy, but it is growing late and I must go to work. What shift are you on, Wright?"

"I go on at seven in the morning. By the way, you should come up of an evening to our Club. We would be glad to see all three of you."

"And pray, what do you mean by your Club?" asked the Colonel.

"Why," said Wright, "I thought you knew. Three or four of us miners met up here one night last month. Joe Miller was in the party, and as we were drinking beer and talking about stocks, Miller proposed that we should hire a vacant house on the divide – the old Beckley House – and give up the boarding and lodging houses. We talked it all over, how shameful we had been going on, how we were spending all our money, how, if we had the

house, we could save fifty or sixty dollars a month, and eat what we pleased, do what we pleased, and have a place in which to pass our leisure time without going to the saloons; so we picked up three or four more men, and, on last pay-day, moved in – seven of us in all – each man bringing his own chair, blankets and food. The latter, of course, was all put into common stock, and Miller had fixed everything else. Since then we have been getting along jolly."

"But who makes up your company?" inquired Alex.

"Oh, you know the whole outfit," answered Wright. "There is Miller, as I told you; there are, besides, Tom Carlin, old man Brewster, Herbert Ashley, Sammy Harding, Barney Corrigan and myself."

"It is a good crowd; but you are not all working in the same mine, are you?" said the Professor, inquiringly.

"Oh, no. Brewster is running a power-drill in the Bullion. He is a mechanic, you know, and not a real miner. Miller and Harding are in the Curry, Barney is in the Norcross, Carlin and Ashley are in the Imperial, and I in the Savage. But we all happen to be on the same shift, so, for this month at least, we have our evenings together."

"It must be splendid," enthusiastically remarked the Colonel.

"How do you spend your evenings?" asked Alex.

"We talk on all subjects except politics. That subject, we agreed at the start, should not be discussed. We read and compare notes on stocks."

"How do you manage about your cooking?" queried the Professor.

"We have a Chinaman, who is a daisy. He is cook, housekeeper, chambermaid, and would be companion and musician if we could stand it. You must come up and see us."

"I will come to-morrow evening," Alex replied, eagerly.

"So will I," said the Colonel, with a positiveness that was noticeable.

"And so will I," shouted the Professor.

Just then the eleven o'clock whistles sounded up and down the lead. "That is our signal for retiring," said Wright, "and so good night."

"Let us go out and take a night cap, first," said the Colonel.

"Well, if I must," said Wright. "Though the rule of our Club is only a little for medicine."

The night caps were ordered and swallowed. Then the men separated, the Colonel, Professor and Wright going home, the journalist to his work.

Professor Stoneman was a character. Tall and spare, with such an outline as Abraham Lincoln had. He was fifty years of age, with grave and serene face when in repose, and with the mien of one of the faculty of a university. Still he had that nature which caused him when a boy to run away from his Indiana home to the Mexican war, and he fought through all that long day at Buena Vista, a lad of eighteen years. Of course he was with the first to reach California. He had tried mining and many other things,

but the deeper side of his nature was to pursue the sciences – the lighter to mingle with good fellows. He would tell a story one moment and the next would combat a scientific theory with the most learned of the Eastern scientists, and carry away from the controversy the full respect of his opponent. There was a great fund of merriment within him, and his generosity not only kept his bank account a minus number, but moreover, kept his heart aching that he had no more to give. When by himself he was an incessant student, and beside knowing all that the books taught, he had his own ideas of their correctness, especially those that deal with the formation of ore deposits. He was a learned writer, a gifted lecturer and an expert of mines, and, over all, the most genial of men.

Adrian Wright was of another stamp altogether. He was tall and strong, with large feet and hands, a massive man in all respects, and forty-five years of age.

He had a cool and brave gray eye, a firm, strong mouth, very light brown hair and carried always with him a something which first impressed those who saw him with his power, while a second look gave the thought that beside the power which was visible, he had unmeasured reserves of concealed force which he could call upon on demand.

He went an uncultured lad to California. He was at first a placer miner. Obtaining a good deal of money he became a mountain trader and the owner of a ditch, which supplied some hydraulic grounds. He was brusque in his address, said "whar"

and "thar," but his head was large and firmly poised; his heart was warm as a child's, and he was loved for his clear, good sense and for the sterling manhood which was apparent in all his ways. Though uncultured in the schools, he had read a great deal, and, mixing much with men, his judgment had matured, until in his mountain hamlet his word had become an authority.

His friends persuaded him to become a candidate for the State Legislature. After he had consented to run he spent a good deal of money in the campaign. He was elected and went to Sacramento. There he was persuaded to buy largely of Comstock stocks. He bought on a margin. When it came time to put up more money he could not without borrowing. He would not do that through fear that he could not pay. He lost the stocks. He went home in the spring to find that his clerks had given large credits to miners; the hydraulic mines ceased to pay, which rendered his ditch property valueless, and a few days later his store burned down. When his debts were paid he had but a few hundred dollars left. He said nothing about his reverses, but went to Virginia City and for several years had been working in the mines.

As already said, a miners' mess had been formed. Seven miners on the Comstock might be picked out who would pretty nearly represent the whole world.

This band had been drawn together partly because of certain traits that they possessed in common, though they were each distinctly different from all the others.

We have read of Wright. Of the others, James Brewster, was

the eldest of the company. He was fifty years of age, and from Massachusetts. He was not tall, but was large and powerful.

There were streaks of gray in his hair, but his eyes were clear, and black as midnight. He had a bold nose and invincible mouth; the expression of his whole face was that of a resolute, self-contained, but kindly nature. All his movements were quick and positive.

He was educated, and though of retiring ways, when he talked everybody near him listened. He was not a miner, but a mechanical engineer, and his work was the running of power drills in the mine. He never talked much of his own affairs, but it was understood that misfortune in business had caused him to seek the West somewhat late in life. The truth was he had never been rich. He possessed a moderately prosperous business until a long illness came to his wife, and when the depression which followed the reaction from the war and the contraction of the currency fell upon the North, he found he had little left, and so sought a new field.

He was the Nestor of the Club and was exceedingly loved by his companions.

Miller, who first proposed the Club, was a New Yorker by birth, a man forty-five years of age, medium height, keen gray eyes, a clear-cut, sharp face, slight of build, but all nerve and muscle, and lithe as a panther. He had been for a quarter of a century on the west coast, and knew it well from British Columbia to Mexico, and from the Rocky Mountains to the

Pacific.

He was given a good education in his youth; he had mingled with all sorts of men and been engaged in all kinds of business. There was a perpetual flash to his eyes, and a restlessness upon him which made him uneasy if restrained at all. He had the reputation of being inclined to take desperate chances sometimes, but was honorable, thoroughly, and generous to a fault.

He had studied men closely, and of Nature's great book he was a constant reader. He knew the voices of the forests and of the streams; he had a theory that the world was but a huge animal; that if we were but wise enough to understand, we should hear from Nature's own voices the story of the world and hear revealed all her profound secrets.

He possessed a magnetism which drew friends to him everywhere. His hair was still unstreaked with gray, but his face was care-worn, like that of one who had been dissipated or who had suffered many disappointments.

Carlin was twenty-eight years of age, long of limb, angular, gruff, but hearty; quick, sharp and shrewd, but free-handed and generally in the best of humors. He was an Illinois man, and a good type of the men of the Old West.

His eyes were brown, his hair chestnut; erect, he was six feet in height, but seated, there seemed to be no place for his hands and hardly room enough for his feet. He was well-educated, and had been but three and a half years on the Comstock.

All the Californians in the Club insisted, of course, that there was no other place but that, but this Carlin always vehemently denied, for he came from the State of Lincoln and Douglas, and the State, moreover, that had Chicago in one corner of it, and he did not believe there was another such State in all the Republic.

Ashley was from Pennsylvania; a young man of twenty-five, above medium height, compact as a tiger in his make-up, and weighing, perhaps, one hundred and eighty pounds. His eyes were gray, his hair brown, his face almost classic in its outlines; his feet and hands were particularly small and finely formed, and there was a jollity and heartiness about his laugh which was contagious. He had an excellent education, and had seen a good deal of business in his early manhood.

Corrigan was a thorough Irishman, generous, warm-hearted, witty, sociable, brave to recklessness, curly-haired, with laughing, blue eyes; the most open and frank of faces that was ever smiling, powerfully built and ready at a moment's notice to fight anyone or give anyone his purse.

Everybody knew and liked him, and he liked everybody that, as he expressed it, was worth the liking.

He had come to America a lad of ten. He lived for twelve years in New York City, attended the schools, and was in his last year in the High School when, for some wild freak, he had been expelled. He worked two years in a Lake Superior copper mine, then went to California and worked there until lured to Nevada by the silver mines, and had been on the Comstock five years

when the Club was formed.

Harding was the boy of the company, only twenty-two years of age, a native California lad. But he was hardly a type of his State.

His eyes were that shade of gray which looks black in the night; his hair was auburn. He had a splendid form, though not quite filled out; his head was a sovereign one.

But he was reticent almost to seriousness, and it was in this respect that he did not seem quite like a California boy. There was a reason for it. He was the son of an Argonaut who had been reckless in business and most indulgent to his boy. He had a big farm near Los Angeles, and shares in mines all over the coast. The boy had grown up half on the farm and half in the city. He was an adept in his studies; he was just as much an adept when it came to riding a wild horse.

He had gained a good education and was just entering the senior class in college when his father suddenly died. He mourned for him exceedingly, and when his affairs were investigated it was found there was a mortgage on the old home.

He believed there was a future for the land. So he made an arrangement to meet the interest on the mortgage annually, then went to San Francisco, obtained an order for employment on a Comstock superintendent, went at once to Virginia City and took up his regular labor as a miner. He had been thus employed for a year when the Club was formed.

This was the company that had formed a mess. Miller had

worked up the scheme.

It had been left to Miller to prepare the house – to buy the necessary materials for beginning housekeeping, like procuring the dishes, knives and forks and spoons, and benches or cheap chairs, for the dining room, and it was agreed to begin on the next pay day.

CHAPTER II

About four o'clock in the afternoon of the day appointed for commencing housekeeping, our miners gathered at this new home. The provisions, bedding and chairs had been sent in advance, in care of Miller, who had remained above ground that day, in order to have things in apple-pie shape. The chairs were typical of the men. Brewster's was a common, old-fashioned, flag-bottomed affair, worth about three dollars. Carlin and Wright each had comfortable armchairs; Ashley and Harding had neat office chairs, while Miller and Corrigan each had heavy upholstered armchairs, which cost sixty dollars each.

When all laughed at Brewster's chair, he merely answered that it would do, and when Miller and Corrigan were asked what on earth they had purchased such out-of-place furniture for, to put in a miner's cabin, Miller answered: "I got trusted and didn't want to make a bill for nothing," and Corrigan said: "To tell the truth, I was not over-much posted on this furniture business, I did not want to invest in too chape an article, so I ordered the best in the thavin' establishment, because you know a good article is always chape, no matter what the cost may be."

The next thing in order was to compare the bills for provisions. Brewster drew his bill from his pocket and read as follows: Twenty pounds bacon, \$7.50; forty pounds potatoes, \$1.60; ten pounds coffee, \$3.75; one sack flour, \$4.00; cream tartar

and salaratus, \$1.00; ten pounds sugar, \$2.75; pepper, salt and mustard, \$1.50; ten pounds prunes, \$2.50; one bottle XXX for medicine, \$2.00; total, \$32.60.

The bill was receipted. The bills of Wright and Harding each comprised about the same list, and amounted to about the same sum. They, too, were receipted. The funny features were that each one had purchased nearly similar articles, and the last item on each of the bills was a charge of \$2.00 for medicine. It had been agreed that no liquor should be bought except for medicine.

The bills of Carlin and Ashley were not different in variety, but each had purchased in larger quantities, so that those bills footed up about \$45 each. On each of the bills, too, was an item of \$4.75 for demijohn and "half gallon of whisky for medicine." All were receipted.

Corrigan's bill amounted to \$73, including one-half gallon of whisky and one bottle of brandy "for medicine," and his too was receipted.

Miller read last. His bill had a little more variety, and amounted to \$97.16. The last item was: "To demijohn and one gallon whisky for medicine, \$8.00." On this bill was a credit for \$30.00.

A general laugh followed the reading of these bills. The variety expected was hardly realized, as Corrigan remarked: "The bills lacked somewhat in versatility, but there was no doubt about there being plenty of food of the kind and no end to the medicine."

When the laugh had subsided, Brewster said: "Miller estimated that our provisions would not cost to exceed \$15.00 per month apiece. I tried to be reasonable and bought about enough for two months, but here we have a ship load. Why did you buy out a store, Miller?"

"I had to make a bill and I did not want the grocery man to think we were paupers," retorted Miller.

"How much were the repairs on the house, Miller?" asked Carlin.

"There's the beggar's bill. It's a dead swindle, and I told him so. He ought to have been a plumber. He had by the Eternal. He has no more conscience than a police judge. Here's the scoundrel's bill," said Miller, excitedly, as he proceeded to read the following:

"To repairing roof, \$17.50; twenty battens, \$4.00; to putting on battens, \$3.00; hanging one door, \$3.50; six lights glass, \$3.00; setting same, \$3.00; lumber, \$4.80; putting up bunks, \$27.50; total, \$66.30.'

"The man is no better than a thief; if he is, I'm a sinner."

"You bought some dishes, did you not, Miller?" inquired Ashley. "How much did they amount to?"

"There's another scalper," answered Miller, warmly. "I told him we wanted a few dishes, knives, forks, etc. – just enough for seven men to cabin with – and here is the bill. It foots up \$63.37. A bill for wood also amounts to \$15.00; two extra chairs, \$6.00."

Brewster, who had been making a memorandum, spoke up

and said: "If I have made no error the account stands as follows:

Provisions	\$357 56
Crockery, knives, forks, etc.	53 37
Wood	19 00
Repairs	66 50
One month's rent	50 00
One month's water	7 00
Chairs	6 00
	-
Making a total of	\$559 43

Or, in round numbers, eighty dollars per capita for us all. I settled my account at the store, amounting to \$32.60, which leaves \$47.40 as my proportion of the balance. Here is the money."

This was like Brewster. Some of the others settled and a part begged-off until next pay-day.

The next question was about the cooking. After a brief debate it was determined that all would join in getting up the first supper. So one rushed to a convenient butcher shop and soon returned with a basket full of porter house steaks, sweetbreads and lamb chops; another prepared the potatoes and put them in the oven; another attended to the fire; another to setting the table. Brewster was delegated to make the coffee. To Corrigan was ascribed the task of cooking the meats, while Miller volunteered to make some biscuits that would "touch their hearts."

He mixed the ingredients in the usual way and thoroughly kneaded the dough. He then, with the big portion of a whisky bottle for a rolling-pin, rolled the dough out about a fourth of an inch thick. He then touched it gently all over with half melted butter; rolled the thin sheet into a large roll; then with the bottle reduced this again to the required thickness for biscuits, and, with a tumbler, cut them out. His biscuit trick he had learned from an old Hungarian, who, for a couple of seasons, had been his mining partner. It is an art which many a fine lady would be glad to know. The result is a biscuit which melts like cream in the mouth – like a fair woman's smile on a hungry eye. Corrigan had his sweetbreads frying, and when the biscuits were put in the oven, the steak and chops were put on to broil. The steak had been salted and peppered – miner's fashion – and over it slices of bacon, cut thin as wafers, had been laid. The bacon, under the heat, shriveled up and rolled off into the fire, but not until the flavor had been given to the steak. One of the miners had opened a couple of cans of preserved pine-apples; the coffee was hot, the meats and the biscuits were ready, and so the simple supper was served. Harding had placed the chairs; Brewster's was at the head of the table.

Corrigan waited until all the others had taken their seats at the table; then, with a glass in his hand and a demijohn thrown over his right elbow, he stepped forward and said:

"To dedicate the house, and also as a medicine, I prescribe for aitch patient forty drops."

Each took his medicine resignedly, and as the last one returned the glass, Corrigan added: "It appears to me I am not faling ony too well meself," and either as a remedy or preventive, he took some of the medicine.

The supper was ravenously swallowed by the men, who for months had eaten nothing but miners' boarding-house fare. With one voice they declared that it was the first real meal they had eaten for weeks, and over their coffee they drank long life to housekeeping and confusion to boarding-houses.

When the supper was over and the things put away, the pipes were lighted. By this time the shadow of Mount Davidson around them had melted into the gloom of the night, and for the first time in months these men settled themselves down to spend an evening at home. It was a new experience.

"It is just splendid," cried Wright. "No beer, no billiards, no painted nymphs, no chance for a row. We have been sorry fools for months – for years, for that matter – or we would have opened business at this stand long ago."

"We have, indeed," said Ashley. "To-night we make a new departure. What shall we call our mess?"

Many names were suggested, but finally "The Comstock Club" was proposed and nominated by acclamation.

It was agreed, too, that no other members, except honorary members, should be admitted, and no politics talked. Then the conversation became general, and later, confidential; and each member of the Club uncovered a little his heart and his hopes.

Miller meant, so soon as he "made a little stake," to go down to San Francisco and assault the stock sharps right in their Pine and California street dens. He believed he had discovered the rule which could reduce stock speculation to an exact science, and he was anxious for the opportunity which a little capital would afford, "to show those sharpers at the Bay a trick or two, which they had never yet 'dropped on.'" He added, patronizingly: "I will loan you all so much money, by and by, that each of you will have enough to start a bank."

"I shtarted a bank alriddy, all be mesilf, night before last," said Corrigan.

"What kind of a bank was it, Barney?" asked Harding.

"One of King Pharo's. I put a twenty-dollar pace upon the Quane; that shtarted the bank. The chap on the other side of the table commenced to pay out the pictures, and the Quane –"

"Well, what of the Queen, Barney?" asked Carlin.

"She fill down be the side of the sardane box, and the chap raked in me double agle."

"How do you like that style of banking, Barney?" asked Ashley.

"Oh! Its mighty plisant and enthertainin', of course; the business sames to be thransacted with a grate dale of promptness and dispatch; the only drawback seems to be that the rates of ixchange are purty high."

Tom Carlin knew of a great farm, a store, a flour mill, and a hazel-eyed girl back in Illinois. He coveted them all, but was

determined to possess the girl anyway.

After a little persuasion, he showed her picture to the Club. They all praised it warmly, and Corrigan declared she was a daisy. In a neat hand on the bottom of the picture was written: "With love, Susie Richards." Carlin always referred to her as "Susie Dick."

Harding, upon being rallied, explained that his father came with the Argonauts to the West; that he was brilliant, but over-generous; that he had lived fast and with his purse open to every one, and had died while yet in his prime, leaving an encumbered estate, which must be cleared of its indebtedness, that no stain might rest upon the name of Harding. There was a gleam in the dark eyes, and a ring to the voice of the boy as he spoke, that kindled the admiration of the Club, and when he ceased speaking, Miller reached out and shook his hand, saying: "You should have the money, my boy!"

Back in Massachusetts, Brewster had met with a whole train of misfortunes; his property had become involved; his wife had died – his voice lowered and grew husky when mentioning this – he had two little girls, Mable and Mildred. He had kept his children at school and paid their way despite the iron fortune that had hedged him about, and he was working to shield them from all the sorrows possible, without the aid of the Saint who had gone to heaven. The Club was silent for a moment, when the strong man added, solemnly, and as if to himself: "Who knows that she does not help us still?"

In his youth, Brewster acquired the trade of an engineer. At this time, as we learned before, he was running a power drill in the Bullion. He was a great reader and was thorough on many subjects.

Wright had his eyes on a stock range in California, where the land was cheap, the pasturage fine, the water abundant, and where, with the land and a few head of stock for a beginning, a man would in a few years be too rich to count his money. He had been accustomed to stock, when a boy, in Missouri, and was sure that there was more fun in chasing a wild steer with a good mustang, than finding the biggest silver mine in America.

Ashley had gained some new ideas since coming West. He believed he knew a cheap farm back in Pennsylvania, that, with thorough cultivation, would yield bountifully. There were coal and iron mines there also, which he could open in a way to make old fogies in that country open their eyes. He knew, too, of a district there, where a man, if he behaved himself, might be elected to Congress. It was plain, from his talk, that he had some ambitious plans maturing in his mind.

Corrigan had an old mother in New York. He was going to have a few acres of land after awhile in California, where grapes and apricots would grow, and chickens and pigs would thrive and be happy. He was going to fix the place to his own notion, then was going to send for his mother, and when she came, every day thereafter he was going to look into the happiest old lady's eyes between the seas.

So they talked, and did not note how swiftly the night was speeding, until the deep whistle of the Norcross hoisting engine sounded for the eleven o'clock shift, and in an instant was followed by all the whistles up and down the great lode.

Then the good nights were said, and in ten minutes the lights were extinguished and the mantles of night and silence were wrapped around the house.

CHAPTER III

An early breakfast was prepared by the whole Club, as the supper of the previous evening had been. The miners had to be at the mines, where they worked, promptly at 7 o'clock, to take the places of the men who had worked since eleven o'clock the previous night.

While at breakfast the door of the house was softly opened and a Chinaman showed his face. He explained that he was a "belly good cook," and would like to work for ten dollars a week.

Carlin was nearest the door, and in a bantering tone opened a conversation with the Mongolian.

"What is your name, John?"

"Yap Sing."

"Are you a good cook, sure, Yap?"

"Oh, yes, me belly good cook; me cookie bleef-steak, chickie, turkie, goosie; me makie bled, pie, ebbything; me belly good cook."

"Have you any cousins, Yap?"

"No cuzzie; no likie cuzzie."

"Do you get drunk, Yap?"

"No gettie glunk; no likie blandy."

"Do you smoke opium?"

"No likie smokie opium. You sabe, one man smokie opium, letee while he all same one fool; all same one d – d monkey."

"Suppose we were to hire you, Yap, how long would it take you to steal everything in the ranch?"

"Me no stealie; me no likie stealie."

"Now, Yap, suppose we hire you and we all go off to the mines and leave you here, and some one comes and wants to buy bacon and beans and flour and sugar, what would you do?"

"Me no sellie."

"Suppose some one comes and wants to steal things, what then?"

"Me cuttie his ears off; me cuttie his d – d throat."

At this Brewster interposed and said: "I believe it would be a good idea to engage this Chinaman. We are away and the place is unprotected all day; besides, after a man has worked all day down in the hot levels of the Comstock, he does not feel like cooking his own dinner. Let us give John a trial."

It was agreed to. Yap Sing was duly installed. He was instructed to have supper promptly at six o'clock; orders were given him on the markets for fresh meat, vegetables, etc. From the remnants of the breakfast the dinner buckets were filled and the men went away to their work.

Yap Sing proved to be an artist in his way. When the members of the Club met again at their home, a splendid, hot supper was waiting for them. They ate, as hungry miners do, congratulating themselves that, as it were from the sky, an angel of a heathen had dropped down upon them.

After supper, when the pipes were lighted, the conversation

of the previous evening was resumed.

The second night brought out something of the history of each. They had nearly all lived in California; some had wandered the Golden Coast all over; all had roughed it, and all had an experience to relate. These evening visits soon became very enjoyable to the members of the Club, and the friendship of the members for each other increased as they the more thoroughly, knew the inner lives of each other.

On this night, Wright was the last to speak of himself. When he had concluded, Ashley said to him: "Wright, you have had some lively experiences. What is the most impressive scene that you ever witnessed?"

"I hardly know." Wright replied. "I think maybe a mirage that was painted for me, one day, out on the desert, this side of the sink of the Humbolt, when I was crossing the plains, shook me up about as much as anything that ever overtook me, except the chills and fever, which I used to have when a boy, back in Missouri. For only a picture it was right worrisome."

The Club wanted to hear about it, and so Wright proceeded as follows:

"We had been having rough times for a good while; thar had been sickness in the train; some of the best animals had been poisoned with alkali; thar had been some Injun scares – it was in '57 – and we all had been broken, more or less, of our rest, I in particular, was a good deal jolted up; was nervous and full of starts and shivers. I suspect thar was a little fever on me. We

halted one morning on the desert, to rest the stock, and make some coffee. It was about eight o'clock. We had been traveling since sundown the night before, crossing the great desert, and hoped to reach Truckee River that afternoon.

"While resting, a mighty desire took possession of me to see the river, and to feel that the desert was crossed.

"I had a saddle mule that was still in good condition. I had petted him since he was three days old, had broken him, and he and myself were the best of friends. His mother was a thoroughbred Kentucky mare; from her he had inherited his courage and staying qualities, while he had also just enough of his father's stubbornness to be useful, for it held his heart up to the work when things got rough.

"I looked over the train; it was all right; I was not needed; would not be any more that day.

"The mule was brought up in the Osage hills, and I had named him Osage, which after awhile became contracted to Sage. I went to him and looked him over. He was quietly munching a bacon sack. I took a couple of quarts of wheaten flour, mixed it into a soft paste, with water from one of the kegs which had been brought along, and gave it to him. He drank it as a hungry boy drinks porridge, and licked the dish clean. The journey had impressed upon him the absolute need of exercising the closest economy.

"When he had finished his rather light breakfast, I whispered to him that if he would stand in with me, I would show him,

before night, the prettiest stream of water – snow water – in the world. I think he understood me perfectly. Telling the people of the train that I would go ahead and look out a camping place, I took my shotgun, put a couple of biscuits in my pocket, and mounted Sage. He struck out at once on his long swinging walk.

"It was an August morning and had been hot ever since the sun rose. That is a feature out thar on the desert in the summer. The nights get cold, but so soon as the sun comes up, it is like going down into the Comstock. In fifteen minutes everything is steaming. Old Ben Allen, down on the borders of the Cherokee Nation, never of a morning, warmed up his niggers any livelier than the sun does the desert.

"I rode for a couple of hours. As I said, I was weak and nervous. In the sand, Sage's feet hardly made any sound, and the glare and the silence of the desert were around and upon me. If you never experienced it you don't know what the silence of the desert means. Take a day when the winds are laid; when in all directions, as far as your vision extends, thar is not a moving thing; when all that you can see is the brazen sky overhead, and the scarred breast of the earth, as if smitten and transfixed by Thor's thunderbolts, lying prone and desolate like the face of a dead world, before you; and withal not one sound: absolute stillness; and strong nerves after awhile become strained. On me, that forenoon, my surroundings became almost intolerable. I had been on foot driving team all night; I had eaten nothing since midnight, and then had only forced down a small slice of bread

and a cup of horrible black coffee, and was really not more than half myself. One moment I was chilly; the next was perspiring, and sometimes it seemed as though I should suffocate. With my nerves strung up as they were, I guess it would not have required much to give me a panic.

"Just then, out against the sun to the southward, and apparently a mile away, I saw something. Talk about being impressed! that was my time. I was sure I saw five hundred Indian warriors, all mounted. They were wheeling in black squadrons on the desert, wheeling and forming, as I thought. Horses and men were all black, and now and then as they wheeled or swung to and fro, I marked what I was sure was the gleam of steel. They evidently had seen me: I expected every moment to hear their yell and wondered that I did not feel the tremble of the earth beneath their horses' feet; I was too nearly paralyzed to try to escape. I slipped or fell, I don't know which, from my mule, and lay panting like a tired hound upon the sand. But I could not keep my eyes from the terrible sight before me. Still those tawny warriors kept wheeling and forming, and as I believed, menacing me.

"At length I grew a little calmer, and remember that I explained to myself that the reason I did not hear the thunder of their horses' feet, was because of the sand, and from the fact that the ponies could not be shod. But I wondered more and more where an Indian tribe could get so many black horses.

"Once, when they seemed particularly furious, and just on the point of charging down upon me; I remember that I said to

myself: 'If they eat me they will have to broil me in the sun, for there is no fuel here.' All the time too, I was pitying Sage, and my own voice frightened me as I unconsciously said: 'Poor Sage, it is a hard fate to be faithful and suffer as you have and then fall into the hands of savages.'

"When a little more under my own control, I cautiously rose to my feet and looked at the mule. It was no use. On top of the fatigue of coming quite two thousand miles, he had, on that morning, been constantly traveling for fourteen hours, with only two rests of thirty minutes each. He never could get away from those fresh ponies. I looked back in the direction of the train; it was nowhere in sight and must have been back probably five miles.

"In this strait I looked up again toward my savages. At that very moment the charge commenced; the whole array was bearing down upon me. I took my gun from the horn of the saddle and sat down on the ground. I felt – but no matter how I felt; I only know that at that moment I would have given my note for a large sum to have been back in Missouri.

"On they swept, and I watched them coming. But somehow they began to grow smaller and smaller, and in an instant more the squadron vanished. Where the moment before an armed band, terrible with life and bristling with fury, had shone upon my eyes, now all that there was to be seen was a flock of perhaps twenty ravens, flying with short flights, and hopping and lighting around some little thing, which lay above the level of the desert. I mounted Sage and rode out to the spot, some four hundred yards

away.

"I found another road, and strung along it, were the carcasses of a good many cattle that had died in emigrant trains. The ravens were hopping about these carcasses and flying from one to another. I had heard of the mirage of the desert, when a boy in school, and suddenly 'I dropped upon' the whole business. By some mighty refraction of the beams of light, these miserable scavengers of the desert had been magnified into formidable, mounted warriors, and the glint of steel that I had seen, was but the shimmer of sunbeams upon their black wings.

"Again I headed Sage for the river. In a little while he commenced to stretch out his nose; soon, of his own accord, he quickened his pace to a trot, a little later he took up his long lope and never relaxed his speed until he drove his nose into the delicious water of the Truckee. I dismounted and joined him. Right there we each took the biggest and longest drink of our lives; then I gave Sage one of my biscuits and ate the other myself, and we both felt immensely refreshed. I stripped the saddle and bridle from the mule and let him go. The river bank was green with grass and Sage was happy.

"Throwing myself upon the ground, and laying my head upon the saddle, I composed myself for a sleep.

"I was greatly in need of sleep, but the moment I closed my eyes, here came my black cavalry charging down upon me again, and I sprang up with a cry. Of all impressive scenes, that was my biggest one sure. I see it in my dreams still, at times, and I never,

from this mountain side, look down to where the sand clouds are piling up their dunes over toward the Sink of the Carson, that I do not instinctively take one furtive glance in search of my savages."

"I had a livelier mirage than that once," said Miller with a laugh. "I was prospecting for quartz in the foothills of Rogue River Valley, Oregon, and looking up, I thought I saw four or five deer, lying under a tree, on a hill side, about three hundred yards away. I raised the sight on my gun, took as good aim as I could on horseback, and blazed away.

"In a second, four of those Rogue River Indians sprang from the ground and made for me. I had a good horse, but they ran me six miles before they gave up the chase. No more mirages like that for me, if you please."

"I had a worse one than either of yees," chimed in Corrigan. "It was in that tough winter of '69. I had been placer mining up by Pine Grove, in California, all summer. I had a fair surface claim, and by wurking half the time, I paid me way and had a few dollars besides. The other half of the time I was wurking upon a dape cut, through bid rock, to get a fall in which I could place heavy sluices, and calculated that with the spring I could put in a pipe, and hydraulic more ground in one sason than I could wurk in the ould way in tin. One day, late in the autumn, I went up to La Porte to buy supplies, and on the night that I made that camp it began to snow. When once it got shtarted, it just continued to snow, as it can up in those mountains, and niver "lit up" for four hours at a time for thray wakes. It began to look as though the

glacial period had returned to the world.

"When I wint into town, I put up at Mrs. O'Kelly's boardin' and lodgin' house. Mrs. O'Kelly was a big woman, weighin' full two hundred pounds, and she was a business woman. She didn't pretend to be remainin' in La Porte jist for her hilth.

"But there was a beautiful girl waitin' on the table in Mrs. O'Kelly's home. Her name was Maggie Murphy, and she was as thrim and purty a girl as you would wish to mate. She had bright, cheery ways, and whin she wint up to a table and sung out 'Soup'? all the crockery in the dinin' room would dance for joy.

"Of an avenin' I used, after a few days, to visit a bit with Maggie. Some one had told about the camp that I had a great mine, and was all solid, and I was willin' to have the delusion kipt up, anyway until the storm saised. Maggie, I have a suspicion, had hurd the same story, for she was exceedingly gracious loike to me. One avenin,' as I was sayin' 'good night' – we were growin' mighty familiar loike thin – I said 'Maggie,' says I, 'the last woman I iver kissed was my ould mother, may I not kiss you, for I love you, darlint?' 'Indade you shall not,' says she, but in spite of that, somethin' in her eyes made me bould loike, and I saised upon and hild her – but she did not hould so very hard – and I kissed her upon chake and lips and eyes, and me arms were around her, and her heart was throbbin' warm against mine, and me soul was in the siventh heaven.

"After awhile we quieted down a bit, and with me arms shtill around her, I asked, didn't she think Corrigan was a purtier name

nor Murphy, and as I could not change my name fur her sake, wouldn't she change hers fur moine?

"Thin with the tears shinin' loike shtars in her beautiful eyes, she raised up her arms, let thim shtale round me neck, and layin' her chake against me breast, which was throbbin' loike a stone bruise, said, said she, 'Yis, Barney, darlint.'

"I had niver thought Barney was a very beautiful name before, but jist then it shtruck upon me ear swater thin marriage bells."

Here Miller interrupted with, "You felt pretty proud just then, did you not, Barney?"

"The Koohinoor would not hiv made a collar button fur me."

"Don't interrupt him, Miller," interposed Carlin; "let Barney tell us the rest of the story."

"There was a sofay near by. I drew Maggie to it, sat down and hild her to me side. She was pale, and we were both sort of trembly loike.

"We did not talk much at first, but after awile Maggie said, suddent, said she: 'What a liar you are, Barney!'

"And I said 'for why?' And she said 'to say you had niver kissed a woman since you had lift your ould mother. You have had plinty of practice.'

"'And how do you know,' says I, and thin – but no matter, we had to begin all over again.

"After awhile I wint away to bid, and talk about your mirages; all that night there was a convoy of angels around me, and the batein' of their wings was swater than the echoes that float in

whin soft music comes from afar over still wathers.

"One of the angels had just folded her wings and taken the form of Maggie, and was jist bend in' over me, whisperin' beautiful loike, whin, oh murther, I was wakened with a cry of: 'Are ye there now, ye blackguard?' I opened me eyes, and there stood Mrs. O'Kelly, with a broomstick over her head, and somethin' in her eye that looked moighty like a cloudburst.

"'Ye thavin' villin,' said she, 'pertendin' to be a rich miner, and atin' up a poor woman all the time.' Thin she broke down intoirely and commined wailin.

"'Oh, Mr. Corrigan,' she howled through her sobs, 'How could yees come here and impose upon a unsuspectin' widdie; you know how hard I wurk; that I am up from early mornin' until the middle of the night, cookin' and shwapin' and makin' beds, and slavin' loike a black nigger, and – ' by this time she recovered her timper and complated the sintence with: 'If yees don't pay me at once I'll – I'll, I'll – '

"I found breath enough after awhile to tell her to hould on. My pantaloons were on a chair within aisy rache; I snatched thim up, sayin' as I did so: 'How much is your bill, Mrs. O'Kelly?'

"'Thray wakes at iliven dollars is thray and thirty dollars, and one extra day is a dollar and five bits, or altogether, thirty-four dollars and five bits.'

"I shtill had several twinty-dollar paces; I plunged me hand into the pocket of me pants, saized them all, thin let them drop upon aich other, all but two, and holdin' these out, said sharply,

and still with the grand air of a millionaire: 'The change, if you please, Mrs. O'Kelly.'

"She took the money, gazed upon it a moment with a dazed and surprised look; then suddenly her face was wrathed in smiles, and as softly as a woman with her voice (it sounded loike a muffled threshing machine) could, said: 'Take back your money. Mr. Corrigan, and remain as long as you please. I was only jist after playin' a bit of a trick upon yees. What do yees think I care for a few beggarly dollars?'

"But I could not see it; I remained firm. Again I said: 'The change, if you please, Mrs. O'Kelly, and as soon too as convanient.'

"She brought me the change, sayin': 'I'll have your briakfast smokin' hot for yees, in five minutes, Mr. Corrigan.'

"I put on me clothes and looked out. The storm had worn itself out at last. I wint down stairs to the dinin' room door, and beckoned to Maggie. She came to me, and there ware the rale love-light in her beautiful eyes. I can see her now. She was straight as a pump rod; her head sat upon her neck like a picture; the neck itsilf was white loike snow – but niver mind.

"'Come out in the hall a bit.' I whispered, and she come. I clasped her hand for a moment and said: 'It's goin' home I am, Maggie; I am goin' to fix me house a little: it will take me forty days to make me arrangements. If I come thin, will you take me name and go back with me?'

"'I will,' says she.

"This is the sivinteenth of the month, Maggie; the sivinteenth of next month will be thirty days, and tin more will make it the twinty-sivinth. If I come thin, will yees go?" I asked.

"I will, Barney, Dear,' was the answer.

"Have yees thought it over, and will yees be satisfied, darlint?" I asked.

"I have, Barney; I shall be satisfied, and I will be a good wife to yees, darlint,' was the answer.

"Thin I hild out me arms and she sprang into thim. There was an embrace and a kiss and thin —

"Goodbye, Maggie!"

"Good bye, Barney!' and I wint away.

"I wint to a ristaurant and got a cup of coffee, and was jist startin' fer home, whin a frind come up and said: 'Barney,' said he; 'there's a man here you ought to go and punch the nose off of.'

"What fur,' says I.

"He's a slanderin' of yer,' says he.

"Who is the man and what is he sayin?" says I.

"It's Mike Dougherty, the blacksmith,' says he; and he is a sayin' as how your claim is no account, and that you are a bummer.'

"Me heart was too light to think of quarrelin'; on me lips the honey of Maggie's kiss was still warm, and what did I care what ony man said. I merely laughed, and said: 'Maybe he is right,' and wint upon me way."

With this Corrigan ceased speaking. After a moment or two

of silence, Carlin said:

"Well, Barney, how was it in six weeks?"

"I had another mirage thin," said Barney. "I went up to town; called at Mrs. O'Kelly's; she met me, smiling like, and said: 'Walk in, Mr. Corrigan!' I said: 'If you please, Mrs. O'Kelly, can I see Miss Murphy?' There was a vicious twinkle in her eye, as she answered, pointing to a nate house upon the hillside, as she spoke.

"You will find her there, but her name is changed now. She was married on Thursday week, to Mr. Mike Dougherty, the blacksmith. A fine man, and man of property, is Mr. Dougherty.'

"Talk about strong impressions! For a moment I felt as though I was falling down a shaft. I – but don't mention it."

Barney was still for a moment, and then said, in a voice almost husky: "As I came into town that day, all the great pines were nodding, smiling and stretching out their mighty arms, as much as to say: 'We congratulate you, Mr. Corrigan.' As I turned away from Mrs. O'Kelly's, it seemed to me that every one of them had drawn in its branches and stood as the hoodlum does when he pinks his thumb to his nose and wiggles his fingers."

Just then the Potosi whistle rang out on the still night again, the others answered the call, and the Club, at the signal, retired.

CHAPTER IV

As the pipes were lighted next evening, Carlin said to Barney: "Corrigan, does the ghost of your La Porte mirage haunt you as Wright's does him?"

"Not a bit of it," answered Corrigan sharply. "It hurt for awhile, I confess it, but a year and a half after Maggie was married, I passed her house one avenin' in the gloaming, and in a voice which I knew well, though all the swateness had been distilled out of it, this missage came out upon the air: 'Mike, if yees have got the brat to slape, yees had better lay him down and come out to your tay. I should loike to get these supper things put away sometime to-night.' Be dad, there was no mirage about that, no ravens about that, Wright; it was the charge of the rale Injun!"

"Speaking of babies," said Miller nonchalantly, "do you know that about the most touching scene I ever witnessed was over a baby? It was in Downieville. California, way back in '51 or '2. You know at that time babies were not very numerous in the Sierras. There were plenty of men there who had not seen a good woman, or a baby, for two years or more. You may not believe it, but you shut the presence of women and children all out of men's lives, for months at a time, and they contract a disease, which I call 'heart hunger,' and because of that I suspect that more whiskey has been drunk in this country, and more killings have grown out of trifling quarrels, than through all other causes

combined. Without the eyes of women, good women, that he respects, upon a man, in a little while the wild beast, which is latent in all men's hearts, begins to assert itself. Because of this, men who were born to be good and true, have, to kill the unrest within their souls, taken to drink; the drink has led naturally up to a quarrel; they have got away with their first fight; the fools around them have praised them for their 'sand'; there has been no look of sorrow and reproach in any honest woman's eyes to bring them back to their senses; and after such a beginning, look for them in a year, and, in nine cases out of ten, you will find that they are lost men.

"But I commenced to tell you about the Downieville baby. It had been decided that we would have a Fourth of July celebration. There was no trouble about getting it up. We had a hundred men in camp, either one of whom could make as pretty a speech as you ever heard; everybody had plenty of money, and there was no trouble about fixing things to have a lively time. True, there was no chance for a triumphal car, with a Goddess of Liberty, and a young lady to represent each State. There was a good reason for it. There were not thirty young ladies within three hundred miles of us.

"But we had a big live eagle to represent Sovereignty, and a grizzly bear as a symbol of Power, which we hauled in the procession; we had some mounted men, including some Mexican packers on mule back; a vast variety of flags, and many citizens on foot in the procession. Of course we had a marshal and his

staff, a president of the day, an orator, poet, reader and chaplain, and last, but not least, a brass band of a few months' training. There were flags enough for a grand army, and every anvil in town was kept red hot firing salutes.

"After the parade, the more sedate portion of the people repaired to the theatre, to hear the Declaration, poem, and oration. The prayer, Declaration and poem had been disposed of, and the president of the day was just about to introduce the orator, when a solitary baby but a few months old, set up a most energetic yell, and continued it for two or three minutes, the frightened mother not daring in that crowd to supply the soothing the youngster was evidently demanding. To cause a diversion, I suppose, the leader of the brass band nodded to the others, and they commenced to play the 'Star Spangled Banner.' The band had not had very much more practice than the baby, but the players were doing the best they could, when a tremendous, big-whiskered miner sprang upon a back seat, and waving his hat wildly, in a voice like a thunder-roll, shouted: 'Stop that – d band and give the baby a chance!'

"Nothing like what followed during the next ten minutes had ever been seen on this earth, since the confusion of tongues transpired among the builders of Babel's Tower. Men shouted and yelled like mad men, strangers shook each other by the hand and screamed 'hurrah,' and in the crowd I saw a dozen men crying like children.

"For a moment every heart was softened by the memories that

baby's cries awakened.

"The next time you feel provoked because the children shout and shy rocks as they return from school, you may all remember that could the world be carried on without children, it would not require more than two generations to transform men into wild beasts."

When Miller ceased speaking, Ashley remarked: "Miller, you talk very wisely on the subject of babies, why have you none of your own?"

Miller waited a moment before answering, and then in an absent-minded manner said:

"Did you never hear a gilt-edged expert talk familiarly about a mine, as though he knew all about it, when he did not really know a streak of ore from east country porphyry?"

At this the others all laughed, and Miller joined in the merriment heartily, but nevertheless, something in the thoughts which the question awakened, had its effect upon him, for he was moody and preoccupied for several minutes. Meanwhile, a spell seemed to be upon the whole Club, except Brewster, who was reading a pamphlet on "The Creation of Mineral Veins," and Carlin, who was absorbed in a daily paper.

"Whoever stops to think," proceeded Miller, speaking as much to himself as to the others, "upon what sorrows the foundations of new States are laid, how many hearts are broken, how many strong lives are worn out in the pitiless struggle?

"Where are the men who were the Argonauts of the golden

days? The most of them are gone. Every hill side is marked with their graves. They were a strong, brave, generous race. They laid the wand of their power on the barbarism which met them; it melted away at their touch; they blazed the trails and smoothed the paths, that, unsoiled, the delicate sandals of civilization might draw near; they rifled the hills and ravines of their stores of gold, and poured it into the Nation's lap, until every sluggish artery of business was set bounding; they built temples to Religion, to Learning, to Justice and to Industry; as they moved on, cities sprung up in their wake; following them came the enchantments of home and the songs of children; but for them, what was their portion? They were to work, to struggle, to be misjudged in the land whence they came; to learn to receive any blows which outrageous fortune might hurl at them, without plaint; to watch while States grew into place around them, and while the frown on the face of the desert relaxed into a smile at their toil, that toil was simply to be accepted as a matter of course by the world, and in the severe and self-satisfied civilization of older States, only pity was to be felt for their ignorance, and only horror for their rough ways. They were to be path-finders, the sappers and miners to storm the strong-holds of barbarism; through summer's heat, and winter's cold, to continue their march, until the final night should come, and then to sink to a dreamless bivouac under the stars. What wonder if some became over-wearied! if others grew reckless?"

He had risen and was walking the floor, to and fro, like a caged

lion, as he talked. Going now to the kitchen door, he cried: "Yap, bring some hot water, some sugar, a nutmeg and some limes, if you have them."

The heathen obeyed, and Miller made seven big, hot whiskey punches. Then lifting his glass he offered this toast:

"Here's to the Old Boys; to those who worked and suffered and died, but never complained!"

All rose and drank in silence.

CHAPTER V

At the next meeting, when the pipes were all lighted, Ashley, turning to Miller, said:

"You took too gloomy a view of things last night. What you said, or rather something in your tone, has haunted me ever since. But you were wrong. The Argonauts will not be forgotten.

"The names of the kings who compelled the building of the pyramids are mostly matters of conjecture now, but no man who ever gazed upon those piles of stone that have borne unscarred the desert storms that have been breaking upon and around them through the centuries, has failed to think of the tremendous energy of the race that reared those monuments above the sand; reared them so that the abrasion of the ages avails not against them.

"One loves to dream of how that race must have looked, there under that sky, while yet the world was young, and while the energy and beauty of youth was upon it. There was no steam power to assist, no power drills, there were only rude, untempered tools. The plain wedge, and the lever in its more effective form, were about all that was known of mechanics; still from the quarries of Syene, far up the Nile, those blocks were wrested, hewed, transported, lifted up and laid in place, and with such mathematical precision was the work performed, that the ebb and flow of the centuries have no effect upon the work.

While this material work was going on, in the same realm wise men were putting into a language the alphabet of the sky, tracing out the procession of the stars and solving the mystery of the seasons. When we think of Ancient Egypt, it is not of her kings, but what was wrought out there by brain and hand.

"To-day I was at work on the twenty-four hundred-foot level of the mine. Around me power drills were working, cars were rattling, cages were running; three hundred men were stoping, timbering and rolling cars to and from the chutes and ore-breasts, and in the spectral light I thought it was a scene for a painter. But while so thinking, for some reason, there came to me the thought of the one hundred times three hundred men, who, for a generation, worked on a single pyramid; worked without pay days, without so much as a kind word, and on poorer fare than one gets at a fourth-rate miners' boarding house; and, as I reflected over that, our little work here seemed small indeed.

"So, in estimating Greece, we do not pick out a few men or women to remember, but we think of the race that made Thermopylæ and Marathon possibilities, of the men who followed Xenophon, of the women who closed their hearts and left their deformed offspring to perish in the woods that Greece should rear no woman who could not bear soldiers, no man who could not bear arms; of the race so finely strung that poetry was born of it; that sculpture and eloquence were so perfected in, that to copy is impossible; that was so susceptible to beauty that it turned justice aside, and yet that was so valiant that it mastered

the world.

"So of Rome! It is not that the great Julius lived that we call it 'The Imperial Nation.' We stand in awe of it still, not because out of its millions a few superb figures shine. Rather, we think of the valor that from a little nucleus widened until it subdued the world; of the ten thousand fields on which Romans fought and conquered. We think how they marshaled their armies, and taught the nations how to lay out camps; how they built roads and aqueducts, that their land might be defended and the Imperial City sustained; how they carved out an architecture of their own which the world still clings to in its most stately edifices; how, from barbarism, they progressed, until they framed a code which is still respected; how, in literature and the arts, they excelled, and how, for a thousand years, they were the concernment of the world.

"So of England. Which merits the greater glory, King John or the stern, half barbarous barons who, with an instinct generations in advance of their age, circled around their sullen king and compelled him to give to them 'the great charter?' Through the thousand years that have succeeded that act, how many individual names can we rescue from the hosts that on that little isle have lived and died? Not many. But the grand career of the nation is in the mind forever. How, through struggle after struggle, the advance has been made; struggles that, though full of errors, knew no faltering or despair, until at last, for the world, she became the center and the bulwark of civilization; until in

material strength she had no equal; until the sheen of her sails gave light to all the seas, and under her flag signal stations were upreared the world around. We do not remember many men, but there is ever in the mind the thought of English valor and persistence, and the clear judgment which backed the valor by land and sea.

"But we need not go abroad; our own land has examples enough. Not many can call over the names of those who came in the 'Mayflower,' or those who made up the colonies up and down the Atlantic coast. But the spectacle of the 'Mayflower' band kneeling, on their arrival, in the snow and singing a triumphal song, is a picture the tints of which will deepen in splendor with the ages. We need not call over the names of our statesmen and warriors; they give but a slight impression of our race. But when we think how, from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, the woods were made to give place to gardens, fruitful fields and smiling homes; when we think that the majority of those families had each of them less to start with than any one of us gets for a month's labor, and yet how they subdued the land, pressed back the savage, reared and educated and created a literature for their children, until over all the vast expanse there was peace, prosperity, enlightenment and joy, then it is that we begin to grow proud.

"If the Argonauts of the Golden Coast can show that they have wrought as well, they will not be forgotten. Those who succeed them will know that they were preceded by a race that

was strong and brave and true, and their memory in the West will be embalmed with the memory of those in the East who, starting under the spray that is tossed from the white surf of the eastern sea, with no capital but pluck, hewed out and embellished the Republic.

"Of course, there have been sorrows; of course, hearts have broken; but there has been much of triumph also. It is something to have a home in this Far West; there is something in the hills, the trees, the free air and action of this region which brings to men thoughts that they would never have had in other lands. It is not bad sometimes for men to leave their books and turn to Nature for instruction. Here of all the world some of the brightest pages of Nature's book are spread open for the reader. And many a man that others pity because they think his heart must be heavy, does not ask that pity; does not feel its need. Those hearts have gathered to themselves delights, which, if not, perhaps, of the highest order, still are very sweet. Let me give an instance.

"Last year I went to look at a mine down in Tuolumne county, California. I was the guest of a miner who had lived in the same cabin for more than twenty years. He was his own cook and housekeeper and seldom had any company except his books – a fine collection – his daily papers, his gun and some domestic animals. He had a little orchard and garden. Around his garden tame rabbits played with his dogs. In explanation, he said: 'They were all babies at the same time and have grown up together.' While walking with him in his garden, he asked me if I had ever

seen a mountain quail on her nest. At the same moment he parted the limbs of a shrub, and there, within six inches of his hand, sat a bird, her bright eyes looking up in perfect confidence into his.

"The place was in the high foothills; there was a space in front of his cabin. From that point the hills, in steadily increasing waves, swelled into the great ridges of the higher Sierras, and far away to the east the blue crest of Mount Bodie stood out clear against the sky.

"It was not strange to me that he loved the place. When within doors he talked upon every subject with a peculiar terse shrewdness all his own. He had had many bouts with the world; he knew men thoroughly; he had in a measure withdrawn himself from them, and found a serener comfort in his pets, his hills and trees. He had acquired that faculty which men often do when a great deal alone in the mountains. He did not reason his way up through the proof of a proposition, but with a clear sagacity reached the truth at a bound, and left the reasoning for others. He had his theory of how fissures were originally formed and filled; he had his opinion of ancient and modern authors; he understood politics well, and gave brief and true reasons for his belief. In short, he was a self-appointed ambassador to the court of the hills, to represent all the world.

"My admiration for him increased the longer I remained with him, for he knew much of interest to me; but he spoke always in a tone as though he was revealing only a little of what he knew. I suspect that was the real state of the case. There was

a charm, too, about his manner. Though I knew that he had suffered many disappointments, if not sorrows, there was no bitterness. Whatever he did or said, was with a gentle grace of his own. He was free, alike, from either harshness, egotism or diffidence. Something of the great calm of the hills around him had entered into his soul.

"But the greatest surprise was reserved for me to the last. I had to get up at three o'clock in the morning and walk over a dim trail two or three miles to a little village, in order to take the stage which passed the village at five o'clock. When I was ready, my friend said: 'There are so many trails through the hills you might take the wrong one in the uncertain light. I will pilot you.'

"When we set out it was yet dark. There was an absolute hush upon the world. Up through the branches of the great pines, God's lanterns were swinging as though but just trimmed and lighted, and under the august roof where they swung, they shone with rays more pure than vestal lamps. But at length up the east some shafts of light were shot, and soon the miracle of the dawn began to unfold. It was a June morning and entirely cloudless. Soon the warm rays of approaching day began to bend over the hills from the east; the foliage which had been black began to grow green; the scarlet of the hills shone out where the light touched it; the sentinel fires above began to grow dim. A little later the hills began to grow resonant with the manifold voices which they held, and which commenced to awaken to hail the approaching day.

"Then my sententious companion, as though kindled by the same influences, opened his lips. He seemed to have forgotten that I was near; he was answering the greetings of his friends in the woods. I can only give the faintest idea of what he said, and I grieve over it, for it was sweeter than music. His words ran something like this:

"Chirp, chirp; O, my martin, (the swallow's grandmother); as usual you are up first, to say good morning, the first to hail the beautiful coming day. Ah, there you are, whistling, my lovely quail, you charming cockaded glory; and now, my mocking bird, you brown splendor with a flat nose, where do you get all your voices? Heigh, O! you are up, Mr. Jacob (woodpecker) up to see if Mrs. Jacob is gathering acorns this morning, you old miser of the woods, with your black and white clothes and your thrift worse than a Chinaman's; and now, my morning dove has commenced its daily drone, growling because breakfast is not ready, I suppose. At last you have opened your eyes, Mrs. Lark; a nice bird you are to claim to be an early riser, but you have a cheery voice, nevertheless. Now, my wren and my oreole, you are making some genuine music, if both of you together are not as big as one note of an organ. Hist! that was a curlew's cry from away down on the river's bank, and now you are all awake and singing, you noisy chatterers, as though your hearts would burst for joy. Finally, old night-raiding owl, you are saying 'good night' this morning, you old burglar of the woods.'

"Meanwhile the banners of the dawn had grown more and

more bright in the sky, and as he ceased speaking, the full disc of the sun, lighted with omnipotent fires, shone full above the hills, with a splendor too severe for human eyes.

"I had not interrupted my friend during the half hour that he, striding before me on the trail, had been talking. I half suspected that he had forgotten that I was near, absorbed as he was in greeting his warblers. Of course I have not named the birds in their order; nor have I named half that he greeted; I might as well try to repeat to you all the scientific terms in one of Professor Stewart's earthquake lectures. But all that day, and for many days afterwards, his words were ringing in my ears; and often have I wondered, if, with his thoughts and his surroundings, he was not with more reason and more peace, passing down life's trail, than as though he were out in the pitiless world of men, striving for wealth and for power. Never since have I seen a lonely man in town, with shy face which revealed that he was unused to the crowds of the city, purchasing some few little necessities, and, apparently, hurrying to get away, that I have not said to myself: 'He has a cabin somewhere with books and dogs, and with a garden outside, and he knows every bird in the forest by its morning call.'"

While Ashley was talking, he had unconsciously fixed his eyes upon the light which shone from a reflector, up through the window from the hoisting works down the hill, and seemed to forget the presence of any one near.

As he ceased and looked around, he discovered that all his

auditors had fallen asleep in their chairs, except Yap Sing, who had stolen into the room. He looked up knowingly, smiled and said:

"You talkie belly nice. Me heap sabbie, clail, chickie, duckie, goosie. Me cookie lem flirst late, you bettie."

"You be – " said Ashley, and went to bed. The rest, awakened by the whistles, started up in surprise, and Corrigan said: "I was drammin' of agles and pacocks and swans and hummin' birds. I must have been afther atin too much supper."

CHAPTER VI

The next evening as the club gathered around the hearth, Brewster, who, next to Harding, was the most reticent member of the party, said apologetically to Ashley:

"It was shabby of us not to give more heed to your story last night, but the truth with me was, I was very tired. We were cutting out a station on the 2,300 level of the mine, yesterday; the work was hard, the ventilation bad, and it was hot and prostrating work. But, I heard most of your story, nevertheless. While I know nothing of your miner who lives with his books and birds and dogs and flowers; and hence know nothing of what storms he has breasted and what heart-aches he has borne; and, therefore, cannot, in my own mind, fix his place, still, on general principles, it is man's duty never to accept any rebuff of unkind fortune as a reason for ceasing to try; but rather he should struggle on and do the best he can; if needs be dying with the harness on his back. Moreover, as a rule, it is the easier way. It is in harmony with nature's first great law, and man seldom errs when he follows the laws that were framed before the world's foundations were laid. When man was given his two feet to stand upon; his arms to cleave out for himself a path and a career, and his brain to be his guide; then with the rich earth for a field, in the opinion of the Infinite Goodness, he has all the capital that he required. The opportunities of this land, especially this

free West, with a capacity to plan and work, are enough for any man. The trouble is, men falter too soon. On that last night of anxiety, before the New World rose out of the sea to greet the eyes of Columbus; when his sullen and fear-stricken crews were on the point of mutiny, suddenly there came to the senses of the great commander, the perfume of earthly flowers. Soon after the veil of the ocean was rent asunder, and upon his thrilled eyes there burst a light. Columbus was not the only man who ever discovered a new world. They are being found daily. I meet men often on the street and know by something in their faces, that, at that very moment, the perfume of the flowers of some glory to come is upon them, and that the first rays of the dawn of a divine light are commencing to fill with splendor their eyes.

"When the idea of the Alexandrian, after having been transmitted from mortal to mortal, for more than fifty generations, at last materialized, and the care worn man who was watching, heard the first sob of artificial life come from a steam engine, to him was the perfume and the light.

"When, after generations of turmoil and war, in the deadly double struggle to assimilate various peoples, and at the same time out of barbarism to construct a stable and enlightened government; when the stern old English barons caught the right inspiration, and gathering around their sovereign, asked him to recognize the rights of the men on whose valor his throne leaned for safety and to sign Magna Charta; to them came the perfume and the light.

"When the desire of the colonies, voiceless before, at length through the pen of Jefferson, found expression in the words: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident – that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights;' then to a whole nation, yes to the world, came the perfume and the light.

"In public life these emotions are marked, and the world applauds. In humble life they are generally unnoticed, but they are frequent, and the enchantment of the perfume becomes like incense, and it is a softer light that dawns. When the poor man, who lays aside daily but a pittance from his earnings, finds at last, after months and years, that the sum has increased until it is certain that he can build a little home for his wife – a home which is to be all his own – and that he can educate his children; then the perfume and lights of a new world entrance him, and in his sphere he is as great as was the dark-eyed Italian.

"In the Bible we read that all the prophets were given to fasting and to labor, in order to bring the body under subjection to the soul. This is but typical of what a great soul must submit to, if it would catch the perfume and the light. The world's wealth rests on labor. Whether a man tills a garden or writes a book, the harvest will be worth gathering just in proportion to the soil, and to the energy and intelligence of the work performed. Columbus could never have discovered a new world by standing on the sea shore and straining his eyes to the West. The tempests had to be met; the raging seas outrode; the mutinous crew controlled.

There are tempests, waves and mutineers in every man's path, and it is only over and beyond them that there comes the perfume and the light. The lesson taught at Eden's gate is the one that must still be learned. All that man can gain is by labor, and the sword that guards the gate flames just as fiercely as of old.

"To the Argonauts was given a duty. They were appointed to redeem a wild and create a sovereign state. I believe they were a brave, true race. The proof is, that without the restraint of pure women and without law, they enforced order. Their energy, also, was something tremendous. After building up California, they, in great part, made a nucleus for civilization to gather to in each of half-a-dozen neighboring Territories. But they had advantages which the men who settled the Eastern States – the region beyond the Mississippi River, I mean – never possessed. They had better food to eat, a better climate to live in. If they did not have capital, they knew a living, at least, could be had from the nearest gravel bank or ravine, and if they lacked the encircling love of wife and children, they were spared the sorrow of seeing dear women wear out lives of hardship and poverty, as has been seen on all other frontiers in America.

"If some fell by the wayside, it was natural, for human nature is weak and Death is everywhere; if some in the pitiless struggle failed, they had no right to cease to try, for when men do that the hope that to them will come the perfume or that upon their eyes will ever shine the light, is forever closed."

"All that is good," said Carlin, "but the rule does not always

hold true. There is sometimes a limit to man's capacity to suffer, and his heart breaks; and still after that his face gives no sign, and there is no abatement of his energies. In such cases, however, men generally lose the capacity to reason calmly and chase impossibilities. I saw a case yesterday. I met a man mounted on a cheap mustang, and leading another on which was packed a little coarse food, a pick, shovel, pan, coffee-pot and frying pan. As he moved slowly up C. street, a friend – himself an Argonaut – clutched me by the arm with one hand, and with the other pointing to the man on horseback, asked me if I knew him. Replying that I did not, he said: 'Why, that is "Prospecting Joe"'; I thought everybody knew him.' I told him I had never heard of him, when he related his story, almost word for word, as follows:

"He came to the far West from some Eastern state in the old, old days. He was not then more than twenty-three or twenty-four years old. Physically he was a splendid specimen of a man, I am told. He was, moreover, genial and generous, and drew friends around him wherever he went. He secured a claim in the hills above Placerville. One who knew him at that time told me, that, calling at his cabin one night, he surprised him poring over a letter written in a fair hand, while beside him on his rude table lay the picture of a beautiful girl. His heart must have been warmed at the time, for picking up the picture and handing it to my friend, he said. 'Look at her! She is my Nora, *my* Nora. She, beautiful as she is, would in her divinity have bent and married a coarse mold of clay like myself, and poor, too, as I was; but her father

said: 'Not yet, Joe. Go out into the world, make a struggle for two years, then come back, and if by that time you have established that you are man enough to be a husband to a true woman, and you and Nora still hold to the thought that is in your hearts now, I will help you all I can. And, mind you, I don't expect you to make a fortune in two years; I only want you to show that the manhood which I think you have within you is true.' 'That was square and sensible talk, and it was not unkind. So I came away.' Then he took the picture and looked fondly at it for a long time, and said: 'I see the delicious girl as she looked on that summer's day, when she waved me her last good by. I shall see her all my life, if I live a thousand years.'

"Well, Joe worked on week days; on Sundays, as miners did in those days, he went to camp to get his mail and supplies. His claim paid him only fairly well, but he was saving some money. In eight months he had been able to deposit twelve hundred dollars in the local bank. One Sunday he did not receive the expected letter from his Nora, and during the next hour or two he drank two or three times with friends. He was about to leave for home, when three men whom he slightly knew, and who had all been drinking too much, met him and importuned him to drink with them. He declined with thanks, when one of the three caught him by the arm and said he must drink.

"At any other time he would have extricated him self without trouble and gone on his way. But on that day he was not in good humor, so he shook the man off roughly and shortly told him to

go about his own affairs.

"The others were just sufficiently sprung with liquor to take offense at this, and the result was a terrific street fight. Joe was badly bruised but he whipped all three of the others. Then he was arrested and ordered to appear next morning to answer a charge of fighting. He was of course cleared without difficulty, but it took one-fourth of his deposit to pay his lawyer. Then the miners gathered around him and called him a hero and he went on his first spree.

"Next morning when he awoke and thought of as much as he could remember of the previous day's events, he was thoroughly ashamed. As he went down to the office of the hotel, in response to an inquiry as to how he felt, he answered: 'Full of repentance and beer.' A friend showed him the morning paper with a full account of the Sunday fight and his trial and acquittal. This was embellished with taking head-lines, as is the custom with reporters. It cut him to the heart. He knew that if the news reached his old home of his being in a street fight on Sunday, all his hopes would be ended. His first thought was to draw his money and take the first steamer for Panama and New York. He went to the bank and asked how his account stood, for he remembered to have drawn something the previous day. He was answered that there was still to his credit \$150. The steamer fare was \$275. Utterly crushed, he returned to his claim. The fear that the news of his disgrace would reach home, haunted him perpetually and made him afraid to write. He continued to work,

but not with the old hope.

"After some weeks, a rumor came that rich ground had been 'struck' away to the north, somewhere in Siskiyou county. He drew what money he had, bought a couple of ponies, one to ride and one to pack, and started for the new field. Before starting, he confided to a friend that the previous night he had dreamed of a mountain, the crest of which glittered all over with gold, and he was going to find it.

"The friend told him it was but a painted devil of the brain, the child of a distempered imagination, but he merely shook his head and went away.

"He has pursued that dream ever since. His eyes have been ever strained to catch the reflection from those shining heights. When he began the search, his early home and the loving arms which were there stretched out to him, began to recede in the distance. In a few years they disappeared altogether. Then his hopes one by one deserted him, until all had fled except the one false one which was, and still is, driving him on. Youth died and was buried by the trail, but so absorbed was he that he hardly grieved. As Time served notice after notice upon him; as his hair blanched, his form bent and the old sprightliness went out of his limbs, he retired more and more from the haunts of men; more and more he drew the mantle of the mountains around him. But his eyes, now bright with an unnatural splendor, were still strained upon the shining height. There were but a few intervening hills and some forests that obstructed his view. A

little further on and the goal would be reached. Last night he was in his cups and he told my friend that this time he would 'strike it sure,' that the old man would make his showing yet, that he would yet go back to the old home and be a Providence to those he loved when a boy.

"Poor wretch. There is an open grave stretched directly across his trail. On this journey or some other soon, he will, while his eyes are still straining towards his heights of gold, drop into that grave and disappear forever.

"Some morning as he awakens, amid the hills or out upon the desert, there will be such a weariness upon him that he will say, 'I will sleep a little longer,' and from that sleep he will never waken.

"Heaven grant that his vision will then become a reality and that he may mount the shining heights at last.

"Of course it is easy to say that he was originally weak, but that is no argument, for human nature is prone to be weak. His was a high-strung, sensitive, generous nature. He never sought gold for the joy it would give him, but for the happiness he dreamed it would give to those he loved. His Nora was a queen in his eyes and he wanted to give her, every day, the surroundings of a queen. He made one mistake and never rallied from it. Had the letter come that fatal Sunday from Nora, as he was expecting it, or had he left for home half an hour earlier, or had he been of coarser clay, that day's performance would have been avoided, or would have been passed as an incident not to be repeated, but not to be seriously minded. But he was of different mold, and

then that was a blow from Fate. It is easy enough to say that there is nothing in that thing called luck. Such talk will not do here on the Comstock. There is no luck when a money lender charges five dollars for the use of a hundred for a month and exacts good security. He gets his one hundred and five dollars, and that is business.

"But in this lead where ore bodies lie like melons on a vine, when ore is reported in the Belcher and in the Savage, when Brown buys stock in the Belcher and Rogers buys in the Savage; when the streak of ore in the Belcher runs into a bonanza and Brown wakes up rich some morning, and when the streak of ore in the Savage runs into a Niagara of hot water which floods the mine and Rogers's stock is sold out to meet an assessment, it will not do to call Brown a shrewd fellow and Rogers an idiot.

"Still, I do not object to the theory that a man should always keep trying, even if the lack is against him, because luck may change sometime, and if it does not, he sleeps better when he knows that with the lights before him he has done the best he could. A man can stand almost anything when his soul does not reproach him as he tries to go to sleep.

"Then, too, man is notoriously a lazy animal, and unless he has the nerve to spur himself to work, even when unfortunate, he is liable to fail and get the dry rot, which is worse than death.

"But my heart goes out in sympathy when I think of the glorified spirits, which on this coast have failed and are failing every day, because from the first an iron fortune has hedged them

round and baffled their every effort, struggle as they would."

Carlin ceased speaking, and the silence which prevailed in the Club for a moment was broken by Miller, who said: "Don't worry about them, Carlin. If they do fail they have lots of fun in trying."

"I would grave more for your mon Joe," interposed Corrigan, "did I not remember Mrs. Dougherty, who married the gentleman of properthy, and thin your Joe war a fraud onyway. What war there in a bit of a scrap to make a mon grave himself into craziness over it?"

"Your stock-buying illustration is not fair, Carlin, for that is only a form of gambling at best," suggested Brewster.

The club winced under this a little, for every member dabbled in stocks sometimes, except Brewster and Harding.

For two evenings Harding had been scribbling away behind the table, and during a lull in the conversation Ashley asked him what he had been writing. "Letters?" suggested Ashley.

"No, not letters," answered Harding, sententiously.

"What is it, then," asked Miller; "won't you read it to us?"

"Yes, rade it, rade it," said Corrigan, and the rest all joined in the request.

"You won't laugh?" said Harding, inquiringly.

They all promised, and Harding read as follows:

THE PROSPECTOR

How strangely to-night my memory flings
From the face of the past its shadowy wings,
And I see far back through the mist and tears
Which make the record of twenty years;
From the beautiful days in the Golden State,
When life seemed sure by long leases from Fate;
From the wondrous visions of "long ago"
To the naked shade that we call "now."

Those halcyon days! There were four with me then —
Ernest and Ned, Wild Tom and Ben.
Now all are gone; Tom was first to die.
I held his hands, closed his glazed eye;
And many a tear o'er his grave we shed
As we tenderly pillowed his curly head
In the shadows deep of the pines, that stand
Forever solemn, forever fanned
By the winds that steal through the Golden Gate
And spread their balm o'er the Golden State.

And the others, too, they all are dead.
By the turbid Gila perished Ned;
Brave, noble Ernest, he was lost
Amid Montana's ice and frost;
And out upon a desert trail
Our Bennie met the spectre pale.

And I am left – the last of all —
And as to-night the white snows fall,

As barbarous winds around me roar,
I think the long past o'er and o'er —
What I have hoped and suffered, all,
From twenty years rolls back the pall,
From the dusty, thorny, weary track,
As the tortuous path I follow back.

In my childhood's home they think me, there,
A failure, or lost, till my name in the prayer
At eve is forgot. Well, they cannot know
That my toil through heat, through tempest and snow,
While it seemed for naught but a struggle for pelf,
Was more for them, far more, than myself.

Ah, well! As my hair turns slowly to snow
The places of childhood more distantly grow;
And my dreams are changing. 'Tis home no more,
For shadowy hands from the other shore
Stretch nightly down, and it seems as when
I lived with Tom, Ned, Ernest and Ben.

And the mountains of Earth seem dwindling down,
And the hills of Eden, with golden crown,
Rise up, and I think, in the last great day,
Will my claim above bear a fire assay?
From the slag of earth, and the baser strains,
Will the crucible show of precious grains
Enough to give me a standing above,
Where in temples of Peace rock the cradles of Love?

"That is good, but it is too serious by half," Miller said, critically. "What is a young fellow like you doing with such a melancholy view of things?"

"It's a heap better to write such things for pleasure in boyhood than to have to feel them for a fact in old age," said Wright.

"I say, Harding, have you measured all the faet in that poem?" remarked Corrigan, good-naturedly.

"We have been talking too seriously for two or three evenings and it is influencing Harding," was Miller's comment.

Brewster thought it was a good way for Sammie to spend his evenings. It would give him discipline, which would help him in writing all his life.

CHAPTER VII

The next evening Wright had business down town.

"Carlin was right last night," began Miller, "when he said that all men were naturally lazy. Laziness is a fixed principle in this world. I can prove it by my friend Wand down at Pioche.

"When he was not so old as he has been these last few years, he made a visit to San Francisco, and one day, passing a building on Fourth street, saw within several hives of bees, evidently placed there to be sold. Some whim led him within the building and, from the man in charge, he learned that in California, because of the softer climate, bees worked quite nine months in the year; that a good swarm of bees would gather a certain number of pounds of honey in a season, which sold readily at a certain price, making a tremendous percentage on the cost of the bees, which was, if I remember correctly, one hundred dollars per hive. The idea seemed to strike Wand. He had fifteen hundred dollars, and all that day he was mentally estimating how much money could be made out of fifteen swarms of bees in a year. The figures looked exceedingly encouraging. They always do, you know, when your mind is fixed upon a certain business which you want to engage in.

"That evening Wand happened to meet a friend who had just come in from Honolulu. This friend was enthusiastic over the Hawaiian Islands. There was perpetual summer there and ever-

blooming flowers. Before one flower cast its leaves, others on the same tree were budding. Their glory was ever before the eyes and their incense ever upon the air.

"Wand fell asleep that night trying to estimate how much money a swarm of bees would make a year in a land of perpetual summer. The conclusion was that next morning Wand bought twelve hives of bees, and that afternoon sailed with them for Honolulu.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.