ALGER HORATIO JR.

THE YOUNG MINER; OR, TOM NELSON IN CALIFORNIA

Horatio Alger

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PREFACE

When "The Young Adventurer" was published, a year since, as the initial volume of The Pacific Series, it was announced that the second volume would be "The Young Pioneer." This has been changed to "The Young Miner," in order to avoid confusion with a book bearing a title somewhat similar to the one first proposed.

Those who were interested in Tom Nelson's trip across the Plains will find in the present story a record of his adventures in the Land of Gold. Though his prosperity was chiefly due to his own energy and industry, it is also true that he was exceptionally lucky. Yet his good fortune has been far exceeded by that of numerous adventurous spirits in Colorado, within the last twelve months. Some measure of prosperity generally awaits the patient and energetic worker, and seldom comes to those who idly wait for something to turn up.

New York, Oct. 1, 1879.

CHAPTER I.
THE GOLD-SEEKERS

A dozen men, provided with rockers, were busily engaged in gathering and washing dirt, mingled with gold-dust, on the banks of a small stream in California. It was in the early days, and this party was but one of hundreds who were scattered over the new Eldorado, seeking for the shining metal which throughout the civilized world exercises a sway potent and irresistible.

I have said there were a dozen men, but this is a mistake. One of the party was a well-grown boy of sixteen, with a good-humored and even handsome face. He was something more than good-humored, however. There was an expression on his face which spoke of strength and resolution and patient endurance. The readers of "The Young Adventurer" will at once recognize in our young hero Tom Nelson, the oldest son of a poor New England farmer, who, finding no prospects at home, had joined the tide of emigrants pouring from all parts of the country to the land of which so many marvelous stories were told. Tom had come to work; and though he doubtless shared to some extent the extravagant anticipations of the great body of Eastern visitors who hoped to make a fortune in a year, he did not expect to succeed without hard toil.

His companions belonged to the same party with whom he

had crossed the plains, under the leadership of Phineas Fletcher, a broad-shouldered Illinois farmer, who had his family with him. Next to Tom was Donald Ferguson, a grave Scotchman, and Tom's special friend; a man of excellent principles, thoroughly reliable, and held in high respect by all though not possessed of popular manners. On the other side was Lawrence Peabody, a young Boston clerk, who had spent several years behind a dry-goods counter. He was soft and effeminate, with no talent for "roughing it," and wholly unfitted for the hard work which he had undertaken. He was deeply disappointed in his first work at gold-hunting, having come out with the vague idea that he should pick up a big nugget within a short time that would make his fortune and enable him to go home a rich man. The practical side of gold-seeking—this washing particles of dust from the dirt of the river-bed—was in the highest degree unsatisfactory and discouraging. He was not a bad fellow; and his companions, though they laughed at him, were well disposed towards him.

Among the rest, mention may be made of John Miles, Henry Scott, and Chapman, owner of a refractory donkey named after King Solomon.

Not far away from the river were the tents occupied by the miners. There was but one house, roughly built of logs. This was occupied by Captain Fletcher and his family. He had not had the trouble of building it, but had found it ready for occupation, having been constructed by a previous party who had wandered farther down the river in search of richer washings. In fact, it was

this building which had decided our party to remain.

"There isn't much difference in places," said Fletcher. "We may as well stay here."

"Then why was it deserted?" suggested John Miles, dubiously. "That's rather against it, isn't it, captain?"

"Not necessarily, Miles. You've been on berrying parties, haven't you, when at home?"

"Many a time."

"You've noticed that many of the pickers leave good places, just from love of novelty, and wander about the field, often faring worse than if they remained where they were?"

"That's so, captain."

"Then let us give this place a try. We'll make more working steady in a medium place than wandering here, there, and everywhere."

So the whole party agreed to "give the place a try."

There had been no brilliant success as yet, but fair luck. In six days Tom had washed out twenty-five dollars' worth of gold-dust, in spite of awkwardness and inexperience. Others had done better, but poor Lawrence Peabody had barely five dollars' worth to show. It must be said, however, that he had not averaged more than two or three hours of real labor in every twenty-four. He spent the rest of the time in wandering about aimlessly, or sitting down and watching the labors of his companions, while he enlivened them by pathetic lamentations over his unfortunate position, so far away from Boston and the refining influences of

civilization.

A little transcript of a conversation between Tom and himself will throw light upon the characters of both.

"This is beastly work," sighed Peabody, resting from his by no means arduous labors, and looking over to Tom. "I tell you, it isn't fit for a gentleman."

"It is rather hard to keep one's hands clean, Mr. Peabody," said Tom; "but you mustn't think of the present. Think of the time when you will go home, your pockets full of gold."

"I don't see any prospect of it, Tom," sighed Peabody. "Here I've been hard at work for a week, and I haven't got over five dollars' worth of dust."

"I have five times as much," said Tom.

"Some people are lucky," said Peabody.

"You haven't worked like Tom," said the Scotchman, plainly. "You haven't averaged over two hours a day, while Tom has worked eight or ten."

"I have worked till my back was like to break," said the young man from Boston. "I am not accustomed to manual labor, Mr. Ferguson. My friend Tom has worked on a farm, while I have been engaged in mercantile pursuits. Oh, why did I leave Boston!"

"I am sure I can't guess," said Ferguson, dryly.

"I never expected anything like *this*."

"What did you expect, if I may be so bold as to inquire?"

"I thought I should find the gold in big nuggets worth

thousands of dollars apiece. I was always reading in the papers about finding them. I think it's a great shame to deceive people by such stories. I don't believe there are any nuggets."

"Oh, yes, there are; but they are few and far between," said Fletcher. "A neighbor of mine found one worth three thousand dollars. Altogether he brought home five thousand dollars, and invested it in a farm and saw-mill. He is doing a good business. When he came to California he had nothing."

"That is what I should like, Captain Fletcher," said Tom. "If I could only manage to carry home five thousand dollars, I could make my father comfortable for life."

"I shouldn't be satisfied with five thousand dollars," said Peabody, whose ideas were lofty.

"How much would satisfy you?"

"About fifty thousand," said the young Bostonian, his face lighting up at the thought of so large a sum.

"And what would you do with it, if I may make so bold?" asked Ferguson.

"I would buy a nice house at the South End, furnish it handsomely, and live in style."

"I suppose you would marry?" suggested Tom, smiling.

"I probably should," answered Peabody, gravely.

"Perhaps you have the lady already selected."

"I have."

"Who is she?" asked John Mills. "Come, now, Peabody, don't be bashful."

"It is the daughter of a Boston merchant."

"Does the lady love you?"

"We understand each other," answered Peabody, loftily. "She would marry me, poor as I am, but for her purse-proud, mercenary sire. It will be a happy day when, with my pockets full of gold, I enter his presence and claim his daughter's hand."

"I wish you success, Mr. Peabody," said Tom. "I hope you have no rivals."

"Yes, there is one."

"Are you not afraid of him?"

"Oh, no; he is a fellow of no style," said Peabody, drawing up his slender form, and looking as stylish as a very dirty shirt, muddy boots, and a soiled suit would allow.

"I think I shall wait awhile before getting married," said Tom. "I am afraid I wouldn't stand any chance with an heiress, Mr. Peabody. Do you think I can ever be stylish?"

The Bostonian understood Tom to be in earnest, and told him he thought in time, under proper training, he might become fairly stylish.

The conversation was interrupted by the ringing of a bell from the log-house. Mrs. Fletcher, by an arrangement with the party, prepared their meals, and thus they fared better than most of the early pioneers. Their labor gave them a good appetite, and they were more solicitous about quantity than quality. Slow as he was at his work, there was no one who exhibited greater alacrity at meal-times, than Lawrence Peabody. At such times he was even

cheerful.

CHAPTER II.
MISSOURI JACK

At the end of a month the settlement had considerably increased. A large party from Missouri went to work farther up stream, and a few stray emigrants also added themselves to the miners at River Bend, for this was the name selected by Captain Fletcher for the location. The new arrivals were a rougher and more disorderly class than Fletcher and his companions. Already there was a saloon, devoted to the double purpose of gambling and drinking; and the proprietor, Missouri Jack (no one knew his last name), was doing a thriving business. Indeed his income considerably exceeded that of any one in the settlement.

Neither Tom nor any of his party contributed much to Missouri Jack's profits. In consequence, they had to bear the ill-will and sometimes open abuse of Jack and his friends.

"Come in and take a drink, stranger," called out Jack, the day after the opening of the saloon, to Captain Fletcher.

"No, thank you."

"It shan't cost you a cent."

"It would cost me my health," returned Fletcher.

"Do you mean to say I sell bad whiskey?" demanded Jack, angrily, emphasizing the inquiry by an oath.

"I don't know anything about it."

"Then what *do* you mean?"

"I mean that all whiskey is bad for the health," replied Fletcher.

"Oh, you're a temperance sneak!" exclaimed Missouri Jack, contemptuously.

"I am a temperance man; you may leave out the other word," calmly answered Fletcher.

"You're not a man!" exploded Jack. "A man that's afraid of whiskey is a—a—isn't half a man. He isn't fit to be a woman."

"Have it as you like," said Fletcher, unruffled. "I shall not drink to please any man. I had a younger brother—a bright, promising young man poor Ben was—who drank himself to death. He'd have been alive now but for whiskey."

"Oh, dry up your pious talk! You make me sick!" exclaimed Missouri Jack in deep disgust.

Next he accosted John Miles, who curtly declined and received in return a volley of abuse. Now Miles was a powerful man, and not possessed of Fletcher's self-control. He paused, and surveyed Jack with a menacing look.

"Look here, stranger," he said, sharply, "just have a care how you use that tongue of yours. This is a free country, and if I choose to decline your whiskey, there's no law against it that I know of."

"You're a white-livered sneak!"

Missouri Jack did not proceed with his remarks, for John Miles, seizing him by the shoulder, tripped him up, and strode

away, leaving him prostrate, and pouring out a volley of curses. Being a bully, and cowardly as most bullies are, he did not pursue his broad-shouldered enemy, but vowed vengeance whenever a good opportunity came.

In fact, the only one of the original miners who accepted Jack's invitation was Lawrence Peabody.

"Step in, stranger, and have a drink!" said Jack, a little dubiously, having met with such poor luck heretofore.

The young Bostonian paused. He was not a drinker at home, but in his discontent and disappointment he was tempted.

"My dear sir, you are very polite," he said.

"I hope you ain't one of them temperance sneaks," said Jack, his brow clouding in anticipation of a refusal.

"I assure you I am not," Peabody hastened to say. "I have participated in convivial scenes more than once in Boston."

"I don't understand college talk," said Jack; "but if you want a glass of prime whiskey, just say the word."

"I don't care if I do," said Peabody, following his new friend into the saloon.

The draught of prime whiskey scorched his throat as he swallowed it down, but it was followed by a sense of exhilaration, and Peabody's tongue was loosened.

"You're a gentleman!" said Missouri Jack. "You ain't like them fellows you're with. They're sneaks."

"Really, you compliment me, Mr.—, what may I call your name?"

"Missouri Jack—that's the peg I hang on to."

"My dear Mr. Jack, I am glad to know you. You are really quite an accession to our settlement."

"Well, if I ain't, my saloon is. How you've managed to live so long without liquor beats me. Why, it ain't civilized."

"It *was* pretty dull," admitted Peabody.

"No life, no amusement; for all the world like a parcel of Methodists. What luck have you met with, stranger?"

"Beastly luck!" answered Peabody. "I tell you, Mr. Jack, California's a fraud. Many a time I've regretted leaving Boston, where I lived in style, and moved in the first circles, for such a place as this. Positively, Mr. Jack, I feel like a tramp, and I'm afraid I look like one. If my fashionable friends could see me now, they wouldn't know me."

"I ain't got no fashionable friends, and I don't want any," growled Missouri Jack, spitting on the floor. "What I want is, to meet gentlemen that ain't afraid to drink like gentlemen. I say, stranger, you'd better leave them Methodist fellers, and join our gang."

"Thank you, Mr. Jack, you're very kind, and I'll think of it," said Peabody, diplomatically. Though a little exhilarated, he was not quite blind to the character of the man with whom he was fraternizing, and had too much real refinement to enjoy his coarseness.

"Have another drink!"

"Thank you."

Peabody drank again, this time with a friend of Jack's, a man of his own stripe, who straggled into the saloon.

"Do you play euchre?" asked Jack, producing a dirty pack of cards.

"I know little of it," said Peabody; "but I'll try a game."

"Then you and me and Bill here will have a game."

"All right," said Peabody, glad to while away the time.

"What'll you put up on your game, stranger?" asked Bill.

"You don't mean to play for money, do you?" asked Peabody, a little startled.

"Sartain I do. What's the good of playin' for nothing?"

So the young Bostonian, out of his modest pile was tempted to stake an ounce of gold-dust. Though his head was hardly in a condition to follow the game intelligently, he won, or at least Bill and Jack told him he had, and for the first time Lawrence felt the rapture of the successful gambler, as he gathered in his winnings.

"He plays a steep game, Bill," said Jack.

"Tip-top—A No. 1."

"I believe I do play a pretty good game," said the flattered Peabody. "My friends in Boston used to say so."

"You're hard to beat, and no mistake," said Bill. "Try another game."

"I'm ready, gentlemen," said Peabody, with alacrity.

"It's a great deal easier earning money this way," he reflected, regarding complacently the two ounces of dust which represented his winnings, "than washing dirt out of the river."

And the poor dupe congratulated himself that a new way of securing the favors of fortune had been opened to him.

The reader will easily guess that Lawrence Peabody did not win the next game, nor will he be surprised to hear that when he left the saloon his pockets were empty.

"Better luck next time, stranger," said Jack, carelessly. "Take a drink before you go?"

Peabody accepted the invitation, and soon after staggered into the tent occupied by Tom and his friend Ferguson.

"What's the matter, Mr. Peabody?" asked Tom. "Are you sick?"

"Yes," answered Peabody, sinking to the floor. "Something's the matter with my head. I don't feel well."

"Have you been to the saloon, Mr. Peabody?" asked Ferguson.

"Yes," answered the Bostonian.

"And while there you drank some of their vile whiskey, didn't you?"

"I'm a free man, Mr. Ferguson. If I choosee to drink, what—what business is it—yours?"

"None, except as a friend I advise you not to go there again."

Further inquiries elicited the facts about the gambling, and Ferguson and Tom seriously remonstrated with Peabody, who, however, insisted that Mr. Jack, as he called him, was a hospitable gentleman.

The dust which Peabody had lost should have been paid to Capt. Fletcher, as his share of the expenses that same evening.

Of course this was now impossible. Fletcher warned him that any subsequent failure from the same cause would be followed by an exclusion from his table.

CHAPTER III.
HOW TOM GOT ON

About this time Tom took account of stock. He had come out to California with the noble and praiseworthy purpose of earning money to help his father pay off the mortgage on his little farm. He was the more anxious to succeed, because two hundred dollars of the amount had been raised to defray his expenses across the continent. The mortgage, amounting now to twenty-two hundred dollars, was held by Squire Hudson, a wealthy resident of the same town, who hoped eventually to find an excuse for fore-closing the mortgage, and ejecting Mr. Nelson's family. He was actuated not alone by mercenary motives, but also to gratify an ancient grudge. In early life Mrs. Nelson, Tom's mother, had rejected the suit of the wealthy squire, and this insult, as he chose to characterize it, he had never forgotten or forgiven.

Had Tom been aware of the Squire's feelings, towards his family, he never would have been willing to have the mortgage increased for his sake, much as he wished to go to California. But neither Tom nor his father dreamed of Squire Hudson's secret animosity, and regarded his willingness to advance the extra two hundred dollars as an evidence of friendship.

But I have said that Tom took account of stock—in other words, ascertained how much he was worth. First, then, of the

money borrowed for his trip—the original two hundred dollars—he had twenty-five dollars left over. Besides this sum, after paying all expenses, he had accumulated, by hard work and strict economy, fifty dollars' worth of gold-dust.

"I wish father had this money," said Tom to his tent-mate, Ferguson. "I am afraid he stands in need of it."

"There may be a way to send it to him, Tom."

"I wish there were."

"There's one of our party going to San Francisco next week. He can buy a draft there, and send it to your father."

"Who is going?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"John Miles. You can trust him with the money, Tom."

"Of course I can. I'd trust John Miles with any sum."

"Who's that taking liberties with my name?" asked a manly voice, and John Miles himself stepped into the tent, bending his head as he entered.

"I hear you are going to San Francisco, John?"

"Yes, I start next week."

"Will you come back again?"

"I intend to. I am going to prospect a little, and buy some things for myself and Captain Fletcher."

"Will you do me a favor?"

"Of course I will, if it isn't too large a one," answered Miles.

Tom explained what he wished, and John Miles cordially assented.

"You're a good boy, Tom," he said, "to think of your father

so soon."

"I feel anxious about him," said Tom. "He raised money to send me out here, and I don't want him to suffer for it."

"That's the right way to feel, Tom. I wish I had a father and mother to look out for," said Miles, soberly, "but you're in better luck than I. Both died when I was a mere lad. How much do you want to send?"

"Seventy-five dollars."

"Have you saved up so much already?" asked Miles, in surprise.

"Part of it I had left over when I got here."

"Will you have any left?"

"No."

"Isn't it well to reserve a little, then?"

"Oh, I shall have some more soon," answered Tom, sanguine, as most boys are.

"Suppose you are sick?"

"If he is sick he shall suffer for nothing," said the Scotchman. "While I have money, Tom shall not feel the want of it."

"Thank you, Mr. Ferguson," said Tom, gratefully.

"That old fellow has a heart, after all," thought Miles, who had been disposed to look upon Ferguson ever since their first acquaintance, as rather miserly.

The Scotchman was certainly frugal, and counted his pennies carefully, but he was not mean, and had conceived a strong affection for his young companion, whom he regarded much as

a son or a nephew.

"Suppose you take the money now, John," said Tom.

"Shall I scribble a receipt, Tom? I am afraid my writing materials have given out."

"I don't want any receipt," said Tom; "I'll trust you without one."

"Nevertheless, lad," said the cautious Scotchman, "it may be well—"

"Yes, Tom, Mr. Ferguson is right. Of course I know that you trust me; but if anything should happen to me,—any accident, I mean,—the paper may be useful to you."

"Just as you like, Mr. Miles, but I don't ask it, remember that."

"Yes, I will remember it, and I don't mean to meet with any accident if I can help it. Mr. Ferguson, can you oblige me with a pipeful of tobacco? I'll join you in smoking."

Smoking was the Scotchman's solitary extravagance, not a costly one, however, as he never smoked cigars, but indulged only in a democratic clay pipe.

John Miles threw himself on the ground between Tom and his Scotch friend, and watched complacently the wreaths of smoke as they curled upwards.

"Tom, you ought to smoke," he said. "You don't know how much enjoyment you lose."

"Don't tempt the lad," said Ferguson. "It's a bad habit."

"You smoke yourself."

"That is true, but it isn't well for a growing boy. It can do him

no good."

"I smoked before I was as old as Tom."

"So did I, but I wish I had not."

"Well, perhaps you're right, but it's a comfort when a man's tired or out of spirits."

"I am not troubled in that way," said Tom. "I mean with being out of spirits."

"Youth is a hopeful age," said the Scotchman. "When we are young we are always hoping for something good to befall us."

"And when one is older, how is it, Mr. Ferguson?"

"We fear ill more than we hope for good," he replied.

"Then I want to remain young as long as I can."

"A good wish, Tom. Some men are always young in spirit; but those that have seen the evil there is in the world find it harder to be hopeful."

"You speak as if you had had experience of the evil, Mr. Ferguson."

"So I have," answered the Scotchman slowly. Then, after a pause, "I will tell you about it: it's no secret."

"Not if it is going to pain you."

"Oh, the pain is past. It's only a matter of money, and those wounds heal."

"Only a matter of money!" said John Miles to himself. "I must have misjudged Ferguson. I thought money was all in all with him. I did not think he would speak so lightly of it."

"When I was a young man," Ferguson began, "my father died,

leaving me a thousand pounds, and a small annuity to my mother. With this money I felt rich, but I knew it would not support me, nor was I minded to be idle. So I began to look about me, to consider what business I had best go into, when a young man, about my own age, a clerk in a mercantile house, came to me and proposed a partnership. He was to put in five hundred pounds, and contribute his knowledge of business, which was greater than mine. He was a young man of good parts, and had a brisk, pleasant way with him, that made him a favorite in business circles. I thought it was a good chance, and, after taking a little time for thought, agreed to his proposal. So the firm of McIntire and Ferguson was formed. We went into business, and for a time all seemed to go well. As my partner chose to keep the books, I was not so clear as I wished to be about matters, but we seemed to be prospering. One morning, however, on coming to business, I found that my partner had disappeared, after possessing himself of all the money he could collect on the credit of the firm. Of course we were bankrupts, or rather I was, for he left me to bear the brunt of failure."

"Have you ever seen him since, Mr. Ferguson?"

"From that day to this—twenty years—I have never set eyes on Sandy McIntire."

"It was a mean trick to serve you, Ferguson," said Miles.

"Yes," said the Scotchman, soberly. "I minded the loss of money, but the loss of confidence was a sore thought too, after all the trust I had put in that man."

Presently Miles rose to go.

"I'll take care of your money, Tom," he said, "and do my best to get it safely to your father."

"Thank you, John."

As Miles left the tent, he did not observe a crouching figure on the other side of it. It was the figure of Bill Crane, a crony of Missouri Jack, in fact, the man who helped him to fleece poor Peabody of his scanty hoard.

Bill looked after Miles enviously.

"I wonder how much money he's got?" thought Bill. "I'd like some of it, for I'm bust. I must tell Jack. I don't dare to tackle him alone."

CHAPTER IV.
A FOILED ROBBER

In the grand rush to the newly discovered gold-fields all classes were represented. There were men of education, representatives of all the learned professions, men versed in business, and along with them adventurers and men of doubtful antecedents, graduates of prisons and penitentiaries. Bill Crane, introduced in the last chapter, belonged to the latter undesirable class. He had served a term at Sing-Sing as a housebreaker, and later another term in a Western penitentiary. He had come to California with a prejudice against honest labor, and a determination to make a living by the use of the peculiar talents on which he had hitherto relied. He had spent a week at River Bend, chiefly at the saloon of Missouri Jack, whom he found a congenial spirit, and had picked up a little money from flats like the young Bostonian; but, on the whole, he had found it an unprofitable field for the exercise of his special talents.

"I must make a raise somehow," he bethought himself, "and then I'll make tracks for some other settlement."

Precisely how to raise the fund of which he stood in need was difficult to decide. Moneyed men were not plenty at River Bend. Captain Fletcher and his party had been at work but a short time, and were not likely to have collected much.

As we know, Bill Crane overheard a part of the closing conversation between Tom and John Miles. From this he learned that Miles, besides his own money, would be in charge of seventy-five dollars belonging to our young hero. It was not much, but it was something.

"If the whole doesn't come to over two hundred dollars, I can make it do," thought Crane. "It will get me out of this beastly hole, and carry me to San Francisco."

John Miles slept by himself under a small tent at the northern end of the small encampment. He looked like a man who ate well and slept well, and this would be favorable to Bill Crane, who proposed to effect the robbery in the night. He had half a mind to secure the aid of Missouri Jack, but then Jack would expect to go shares in the "plunder," and there was likely to be little enough for one. So Bill decided to make the attempt alone.

In a small camp like that at River Bend, the movements and plans of each individual were generally known. So it was generally understood that John Miles intended to start on Thursday for the city.

The previous evening he spent with Tom and Ferguson, with whom he was more intimate than any others of the party. He would not have been drawn to the Scotchman, but for his being Tom's room-mate. Through him he came to appreciate and respect the Scot's sterling virtues, and to overlook his dry, phlegmatic manner.

"I hope you'll have good luck, Mr. Miles," said Tom.

"Thank you, my boy."

"I would join with my young friend Tom," said Ferguson, "if I were quite clear in my mind whether good luck is the right term to use."

"Don't you think some men are luckier than others, Mr. Ferguson?" asked Tom.

"Some men are more successful, doubtless; but what we call good luck, generally comes from greater industry, good judgment, and, above all, the prompt use of opportunities."

"There is something in that," said Miles; "but when two men work side by side with equal industry, and one finds a nugget worth thousands of dollars, while the other plods along at a few dollars a day, isn't there some luck there?"

"It may be so," said the Scotchman, cautiously, "but such cases are exceptional."

"So one boy is born to an inheritance of wealth and another to an inheritance of hard work. Isn't there any luck there?"

"The luck may be on the side of the poor boy," was the reply. "He is further removed from temptation."

John Miles laughed.

"Well, at any rate, it seems you believe in luck after all. I am sure you both wish me to be prosperous, whether you call it luck or by some other name. Tom, if I meet with any good opening that I think will suit you, I shall write you. You don't want to stay here, particularly?"

"No; the place is not so pleasant since these new people have

come here. Missouri Jack isn't a neighbor that I like."

"He is exerting a bad influence," said Ferguson. "I am afraid Peabody visits him too often for his own good."

"He ought to have stayed in Boston," said Miles. "He is not the man for such a life as ours. He is too delicate to work, or thinks he is, and I see no other reliable road to success."

"I saw Peabody reeling out of the saloon this afternoon," said Tom. "I asked him if he considered it was 'high-toned' to drink in a saloon, as that is the word he is always using, but he said it didn't make much difference out here, where he wasn't known."

"Peabody isn't overstocked with brains, though he does come from Boston," said Miles.

Ten o'clock came, and Miles rose to go.

"I must have a good night's rest," he said, "for to-morrow night must see me many miles on my road. Tom, I will attend to that commission of yours just as soon as I have the opportunity."

"Thank you, Mr. Miles."

John Miles walked slowly toward his tent. Arrived there, he threw himself down on his rude couch, and in less than fifteen minutes, he was sound asleep. He had done his usual day's work, and made some preparations for his journey besides, and these made slumber sweet and refreshing.

Before settling himself for the night, however, Miles carefully deposited a bag of gold-dust under his head, wrapped up in an extra pair of pantaloons. Had he known that Bill Crane had formed a plan to rob him that very night, he would have taken

extra precautions, but he was not inclined to be suspicious, or to anticipate danger.

Perhaps an hour later, Tom, who found himself unusually restless, got up from his hard couch, leaving Ferguson fast asleep, and went out into the air, thinking that a walk would do him good and dispose him to sleep. The night was dark, but not wholly so. There was no moon, but a few stars were shining; and as his eyes became accustomed to the faint light, he could easily distinguish objects at the distance of a few rods.

Tom's thoughts reverted to his humble home, more than three thousand miles away. Probably the fact that he had committed to John Miles a sum of money to send to his father, had turned his thoughts in that direction.

"Father will be glad to get the seventy-five dollars," thought Tom, "and I am sure he will need it. I wish it could get there more quickly, but it is a long way off."

Tom was not homesick, and was far from wishing himself back, with his object in coming yet unaccomplished, but it did occur to him, that he would like to see his father and mother, and brothers and sisters, if only for a few minutes.

When he came out he had no particular direction in mind in which he wished to walk, but chance directed his steps toward the tent of his friend, John Miles.

When he came near it, his attention was arrested by the sight of a crouching figure which appeared to be entering the tent. His first thought was, that Miles, like himself, had got up from

his couch and was just returning. He was on the point of calling out "John," when a sudden doubt and suspicion silenced him. —"Might not it be a robber?"

Tom was determined to find out. He crept nearer, so that he could have a clearer view of the figure.

"It's Bill Crane!" he said to himself, with sudden recognition. "What's he up to?"

Tom could guess. He didn't know the man's antecedents, but he had read his character aright. He was instantly on the alert. Crane evidently was on a thief's errand, and was likely to steal not only Miles's money but Tom's. Our hero was alive to the emergency, and resolved to foil him. He had his revolver with him; for in the unsettled state of society, with no one to enforce the laws, and indeed no laws to enforce, it was the custom for all men to go armed.

Tom was not long left in doubt as to Crane's intentions. He saw him cautiously pulling at something in the tent, and felt sure that it was the bag of treasure. He decided that the time had come to act.

"Put that back," he exclaimed in boyish, but clear, commanding tone.

Bill Crane turned suddenly, panic-stricken.

He saw Tom standing a few feet from him, with a revolver in his hand.

All was not lost. He might, he thought, intimidate the boy.

"Mind your business, you young cub," he growled.

"What are you about?" demanded Tom.

"I am going to sleep with Miles. He invited me. Does that satisfy you?"

"No, it doesn't, for I know that it's a lie. You are here to rob him."

"You'd better not insult me, boy, or I'll have your life."

"Get up this instant and leave the tent, or I'll fire," said Tom, resolutely.

"A young cub like you can't frighten me. That shooting-iron of yours isn't loaded," said Bill Crane, rather uneasily.

"It'll be rather a bad thing for you to take the risk," said Tom, with a coolness that surprised himself, for the situation was a strange one for a boy brought up in a quiet New England farming town.

"What do you want of me?" growled the desperado, uncomfortably, for he was satisfied that the weapon was loaded, and Tom looked as if he would shoot.

"I want you to leave that tent at once," said Tom.

"Suppose I don't."

"Then I shall fire at you."

"And be hung for attempted murder."

"I think I could explain it," said our hero. "You know very well what will happen to you if you are caught."

Bill Crane did know. Hanging was the penalty for theft in the early days of California, and he had no desire to swing from the branch of a tree.

"You're a young fool!" he said roughly, as he rose from his stooping posture. "I wanted to ask Miles to do a little commission for me in Frisco. I had no thought of robbing him."

"You can see him in the morning about it," said Tom, resolutely.

"I'll be even with you for this," said the foiled thief, as he sullenly obeyed the boy, half-ashamed to do so.

Tom went back to his tent, aroused Ferguson, and the two took turns in guarding the tent of Miles during the night. Tom did not wish to awaken him, for he needed rest on the eve of a long and fatiguing journey.

CHAPTER V.
MILES SETS OUT ON HIS JOURNEY

"When Miles woke up in the morning he found Tom beside him.

"Hallo, Tom!" he said, in some surprise. "This is an early call."

"I have been here half the night," said Tom, quietly.

"How is that?"

"I was afraid you would be robbed."

"Did you have any particular reason for fearing it?" asked Miles, quickly.

Thereupon Tom described his chance visit of the evening before, and what he saw. As might have been expected, John Miles was indignant.

"The miserable sneak! I'd like to wring his neck," he exclaimed. "Did you say he had his hand upon the bag of gold-dust, Tom?"EY.

"Yes; I distinctly saw him attempting to draw it out from under your head."

"If the boys knew of this, Crane's fate would be sealed. A thief in a mining camp has a short shrift."

"You mean he would be hung?" asked Tom, in surprise.

"Yes, he would grace a limb of yonder tree, and I am not sure

but it would be the best way to dispose of him."

Tom shuddered.

"It would be a terrible fate," he said. "I should like to see him punished, but I don't want him hanged."

"Then you will have to keep your mouth shut. Once let the boys get hold of what happened, and nothing will save him."

"Then I shall keep it to myself."

"I will see Crane, and let him understand that I am aware of the attempt he made," said Miles.

After breakfast he came upon Crane within a few rods of Missouri Jack's saloon.

"Look here, Bill Crane," said Miles, "I've got something to say to you."

"What is it?" returned Crane, sullenly, looking ill at ease.

"I understand you favored me with a visit, last night."

"Who told you so?"

"Tom Nelson."

"The young cub had better mind his own business," growled Crane, in a menacing tone.

"He did me a service in preventing your intended theft."

"If he says I meant to rob you, he lies!"

"Nevertheless, if he should make public what he saw, the boys would be likely to believe him rather than you," said Miles, significantly.

"Is he going to tell?" asked Crane, nervously.

"He has told me, but is not likely to speak of it to others, being

unwilling that you should suffer the punishment you deserve."

"He is very kind," sneered Bill Crane, but he felt very much relieved.

"You probably owe your life to his kindness," said Miles, quietly. "He tells me you wish me to do something for you in Frisco."

"I've changed my mind," said Crane, abruptly; "I may go there myself, soon."

Miles smiled.

"I thought it might be something urgent," he said, "since it led you to come to my tent at midnight."

"I thought you would be starting away early this morning."

"Well thought of, Bill Crane; but it is only fair to tell you that I don't believe a word you say. I have one thing to say to you before I go, and you had better bear it in mind. If you harm a hair of Tom Nelson's head, and I believe you quite capable of it, I will never rest till I have found you out and punished you for it."

"I am not afraid of you, John Miles," retorted Crane, but he looked uncomfortable.

"You will have cause to be, if you injure Tom."

Miles walked off, leaving behind him a bitter enemy.

"I *hate* him—him and the boy too!" muttered Bill Crane. "If I dared, I would put my mark on him before he leaves the camp."

But Crane did not dare. He knew that he was in a very critical position. His safety depended on the silence of two persons—one of whom would soon be gone. He was not aware that Ferguson

also knew of his attempted crime, or the danger would have seemed greater. However much he thirsted for vengeance, it would not do to gratify it now. He must bide his time.

Bill Crane was cunning as well as malignant. He decided to quiet Tom's suspicions if he could, and ensure his continued silence, by an affectation of friendliness. He waited till he saw our hero washing dust beyond earshot of any listeners, and strolled up to him.

"How are you getting on, Tom?" he asked, with an appearance of friendliness.

Tom looked up quickly. Considering all that had happened, he was somewhat struck by Crane's effrontery.

"Fairly well," he answered coldly.

"Shan't I relieve you a few minutes?" proposed Crane.

"No, thank you."

"It's pretty hard work, and don't pay as well as it might. I think California's a humbug, for my part."

"Have you tried washing for gold?" asked Tom. "I haven't seen you at work."

"Not here. I've tried it elsewhere, but it's slow."

"Then, why do you stay here?" asked Tom, naturally.

Crane shrugged his shoulders.

"Because I haven't money to get away," he said. "I'm waiting for something to turn up. If I could only get to Frisco, I would go into some business. I would like to have gone with Miles."

"Was that what you were going to propose to him, last night?"

asked Tom, dryly.

"Yes, I wanted to speak to him on that subject. I had a great mind to ask him to lend me a little money, and take me along with him. I would have arranged to pay him soon after we reached Frisco."

Tom knew that the fellow was lying, and remained silent.

"You made a little mistake about my intentions," continued Bill Crane, smoothly, "but perhaps it was natural under the circumstances."

Tom thought it was, but still preserved silence, much to Crane's discomfiture.

Bill Crane eyed him sharply, and saw his incredulity, but for that he cared little, if only he could secure his silence.

"I think you will see that it isn't fair to me to speak of this matter," he continued.

"I had made up my mind not to speak of it," said Tom. "I don't want to get you into trouble."

"Good-morning, Mr. Crane," said Lawrence Peabody, who had just come up.

"Good-morning, Peabody. I was watching our friend Tom. How are you getting on?"

"I haven't done anything yet to-day. It's dirty work. I don't think it's fit for a gentleman; Tom, there, is used to work, and he don't mind."

"Shall we go round to Jack's?"

"All right!"

And the two walked away together.

"I am sorry Peabody doesn't keep better company," Tom said to himself. "Bill Crane won't do him any good."

CHAPTER VI.
ROBBED IN HIS SLEEP

Tom was right in concluding that Bill Crane's influence over Peabody was anything but good. The young Bostonian, however, was not long subjected to it. During the night following John Miles's departure, the little settlement at River Bend was called upon to deplore the loss of an eminent member.

In brief, somewhere between midnight and dawn Mr. William Crane took his departure, without the ceremony of leave-taking. Had he gone alone no one perhaps would have felt any violent sorrow, but he took with him a horse belonging to Adam Dietrich, an industrious young German, who had only recently arrived. No one had seen the two go together, but it was only natural to suppose that Crane had spirited away the horse.

Dietrich borrowed a horse, and, accompanied by a friend, set out in search of the thief, but returned at night unsuccessful. Had it been wet weather, it might have been possible to track the fugitive; but it was very dry, and the trail was soon lost. It was almost impossible to tell what direction Crane would choose, and continued pursuit would not pay, so Adam sadly returned to his work.

Little doubt was entertained among the miners that Crane was responsible for the loss of the horse. Had he been caught,

there would have been small chance for him, so generally was he pronounced guilty. A few of his companions, especially Missouri Jack, defended him.

"Bill Crane wouldn't steal a horse any more than I would," said Jack; and there were those who agreed with him without acquitting Bill. "Bill ain't no saint, but he ain't a thief."

Whether Jack believed what he said, admits of a doubt. Crane needed a different advocate to clear him from suspicion.

It may as well be stated that Crane did steal the horse. He had a decided objection to walking as long as he could ride, and, having no animal of his own, annexed the property of his neighbor.

He had two motives which influenced him to leave the settlement. First, he was in Tom's power, and he was by no means certain that our hero would keep silence touching his night-attempt at robbery. In the second place, he still coveted the bag of gold-dust which John Miles carried away with him. He had been prevented from taking it; but, as Miles was travelling alone, he foresaw a better chance of success if he should follow on his track.

How or under what circumstances he should make the new attempt he left to be decided later. The first thing, obviously, was to overtake him.

Crane experienced the same difficulty in tracking Miles that had led to the failure of his own pursuers. It was only on the fifth day, that, as he halted his steed on the hillside, and cast long glances about him, he caught sight, a mile away, of the object of

his pursuit. He could not mistake the sturdy, broad-shouldered figure, and large, massive head.

"That's Miles, sure enough!" he exclaimed, joyfully. "I thought I had missed him, but I'm in luck. That bag must be mine."

The most direct course was to ride up in the fashion of a highwayman, and demand the bag. But Crane did not mean to proceed in this fashion. Physically, though not a weak man, he was not a match for Miles, and he knew it. Cunning must supply the place of strength. He knew that Miles was a sound sleeper, and could think of no better plan than repeating the visit he had made in camp. It was already late in the afternoon when he caught sight of the sturdy miner. It was his policy now to keep him in sight, but not to approach near enough for recognition. Once seen, Miles would be on his guard, and the game would be spoiled. Crane halted, therefore, and drew back within the shadow of the trees, henceforth advancing cautiously.

John Miles did not once turn back. Had he done so, it is quite possible that he might have caught a glimpse of his pursuer. He had travelled since morning, and his faithful horse was beginning to show signs of fatigue.

"You are tired, my poor Dick," he said kindly, stroking the horse. "You deserve supper and rest, and you shall have it."

Dick appeared to understand what his rider said, for he gave a short neigh of satisfaction.

John Miles looked around him. Just ahead was a large tree,

under whose broad branches it would be pleasant to recline. Not far away was a slender mountain-stream trickling over the rocks. Nothing could have been better.

Miles slid from his horse and made preparations to encamp for the night, first leading his faithful steed to the stream, where he quenched his thirst. Then he brought out his slender stock of provisions and partook of supper.

"It's pleasant to rest after a long day's ride," soliloquized Miles. "I must have made forty miles to-day. I could easily have gone farther, had it been on the prairies at home, but these mountain-roads are hard upon man and beast."

After supper Miles threw himself upon the ground, and his mind became busy with his plans and prospects.

"I shall reach Frisco in three days, according to my calculations," he reflected; "and then, first of all, I must attend to Tom's commission. That's a good boy, Tom. I wish he were here with me to-night. Why didn't I urge him to come with me? He is not doing very well where he is, and there are plenty of chances for a smart boy in the city. If I find any opening for him, I will send for him. I don't know what gives me such an interest in that boy, but I'd sooner do him a good turn than any man I know. I hope that thief Crane won't play any trick upon him. If he does, I swear I'll get even with him."

John Miles little suspected that he himself stood in more peril from the man he denounced than our hero. Had he known that Bill Crane was lurking in the vicinity, he would scarcely have

courted slumber so fearlessly.

Physical fatigue and the stillness of outward nature speedily brought on a feeling of drowsiness that was not long in bringing sleep. Twilight had hardly given place to night when our traveller had become "to dumb forgetfulness a prey."

This was what Bill Crane had been waiting for. He rightly calculated that Miles would soon be asleep. He inferred this from his own feelings. He, too, had travelled many miles, and felt drowsy; but, with the object he had in view near accomplishment, he was able to resist the promptings of nature.

Crane rode till he was but a few rods from Miles, then dismounted and tethered his horse. With stealthy step he approached the sleeper. With satisfaction he regarded the upturned face of the man whom, if waking, he would have feared, and noted his deep, regular breathing.

"You wouldn't sleep so sound, John Miles," he said to himself, "if you knew I was standing over you. How easily I could put a bullet into you! But then I wouldn't have the satisfaction of anticipating your disappointment when you wake up and find your treasure gone! No, you may live. I have no use for your life, that is, if you don't wake up. In that case, I may have to kill you."

The bag of gold-dust lay under the head of Miles. He knew of no better place for it, calculating that any attempt at removal would arouse him. So it might under ordinary circumstances, but unusual fatigue made him sleep like a log. Bill Crane kneeled down, and by delicate manipulation succeeded in drawing the bag

from beneath the sleeper's head. Lest the removal of the pillow might awaken Miles, he replaced it by a coat, which he folded up so as to produce about the same elevation above the ground.

The transfer was made, without in the least interfering with the slumbers of the tired traveller.

Bill Crane rose to his feet, triumphant. Not only was he possessed of a sum of which he stood sorely in need, but he had the satisfaction of outwitting his adversary. Moreover, he had obtained Tom's money in addition, and thus revenged himself upon the boy who had once thwarted him.

"Good-by, John Miles!" he said, lifting his hat mockingly. "Sorry to inconvenience you, but can't help it. A long sleep, and pleasant dreams!"

Thus speaking, he turned away, unconscious that he had been observed by a third party.

CHAPTER VII.
THE HEATHEN CHINEE

This third party belonged to that peculiar race immortalized by Bret Harte. He was a heathen Chinee! His face was smooth and bland, and wore an expression of childlike innocence which was well calculated to deceive. Ah Sin possessed the usual craft of his countrymen, and understood very well how to advance his worldly fortunes. He belonged to the advance guard of immigrants from the Central Flowery Kingdom, and with a companion, Ah Jim, was engaged in mining in the immediate neighborhood. His gains had not been great thus far, but then his expenses had amounted to little or nothing. He and his friend had brought two bags of rice from San Francisco, and they were well satisfied with this solitary article of diet.

Ah Sin, from a distance, had seen John Miles encamp for the night, and, impelled by curiosity or a more questionable motive, had approached to take a view of the stranger. Before reaching him he caught sight of Bill Crane, and his almond eyes straightway watched the movements of that gentleman, while he himself kept sufficiently in the background to escape observation.

When he saw Crane stealthily remove the bag from under the sleeper's head, he became very much interested, and a bland

smile overspread his face, while his cue vibrated gently with approval.

"'Melican man very smart," he murmured to himself. "He steal his friend's money while he sleep."

My readers are probably aware that our Mongolian visitors find a difficulty in pronouncing the letter *r*, and invariably replace it by *l*.

"Suppose other 'Melican man wake up, he make a low," continued Ah Sin, softly.

But the other 'Melican man did not wake up, and Bill Crane got away with his booty, as we already know. Cautiously the Chinaman followed him, and ascertained where he intended to pass the night. It was at a moderate distance from the cabin which the two Chinamen had selected for their mining camp.

Bill Crane jumped from his horse, stretched his limbs, and gaped.

"I'm powerful sleepy," he soliloquized. "I can't go any farther to-night. I don't like to rest so near Miles, but I can be on the road before he wakes up. I guess it will be safe enough."

Crane, having made up his mind to rest, rolled himself up in his blanket, and stretched himself out, first tying his horse to a sapling. The place was retired, and he felt moderately confident that, even if he overslept himself, he would not be discovered.

"I'd like to see Miles when he discovers his loss," he said to himself, smiling at the thought. "He'll be ready to tear his hair, and won't have the least idea how the gold-dust was spirited away.

You excel me in brute strength, John Miles, but one thing I am pretty sure of, you haven't got my brains," and he complacently tapped his forehead.

"There must be at least two hundred dollars' worth in that bag," he reflected. "It isn't a great haul, but it will do. It will last me some time, and perhaps start me in something in Frisco. Bill Crane, you've done a good stroke of business to-day. You are entitled to a good night's rest, and you shall have it."

First, however, he concealed the bag. He did not think it safe to place it under his head as Miles had done. He scooped a hole in the earth near by, deposited the bag, replaced the dirt, and spread a few leaves over the top.

"No one will think of searching there," thought Crane. "Even if Miles himself surprises me here, he won't suspect anything."

Bill Crane felt that he was unusually sharp and crafty, and felt great contempt for the stupidity of the man whom he had overreached. The time was not far off when he had occasion to doubt whether he had not overrated his own artfulness.

A pair of almond eyes, lighted up with mild wonder, followed closely all the movements of William Crane. When the bag was concealed, and Crane lay down to sleep, the Chinaman nodded blandly, and remarked softly, "All light! Me go find Ah Jim."

Ah Sin had to walk but half a mile to find the partner of his toils. Ah Sin and Ah Jim, though not related to each other, were as like as two peas. The same smooth face, the same air of childlike confidence, the same almond eyes, a pigtail of the same

length, a blouse and loose pants of the same coarse cloth, were characteristic of both.

When the two met, they straightway plunged into a conversation in which Ah Sin had most to say.

Ah Jim listened attentively, and was evidently well pleased with what his companion said. I am afraid my young friends are not well up in the Chinese tongue, and would not understand the conversation, however faithfully reported. They must infer what it was from what followed.

The two Chinamen bent their steps towards the resting-place of Bill Crane. Ah Sin carried a bag of about the same size as the one Crane had stolen, which he carefully filled with sandy earth. With stealthy steps these two innocent heathen drew near the spot, and looked searchingly at the recumbent form of the eminent representative of American civilization.

Ah Sin turned to Ah Jim with a pleased smile.

"All light!" he said. "'Melican man asleep."

A similar smile lighted up the face of Ah Jim. "'Melican man sleep sound," he said; "no wake up."

Quite unaware of the honor done him by the special Chinese embassy which had taken this early opportunity to call upon him, Bill Crane slept on. There was a smile upon his upturned face as if he were dreaming of something pleasant. He should have been a prey to remorse, if his conscience had done its duty, but Bill's conscience had grown callous, and gave him very little trouble. It was only when he was found out that he became sensible of a

kind of mental discomfort which came as near to remorse as he was capable of feeling.

Reassured by the deep, regular breathing of the sleeper, Ah Sin and his friend proceeded to their work. The former drew a slender stiletto-like knife from a fan which protruded above the collar of his blouse, and, stooping down, began skilfully to remove the dirt which covered the bag of gold-dust. From time to time he stole a glance at the sleeper to mark the first indications of returning consciousness. It was well for Crane that his sleep continued. A Chinaman does not set a high value upon human life, and the long stiletto would have been plunged into the 'Melican man before he was well aware of what was going on. Bill Crane's good genius saved him from this sudden exit by continuing the profound slumber in which he was repairing the ravages of fatigue.

The Chinamen therefore met with no interruption in their work. They drew out from its place of concealment the buried bag, and emptying the contents of their own poured into it the combined treasures of Miles and poor Tom. Then they filled the first bag with the worthless dust which they had brought with them, and carefully reburied it in the ground.

They did their work so carefully and well that no one was likely to suspect that the bag had been tampered with.

Having done their work, Ah Sin and his friend smiled upon each other in bland satisfaction, which was further expressed by a low guttural chuckle.

"All light," said Ah Sin, with a nod.

"All light," chimed in Ah Jim, nodding in return.

A consciousness of lofty virtue could not have produced a happier expression upon any face than appeared on the mild countenance of the Chinamen.

"'Melican man much supplised when he wake up," remarked Ah Jim.

"Chinamen make much money," returned his friend.

The two enterprising visitors returned to their quarters, and concealed their booty in a safe place. Then they too lay down and slept the sleep of confiding innocence.

Bret Harte has not told us whether the heathen Chinee has a conscience; but if he has, neither Ah Sin nor Ah Jim experienced any inconvenience from its possession. Neither they nor Bill perhaps can fairly be taken as fair representatives of the different religious systems under which they were trained. Bill Crane could hardly claim any superiority over the heathen Chinee in point of honesty.

CHAPTER VIII.
BILL CRANE'S DISAGREEABLE DISCOVERY

It was five o'clock in the morning when Bill Crane opened his eyes. He felt refreshed by his night's sleep, yet under ordinary circumstances would have deferred getting up for at least an hour. But the consciousness that he had a treasure to guard, and the knowledge that he was at any moment liable to be called to account by the real owner, whose camp was scarcely more than a mile distant, aroused him to exertion.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.