

**BRET HARTE**

TALES OF  
TRAIL AND  
TOWN

**Bret Harte**  
**Tales of Trail and Town**

*[http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio\\_book/?art=36322132](http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=36322132)*

*Tales of Trail and Town:*

# Содержание

THE ANCESTORS OF PETER ATHERLY	4
CHAPTER I	4
CHAPTER II	23
CHAPTER III	36
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	62

# **Bret Harte**

## **Tales of Trail and Town**

### **THE ANCESTORS OF PETER ATHERLY**

#### **CHAPTER I**

It must be admitted that the civilizing processes of Rough and Ready were not marked by any of the ameliorating conditions of other improved camps. After the discovery of the famous "Eureka" lead, there was the usual influx of gamblers and saloon-keepers; but that was accepted as a matter of course. But it was thought hard that, after a church was built and a new school erected, it should suddenly be found necessary to have doors that locked, instead of standing shamelessly open to the criticism and temptation of wayfarers, or that portable property could no longer be left out at night in the old fond reliance on universal brotherhood. The habit of borrowing was stopped with the introduction of more money into the camp, and the establishment of rates of interest; the poorer people either took what they wanted, or as indiscreetly bought on credit. There were

better clothes to be seen in its one long straggling street, but those who wore them generally lacked the grim virtue of the old pioneers, and the fairer faces that were to be seen were generally rouged. There was a year or two of this kind of mutation, in which the youthful barbarism of Rough and Ready might have been said to struggle with adult civilized wickedness, and then the name itself disappeared. By an Act of the Legislature the growing town was called "Atherly," after the owner of the Eureka mine,—Peter Atherly,—who had given largess to the town in its "Waterworks" and a "Gin Mill," as the new Atherly Hotel and its gilded bar-rooms were now called. Even at the last moment, however, the new title of "Atherly" hung in the balance. The romantic daughter of the pastor had said that Mr. Atherly should be called "Atherly of Atherly," an aristocratic title so strongly suggestive of an innovation upon democratic principles that it was not until it was discreetly suggested that everybody was still free to call him "Atherly, late of Rough and Ready," that opposition ceased.

Possibly this incident may have first awakened him to the value of his name, and some anxiety as to its origin. Roughly speaking, Atherly's father was only a bucolic emigrant from "Mizzouri," and his mother had done the washing for the camp on her first arrival. The Atherlys had suffered on their overland journey from drought and famine, with the addition of being captured by Indians, who had held them captive for ten months. Indeed, Mr. Atherly, senior, never recovered from the

effects of his captivity, and died shortly after Mrs. Atherly had given birth to twins, Peter and Jenny Atherly. This was scant knowledge for Peter in the glorification of his name through his immediate progenitors; but "Atherly of Atherly" still sounded pleasantly, and, as the young lady had said, smacked of old feudal days and honors. It was believed beyond doubt, even in their simple family records,—the flyleaf of a Bible,—that Peter Atherly's great-grandfather was an Englishman who brought over to his Majesty's Virginian possessions his only son, then a boy. It was not established, however, to what class of deportation he belonged: whether he was suffering exile from religious or judicial conviction, or if he were only one of the articulated "apprentices" who largely made up the American immigration of those days. Howbeit, "Atherly" was undoubtedly an English name, even suggesting respectable and landed ancestry, and Peter Atherly was proud of it. He looked somewhat askance upon his Irish and German fellow citizens, and talked a good deal about "race." Two things, however, concerned him: he was not in looks certainly like any type of modern Englishman as seen either on the stage in San Francisco, or as an actual tourist in the mining regions, and his accent was undoubtedly Southwestern. He was tall and dark, with deep-set eyes in a singularly immobile countenance; he had an erect but lithe and sinewy figure even for his thirty odd years, and might easily have been taken for any other American except for the single exception that his nose was distinctly Roman, and gave him a distinguished air. There was a

suggestion of Abraham Lincoln (and even of Don Quixote) in his tall, melancholy figure and length of limb, but nothing whatever that suggested an Englishman.

It was shortly after the christening of Atherly town that an incident occurred which at first shook, and then the more firmly established, his mild monomania. His widowed mother had been for the last two years an inmate of a private asylum for inebriates, through certain habits contracted while washing for the camp in the first year of her widowhood. This had always been a matter of open sympathy to Rough and Ready; but it was a secret reproach hinted at in Atherly, although it was known that the rich Peter Atherly kept his mother liberally supplied, and that both he and his sister "Jinny" or Jenny Atherly visited her frequently. One day he was telegraphed for, and on going to the asylum found Mrs. Atherly delirious and raving. Through her son's liberality she had bribed an attendant, and was fast succumbing to a private debauch. In the intervals of her delirium she called Peter by name, talked frenziedly and mysteriously of his "high connections"—alluded to himself and his sister as being of the "true breed"—and with a certain vigor of epithet, picked up in the familiarity of the camp during the days when she was known as "Old Ma'am Atherly" or "Aunt Sally," declared that they were "no corn-cracking Hoosiers," "hayseed pikes," nor "northern Yankee scum," and that she should yet live to see them "holding their own lands again and the lands of their forefathers." Quieted at last by opiates, she fell into a more lucid but scarcely

less distressing attitude. Recognizing her son again, as well as her own fast failing condition, she sarcastically thanked him for coming to "see her off," congratulated him that he would soon be spared the lie and expense of keeping her here on account of his pride, under the thin pretext of trying to "cure" her. She knew that Sally Atherly of Rough and Ready wasn't considered fit company for "Atherly of Atherly" by his fine new friends. This and much more in a voice mingling maudlin sentiment with bitter resentment, and with an ominous glitter in her bloodshot and glairy eyes. Peter winced with a consciousness of the half-truth of her reproaches, but the curiosity and excitement awakened by the revelations of her frenzy were greater than his remorse. He said quickly:—

"You were speaking of father!—of his family—his lands and possessions. Tell me again!"

"Wot are ye givin' us?" she ejaculated in husky suspicion, opening upon him her beady eyes, in which the film of death was already gathering.

"Tell me of father,—my father and his family! his great-grandfather!—the Atherlys, my relations—what you were saying. What do you know about them?"

"THAT'S all ye want'er know—is it? THAT'S what ye'r comin' to the old washer-woman for—is it?" she burst out with the desperation of disgust. "Well—give it up! Ask me another!"

"But, mother—the old records, you know! The family Bible—what you once told us—me and Jinny!"



Something gurgled in her throat like a chuckle. With the energy of malevolence, she stammered: "There wasn't no records—there wasn't no family Bible! it's all a lie—you hear me! Your Atherly that you're so proud of was just a British bumner who was kicked outer his family in England and sent to buzz round in Americky. He honey-fogled me—Sally Magregor—out of a better family than his'n, in Kansas, and skyugled me away, but it was a straight out marriage, and I kin prove it. It was in the St. Louis papers, and I've got it stored away safe enough in my trunk! You hear me! I'm shoutin'! But he wasn't no old settler in Mizzouri—he wasn't descended from any settler, either! He was a new man outer England—fresh caught—and talked down his throat. And he fooled ME—the darter of an old family that was settled on the right bank of the Mizzouri afore Dan'l Boone came to Kentucky—with his new philanderings. Then he broke up, and went all to pieces when we struck Californy, and left ME—Sally Magregor, whose father had niggers of his own—to wash for Rough and Ready! THAT'S your Atherly! Take him! I don't want him—I've done with him! I was done with him long afore—afore"—a cough checked her utterance,—“afore”—She gasped again, but the words seemed to strangle in her throat. Intent only on her words and scarcely heeding her sufferings, Peter was bending over her eagerly, when the doctor rudely pulled him away and lifted her to a sitting posture. But she never spoke again. The strongest restoratives quickly administered only left her in a state of scarcely breathing unconsciousness.

"Is she dying? Can't you bring her to," said the anxious Peter, "if only for a moment, doctor?"

"I'm thinkin'," said the visiting doctor, an old Scotch army surgeon, looking at the rich Mr. Atherly with cool, professional contempt, "that your mother willna do any more washing for me as in the old time, nor give up her life again to support her bairns. And it isna my eentention to bring her back to pain for the purposes of geeneral conversation!"

Nor, indeed, did she ever come back to any purpose, but passed away with her unfinished sentence. And her limbs were scarcely decently composed by the attendants before Peter was rummaging the trunk in her room for the paper she had spoken of. It was in an old work-box—a now faded yellow clipping from a newspaper, lying amidst spoils of cotton thread, buttons, and beeswax, which he even then remembered to have seen upon his mother's lap when she superadded the sewing on of buttons to her washing of the miners' shirts. And his dark and hollow cheek glowed with gratified sentiment as he read the clipping.

"We hear with regret of the death of Philip Atherly, Esq., of Rough and Ready, California. Mr. Atherly will be remembered by some of our readers as the hero of the romantic elopement of Miss Sallie Magregor, daughter of Colonel 'Bob' Magregor, which created such a stir in well-to-do circles some thirty years ago. It was known vaguely that the young couple had 'gone West,'—a then unknown region,—but it seems that after severe trials and tribulations on the frontier with savages, they emigrated

early to Oregon, and then, on the outbreak of the gold fever, to California. But it will be a surprise to many to know that it has just transpired that Mr. Atherly was the second son of Sir Ashley Atherly, an English baronet, and by the death of his brother might have succeeded to the property and title."

He remained for some moments looking fixedly at the paper, until the commonplace paragraph imprinted itself upon his brain as no line of sage or poet had ever done, and then he folded it up and put it in his pocket. In his exaltation he felt that even the mother he had never loved was promoted to a certain respect as his father's wife, although he was equally conscious of a new resentment against her for her contemptuous allusions to HIS father, and her evident hopeless inability to comprehend his position. His mother, he feared, was indeed low!—but HE was his father's son! Nevertheless, he gave her a funeral at Atherly, long remembered for its barbaric opulence and display. Thirty carriages, procured from Sacramento at great expense, were freely offered to his friends to join in the astounding pageant. A wonderful casket of iron and silver, brought from San Francisco, held the remains of the ex-washerwoman of Rough and Ready. But a more remarkable innovation was the addition of a royal crown to the other ornamentation of the casket. Peter Atherly's ideas of heraldry were very vague,—Sacramento at that time offered him no opportunity of knowing what were the arms of the Atherlys,—and the introduction of the royal crown seemed to satisfy Peter's mind as to what a crest MIGHT be, while to

the ordinary democratic mind it simply suggested that the corpse was English! Political criticism being thus happily averted, Mrs. Atherly's body was laid in the little cemetery, not far away from certain rude wooden crosses which marked the burial-place of wanderers whose very names were unknown, and in due time a marble shaft was erected over it. But when, the next day, the county paper contained, in addition to the column-and-a-half description of the funeral, the more formal announcement of the death of "Mrs. Sallie Atherly, wife of the late Philip Atherly, second son of Sir Ashley Atherly, of England," criticism and comment broke out. The old pioneers of Rough and Ready felt that they had been imposed upon, and that in some vague way the unfortunate woman had made them the victims of a huge practical joke during all these years. That she had grimly enjoyed their ignorance of her position they did not doubt. "Why, I remember onct when I was sorter bullyraggin' her about mixin' up my duds with Doc Simmons's, and sendin' me Whiskey Dick's old rags, she turned round sudden with a kind of screech, and ran out into the brush. I reckoned, at the time, that it was either 'drink' or feelin's, and could hev kicked myself for being sassy to the old woman, but I know now that all this time that air critter—that barrownet's daughter-in-law—was just laughin' herself into fits in the brush! No, sir, she played this yer camp for all it was worth, year in and out, and we just gave ourselves away like speckled idiots! and now she's lyin' out thar in the bone yard, and keeps on p'intin' the joke, and a-roarin' at us in marble."

Even the later citizens in Atherly felt an equal resentment against her, but from different motives. That her drinking habits and her powerful vocabulary were all the effect of her aristocratic alliance they never doubted. And, although it brought the virtues of their own superior republican sobriety into greater contrast, they felt a scandal at having been tricked into attending this gilded funeral of dissipated rank. Peter Atherly found himself unpopular in his own town. The sober who drank from his free "Waterworks," and the giddy ones who imbibed at his "Gin Mill," equally criticised him. He could not understand it; his peculiar predilections had been accepted before, when they were mere presumptions; why should they not NOW, when they were admitted facts? He was conscious of no change in himself since the funeral! Yet the criticism went on. Presently it took the milder but more contagious form of ridicule. In his own hotel, built with his own money, and in his own presence, he had heard a reckless frequenter of the bar-room decline some proffered refreshment on the ground that "he only drank with his titled relatives." A local humorist, amidst the applause of an admiring crowd at the post-office window, had openly accused the postmaster of withholding letters to him from his only surviving brother, "the Dook of Doncherknow." "The ole dooky never onct missed the mail to let me know wot's goin' on in me childhood's home," remarked the humorist plaintively; "and yer's this dod-blasted gov'ment mule of a postmaster keepin' me letters back!" Letters with pretentious and gilded coats of arms, taken from the

decorated inner lining of cigar-boxes, were posted to prominent citizens. The neighboring and unregenerated settlement of Red Dog was more outrageous in its contribution. The Red Dog "Sentinel," in commenting on the death of "Haulbowline Tom," a drunken English man-o'-war's man, said: "It may not be generally known that our regretted fellow citizen, while serving on H. M. S. Boxer, was secretly married to Queen Kikaluk of the Friendly Group; but, unlike some of our prosperous neighbors, he never boasted of his royal alliance, and resisted with steady British pluck any invitation to share the throne. Indeed, any allusion to the subject affected him deeply. There are those among us who will remember the beautiful portrait of his royal bride tattooed upon his left arm with the royal crest and the crossed flags of the two nations." Only Peter Atherly and his sister understood the sting inflicted either by accident or design in the latter sentence. Both he and his sister had some singular hieroglyphic branded on their arms,—probably a reminiscence of their life on the plains in their infant Indian captivity. But there was no mistaking the general sentiment. The criticisms of a small town may become inevitable. Atherly determined to take the first opportunity to leave Rough and Ready. He was rich; his property was secure; there was no reason why he should stay where his family pretensions were a drawback. And a further circumstance determined his resolution.

He was awaiting his sister in his new house on a little crest above the town. She had been at the time of her mother's death,

and since, a private boarder in the Sacred Heart Convent at Santa Clara, whence she had been summoned to the funeral, but had returned the next day. Few people had noticed in her brother's carriage the veiled figure which might have belonged to one of the religious orders; still less did they remember the dark, lank, heavy-browed girl who had sometimes been seen about Rough and Ready. For she had her brother's melancholy, and greater reticence, and had continued of her own free will, long after her girlish pupilage at the convent, to live secluded under its maternal roof without taking orders. A general suspicion that she was either a religious "crank," or considered herself too good to live in a mountain mining town, had not contributed to her brother's popularity. In her abstraction from worldly ambitions she had, naturally, taken no part in her brother's family pretensions. He had given her an independent allowance, and she was supposed to be equally a sharer in his good fortune. Yet she had suddenly declared her intention of returning to Atherly, to consult him on affairs of importance. Peter was both surprised and eager; there was but little affection between them, but, preoccupied with his one idea, he was satisfied that she wanted to talk about the family.

But he was amazed, disappointed, and disconcerted. For Jenny Atherly, the sober recluse of Santa Clara, hidden in her sombre draperies at the funeral, was no longer to be recognized in the fashionable, smartly but somewhat over-dressed woman he saw before him. In spite of her large features and the distinguishing Roman nose, like his own, she looked even pretty

in her excitement. She had left the convent, she was tired of the life there, she was satisfied that a religious vocation would not suit her. In brief, she intended to enjoy herself like other women. If he really felt a pride in the family he ought to take her out, like other brothers, and “give her a show.” He could do it there if he liked, and she would keep house for him. If he didn’t want to, she must have enough money to keep her fashionably in San Francisco. But she wanted excitement, and that she **WOULD HAVE!** She wanted to go to balls, theatres, and entertainments, and she intended to! Her voice grew quite high, and her dark cheek glowed with some new-found emotion.

Astounded as he was, Peter succumbed. It was better that she should indulge her astounding caprice under his roof than elsewhere. It would not do for the sister of an Atherly to provoke scandal. He gave entertainments, picnics, and parties, and “Jinny” Atherly plunged into these mild festivities with the enthusiasm of a schoolgirl. She not only could dance with feverish energy all night, but next day could mount a horse—she was a fearless rider—and lead the most accomplished horsemen. She was a good shot, she walked with the untiring foot of a coyote, she threaded the woods with the instinct of a pioneer. Peter regarded her with a singular mingling of astonishment and fear. Surely she had not learned this at school! These were not the teachings nor the sports of the good sisters! He once dared to interrogate her regarding this change in her habits. “I always **FELT** like it,” she answered quickly, “but I kept it down. I used



sometimes to feel that I couldn't stand it any longer, but must rush out and do something," she said passionately; "but," she went on with furtive eyes, and a sudden wild timidity like that of a fawn, "I was afraid! I was afraid IT WAS LIKE MOTHER! It seemed to me to be HER blood that was rising in me, and I kept it down,—I didn't want to be like her,—and I prayed and struggled against it. Did you," she said, suddenly grasping his hand, "ever feel like that?"

But Peter never had. His melancholy faith in his father's race had left no thought of his mother's blood mingling with it. "But," he said gravely, "believing this, why did you change?"

"Because I could hold out no longer. I should have gone crazy. Times I wanted to take some of those meek nuns, some of those white-faced pupils with their blue eyes and wavy flaxen hair, and strangle them. I couldn't strive and pray and struggle any longer THERE, and so I came here to let myself out! I suppose when I get married—and I ought to, with my money—it may change me! You don't suppose," she said, with a return of her wild-animal-like timidity, "it is anything that was in FATHER, in those ATHERLYS,—do you?"

But Peter had no idea of anything but virtue in the Atherly blood; he had heard that the upper class of Europeans were fond of field sports and of hunting; it was odd that his sister should inherit this propensity and not he. He regarded her more kindly for this evidence of race. "You think of getting married?" he said more gently, yet with a certain brotherly doubt that any man

could like her enough, even with her money. "Is there any one here would—suit you?" he added diplomatically.

"No—I hate them all!" she burst out. "There isn't one I don't despise for his sickening, foppish, womanish airs."

Nevertheless, it was quite evident that some of the men were attracted by her singular originality and a certain good comradeship in her ways. And it was on one of their riding excursions that Peter noticed that she was singled out by a good-looking, blond-haired young lawyer of the town for his especial attentions. As the cavalcade straggled in climbing the mountain, the young fellow rode close to her saddle-bow, and as the distance lengthened between the other stragglers, they at last were quite alone. When the trail became more densely wooded, Peter quite lost sight of them. But when, a few moments later, having lost the trail himself, they again appeared in the distance before him, he was so amazed that he unconsciously halted. For the two horses were walking side by side, and the stranger's arm was round his sister's waist.

Had Peter any sense of humor he might have smiled at this weakness in his Amazonian sister, but he saw only the serious, practical side of the situation, with, of course, its inevitable relation to his one controlling idea. The young man was in good practice, and would have made an eligible husband to any one else. But was he fit to mate with an Atherly? What would those as yet unknown and powerful relatives say to it? At the same time he could not help knowing that "Jinny," in the eccentricities

of her virgin spinsterhood, might be equally objectionable to them, as she certainly was a severe trial to him here. If she were off his hands he might be able to prosecute his search for his relatives with more freedom. After all, there were mesalliances in all families, and being a woman she was not in the direct line. Instead, therefore, of spurring forward to join them, he lingered a little until they passed out of sight, and until he was joined by a companion from behind. Him, too, he purposely delayed. They were walking slowly, breathing their mustangs, when his companion suddenly uttered a cry of alarm, and sprang from his horse. For on the trail before them lay the young lawyer quite unconscious, with his riderless steed nipping the young leaves of the underbrush. He was evidently stunned by a fall, although across his face was a livid welt which might have been caused by collision with the small elastic limb of a sapling, or a blow from a riding-whip; happily the last idea was only in Peter's mind. As they lifted him up he came slowly to consciousness. He was bewildered and dazed at first, but as he began to speak the color came back freshly to his face. He could not conceive, he stammered, what had happened. He was riding with Miss Atherly, and he supposed his horse had slipped upon some withered pine needles and thrown him! A spasm of pain crossed his face suddenly, and he lifted his hand to the top of his head. Was he hurt THERE? No, but perhaps his hair, which was flowing and curly, had caught in the branches—like Absalom's! He tried to smile, and even begged them to assist

him to his horse that he might follow his fair companion, who would be wondering where he was; but Peter, satisfied that he had received no serious injury, hurriedly enjoined him to stay, while he himself would follow his sister. Putting spurs to his horse, he succeeded, in spite of the slippery trail, in overtaking her near the summit. At the sound of his horse's hoofs she wheeled quickly, came dashing furiously towards him, and only pulled up at the sound of his voice. But she had not time to change her first attitude and expression, which was something which perplexed and alarmed him. Her long lithe figure was half crouching, half clinging to the horse's back, her loosened hair flying over her shoulders, her dark eyes gleaming with an odd nymph-like mischief. Her white teeth flashed as she recognized him, but her laugh was still mocking and uncanny. He took refuge in indignation.

"What has happened?" he said sharply.

"The fool tried to kiss me!" she said simply. "And I—I—let out at him—like mother!"

Nevertheless, she gave him one of those shy, timid glances he had noticed before, and began coiling something around her fingers, with a suggestion of coy embarrassment, indescribably inconsistent with her previous masculine independence.

"You might have killed him," said Peter angrily.

"Perhaps I might! OUGHT I have killed him, Peter?" she said anxiously, yet with the same winning, timid smile. If she had not been his sister, he would have thought her quite handsome.

“As it is,” he said impetuously, “you have made a frightful scandal here.”

“HE won’t say anything about it—will he?” she inquired shyly, still twisting the something around her finger.

Peter did not reply; perhaps the young lawyer really loved her and would keep her secret! But he was vexed, and there was something maniacal in her twisting fingers. “What have you got there?” he said sharply.

She shook the object in the air before her with a laugh. “Only a lock of his hair,” she said gayly; “but I didn’t CUT it off!”

“Throw it away, and come here!” he said angrily.

But she only tucked the little blond curl into her waist belt and shook her head. He urged his horse forward, but she turned and fled, laughing as he pursued her. Being the better rider she could easily evade him whenever he got too near, and in this way they eventually reached the town and their house long before their companions. But she was far enough ahead of her brother to be able to dismount and hide her trophy with childish glee before he arrived.

She was right in believing that her unfortunate cavalier would make no revelation of her conduct, and his catastrophe passed as an accident. But Peter could not disguise the fact that much of his unpopularity was shared by his sister. The matrons of Atherly believed that she was “fast,” and remembered more distinctly than ever the evil habits of her mother. That she would, in the due course of time, “take to drink,” they never doubted. Her

dancing was considered outrageous in its unfettered freedom, and her extraordinary powers of endurance were looked upon as “masculine” by the weaker girls whose partners she took from them. She reciprocally looked down upon them, and made no secret of her contempt for their small refinements and fancies. She affected only the society of men, and even treated them with a familiarity that was both fearless and scornful. Peter saw that it was useless to face the opposition; Miss Atherly did not seem to encourage the renewal of the young lawyer’s attentions, although it was evident that he was still attracted by her, nor did she seem to invite advances from others. He must go away—and he would have to take her with him. It seemed ridiculous that a woman of thirty, of masculine character, should require a chaperon in a brother of equal age; but Peter knew the singular blending of childlike ignorance with this Amazonian quality. He had made his arrangements for an absence from Atherly of three or four years, and they departed together. The young fair-haired lawyer came to the stage-coach office to see them off. Peter could detect no sentiment in his sister’s familiar farewell of her unfortunate suitor. At New York, however, it was arranged that “Jinny” should stay with some friends whom they had made en route, and that, if she wished, she could come to Europe later, and join him in London.

Thus relieved of one, Peter Atherly of Atherly started on his cherished quest of his other and more remote relations.

## CHAPTER II

Peter Atherly had been four months in England, but knew little of the country until one summer afternoon when his carriage rolled along the well-ordered road between Nonningsby Station and Ashley Grange.

In that four months he had consulted authorities, examined records, visited the Heralds' College, written letters, and made a few friends. A rich American, tracing his genealogical tree, was not a new thing—even in that day—in London; but there was something original and simple in his methods, and so much that was grave, reserved, and un-American in his personality, that it awakened interest. A recognition that he was a foreigner, but a puzzled doubt, however, of his exact nationality, which he found everywhere, at first pained him, but he became reconciled to it at about the same time that his English acquaintances abandoned their own reserve and caution before the greater reticence of this melancholy American, and actually became the questioners! In this way his quest became known only as a disclosure of his own courtesy, and offers of assistance were pressed eagerly upon him. That was why Sir Edward Atherly found himself gravely puzzled, as he sat with his family solicitor one morning in the library of Ashley Grange.

“Humph!” said Sir Edward. “And you say he has absolutely no other purpose in making these inquiries?”

“Positively none,” returned the solicitor. “He is even willing to sign a renunciation of any claim which might arise out of this information. It is rather a singular case, but he seems to be a rich man and quite able to indulge his harmless caprices.”

“And you are quite sure he is Philip’s son?”

“Quite, from the papers he brings me. Of course I informed him that even if he should be able to establish a legal marriage he could expect nothing as next of kin, as you had children of your own. He seemed to know that already, and avowed that his only wish was to satisfy his own mind.”

“I suppose he wants to claim kinship and all that sort of thing for society’s sake?”

“I do not think so,” said the solicitor dryly. “I suggested an interview with you, but he seemed to think it quite unnecessary, if I could give him the information he required.”

“Ha!” said Sir Edward promptly, “we’ll invite him here. Lady Atherly can bring in some people to see him. Is he—a hem—What is he like? The usual American, I suppose?”

“Not at all. Quite foreign-looking—dark, and rather like an Italian. There is no resemblance to Mr. Philip,” he said, glancing at the painting of a flaxen-haired child fondling a greyhound under the elms of Ashley Park.

“Ah! Yes, yes! Perhaps the mother was one of those Southern creoles, or mulattoes,” said Sir Edward with an Englishman’s tolerant regard for the vagaries of people who were clearly not English; “they’re rather attractive women, I hear.”



"I think you do quite well to be civil to him," said the solicitor. "He seems to take an interest in the family, and being rich, and apparently only anxious to enhance the family prestige, you ought to know him. Now, in reference to those mortgages on Appleby Farm, if you could get"—

"Yes, yes!" said Sir Edward quickly; "we'll have him down here; and, I say! YOU'LL come too?"

The solicitor bowed. "And, by the way," continued Sir Edward, "there was a girl too,—wasn't there? He has a sister, I believe?"

"Yes, but he has left her in America."

"Ah, yes!—very good—yes!—of course. We'll have Lord Greyshott and Sir Roger and old Lady Everton,—she knows all about Sir Ashley and the family. And—er—is he young or old?"

"About thirty, I should say, Sir Edward."

"Ah, well! We'll have Lady Elfrida over from the Towers."

Had Peter known of these preparations he might have turned back to Nonningsby without even visiting the old church in Ashley Park, which he had been told held the ashes of his ancestors. For during these four months the conviction that he was a foreigner and that he had little or nothing in common with things here had been clearly forced upon him. He could recognize some kinship in the manners and customs of the people to those he had known in the West and on the Atlantic coast, but not to his own individuality, and he seemed even more a stranger here—where he had expected to feel the thrill of

consanguinity—than in the West. He had accepted the invitation of the living Atherly for the sake of the Atherlys long dead and forgotten. As the great quadrangle of stone and ivy lifted itself out of the park, he looked longingly towards the little square tower which peeped from between the yews nearer the road. As the carriage drove up to the carved archway whence so many Atherlys had issued into the world, he could not believe that any of his blood had gone forth from it, or, except himself, had ever entered it before. Once in the great house he felt like a prisoner as he wandered through the long corridors to his room; even the noble trees beyond his mullioned windows seemed of another growth than those he had known.

There was no doubt that he created a sensation at Ashley Grange, not only from his singular kinship, but from his striking individuality. The Atherlys and their guests were fascinated and freely admiring. His very originality, which prevented them from comparing him with any English or American standard of excellence, gave them a comfortable assurance of safety in their admiration. His reserve, his seriousness, his simplicity, very unlike their own, and yet near enough to suggest a delicate flattery, was in his favor. So was his naive frankness in regard to his status in the family, shown in the few words of greeting with Sir Ashley, and in his later simple yet free admissions regarding his obscure youth, his former poverty, and his present wealth. He boasted of neither; he was disturbed by neither. Standing alone, a stranger, for the first time in an assemblage of distinguished and

titled men and women, he betrayed no consciousness; surrounded for the first time by objects which he knew his wealth could not buy, he showed the most unmistakable indifference,—the indifference of temperament. The ladies vied with each other to attack this unimpressible nature,—this profound isolation from external attraction. They followed him about, they looked into his dark, melancholy eyes; it was impossible, they thought, that he could continue this superb acting forever. A glance, a smile, a burst of ingenuous confidence, a covert appeal to his chivalry would yet catch him tripping. But the melancholy eyes that had gazed at the treasures of Ashley Grange and the opulent ease of its guests without kindling, opened to their first emotion,—wonder! At which Lady Elfrida, who had ingenuously admired him, hated him a little, as the first step towards a kindlier feeling.

The next day, having declared his intention of visiting Ashley Church, and, as frankly, his intention of going there alone, he slipped out in the afternoon and made his way quietly through the park to the square ivied tower he had first seen. In this tranquil level length of the wood there was the one spot, the churchyard, where, oddly enough, the green earth heaved into little billows as if to show the turbulence of that life which those who lay below them had lately quitted. It was a relief to the somewhat studied and formal monotony of the well-ordered woodland,—every rood, of which had been paced by visitors, keepers, or poachers,—to find those decrepit and bending tombstones, lurching at every angle, or deeply sinking into the green sea of

forgetfulness around them. All this, and the trodden paths of the villagers towards that common place of meeting, struck him as being more human than anything he had left behind him at the Grange.

He entered the ivy-grown porch and stared for a moment at the half-legal official parochial notices posted on the oaken door,—his first obtrusive intimation of the combination of church and state,—and hesitated. He was not prepared to find that this last resting-place of his people had something to do with taxes and tithes, and that a certain material respectability and security attended his votive sigh. God and the reigning sovereign of the realm preserved a decorous alliance in the royal arms that appeared above the official notices. Presently he pushed open the door gently and entered the nave. For a moment it seemed to him as if the arched gloom of the woods he had left behind was repeated in the dim aisle and vaulted roof; there was an earthy odor, as if the church itself, springing from the fertilizing dust below, had taken root in the soil; the chequers of light from the faded stained-glass windows fell like the flicker of leaves on the pavement. He paused before the cold altar, and started, for beside him lay the recumbent figure of a warrior pillowed on his helmet with the paraphernalia of his trade around him. A sudden childish memory of the great Western plains, and the biers of the Indian “braves” raised on upright poles against the staring sky and above the sunbaked prairie, rushed upon him. There, too, had lain the weapons of the departed chieftain; there,

too, lay the Indian's "faithful hound," here simulated by the cross-legged crusader's canine effigy. And now, strangest of all, he found that this unlooked-for recollection and remembrance thrilled him more at that moment than the dead before him. Here they rested,—the Atherlys of centuries; recumbent in armor or priestly robes, upright in busts that were periwigged or hidden in long curls, above the marble record of their deeds and virtues. Some of these records were in Latin,—an unknown tongue to Peter,—some in a quaint English almost as unintelligible; but none as foreign to him as the dead themselves. Their banners waved above his head; their voices filled the silent church, but fell upon his vacant eye and duller ear. He was none of them.

Presently he was conscious of a footstep, so faint, so subtle, that it might have come from a peregrinating ghost. He turned quickly and saw Lady Elfrida, half bold, yet half frightened, halting beside a pillar of the chancel. But there was nothing of the dead about her: she was radiating and pulsating with the uncompromising and material freshness of English girlhood. The wild rose in the hedgerow was not more tangible than her cheek, nor the summer sky more clearly cool and blue than her eyes. The vigor of health and unfettered freedom of limb was in her figure from her buckled walking-shoe to her brown hair topped by a sailor hat. The assurance and contentment of a well-ordered life, of secured position and freedom from vain anxieties or expectations, were visible in every line of her refined, delicate, and evenly quiescent features. And yet Lady Elfrida, for the first

time in her girlhood, felt a little nervous.

Yet she was frank, too, with the frankness of those who have no thought of being misunderstood. She said she had come there out of curiosity to see how he would “get on” with his ancestors. She had been watching him from the chancel ever since he came,—and she was disappointed. As far as emotion went she thought he had the advantage of the stoniest and longest dead of them all. Perhaps he did not like them? But he must be careful what he SAID, for some of her own people were there,—manifestly this one. (She put the toe of her buckled shoe on the crusader Peter had just looked at.) And then there was another in the corner. So she had a right to come there as well as he,—and she could act as cicerone! This one was a De Brecy, one of King John’s knights, who married an Atherly. (She swung herself into a half-sitting posture on the effigy of the dead knight, composed her straight short skirt over her trim ankles, and looked up in Peter’s dark face.) That would make them some kind of relations,—wouldn’t it? He must come over to Bentley Towers and see the rest of the De Brecys in the chapel there to-morrow. Perhaps there might be some he liked better, and who looked more like him. For there was no one here or at the Grange who resembled him in the least.

He assented to the truth of this with such grave, disarming courtesy, and yet with such undisguised wonder,—as she appeared to talk with greater freedom to a stranger than an American girl would,—that she at once popped off the crusader, and accompanied him somewhat more demurely around the

church. Suddenly she stopped with a slight exclamation.

They had halted before a tablet to the memory of a later Atherly, an officer of his Majesty's 100th Foot, who was killed at Braddock's defeat. The tablet was supported on the one side by a weeping Fame, and on the other by a manacled North American Indian. She stammered and said: "You see there are other Atherlys who went to America even before your father," and then stopped with a sense of having made a slip.

A wild and inexplicable resentment against this complacent historical outrage suddenly took possession of Peter. He knew that his rage was inconsistent with his usual calm, but he could not help it! His swarthy cheek glowed, his dark eyes flashed, he almost trembled with excitement as he hurriedly pointed out to Lady Elfrida that the Indians were VICTORIOUS in that ill-fated expedition of the British forces, and that the captive savage was an allegorical lie. So swift and convincing was his emotion that the young girl, knowing nothing of the subject and caring less, shared his indignation, followed him with anxious eyes, and their hands for an instant touched in innocent and generous sympathy. And then—he knew not how or why—a still more wild and terrible idea sprang up in his fancy. He knew it was madness, yet for a moment he could only stand and grapple with it silently and breathlessly. It was to seize this young and innocent girl, this witness of his disappointment, this complacent and beautiful type of all they valued here, and bear her away—a prisoner, a hostage—he knew not why—on a galloping horse

in the dust of the prairie—far beyond the seas! It was only when he saw her cheek flush and pale, when he saw her staring at him with helpless, frightened, but fascinated eyes,—the eyes of the fluttering bird under the spell of the rattlesnake,—that he drew his breath and turned bewildered away. “And do you know, dear,” she said with naive simplicity to her sister that evening, “that although he was an American, and everybody says that they don’t care at all for those poor Indians, he was so magnanimous in his indignation that I fancied he looked like one of Cooper’s heroes himself rather than an Atherly. It was such a stupid thing for me to show him that tomb of Major Atherly, you know, who fought the Americans,—didn’t he?—or was it later?—but I quite forgot he was an American.” And with this belief in her mind, and in the high expiation of a noble nature, she forbore her characteristic raillery, and followed him meekly, manacled in spirit like the allegorical figure, to the church porch, where they separated, to meet on the morrow. But that morrow never came.

For late in the afternoon a cable message reached him from California asking him to return to accept a nomination to Congress from his own district. It determined his resolution, which for a moment at the church porch had wavered under the bright eyes of Lady Elfrida. He telegraphed his acceptance, hurriedly took leave of his honestly lamenting kinsman, followed his dispatch to London, and in a few days was on the Atlantic.

How he was received in California, how he found his sister married to the blond lawyer, how he recovered his popularity and



won his election, are details that do not belong to this chronicle of his quest. And that quest seems to have terminated forever with his appearance at Washington to take his seat as Congressman.

It was the night of a levee at the White House. The East Room was crowded with smartly dressed men and women of the capital, quaintly simple legislators from remote States in bygone fashions, officers in uniform, and the diplomatic circle blazing with orders. The invoker of this brilliant assembly stood in simple evening dress near the door,—unattended and hedged by no formality. He shook the hand of the new Congressman heartily, congratulated him by name, and turned smilingly to the next comer. Presently there was a slight stir at one of the opposite doors, the crowd fell back, and five figures stalked majestically into the centre of the room. They were the leading chiefs of an Indian reservation coming to pay their respects to their “Great Father,” the President. Their costumes were a mingling of the picturesque with the grotesque; of tawdriness with magnificence; of artificial tinsel and glitter with the regal spoils of the chase; of childlike vanity with barbaric pride. Yet before these the glittering orders and ribbons of the diplomats became dull and meaningless, the uniforms of the officers mere servile livery. Their painted, immobile faces and plumed heads towered with grave dignity above the meaner crowd; their inscrutable eyes returned no response to the timid glances directed towards them. They stood by themselves, alone and impassive,—yet their presence filled the room with the sense of kings. The

unostentatious, simple republican court suddenly seemed to have become royal. Even the interpreter who stood between their remote dignity and the nearer civilized world acquired the status of a court chamberlain.

When their "Great Father," apparently the less important personage, had smilingly received them, a political colleague approached Peter and took his arm. "Gray Eagle would like to speak with you. Come on! Here's your chance! You may be put on the Committee on Indian Relations, and pick up a few facts. Remember we want a firm policy; no more palaver about the 'Great Father' and no more blankets and guns! You know what we used to say out West, 'The only "Good Indian" is a dead one.' So wade in, and hear what the old plug hat has to say."

Peter permitted himself to be led to the group. Even at that moment he remembered the figure of the Indian on the tomb at Ashley Grange, and felt a slight flash of satisfaction over the superior height and bearing of Gray Eagle.

"How!" said Gray Eagle. "How!" said the other four chiefs. "How!" repeated Peter instinctively. At a gesture from Gray Eagle the interpreter said: "Let your friend stand back; Gray Eagle has nothing to say to him. He wishes to speak only with you."

Peter's friend reluctantly withdrew, but threw a cautioning glance towards him. "Ugh!" said Gray Eagle. "Ugh!" said the other chiefs. A few guttural words followed to the interpreter, who turned, and facing Peter with the monotonous impassiveness

which he had caught from the chiefs, said: "He says he knew your father. He was a great chief,—with many horses and many squaws. He is dead."

"My father was an Englishman,—Philip Atherly!" said Peter, with an odd nervousness creeping over him.

The interpreter repeated the words to Grey Eagle, who, after a guttural "Ugh!" answered in his own tongue.

"He says," continued the interpreter with a slight shrug, yet relapsing into his former impassiveness, "that your father was a great chief, and your mother a pale face, or white woman. She was captured with an Englishman, but she became the wife of the chief while in captivity. She was only released before the birth of her children, but a year or two afterwards she brought them as infants to see their father,—the Great Chief,—and to get the mark of their tribe. He says you and your sister are each marked on the left arm."

Then Gray Eagle opened his mouth and uttered his first English sentence. "His father, big Injin, take common white squaw! Papoose no good,—too much white squaw mother, not enough big Injin father! Look! He big man, but no can bear pain! Ugh!"

The interpreter turned in time to catch Peter. He had fainted.

## CHAPTER III

A hot afternoon on the plains. A dusty cavalcade of United States cavalry and commissary wagons, which from a distance preserved a certain military precision of movement, but on nearer view resolved itself into straggling troopers in twos and fours interspersed between the wagons, two noncommissioned officers and a guide riding ahead, who had already fallen into the cavalry slouch, but off to the right, smartly erect and cadet-like, the young lieutenant in command. A wide road that had the appearance of being at once well traveled and yet deserted, and that, although well defined under foot, still seemed to disappear and lose itself a hundred feet ahead in the monotonous level. A horizon that in that clear, dry, hazeless atmosphere never mocked you, yet never changed, but kept its eternal rim of mountains at the same height and distance from hour to hour and day to day. Dust—a parching alkaline powder that cracked the skin—everywhere, clinging to the hubs and spokes of the wheels, without being disturbed by movement, incrusting the cavalryman from his high boots to the crossed sabres of his cap; going off in small puffs like explosions under the plunging hoofs of the horses, but too heavy to rise and follow them. A reeking smell of horse sweat and boot leather that lingered in the road long after the train had passed. An external silence broken only by the cough of a jaded horse in the suffocating dust, or the cracking of

harness leather. Within one of the wagons that seemed a miracle of military neatness and methodical stowage, a lazy conversation carried on by a grizzled driver and sunbrowned farrier.

“Who be you?” sezee. ‘I’m Philip Atherly, a member of Congress,’ sez the long, dark-complected man, sezee, ‘and I’m on a commission for looking into this yer Injin grievance,’ sezee. ‘You may be God Almighty,’ sez Nebraska Bill, sezee, ‘but you look a d—d sight more like a hoss-stealin’ Apache, and we don’t want any of your psalm-singing, big-talkin’ peacemakers interferin’ with our ways of treatin’ pizen,—you hear me? I’m shoutin’,’ sezee. With that the dark-complected man’s eyes began to glisten, and he sorter squirmed all over to get at Bill, and Bill outs with his battery.—Whoa, will ye; what’s up with YOU now?” The latter remark was directed to the young spirited near horse he was driving, who was beginning to be strangely excited.

“What happened then?” said the farrier lazily.

“Well,” continued the driver, having momentarily quieted his horse, “I reckoned it was about time for me to wheel into line, for fellers of the Bill stripe, out on the plains, would ez leave plug a man in citizen’s clothes, even if he was the President himself, as they would drop on an Injin or a nigger. ‘Look here, Bill,’ sez I, ‘I’m escortin’ this stranger under gov’mnt orders, and I’m responsible for him. I ain’t allowed to waste gov’mnt powder and shot on YOUR kind onless I’ve orders, but if you’ll wait till I strip off this shell<sup>1</sup> I’ll lam the stuffin’ outer ye, afore the

---

<sup>1</sup> Cavalry jacket.

stranger.’ With that Bill just danced with rage, but dassent fire, for HE knew, and I knew, that if he’d plugged me he’d been a dead frontiersman afore the next mornin’.”

“But you’d have had to give him up to the authorities, and a jury of his own kind would have set him free.”

“Not much! If you hadn’t just joined, you’d know that ain’t the way o’ 30th Cavalry,” returned the driver. “The kernel would have issued his orders to bring in Bill dead or alive, and the 30th would have managed to bring him in DEAD! Then your jury might have sat on him! Tell you what, chaps of the Bill stripe don’t care overmuch to tackle the yaller braid<sup>2</sup>.”

“But what’s this yer Congressman interferin’ for, anyway?”

“He’s a rich Californian. Thinks he’s got a ‘call,’ I reckon, to look arter Injins, just as them Abolitionists looked arter slaves. And get hated just as they was by the folks here,—and as WE are, too, for the matter of that.”

“Well, I dunno,” rejoined the farrier, “it don’t seem nateral for white men to quarrel with each other about the way to treat an Injin, and that Injin lyin’ in ambush to shoot ‘em both. And ef gov’ment would only make up its mind how to treat ‘em, instead of one day pretendin’ to be their ‘Great Father’ and treatin’ them like babies, and the next makin’ treaties with ‘em like as they wos forriners, and the next sendin’ out a handful of us to lick ten thousand of them—Wot’s the use of ONE regiment—even two—agin a nation—on their own ground?”

---

<sup>2</sup> Characteristic trimming of cavalry jacket

“A nation,—and on their own ground,—that’s just whar you’ve hit it, Softy. That’s the argument of that Congressman Atherly, as I’ve heard him talk with the kernel.”

“And what did the kernel say?”

“The kernel reckoned it was his business to obey orders,—and so should you. So shut your head! If ye wanted to talk about gov’ment ye might say suthin’ about its usin’ us to convoy picnics and excursion parties around, who come out here to have a day’s shootin’, under some big-wig of a political boss or a railroad president, with a letter to the general. And WE’RE told off to look arter their precious skins, and keep the Injins off ‘em,—and they shootin’ or skeerin’ off the Injins’ nat’ral game, and our provender! Darn my skin ef there’ll be much to scout for ef this goes on. And b’gosh!—of they aren’t now ringin’ in a lot of titled forriners to hunt ‘big game,’ as they call it,—Lord This-and-That and Count So-and-So,—all of ‘em with letters to the general from the Washington cabinet to show ‘hospitality,’ or from millionaires who’ve bin hobnobbin’ with ‘em in the old country. And darn my skin ef some of ‘em ain’t bringin’ their wives and sisters along too. There was a lord and lady passed through here under escort last week, and we’re goin’ to pick up some more of ‘em at Fort Biggs tomorrow,—and I reckon some of us will be told off to act as ladies’ maids or milliners. Nothin’ short of a good Injin scare, I reckon, would send them and us about our reg’lar business. Whoa, then, will ye? At it again, are ye? What’s gone of the d—d critter?”

Here the fractious near horse was again beginning to show signs of disturbance and active terror. His quivering nostrils were turned towards the wind, and he almost leaped the centre pole in his frantic effort to avoid it. The eyes of the two men were turned instinctively in that direction. Nothing was to be seen,—the illimitable plain and the sinking sun were all that met the eye. But the horse continued to struggle, and the wagon stopped. Then it was discovered that the horse of an adjacent trooper was also laboring under the same mysterious excitement, and at the same moment wagon No. 3 halted. The infection of some inexplicable terror was spreading among them. Then two non-commissioned officers came riding down the line at a sharp canter, and were joined quickly by the young lieutenant, who gave an order. The trumpeter instinctively raised his instrument to his lips, but was stopped by another order.

And then, as seen by a distant observer, a singular spectacle was unfolded. The straggling train suddenly seemed to resolve itself into a large widening circle of horsemen, revolving round and partly hiding the few heavy wagons that were being rapidly freed from their struggling teams. These, too, joined the circle, and were driven before the whirling troopers. Gradually the circle seemed to grow smaller under the “winding-up” of those evolutions, until the horseless wagons reappeared again, motionless, fronting the four points of the compass, thus making the radii of a smaller inner circle, into which the teams of the wagons as well as the troopers’ horses were closely “wound up”



and densely packed together in an immovable mass. As the circle became smaller the troopers leaped from their horses,—which, however, continued to blindly follow each other in the narrower circle,—and ran to the wagons, carbines in hand. In five minutes from the time of giving the order the straggling train was a fortified camp, the horses corralled in the centre, the dismounted troopers securely posted with their repeating carbines in the angles of the rude bastions formed by the deserted wagons, and ready for an attack. The stampede, if such it was, was stopped.

And yet no cause for it was to be seen! Nothing in earth or sky suggested a reason for this extraordinary panic, or the marvelous evolution that suppressed it. The guide, with three men in open order, rode out and radiated across the empty plain, returning as empty of result. In an hour the horses were sufficiently calmed and fed, the camp slowly unwound itself, the teams were set to and were led out of the circle, and as the rays of the setting sun began to expand fanlike across the plain the cavalcade moved on. But between them and the sinking sun, and visible through its last rays, was a faint line of haze parallel with their track. Yet even this, too, quickly faded away.

Had the guide, however, penetrated half a mile further to the west he would have come upon the cause of the panic, and a spectacle more marvelous than that he had just witnessed. For the illimitable plain with its monotonous prospect was far from being level; a hundred yards further on he would have slowly and imperceptibly descended into a depression nearly a mile in

width. Here he not only would have completely lost sight of his own cavalcade, but have come upon another thrice its length. For here was a trailing line of jog-trotting dusky shapes, some crouching on dwarf ponies half their size, some trailing lances, lodge-poles, rifles, women and children after them, all moving with a monotonous rhythmic motion as marked as the military precision of the other cavalcade, and always on a parallel line with it. They had done so all day, keeping touch and distance by stealthy videttes that crept and crawled along the imperceptible slope towards the unconscious white men. It was, no doubt, the near proximity of one of those watchers that had touched the keen scent of the troopers' horses.

The moon came up; the two cavalcades, scarcely a mile apart, moved on in unison together. Then suddenly the dusky caravan seemed to arise, stretch itself out, and swept away like a morning mist towards the west. The bugles of Fort Biggs had just rung out.

Peter Atherly was up early the next morning pacing the veranda of the commandant's house at Fort Biggs. It had been his intention to visit the new Indian Reservation that day, but he had just received a letter announcing an unexpected visit from his sister, who wished to join him. He had never told her the secret of their Indian paternity, as it had been revealed to him from the scornful lips of Gray Eagle a year ago; he knew her strangely excitable nature; besides, she was a wife now, and the secret would have to be shared with her husband. When he himself had recovered from the shock of the revelation, two things had

impressed themselves upon his reserved and gloomy nature: a horror of his previous claim upon the Atherlys, and an infinite pity and sense of duty towards his own race. He had devoted himself and his increasing wealth to this one object; it seemed to him at times almost providential that his position as a legislator, which he had accepted as a whim or fancy, should have given him this singular opportunity.

Yet it was not an easy task or an enviable position. He was obliged to divorce himself from his political party as well as keep clear of the wild schemes of impractical enthusiasts, too practical "contractors," and the still more helpless bigotry of Christian civilizers, who would have regenerated the Indian with a text which he did not understand and they were unable to illustrate by example. He had expected the opposition of lawless frontiersmen and ignorant settlers—as roughly indicated in the conversation already recorded; indeed he had felt it difficult to argue his humane theories under the smoking roof of a raided settler's cabin, whose owner, however, had forgotten his own repeated provocations, or the trespass of which he was proud. But Atherly's unaffected and unobtrusive zeal, his fixity of purpose, his undoubted courage, his self-abnegation, and above all the gentle melancholy and half-philosophical wisdom of this new missionary, won him the respect and assistance of even the most callous or the most skeptical of officials. The Secretary of the Interior had given him *carte blanche*; the President trusted him, and it was said had granted

him extraordinary powers. Oddly enough it was only his own Californian constituency, who had once laughed at what they deemed his early aristocratic pretensions, who now found fault with his democratic philanthropy. That a man who had been so well received in England—the news of his visit to Ashley Grange had been duly recorded—should sink so low as “to take up with the Injins” of his own country galled their republican pride. A few of his personal friends regretted that he had not brought back from England more conservative and fashionable graces, and had not improved his opportunities. Unfortunately there was no essentially English policy of trusting aborigines that they knew of.

In his gloomy self-scrutiny he had often wondered if he ought not to openly proclaim his kinship with the despised race, but he was always deterred by the thought of his sister and her husband, as well as by the persistent doubt whether his advocacy of Indian rights with his fellow countrymen would be as well served by such a course. And here again he was perplexed by a singular incident of his early missionary efforts which he had at first treated with cold surprise, but to which later reflection had given a new significance. After Gray Eagle’s revelation he had made a pilgrimage to the Indian country to verify the statements regarding his dead father,—the Indian chief Silver Cloud. Despite the confusion of tribal dialects he was amazed to find that the Indian tongue came back to him almost as a forgotten boyish memory, so that he was soon able to do without

an interpreter; but not until that functionary, who knew his secret, appeared one day as a more significant ambassador. "Gray Eagle says if you want truly to be a brother to his people you must take a wife among them. He loves you—take one of his!" Peter, through whose veins—albeit of mixed blood—ran that Puritan ice so often found throughout the Great West, was frigidly amazed. In vain did the interpreter assure him that the wife in question, Little Daybreak, was a wife only in name, a prudent reserve kept by Gray Eagle in the orphan daughter of a brother brave. But Peter was adamant. Whatever answer the interpreter returned to Gray Eagle he never knew. But to his alarm he presently found that the Indian maiden Little Daybreak had been aware of Gray Eagle's offer, and had with pathetic simplicity already considered herself Peter's spouse. During his stay at the encampment he found her sitting before his lodge every morning. A girl of sixteen in years, a child of six in intellect, she flashed her little white teeth upon him when he lifted his tent flap, content to receive his grave, melancholy bow, or patiently trotted at his side carrying things he did not want, which she had taken from the lodge. When he sat down to work, she remained seated at a distance, looking at him with glistening beady eyes like blackberries set in milk, and softly scratching the little bare brown ankle of one foot with the turned-in toes of the other, after an infantine fashion. Yet after he had left—a still single man, solely though his interpreter's diplomacy, as he always believed—he was very worried as to the wisdom of his course. Why should he not in

this way ally himself to his unfortunate race irrevocably? Perhaps there was an answer somewhere in his consciousness which he dared not voice to himself. Since his visit to the English Atherlys, he had put resolutely aside everything that related to that episode, which he now considered was an unhappy imposture. But there were times when a vision of Lady Elfrida, gazing at him with wondering, fascinated eyes, passed across his fancy; even the contact with his own race and his thoughts of their wrongs recalled to him the tomb of the soldier Atherly and the carven captive savage supporter. He could not pass the upright supported bier of an Indian brave—slowly desiccating in the desert air—without seeing in the dead warrior's paraphernalia of arms and trophies some resemblance to the cross-legged crusader on whose marble effigy SHE had girlishly perched herself as she told the story of her ancestors. Yet only the peaceful gloom and repose of the old church touched him now; even she, too, with all her glory of English girlhood, seemed to belong to that remote past. She was part of the restful quiet of the church; the yews in the quaint old churchyard might have waved over her as well.

Still, he was eager to see his sister, and if he should conclude to impart to her his secret, she might advise him. At all events, he decided to delay his departure until her arrival, a decision with which the commanding officer concurred, as a foraging party had that morning discovered traces of Indians in the vicinity of the fort, and the lately arrived commissary train had reported the unaccountable but promptly prevented stampede.

Unfortunately, his sister Jenny appeared accompanied by her husband, who seized an early opportunity to take Peter aside and confide to him his anxiety about her health, and the strange fits of excitement under which she occasionally labored. Remembering the episode of the Californian woods three years ago, Peter stared at this good-natured, good-looking man, whose life he had always believed she once imperiled, and wondered more than ever at their strange union.

“Do you ever quarrel?” asked Peter bluntly.

“No,” said the good-hearted fellow warmly, “never! We have never had a harsh word; she’s the dearest girl,—the best wife in the world to me, but”—he hesitated, “you know there are times when I think she confounds me with somebody else, and is strange! Sometimes when we are in company she stands alone and stares at everybody, without saying a word, as if she didn’t understand them. Or else she gets painfully excited and dances all night until she is exhausted. I thought, perhaps,” he added timidly, “that you might know, and would tell me if she had any singular experience as a child,—any illness, or,” he went on still more gently, “if perhaps her mother or father”—

“No,” interrupted Peter almost brusquely, with the sudden conviction that this was no time for revelation of his secret, “no, nothing.”

“The doctor says,” continued Lascelles with that hesitating, almost mystic delicacy with which most gentlemen approach a subject upon which their wives talk openly, “that it may be owing

to Jenny's peculiar state of health just now, you know, and that if—all went well, you know, and there should be—don't you see—a little child"—

Peter interrupted him with a start. A child! Jenny's child! Silver Cloud's grandchild! This was a complication he had not thought of. No! It was too late to tell his secret now. He only nodded his head abstractedly and said coldly, "I dare say he is right."

Nevertheless, Jenny was looking remarkably well. Perhaps it was the excitement of travel and new surroundings; but her tall, lithe figure, nearly half a head taller than her husband's, was a striking one among the officers' wives in the commandant's sitting-room. Her olive cheek glowed with a faint illuminating color; there was something even patrician in her slightly curved nose and high cheek bones, and her smile, rare even in her most excited moments, was, like her brother's, singularly fascinating. The officers evidently thought so too, and when the young lieutenant of the commissary escort, fresh from West Point and Flirtation Walk, gallantly attached himself to her, the ladies were slightly scandalized at the naive air of camaraderie with which Mrs. Lascelles received his attentions. Even Peter was a little disturbed. Only Lascelles, delighted with his wife's animation, and pleased at her success, gazed at her with unqualified admiration. Indeed, he was so satisfied with her improvement, and so sanguine of her ultimate recovery, that he felt justified in leaving her with her brother and returning to Omaha by



the regular mail wagon next day. There was no danger to be apprehended in her accompanying Peter; they would have a full escort; the reservation lay in a direction unfrequented by marauding tribes; the road was the principal one used by the government to connect the fort with the settlements, and well traveled; the officers' wives had often journeyed thither.

The childish curiosity and high spirits which Jenny showed on the journey to the reservation was increased when she reached it and drew up before the house of the Indian agent. Peter was relieved; he had been anxious and nervous as to any instinctive effect which might be produced on her excitable nature by a first view of her own kinsfolk, although she was still ignorant of her relationship. Her interest and curiosity, however, had nothing abnormal in it. But he was not prepared for the effect produced upon THEM at her first appearance. A few of the braves gathered eagerly around her, and one even addressed her in his own guttural tongue, at which she betrayed a slight feeling of alarm; and Peter saw with satisfaction that she drew close to him. Knowing that his old interpreter and Gray Eagle were of a different and hostile tribe a hundred miles away, and that his secret was safe with them, he simply introduced her as his sister. But he presently found that the braves had added to their curiosity a certain suspiciousness and sullen demeanor, and he was glad to resign his sister into the hands of the agent's wife, while he prosecuted his business of examination and inspection. Later, on his return to the cabin, he was met by the agent, who seemed to

be with difficulty suppressing a laugh.

“Your sister is exciting quite a sensation here,” he said. “Do you know that some of these idiotic braves and the Medicine Man insist upon it that she’s A SQUAW, and that you’re keeping her in captivity against your plighted faith to them! You’ll excuse me,” he went on with an attempt to recover his gravity, “troubling you with their d—d fool talk, and you won’t say anything to HER about it, but I thought you ought to know it on account of your position among ‘em. You don’t want to lose their confidence, and you know how easily their skeery faculties are stampeded with an idea!”

“Where is she now?” demanded Peter, with a darkening face.

“Somewhere with the squaws, I reckon. I thought she might be a little skeered of the braves, and I’ve kept them away. SHE’S all right, you know; only if you intend to stay here long I’d”—

But Peter was already striding away in the direction of a thicket of cottonwood where he heard the ripple of women’s and children’s voices. When he had penetrated it, he found his sister sitting on a stump, surrounded by a laughing, gesticulating crowd of young girls and old women, with a tightly swaddled papoose in her lap. Some of them had already half mischievously, half curiously possessed themselves of her dust cloak, hat, parasol, and gloves, and were parading before her in their grotesque finery, apparently as much to her childish excited amusement as their own. She was even answering their gesticulations with equivalent gestures in her attempt to understand them, and trying

amidst shouts of laughter to respond to the monotonous chant of the old women who were zigzagging a dance before her. With the gayly striped blankets lying on the ground, the strings of beads, wampum, and highly colored feathers hanging from the trees, and the flickering lights and shadows, it was an innocent and even idyllic picture, but the more experienced Peter saw in the performances only the uncertain temper and want of consecutive idea of playing animals, and the stolid unwinking papoose in his sister's lap gave his sentiment a momentary shock.

Seeing him approach she ran to meet him, the squaws and children slinking away from his grave face. "I have had such a funny time, Peter! Only to think of it, I believe they've never seen men or women with decent clothes before,—of course the settlers' wives don't dress much,—and I believe they'd have had everything I possess if you hadn't come. But they're TOO funny for anything. It was killing to see them put on my hat wrong side before, and try to make one out of my parasol. But I like them a great deal better than those gloomy chiefs, and I think I understand them almost. And do you know, Peter, somehow I seem to have known them all before. And those dear little papooses, aren't they ridiculously lovely. I only wish"—she stopped, for Peter had somewhat hurriedly taken the Indian boy from her arms and restored it to the frightened mother. A singular change came over her face, and she glanced at him quickly. But she resumed, with a heightened color, "I like it ever so much better here than down at the fort. And ever so much better than

New York. I don't wonder that you like them so much, Peter, and are so devoted to them. Don't be angry, dear, because I let them have my things; I'm sure I never cared particularly for them, and I think it would be such fun to dress as they do." Peter remembered keenly his sudden shock at her precipitate change to bright colors after leaving her novitiate at the Sacred Heart. "I do hope," she went on eagerly, "that we are going to stay a long time here."

"We are leaving to-morrow," he said curtly. "I find I have urgent business at the fort."

And they did leave. None too soon, thought Peter and the Indian agent, as they glanced at the faces of the dusky chiefs who had gathered around the cabin. Luckily the presence of their cavalry escort rendered any outbreak impossible, and the stoical taciturnity of the race kept Peter from any verbal insult. But Mrs. Lascelles noticed their lowering dissatisfaction, and her eyes flashed. "I wonder you don't punish them," she said simply.

For a few days after their return she did not allude to her visit, and Peter was beginning to think that her late impressions were as volatile as they were childlike. He devoted himself to his government report, and while he kept up his communications with the reservation and the agent, for the present domiciled himself at the fort.

Colonel Bryce, the commandant though doubtful of civilians, was not slow to appreciate the difference of playing host to a man of Atherly's wealth and position and even found in Peter's reserve and melancholy an agreeable relief to the somewhat boisterous

and material recreations of garrison life, and a gentle check upon the younger officers. For, while Peter did not gamble or drink, there was yet an unobtrusive and gentle dignity in his abstention that relieved him from the attitude of a prig or an "example." Mrs. Lascelles was popular with the officers, and accepted more tolerantly by the wives, since they recognized her harmlessness. Once or twice she was found apparently interested in the gesticulations of a few "friendlies" who had penetrated the parade ground of the fort to barter beads and wampum. The colonel was obliged at last to caution her against this, as it was found that in her inexperience she had given them certain articles that were contraband of the rules, and finally to stop them from an intrusion which was becoming more frequent and annoying. Left thus to herself, she relieved her isolation by walks beyond the precincts of the garrison, where she frequently met those "friendly" wanderers, chiefly squaws and children. Here she was again cautioned by the commander,—

"Don't put too much faith in those creatures, Mrs. Lascelles."

Jenny elevated her black brows and threw up her arched nose like a charger. "I'm not afraid of old women and children," she said loftily.

"But I am," said the colonel gravely. "It's a horrible thing to think of, but these feeble old women and innocent children are always selected to torture the prisoners taken by the braves, and, by Jove, they seem to like it."

Thus restricted, Mrs. Lascelles fell back upon the attentions

of Lieutenant Forsyth, whose gallantry was always as fresh as his smart cadet-like tunics, and they took some rides together. Whether it was military caution or the feminine discretion of the colonel's wife,—to the quiet amusement of the other officers,—a trooper was added to the riding party by the order of the colonel, and thereafter it consisted of three. One night, however, the riders did not appear at dinner, and there was considerable uneasiness mingled with some gossip throughout the garrison. It was already midnight before they arrived, and then with horses blown and trembling with exhaustion, and the whole party bearing every sign of fatigue and disturbance. The colonel said a few sharp, decisive words to the subaltern, who, pale and reticent, plucked at his little moustache, but took the whole blame upon himself. HE and Mrs. Lascelles had, he said, outridden the trooper and got lost; it was late when Cassidy (the trooper) found them, but it was no fault of HIS, and they had to ride at the top of their speed to cover the ground between them and the fort. It was noticed that Mrs. Lascelles scarcely spoke to Forsyth, and turned abruptly away from the colonel's interrogations and went to her room.

Peter, absorbed in his report, scarcely noticed the incident, nor the singular restraint that seemed to fall upon the little military household for a day or two afterwards. He had accepted the lieutenant's story without comment or question; he knew his own sister too well to believe that she had lent herself to a flirtation with Forsyth; indeed, he had rather pitied the young officer when

he remembered Lascelles' experience in his early courtship. But he was somewhat astonished one afternoon to find the trooper Cassidy alone in his office.

"Oi thought Oi'd make bould to have a word wid ye, sorr," he said, recovering from a stiff salute with his fingers nipping the cord of his trousers. "It's not for meeself, sorr, although the ould man was harrd on me, nor for the leddy, your sister, but for the sake of the lieutenant, sorr, who the ould man was harrdest on of all. Oi was of the partry that rode with your sister."

"Yes, yes, I remember, I heard the story," said Peter. "She and Mr. Forsyth got lost."

"Axin' your pardin, sorr, she didn't. Mr. Forsyth loid. Loid like an officer and a jintleman—as he is, God bless him—to save a leddy, more betoken your sister, sorr. They never got lost, sorr. We was all three together from the toime we shtarted till we got back, and it's the love av God that we ever got back at all. And it's breaking me hearrt, sorr, to see HIM goin' round with the black looks of everybody upon him, and he a-twirlin' his moustache and purtending not to mind."

"What do you mean?" said Peter, uneasily.

"Oi mane to be tellin' you what happened, sorr," said Cassidy stoutly. "When we shtarted out Oi fell three files to the rear, as became me, so as not to be in the way o' their colloquing, but sorra a bit o' stragglin' was there, and Oi kept them afore me all the toime. When we got to Post Oak Bottom the leddy p'int's her whip off to the roight, and sez she: 'It's a fine bit of turf

there, Misther Forsyth,' invitin' like, and with that she gallops away to the right. The leftenant follys her, and Oi closed up the rear. So we rides away innoshent like amongst the trees, me thinkin' only it wor a mighty queer place for manoeuvrin', until we seed, just beyond us in the hollow, the smoke of an Injin camp and a lot of women and childer. And Mrs. Lascelles gets off and goes to discoursin' and blarneying wid 'em: and Oi sees Mr. Forsyth glancin' round and lookin' oneasy. Then he goes up and sez something to your sister, and she won't give him a hearin'. And then he tells her she must mount and be off. And she turns upon him, bedad, like a tayger, and bids him be off himself. Then he comes to me and sez he, 'Oi don't like the look o' this, Cassidy,' sez he; 'the woods behind is full of braves,' sez he. 'Thru for you, leftenant,' sez Oi, 'it's into a trap that the leddy hez led us, God save her!' 'Whisht,' he sez, 'take my horse, it's the strongest. Go beside her, and when Oi say the word lift her up into the saddle before ye, and gallop like blazes. Oi'll bring up the rear and the other horse.' Wid that we changed horses and cantered up to where she was standing, and he gives the word when she isn't lookin', and Oi grabs her up—she sthru gglin' like mad but not utterin' a cry—and Oi lights out for the trail agin. And sure enough the braves made as if they would folly, but the leftenant throws the reins of her horse over the horn of his saddle, and whips out his revolver and houlds 'em back till I've got well away to the trail again. And then they let fly their arrows, and begorra the next thing a BULLET whizzes by him. And then he



knows they have arms wid 'em and are 'hostiles,' and he rowls the nearest one over, wheelin' and fightin' and coverin' our retreat till we gets to the road agin. And they daren't folly us out of cover. Then the lady gets more sinsible, and the leftenant pershuades her to mount her horse agin. But before we comes to the fort, he sez to me: 'Cassidy,' sez he, 'not a word o' this on account of the leddy.' And I was mum, sorr, while he was shootin' off his mouth about him bein' lost and all that, and him bein' bully-ragged by the kernel, and me knowin' that but for him your sister wouldn't be between these walls here, and Oi wouldn't be talkin' to ye. And shure, sorr, ye might be tellin's the kernel as how the leddy was took by the hysterics, and was that loony that she didn't know whatever she was sayin', and so get the leftenant in favor again."

"I will speak with the colonel to-night," said Peter gloomily.

"Lord save yer honor," returned the trooper gratefully, "and if ye could be sayin' that the LEDDY tould you,—it would only be the merest taste of a loi ye'd be tellin',—and you'd save me from breakin' me word to the leftenant."

"I shall of course speak to my sister first," returned Peter, with a guilty consciousness that he had accepted the trooper's story mainly from his previous knowledge of his sister's character. Nevertheless, in spite of this foregone conclusion, he DID speak to her. To his surprise she did not deny it. Lieutenant Forsyth, —a vain and conceited fool,—whose silly attentions she had accepted solely that she might get recreation beyond the fort,—had presumed to tell her what SHE must do! As if SHE was one

of those stupid officers' wives or sisters! And it never would have happened if he—Peter—had let her remain at the reservation with the Indian agent's wife, or if "Charley" (the gentle Lascelles) were here! HE would have let her go, or taken her there. Besides all the while she was among friends; HIS, Peter's own friends,—the people whose cause he was championing! In vain did Peter try to point out to her that these "people" were still children in mind and impulse, and capable of vacillation or even treachery. He remembered he was talking to a child in mind and impulse, who had shown the same qualities, and in trying to convince her of her danger he felt he was only voicing the common arguments of his opponents.

He spoke also to the colonel, excusing her through her ignorance, her trust in his influence with the savages, and the general derangement of her health. The colonel, relieved of his suspicions of a promising young officer, was gentle and sympathetic, but firm as to Peter's future course. In a moment of caprice and willfulness she might imperil the garrison as she had her escort, and, more than that, she was imperiling Peter's influence with the Indians. Absurd stories had come to his ears regarding the attitude of the reservation towards him. He thought she ought to return home as quickly as possible. Fortunately an opportunity offered. The general commanding had advised him of the visit to the fort of a party of English tourists who had been shooting in the vicinity, and who were making the fort the farthest point of their western excursion. There were three or four

ladies in the party, and as they would be returning to the line of railroad under escort, she could easily accompany them. This, added Colonel Carter, was also Mrs. Carter's opinion,—she was a woman of experience, and had a married daughter of her own. In the mean time Peter had better not broach the subject to his sister, but trust to the arrival of the strangers, who would remain for a week, and who would undoubtedly divert Mrs. Lascelles' impressible mind, and eventually make the proposition more natural and attractive.

In the interval Peter revisited the reservation, and endeavored to pacify the irritation that had sprung from his previous inspection. The outrage at Post Oak Bottom he was assured had no relation to the incident at the reservation, but was committed by some stragglers from other tribes who had not yet accepted the government bounty, yet had not been thus far classified as "hostile." There had been no "Ghost Dancing" nor other indication of disturbance. The colonel had not deemed it necessary to send out an exemplary force, or make a counter demonstration. The incident was allowed to drop. At the reservation Peter had ignored the previous conduct of the chiefs towards him; had with quiet courage exposed himself fully—unarmed and unattended—amongst them, and had as fully let it be known that this previous incident was the reason that his sister had not accompanied him on his second visit. He left them at the close of the second day more satisfied in his mind, and perhaps in a more enthusiastic attitude towards his report.

As he came within sound of the sunset bugles, he struck a narrower trail which led to the fort, through an oasis of oaks and cottonwoods and a small stream or "branch," which afterwards lost itself in the dusty plain. He had already passed a few settler's cabins, a sutler's shop, and other buildings that had sprung up around this armed nucleus of civilization—which, in due season, was to become a frontier town. But as yet the brief wood was wild and secluded; frequented only by the women and children of the fort, within whose protecting bounds it stood, and to whose formal "parade," and trim white and green cottage "quarters," it afforded an agreeable relief. As he rode abstractedly forward under the low cottonwood vault he felt a strange influence stealing over him, an influence that was not only a present experience but at the same time a far-off memory. The concave vault above deepened; the sunset light from the level horizon beyond streamed through the leaves as through the chequers of stained glass windows; through the two shafts before him stretched the pillared aisles of Ashley Church! He was riding as in a dream, and when a figure suddenly slipped across his pathway from a column-like tree trunk, he woke with the disturbance and sense of unreality of a dream. For he saw Lady Elfrida standing before him!

It was not a mere memory conjured up by association, for although the figure, face, and attitude were the same, there were certain changes of costume which the eye of recollection noticed. In place of the smart narrow-brimmed sailor hat he remembered,

she was wearing a slouched cavalry hat with a gold cord around its crown, that, with all its becomingness and picturesque audacity, seemed to become characteristic and respectable, as a crest to her refined head, and as historic as a Lely canvas. She wore a flannel shirt, belted in at her slight waist with a band of yellow leather, defining her small hips, and short straight pleatless skirts that fell to her trim ankles and buckled leather shoes. She was fresh and cool, wholesome and clean, free and unfettered; indeed, her beauty seemed only an afterthought or accident. So much so that when Peter saw her afterwards, amidst the billowy, gauzy, and challenging graces of the officer's wives, who were dressed in their best and prettiest frocks to welcome her, the eye turned naturally from that suggestion of enhancement to the girl who seemed to defy it. She was clearly not an idealized memory, a spirit or a ghost, but naturalistic and rosy; he thought a trifle rosier, as she laughingly addressed him:—

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

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

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