

Farjeon Benjamin Leopold

At the Sign of the Silver Flagon



Benjamin Farjeon
At the Sign of the Silver Flagon

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=23164731

At the Sign of the Silver Flagon:

Содержание

Part the First	4
CHAPTER I	4
CHAPTER II	18
CHAPTER III	28
CHAPTER IV	38
CHAPTER V	47
CHAPTER VI	56
CHAPTER VII	63
CHAPTER VIII	74
CHAPTER IX	78
CHAPTER X	83
CHAPTER XI	88
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	91

**Farjeon B. L.
Benjamin Leopold
At the Sign of
the Silver Flagon**

**Part the First
AT THE OTHER END
OF THE WORLD**

**CHAPTER I
SILVER CREEK TOWNSHIP**

It is December, and the sun marks the record of a hundred and six in the shade. We are at the golden end of the world, in Australia, at Silver Creek, twelve months ago a wilderness, now a busy and thriving township. Within this brief space, an infant in the history of cities has grown into what promises to become a strong and healthy man. Unknown, unthought of but a year ago, the name of Silver Creek is already a household word in a new and flourishing colony, and holds an important place in the

journals of commerce.

There are turnings and thoroughfares in Silver Creek sufficiently irregular to drive land surveyors into a state of distraction, and there is but one street which exhibits anything like regularity in its formation; but this is a result more of accident than design. It is the principal street in the township, and is lined with wooden tenements and calico tents, in which the business of the town is transacted. Stores of every description, in which all things necessary, and many things unnecessary, for the requirements of life, are to be found within the limits of this thoroughfare, which is known to the residents as High Street. If you are curious in such matters, you may calculate how many stores High Street contains by setting its length at a mile and a half, and giving each store an average frontage of sixteen feet. A few of the buildings are of wood, the majority of calico, and the inhabitants of one Englishman's castle can hear the inhabitants of the next talking and bargaining during the day, and sighing and murmuring during the night. Not that the inhabitants of Silver Creek are all Englishmen. Other nations thirsting to have their fingers in the golden pie, have sent their representatives across the seas and through the bush, and Americans, Germans, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Italians, Mongols, and Africans, form a rare Tower-of-Babel community. As, however, they have all been drawn thither by one magnet-fashioned of bright gold—they do not emulate the Tower-of-Babel folk, but hob-a-nob amicably with one another, and make common cause of it with

the ubiquitous Englishman. The pie is a rich one, but the fruit is unequally distributed, and there are many waste places in it (unfortunately not seen until the crust is dived into), the discovery of which brings disappointment and despair to the hungry seekers. The despair does not last long; they are soon tearing up the earth again, animated by new hopes of coming suddenly upon rich pockets of gold.

High Street had only one side, where the stores were built. Opposite, it was open ground for a distance of some four hundred yards; then commenced the upland, on the ridge of which a long thin range of wooden buildings was erected, which formed the Government Camp, where the official business of the township was transacted. There were the resident-magistrate's court, the treasury, and, in dangerous proximity, the gaol, and all the other necessary adjuncts of civil government. The goldfields' commissioner, or the warden, as he was usually called, and his staff, and the resident magistrate, and a few of the lesser luminaries, dwelt there in snug habitations with their Chinese cooks, who were rare masters at crust and paste—which is but natural, as they are proverbially light-fingered. There these children of the sun and the moon chattered, and cooked, and smoked opium in their little wooden pipes, of which they were as tenderly solicitous as though they had been children of their blood; and went elsewhere, to the vilest and dirtiest nest of thoroughfares the imagination can conjure up, and which was known as the Chinese Camp, to gamble away their hard earnings.

In this camp, of course, was the Joss-House, with its absurd and senseless mummeries; and there, also, were certain dens, which every night were filled with Chinamen, smoking themselves into helpless idiocy. The provision stores in the Chinese camp were stocked with curiosities in the eating way which made fastidious persons shudder: such as preserved slugs and snails (delicious delicacies to the Chinese palate), and bottles crammed with what seemed to be pieces of preserved monkey, while thousands of shreds of shrivelled meat hung from the calico roofs, which were black with smoke. These shreds weighed about an ounce each, and looked like the dried and twisted skins and tails of rats. To judge from the glistening pig-like eyes of the children of the celestial sphere when these morsels were on their platters, and they were preparing to discuss them with their chop-sticks, they must have contained some exquisite and delectable charm, which was hidden from the sight and sense of the English barbarian. If ever night was made hideous, the the Chinamen made it so in their dirty camp with the clanging of their gongs and tom-toms, and the harsh treble of their voices. To unaccustomed ears it appeared as though Bedlam had been turned loose in this remote part of the globe.

Between the Government Camp and the High Street ran a valley through which a sparkling stream of water meandered; this was the Silver Creek, from which the township derived its name. At the back of the High Street stores, dotting the hills and gullies for miles around, and in the rear again of the Government Camp,

were the white tents of the gold-diggers. There was a range of hills from which one could look down upon the scene, and it was well worth the labour to climb this height on a moonlight night, and gaze at the perspective of snow-white roofs, beneath which the tired miners were sleeping, and at the silver stream of water threading its way through the undulations. Then there were the Government buildings, prettily situated, and here and there clumps of silver-bark trees, and, in the distance, shadows of great ranges melting into the clouds. It was a picturesque scene, and the solemn silence and its romantic history afforded food for the mind as well as for the eye.

The Silver Creek diggings more than fulfilled the promise of its name, for gold was found in its soil instead of silver. It was first discovered by Chinamen, who had been hunted off another goldfield fifty miles away, where their presence had been considered an abomination by the European miners. They brought this judgment on themselves by stealing, in the dead of the night, golden dirt which did not by right belong to them, and severe skirmishes had taken place between the rival races, in which the Chinamen were worsted. They had to fly for their lives, and they wandered wearily, and yet with spirit, further into the interior of the country, prospecting here and there for gold, but without satisfactory results until they reached the hitherto unexplored district of Silver Creek. Here, by their discovery of the precious metal, their wanderings came to an end, and they pitched their tents and lit their fires, and worked undisturbed

for a few weeks, getting much gold, and laughing doubtless in their capacious sleeves at the lucky chance which had led them to the place. But if they had indulged in the dream of keeping Silver Creek and its precious deposit all to themselves, it was rudely disturbed one fine morning, and they screeched like magpies when they saw six lusty Tipperary men march on to their diggings, and stick their picks into the ground. The Mongolian saw his enemy before him, and waited in dread for what was to come.

The following was the order of the proceedings of the Tipperary men:

They first stuck their picks into the ground, at a distance of about twenty yards apart from each other; then they clustered together, and tightened their belts. When these were arranged to their satisfaction, they solemnly and simultaneously produced six cutty pipes, all very short and very black, and carefully lighted them. Being now, with their pipes held firmly between their teeth, prepared for action, they sauntered in an indolent kind of way towards the shafts at which the Chinamen were working, and pausing at one, watched the man at the windlass winding up the bucket. The Chinamen spoke not a word; the Tipperary men spoke not a word. For full five minutes this was the state of things, and the Chinamen proceeded sullenly with their work; from screeching magpies, they were transformed into mute, fear-stricken slaves. Wrath and animosity were in their hearts, but outwardly they were the humblest of mortals. Their sallow faces

grew sallow, and they cursed their ill-fortune; for it happened that when the Tipperary men appeared upon the scene, they were pulling up wash-dirt, in which specks of gold could be plainly seen. But they cursed in silence.

"How deep, John?" asked one of the Tipperary men, touching the Chinaman gently on his blue dungaree sleeve.

He referred to the depth of the shaft at which the Chinaman was working.

John did not reply.

But be it here understood that on Australasian and doubtless other goldfields, all Chinamen have but one name-John-not given to them by their godfathers and godmothers; and the countrymen of Confucius have meekly accepted it.

The Tipperary man repeated his question.

"How deep, John?"

John preserved silence. The Tipperary man and his mates followed suit for a few seconds. Then he broke cover again.

"M'lenty gold, John?"

M'lenty means plenty; this was everywhere recognised as Chinaman's English.

"M'lenty gold, John?"

Compelled to reply by the sense of danger which the slightly raised tone in which this second question was repeated conveyed to the sensitive soul of the Mongolian, John looked blankly into the face of his interlocutor, and said, with all the innocence of a babe.

"Me no sabby!"

Perhaps no race in the world combines so much simplicity with so much cunning as the Chinese. They utter falsehoods, as children do, with an absolute conviction that it will be believed. In this instance, it need scarcely be said that John understood perfectly the nature of the inquiries addressed to him, and professed ignorance from a mingled feeling of cunning, impotent anger, and helplessness.

The Tipperary man quietly knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the barrel of the windlass, and sticking it in his belt, produced from his pocket a cake of Cavendish tobacco and a great spring knife. His mates followed his example. They knocked the ashes out of their pipes, and began cutting up sticks of Cavendish tobacco with great spring knives. There was a wicked click in their knives as they opened them. The Chinamen's eyes grew white, and they sighed for thunderbolts, or lightning to strike these desperadoes into ashes, or for some secret and as effectual means of getting rid of them. The Tipperary men leisurely filled their pipes, applied a match to them, and puffed away till they were well lighted. Then the one who had acted as spokesman took the Chinaman's ear between his fingers, and the foreigner betrayed himself by yelling out, "What for, you? What for, you?" Another Tipperary man laid hold of the handle of the windlass, and the Chinaman was whirled aside, screaming and yelling, and, after spinning like a teetotum for a dozen yards, found himself in a favourable

position for studying the celestial sphere. A third Tipperary man put his foot into the bucket which was about to be sent empty to the bottom of the shaft, and grasped the rope above him with one firm hand, while the second man, working at the windlass, slowly unwound the rope, and let his mate down the pit.

The yelling of the Chinaman who had been whirled from the windlass brought every one of his companions to the spot. They formed quite a small colony, numbering in all, twenty-two souls. The Tipperary men would have grinned had they been told that they were surrounded by twenty-two souls. They knew as much of theology as a laughing jackass does, but, had they been put to it, they certainly would have denied with powerful emphasis that Chinamen have souls. They saw around them twenty-two pasty faces, and twenty-two bodies dressed in blue dungaree; had the Chinamen turned their backs, the Tipperary men would have seen twenty-two pigtailed dangles from the crowns of the Chinamen's heads, all trembling simultaneously and responsively from agitation. This feature in the scene was curious and unique; but, indeed, speaking in a dramatic sense, the entire situation was stirring and interesting. One Tipperary man was hanging between heaven and earth, with his foot in a bucket; a second was letting him down the shaft. So that there were four Tipperary men left to confront, and if necessary do battle with, twenty-two Chinamen. Long odds: but the Tipperary men did not seem to think so, did not seem even to consider that there was the slightest danger. Certainly they trifled with their knives, but they trifled

with them unconcernedly, opening and shutting them with cruel clicks, and as though they had not the slightest notion that they might be required for the cutting-up of Chinamen instead of the cutting-up of tobacco. These Tipperary men-or, as they should be more properly called, Tipperary boys-looked upon Chinamen as the scum of the earth, as so many cattle. And the Chinamen, in this instance, really did behave as though they were dirt beneath the feet of the Tipperary boys. They screamed, they stamped, they expostulated, they flashed their fingers in each other's faces, but not in the faces of the Tipperary boys; but they did nothing more. The Tipperary boys scarcely looking at the Chinamen, calmly sucked at their pipes and played with their knives.

Suddenly a great screeching was heard at the bottom of the shaft, which might have come from twenty hungry and venomous cats let loose upon one another; the Chinamen made a movement towards the shaft, but did not approach close enough to mingle with the Tipperary boys. The screeching continued, and an Irish oath or two, heartily uttered, gave it variety. A voice was heard from below, calling out one single word:

"Up!"

The moment this word was uttered, the man at the windlass worked at the handle, and began to wind up the rope. There was a heavy weight at the end of it but the muscles of the Tipperary boy were equal to greater emergencies, and he turned the handle slowly and easily, until there came in view the shaven head of another Chinaman, and then an antique weazened face, in

which wrath and dismay were strongly expressed. The man at the windlass, stooping, clutched with his left hand the collar of the antique Chinaman, and pulling him out of the bucket, flung him among his companions, who instantly recommenced screaming, and chattering, and gesticulating with so much vehemence that one might have imagined that their tongues had just been loosened for the first time for twenty years. The arrival from the lower regions was much older than his companions: their faces were large and expressionless, his was small and vivacious; theirs were smooth, and looked as though they were made out of dirty dough, his was lined and wrinkled, and looked like an old and elaborate carving: their eyes were mild and fishlike, his were full of dark fire. Evidently he was the leader of the Chinese crew, for the moment he recovered his breath he began to harangue them with almost frenzied eloquence. A man of spirit he, inciting his mates to open resistance. His fingers flashed the number of friends and foes as his tongue uttered them-five to twenty-three; he even drew partly out of its sheath a long, thin, glittering knife-but nothing came of it, for one of the Tipperary boys, observing the action, caught him instantly by the neck, dragged him from the midst of his companions, wrested the knife from his hand, and hurled him far away on the other side of the Chinamen. It was the work of an instant, and the twenty-three Mongolians-twenty-two on one side, one on the other-looked on, cowed and trembling.

What had occurred at the bottom of the shaft is soon told. The

Tipperary boy, when he stepped out of the bucket and landed on *terra firma*, found the antique Chinaman busily at work in the gutter, where the gold was found. The intruder made short work of it, trying pacific means first. He pointed to the rope and the bucket, and motioned to the Chinaman that he was wanted above. The Chinaman shook his head, and did not understand. The Tipperary boy, not being in the humour to waste time, seized him, placed him by main force in the bucket, and then called to his mate to haul up. Having a sensible regard for his limbs, the antique Chinaman was compelled to hold on to the rope. After this a tape-line was let down the shaft, and the depth measured: then the man below busied himself in tracing the bearing of the gold gutter, its dip and direction, and what was the nature of the earth above and below it. Having satisfied himself upon these points, he half filled the bucket with the auriferous soil, and, stepping into it, was pulled to heaven's light.

"All right, mates," was all he said.

Then he took a tin dish which belonged to the Chinamen, and, filling it with the earth he had dug out of the gold gutter, walked towards the creek, followed by his mates and the rightful owners. He washed the earth carefully and deftly, and with experienced hands: all of them looked on, animated by various feelings, as he swung the dish round and round. Soon the gold came into view, dotting the lessened earth brightly, like stars in a dirty sky: little by little all the earth was washed away, and the pure gold lay in a little heap in the corner of the tin dish. One of the Irishmen

produced a pair of gold scales, and the gold was weighed.

"Four pennyweights to the dish," he said.

"How thick is the wash-dirt?" asked one, of him who had been below.

"About two foot and a half," was the reply.

Hurrah! It was a fortune if they could get claims on the gutter. The Chinamen waited anxiously. What were their enemies now about to do? The man who had washed the gold held it towards the rightful owner.

"M'lenty gold, John," he said, with a pleasant laugh.

Somewhat more satisfied as to the honesty of the intentions of the Tipperary boys, the Chinamen nodded their heads violently enough almost to shake them off, and found their tongues and their understanding.

"Yes, yes. M'lenty gold! Englishman welly good man! Englishman get m'lenty gold!" And pointed to some distance, with tempting fingers, to show where gold was sure to be found in larger quantities.

"All right, John," they said; "we don't want your claims. We only want to find out the lay of the gutter. There's room enough for all at present."

The Chinamen, understanding now the English language, of which they were before so ignorant, became gratefully effusive. The old man darted forward to take the four pennyweights of gold.

"Stop, though," said a Tipperary boy, the lawyer of the

company. "Have you got Miners' Rights! Where's your Miners' Rights?"

Without their Miners' Rights-which, it may be necessary to explain, were parchment grants from her Majesty the Queen, to mine the soil for gold, at the rate of one pound per year per man-the claims which the Chinamen were working were not legally theirs, and could be taken from them at a moment's notice. In reply to the query, twenty-three hands were thrust into twenty-three blue dungaree bosoms, and twenty-three pieces of parchment were waved like flags of freedom triumphantly in the air. The gold was returned to the rightful owners, and the Tipperary boys marked out claims for themselves on the line of the gutter, and were fortunate enough to hit the mark. Next day more men arrived on the ground, and the gold rush having set in, in less than three months the township of Silver Creek was formed. Diggers and traders flocked there from all quarters, and a strangely mixed crew was soon assembled together.

CHAPTER II

HOW BABY OBTAINED HER SHARE IN THE STAR DRAMATIC COMPANY

Silver Creek could soon boast of its newspaper, of course; and equally as a matter of course, it could almost as soon boast of its rival newspaper. It is strange that in communities where one newspaper would languish, two are almost sure to flourish; and the *Silver Creek Herald* and the *Silver Creek Mercury* were not an exception to the rule. They led a prosperous and noisy life, and were conducted upon the usual abusive principles, with great vigour and some ability. Their establishments were in the High Street, where there were also sale-rooms, banks, hotels and restaurants, billiard-rooms, clothes and provision stores, and a store with "Pie-office" written over it. This was almost as good as the peripatetic vendor of baked potatoes, upon whose tin can was painted "The Universal Baked Potato Company (Limited)." The stores drove a roaring trade; flags waved gaily over them; a continual stream of people was flowing up and down. It was like a fair. Here were two Chinamen bearing a pole on their shoulders, in the centre of which dangled, head downwards, a pig at the end of a rope, with its four feet tied in one knot. (When the Chinaman gets to Paradise he hopes to eat roast pig for breakfast, dinner, teas and supper, through all eternity.) Here were half-

a-dozen gold-diggers in great thigh-boots, dragging a jibbing-horse along for their puddling machine, cracking their whips and leaping here and there in sympathy with the antics of their wild purchase. Here were American wagons, with handsome teams of horses, and bullock-drays yoked by patient long-suffering cattle, the drivers of which were unloading their stores. Here was a negro, with his gleaming teeth, and his face alight with humour, badgering a perplexed Mongolian, and a crowd of noisy gold-diggers around them egging him on and laughing. The negro was proving by the most absolute and logical of arguments that he had a perfect right to enjoy the privileges of Silver Creek township, and that the Mongolian was an interloper-"A foreigner, sah!" and had no right there at all. The contest was an unequal one. All the sympathies of the Europeans were with the negro, whose amazing flow of natural spirits would have borne down far greater obstacles than were presented in the distressed actions and thin voice of the Mongolian. It was a peculiar feature of the goldfields that the African was everywhere welcomed, and the Mongolian everywhere scowled at. Here was a great dray creaking along, loaded with portions of the first quartz-reefing machine which Silver Creek could boast of; and all along the road were men buying boots and clothes, and picks and long and short-handled shovels, and bars of steel, and powder and fuse, calling out to one another heartily the while. It was a scene filled with life and colour.

Among the new arrivals, of whom thousands flocked into the

township every day, were some dozen men and women, who came in dusty and weary with the toils of the road. They had travelled more than a hundred and fifty miles, being attracted to Silver Creek township by the news of its wonderful prosperity. They were a common-enough troop in outward appearance, and did not look like traders or gold-miners. They had with them a dray drawn by one horse—a poor weak-kneed creature, to whom existence seemed to be a burden as he toiled painfully along with his load behind him. What this load was could not be seen, for the dray had a tarpaulin over it. Upon the tarpaulin were seated three women. The first who calls for notice by virtue of her position was a stately person, probably about thirty-five years of age; her complexion was dark, and in her face was an expression, which might be said to be stamped upon it, and which represented all the tragic passions in little; she bore herself loftily in more senses than one. Her mind was a storehouse, filled with tragedy queens, intermixed with heroines of tenderer sentiment—which latter, however, were somewhat out of place; but you would have roused her to great indignation had you said so in her hearing. The second, about twenty-three years of age, was a nice-looking saucy widow, with a pretty baby in her arms. The third was a beautiful girl, of some eighteen or nineteen summers. The men, who were all much sunburnt, walked along by the side and in the rear of the dray, and when they entered High Street, peered curiously about them, and then at each other, with an air of "This will do." The eyes of one of the party, the eldest,

a man of over sixty years of age, were expressive of something more than curiosity: anxiety was plainly there, but presently this vanished, and bright twinkles took their place. He rubbed his hands joyously, and smiled upon one and another.

"It looks well," he said.

He was the chief of the party, which was nothing less than a company of actors and actresses come to open the first theatre at Silver Creek. Before they started from Melbourne, they had formed themselves into a joint stock company, and agreed to divide profits in proportion to their abilities. There were twelve in the party, not reckoning the baby, and the number of shares were thirty-six. These, after much anxious discussion and deliberation, and some display of the peacock's chief attribute, were distributed as follows: -

	Shares.
1. Tragedian, light comedian, and stage-manager, playing the lead in everything	4½
2. Heavy man	3
3. First old man	2½
4. Second old man	1½
5. First low comedy	3
6. Second low comedy	2
7. Walking gentleman and treasurer	3
8. Supernumerary	1
9. Juvenile lead and general utility, scene painter, acting-manager, and general director	4½
10. Leading lady	4½
11. First old woman	3
<i>(There was no second.)</i>	
12. Chambermaid (who could sing and dance)	2½

These proportions being settled, they jogged along

comfortably, dreaming of full purses; but on the second day the First Old Man drew attention to the circumstance that although there were thirty-six shares in the company, only thirty-five had been allotted. The Walking Gentleman, who, as treasurer, was looked upon as the arithmetician of the company, and was, therefore, the great authority in figures, instantly began to reckon up, for the fifty-seventh time, and made the number of shares thirty-seven: he tried again and made them thirty-four; tried again, and made them thirty-eight. Then, in desperation, he said that the First Old Man had "discovered a mare's nest," and that the figures were right-thirty-six shares in the company, and thirty-six allotted. Hurt in a tender point, the First Old Man began again to pencil and reckon, and after achieving a dozen different results, came back to his original discovery, and stuck to his guns like a man. Thereupon high words ensued between the Walking Gentleman and the First Old Man, and the matter was referred to the arbitration of the other ten, who immediately set to work to settle the dispute. The results they produced were extraordinary, varying from seventeen to fifty-two, the highest and the lowest totals being accomplished by the First Old Woman (who, to prove the general fitness of things, should have been the First Old Man's wife, but in proof of the general *unfitness* of things, wasn't) and the singing and dancing Chambermaid.

"*I* make it fifty-two," said the First Old Woman, in a despondent tone, "and what's to become of us, I'm sure I don't know."

She said this in a tone which denoted that the salvation of the Company was imperilled by this arithmetical crisis.

"Fifty-two!" exclaimed the singing and acting Chambermaid, with a melodious laugh. "Why, my dear, its only seventeen!"

The matter was so serious, and everybody became so positive, that in a very short time they were all wrangling and disputing. Nothing was clear but one thing, that if these actors and actresses were a fair sample of the profession they represented, then very few actors and actresses are blessed with a genius for figures.

"This is a bad commencement," frowned the Heavy Man, as was becoming in him: frowns were his special privilege.

The Supernumerary was the only indifferent person; his being the lowest share and represented by the simple figure 1, he considered himself safe. Besides, he was a neophyte, who had fully made up his mind to rival the elder Kean one of these fine days; he was content, in the meantime, to wait and suffer. Suffering is the badge of all his tribe.

Those were most uneasy and perplexed who held fractions of shares, such as the Tragedian and Stage-manager, and the Leading Lady of the company.

A happy thought entered the mind of the eldest man of the party, whose shares, represented by $4\frac{1}{2}$, were set against No. 9, General Utility, Scene-painter, Acting-manager, etc.

"I have it!" he cried, slapping his thigh with the vigour of a younger man.

The others looked doubtful, but listened with attention, for he

was one whom they all respected and regarded with affection.

"It is easily arrived at," he continued; "let us take thirty-six shillings, which will represent the thirty-six shares, and give each his proportion. Then, if there is no money left, no mistake has been made."

This proposal was received with laughter and applause, the largest demonstrations coming from those whose pockets were bare of shillings. For, truth to tell, these heroes and heroines of the sock and buskin were impecunious. This circumstance is not uncommon; the condition is almost chronic in the Profession.

"Contributions!" cried the Acting-manager, pulling out of his own pocket no fewer than seventeen shillings: a very Cræsus he.

Others gave timidly, hesitatingly, grudgingly, doubtfully, for the risk was not small. The Heavy Man had nothing to give; the Second Old Man the same contribution; the Supernumerary the same. The Treasurer, as became a "Walking Gentleman," was light of heart as he was of pocket; he looked forward with hope, rich argosies were before him. The First Old Woman produced a plethoric purse, which proved, however, to be stuffed, not with bank notes, but with critical notes of her abilities as the first of First Old Women. She managed to get together a sixpence and two fourpenny-pieces, which she handed to the Acting-manager, asking for twopence change. He gave her the demanded twopence, and was haunted by visions of future complications. The Leading Lady assumed an air of scornful indifference. The Leading Tragedian contributed three shillings, the whole of his

wealth. The First Old Man produced four shillings, saying, "I give thee all-I can no more," but he had money concealed. "Who steals my purse, steals trash," observed the Low-Comedy Man, tossing a bad shilling to the Acting-manager. In due time the full complement of thirty-six shillings, representing thirty-six shares, lay in the Acting-manager's palm. He apportioned them to the cry of "The Ghost walks!" Four and sixpence to the Acting-manager, three shillings to the Heavy Man, and so on and so on, until each had received his share. Then he found he had a shilling left, and by this primitive arithmetic the First Old Man was proved to be right.

The next thing to be accomplished was the difficult task of collecting and re-distributing the shillings which had been advanced. This occasioned some comically-distressing scenes. The responsibility fell upon the Acting-manager, who had advanced seventeen shillings. When everybody was satisfied, he had only fourteen shillings left (a bad one among them which they all repudiated) which he pocketed with a grimace, amid general laughter.

Then,

"What's to be done with the other share?" was asked.

It never occurred to these Bohemians that the matter might rest where it was, and that the company could be carried on as well with thirty-five shares as thirty-six.

"O! I'll take it," said First Low-Comedy, "rather than it should cause disturbances."

"Will you?" from other throats. "But I'll take it!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

It threatened to become a bone of desperate contention.

Another happy thought occurred to the Acting-manager.

Again he slapped his thigh.

"I have it!" he cried. "Give it to the baby."

"Bravo!" cried the other ten; the mother remained silent.

"Bravo! Give it to the baby!"

"Agreed!" sang the First Low-Comedy Man, in the character of one of "Macbeth's" witches.

"Agreed!" sang the Second Low-Comedy Man, in the character of another of "Macbeth's" witches.

And,

"Agreed!" they all broke out in full chorus.

Then they filled the woods with the music from "Macbeth," and danced round an imaginary cauldron.

Thus the baby became a shareholder.

It was not the worst of small comedies this that was played in the Australian woods on a blazing summer's day in January. Many passions and emotions were represented in it in a small way. The curtain falls down as the mother tosses her baby in the air, and as the child is passed from one to another to be kissed.

If in response to the general applause, which I hope will not be wanting, the curtain is drawn aside again, the weak-kneed horse will be seen shambling leisurely along, and the Heavy Man will

be taking great strides in advance of the others, with the baby on his shoulders, crowing and laughing and flourishing her dimpled fists in the air.

CHAPTER III

THE OPENING OF THE THEATRE, AND WHAT PART BABY TOOK IN THE PERFORMANCES

The news of the arrival of Hart's Star Dramatic Company spread through the Silver Creek Goldfields like wildfire, and every able-bodied man and woman (about thirty of the former to one of the latter, so you may guess what a precious commodity woman was) within ten miles around, resolved to pay them a visit. It was really an event in the history of the township; with the exception of casinos, sing-songs, and negro entertainments, there had been no amusements, and the inhabitants looked forward to the opening night with great interest and excitement.

Mr. Hart, who was the originator and guiding-star of the company, was the old man already referred to as the Acting-manager; he was the putty that kept the separate parts of the venture together, for without him the concern would have gone to pieces. A tradesman takes a small order, and is thankful for it; but give a small part to an actress who aspires (and lives there an actress who does not aspire?) and wait to hear the thanks that are showered on your head! Heaven and earth! These little Junos are sublime in their indignation, and as for the little Jupiters, it is well for some persons that they are not Vulcans. It devolved upon

Mr. Hart to heal every difference that arose among the members of the company. No sinecure this, for Vanity's ruffled feathers had to be smoothed a dozen times a week. In every difficulty he was the one appealed to, and his decision was invariably received with respect, if not with equanimity, for he was known to be a just man. He had led a strange and wandering life, had been Jack-of-all-trades and master of none, as he himself said, and was in every respect a gentleman. He spoke French and German, and was in other ways well educated; he painted, he sang, and knew how to conduct himself—in other words he had no low vices, and here he was an old man, fourteen thousand miles away from the land of his birth, an adventurer, with a purse as lean as Falstaff's. He had been all over the world, and (rare gift) had made friends everywhere; no one had ever been heard to speak an ill word of him. That so old a man, becoming attached to a Star Dramatic Company, should play the juvenile lead will not be wondered at by persons acquainted with the peculiarities of the profession; as little will it be wondered at that the First Old Man was barely out of his teens. These reversals of the proper order of things are common. Was Mr. Hart happy? His eye was bright, his step was light, and his heart was as fresh as a young man's. For the rest the question will be answered as this story proceeds.

Being in the Silver Creek township, with probably five pounds between them, the first thing to be seen to by these wandering Bohemians was the building of a theatre. An impossibility do you say? Not at all. Easily accomplished. Directly their arrival and

purpose became known, the proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle Hotel and Restaurant addressed Mr. Hart.

"What have you come here for?" he asked.

"To act," replied Mr. Hart.

"You will want a theatre to act in."

"We shall."

"Is your company a good one?"

"I think I may say it is. Go and look at our women."

"I've seen them. You've a real beauty among them. I'm not a man to beat about the bush, and you look like a man to be trusted."

"Try me."

"I will. I'll build you a theatre at the back of my hotel on the following conditions." (The proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle Hotel dotted off the conditions on the fingers of his left hand with the forefinger of his right hand.) "You will undertake to play in no other place for three months. You will undertake to play in my theatre for six nights a week for three months, and the entertainment shall not last less than four hours. You will undertake to hand over to me every night one-fifth of the gross money received, that being the rent I shall charge you. You will undertake that you and all of you shall board and lodge at the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle, and to pay me three pounds per week per head for such board and lodging-baby not to count." He looked at his thumb with a pucker in his forehead, and finding no condition to which it could be applied, concluded abruptly by

saying, "That's all."

Mr. Hart, with the mind of a general, debated for one moment, and resolved the next.

"How many people will the theatre hold?"

"A thousand," replied the enterprising hotel-keeper promptly.

It was a rough guess; he had not the slightest idea as to the size of the place required for the accommodation of the number.

"How long will the theatre take to build?"

"A week," was the brisk reply.

"Then we can open in ten days," said Mr. Hart. "There's my hand on it. What shall be the name of the theatre?"

"I'm a loyal subject," said the hotel-keeper. "We'll call it 'The Theatre Royal.' God save the Queen!"

"So be it."

And there and then the matter was settled.

Within an hour a contract was given for the building of the Theatre Royal; within two it was commenced; within a week it was finished; and on the tenth night it was opened. Men never know what they can do till they try; wonders can be accomplished only by saying they shall be accomplished, and setting to work on them. It is grappling with small things that dwarf men's minds; give them a wilderness to conquer, and they rise to the occasion. When I say "them," I mean especially Americans and English; next to them, but not equal to them, the Germans; least of all civilised nations, with capacity to make grand use of such opportunity, the French.

The excitement in Silver Creek was tremendous. Crowds thronged the High Street during the opening day of the Theatre Royal. The Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle did a roaring trade. Eight hundred pounds were taken over the bars for drinks before six o'clock in the evening; no drink less than a shilling. Some contemptible rival grog-shop in the vicinity had already reduced the price of a glass of ale to sixpence, but the miners turned their noses up at it. They were as generous as sailors, and they were not going to pay sixpence for a glass of ale when a shilling was the regulation price. There was something sneaking in it, and many a gold-digger lost caste by patronising the cheap grog-shop. Fabulous prices were offered for the privilege of going into the theatre before the doors were open, and securing front seats; but the landlord of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle turned a deaf ear to the tempters.

"Fair play, mates," he said. "First come, first served; and the devil take the hindmost."

(Which, if the devil did, he would have had a good haul, for the hindmost on that night stood for a thousand at least.)

"Bravo, mate," the rough diggers cried; "you're the right sort!"

He looked it, as he stood behind the bar, passing the jest and merry word, with one eye gleaming cordially on his customers, and the other eye looking sharply after his till, and nothing loth to make his "pile" (or fortune) with his sleeves tucked up, and to boast of it afterwards.

The scene that took place that night within the walls of the

new Theatre Royal was one which not many have the privilege of witnessing. Before the curtain drew up, there were two hundred and twenty pounds in the drawers. And listen to this with envy, you harassed lessees; there were only three persons admitted within the walls of the Theatre Royal who did not pay; these were the proprietor of the theatre and the editors of the two newspapers. Happy theatrical manager! Only two critics to woo and conciliate! Deducting the landlord's fifth, and the expenses for printing and lighting, there would not be less than one hundred and forty pounds to divide. Why, at that rate, even the baby would have four pounds for her share so curiously acquired! The entertainment was arranged to show off the full strength of the company. A "screaming" farce, to set the audience in a good humour (it was not required, for they came in prime spirits, full set for enjoyment); a dance by the pretty Chambermaid, *not* dressed as a chambermaid, be it here remarked; a stirring mob-drama; and a two-act comic drama to conclude with. A liberal programme-one which made the proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle rub his hands with satisfaction. The actors and actresses, as they came on the stage, were greeted with roars of applause, as they were already old established favourites; the very supernumerary, the neophyte who intended to rival the elder Kean, received a round which made him certain that fame was within his grasp. All through the night, the audience appeared to be anxiously looking out for new faces to give them cordial greeting. The farce was literally a "screaming" farce;

had the author of the poor little literary bantling been present, it would have done his heart good, and he might have had dreams of greatness. When the curtain fell on the farce, it seemed impossible for anything to be more successful; but the dance that followed it eclipsed it. The gold-diggers could not have the farce repeated-although they would have been well content to have had it, one fellow actually crying out, "Let's have it all over again, mates!" but they could have the dance again, and they did, once, twice, thrice, and would have insisted on it again, but that the poor girl stood before them with panting bosom, like a deer at its last gasp, and appealed to them as prettily as her exhaustion would allow her to do. The gold-diggers stood up, waved their billycock hats, and cheered her as she had never been cheered before; and one threw a crown-piece on the stage, and another cried, "I can beat that, mate!" and threw a sovereign. Then it commenced to rain silver and gold, and the girl stood aside at the wings, half frightened at the shower. It amounted to no less than eleven pounds, which she gathered up in her gauze dress and walked off with, kissing her hand and smiling bewitchingly on the generous givers, who felt themselves well paid for their liberality.

(Before the week was out this dancing and singing Chambermaid had forty-two distinct offers of marriage, and the other two ladies of the company each about half as many.)

Then came the Tragedian's chance in the melodrama, and good use did he make of it. He emulated Bottom in his roaring,

and the louder he roared the louder the audience cheered. But decidedly the greatest success of the night was achieved by the smallest member of the company, and in an unexpected way. If any person was to be thanked for it, it was the Acting-manager, Mr. Hart.

It occurred in this wise: The Leading Lady dropped a few words, which were construed into an objection to the baby receiving its one-thirty-sixth share of the receipts. The mother (who was the First Old Woman of the company) heard them, and spoke to Mr. Hart with tears in her eyes. The singing Chambermaid stood near.

"The spiteful thing!" she exclaimed.

"Never mind," said Mr. Hart, "we will get over the difficulty; the baby shall appear in the last piece."

The mother in astonishment said that was impossible.

"It is quite possible," answered Mr. Hart, "and shall be done."

"But she'll be asleep, the darling!" exclaimed the mother.

"All the better," was the answer. "She'll have nothing to say. You play in the piece. Now attend to my instructions;" and he forthwith gave them to her.

In the drama, the mother, who really played the part of a mother, had to sit at a table for five or six minutes sewing, and speaking perhaps a dozen words, while the action of the piece was being carried on by two characters who occupied the front of the stage. Mr. Hart, in this scene, placed the cradle on the stage, with the baby in it. When the mother went to her seat at the table,

she took the baby from the cradle on to her lap.

"Why, it's a real baby!" cried the gold-diggers, and a buzz of delight ran through the house.

Suddenly the baby awoke, opened her eyes and stared with all her might at the audience, whose attention was now entirely fixed upon the movements of the pretty little thing. The mother raised her to her feet on her lap, and the child, pleased with the light and glitter of the scene, clapped her little hands—one of her pretty tricks—while her face broke out into smiles and dimples. This was enough for the gold-diggers; they laughed, they clapped their hands, they applauded, they cried:

"Bravo, young un! Bravo!"

As though the baby had performed the most marvellous feats; and when the mother, carried away by her feelings, tossed her baby in the air, who fell into her arms crowing and laughing, this little touch of nature roused the audience to a pitch of the wildest enthusiasm. They called for three cheers for the baby, and three for the mother, and three more on the top of those, and some of the men left money at the bars of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle, to buy sweets and cakes for the youngster.

"A great success," remarked Mr. Hart; "no one can say now that she is not entitled to her share. It will be as well to repeat baby every evening until further notice. We will make a feature of baby. She will draw."

Baby did "draw," and the performances went on bravely. Full houses every night. At the end of the week, after paying expenses,

there were nearly six hundred pounds to divide. The money was shared on the Saturday night, after the performance. Mr. Hart, with his share tightly clasped in his hand walked into his bedroom and locked the door. Then he lit a candle, and out of a small trunk took a little packet of letters and a portrait. He knelt by the bed, and read the letters with slow delight; they were short, and the earlier ones were written in a large straggling hand. He opened the portrait-case, and gazed lovingly on the picture of a beautiful girl; a child, with laughing hazel eyes and light curls. He kissed it again and again; and taking from his share of the money he had received a sum barely sufficient for his necessities, he deposited the balance in a safe corner of the trunk.

"For you, my darling, for you," he murmured, speaking to the pretty picture before him. "God preserve and bless you, and make your life happy!"

Tears came into his eyes, and rolled down his cheeks; and sweet remembrance brought his darling into his arms, where she lay as she had lain on the last day he saw her, seven years ago.

"My darling must be almost a woman now," he mused, with a yearning heart.

And so he knelt and dreamed, and garlanded his heart's treasure with loving thoughts. Many a rough hard life is in this way sweetened and purified.

CHAPTER IV

MR. HART SEARCHES FOR A GOLDEN REEF

Gold was first discovered in the alluvial soil in the gullies, a few feet beneath the surface. In some cases the metal was picked up on the surface, and tracked into the bowels of the earth. Sometimes the gold gutter ran across great plains, which soon were riddled with holes, and covered with hillocks of pipe-clay soil; sometimes it ran into hillsides, where the miners tracked it, until the sinking became too deep for profitable labour, or until the "lead," as it is called, was lost. Some of the richest patches of gold that had been found in the colony were found here and there in Silver Creek. In Sailors' Gully, for instance, there was a famous claim, where one gold lead crossed another; the fortunate men who happened to light on this rare junction were runaway sailors, and they made no secret of the fact that they washed fourteen hundred ounces of gold out of twelve buckets of earth in one day. In the same week, the man who was working at the windlass (there were only two partners in this concern) began to turn the handle, and found that the weight at the other end of the rope was greater than he anticipated. He knew that it was only a bucket of earth he was winding up, for he heard it bump against the sides of the shaft. When he caught sight of the bucket he almost

let the handle of the windlass slip from him in his excitement. It was not earth he was hauling up, it was gold; and it proved to be the richest bucket of earth that was ever found in Silver Creek. It yielded thirteen hundred ounces of the precious metal; no less. The fortunate sailors celebrated the occasion, decorated the shaft with as many flags as they could get together, fired off their revolvers for an hour as rapidly as they could load them, bought up all the grog in the gully, and invited all the diggers round about to join them in drinking it. That bucket of gold and dirt was almost the death of them, for the carouse was a wild one; but they recovered themselves in a day or two, and set to work again soberly and sensibly, and retired, after ten weeks' labour, with a fortune of seventeen thousand pounds between them.

After a time men began to look for gold in the hills. It was settled years ago by the miners that all the gold that was found in the gullies was washed down from the ranges. Before many days had passed, quartz reefs were found with great lumps of gold in the stone; and one Saturday the principal gold-broker in Silver Creek displayed in his window a mass of quartz which could not have weighed less than two hundred pounds, and which was literally studded and veined with gold. It was labelled "From Pegleg Reef," so named because it was discovered by a man with a wooden leg. Then commenced a craze, and everybody went mad on quartz. This brings us to a day when Mr. Hart, who, with his company, had now been in Silver Creek for three weeks, winning money and laurels, was walking over the ranges, at some

distance from the township, with a short-handled pick over his shoulder, a hammer in his hand, and a "fossicking" knife in his belt. The craze for discovering a quartz reef had infected him, and he was looking for a trail.

If you can love this man as you proceed with the story, I shall be glad; for he was a large-souled man, who had never been guilty of a meanness. That he was always poor came from the generosity of his nature, which frequent disappointments had not been able to sour; he could never stoop to trickery for money. In his younger days he had frequently been heard to despise money; but I think, now that he was old, his views were beginning to experience change. Else why should he be toiling over the hills on this hot sultry day, with his eyes eagerly bent to the earth, in search of gold?

He came to the ridge of a range, and he paused for a few moments to look back on the township. The air was still; the heavens were full of beautiful colour; the white tents of the diggers shone in the sun. A world in miniature was before him. Gold had lately been discovered in a large plain which with its busy life was stretched beneath him. Although he was at a great distance from it, he could see it clearly from the height on which he stood. At the farthest edge of this plain were a dozen puddling machines at work, and two or three dams filled with clear water which had not been polluted. The water gleamed and glittered like sheets of burnished silver; the tiny horses walked round and round, yoked to their wheels; the tiny men flitted here

and there across the plain, and bent over heaps of auriferous soil, and worked at toy windlasses, with ropes no thicker than thread; thin wreaths of smoke curled from the rear of the tents, where the smallest women in the world were washing and cooking; lilliputians were cutting down trees for firewood with bright sharp axes which were indicated by thin keen flashing edges of light as they were flourished in the air.

Mr. Hart turned his back upon these signs of busy life, and descended the range on the other side. On and on he walked, without discovering any indications of gold, although he paused to crack many a score pieces of the quartz which studded the hills. He smiled curiously at his ill-success. "Well," he mused, as if arguing with himself, "but I should like to find a golden reef! Let me see. A golden reef, yielding say twenty, thirty ounces to the ton. Ah, Gerald, Gerald! don't be greedy. Say fifteen ounces and be satisfied. A hundred tons-fifteen hundred ounces; six thousand pounds. And then, Home! Home! Home! Ah, my darling, how my heart yearns to you! But you are happy, thank God, and if I never look upon your sweet face, if I never hold you in my arms! – " He paused suddenly, with an aching feeling in his breast. "I must see her-I must see her!" he murmured; and stretching forth his arms, cried half seriously, "Come, Fortune, and take me to her!"

He was alone, and no one heard him. For an hour he had seen no evidences of human life about him; Silver Creek township was entirely shut out from view. On he walked, not stopping to chip

now, for he thought that he might have a better chance of finding a golden reef if he went farther afield. He must have walked fully two miles farther, when he saw before him at a distance of a few hundred yards a thick clump of trees arranged by nature almost in a straight line, and entirely obscuring the view that lay beyond it. He plunged into the thicket-for it was no less-and through it, and found himself before another thicket of trees similarly arranged. Between the two thickets there were not more than two hundred feet of clear ground. The intervening space was level and bare, and the trees between which he stood were of a great height. The light came through the uppermost branches in slanting devious lines, which, as he moved, darted hither and thither, as though imbued with life. The ground was all in shadow, and so solemn was the stillness and so dim the light in this place, that it seemed like a page out of another existence.

Lost in admiration, Mr. Hart paused for awhile, and then plunged into the second thicket, and found it denser than the first. In a quarter of an hour he emerged into the open unobscured sunlight again.

Before him rose a vast range with masses of outcropping quartz. He considered within himself whether it was worth his while to climb this range; the quartz looked tempting. There were traces of iron pyrites in it, and he had heard that the richest reefs were sometimes found on such heights. Moreover, it seemed to him as though the hill had never been prospected. He decided that he would mount the range.

It was a difficult task that he had set himself; the range was higher, steeper, than he had imagined, and the day was very hot. He was compelled to stop and rest. "Shall I go to the top or turn back?" he asked of himself. He was inclined to retrace his steps, until he thought of his darling at home; he took her picture from his pocket, and kissed it many times. "I will go up," he said "to the very top. I might hear one day that a golden reef had been found on the summit of this hill, and then I should never forgive myself."

Little did he suspect how much hung upon that moment of hesitation. Little did he suspect that simply by mounting this hill, the means of bringing into his daughter's life its greatest joy and happiness were to be put into his hands. But even had he suspected it, his wildest dream would not have afforded a clue to the manner of its accomplishment.

He mounted the hill; he reached its summit. Then he found that others had been before him.

A shaft had been sunk; a windlass was erected. Mr. Hart judged, from the great hillock of earth by the side of the claim, that the pit could not be less than a hundred feet deep. A tree, split in two, was on the ground close by, with its inner surfaces exposed.

Mr. Hart went to the windlass, thinking at first that the shaft was a deserted one, for he saw no person on the hill. But the sound of metal upon stone which came to his ears from the bottom of the pit was sufficient to convince him that his idea was

wrong, and that a miner was working in the shaft.

A little heap of quartz lay within a yard or two of him. He examined it, and found gold in it. He took up piece after piece, and in every other piece there were traces of gold. He cast greedy glances, not at the quartz he was examining, but along the brow of the hill, beyond the boundary pegs which marked the area of the prospectors' claim. Then turning, he jumped back with a loud cry, for a man whom he had not before observed was lying on the ground at his feet, and he had almost trodden on his upturned face. But another thing that he saw held him for a moment motionless from fear.

The man was asleep, and in his hair was moving a long brown reptile, with, as it seemed, numberless legs, which were all in motion, stealthily and venomously. Two slender horns protruded from its head, and behind its horns its eyes gleamed with spiteful fire. Mr. Hart knew immediately that it was a centipede—a very large one of its species—and that its sting might bring death to the sleeper. It had crawled out of the centre of the split tree which lay near, and was now crawling from the hair on to the face of the sleeping man. Taking his handkerchief in his hand for protection, Mr. Hart, with a swift and sudden movement, plucked the crawling reptile from the sleeper's hair, and threw it and his handkerchief a dozen yards away.

"Holloa, mate!" cried the man, aroused by the action, and jumping to his feet, "what are you up to?"

He was a young and handsome man, with a noble beard

hanging on his breast, and with his hair hanging almost to his shoulders. His eyes were blue, his hair was brown. His skin was fair, as might be seen, not on his face, nor on his neck where it was bared to the sun, but just below the collar of his light-blue serge shirt, the top button of which was unfastened. In age probably twenty-five or six. In height, five feet ten inches, or thereabouts; a model of strength, beauty, and symmetry. Such a form and figure as one of the old painters would have loved to paint, and as might win the heart of any woman not in love and that way inclined-as most women are, naturally.

Impetuous, fiery, aggressive, his first thought was that the stranger had attacked him in his sleep. He did not wait for a second thought, but pulled a revolver from his belt, where it was slung, covered by a leathern sheath, and levelled it at Mr. Hart. In new goldfields these weapons were necessary for self-defence; like vultures after carrion (although the simile does not entirely hold good), the most desperate characters flew to the new goldfields on the first scent of gold, resolved to get it by hook or by crook.

Mr. Hart held up his hand and smiled deprecatingly.

"I think I have done you a service, young sir," he said. "I saw a centipede crawling in your hair on to your face as you were lying asleep, and I plucked it away. That is all. I was once stung in the arm by such a reptile, and was disabled for three months. I fancied you might not relish a like experience; your face is far too handsome to be spoiled in that way. If you will lift my

handkerchief gently and carefully-I did not care to seize the beast with naked fingers-you will see for yourself."

The young man had no need to lift the handkerchief. The long ugly thing was wriggling out of it; half its body was exposed.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young man, seizing a spade and cutting the creature in a dozen pieces, all of which immediately began to crawl away in different directions, north, south, east, and west, with the intention of commencing independent existences.

CHAPTER V

PHILIP'S RIDE FOR FLOWERS FOR MARGARET

"Thank you," said the young man to Mr. Hart, replacing his revolver in his belt.

"Thank *you*," returned Mr. Hart drily, "for cutting up my pocket-handkerchief."

The young man laughed.

"Take mine," he said, offering a red-silk handkerchief to Mr. Hart.

Red was a favourite colour in the diggings in the matter of personal adornment. Red handkerchiefs, red serge shirts, red scarves and sashes, red tassels and bindings, were much coveted.

Mr. Hart shook his head.

"No; I will keep my own as a remembrance."

He gazed admiringly at the young man, and with curiosity, for he saw that the young fellow was superior to the general run of gold-diggers.

"What are you looking at?" asked the young man merrily.

"At what seems to me an anomaly."

"That's me."

"That is you. What made a gold-digger of you?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders.

"A thirst for freedom and adventure. That answer will do as well as another, I suppose. I was cramped up in the old country, so I thought I would come where there was room to move and breathe."

"You find it here."

"Rather!"

He inflated his lungs, and expelled the air with vigorous enjoyment.

"What part of the old country do you hail from?" There was an unconscious tenderness in their tones as they spoke of their native land.

"Devon-dear old Devon. Oh, for a tankard of real Devonshire cider!"

Mr. Hart sighed. "You have home ties, then?"

"Yes, I have an old father at home, who is old only in years. Let us drink to him." He took a tin saucepan half filled with cold tea, and handed it to Mr. Hart, who drank from it, and returned it. "He is about your age, I should say. Have you been long in the colony?"

"Seven years."

"Ah! I haven't served my apprenticeship yet. Now, what brought *you* over these hills to-day?"

Mr. Hart stammered and hesitated; no man on the goldfields liked to confess that he had been wasting hours and days in the wild hope of discovering a golden reef, simply by wandering about and chipping up stones, although every man did it at some

time or other, in secret. However, Mr. Hart blurted out the truth.

"Well," said the young man, "that's the way I and my mate discovered this reef. We found a vein of quartz with gold in it, cropping out on the surface, and we followed it down until we came to another vein about two feet thick, and this we are working now. We're down a hundred and two feet. You see we have about twenty tons of quartz up now; it will go about twelve ounces to the ton, I should say. But we're stuck for a machine to crush it."

"There's one being put up in Iron Bark Gulley."

"Yes; that's nine miles off," said the young man fretfully; "how are we to get the stone to the machine over the ranges, unless we carry it on our backs? A nice job that would be, and would cost as much as the stone's worth!"

"When Mahomet found that the mountain wouldn't come to him-" Mr. Hart said, and paused.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young quartz miner, "you're a gentleman. It does one good to talk to a man who *can* talk. Well, then Mahomet went to the mountain. That is to say, as we can't take the stone to a machine, we must bring a machine to the stone. But that would cost money, and we're on our beam ends."

Many a gold-miner has been in the same strait-with wealth at his feet, staring him in the face, and no money in his pocket-a rich beggar.

Mr. Hart considered. Should he offer his savings for a share in the claim? He had a hundred and twenty pounds in the corner of

his trunk. The chance was a good one. He made the offer. The young man laughed at him.

"We should want twenty times as much," he said.

"I shall mark out a claim for myself, then," said Mr. Hart.

"All right, mate; but you'll have to go a mile away for it. The reef is pegged, north and south, for quite that distance."

This was true; Mr. Hart, with regret, gave up the idea. He looked at the sun, and saw that if he wished to get back to the theatre in time for the performance he must start at once. He bade the young man good-day.

"What's your hurry?"

Mr. Hart explained.

"By Jove!" cried the young man, his face flushing scarlet. "I thought! recognised you. How I should like to go behind the scenes."

"Come then; I shall be glad to see you. This will admit you." And he took a card from his pocket, and wrote some words in pencil upon it. "What name shall I say?"

"Rowe."

"Here is the open sesame. Admit Mr. Rowe by the stage-door. Hart's Star Dramatic Company. – Signed, John Hart."

"You're a brick!" said the young fellow, looking at the card with a flushed face. If it had been an enchanted wand, it could not have made his heart beat more quickly. "I'll be there to-night."

He was as good as his word. What made him so eager was that he had been to the theatre three times, and had fallen dead in love

with the singing and dancing Chambermaid. Such an opportunity to make her acquaintance was not to be thrown away. At eight o'clock he stood by the wings, as handsome as Apollo, as strong as Hercules. When he was introduced to the singing and dancing Chambermaid, he was as shy as a sensitive plant, and would have looked foolish but that his beard prevented him. Many a man has to thank his beard for similar grace. The Chambermaid, as good a girl as she was beautiful, saw the state of affairs at once, and knew, by feminine instinct, that she could twist him round her little finger. Nevertheless, she fell in love with him. Nature will not be denied, and he was a man to be fallen in love with. Her name was Margaret. His was Philip.

After the performance, John Hart and Philip Rowe had a glass together. They spoke of the old country.

"I'll give you a toast," said Philip Rowe. "Here's to the Silver Flagon."

"To the Silver Flagon," responded John Hart. Philip Rowe drank another toast, but did not utter it: To Margaret.

He went to the back of the stage on the following night, and many nights after that, and made friends with the company. All the men liked him; he was free-hearted and free-handed. But the Leading Lady, after a night or two, looked upon him with displeasure, for he paid her less court than her state demanded. Her displeasure was the greater because she had shown that she was inclined to be gracious to him. It was incredible that a lady who enacted Pauline, and Juliet, and Lady Macbeth, should be

overlooked for a chitling who played simple chambermaids, and could dance a little. But then Philip Rowe was blind-which was not a valid excuse for him. The Leading Lady-being a woman as well as a Leading Lady-would have been well pleased to receive the attentions of so handsome a young man, who was evidently a gentleman, and she snubbed Margaret one night, and was spiteful to her, because of her good fortune. Philip Rowe, going behind the scenes, found his Margaret in tears, in a convenient corner. She had a spare half-hour, and he coaxed her to tell him the cause of her distress.

"Never mind, Margaret," he said tenderly. "Don't cry!"

She looked up shyly at this. It was the first time he had called her by her Christian name. If brevity be the soul of wit, it is also frequently the soul of love. Margaret was comforted.

When Philip Rowe came face to face with the Leading Lady, he glared at her. She glared at him in return. He felt awkward and hung down his head. Her glare was more potent than his; she had to glare often on the stage, and was an adept at it. Besides, her face was smooth; his was hairy.

Margaret coaxed him to do something that night; she knew where and how to plant a dagger in her rival's bosom. She whispered to Philip and he ran out of the theatre in a glow of ecstatic delirium, for her lovely lips had almost touched his ear. Her warm breath on his neck made him tremble.

She had asked him to get a bouquet of flowers, to throw on the stage to her in the last piece, in which both she and the Leading

Lady appeared. Flowers have before now been used for purposes as sharp.

But where to get the flowers? A bouquet of flowers was unheard of in Silver Creek township. Where to get them? Where?

Could not love grow them?

Where to get them? Ah, he knew! Six miles away on the main road to the metropolis, there was a-yes, call it so-a garden; a little plot of ground tended by a woman with country memories. In less than two minutes he was in the saddle, galloping in that direction, and right in front of him, all the way, shone Margaret's face and Margaret's eyes and hair. No will-o'-the-wisp was ever more alluring. Margaret lurked in the bushes, glided among the trees, shone in the open spaces, and Philip's heart beat fast and joyously. The six miles of bush road, so soft and pleasant to the horse's feet, were soon traversed, and there was the garden with a few-not many-flowers in it. Philip Rowe leaped off his horse, with joyous exclamations. A woman came to the door.

"Here, Jim!" she cried, to her husband, running into the house, thinking that a bushranger (*Anglicè*, highwayman) was paying them a visit.

Jim promptly appeared, with a gun in his hand. "Now then?" he demanded, nothing daunted.

"Oh! it's all right, mate," said Philip; and in a few moments he explained the motive of his visit.

"About a dozen flowers done up in a bunch are all I want. This

for them."

He held up two pieces of rich quartz, in which there were probably two ounces of gold.

Jim was agreeable, coveting the specimen; his wife was not, loving her flowers. But when Philip pleaded, and told his story, she relented.

"Oh, if it's for that!" she said with a sly smile, and took a good look at Philip, and thought that the woman was to be envied who had won so fine a young fellow.

While she cut the flowers the two men had a nip of brandy each, which Philip paid for. The place really was a sly grog-shop.

Soon Philip was galloping back to Silver Creek township in a glow of triumph. He arrived in time, and paid for admission into the body of the theatre, hiding the flowers in the breast of his dandy serge shirt. He was a bit of a dandy in his way, and especially so when he expected to see Margaret. He followed her instructions to the letter; she had told him at what point to throw the flowers, and plump at her feet they fell, at the precise moment she desired. The audience stared at first at the unusual compliment, and then applauded loudly. Margaret curtsyed, at which they applauded still more vociferously; the beautiful girl was a pet of theirs, and they approved of the tribute. The Leading Lady turned pale, and clutched at her bosom tragically. The dagger had been deftly planted, and she felt the smart-as only a woman would feel it. Margaret placed the flowers in the bosom of her dress, and sent a look straight into the eyes of Philip, which

made every nerve in his body tingle.

CHAPTER VI

ROMEO AND JULIET

The Leading Lady was fond of money, and the theatre was doing so well that her dividend every week was a very handsome one, three times as much as she could expect to get elsewhere; but what woman is prudent when her vanity is hurt? A man with a large bump of caution occasionally hangs back, and calculates consequences. A woman never does. The Leading Lady in a towering passion confronted Mr. Hart, the manager, at the end of the performance.

"Here comes a tragedy," thought he, as he looked into her wrathful eyes. There was a smile on his face, nevertheless.

"I leave the company!" she said abruptly, with heaving bosom.

"My dear lady!" remonstrated the manager.

"To-morrow. I shall take a place in the coach that starts at eight o'clock."

She knew well enough what the result would be if she left; the company would collapse. A man might be spared, and his place filled, or his parts doubled, but the loss of a woman would inflict irreparable injury upon the prospects of the theatre. Mr. Hart knew this also.

"You don't forget," he said gravely, "that we have your signature, and that if you leave without consent we can make you pay heavy damages!"

"That for my signature! that for your heavy damages!" Each time she snapped a disdainful finger.

"My dear lady," he said, in a soothing tone, "you are excited, you are overstrained. We have taxed you a little hardly. We'll play light pieces for a night or two, and give you a rest."

Inconsiderate man He could not more successfully have fanned the flame in her breast.

"You'll play no light pieces to give me a rest! Play light pieces, and give *her* the opportunity of taking leading characters! The shameless hussy! Not if I know it!"

Mr. Hart began to understand. This colloquy was taking place on the stage; the theatre was clear, the curtain was up. Down the stairs which led to the ladies' dressing-room tripped Margaret, fresh, and bright, and happy, with her bunch of flowers in her hand.

"Good night, Mr. Hart," she cried gaily.

In the shadow of the door which led on to the stage a man was waiting for her-Philip. They met, clasped hands-her supple fingers lay in Philip's great palm as in a nest, and he imprisoned them, be sure! – and walked out, side by side, chatting confidentially, with their heads close together. The Leading Lady saw this, and her anger rose higher; but still it was bitter gall to her to reflect that if she went away, the field would be clear for her rival.

Mr. Hart felt that he was on the horns of a difficulty; he could spare neither one nor the other of the ladies.

"You're the manager of this company," said the Leading Lady, "and you ought long ago to have put down such shameless goings on. Did you see the way they went out together, and do you think people are blind? We shall be the talk of the town; but I'll not be implicated in it. My name musn't be used lightly." The manager smiled grimly. "I leave to-morrow. Understand that."

"I decline to understand it. You will fulfil your engagement, and if it is necessary for me to take steps to prevent your departure, I must do so for the sake of the others. I will swear a declaration against you!"

He was aware that he was talking the most arrant nonsense, but he relied on the feminine mind to assist him with its fears, and with its ignorance of legal subtleties.

"I shall be sorry to do so against a lady whom I esteem and respect so much, and of whose talents I have so high an opinion, but no other course will be open to me. If I allowed you to go, the diggers would rise against me. And quite right they would be! Why, my dear lady," he said, cunningly, "you know as well as I do that we are nothing without you-that you are the soul of the company-that there is not your equal on the colonial stage!"

The Leading Lady began to soften beneath the influence of such gross flattery, but it would not do to give way at once.

"I will *not* stop to be insulted!"

"No one *shall* insult you."

"But some one has-you know who-and she shall not do so again-no, not if you swear a million declarations!"

"Come, now, tell me all about it," said the manager, taking her arm, and walking slowly with her up and down the stage. "By the way, the Honourable Mr. Simpson, the Warden of Moonlight Flat, said last night, when you were playing Ophelia-you know him; he was in the theatre with the Commissioner of the Goldfields and the Resident Magistrate-"

"Yes, yes," said the Leading Lady impatiently, "what did he say?"

"That your Ophelia was equal to anything he had seen on the London stage, and that he believed you would create a sensation there. He is first cousin to the Earl of Badmington, you know, who has a theatre in London. I thought you would like to hear it. He is very anxious to make your acquaintance-as all gentlemen of taste and refinement would be."

He glanced slyly at the Leading Lady, whose head was nodding gently up and down, in sweet contentment.

"And now, my dear lady, tell me your grievance."

"It's yours as well as mine, but if you like to stand it, I shan't. If bouquets of flowers are to be thrown on the stage, they must be thrown to me-do you understand, sir? to *me*, as the Leading Lady, and as the star of the company!"

It happened that Mr. Hart had been busy elsewhere during the episode that had very nearly brought the ship to wreck, and had heard nothing of it. He asked the Leading Lady for an explanation, which was given to him.

"And if you don't stop these shameful goings-on," were her

concluding words, "I give you fair warning, I will not stay with you. *I have a character to lose, thank God!*"

Which was to be construed in so many queer ways, that Mr. Hart could scarcely refrain from laughing. "Confound Master Philip!" he thought, and said aloud, "Well, well, my dear creature, I will see to it. And no flowers shall be thrown-by Mr. Philip Rowe, at all events-on the stage to any one but you."

This difficulty being soothed over, he went in search of Philip Rowe, and found him leaning against a fence outside the hotel, gazing up at a light in a bedroom window on the first floor.

"Rehearsing 'Romeo and Juliet?'" asked Mr. Hart kindly, taking the young man's arm.

Philip blushed, and stammered some unintelligible words.

"That *is* her window, Philip," said Mr. Hart, "so you will not make the same ridiculous mistake that I did for a fortnight together, gazing up every night at the light in my lady's bedroom, and working myself into a state of gushing sentimentalism over the slender waist and the graceful turn of the head I saw shadowed on the blind, until I discovered that I had been watching the bedroom window of a black footman."

This was a piece of pure invention on the part of Mr. Hart.

Philip, having nothing to say in reply, shifted one foot over another restlessly. If he could have retired with a good grace, he would have done so, but Mr. Hart had hold of his arm. Mr. Hart continued:

"Putting sentiment aside, a nice scrape you were almost

getting me into to-night. Ah! you may stare, but I should like to know what you mean by throwing flowers to my singing Chambermaid—who is not by any means clever, let me tell you, and will never make her fortune on the stage—when we have in our company a lady who plays leading characters, and who knows every line of Juliet's part?"

"Ho, ho!" laughed Philip; "Juliet was a girl of sixteen or seventeen, and your Leading Lady is forty."

"Woe for your life if you said so in her presence!" exclaimed Mr. Hart, with a quiet chuckle; "it would not be worth a moment's purchase. Forty, sir! and what if she is forty? — which she is not by five years—she is the only woman that can play Juliet to your Romeo."

"Hush!" whispered Philip. "She is opening the window."

Margaret, alone, in her white dress, was indeed opening the window. She did not know—not she! — that her lover was below, nor that her form could be seen, for she had extinguished the light in the room. Her shadow might be discerned, but what is there in a shadow? She sat down by the window, and rested her head on her arm. The graceful outlines of her arm and neck and bended head were clearly visible, and the lover feasted his eyes upon them. She held in her hand the flowers which Philip had thrown her! Her lips were upon the tender leaves—sweets to the sweet. He saw her kiss the flowers, and his soul thrilled with rapture. The night was beautifully still; not a sound was stirring; and as far as eye could see the white tents of the diggers were gleaming.

So Margaret sat and mused, and Philip looked on and dreamed. Here, in the new world, but yesterday a savage waste, the old, old story was being enacted with as much freshness as though the world were but just created. What wonder? Because the sun has risen a few million of times, is the dew on the leaves less sweet and pure in the early morning's light than on that wondrous day when Adam awoke and found Eve by his side?

So Margaret sat and mused, and Philip looked on and dreamed; and I think that Margaret peeped through the lattice-work of her fingers, and saw with her cunning eyes that her lover was there, worshipping her.

How long they would have thus remained, Heaven only knows. Mr. Hart gave them at least twenty minutes, and then touched Philip's arm. Philip started, and Margaret at the window started also, and with a swift happy glance outwards, and with wave of the pretty hand and arm, closed the window. Philip was standing in the light, and Mr. Hart, like a kind and careful friend, had crept backward in the shade; so that Margaret, when she cast that straight swift glance in her lover's direction, saw only him. Surely as the hand-love's white flag of recognition-waved towards him, it had touched her lips first, and she had sent a kiss into the air-which he received in his heart. It stirred tender chords there, and through his veins crept love's fever, which turns dross into gold, and makes a heaven of earth!

CHAPTER VII

AH, PHILIP, MY SON! I, ALSO, HAVE A GIRL WHOM I LOVE

Then said Philip, as he and Mr. Hart moved slowly away-then said Philip softly, as though but a moment had passed since his companion last spoke:

"Her name is Margaret, not Juliet. I have no need to play Romeo to Margaret. Margaret!" he whispered to himself, finding a subtle charm in the name; "My Margaret!" and then aloud, "Has your Leading Lady ever played such a character?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Hart, without any direct meaning, "in 'Faust.'"

Philip's face flushed scarlet, not at the words, but at the tone, which was sad and significant, without the speaker intending it to be so.

"I know you to be a gentleman-" pursued Mr. Hart.

"I thought you to be one," interrupted Philip hotly.

"I hope you will see no reason to change your opinion," said Mr. Hart.

"I see a reason already."

"Let me hear it," asked Mr. Hart, secretly pleased at the young man's ill-humour.

"You associated my Margaret's name-"

"Your Margaret!" exclaimed Mr. Hart. "My Margaret, if you please!"

"Mine!" cried Philip, in a loud voice.

"Mine!" echoed Mr. Hart, in a calmer tone.

"Call her down and ask her!" demanded Philip in his rashness, without considering; and, for the life of him, Mr. Hart could not help laughing long and heartily.

"O that you were twenty years younger!" said Philip.

"O that I were!" exclaimed Mr. Hart, with grave humour. "Then you would really have cause for uneasiness when you hear me call her mine."

"How do you make her yours?"

"I stand to her in the light of a father," replied Mr. Hart more seriously. "When I persuaded her mother in town to let her accompany us, I promised that I would look after her and protect her. Therefore she is mine, because I am her father."

"And without any 'therefore,'" responded Philip, "she is mine, because I am her lover."

"Ah," said Mr. Hart, with a bright smile, "here is a case to be settled, then. But if every pretty girl was her lover's, then one might belong to fifty, or more, for there are hearts enough. Why, you rash-head! do you know how many men in Silver Creek might call your Margaret theirs by the same right as that by which you claim her?"

"No," said Philip, a little sulkily, "I don't know."

"Then I'll tell you. To my certain knowledge, sixty-nine; to my

almost as certain conviction, some five hundred. She had forty-two offers of marriage the first week, and has had twenty-seven since. Come now, divide her between the sixty-nine lovers who have declared themselves; what part of her is yours?"

"You talk nonsense," said Philip roughly.

"Well, suppose you talk sense," said Mr. Hart blandly.

"It is hardly believable," cried Philip, clenching his fist. "Sixty-nine offers of marriage! She never told me, and I'm her lover."

"She has told me, and I'm only her father."

"By proxy," corrected Philip.

"Well, by proxy."

"Why should she tell you and not me?" asked Philip, more sulkily still.

"Because, my dear Philip," said Mr. Hart, laying his hand kindly on the young man's arm, "up to the present, as I have said, she is mine, and not yours; and because she has a frank open nature, and must confide in some one. As I come first, she confides in me. She has given me all the letters to read, and a rare collection they are. If they were printed they would be a curiosity."

"I should like to see them, and the names at the bottom of them."

"So that you might fight all the writers for falling in love as you have done! Well, you would have enough to do, for you would have to fight according to the fashion of different

countries. I have made an analysis, my dear Philip. Seven Frenchmen, four Germans, one Spaniard, three Americans, fifty-three Englishmen, Irishmen, and Scotchmen, and one Chinaman, have offered marriage to-I will say-*our* Margaret."

"A Chinaman! Good heavens! such a creature to raise his eyes to my Margaret! Tell me, at least, *his* name, that I may cut his pigtail from his dirty crown!"

"There's an Ah in it and a Sen in it and a Ping in it; and if you can find him out by those signs you are very welcome. But why should a Chinaman not love? Hath he not eyes, hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? His letter is the greatest curiosity of the lot, and he has evidently educated himself in the English language. I know his proposal by heart. Here it is: 'You welly good English girl; me welly good Chinaman. You mally me, welly good match. Roast pig and m'landy (brandy) for dinner every day. M'lenty gold-make m'lenty more. Me take you to my country, by bye. Chinaman welly good man.' Then comes the Ah and the Sen and the Ping. But let us be serious, although this is true enough that I have told you-truth with a comical side to it. You were angry with me a little while ago."

"Yes, for associating my Margaret's name with mine in the character of Faust."

"I had no distinct intention in my mind, Philip; the conversation happened to take that turn. It would pain me very much to have to think of you in that way. But Margaret is a simple good girl, and it is my duty to look after her. I never knew till to-

night that you were paying marked attention to her."

"Who told you?"

"Our Leading Lady."

Philip Rowe smiled: he had his vanities.

"O, indeed!" he said, with assumed carelessness.

"And that will bring me back presently to a subject I mentioned when I surprised you to-night. First, however, there is another thing to be settled. You must cease your attentions to Margaret."

"Not if I know it!" said Philip, with a defiant shake of his head. "I mean to marry her. If you throw any obstacles in the way I'll run away with her to-morrow, in spite of your teeth."

He laughed confidently: he knew his power.

"But you are a gentleman," remonstrated Mr. Hart. "And she is a lady," quoth Philip.

If love's guild could give titles, a peasant would rank higher than a duchess. Not that there was anything common about Margaret. She was born of humble parents, it is true; but she was a good girl, and that is enough for any man.

It was enough for Mr. Hart. He gazed at Philip in frank and honest admiration; but he determined to apply a test. He was not a suspicious man, but he had a duty to perform.

"Suppose there is an obstacle already in the way," he said, looking Philip steadily in the face; "suppose she is already married."

Philip staggered, and the blood deserted his face. "Good

God!" he cried. "Then she has been playing me false!"

Mr. Hart wished he had not applied the test; he was satisfied of Philip's sincerity.

"Not so fast!" he cried, in a cheery tone, "not so fast! I only said 'suppose;' I didn't say it was so. How you young hot spirits jump at conclusions."

But it was a few minutes before Philip recovered himself.

"You frightened me," he said, with a feeble smile. "Then it is not true! If I had considered a moment, I should have known; for if truth and innocence have a home in this world, they have it in Margaret's breast. But you came upon me suddenly."

Mr. Hart thought, "Ah! youth, youth, what a painter you are!" And said aloud, "Here is my hand; knowing that you mean honourably by Margaret, I give my consent to your seeing her as usual."

"I'll marry her to-morrow," said Philip, taking the hand offered him.

"Softly, softly; there are conditions."

"I'll have no conditions!" shouted Philip impetuously.

"You'll have this and you'll have that!" said Mr. Hart, in a tone of gentle sarcasm. "You won't have this, and you won't have that! Very well, then. I wish you good-night." And he turned away.

"What!" cried Philip, turning after him, "desert me when I want you to be my friend!"

The old man's heart warmed to the young fellow; he admired everything in him-his hot blood, his impetuosity, his obstinacy,

his generous imperiousness.

"I am your friend," said Mr. Hart, "and I will continue to be so if you will let me. But when a man says of something that is mine, as Margaret is-ah, shake your head! it doesn't affect *me!*-when a man says of something that is mine, and that he wants to be his, that he'll have no conditions, he compels me to act in self-defence. Attend to me, young sir! Be reasonable, or to-morrow I take Margaret back to her mother, a hundred and forty miles away, and you shall not speak another word to her, as sure as my name's Hart."

"Ho! ho! you speak boldly; but it doesn't matter-you're a man in a thousand. In a thousand! in ten thousand. I'm glad you're not younger, or you might prove dangerous." Mr. Hart took off his cap, and bowed lowly at this compliment. "You'll not let me speak to her, will you not? I'll borrow a speaking-trumpet, and shout to her that you are parting us for ever. But there! give me your hand again. I'm not frightened of you. I am in such spirits that I must do something desperate. As you value your life, give me a back!"

With the readiness of a boy, Mr. Hart stooped and rested his hands on his knees. Philip took a run backward, then darted forward like a deer, and, lightly touching the stooping man's back, flew over him like a bird. Then stooped himself, and folded his arms; and old as Mr. Hart was, he took the leap.

After that they had a hearty laugh together.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Philip, "you are as young as I am, and

yet I should say you are over sixty."

"I am," said Mr. Hart proudly, straightening his back.

"I don't mind giving way a little to such a man. Name your conditions."

"You want to marry Margaret?"

"I do-to-morrow!"

"Nonsense. You want to marry her."

"I do-I will; stop me who can!"

"She has a mother."

"God bless her, and all belonging to her!"

"Bravo-a good mother, mind."

"All that belongs to Margaret must be good."

"Her mother must be consulted."

Philip scratched his head. "Must?" he asked dubiously.

"Must."

"How is that to be done?"

"By letter."

Philip counted rapidly on his fingers.

"Why, we shall have to wait a week!"

"For the consent. And then perhaps she'll not give it."

"It will be all the same. We'll marry without it."

"But you'll have to wait longer than a week, Philip. You'll have to wait until our three months' engagement at the theatre is at an end."

"Impossible."

"It must and shall be. Why, without Margaret we are nothing."

"I know it," chuckled Philip.

"She is the soul of the company." The wily old fellow was using the very words he had used to the Leading Lady, and he thought nothing of contradicting what he had said a few minutes before, when he declared that Margaret was not clever, and would never make her fortune on the stage. "Do you hear me? She is the soul of the company."

"I know it," chuckled Philip again.

"Well, then, do you think I am going to let you ruin our prospects, and rob us, as you propose doing?"

"Gently, gently there! Not so fast with your robbing!"

"It is the truth that I am speaking, and you know it; you have said so yourself. Margaret is the soul of the company-she is our greatest draw. If she goes without my being able to get another girl as pretty in her place-

"You can't do that; I defy you."

"Hold your tongue, hot-head! – without our getting another girl *nearly* as pretty in her place-

"That's better," interrupted the incorrigible Philip; "but you'll have a rare hunt even for such a one. They don't grow on gooseberry bushes."

"Our business is as good as ruined without her, or some one in her place; and do you suppose I'll stand quietly by and see that done? Besides, think of the money Margaret herself is saving-

"*That* for the money!" said Philip, with a snap of his fingers. "Money-making's a man's business, not a woman's."

"That's true, and I like you the better for saying so. But leaving Margaret out of the question, there are persons in our company the happiness of whose life hangs upon their being able to save a certain amount of money within a certain time. Not only their happiness but the happiness of helpless ones who are dearer to them than their heart's blood, depends upon this."

"By Jove! you speak strongly. Mention one of them."

"One of them stands before you now."

Philip turned and looked Mr. Hart straight in the face. Tears were gathering in the old man's eyes, and the young man turned away again, so that he should not see them.

"Forgive me, mate," he said softly; "I am so wrapt up in my own happiness that I am forgetful of the feelings of others."

"Ah, Philip, my son" – there was so tender an accent in the old man's tone, that the tears rose to Philip's eyes as well- "I also have a girl whom I love. See here, my dear boy. This is my daughter. She is at home in England, and I am here sixteen thousand miles away."

He had taken the picture of his darling from his pocket, and now he handed it to Philip. The young man looked at it in the clear moonlight. A round fresh face, open mouth with rosy lips, bright ingenuous eyes, fair curls around her white forehead. She was standing within an ivy porch, and one little hand was raised as though she were listening.

"It was taken seven years ago," said Mr. Hart; "she was twelve years old then."

"She is beautiful, beautiful!" exclaimed Philip enthusiastically. "And you haven't seen her since then?"

"No-and my old heart aches for a sight of her. This money that I am earning will take me to her."

"By Jove! and I was going to step in your way! Brute that I was! Margaret shall stop. I'll wait till the end of the time. I can see her every night; and I can build a wooden house for her in the meantime. God bless you, old boy! Give me your hand again. Next to my own father, you are the man I love and respect the most."

CHAPTER VIII

GOD BLESS EVERYBODY

"But I haven't finished yet," said Mr. Hart, after a short pause.

"I have another condition."

"Another!" exclaimed Philip, with an inclination to turn ill-humoured. "You are insatiable! And how many more after that, pray?"

"None."

"That's a mercy. Out with your last condition-which I'll not comply with."

"Which you will comply with, or I'll know the reason why."

"Ah, ah! my Cornishman, go on with your conditions."

"Where did you get those flowers from?"

"Where did I get them from? I gave Nature an order for them, and they grew for me-and bloomed for Margaret. I rode a dozen miles for them, and I'd ride a thousand if she bade me."

"Or fly to the moon, or swim, or dive in the fire, or ride on the clouds, no doubt!"

"Yes, if she wanted me to. She has but to speak."

"Quite right," said Mr. Hart, turning his face from Philip, so that the smile on his lips should not be seen "but that's not my concern. This is. Mind what I say, sir. I'll have no more flowers thrown to my singing Chambermaid."

"O," retorted Philip, "now it's you'll not have this, and you'll

not have that! Very well, then. I wish you good-night."

And off he went, taking huge strides purposely, and stretching his legs to their utmost.

"No, no, Philip!" cried Mr. Hart, running after Philip, and laughing heartily at the wit of the retort. "No, no; I'm serious."

"And so am I," said Philip, stopping so that Mr. Hart might come up to him. "No more flowers, eh! Why, I'll smother her with them every night. I'll compel you to engage some one to carry them off the stage. No more flowers! I'll show you! Why, I'm going to scour the country for flowers, and I shall set seeds all round my tent."

"If you wait for the flowers to grow, I shall be satisfied. You can't make them come up by blowing on them with your hot words and hot breath. But seriously, Philip, there *must* be no more flower-throwing."

Briefly he explained the reason why, and then upshot of it all was that Philip promised. Then Mr. Hart said that Philip had better return with him to the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle Hotel; it was too late for him to walk back to his reef.

"I can give you a shake-down in my bedroom," said Mr. Hart.

"All right!" said Philip, and thought with ecstasy, "I shall be near Margaret; I shall sleep under the same roof as Margaret."

"Have you anything to drink?" asked Philip when they were in Mr. Hart's room.

Mr. Hart wanted Philip to sleep in his bed, which was but a stretcher, barely wide enough for one fair-sized man, but Philip

would not hear of it; so they obtained a straw mattress, and laid it on the floor, and Philip tossed off his clothes, and stretched himself upon his hard bed (and slept upon it afterwards as soundly as if it had been made of eider-duck's feathers), in a state of complete satisfaction with himself and every one in the world. It was while he was lying like this, and while Mr. Hart, more methodical than his companion, was slowly undressing himself, that Philip had asked if he had anything to drink.

"I'll get something," said Mr. Hart, and left the room, and returned with a bottle and glasses.

While he was gone, Philip looked about him, and soon discovered that his Margaret's bedroom was immediately above him. He gazed at the ceiling with rapture, and sent kisses thitherward. A single partition parted him from his sweetheart. He fancied that he could hear her soft breathing. The same roof covered them. It was as yet his nearest approach to heaven.

"Here's to Margaret," said Philip, holding up his glass.

"To Margaret," responded Mr. Hart, "and happiness to you both."

"Another toast," said Philip; "to my old dad and the dear old Silver Flagon."

They drank the toast.

"What is the Silver Flagon?" asked Mr. Hart.

"One of these fine days perhaps I'll tell you," replied Philip.

But Philip never told him. One of these fine days Mr. Hart discovered for himself.

The light was out, and Mr. Hart knelt by a corner of his stretcher, and prayed for a few minutes. He was praying for his daughter, and thinking of her; he beheld her pretty face very plainly in the dark room. Philip saw the shadow of the kneeling man; it made him very tender towards Mr. Hart.

"Heathen that I am!" he whispered to himself. "I haven't knelt at my bedside for many a long month."

Then he prayed in silence, without getting out of bed.

"Are you comfortable, Philip?" asked Mr. Hart presently.

"I am very happy," replied Philip. "Good night-God bless you."

"And you, my boy. Good night."

Philip thought, "I am glad my Margaret has had such a protector. God bless everybody."

The next moment he was asleep.

He was up an hour after the sun, and off to his reef. Things were looking well there. Mr. Hart had spoken to the proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle, whose name, by the way, as something has to be said concerning him, it may be as well to mention. You will have heard it before-it was Smith. Mr. Hart had spoken to Mr. Smith about Philip's reef, and showed him some pieces of golden quartz, saying what a pity it was that there was no crushing-machine near such rich stone; and what a fortune a man might make who had money and enterprise enough to erect one. Mr. Smith had both. Four years ago- But no, common as his name is he deserves a chapter to himself, and shall have it.

CHAPTER IX

A MAN OF METTLE

Not longer than four years ago, Mr. Smith was a bricklayer in the old country, earning an average wage of thirty shillings a week, out of which he supported himself and his old mother; and one day, for want of something better to do—he was out of work at the time—he emigrated almost by accident. This is a literal fact. He arose early in the morning, with no intention of leaving the country, but somewhat sad at heart because he had no work to do. (When he related the story in after days he said that his hands felt like lumps of lead as they hung by his side.) On this morning, then, he strolled to the London Docks, and saw a ship making ready to start for Australia; was told that it would sail for Gravesend in the afternoon; idly inquired the price of a steerage passage, and found that he had just money enough in his pocket, and a trifle over, the scrapings and savings of ten years' bricklaying; and had a chat with an enthusiast, who painted Australia in the colours of the rainbow, and then painted England in ditch colours.

"What is the use of wearing one's life away in such a country as this?" demanded the enthusiast. "What has a man got to look forward to when he's old, and not fit to work?"

Mr. Smith considered. What *was* the use of grinding one's life away in such a country as England? What was there to look

forward to, to hope for, to work for? A poor man's grave. Perhaps a pauper's funeral. Born a bricklayer, died a bricklayer; that might be his epitaph, if he left money enough to pay for one.

"Australia's the place for such men as us," continued the enthusiast. "Australia's the land of gold, and milk, and honey. England's no country for men of spirit; it's used up, sir-used up. And there's the new land waiting to make poor men rich-holding out its arms for them."

"I should like to go with you," said Smith.

"Come, then," said the enthusiast.

"I'm afraid there's not time," said Smith; "there's my old mother. I couldn't leave without saying good-bye to her."

"What's your name?" asked the enthusiast.

"Smith," replied Smith.

The enthusiast gave a start, and uttered an exclamation.

"What's the matter?" asked Smith.

"Nothing," said the enthusiast; "only I was thinking that I *should* like you to come."

"But how is it to be managed?" inquired Smith, glancing at the name of the vessel, with his mouth watering. It was a nine-hundred-ton ship, called the Gold Packet. "But how is it to be managed? A man that I know emigrated a year ago, and he had to buy bedding, and tin cups, and soap and towels, and I don't know what else; those things ain't got by whistling for them."

"I'll manage it for you," said the enthusiast. "You go home and say good-bye to your mother. Be back here at one o'clock."

By that time I'll have your passage-ticket, and your berth, and bedding, and tin cups, and soap and towels, and everything else ready for you. What do you say?"

"What do I say? There's my hand upon it, and thank you. I'll do it."

And with quickened pulses he hastened home, kissed the amazed old woman-who was so dumbfounded that she could do nothing but look at her son, and cry-promised to send her plenty of money from Australia and to make a lady of her in five years, and was back to the Gold Packet at one o'clock.

"You're a man of mettle," said the enthusiast; "you're just the sort for the gold-diggings; it's such men as you they want. You'll make your fortune there as sure as eggs are eggs. Here's your ticket. Come down-stairs; I'll show you your berth and things."

"How much does it all come to?" asked Smith. The enthusiast pencilled some figures on a piece of paper, and gave it to Smith, who looked at the items, and added them up. Everything was correct; he handed the enthusiast the money, and had exactly two shillings and fourpence left to conquer the new world with. Smith went down-stairs (to speak courteously of the descent; but there are worse, we are taught) into the den where the steerage passengers were packed, and the enthusiast showed him his berth, his bedding, his tin cups, his bar of yellow soap, and other necessary paraphernalia. The enthusiast showed these things to Smith, but Smith could scarcely see them, the place was so dark. Smith was not daunted because the place was dismal, and

because it was filled with women crying, and children screaming, and men growling—a very pit of discomfort. His soul rose to the occasion; he had a spirit above a bricklayer's; with his passage ticket in his hand, and two shillings and fourpence in his pocket, he felt himself a king. There was work before him to do, and he was happy in the prospect of no more idle days. When he went on to the deck he did not see the enthusiast, but he did not miss him, he was so interested in what was going on about him, the hurrying to and fro, the shouting, the singing of the sailors, the loosening of the sails, the hauling of ropes. In an hour the ship was off, winding its way through such a complicated labyrinth of boats and ships and ropes, that the wonder was how it disentangled itself safely. Smith watched the manœuvres with admiration. Then he glanced at the passage ticket. "Holloa!" he said, "they've made a mistake in my Christian name. I'm William Smith, not John."

(Let me mention here, briefly, that our Smith never set eyes again on the enthusiast, whose name was also Smith, prefixed by John. It was his passage ticket, indeed, that our Smith held in his hand. All the time he had been painting in the most glowing colours the glowing attractions of the goldfields on the other side of the world, he had been filled with the most gloomy forebodings. His courage had failed him at the last moment, and seizing the opportunity which had so fortunately presented itself of giving the new world another Smith instead of himself, he had sold his passage ticket and bedding and cooking utensils to the

bricklayer, and after receiving the money for them, bade good-bye to the Gold Packet and all the fair promises it held out.)

With his two shillings and fourpence in his pocket, William Smith started on the voyage, and made himself so useful, and was altogether so cheerful and shrewd and bustling, that he soon became a prime favourite with the passengers and crew. In ninety-two days from the date of sailing, the ship passed through Port Philip Heads, and from that day Fortune smiled upon William Smith. In a fortnight he was on the goldfields; in six months he was a speculator; in twelve, he had saved a thousand pounds. And now he was proprietor of a fine hotel and a theatre, and had a dozen other irons in the fire, not one of which did he allow to grow cold.

I think I shall be pardoned for this digression. This story is of the Mosaic kind, and although there are some strange bits in it, I hope none will be found incongruous, but that they will all fit in one with another, and form a complete and original whole.

CHAPTER X

TO-MORROW IT IS ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

Mr. Hart, then, had spoken to William Smith about Philip's golden reef, and what a capital chance there was for a crushing machine. His words did not fall upon listless ears. The same day William Smith walked to the reef, examined the stone, went down the shaft, chipped here and there, putting two, or three bits of gold and stone in his pocket, as treasure-trove, came up from the hole, strolled about the locality, Argus-eyed, and made up his mind. He spoke it to Philip and his mate. Said he: "In three weeks I will have a machine erected here, with twelve heads of stampers, which shall be working day and night, and which shall crush forty tons of quartz every twenty-four hours. You have raised, I should say, about one hundred and fifty tons of stone. You shall put a dozen men at work in your claim-I will provide the money for their wages, and for powder and fuse-and in three weeks you shall raise another hundred tons. I will do all this on the following terms: You shall contract to give me the first two hundred tons of quartz to crush, and I will contract to crush it at the rate of three ounces of gold per ton." (The shrewd speculator had seen clearly enough that there was plenty of gold in the stone to pay him, and leave a handsome margin; indeed, he calculated

that the quartz already raised from the bowels of the earth, and lying on the surface of the claim, would yield not less than ten or twelve ounces to the ton.) "The next two hundred tons I will crush for two and a half ounces of gold per ton; the next two hundred for two ounces per ton."

Some men are born with a genius for figures: William Smith was one; and he had already totted up in his own mind that the crushing of these six hundred tons of quartz would bring him in no less than £6000; and that it could all be done in fifteen days. His £6000 would pay all expenses of labour and the purchase and erection of the machine, which in little more than a fortnight after it was put up would stand him in nothing. There were many chances of this kind in the goldfields for enterprising men.

"After that," concluded William Smith, "we can make fresh arrangements."

Philip and his mate jumped at the offer. Then, practical William Smith, to their astonishment and admiration, told them that although he had been but a short time on the range-it could not have been more than three hours altogether-he had settled on the very spot where the machine was to be erected. He showed them the place. It was on the slope of a natural basin, which, with a little labour, could be made into a splendid reservoir for the rain. Here the machine was to be erected; here the dam was to be built; here the sheds for the furnace and for the washing-out and retorting of the gold were to be put up. All was arranged. The only thing that would be wanted was water. "Pray for rain,"

said William Smith; and fancying that he saw in Philip's face an intention to fall on his knees that instant, cried out, in a fright, "Not now, not now! In a fortnight, when the dam is ready." So Philip deferred his prayer for two weeks.

Now, it was manifestly impossible to get a crushing-machine from the capital of the colony in time. But William Smith, when he made his offer, knew what he was about. He knew of a machine on a neighbouring goldfield not many miles away, which had been erected in a foolish spot, where it was practically useless, for the quartz would not yield sufficient gold to pay expenses of labour. Those who had bought and erected the machine had done so on the credit of a small patch of gold which they had found, and which they thought would lead them to precious deposits. They found no more gold, or not sufficient to pay. They built castles in the air-which practical William Smith never did; he always went upon solid ground, and seldom made a mistake. Before he was two days older he had bought the machine for a quarter of its value, and fifty men were set to work on it, so that it was almost literally torn down. But he had an experienced man at the head of his workers, and everything was done right. Fifty more men were working at the reservoir, digging out the earth, and piling up the banks, and on the very day succeeding the scene which had taken place between Philip and Mr. Hart the first portion of the crushing-machine arrived on the ground. This kept Philip busy, and although he was burning to get away to his Margaret, he could not do so until the night. The first thing that

he saw when he went behind the scenes was one of the flowers he had bought the night before. He raised his eyes from the flower to Margaret's face, for the flower was in her bosom.

"Ah!" he sighed, flushing with delight.

Of such simple things are life's sweetest pleasures born.

The bunch of flowers had, as a matter of course, formed a fruitful subject of conversation among the members of the dramatic company, and Margaret, being a woman, and womanly, was obliged to make a confidante of some one of her own sex. The Leading Lady was out of the question; so the First Old Woman, the mother of the baby who had proved such a hit, on the first night, received Margaret's confidences, and being a good-hearted, unselfish creature, and delighted at the opportunity of indulging in a little bit of match-making, and also of revenging herself upon the Leading Lady for her objection to baby being a shareholder in the Star Dramatic Company, she listened, and smiled, and congratulated the young girl.

"To-morrow it is Saint Valentine's Day!" she sang.

"You've come to silver Creek for something. Here, my dear, nurse my baby, and get your hand in."

Which caused Margaret to blush furiously.

"O," cried Margaret, "but there's been nothing said between us!"

"Nothing, my dear!" exclaimed the First Old Woman, with a mischievous laugh. "Really nothing!"

"Well, nothing *very* particular."

"Indeed!" said the First Old Woman, with good-humoured sarcasm. "Is coming behind the scenes every night saying nothing? Was throwing you the flowers saying nothing? Was standing outside your window last night for a full hour and a half- I saw him with my own eyes, my dear! I did; and envied you- was that saying nothing? I declare, then, I shall set *my* cap at him; I may as well take a chance in the lottery. He's as handsome a young fellow as ever walked in two shoes, and if you intend to disappoint him-"

"O, but I don't," interrupted Margaret, apprehensively.

Whereupon they fell to kissing one another, and baby came in for her share.

CHAPTER XI

"I AM GOING TO SPEAK OUT," SAID PHILIP

When Philip made his appearance that evening behind the scenes, the First Old Woman smiled significantly at him, and once, when her cue to go on the stage was given, she cried to him, of malice aforethought:

"O, dear me! I'm wanted on the stage! Hold my baby, Mr. Rowe, till I come off again."

And before he had time to utter a word one way or another, baby was in his arms, and the mother darted away, laughing to herself.

Philip was not ashamed of his burden; he nursed the baby tenderly, but somewhat gingerly, it must be confessed-fearful, perhaps, lest he should break the little thing, or dislocate something. Margaret, who was on the stage at the time, looked at him furtively as he was kissing the mite, and her mind was in such a whirl, that for the first time during her engagement she forgot the words she had to speak. Observing which the First Old Woman made matters worse by whispering sly nonsense in Margaret's ear. Little did the unconscious baby suspect the important part she was playing in the sentimental comedy.

Later on in the night, Philip said to Margaret:

"I am going to speak out."

This was the very thing she was pining for, and now that her wish was about to be gratified, she exclaimed:

"If you dare, sir!" saucily, mischievously, coquettishly.

Then what did Margaret do but lead him into a more retired spot, where, if he did speak out, no one but herself could hear him.

"If you dare, sir!" she repeated, with a smile which magnetised him. There was but little need for that; he was bewitched already.

"Call me Philip," he entreated.

"Philip," she sighed.

It was like the whisper of a rose.

He was radiant; the joy in his heart was reflected in his face. He toyed with her fingers. Slender they were, and supple, and not strong. But never were chains more potent.

"Well, Philip?" said Margaret shyly.

"Well, Margaret?"

He could find at that moment nothing more sensible to say. He was engaged watching the light of her eyes, and the colour come and go on her cheek.

"What is that in your hand?" said she.

"A letter."

"Ah, that's what you brought me here for! A letter! For me! Give it to me!" She held out her little hand eagerly.

He withheld the letter from her.

"It is not for you."

"O, indeed!"

She tore her fingers from his grasp, for he had taken them and was kissing them.

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.