BRET HARTE

A WARD OF THE GOLDEN GATE

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Содержание

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PROLOGUE

In San Francisco the "rainy season" had been making itself a reality to the wondering Eastern immigrant. There were short days of drifting clouds and flying sunshine, and long succeeding nights of incessant downpour, when the rain rattled on the thin shingles or drummed on the resounding zinc of pioneer roofs. The shifting sand-dunes on the outskirts were beaten motionless and sodden by the onslaught of consecutive storms; the southeast trades brought the saline breath of the outlying Pacific even to the busy haunts of Commercial and Kearney streets; the low-lying Mission road was a quagmire; along the City Front, despite of piles and pier and wharf, the Pacific tides still asserted themselves in mud and ooze as far as Sansome Street; the wooden sidewalks of Clay and Montgomery streets were mere floating bridges or buoyant pontoons superposed on elastic bogs; Battery Street was the Silurian beach of that early period on which tin cans, packing-boxes, freight, household furniture, and even the runaway crews of deserted ships had been cast away. There were dangerous and unknown depths in Montgomery Street and on the Plaza, and the wheels of a passing carriage hopelessly

mired had to be lifted by the volunteer hands of a half dozen high-booted wayfarers, whose wearers were sufficiently content to believe that a woman, a child, or an invalid was behind its closed windows, without troubling themselves or the occupant by looking through the glass.

It was a carriage that, thus released, eventually drew up before the superior public edifice known as the City Hall. From it a woman, closely veiled, alighted, and quickly entered the building. A few passers-by turned to look at her, partly from the rarity of the female figure at that period, and partly from the greater rarity of its being well formed and even ladylike.

As she kept her way along the corridor and ascended an iron staircase, she was passed by others more preoccupied in business at the various public offices. One of these visitors, however, stopped as if struck by some fancied resemblance in her appearance, turned, and followed her. But when she halted before a door marked "Mayor's Office," he paused also, and, with a look of half humorous bewilderment and a slight glance around him as if seeking for some one to whom to impart his arch fancy, he turned away. The woman then entered a large anteroom with a certain quick feminine gesture of relief, and, finding it empty of other callers, summoned the porter, and asked him some question in a voice so suppressed by the official severity of the apartment as to be hardly audible. The attendant replied by entering another room marked "Mayor's Secretary," and reappeared with a stripling of seventeen or eighteen, whose

singularly bright eyes were all that was youthful in his composed features. After a slight scrutiny of the woman—half boyish, half official—he desired her to be seated, with a certain exaggerated gravity as if he was over-acting a grown-up part, and, taking a card from her, reentered his office. Here, however, he did NOT stand on his head or call out a confederate youth from a closet, as the woman might have expected. To the left was a green baize door, outlined with brass-studded rivets like a cheerful coffin-lid, and bearing the mortuary inscription, "Private." This he pushed open, and entered the Mayor's private office.

The municipal dignitary of San Francisco, although an erect, soldier-like man of strong middle age, was seated with his official chair tilted back against the wall and kept in position by his feet on the rungs of another, which in turn acted as a support for a second man, who was seated a few feet from him in an easy-chair. Both were lazily smoking.

The Mayor took the card from his secretary, glanced at it, said "Hullo!" and handed it to his companion, who read aloud "Kate Howard," and gave a prolonged whistle.

"Where is she?" asked the Mayor.

"In the anteroom, sir."

"Any one else there?"

"No, sir."

"Did you say I was engaged?"

"Yes, sir; but it appears she asked Sam who was with you, and when he told her, she said, All right, she wanted to see Colonel

Pendleton too."

The men glanced interrogatively at each other, but Colonel Pendleton, abruptly anticipating the Mayor's functions, said, "Have her in," and settled himself back in his chair.

A moment later the door opened, and the stranger appeared. As she closed the door behind her she removed her heavy veil, and displayed the face of a very handsome woman of past thirty. It is only necessary to add that it was a face known to the two men, and all San Francisco.

"Well, Kate," said the Mayor, motioning to a chair, but without rising or changing his attitude. "Here I am, and here is Colonel Pendleton, and these are office hours. What can we do for you?"

If he had received her with magisterial formality, or even politely, she would have been embarrassed, in spite of a certain boldness of her dark eyes and an ever present consciousness of her power. It is possible that his own ease and that of his companion was part of their instinctive good nature and perception. She accepted it as such, took the chair familiarly, and seated herself sideways upon it, her right arm half encircling its back and hanging over it; altogether an easy and not ungraceful pose.

"Thank you, Jack—I mean, Mr. Mayor—and you, too, Harry. I came on business. I want you two men to act as guardians for my little daughter."

"Your what?" asked the two men simultaneously.

"My daughter," she repeated, with a short laugh, which, however, ended with a note of defiance. "Of course you don't know. Well," she added half aggressively, and yet with the air of hurrying over a compromising and inexplicable weakness, "the long and short of it is I've got a little girl down at the Convent of Santa Clara, and have had—there! I've been taking care of her—GOOD care, too, boys—for some time. And now I want to put things square for her for the future. See? I want to make over to her all my property—it's nigh on to seventy-five thousand dollars, for Bob Snelling put me up to getting those water lots a year ago—and, you see, I'll have to have regular guardians, trustees, or whatever you call 'em, to take care of the money for her."

"Who's her father?" asked the Mayor.

"What's that to do with it?" she said impetuously.

"Everything—because he's her natural guardian."

"Suppose he isn't known? Say dead, for instance."

"Dead will do," said the Mayor gravely. "Yes, dead will do," repeated Colonel Pendleton. After a pause, in which the two men seemed to have buried this vague relative, the Mayor looked keenly at the woman.

"Kate, have you and Bob Ridley had a quarrel?"

"Bob Ridley knows too much to quarrel with me," she said briefly.

"Then you are doing this for no motive other than that which you tell me?"

"Certainly. That's motive enough—ain't it?"

"Yes." The Mayor took his feet off his companion's chair and sat upright. Colonel Pendleton did the same, also removing his cigar from his lips. "I suppose you'll think this thing over?" he added.

"No—I want it done NOW—right here—in this office."

"But you know it will be irrevocable."

"That's what I want it—something might happen afterwards."

"But you are leaving nothing for yourself, and if you are going to devote everything to this daughter and lead a different life, you'll"—

"Who said I was?"

The two men paused, and looked at her. "Look here, boys, you don't understand. From the day that paper is signed, I've nothing to do with the child. She passes out of my hands into yours, to be schooled, educated, and made a rich girl out of—and never to know who or what or where I am. She doesn't know now. I haven't given her and myself away in that style—you bet! She thinks I'm only a friend. She hasn't seen me more than once or twice, and not to know me again. Why, I was down there the other day, and passed her walking out with the Sisters and the other scholars, and she didn't know me—though one of the Sisters did. But they're mum—THEY are, and don't let on. Why, now I think of it, YOU were down there, Jack, presiding in big style as Mr. Mayor at the exercises. You must have noticed her. Little thing, about nine—lot of hair, the same color as mine, and brown eyes.

White and yellow sash. Had a necklace on of real pearls I gave her. I BOUGHT THEM, you understand, myself at Tucker's—gave two hundred and fifty dollars for them—and a big bouquet of white rosebuds and lilacs I sent her."

"I remember her now on the platform," said the Mayor gravely. "So that is your child?"

"You bet—no slouch either. But that's neither here nor there. What I want now is you and Harry to look after her and her property the same as if I didn't live. More than that, as if I had NEVER LIVED. I've come to you two boys, because I reckon you're square men and won't give me away. But I want to fix it even firmer than that. I want you to take hold of this trust not as Jack Hammersley, but as the MAYOR OF SAN FRANCISCO! And when you make way for a new Mayor, HE takes up the trust by virtue of his office, you see, so there's a trustee all along. I reckon there'll always be a San Francisco and always a Mayor—at least till the child's of age; and it gives her from the start a father, and a pretty big one too. Of course the new man isn't to know the why and wherefore of this. It's enough for him to take on that duty with his others, without asking questions. And he's only got to invest that money and pay it out as it's wanted, and consult Harry at times."

The two men looked at each other with approving intelligence. "But have you thought of a successor for ME, in case somebody shoots me on sight any time in the next ten years?" asked Pendleton, with a gravity equal to her own.

"I reckon, as you're President of the El Dorado Bank, you'll make that a part of every president's duty too. You'll get the directors to agree to it, just as Jack here will get the Common Council to make it the Mayor's business."

The two men had risen to their feet, and, after exchanging glances, gazed at her silently. Presently the Mayor said:—

"It can be done, Kate, and we'll do it for you—eh, Harry?"

"Count me in," said Pendleton, nodding. "But you'll want a third man."

"What's that for?"

"The casting vote in case of any difficulty."

The woman's face fell. "I reckoned to keep it a secret with only you two," she said half bitterly.

"No matter. We'll find some one to act, or you'll think of somebody and let us know."

"But I wanted to finish this thing right here," she said impatiently. She was silent for a moment, with her arched black brows knitted. Then she said abruptly, "Who's that smart little chap that let me in? He looks as if he might be trusted."

"That's Paul Hathaway, my secretary. He's sensible, but too young. Stop! I don't know about that. There's no legal age necessary, and he's got an awfully old head on him," said the Mayor thoughtfully.

"And I say his youth's in his favor," said Colonel Pendleton, promptly. "He's been brought up in San Francisco, and he's got no d—d old-fashioned Eastern notions to get rid of, and will

drop into this as a matter of business, without prying about or wondering. I'LL serve with him."

"Call him in!" said the woman.

He came. Very luminous of eye, and composed of lip and brow. Yet with the same suggestion of "making believe" very much, as if to offset the possible munching of forbidden cakes and apples in his own room, or the hidden presence of some still in his pocket.

The Mayor explained the case briefly, but with business-like precision. "Your duty, Mr. Hathaway," he concluded, "at present will be merely nominal and, above all, confidential. Colonel Pendleton and myself will set the thing going." As the youth—who had apparently taken in and "illuminated" the whole subject with a single bright-eyed glance—bowed and was about to retire, as if to relieve himself of his real feelings behind the door, the woman stopped him with a gesture.

"Let's have this thing over now," she said to the Mayor. "You draw up something that we can all sign at once." She fixed her eyes on Paul, partly to satisfy her curiosity and justify her predilection for him, and partly to detect him in any overt act of boyishness. But the youth simply returned her glance with a cheerful, easy prescience, as if her past lay clearly open before him. For some minutes there was only the rapid scratching of the Mayor's pen over the paper. Suddenly he stopped and looked up.

"What's her name?"

"She mustn't have mine," said the woman quickly. "That's a

part of my idea. I give that up with the rest. She must take a new name that gives no hint of me. Think of one, can't you, you two men? Something that would kind of show that she was the daughter of the city, you know."

"You couldn't call her 'Santa Francisca,' eh?" said Colonel Pendleton, doubtingly.

"Not much," said the woman, with a seriousness that defied any ulterior insinuation.

"Nor Chrysopolinia?" said the Mayor, musingly.

"But that's only a FIRST name. She must have a family name," said the woman impatiently.

"Can YOU think of something, Paul?" said the Mayor, appealing to Hathaway. "You're a great reader, and later from your classics than I am." The Mayor, albeit practical and Western, liked to be ostentatiously forgetful of his old Alma Mater, Harvard, on occasions.

"How would YERBA BUENA do, sir?" responded the youth gravely. "It's the old Spanish title of the first settlement here. It comes from the name that Father Junipero Serra gave to the pretty little vine that grows wild over the sandhills, and means 'good herb.' He called it 'A balm for the wounded and sore.'"

"For the wounded and sore?" repeated the woman slowly.

"That's what they say," responded Hathaway.

"You ain't playing us, eh?" she said, with a half laugh that, however, scarcely curved the open mouth with which she had been regarding the young secretary.

"No," said the Mayor, hurriedly. "It's true. I've often heard it. And a capital name it would be for her too. YERBA the first name. BUENA the second. She could be called Miss Buena when she grows up."

"Yerba Buena it is," she said suddenly. Then, indicating the youth with a slight toss of her handsome head, "His head's level —you can see that."

There was a silence again, and the scratching of the Mayor's pen continued. Colonel Pendleton buttoned up his coat, pulled his long moustache into shape, slightly arranged his collar, and walked to the window without looking at the woman. Presently the Mayor arose from his seat, and, with a certain formal courtesy that had been wanting in his previous manner, handed her his pen and arranged his chair for her at the desk. She took the pen, and rapidly appended her signature to the paper. The others followed; and, obedient to a sign from him, the porter was summoned from the outer office to witness the signatures. When this was over, the Mayor turned to his secretary. "That's all just now, Paul."

Accepting this implied dismissal with undisturbed gravity, the newly made youthful guardian bowed and retired. When the green baize door had closed upon him, the Mayor turned abruptly to the woman with the paper in his hand.

"Look here, Kate; there is still time for you to reconsider your action, and tear up this solitary record of it. If you choose to do so, say so, and I promise you that this interview, and all you have told us, shall never pass beyond these walls. No one will be the

wiser for it, and we will give you full credit for having attempted something that was too much for you to perform."

She had half risen from her chair when he began, but fell back again in her former position and looked impatiently from him to his companion, who was also regarding her earnestly.

"What are you talking about?" she said sharply.

"YOU, Kate," said the Mayor. "You have given everything you possess to this child. What provision have you made for yourself?"

"Do I look played out?" she said, facing them.

She certainly did not look like anything but a strong, handsome, resolute woman, but the men did not reply.

"That is not all, Kate," continued the Mayor, folding his arms and looking down upon her. "Have you thought what this means? It is the complete renunciation not only of any claim but any interest in your child. That is what you have just signed, and what it will be our duty now to keep you to. From this moment we stand between you and her, as we stand between her and the world. Are you ready to see her grow up away from you, losing even the little recollection she has had of your kindness—passing you in the street without knowing you, perhaps even having you pointed out to her as a person she should avoid? Are you prepared to shut your eyes and ears henceforth to all that you may hear of her new life, when she is happy, rich, respectable, a courted heiress—perhaps the wife of some great man? Are you ready to accept that she will never know—that no one will ever know—

that you had any share in making her so, and that if you should ever breathe it abroad we shall hold it our duty to deny it, and brand the man who takes it up for you as a liar and the slanderer of an honest girl?"

"That's what I came here for," she said curtly, then, regarding them curiously, and running her ringed hand up and down the railed back of her chair, she added, with a half laugh, "What are you playin' me for, boys?"

"But," said Colonel Pendleton, without heeding her, "are you ready to know that in sickness or affliction you will be powerless to help her; that a stranger will take your place at her bedside, that as she has lived without knowing you she will die without that knowledge, or that if through any weakness of yours it came to her then, it would embitter her last thoughts of earth and, dying, she would curse you?"

The smile upon her half-open mouth still fluttered around it, and her curved fingers still ran up and down the rails of the chair-back as if they were the cords of some mute instrument, to which she was trying to give voice. Her rings once or twice grated upon them as if she had at times gripped them closely. But she rose quickly when he paused, said "Yes," sharply, and put the chair back against the wall.

"Then I will send you copies of this tomorrow, and take an assignment of the property."

"I've got the check here for it now," she said, drawing it from her pocket and laying it upon the desk. "There, I reckon that's

finished. Good-by!"

The Mayor took up his hat, Colonel Pendleton did the same; both men preceded her to the door, and held it open with grave politeness for her to pass.

"Where are you boys going?" she asked, glancing from the one to the other.

"To see you to your carriage, Mrs. Howard," said the Mayor, in a voice that had become somewhat deeper.

"Through the whole building? Past all the people in the hall and on the stairs? Why, I passed Dan Stewart as I came in."

"If you will allow us?" he said, turning half appealing to Colonel Pendleton, who, without speaking, made a low bow of assent.

A slight flush rose to her face—the first and only change in the even healthy color she had shown during the interview.

"I reckon I won't trouble you, boys, if it's all the same to you," she said, with her half-strident laugh. "YOU mightn't mind being seen—but I would— Good-by."

She held out a hand to each of the men, who remained for an instant silently holding them. Then she passed out of the door, slipping on her close black veil as she did so with a half-funereal suggestion, and they saw her tall, handsome figure fade into the shadows of the long corridor.

"Paul," said the Mayor, reentering the office and turning to his secretary, "do you know who that woman is?"

"Yes, sir."

"She's one in a million! And now forget that you have ever seen her."

CHAPTER I

The principal parlor of the New Golden Gate Hotel in San Francisco, fairly reported by the local press as being "truly palatial" in its appointments, and unrivaled in its upholstery, was, nevertheless, on August 5, 1860, of that startling newness that checked any familiarity, and evidently had produced some embarrassment on the limbs of four visitors who had just been ushered into its glories. After hesitating before one or two gorgeous fawn-colored brocaded easy-chairs of appalling and spotless virginity, one of them seated himself despairingly on a tete-a-tete sofa in marked and painful isolation, while another sat uncomfortably upright on a sofa. The two others remained standing, vaguely gazing at the ceiling, and exchanging ostentatiously admiring but hollow remarks about the furniture in unnecessary whispers. Yet they were apparently men of a certain habit of importance and small authority, with more or less critical attitude in their speech.

To them presently entered a young man of about five-and-twenty, with remarkably bright and singularly sympathetic eyes. Having swept the group in a smiling glance, he singled out the lonely occupier of the tete-a-tete, and moved pleasantly towards him. The man rose instantly with an eager gratified look.

"Well, Paul, I didn't allow you'd remember me. It's a matter of four years since we met at Marysville. And now you're bein'

a great man you've"—

No one could have known from the young man's smiling face that he really had not recognized his visitor at first, and that his greeting was only an exhibition of one of those happy instincts for which he was remarkable. But, following the clew suggested by his visitor, he was able to say promptly and gayly:—

"I don't know why I should forget Tony Shear or the Marysville boys," turning with a half-confiding smile to the other visitors, who, after the human fashion, were beginning to be resentfully impatient of this special attention.

"Well, no,—for I've allus said that you took your first start from Marysville. But I've brought a few friends of our party that I reckoned to introduce to you. Cap'n Stidger, Chairman of our Central Committee, Mr. Henry J. Hoskins, of the firm of Hoskins and Bloomer, and Joe Slate, of the 'Union Press,' one of our most promising journalists. Gentlemen," he continued, suddenly and without warning lifting his voice to an oratorical plane in startling contrast to his previous unaffected utterance, "I needn't say that this is the honorable Paul Hathaway, the youngest state senator in the Legislature. You know his record!" Then, recovering the ordinary accents of humanity, he added, "We read of your departure last night from Sacramento, and I thought we'd come early, afore the crowd."

"Proud to know you, sir," said Captain Stidger, suddenly lifting the conversation to the platform again. "I have followed your career, sir. I've read your speech, Mr. Hathaway, and,

as I was telling our mutual friend, Mr. Shear, as we came along, I don't know any man that could state the real party issues as squarely. Your castigating exposition of so-called Jeffersonian principles, and your relentless indictment of the resolutions of '98, were—were"—coughed the captain, dropping into conversation again—"were the biggest thing out. You have only to signify the day, sir, that you will address us, and I can promise you the largest audience in San Francisco."

"I'm instructed by the proprietor of the 'Union Press,'" said Mr. Slate, feeling for his notebook and pencil, "to offer you its columns for any explanations you may desire to make in the form of a personal letter or an editorial in reply to the 'Advertiser's' strictures on your speech, or to take any information you may have for the benefit of our readers and the party."

"If you are ever down my way, Mr. Hathaway," said Mr. Hoskins, placing a large business card in Hathaway's hand, "and will drop in as a friend, I can show you about the largest business in the way of canned provisions and domestic groceries in the State, and give you a look around Battery Street generally. Or if you'll name your day, I've got a pair of 2.35 Blue Grass horses that'll spin you out to the Cliff House to dinner and back. I've had Governor Fiske, and Senator Doolan, and that big English capitalist who was here last year, and they—well, sir,—they were PLEASED! Or if you'd like to see the town—if this is your first visit—I'm a hand to show you."

Nothing could exceed Mr. Hathaway's sympathetic

acceptance of their courtesies, nor was there the least affectation in it. Thoroughly enjoying his fellowmen, even in their foibles, they found him irresistibly attractive. "I lived here seven years ago," he said, smiling, to the last speaker.

"When the water came up to Montgomery Street," interposed Mr. Shear, in a hoarse but admiring aside.

"When Mr. Hammersley was mayor," continued Hathaway.

"Had an official position—private secretary—afore he was twenty," explained Shear, in perfectly audible confidence.

"Since then the city has made great strides, leaping full-grown, sir, in a single night," said Captain Stidger, hastily ascending the rostrum again with a mixed metaphor, to the apparent concern of a party of handsomely dressed young ladies who had recently entered the parlor. "Stretching from South Park to Black Point, and running back to the Mission Dolores and the Presidio, we are building up a metropolis, sir, worthy to be placed beside the Golden Gate that opens to the broad Pacific and the shores of far Cathay! When the Pacific Railroad is built we shall be the natural terminus of the Pathway of Nations!"

Mr. Hathaway's face betrayed no consciousness that he had heard something like this eight years before, and that much of it had come true, as he again sympathetically responded. Neither was his attention attracted by a singular similarity which the attitude of the group of ladies on the other side of the parlor bore to that of his own party. They were clustered around one of their own number—a striking-looking girl—who was apparently

receiving their mingled flatteries and caresses with a youthful yet critical sympathy, which, singularly enough, was not unlike his own. It was evident also that an odd sort of rivalry seemed to spring up between the two parties, and that, in proportion as Hathaway's admirers became more marked and ostentatious in their attentions, the supporters of the young girl were equally effusive and enthusiastic in their devotion. As usual in such cases, the real contest was between the partisans themselves; each successive demonstration on either side was provocative or retaliatory, and when they were apparently rendering homage to their idols they were really distracted by and listening to each other. At last, Hathaway's party being reinforced by fresh visitors, a tall brunette of the opposition remarked in a professedly confidential but perfectly audible tone:—

"Well, my dear, as I don't suppose you want to take part in a political caucus, perhaps we'd better return to the Ladies' Boudoir, unless there's a committee sitting there too."

"I know how valuable your time must be, as you are all business men," said Hathaway, turning to his party, in an equally audible tone; "but before you go, gentlemen, you must let me offer you a little refreshment in a private room," and he moved naturally towards the door. The rival fair, who had already risen at their commander's suggestion, here paused awkwardly over an embarrassing victory. Should they go or stay? The object of their devotion, however, turned curiously towards Hathaway. For an instant their eyes met. The young girl turned carelessly to her

companions and said, "No; stay here—it's the public parlor;" and her followers, evidently accustomed to her authority, sat down again.

"A galaxy of young ladies from the Convent of Santa Clara, Mr. Hathaway," explained Captain Stidger, naively oblivious of any discourtesy on their part, as he followed Hathaway's glance and took his arm as they moved away. "Not the least of our treasures, sir. Most of them daughters of pioneers—and all Californian bred and educated. Connoisseurs have awarded them the palm, and declare that for Grace, Intelligence, and Woman's Highest Charms the East cannot furnish their equal!" Having delivered this Parthian compliment in an oratorical passage through the doorway, the captain descended, outside, into familiar speech. "But I suppose you will find that out for yourself if you stay here long. San Francisco might furnish a fitting bride to California's youngest senator."

"I am afraid that my stay here must be brief, and limited to business," said Hathaway, who had merely noticed that the principal girl was handsome and original-looking. "In fact, I am here partly to see an old acquaintance—Colonel Pendleton."

The three men looked at each other curiously. "Oh! Harry Pendleton," said Mr. Hoskins, incredulously "You don't know HIM?"

"An old pioneer—of course," interposed Shear, explanatorily and apologetically. "Why, in Paul's time the colonel was a big man here."

"I understand the colonel has been unfortunate," said Hathaway, gravely; "but in MY time he was President of the El Dorado Bank."

"And the bank hasn't got through its settlement yet," said Hoskins "I hope YOU ain't expecting to get anything out of it?"

"No," said Hathaway, smiling; "I was a boy at that time, and lived up to my salary. I know nothing of his bank difficulties, but it always struck me that Colonel Pendleton was himself an honorable man."

"It ain't that," said Captain Stidger energetically, "but the trouble with Harry Pendleton is that he hasn't grown with the State, and never adjusted himself to it. And he won't. He thinks the Millennium was between the fall of '49 and the spring of '50, and after that everything dropped. He belongs to the old days, when a man's simple WORD was good for any amount if you knew him; and they say that the old bank hadn't a scrap of paper for half that was owing to it. That was all very well, sir, in '49 and '50, and—Luck; but it won't do for '59 and '60, and—Business! And the old man can't see it."

"But he is ready to fight for it now, as in the old time," said Mr. Slate, "and that's another trouble with his chronology. He's done more to keep up dueling than any other man in the State, and don't know the whole spirit of progress and civilization is against it."

It was impossible to tell from Paul Hathaway's face whether his sympathy with Colonel Pendleton's foibles or his assent

to the criticisms of his visitors was the truer. Both were no doubt equally sincere. But the party was presently engaged in the absorption of refreshment, which, being of a purely, spirituous and exhilarating quality, tended to increase their good humor with the host till they parted. Even then a gratuitous advertisement of his virtues and their own intentions in calling upon him was oratorically voiced from available platforms and landings, in the halls and stairways, until it was pretty well known throughout the Golden Gate Hotel that the Hon. Mr. Paul Hathaway had arrived from Sacramento and had received a "spontaneous ovation."

Meantime the object of it had dropped into an easy-chair by the window of his room, and was endeavoring to recall a less profitable memory. The process of human forgetfulness is not a difficult one between the ages of eighteen and twenty-six, and Paul Hathaway had not only fulfilled the Mayor's request by forgetting the particulars of a certain transfer that he had witnessed in the Mayor's office, but in the year succeeding that request, being about to try his fortunes in the mountains, he had formally constituted Colonel Pendleton to act as his proxy in the administration of Mrs. Howard's singular Trust, in which, however, he had never participated except yearly to sign his name. He was, consequently, somewhat astonished to have received a letter a few days before from Colonel Pendleton, asking him to call and see him regarding it.

He vaguely remembered that it was eight years ago, and eight

years had worked considerable change in the original trustees, greatest of all in his superior officer, the Mayor, who had died the year following, leaving his trusteeship to his successor in office, whom Paul Hathaway had never seen. The Bank of El Dorado, despite Mrs. Howard's sanguine belief, had long been in bankruptcy, and, although Colonel Pendleton still survived it, it was certain that no other president would succeed to his office as trustee, and that the function would lapse with him. Paul himself, a soldier of fortune, although habitually lucky, had only lately succeeded to a profession—if his political functions could be so described. Even with his luck, energy, and ambition, while everything was possible, nothing was secure. It seemed, therefore, as if the soulless official must eventually assume the duties of the two sympathizing friends who had originated them, and had stood in loco parentis to the constructive orphan. The mother, Mrs. Howard, had disappeared a year after the Trust had been made—it was charitably presumed in order to prevent any complications that might arise from her presence in the country. With these facts before him, Paul Hathaway was more concerned in wondering what Pendleton could want with him than, I fear, any direct sympathy with the situation. On the contrary, it appeared to him more favorable for keeping the secret of Mrs. Howard's relationship, which would now die with Colonel Pendleton and himself; and there was no danger of any emotional betrayal of it in the cold official administration of a man who had received the Trust through the formal hands

of successive predecessors. He had forgotten the time limited for the guardianship, but the girl must soon be of age and off their hands. If there had ever been any romantic or chivalrous impression left upon his memory by the scene in the mayor's office, I fear he had put it away with various other foolish illusions of his youth, to which he now believed he was superior.

Nevertheless, he would see the colonel, and at once, and settle the question. He looked at the address, "St. Charles Hotel." He remembered an old hostelry of that name, near the Plaza. Could it be possible that it had survived the alterations and improvements of the city? It was an easy walk through remembered streets, yet with changed shops and houses and faces. When he reached the Plaza, scarce recognizable in its later frontages of brick and stone, he found the old wooden building still intact, with its villa-like galleries and verandas incongruously and ostentatiously overlooked by two new and aspiring erections on either side. For an instant he tried to recall the glamour of old days. He remembered when his boyish eyes regarded it as the crowning work of opulence and distinction; he remembered a ball given there on some public occasion, which was to him the acme of social brilliancy and display. How tawdry and trivial it looked beside those later and more solid structures! How inconsistent were those long latticed verandas and balconies, pathetic record of that first illusion of the pioneers that their climate was a tropical one! A restaurant and billiard-saloon had aggrandized all of the lower story; but there was still

the fanlight, over which the remembered title of "St. Charles," in gilded letters, was now reinforced by the too demonstrative legend, "Apartments and Board, by the Day or Week." Was it possible that this narrow, creaking staircase had once seemed to him the broad steps of Fame and Fortune? On the first landing, a preoccupied Irish servant-girl, with a mop, directed him to a door at the end of the passage, at which he knocked. The door was opened by a grizzled negro servant, who was still holding a piece of oily chamois-leather in his hand; and the contents of a dueling-case, scattered upon a table in the centre of the room, showed what had been his occupation. Admitting Hathaway with great courtesy, he said:—

"Marse Harry bin havin' his ole trubble, sah, and bin engaged just dis momen' on his toylet; ef yo'll accommodate yo'self on de sofa, I inform him yo' is heah."

As the negro passed into the next room, Paul cast a hasty glance around the apartment. The furniture, originally rich and elegant, was now worn threadbare and lustreless. A book-case, containing, among other volumes, a few law books—there being a vague tradition, as Paul remembered, that Colonel Pendleton had once been connected with the law—a few French chairs of tarnished gilt, a rifle in the corner, a presentation sword in a mahogany case, a few classical prints on the walls, and one or two iron deed-boxes marked "El Dorado Bank," were the principal objects. A mild flavor of dry decay and methylated spirits pervaded the apartment. Yet it was scrupulously clean and

well kept, and a few clothes neatly brushed and folded on a chair bore witness to the servant's care. As Paul, however, glanced behind the sofa, he was concerned to see a coat, which had evidently been thrust hurriedly in a corner, with the sleeve lining inside out, and a needle and thread still sticking in the seam. It struck him instantly that this had been the negro's occupation, and that the pistol-cleaning was a polite fiction.

"Yo' 'll have to skuse Marse Harry seein' yo in bed, but his laig's pow'ful bad to-day, and he can't stand," said the servant reentering the room. "Skuse me, sah," he added in a dignified confidential whisper, half closing the door with his hand, "but if yo' wouldn't mind avoidin' 'xcitin' or controversical topics in yo' conversation, it would be de better fo' him."

Paul smilingly assented, and the black retainer, with even more than the usual solemn ceremonious exaggeration of his race, ushered him into the bedroom. It was furnished in the same faded glory as the sitting-room, with the exception of a low, iron camp-bedstead, in which the tall, soldierly figure of Colonel Pendleton, clad in threadbare silk dressing-gown, was stretched. He had changed in eight years: his hair had become gray, and was thinned over the sunken temples, but his iron-gray moustache was still particularly long and well pointed. His face bore marks of illness and care; there were deep lines down the angle of the nostril that spoke of alternate savage outbreak and repression, and gave his smile a sardonic rigidity. His dark eyes, that shone with the exaltation of fever, fixed Paul's on entering, and with

the tyranny of an invalid never left them.

"Well, Hathaway?"

With the sound of that voice Paul felt the years slip away, and he was again a boy, looking up admiringly to the strong man, who now lay helpless before him. He had entered the room with a faint sense of sympathizing superiority and a consciousness of having had experience in controlling men. But all this fled before Colonel Pendleton's authoritative voice; even its broken tones carried the old dominant spirit of the man, and Paul found himself admiring a quality in his old acquaintance that he missed in his newer friends.

"I haven't seen you for eight years, Hathaway. Come here and let me look at you."

Paul approached the bedside with boyish obedience. Pendleton took his hand and gazed at him critically.

"I should have recognized you, sir, for all your moustache and your inches. The last time I saw you was in Jack Hammersley's office. Well, Jack's dead, and here I am, little better, I reckon. You remember Hammersley's house?"

"Yes," said Paul, albeit wondering at the question.

"Something like this, Swiss villa style. I remember when Jack put it up. Well, the last time I was out, I passed there. And what do you think they've done to it?"

Paul could not imagine.

"Well, sir," said the colonel gravely, "they've changed it into a church missionary shop and young men's Christian reading-

room! But that's 'progress' and 'improvement'!" He paused, and, slowly withdrawing his hand from Paul's, added with grim apology, "You're young, and belong to the new school, perhaps. Well, sir, I've read your speech; I don't belong to your party —mine died ten years ago—but I congratulate you. George! Confound it where's that boy gone?"

The negro indicated by this youthful title, although he must have been ten years older than his master, after a hurried shuffling in the sitting-room eventually appeared at the door.

"George, champagne and materials for cocktails for the gentleman. The BEST, you understand. No new-fangled notions from that new barkeeper."

Paul, who thought he observed a troubled blinking in George's eyelid, and referred it to a fear of possible excitement for his patient, here begged his host not to trouble himself—that he seldom took anything in the morning.

"Possibly not, sir; possibly not," returned the colonel, hastily. "I know the new ideas are prohibitive, and some other blank thing, but you're safe here from your constituents, and by gad, sir, I shan't force you to take it! It's MY custom, Hathaway—an old one—played out, perhaps, like all the others, but a custom nevertheless, and I'm only surprised that George, who knows it, should have forgotten it."

"Fack is, Marse Harry," said George, with feverish apology, "it bin gone 'scaped my mind dis mo'nin' in de prerogation ob business, but I'm goin' now, shuah!" and he disappeared.

"A good boy, sir, but beginning to be contaminated. Brought him here from Nashville over ten years ago. Eight years ago they proved to him that he was no longer a slave, and made him d—d unhappy until I promised him it should make no difference to him and he could stay. I had to send for his wife and child—of course, a dead loss of eighteen hundred dollars when they set foot in the State—but I'm blanked if he isn't just as miserable with them here, for he has to take two hours in the morning and three in the afternoon every day to be with 'em. I tried to get him to take his family to the mines and make his fortune, like those fellows they call bankers and operators and stockbrokers nowadays; or to go to Oregon where they'll make him some kind of a mayor or sheriff—but he won't. He collects my rents on some little property I have left, and pays my bills, sir, and, if this blank civilization would only leave him alone, he'd be a good enough boy."

Paul couldn't help thinking that the rents George collected were somewhat inconsistent with those he was evidently mending when he arrived, but at that moment the jingle of glasses was heard in the sitting-room, and the old negro reappeared at the door. Drawing himself up with ceremonious courtesy, he addressed Paul. "Wo'd yo' mind, sah, taking a glance at de wine for yo' choice?" Paul rose, and followed him into the sitting-room, when George carefully closed the door. To his surprise Hathaway beheld a tray with two glasses of whiskey and bitters, but no wine. "Skuse me, sah," said the old man with dignified

apology, "but de Kernel won't have any but de best champagne for hono'ble gemmen like yo'self, and I'se despaired to say it can't be got in de house or de subburbs. De best champagne dat we gives visitors is de Widder Glencoe. Wo'd yo' mind, sah, for de sake o' not 'xcitin' de Kernel wid triflin' culinary matter, to say dat yo' don' take but de one brand?"

"Certainly," said Paul, smiling. "I really don't care for anything so early;" then, returning to the bedroom, he said carelessly, "You'll excuse me taking the liberty, colonel, of sending away the champagne and contenting myself with whiskey. Even the best brand—the Widow Cliquot"—with a glance at the gratified George—"I find rather trying so early in the morning."

"As you please, Hathaway," said the colonel, somewhat stiffly. "I dare say there's a new fashion in drinks now, and a gentleman's stomach is a thing of the past. Then, I suppose, we can spare the boy, as this is his time for going home. Put that tin box with the Trust papers on the bed, George, and Mr. Hathaway will excuse your waiting." As the old servant made an exaggerated obeisance to each, Paul remarked, as the door closed upon him, "George certainly keeps his style, colonel, in the face of the progress you deplore."

"He was always a 'dandy nigger,'" returned Pendleton, his face slightly relaxing as he glanced after his grizzled henchman, "but his exaggeration of courtesy is a blank sight more natural and manly than the exaggeration of discourtesy which your superior civilized 'helps' think is self-respect. The excuse of servitude

of any kind is its spontaneity and affection. When you know a man hates you and serves you from interest, you know he's a cur and you're a tyrant. It's your blank progress that's made menial service degrading by teaching men to avoid it. Why, sir, when I first arrived here, Jack Hammersley and myself took turns as cook to the party. I didn't consider myself any the worse master for it. But enough of this." He paused, and, raising himself on his elbow, gazed for some seconds half cautiously, half doubtfully, upon his companion. "I've got something to tell you, Hathaway," he said, slowly. "You've had an easy time with this Trust; your share of the work hasn't worried you, kept you awake nights, or interfered with your career. I understand perfectly," he continued, in reply to Hathaway's deprecating gesture. "I accepted to act as your proxy, and I HAVE. I'm not complaining. But it is time that you should know what I've done, and what you may still have to do. Here is the record. On the day after that interview in the Mayor's office, the El Dorado Bank, of which I was, and still am, president, received seventy-five thousand dollars in trust from Mrs. Howard. Two years afterwards, on that same day, the bank had, by lucky speculations, increased that sum to the credit of the trust one hundred and fifty thousand dollars, or double the original capital. In the following year the bank suspended payment."

CHAPTER II

In an instant the whole situation and his relations to it flashed upon Paul with a terrible, but almost grotesque, completeness. Here he was, at the outset of his career, responsible for the wasted fortune of the daughter of a social outcast, and saddled with her support! He now knew why Colonel Pendleton had wished to see him; for one shameful moment he believed he also knew why he had been content to take his proxy! The questionable character of the whole transaction, his own carelessness, which sprang from that very confidence and trust that Pendleton had lately extolled—what WOULD, what COULD not be made of it! He already heard himself abused by his opponents—perhaps, more terrible still, faintly excused by his friends. All this was visible in his pale face and flashing eyes as he turned them on the helpless invalid.

Colonel Pendleton received his look with the same critical, half-curious scrutiny that had accompanied his speech. At last his face changed slightly, a faint look of disappointment crossed his eyes, and a sardonic smile deepened the lines of his mouth.

"There, sir," he said hurriedly, as if dismissing an unpleasant revelation; "don't alarm yourself! Take a drink of that whiskey. You look pale. Well; turn your eyes on those walls. You don't see any of that money laid out here—do you? Look at me. I don't look like a man enriched with other people's money—do I? Well, let that content you. Every dollar of that Trust fund,

Hathaway, with all the interests and profits that have accrued to it, is SAFE! Every cent of it is locked up in government bonds with Rothschild's agent. There are the receipts, dated a week before the bank suspended. But enough of THAT—THAT isn't what I asked you to come and see me for."

The blood had rushed back to Paul's cheeks uncomfortably. He saw now, as impulsively as he had previously suspected his co-trustee, that the man had probably ruined himself to save the Trust. He stammered that he had not questioned the management of the fund nor asked to withdraw his proxy.

"No matter, sir," said the colonel, impatiently; "you had the right, and I suppose," he added with half-concealed scorn, "it was your duty. But let that pass. The money is safe enough; but, Mr. Hathaway,—and this is the point I want to discuss with you,—it begins to look as if the SECRET was safe no longer!" He had raised himself with some pain and difficulty to draw nearer to Paul, and had again fixed his eyes eagerly upon him. But Paul's responsive glance was so vague that he added quickly, "You understand, sir; I believe that there are hounds—I say hounds!—who would be able to blurt out at any moment that that girl at Santa Clara is Kate Howard's daughter."

At any other moment Paul might have questioned the gravity of any such contingency, but the terrible earnestness of the speaker, his dominant tone, and a certain respect which had lately sprung up in his breast for him, checked him, and he only asked with as much concern as he could master for the moment:—

"What makes you think so?"

"That's what I want to tell you, Hathaway, and how I, and I alone, am responsible for it. When the bank was in difficulty and I made up my mind to guard the Trust with my own personal and private capital, I knew that there might be some comment on my action. It was a delicate matter to show any preference or exclusion at such a moment, and I took two or three of my brother directors whom I thought I could trust into my confidence. I told them the whole story, and how the Trust was sacred. I made a mistake, sir," continued Pendleton sardonically, "a grave mistake. I did not take into account that even in three years civilization and religion had gained ground here. There was a hound there—a blank Judas in the Trust. Well; he didn't see it. I think he talked Scripture and morality. He said something about the wages of sin being infamous, and only worthy of confiscation. He talked about the sins of the father being visited upon the children, and justly. I stopped him. Well! Do you know what's the matter with my ankle? Look!" He stopped and, with some difficulty and invincible gravity, throwing aside his dressing-gown, turned down his stocking, and exposed to Paul's gaze the healed cicatrix of an old bullet-wound. "Troubled me damnably near a year. Where I hit HIM—hasn't troubled him at all since!

"I think," continued the colonel, falling back upon the pillow with an air of relief, "that he told others—of his own kidney, sir,—though it was a secret among gentlemen. But they have preferred to be silent now—than AFTERWARDS. They know

that I'm ready. But I can't keep this up long; some time, you know, they're bound to improve in practice and hit higher up! As far as I'm concerned," he added, with a grim glance around the faded walls and threadbare furniture, "it don't mind; but mine isn't the mouth to be stopped." He paused, and then abruptly, yet with a sudden and pathetic dropping of his dominant note, said: "Hathaway, you're young, and Hammersley liked you—what's to be done? I thought of passing over my tools to you. You can shoot, and I hear you HAVE. But the h—l of it is that if you dropped a man or two people would ask WHY, and want to know what it was about; while, when I do, nobody here thinks it anything but MY WAY! I don't mean that it would hurt you with the crowd to wipe out one or two of these hounds during the canvass, but the trouble is that they belong to YOUR PARTY, and," he added grimly, "that wouldn't help your career."

"But," said Paul, ignoring the sarcasm, "are you not magnifying the effect of a disclosure? The girl is an heiress, excellently brought up. Who will bother about the antecedents of the mother, who has disappeared, whom she never knew, and who is legally dead to her?"

"In my day, sir, no one who knew the circumstances," returned the colonel, quickly. "But we are living in a blessed era of Christian retribution and civilized propriety, and I believe there are a lot of men and women about who have no other way of showing their own virtue than by showing up another's vice. We're in a reaction of reform. It's the old drunkards who are

always more clamorous for total abstinence than the moderately temperate. I tell you, Hathaway, there couldn't be an unluckier moment for our secret coming out."

"But she will be of age soon."

"In two months."

"And sure to marry."

"Marry!" repeated Pendleton, with grim irony. "Would YOU marry her?"

"That's another question," said the young man, promptly, "and one of individual taste; but it does not affect my general belief that she could easily find a husband as good and better."

"Suppose she found one BEFORE the secret is out. Ought he be told?"

"Certainly."

"And that would imply telling HER?"

"Yes," said Paul, but not so promptly. "And you consider THAT fulfilling the promise of the Trust—the pledges exchanged with that woman?" continued Pendleton, with glittering eyes and a return to his own dominant tone.

"My dear colonel," said Paul, somewhat less positively, but still smiling, "you have made a romantic, almost impossible compact with Mrs. Howard that, you yourself are now obliged to admit, circumstances may prevent your carrying out substantially. You forget, also, that you have just told me that you have already broken your pledge—under circumstances, it is true, that do you honor—and that now your desperate attempts

to retrieve it have failed. Now, I really see nothing wrong in your telling to a presumptive well-wisher of the girl what you have told to her enemy."

There was a dead silence. The prostrate man uttered a slight groan, as if in pain, and drew up his leg to change his position. After a pause, he said, in a restrained voice, "I differ from you, Mr. Hathaway; but enough of this for the present. I have something else to say. It will be necessary for one of us to go at once to Santa Clara and see Miss Yerba Buena."

"Good heavens!" said Paul, quickly. "Do you call her THAT?"

"Certainly, sir. You gave her the name. Have you forgotten?"

"I only suggested it," returned Paul, hopelessly; "but no matter —go on."

"I cannot go there, as you see," continued Pendleton, with a weary gesture towards his crippled ankle; "and I should particularly like you to see her before we make the joint disposition of her affairs with the Mayor, two months hence. I have some papers you can show her, and I have already written a letter introducing you to the Lady Superior at the convent, and to her. You have never seen her?"

"No," said Paul. "But of course you have?"

"Not for three years."

Paul's eyes evidently expressed some wonder, for a moment after the colonel added, "I believe, Hathaway, I am looked upon as a queer survival of a rather lawless and improper past. At least, I have thought it better not socially to compromise her by

my presence. The Mayor goes there—at the examinations and exercises, I believe, sir; they make a sort of reception for him—with a—a—banquet—lemonade and speeches."

"I had intended to leave for Sacramento to-morrow night," said Paul, glancing curiously at the helpless man; "but I will go there if you wish."

"Thank you. It will be better."

There were a few words of further explanation of the papers, and Pendleton placed the packet in his visitor's hands. Paul rose. Somehow, it appeared to him that the room looked more faded and forgotten than when he entered it, and the figure of the man before him more lonely, helpless, and abandoned. With one of his sympathetic impulses he said:—

"I don't like to leave you here alone. Are you sure you can help yourself without George? Can I do anything before I go?"

"I am quite accustomed to it," said Pendleton, quietly. "It happens once or twice a year, and when I go out—well—I miss more than I do here."

He took Paul's proffered hand mechanically, with a slight return of the critical, doubting look he had cast upon him when he entered. His voice, too, had quite recovered its old dominance, as he said, with half-patronizing conventionality, "You'll have to find your way out alone. Let me know how you have sped at Santa Clara, will you? Good-by."

The staircase and passage seemed to have grown shabbier and meaner as Paul, slowly and hesitatingly, descended to the

street. At the foot of the stairs he paused irresolutely, and loitered with a vague idea of turning back on some pretense, only that he might relieve himself of the sense of desertion. He had already determined upon making that inquiry into the colonel's personal and pecuniary affairs which he had not dared to offer personally, and had a half-formed plan of testing his own power and popularity in a certain line of relief that at once satisfied his sympathies and ambitions. Nevertheless, after reaching the street, he lingered a moment, when an odd idea of temporizing with his inclinations struck him. At the farther end of the hotel —one of the parasites living on its decayed fortunes—was a small barber's shop. By having his hair trimmed and his clothes brushed he could linger a little longer beneath the same roof with the helpless solitary, and perhaps come to some conclusion. He entered the clean but scantily furnished shop, and threw himself into one of the nearest chairs, hardly noting that there were no other customers, and that a single assistant, stropping a razor behind a glass door, was the only occupant. But there was a familiar note of exaggerated politeness about the voice of this man as he opened the door and came towards the back of the chair with the formula:—

"Mo'nin', sah! Shall we hab de pleshure of shavin' or hah-cuttin' dis mo'nin'?" Paul raised his eyes quickly to the mirror before him. It reflected the black face and grizzled hair of George.

More relieved at finding the old servant still near his master

than caring to comprehend the reason, Hathaway said pleasantly, "Well, George, is this the way you look after your family?"

The old man started; for an instant his full red lips seemed to become dry and ashen, the whites of his eyes were suffused and staring, as he met Paul's smiling face in the glass. But almost as quickly he recovered himself, and, with a polite but deprecating bow, said,—"For God sake, sah! I admit de sarkumstances is agin me, but de simple fack is dat I'm temper'ly occupyin' de place of an ole frien', sah, who is called round de cornah."

"And I'm devilish glad of any fact, George, that gives me a chance of having my hair cut by Colonel Pendleton's right-hand man. So fire away!"

The gratified smile which now suddenly overspread the whole of the old man's face, and seemed to quickly stiffen the rugged and wrinkled fingers that had at first trembled in drawing a pair of shears from a ragged pocket, appeared to satisfy Paul's curiosity for the present. But after a few moments' silent snipping, during which he could detect in the mirror some traces of agitation still twitching the negro's face, he said with an air of conviction:—

"Look here, George—why don't you regularly use your leisure moments in this trade? You'd make your fortune by your taste and skill at it."

For the next half minute the old man's frame shook with silent childlike laughter behind Paul's chair. "Well, Marse Hathaway, yo's an ole frien' o' my massa, and a gemman yo'self, sah, and a

senetah, and I do'an mind tellin' yo'—dat's jess what I bin gone done! It makes a little ready money for de ole woman and de chilleren. But de Kernel don' no'. Ah, sah! de Kernel kill me or hisself if he so much as 'spicioned me. De Kernel is high-toned, sah!—bein' a gemman yo'self, yo' understand. He wouldn't heah ob his niggah worken' for two massas—for all he's willen' to lemme go and help myse'f. But, Lord bless yo', sah, dat ain't in de category! De Kernel couldn't get along widout me."

"You collect his rents, don't you?" said Paul, quietly.

"Yes, sah."

"Much?"

"Well, no, sah; not so much as fom'ly, sah! Yo' see, de Kernel's prop'ty lies in de ole parts ob de town, where de po' white folks lib, and dey ain't reg'lar. De Kernel dat sof' in his heart, he dare n' press 'em; some of 'em is ole fo'ty-niners, like hisself, sah; and some is Spanish, sah, and dey is sof' too, and ain't no more gumption dan chilleren, and tink it's ole time come ag'in, and dey's in de ole places like afo' de Mexican wah! and dey don' bin payin' noffin'. But we gets along, sah,—we gets along,—not in de prima facie style, sah! mebbe not in de modden way dut de Kernel don't like; but we keeps ourse'f, sah, and has wine fo' our friends. When yo' come again, sah, yo' 'll find de Widder Glencoe on de sideboard."

"Has the colonel many friends here?"

"Mos' de ole ones bin done gone, sah, and de Kernel don' cotton to de new. He don' mix much in sassiety till de bank

settlements bin gone done. Skuse me, sah!—but you don' happen to know when dat is? It would be a pow'ful heap off de Kernel's mind if it was done. Bein' a high and mighty man in committees up dah in Sacramento, sah, I didn't know but what yo' might know as it might come befo' yo'."

"I'll see about it," said Paul, with an odd, abstracted smile.

"Shampoo dis mornen', sah?"

"Nothing more in this line," said Paul, rising from his chair, "but something more, perhaps, in the line of your other duties. You're a good barber for the public, George, and I don't take back what I said about your future; but JUST NOW I think the colonel wants all your service. He's not at all well. Take this," he said, putting a twenty-dollar gold piece in the astonished servant's hand, "and for the next three or four days drop the shop, and under some pretext or another arrange to be with him. That money will cover what you lose here, and as soon as the colonel's all right again you can come back to work. But are you not afraid of being recognized by some one?"

"No, sah, dat's just it. On'y strangers dat don't know no better come yere."

"But suppose your master should drop in? It's quite convenient to his rooms."

"Marse Harry in a barber-shop!" said the old man with a silent laugh. "Skuse me, sah," he added, with an apologetic mixture of respect and dignity, "but fo' twenty years no man hez touched de Kernel's chin but myself. When Marse Harry hez to go to a

barber's shop, it won't make no matter who's dar."

"Let's hope he will not," said Paul gayly; then, anxious to evade the gratitude which, since his munificence, he had seen beaming in the old negro's eye and evidently trying to find polysyllabic and elevated expression on his lips, he said hurriedly, "I shall expect to find you with the colonel when I call again in a day or two," and smilingly departed.

At the end of two hours George's barber-employer returned to relieve his assistant, and, on receiving from him an account and a certain percentage of the afternoon's fees (minus the gift from Paul), was informed by George that he should pretermit his attendance for a few days. "Udder private and personal affairs," explained the old negro, who made no social distinction in his vocabulary, "peroccupyin' dis niggah's time." The head barber, unwilling to lose a really good assistant, endeavored to dissuade him by the offer of increased emolument, but George was firm.

As he entered the sitting-room the colonel detected his step, and called him in.

"Another time, George, never allow a guest of mine to send away wine. If he don't care for it, put it on the sideboard."

"Yes, sah; but as yo' didn't like it yo'self, Marse Harry, and de wine was de most 'xpensive quality ob Glencoe"—

"D—n the expense!" He paused, and gazed searchingly at his old retainer.

"George," he said suddenly, yet in a gentle voice, "don't lie to me, or"—in a still kinder voice—"I'll flog the black skin off you!

Listen to me. HAVE you got any money left?"

"'Deed, sah, dere IS," said the negro earnestly. "I'll jist fetch it wid de accounts."

"Hold on! I've been thinking, lying here, that if the Widow Molloy can't pay because she sold out, and that tobacconist is ruined, and we've had to pay the water tax for old Bill Soames, the rent last week don't amount to much, while there's the month's bill for the restaurant and that blank druggist's account for lotions and medicines to come out of it. It strikes me we're pretty near touching bottom. I've everything I want here, but, by God, sir, if I find YOU skimping yourself or lying to me or borrowing money"—

"Yes, Marse Harry, but the Widder Molloy done gone and paid up dis afernoon. I'll bring de books and money to prove it;" and he hurriedly reentered the sitting-room.

Then with trembling hands he emptied his pockets on the table, including Paul's gift and the fees he had just received, and opening a desk-drawer took from it a striped cotton handkerchief, such as negro women wear on their heads, containing a small quantity of silver tied up in a hard knot, and a boy's purse. This he emptied on the table with his own money.

They were the only rents of Colonel Henry Pendleton! They were contributed by "George Washington Thomson;" his wife, otherwise known as "Aunt Dinah," washerwoman; and "Scipio Thomson," their son, aged fourteen, bootblack. It did not amount to much. But in that happy moisture that dimmed the old man's

eyes, God knows it looked large enough.

CHAPTER III

Although the rays of an unclouded sun were hot in the Santa Clara roads and byways, and the dry, bleached dust had become an impalpable powder, the perspiring and parched pedestrian who rashly sought relief in the shade of the wayside oak was speedily chilled to the bone by the northwest trade-winds that on those August afternoons swept through the defiles of the Coast Range, and even penetrated the pastoral valley of San Jose. The anomaly of straw hats and overcoats with the occupants of buggies and station wagons was thus accounted for, and even in the sheltered garden of "El Rosario" two young girls in light summer dresses had thrown wraps over their shoulders as they lounged down a broad rose-alley at right angles with the deep, long veranda of the casa. Yet, in spite of the chill, the old Spanish house and gardens presented a luxurious, almost tropical, picture from the roadside. Banks, beds, and bowers of roses lent their name and color to the grounds; tree-like clusters of hanging fuchsias, mound-like masses of variegated verbena, and tangled thickets of ceanothus and spreading heliotrope were set in boundaries of venerable olive, fig, and pear trees. The old house itself, a picturesque relief to the glaring newness of the painted villas along the road, had been tastefully modified to suit the needs and habits of a later civilization; the galleries of the inner courtyard, or patio, had been transferred to the

outside walls in the form of deep verandas, while the old adobe walls themselves were hidden beneath flowing Cape jessamine or bestarred passion vines, and topped by roofs of cylindrical red tiles.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.