

AN EPISODE OF FIDDLETOWN

by Bret Harte

In 1858 Fiddletown considered her a very pretty woman. She had a quantity of light chestnut hair, a good figure, a dazzling complexion, and a certain languid grace which passed easily for gentle-womanliness. She always dressed becomingly, and in what Fiddletown accepted as the latest fashion. She had only two blemishes: one of her velvety eyes, when examined closely, had a slight cast; and her left cheek bore a small scar left by a single drop of vitriol--happily the only drop of an entire phial--thrown upon her by one of her own jealous sex, that reached the pretty face it was intended to mar. But when the observer had studied the eyes sufficiently to notice this defect, he was generally incapacitated for criticism; and even the scar on her cheek was thought by some to add piquancy to her smile. The youthful editor of THE FIDDLETOWN AVALANCHE had said privately that it was "an exaggerated dimple." Colonel Starbottle was instantly "reminded of the beautifying patches of the days of Queen Anne, but more particularly, sir, of the blankest beautiful women that, blank you, you ever laid your two blank eyes upon--a Creole woman, sir, in New Orleans. And this woman had a scar--a line extending, blank me, from her eye to her blank chin. And this woman, sir, thrilled you, sir; maddened you, sir; absolutely sent your blank soul to perdition with her blank fascination! And one day I said to her, 'Celeste, how in blank did you come by that beautiful scar, blank you?' And she said to me, 'Star, there isn't another white man that I'd confide in but you; but I made that scar myself, purposely, I did, blank me.' These were her very words, sir, and perhaps you think it a blank lie, sir; but I'll put up any blank sum you can name and prove it, blank me."

Indeed, most of the male population of Fiddletown were or had been in love with her. Of this number, about one-half believed that their

love was returned, with the exception, possibly, of her own husband. He alone had been known to express skepticism.

The name of the gentleman who enjoyed this infelicitous distinction was Tretherick. He had been divorced from an excellent wife to marry this Fiddletown enchantress. She, also, had been divorced; but it was hinted that some previous experiences of hers in that legal formality had made it perhaps less novel, and probably less sacrificial. I would not have it inferred from this that she was deficient in sentiment, or devoid of its highest moral expression. Her intimate friend had written (on the occasion of her second divorce), "The cold world does not understand Clara yet"; and Colonel Starbottle had remarked blankly that with the exception of a single woman in Opelousas Parish, La., she had more soul than the whole caboodle of them put together. Few indeed could read those lines entitled "Infelissimus," commencing "Why waves no cypress o'er this brow?" originally published in the AVALANCHE, over the signature of "The Lady Clare," without feeling the tear of sensibility tremble on his eyelids, or the glow of virtuous indignation mantle his cheek, at the low brutality and pitiable jocularly of THE DUTCH FLAT INTELLIGENCER, which the next week had suggested the exotic character of the cypress, and its entire absence from Fiddletown, as a reasonable answer to the query.

Indeed, it was this tendency to elaborate her feelings in a metrical manner, and deliver them to the cold world through the medium of the newspapers, that first attracted the attention of Tretherick. Several poems descriptive of the effects of California scenery upon a too-sensitive soul, and of the vague yearnings for the infinite which an enforced study of the heartlessness of California society produced in the poetic breast, impressed Mr. Tretherick, who was then driving a six-mule freight wagon between Knight's Ferry and Stockton, to seek out the unknown poetess. Mr. Tretherick was himself dimly conscious of a certain hidden sentiment in his own nature; and it is possible that some reflections on the vanity of his pursuit--he supplied several mining camps with whisky and tobacco--in conjunction with the

dreariness of the dusty plain on which he habitually drove, may have touched some chord in sympathy with this sensitive woman. Howbeit, after a brief courtship--as brief as was consistent with some previous legal formalities--they were married; and Mr. Tretherick brought his blushing bride to Fiddletown, or "Fideletown," as Mrs. Tretherick preferred to call it in her poems.

The union was not a felicitous one. It was not long before Mr. Tretherick discovered that the sentiment he had fostered while freighting between Stockton and Knight's Ferry was different from that which his wife had evolved from the contemplation of California scenery and her own soul. Being a man of imperfect logic, this caused him to beat her; and she, being equally faulty in deduction, was impelled to a certain degree of unfaithfulness on the same premise. Then Mr. Tretherick began to drink, and Mrs. Tretherick to contribute regularly to the columns of the AVALANCHE. It was at this time that Colonel Starbottle discovered a similarity in Mrs. Tretherick's verse to the genius of Sappho, and pointed it out to the citizens of Fiddletown in a two-columned criticism, signed "A. S.," also published in the AVALANCHE, and supported by extensive quotation. As the AVALANCHE did not possess a font of Greek type, the editor was obliged to reproduce the Leucadian numbers in the ordinary Roman letter, to the intense disgust of Colonel Starbottle, and the vast delight of Fiddletown, who saw fit to accept the text as an excellent imitation of Choctaw--a language with which the colonel, as a whilom resident of the Indian Territories, was supposed to be familiar. Indeed, the next week's INTELLIGENCER contained some vile doggerel supposed to be an answer to Mrs. Tretherick's poem, ostensibly written by the wife of a Digger Indian chief, accompanied by a glowing eulogium signed "A. S. S."

The result of this jocularly was briefly given in a later copy of the AVALANCHE. "An unfortunate rencounter took place on Monday last, between the Hon. Jackson Flash of THE DUTCH FLAT INTELLIGENCER and the well-known Col. Starbottle of this place,

in front of the Eureka Saloon. Two shots were fired by the parties without injury to either, although it is said that a passing Chinaman received fifteen buckshot in the calves of his legs from the colonel's double-barreled shotgun, which were not intended for him. John will learn to keep out of the way of Melican man's firearms hereafter. The cause of the affray is not known, although it is hinted that there is a lady in the case. The rumor that points to a well-known and beautiful poetess whose lucubrations have often graced our columns seems to gain credence from those that are posted."

Meanwhile the passiveness displayed by Tretherick under these trying circumstances was fully appreciated in the gulches. "The old man's head is level," said one long-booted philosopher. "Ef the colonel kills Flash, Mrs. Tretherick is avenged: if Flash drops the colonel, Tretherick is all right. Either way, he's got a sure thing." During this delicate condition of affairs, Mrs. Tretherick one day left her husband's home and took refuge at the Fiddletown Hotel, with only the clothes she had on her back. Here she staid for several weeks, during which period it is only justice to say that she bore herself with the strictest propriety.

It was a clear morning in early spring that Mrs. Tretherick, unattended, left the hotel, and walked down the narrow street toward the fringe of dark pines which indicated the extreme limits of Fiddletown. The few loungers at that early hour were preoccupied with the departure of the Wingdown coach at the other extremity of the street; and Mrs. Tretherick reached the suburbs of the settlement without discomposing observation. Here she took a cross street or road, running at right angles with the main thoroughfare of Fiddletown and passing through a belt of woodland. It was evidently the exclusive and aristocratic avenue of the town. The dwellings were few, ambitious, and uninterrupted by shops. And here she was joined by Colonel Starbottle.

The gallant colonel, notwithstanding that he bore the swelling port which usually distinguished him, that his coat was tightly buttoned and his boots tightly fitting, and that his cane, hooked over his arm, swung jauntily, was not entirely at his ease. Mrs. Tretherick, however, vouchsafed him a gracious smile and a glance of her dangerous eyes; and the colonel, with an embarrassed cough and a slight strut, took his place at her side.

"The coast is clear," said the colonel, "and Tretherick is over at Dutch Flat on a spree. There is no one in the house but a Chinaman; and you need fear no trouble from him. I," he continued, with a slight inflation of the chest that imperiled the security of his button, "I will see that you are protected in the removal of your property."

"I'm sure it's very kind of you, and so disinterested!" simpered the lady as they walked along. "It's so pleasant to meet someone who has soul--someone to sympathize with in a community so hardened and heartless as this." And Mrs. Tretherick cast down her eyes, but not until they wrought their perfect and accepted work upon her companion.

"Yes, certainly, of course," said the colonel, glancing nervously up and down the street--"yes, certainly." Perceiving, however, that there was no one in sight or hearing, he proceeded at once to inform Mrs. Tretherick that the great trouble of his life, in fact, had been the possession of too much soul. That many women--as a gentleman she would excuse him, of course, from mentioning names--but many beautiful women had often sought his society, but being deficient, madam, absolutely deficient, in this quality, he could not reciprocate. But when two natures thoroughly in sympathy, despising alike the sordid trammels of a low and vulgar community and the conventional restraints of a hypocritical society--when two souls in perfect accord met and mingled in poetical union, then--but here the colonel's speech, which had been remarkable for a certain whisky-and-watery fluency, grew husky, almost inaudible, and decidedly incoherent. Possibly

Mrs. Tretherick may have heard something like it before, and was enabled to fill the hiatus. Nevertheless, the cheek that was on the side of the colonel was quite virginal and bashfully conscious until they reached their destination.

It was a pretty little cottage, quite fresh and warm with paint, very pleasantly relieved against a platoon of pines, some of whose foremost files had been displaced to give freedom to the fenced enclosure in which it sat. In the vivid sunlight and perfect silence, it had a new, uninhabited look, as if the carpenters and painters had just left it. At the farther end of the lot, a Chinaman was stolidly digging; but there was no other sign of occupancy. "The coast," as the colonel had said, was indeed "clear." Mrs. Tretherick paused at the gate. The colonel would have entered with her, but was stopped by a gesture. "Come for me in a couple of hours, and I shall have everything packed," she said, as she smiled, and extended her hand. The colonel seized and pressed it with great fervor. Perhaps the pressure was slightly returned; for the gallant colonel was impelled to inflate his chest, and trip away as smartly as his stubby-toed, high-heeled boots would permit. When he had gone, Mrs. Tretherick opened the door, listened a moment in the deserted hall, and then ran quickly upstairs to what had been her bedroom.

Everything there was unchanged as on the night she left it. On the dressing-table stood her bandbox, as she remembered to have left it when she took out her bonnet. On the mantle lay the other glove she had forgotten in her flight. The two lower drawers of the bureau were half-open (she had forgotten to shut them); and on its marble top lay her shawl pin and a soiled cuff. What other recollections came upon her I know not; but she suddenly grew quite white, shivered, and listened with a beating heart, and her hand upon the door. Then she stepped to the mirror, and half-fearfully, half-curiously, parted with her fingers the braids of her blond hair above her little pink ear, until she came upon an ugly, half-healed scar. She gazed at this, moving her pretty head up and down to get a better light upon it, until the

slight cast in her velvety eyes became very strongly marked indeed. Then she turned away with a light, reckless, foolish laugh, and ran to the closet where hung her precious dresses. These she inspected nervously, and missing suddenly a favorite black silk from its accustomed peg, for a moment, thought she should have fainted. But discovering it the next instant lying upon a trunk where she had thrown it, a feeling of thankfulness to a superior Being who protects the friendless for the first time sincerely thrilled her. Then, albeit she was hurried for time, she could not resist trying the effect of a certain lavender neck ribbon upon the dress she was then wearing, before the mirror. And then suddenly she became aware of a child's voice close beside her, and she stopped. And then the child's voice repeated, "Is it Mamma?"

Mrs. Tretherick faced quickly about. Standing in the doorway was a little girl of six or seven. Her dress had been originally fine, but was torn and dirty; and her hair, which was a very violent red, was tumbled seriocomically about her forehead. For all this, she was a picturesque little thing, even through whose childish timidity there was a certain self-sustained air which is apt to come upon children who are left much to themselves. She was holding under her arm a rag doll, apparently of her own workmanship, and nearly as large as herself--a doll with a cylindrical head, and features roughly indicated with charcoal. A long shawl, evidently belonging to a grown person, dropped from her shoulders and swept the floor.

The spectacle did not excite Mrs. Tretherick's delight. Perhaps she had but a small sense of humor. Certainly, when the child, still standing in the doorway, again asked, "Is it Mamma?" she answered sharply, "No, it isn't," and turned a severe look upon the intruder.

The child retreated a step, and then, gaining courage with the distance, said in deliciously imperfect speech:

"Dow 'way then! why don't you dow away?"

But Mrs. Tretherick was eyeing the shawl. Suddenly she whipped it off the child's shoulders, and said angrily:

"How dared you take my things, you bad child?"

"Is it yours? Then you are my mamma; ain't you? You are Mamma!" she continued gleefully; and before Mrs. Tretherick could avoid her, she had dropped her doll, and, catching the woman's skirts with both hands, was dancing up and down before her.

"What's your name, child?" said Mrs. Tretherick coldly, removing the small and not very white hands from her garments.

"Tarry."

"Tarry?"

"Yeth. Tarry. Tarowline."

"Caroline?"

"Yeth. Tarowline Tretherick."

"Whose child ARE you?" demanded Mrs. Tretherick still more coldly, to keep down a rising fear.

"Why, yours," said the little creature with a laugh. "I'm your little durl. You're my mamma, my new mamma. Don't you know my ol' mamma's dorn away, never to turn back any more? I don't live wid my ol' mamma now. I live wid you and Papa."

"How long have you been here?" asked Mrs. Tretherick snappishly.

"I fink it's free days," said Carry reflectively.

"You think! Don't you know?" sneered Mrs. Tretherick. "Then, where did you come from?"

Carry's lip began to work under this sharp cross-examination. With a great effort and a small gulp, she got the better of it, and answered:

"Papa, Papa fetched me--from Miss Simmons--from Sacramento, last week."

"Last week! You said three days just now," returned Mrs. Tretherick with severe deliberation.

"I mean a monf," said Carry, now utterly adrift in sheer helplessness and confusion.

"Do you know what you are talking about?" demanded Mrs. Tretherick shrilly, restraining an impulse to shake the little figure before her and precipitate the truth by specific gravity.

But the flaming red head here suddenly disappeared in the folds of Mrs. Tretherick's dress, as if it were trying to extinguish itself forever.

"There now--stop that sniffing," said Mrs. Tretherick, extricating her dress from the moist embraces of the child and feeling exceedingly uncomfortable. "Wipe your face now, and run away, and don't bother. Stop," she continued, as Carry moved away. "Where's your papa?"

"He's dorn away too. He's sick. He's been dorn"--she hesitated--"two, free, days."

"Who takes care of you, child?" said Mrs. Tretherick, eying her curiously.

"John, the Chinaman. I tresses myselth. John tooks and makes the beds."

"Well, now, run away and behave yourself, and don't bother me any more," said Mrs. Tretherick, remembering the object of her visit. "Stop--where are you going?" she added as the child began to ascend the stairs, dragging the long doll after her by one helpless leg.

"Doin' upstairs to play and be dood, and no bother Mamma."

"I ain't your mamma," shouted Mrs. Tretherick, and then she swiftly re-entered her bedroom and slammed the door.

Once inside, she drew forth a large trunk from the closet and set to work with querulous and fretful haste to pack her wardrobe. She tore her best dress in taking it from the hook on which it hung: she scratched her soft hands twice with an ambushed pin. All the while, she kept up an indignant commentary on the events of the past few moments. She said to herself she saw it all. Tretherick had sent for this child of his first wife--this child of whose existence he had never seemed to care--just to insult her, to fill her place. Doubtless the first wife herself would follow soon, or perhaps there would be a third. Red hair, not auburn, but RED--of course the child, this Caroline, looked like its mother, and, if so, she was anything but pretty. Or the whole thing had been prepared: this red-haired child, the image of its mother, had been kept at a convenient distance at Sacramento, ready to be sent for when needed. She remembered his occasional visits there on--business, as he said. Perhaps the mother already was there; but no, she had gone East. Nevertheless, Mrs. Tretherick, in her then state of mind, preferred to dwell upon the fact that she might be there. She was dimly conscious, also, of a certain satisfaction in exaggerating her feelings. Surely no woman had ever been so shamefully abused. In fancy, she sketched a picture of herself sitting alone and deserted, at sunset, among the fallen columns of a ruined temple, in a melancholy yet graceful attitude, while her husband drove

rapidly away in a luxurious coach-and-four, with a red-haired woman at his side. Sitting upon the trunk she had just packed, she partly composed a lugubrious poem describing her sufferings as, wandering alone and poorly clad, she came upon her husband and "another" flaunting in silks and diamonds. She pictured herself dying of consumption, brought on by sorrow--a beautiful wreck, yet still fascinating, gazed upon adoringly by the editor of the AVALANCHE and Colonel Starbottle. And where was Colonel Starbottle all this while? Why didn't he come? He, at least, understood her. He--she laughed the reckless, light laugh of a few moments before; and then her face suddenly grew grave, as it had not a few moments before.

What was that little red-haired imp doing all this time? Why was she so quiet? She opened the door noiselessly, and listened. She fancied that she heard, above the multitudinous small noises and creakings and warpings of the vacant house, a smaller voice singing on the floor above. This, as she remembered, was only an open attic that had been used as a storeroom. With a half-guilty consciousness, she crept softly upstairs and, pushing the door partly open, looked within.

Athwart the long, low-studded attic, a slant sunbeam from a single small window lay, filled with dancing motes, and only half illuminating the barren, dreary apartment. In the ray of this sunbeam she saw the child's glowing hair, as if crowned by a red aureole, as she sat upon the floor with her exaggerated doll between her knees. She appeared to be talking to it; and it was not long before Mrs. Tretherick observed that she was rehearsing the interview of a half-hour before. She catechized the doll severely, cross-examining it in regard to the duration of its stay there, and generally on the measure of time. The imitation of Mrs. Tretherick's manner was exceedingly successful, and the conversation almost a literal reproduction, with a single exception. After she had informed the doll that she was not her mother, at the close of the interview she added pathetically, "that if she was dood, very dood, she might be her mamma, and love her very much."

I have already hinted that Mrs. Tretherick was deficient in a sense of humor. Perhaps it was for this reason that this whole scene affected her most unpleasantly; and the conclusion sent the blood tingling to her cheek. There was something, too, inconceivably lonely in the situation. The unfurnished vacant room, the half-lights, the monstrous doll, whose very size seemed to give a pathetic significance to its speechlessness, the smallness of the one animate, self-centered figure--all these touched more or less deeply the half-poetic sensibilities of the woman. She could not help utilizing the impression as she stood there, and thought what a fine poem might be constructed from this material if the room were a little darker, the child lonelier--say, sitting beside a dead mother's bier, and the wind wailing in the turrets. And then she suddenly heard footsteps at the door below, and recognized the tread of the colonel's cane.

She flew swiftly down the stairs, and encountered the colonel in the hall. Here she poured into his astonished ear a voluble and exaggerated statement of her discovery, and indignant recital of her wrongs. "Don't tell me the whole thing wasn't arranged beforehand; for I know it was!" she almost screamed. "And think," she added, "of the heartlessness of the wretch, leaving his own child alone here in that way."

"It's a blank shame!" stammered the colonel, without the least idea of what he was talking about. In fact, utterly unable as he was to comprehend a reason for the woman's excitement, with his estimate of her character, I fear he showed it more plainly than he intended. He stammered, expanded his chest, looked stern, gallant, tender, but all unintelligently. Mrs. Tretherick, for an instant, experienced a sickening doubt of the existence of natures in perfect affinity.

"It's of no use," said Mrs. Tretherick with sudden vehemence, in answer to some inaudible remark of the colonel's, and withdrawing her hand from the fervent grasp of that ardent and sympathetic man. "It's of no use: my mind is made up. You can send for my trunk as

soon as you like; but I shall stay here, and confront that man with the proof of his vileness. I will put him face to face with his infamy."

I do not know whether Colonel Starbottle thoroughly appreciated the convincing proof of Tretherick's unfaithfulness and malignity afforded by the damning evidence of the existence of Tretherick's own child in his own house. He was dimly aware, however, of some unforeseen obstacle to the perfect expression of the infinite longing of his own sentimental nature. But, before he could say anything, Carry appeared on the landing above them, looking timidly, and yet half-critically, at the pair.

"That's her," said Mrs. Tretherick excitedly. In her deepest emotions, in either verse or prose, she rose above a consideration of grammatical construction.

"Ah!" said the colonel, with a sudden assumption of parental affection and jocularly that was glaringly unreal and affected. "Ah! pretty little girl, pretty little girl! How do you do? How are you? You find yourself pretty well, do you, pretty little girl?" The colonel's impulse also was to expand his chest and swing his cane, until it occurred to him that this action might be ineffective with a child of six or seven. Carry, however, took no immediate notice of this advance, but further discomposed the chivalrous colonel by running quickly to Mrs. Tretherick and hiding herself, as if for protection, in the folds of her gown. Nevertheless, the colonel was not vanquished. Falling back into an attitude of respectful admiration, he pointed out a marvelous resemblance to the "Madonna and Child." Mrs. Tretherick simpered, but did not dislodge Carry as before. There was an awkward pause for a moment; and then Mrs. Tretherick, motioning significantly to the child, said in a whisper: "Go now. Don't come here again, but meet me tonight at the hotel." She extended her hand: the colonel bent over it gallantly and, raising his hat, the next moment was gone.

"Do you think," said Mrs. Tretherick with an embarrassed voice and a prodigious blush, looking down, and addressing the fiery curls just visible in the folds of her dress--"do you think you will be 'dood' if I let you stay in here and sit with me?"

"And let me tall you Mamma?" queried Carry, looking up.

"And let you call me Mamma!" assented Mrs. Tretherick with an embarrassed laugh.

"Yeth," said Carry promptly.

They entered the bedroom together. Carry's eye instantly caught sight of the trunk.

"Are you downin' away adain, Mamma?" she said with a quick nervous look, and a clutch at the woman's dress.

"No-o," said Mrs. Tretherick, looking out of the window.

"Only playing your downin' away," suggested Carry with a laugh. "Let me play too."

Mrs. Tretherick assented. Carry flew into the next room, and presently reappeared dragging a small trunk, into which she gravely proceeded to pack her clothes. Mrs. Tretherick noticed that they were not many. A question or two regarding them brought out some further replies from the child; and before many minutes had elapsed, Mrs. Tretherick was in possession of all her earlier history. But, to do this, Mrs. Tretherick had been obliged to take Carry upon her lap, pending the most confidential disclosures. They sat thus a long time after Mrs. Tretherick had apparently ceased to be interested in Carry's disclosures; and when lost in thought, she allowed the child to rattle on unheeded, and ran her fingers through the scarlet curls.

"You don't hold me right, Mamma," said Carry at last, after one or two uneasy shiftings of position.

"How should I hold you?" asked Mrs. Tretherick with a half-amused, half-embarrassed laugh.

"Dis way," said Carry, curling up into position, with one arm around Mrs. Tretherick's neck and her cheek resting on her bosom--"dis way--dere." After a little preparatory nestling, not unlike some small animal, she closed her eyes, and went to sleep.

For a few moments the woman sat silent, scarcely daring to breathe in that artificial attitude. And then, whether from some occult sympathy in the touch, or God best knows what, a sudden fancy began to thrill her. She began by remembering an old pain that she had forgotten, an old horror that she had resolutely put away all these years. She recalled days of sickness and distrust--days of an overshadowing fear--days of preparation for something that was to be prevented, that WAS prevented, with mortal agony and fear. She thought of a life that might have been--she dared not say HAD been--and wondered. It was six years ago; if it had lived, it would have been as old as Carry. The arms which were folded loosely around the sleeping child began to tremble, and tighten their clasp. And then the deep potential impulse came, and with a half-sob, half-sigh, she threw her arms out and drew the body of the sleeping child down, down, into her breast, down again and again as if she would hide it in the grave dug there years before. And the gust that shook her passed, and then, ah me! the rain.

A drop or two fell upon the curls of Carry, and she moved uneasily in her sleep. But the woman soothed her again--it was SO easy to do it now--and they sat there quiet and undisturbed, so quiet that they might have seemed incorporate of the lonely silent house, the slowly declining sunbeams, and the general air of desertion and abandonment, yet a desertion that had in it nothing of age, decay, or despair.

Colonel Starbottle waited at the Fiddletown Hotel all that night in vain. And the next morning, when Mr. Tretherick returned to his husks, he found the house vacant and untenanted, except by motes and sunbeams.

When it was fairly known that Mrs. Tretherick had run away, taking Mr. Tretherick's own child with her, there was some excitement and much diversity of opinion, in Fiddletown. THE DUTCH FLAT INTELLIGENCER openly alluded to the "forcible abduction" of the child with the same freedom, and it is to be feared the same prejudice, with which it had criticized the abductor's poetry. All of Mrs. Tretherick's own sex, and perhaps a few of the opposite sex, whose distinctive quality was not, however, very strongly indicated, fully coincided in the views of the INTELLIGENCER. The majority, however, evaded the moral issue; that Mrs. Tretherick had shaken the red dust of Fiddletown from her dainty slippers was enough for them to know. They mourned the loss of the fair abductor more than her offense. They promptly rejected Tretherick as an injured husband and disconsolate father, and even went so far as to openly cast discredit on the sincerity of his grief. They reserved an ironical condolence for Colonel Starbottle, overbearing that excellent man with untimely and demonstrative sympathy in barrooms, saloons, and other localities not generally deemed favorable to the display of sentiment. "She was alliz a skittish thing, Kernel," said one sympathizer, with a fine affectation of gloomy concern and great readiness of illustration; "and it's kinder nat'ril thet she'd get away someday, and stampede that theer colt: but thet she should shake YOU, Kernel, diet she should jist shake you--is what gits me. And they do say thet you jist hung around thet hotel all night, and payrolled them corridors, and histed yourself up and down them stairs, and meandered in and out o' thet piазzy, and all for nothing?" It was another generous and tenderly commiserating spirit that poured additional oil and wine on the colonel's wounds. "The boys yer let on thet Mrs. Tretherick prevailed on ye to pack her trunk and a baby over from the house to the stage offis, and that the chap ez

did go off with her thanked you, and offered you two short bits, and sed ez how he liked your looks, and ud employ you agin--and now you say it ain't so? Well, I'll tell the boys it ain't so, and I'm glad I met you, for stories DO get round."

Happily for Mrs. Tretherick's reputation, however, the Chinaman in Tretherick's employment, who was the only eyewitness of her flight, stated that she was unaccompanied, except by the child. He further deposed that, obeying her orders, he had stopped the Sacramento coach, and secured a passage for herself and child to San Francisco. It was true that Ah Fe's testimony was of no legal value. But nobody doubted it. Even those who were skeptical of the pagan's ability to recognize the sacredness of the truth admitted his passionless, unprejudiced unconcern. But it would appear, from a hitherto unrecorded passage of this veracious chronicle, that herein they were mistaken.

It was about six months after the disappearance of Mrs. Tretherick that Ah Fe, while working in Tretherick's lot, was hailed by two passing Chinamen. They were the ordinary mining coolies, equipped with long poles and baskets for their usual pilgrimages. An animated conversation at once ensued between Ah Fe and his brother Mongolians--a conversation characterized by that usual shrill volubility and apparent animosity which was at once the delight and scorn of the intelligent Caucasian who did not understand a word of it. Such, at least, was the feeling with which Mr. Tretherick on his veranda and Colonel Starbottle, who was passing, regarded their heathenish jargon. The gallant colonel simply kicked them out of his way; the irate Tretherick, with an oath, threw a stone at the group, and dispersed them, but not before one or two slips of yellow rice paper, marked with hieroglyphics, were exchanged, and a small parcel put into Ah Fe's hands. When Ah Fe opened this in the dim solitude of his kitchen, he found a little girl's apron, freshly washed, ironed, and folded. On the corner of the hem were the initials "C. T." Ah Fe

tucked it away in a corner of his blouse, and proceeded to wash his dishes in the sink with a smile of guileless satisfaction.

Two days after this, Ah Fe confronted his master. "Me no likee Fiddletown. Me belly sick. Me go now." Mr. Tretherick violently suggested a profane locality. Ah Fe gazed at him placidly, and withdrew.

Before leaving Fiddletown, however, he accidentally met Colonel Starbottle, and dropped a few incoherent phrases which apparently interested that gentleman. When he concluded, the colonel handed him a letter and a twenty-dollar gold piece. "If you bring me an answer, I'll double that--sabe, John?" Ah Fe nodded. An interview equally accidental, with precisely the same result, took place between Ah Fe and another gentleman, whom I suspect to have been the youthful editor of the AVALANCHE. Yet I regret to state that, after proceeding some distance on his journey, Ah Fe calmly broke the seals of both letters, and after trying to read them upside down and sideways, finally divided them into accurate squares, and in this condition disposed of them to a brother Celestial whom he met on the road, for a trifling gratuity. The agony of Colonel Starbottle on finding his wash bill made out on the unwritten side of one of these squares, and delivered to him with his weekly clean clothes, and the subsequent discovery that the remaining portions of his letter were circulated by the same method from the Chinese laundry of one Fung Ti of Fiddletown, has been described to me as peculiarly affecting. Yet I am satisfied that a higher nature, rising above the levity induced by the mere contemplation of the insignificant details of this breach of trust, would find ample retributive justice in the difficulties that subsequently attended Ah Fe's pilgrimage.

On the road to Sacramento he was twice playfully thrown from the top of the stagecoach by an intelligent but deeply intoxicated Caucasian, whose moral nature was shocked at riding with one addicted to opium-smoking. At Hangtown he was beaten by a passing stranger--

purely an act of Christian supererogation. At Dutch Flat he was robbed by well-known hands from unknown motives. At Sacramento he was arrested on suspicion of being something or other, and discharged with a severe reprimand--possibly for not being it, and so delaying the course of justice. At San Francisco he was freely stoned by children of the public schools; but, by carefully avoiding these monuments of enlightened progress, he at last reached, in comparative safety, the Chinese quarters, where his abuse was confined to the police and limited by the strong arm of the law.

The next day he entered the washhouse of Chy Fook as an assistant, and on the following Friday was sent with a basket of clean clothes to Chy Fook's several clients.

It was the usual foggy afternoon as he climbed the long windswept hill of California Street--one of those bleak, gray intervals that made the summer a misnomer to any but the liveliest San Franciscan fancy. There was no warmth or color in earth or sky, no light nor shade within or without, only one monotonous, universal neutral tint over everything. There was a fierce unrest in the wind-whipped streets: there was a dreary vacant quiet in the gray houses. When Ah Fe reached the top of the hill, the Mission Ridge was already hidden, and the chill sea breeze made him shiver. As he put down his basket to rest himself, it is possible that, to his defective intelligence and heathen experience, this "God's own climate," as was called, seemed to possess but scant tenderness, softness, or mercy. But it is possible that Ah Fe illogically confounded this season with his old persecutors, the schoolchildren, who, being released from studious confinement, at this hour were generally most aggressive. So he hastened on, and turning a corner, at last stopped before a small house.

It was the usual San Franciscan urban cottage. There was the little strip of cold green shrubbery before it; the chilly, bare veranda, and above this, again, the grim balcony, on which no one sat. Ah Fe rang the bell. A servant appeared, glanced at his basket, and reluctantly

admitted him, as if he were some necessary domestic animal. Ah Fe silently mounted the stairs, and entering the open door of the front chamber, put down the basket and stood passively on the threshold.

A woman, who was sitting in the cold gray light of the window, with a child in her lap, rose listlessly, and came toward him. Ah Fe instantly recognized Mrs. Tretherick; but not a muscle of his immobile face changed, nor did his slant eyes lighten as he met her own placidly. She evidently did not recognize him as she began to count the clothes. But the child, curiously examining him, suddenly uttered a short, glad cry.

"Why, it's John, Mamma! It's our old John what we had in Fiddletown."

For an instant Ah Fe's eyes and teeth electrically lightened. The child clapped her hands, and caught at his blouse. Then he said shortly: "Me John--Ah Fe--altee same. Me know you. How do?"

Mrs. Tretherick dropped the clothes nervously, and looked hard at Ah Fe. Wanting the quick-witted instinct of affection that sharpened Carry's perception, she even then could not distinguish him above his fellows. With a recollection of past pain, and an obscure suspicion of impending danger, she asked him when he had left Fiddletown.

"Longee time. No likee Fiddletown, no likee Tlevelick. Likee San Flisco. Likee washee. Likee Tally."

Ah Fe's laconics pleased Mrs. Tretherick. She did not stop to consider how much an imperfect knowledge of English added to his curt directness and sincerity. But she said, "Don't tell anybody you have seen me," and took out her pocketbook.

Ah Fe, without looking at it, saw that it was nearly empty. Ah Fe, without examining the apartment, saw that it was scantily furnished.

Ah Fe, without removing his eyes from blank vacancy, saw that both Mrs. Tretherick and Carry were poorly dressed. Yet it is my duty to state that Ah Fe's long fingers closed promptly and firmly over the half-dollar which Mrs. Tretherick extended to him.

Then he began to fumble in his blouse with a series of extraordinary contortions. After a few moments, he extracted from apparently no particular place a child's apron, which he laid upon the basket with the remark:

"One piecee washman flagittee."

Then he began anew his fumblings and contortions. At last his efforts were rewarded by his producing, apparently from his right ear, a many-folded piece of tissue paper. Unwrapping this carefully, he at last disclosed two twenty-dollar gold pieces, which he handed to Mrs. Tretherick.

"You leavee money topside of blulow, Fiddletown. Me findee money. Me fetchee money to you. All lightee."

"But I left no money on the top of the bureau, John," said Mrs. Tretherick earnestly. "There must be some mistake. It belongs to some other person. Take it back, John."

Ah Fe's brow darkened. He drew away from Mrs. Tretherick's extended hand, and began hastily to gather up his basket.

"Me no takee it back. No, no! Bimeby pleesman he catchee me. He say, 'God damn thief!--catchee flowty dollar: come to jailee.' Me no takee back. You leavee money topside blulow, Fiddletown. Me fetchee money you. Me no takee back."

Mrs. Tretherick hesitated. In the confusion of her flight, she MIGHT have left the money in the manner he had said. In any event, she had

no right to jeopardize this honest Chinaman's safety by refusing it. So she said: "Very well, John, I will keep it. But you must come again and see me--" here Mrs. Tretherick hesitated with a new and sudden revelation of the fact that any man could wish to see any other than herself--"and, and--Carry."

Ah Fe's face lightened. He even uttered a short ventriloquistic laugh without moving his mouth. Then, shouldering his basket, he shut the door carefully and slid quietly down stairs. In the lower hall he, however, found an unexpected difficulty in opening the front door, and, after fumbling vainly at the lock for a moment, looked around for some help or instruction. But the Irish handmaid who had let him in was contemptuously oblivious of his needs, and did not appear.

There occurred a mysterious and painful incident, which I shall simply record without attempting to explain. On the hall table a scarf, evidently the property of the servant before alluded to, was lying. As Ah Fe tried the lock with one hand, the other rested lightly on the table. Suddenly, and apparently of its own volition, the scarf began to creep slowly toward Ah Fe's hand; from Ah Fe's hand it began to creep up his sleeve slowly, and with an insinuating, snakelike motion; and then disappeared somewhere in the recesses of his blouse. Without betraying the least interest or concern in this phenomenon, Ah Fe still repeated his experiments upon the lock. A moment later the tablecloth of red damask, moved by apparently the same mysterious impulse, slowly gathered itself under Ah Fe's fingers, and sinuously disappeared by the same hidden channel. What further mystery might have followed, I cannot say; for at this moment Ah Fe discovered the secret of the lock, and was enabled to open the door coincident with the sound of footsteps upon the kitchen stairs. Ah Fe did not hasten his movements, but patiently shouldering his basket, closed the door carefully behind him again, and stepped forth into the thick encompassing fog that now shrouded earth and sky.

From her high casement window, Mrs. Tretherick watched Ah Fe's figure until it disappeared in the gray cloud. In her present loneliness, she felt a keen sense of gratitude toward him, and may have ascribed to the higher emotions and the consciousness of a good deed that certain expansiveness of the chest, and swelling of the bosom, that was really due to the hidden presence of the scarf and tablecloth under his blouse. For Mrs. Tretherick was still poetically sensitive. As the gray fog deepened into night, she drew Carry closer toward her, and, above the prattle of the child, pursued a vein of sentimental and egotistic recollection at once bitter and dangerous. The sudden apparition of Ah Fe linked her again with her past life at Fiddletown. Over the dreary interval between, she was now wandering--a journey so piteous, willful, thorny, and useless that it was no wonder that at last Carry stopped suddenly in the midst of her voluble confidences to throw her small arms around the woman's neck, and bid her not to cry.

Heaven forefend that I should use a pen that should be ever dedicated to an exposition of unalterable moral principle to transcribe Mrs. Tretherick's own theory of this interval and episode, with its feeble palliations, its illogical deductions, its fond excuses, and weak apologies. It would seem, however, that her experience had been hard. Her slender stock of money was soon exhausted. At Sacramento she found that the composition of verse, although appealing to the highest emotions of the human heart, and compelling the editorial breast to the noblest commendation in the editorial pages, was singularly inadequate to defray the expenses of herself and Carry. Then she tried the stage, but failed signally. Possibly her conception of the passions was different from that which obtained with a Sacramento audience; but it was certain that her charming presence, so effective at short range, was not sufficiently pronounced for the footlights. She had admirers enough in the greenroom, but awakened no abiding affection among the audience. In this strait, it occurred to her that she had a voice--a contralto of no very great compass or cultivation, but singularly sweet and touching; and she finally obtained position in a church choir. She held it for three months, greatly to her pecuniary

advantage, and, it is said, much to the satisfaction of the gentlemen in the back pews, who faced toward her during the singing of the last hymn.

I remember her quite distinctly at this time. The light that slanted through the oriel of St. Dives's choir was wont to fall very tenderly on her beautiful head with its stacked masses of deerskin-colored hair, on the low black arches of her brows, and to deepen the pretty fringes that shaded her eyes of Genoa velvet. Very pleasant it was to watch the opening and shutting of that small straight mouth, with its quick revelation of little white teeth, and to see the foolish blood faintly deepen her satin cheek as you watched. For Mrs. Tretherick was very sweetly conscious of admiration and, like most pretty women, gathered herself under your eye like a racer under the spur.

And then, of course, there came trouble. I have it from the soprano--a little lady who possessed even more than the usual unprejudiced judgment of her sex--that Mrs. Tretherick's conduct was simply shameful; that her conceit was unbearable; that, if she considered the rest of the choir as slaves, she (the soprano) would like to know it; that her conduct on Easter Sunday with the basso had attracted the attention of the whole congregation; and that she herself had noticed Dr. Cope twice look up during the service; that her (the soprano's) friends had objected to her singing in the choir with a person who had been on the stage, but she had waived this. Yet she had it from the best authority that Mrs. Tretherick had run away from her husband, and that this red-haired child who sometimes came in the choir was not her own. The tenor confided to me behind the organ that Mrs. Tretherick had a way of sustaining a note at the end of a line in order that her voice might linger longer with the congregation--an act that could be attributed only to a defective moral nature; that as a man (he was a very popular dry goods clerk on weekdays, and sang a good deal from apparently behind his eyebrows on the Sabbath)--that as a man, sir, he would put up with it no longer. The basso alone--a short German with a heavy voice, for which he seemed reluctantly

responsible, and rather grieved at its possession--stood up for Mrs. Tretherick, and averred that they were jealous of her because she was "bretty." The climax was at last reached in an open quarrel, wherein Mrs. Tretherick used her tongue with such precision of statement and epithet that the soprano burst into hysterical tears, and had to be supported from the choir by her husband and the tenor. This act was marked intentionally to the congregation by the omission of the usual soprano solo. Mrs. Tretherick went home flushed with triumph, but on reaching her room frantically told Carry that they were beggars henceforward; that she--her mother--had just taken the very bread out of her darling's mouth, and ended by bursting into a flood of penitent tears. They did not come so quickly as in her old poetical days; but when they came they stung deeply. She was roused by a formal visit from a vestryman--one of the music committee. Mrs. Tretherick dried her long lashes, put on a new neck ribbon, and went down to the parlor. She staid there two hours--a fact that might have occasioned some remark but that the vestryman was married, and had a family of grownup daughters. When Mrs. Tretherick returned to her room, she sang to herself in the glass and scolded Carry--but she retained her place in the choir.

It was not long, however. In due course of time, her enemies received a powerful addition to their forces in the committeeman's wife. That lady called upon several of the church members and on Dr. Cope's family. The result was that, at a later meeting of the music committee, Mrs. Tretherick's voice was declared inadequate to the size of the building and she was invited to resign. She did so. She had been out of a situation for two months, and her scant means were almost exhausted, when Ah Fe's unexpected treasure was tossed into her lap.

The gray fog deepened into night, and the street lamps started into shivering life as, absorbed in these unprofitable memories, Mrs. Tretherick still sat drearily at her window. Even Carry had slipped away unnoticed; and her abrupt entrance with the damp evening paper in her hand roused Mrs. Tretherick, and brought her back to an active

realization of the present. For Mrs. Tretherick was wont to scan the advertisements in the faint hope of finding some avenue of employment--she knew not what--open to her needs; and Carry had noted this habit.

Mrs. Tretherick mechanically closed the shutters, lit the lights, and opened the paper. Her eye fell instinctively on the following paragraph in the telegraphic column:

FIDDLETOWN, 7th.--Mr. James Tretherick, an old resident of this place, died last night of delirium tremens. Mr. Tretherick was addicted to intemperate habits, said to have been induced by domestic trouble.

Mrs. Tretherick did not start. She quietly turned over another page of the paper, and glanced at Carry. The child was absorbed in a book. Mrs. Tretherick uttered no word, but during the remainder of the evening was unusually silent and cold. When Carry was undressed and in bed, Mrs. Tretherick suddenly dropped on her knees beside the bed, and, taking Carry's flaming head between her hands, said:

"Should you like to have another papa, Carry, darling?"

"No," said Carry, after a moment's thought.

"But a papa to help Mamma take care of you, to love you, to give you nice clothes, to make a lady of you when you grow up?"

Carry turned her sleepy eyes toward the questioner. "Should YOU, Mamma?"

Mrs. Tretherick suddenly flushed to the roots of her hair. "Go to sleep," she said sharply, and turned away.

But at midnight the child felt two white arms close tightly around her, and was drawn down into a bosom that heaved, fluttered, and at last was broken up by sobs.

"Don't ky, Mamma," whispered Carry, with a vague retrospect of their recent conversation. "Don't ky. I fink I SHOULD like a new papa, if he loved you very much--very, very much!"

A month afterward, to everybody's astonishment, Mrs. Tretherick was married. The happy bridegroom was one Colonel Starbottle, recently elected to represent Calaveras County in the legislative councils of the State. As I cannot record the event in finer language than that used by the correspondent of THE SACRAMENTO GLOBE, I venture to quote some of his graceful periods. "The relentless shafts of the sly god have been lately busy among our gallant Solons. We quote 'one more unfortunate.' The latest victim is the Hon. C. Starbottle of Calaveras. The fair enchantress in the case is a beautiful widow, a former votary of Thespis, and lately a fascinating St. Cecilia of one of the most fashionable churches of San Francisco, where she commanded a high salary."

THE DUTCH FLAT INTELLIGENCER saw fit, however, to comment upon the fact with that humorous freedom characteristic of an unfettered press. "The new Democratic war horse from Calaveras has lately advented in the legislature with a little bill to change the name of Tretherick to Starbottle. They call it a marriage certificate down there. Mr. Tretherick has been dead just one month; but we presume the gallant colonel is not afraid of ghosts." It is but just to Mrs. Tretherick to state that the colonel's victory was by no means an easy one. To a natural degree of coyness on the part of the lady was added the impediment of a rival--a prosperous undertaker from Sacramento, who had first seen and loved Mrs. Tretherick at the theater and church, his professional habits debarring him from ordinary social intercourse, and indeed any other than the most formal public contact with the sex. As this gentleman had made a snug

fortune during the felicitous prevalence of a severe epidemic, the colonel regarded him as a dangerous rival. Fortunately, however, the undertaker was called in professionally to lay out a brother senator, who had unhappily fallen by the colonel's pistol in an affair of honor; and either deterred by physical consideration from rivalry, or wisely concluding that the colonel was professionally valuable, he withdrew from the field.

The honeymoon was brief, and brought to a close by an untoward incident. During their bridal trip, Carry had been placed in the charge of Colonel Starbottle's sister. On their return to the city, immediately on reaching their lodgings, Mrs. Starbottle announced her intention of at once proceeding to Mrs. Culpepper's to bring the child home. Colonel Starbottle, who had been exhibiting for some time a certain uneasiness which he had endeavored to overcome by repeated stimulation, finally buttoned his coat tightly across his breast, and after walking unsteadily once or twice up and down the room, suddenly faced his wife with his most imposing manner.

"I have deferred," said the colonel with an exaggeration of port that increased with his inward fear, and a growing thickness of speech--"I have deferr--I may say poshponed statement o' fack thash my duty ter dishclose ter ye. I did no wish to mar sushine mushal happ'ness, to bligh bud o' promise, to darken conjuglar sky by unpleasht revelashun. Musht be done--by God, m'm, musht do it now. The chile is gone!"

"Gone!" echoed Mrs. Starbottle.

There was something in the tone of her voice, in the sudden drawing-together of the pupils of her eyes, that for a moment nearly sobered the colonel, and partly collapsed his chest.

"I'll splain all in a minit," he said with a deprecating wave of the hand. "Everything shall be splained. The-the-the-melencholly event wish preshipitate our happ'ness--the myster'us prov'nice wish releash you--"

releash chile! hunerstan?--releash chile. The mom't Tretherick die--all claim you have in chile through him--die too. Thash law. Who's chile b'long to? Tretherick? Tretherick dead. Chile can't b'long dead man. Damn nonshense b'long dead man. I'sh your chile? no! whose chile then? Chile b'long to 'ts mother. Unnerstan?"

"Where is she?" said Mrs. Starbottle, with a very white face and a very low voice.

"I'll splain all. Chile b'long to 'ts mother. Thash law. I'm lawyer, leshlator, and American sis'n. Ish my duty as lawyer, as leshlator, and 'merikan sis'n to reshtore chile to suff'rin mother at any coss--any coss."

"Where is she?" repeated Mrs. Starbottle, with her eyes still fixed on the colonel's face.

"Gone to 'ts m'o'r. Gone East on shteamer, yesserday. Waffed by fav'rin gales to suff'rin p'rent. Thash so!"

Mrs. Starbottle did not move. The colonel felt his chest slowly collapsing, but steadied himself against a chair, and endeavored to beam with chivalrous gallantry not unmixed with magisterial firmness upon her as she sat.

"Your feelin's, m'm, do honor to yer sex, but conshider situashun. Conshider m'or's feelings--conshider MY feelin's." The colonel paused, and flourishing a white handkerchief, placed it negligently in his breast, and then smiled tenderly above it, as over laces and ruffles, on the woman before him. "Why should dark shed-der cass bligh on two sholes with single beat? Chile's fine chile, good chile, but summonelse chile! Chile's gone, Clar'; but all ish'n't gone, Clar'. Conshider dearesht, you all's have me!"

Mrs. Starbottle started to her feet. "YOU!" she cried, bringing out a chest note that made the chandeliers ring--"You that I married to give my darling food and clothes--YOU! a dog that I whistled to my side to keep the men off me--YOU!"

She choked up, and then dashed past him into the inner room, which had been Carry's; then she swept by him again into her own bedroom, and then suddenly reappeared before him, erect, menacing, with a burning fire over her cheekbones, a quick straightening of her arched brows and mouth, a squaring of jaw, and ophidian flattening of the head.

"Listen!" she said in a hoarse, half-grown boy's voice. "Hear me! If you ever expect to set eyes on me again, you must find the child. If you ever expect to speak to me again, to touch me, you must bring her back. For where she goes, I go; you hear me! Where she has gone, look for me."

She struck out past him again with a quick feminine throwing-out of her arms from the elbows down, as if freeing herself from some imaginary bonds, and dashing into her chamber, slammed and locked the door. Colonel Starbottle, although no coward, stood in superstitious fear of an angry woman, and, recoiling as she swept by, lost his unsteady foothold and rolled helplessly on the sofa. Here, after one or two unsuccessful attempts to regain his foothold, he remained, uttering from time to time profane but not entirely coherent or intelligible protests, until at last he succumbed to the exhausting quality of his emotions, and the narcotic quantity of his potations.

Meantime, within, Mrs. Starbottle was excitedly gathering her valuables and packing her trunk, even as she had done once before in the course of this remarkable history. Perhaps some recollection of this was in her mind; for she stopped to lean her burning cheeks upon her hand, as if she saw again the figure of the child standing in the doorway, and heard once more a childish voice asking, "Is it

Mamma?" But the epithet now stung her to the quick, and with a quick, passionate gesture she dashed it away with a tear that had gathered in her eye. And then it chanced that, in turning over some clothes, she came upon the child's slipper with a broken sandal string. She uttered a great cry here--the first she had uttered--and caught it to her breast, kissing it passionately again and again, and rocking from side to side with a motion peculiar to her sex. And then she took it to the window, the better to see it through her now streaming eyes. Here she was taken with a sudden fit of coughing that she could not stifle with the handkerchief she put to her feverish lips. And then she suddenly grew very faint. The window seemed to recede before her, the floor to sink beneath her feet; and staggering to the bed, she fell prone upon it with the sandal and handkerchief pressed to her breast. Her face was quite pale, the orbit of her eyes dark; and there was a spot upon her lip, another on her handkerchief, and still another on the white counterpane of the bed.

The wind had risen, rattling the window sashes and swaying the white curtains in a ghostly way. Later, a gray fog stole softly over the roofs, soothing the wind-roughened surfaces, and in-wrapping all things in an uncertain light and a measureless peace. She lay there very quiet--for all her troubles, still a very pretty bride. And on the other side of the bolted door the gallant bridegroom, from his temporary couch, snored peacefully.

A week before Christmas Day, 1870, the little town of Genoa, in the State of New York, exhibited, perhaps more strongly than at any other time, the bitter irony of its founders and sponsors. A driving snowstorm that had whitened every windward hedge, bush, wall, and telegraph pole, played around this soft Italian Capital, whirled in and out of the great staring wooden Doric columns of its post office and hotel, beat upon the cold green shutters of its best houses, and powdered the angular, stiff, dark figures in its streets. From the level of the street, the four principal churches of the town stood out starkly, even while their misshapen spires were kindly hidden in the low,

driving storm. Near the railroad station, the new Methodist chapel, whose resemblance to an enormous locomotive was further heightened by the addition of a pyramidal row of front steps, like a cowcatcher, stood as if waiting for a few more houses to be hitched on to proceed to a pleasanter location. But the pride of Genoa--the great Crammer Institute for Young Ladies--stretched its bare brick length and reared its cupola plainly from the bleak Parnassian hill above the principal avenue. There was no evasion in the Crammer Institute of the fact that it was a public institution. A visitor upon its doorsteps, a pretty face at its window, were clearly visible all over the township.

The shriek of the engine of the four-o'clock Northern express brought but few of the usual loungers to the depot. Only a single passenger alighted, and was driven away in the solitary waiting sleigh toward the Genoa Hotel. And then the train sped away again, with that passionless indifference to human sympathies or curiosity peculiar to express trains; the one baggage truck was wheeled into the station again; the station door was locked; and the stationmaster went home.

The locomotive whistle, however, awakened the guilty consciousness of three young ladies of the Crammer Institute, who were even then surreptitiously regaling themselves in the bakeshop and confectionery saloon of Mistress Phillips in a by-lane. For even the admirable regulations of the Institute failed to entirely develop the physical and moral natures of its pupils. They conformed to the excellent dietary rules in public, and in private drew upon the luxurious rations of their village caterer. They attended church with exemplary formality, and flirted informally during service with the village beaux. They received the best and most judicious instruction during school hours, and devoured the trashiest novels during recess. The result of which was an aggregation of quite healthy, quite human, and very charming young creatures that reflected infinite credit on the Institute. Even Mistress Phillips, to whom they owed vast sums, exhilarated by the exuberant spirits and youthful freshness of her guests, declared that

the sight of "them young things" did her good, and had even been known to shield them by shameless equivocation.

"Four o'clock, girls! and, if we're not back to prayers by five, we'll be missed," said the tallest of these foolish virgins, with an aquiline nose, and certain quiet elan that bespoke the leader, as she rose from her seat. "Have you got the books, Addy?" Addy displayed three dissipated-looking novels under her waterproof. "And the provisions, Carry?" Carry showed a suspicious parcel filling the pocket of her sack. "All right, then. Come, girls, trudge--Charge it," she added, nodding to her host as they passed toward the door. "I'll pay you when my quarter's allowance comes."

"No, Kate," interposed Carry, producing her purse, "let me pay; it's my turn."

"Never!" said Kate, arching her black brows loftily, "even if you do have rich relatives, and regular remittances from California. Never! Come, girls, forward, march!"

As they opened the door, a gust of wind nearly took them off their feet. Kindhearted Mrs. Phillips was alarmed. "Sakes alive, galls! ye mussn't go out in sich weather. Better let me send word to the Institoot, and make ye up a nice bed tonight in my parlor." But the last sentence was lost in a chorus of half-suppressed shrieks as the girls, hand in hand, ran down the steps into the storm, and were at once whirled away.

The short December day, unlit by any sunset glow, was failing fast. It was quite dark already, and the air was thick with driving snow. For some distance their high spirits, youth, and even inexperience kept them bravely up; but, in ambitiously attempting a short cut from the highroad across an open field, their strength gave out, the laugh grew less frequent, and tears began to stand in Carry's brown eyes. When

they reached the road again, they were utterly exhausted. "Let us go back," said Carry.

"We'd never get across that field again," said Addy.

"Let's stop at the first house, then," said Carry.

"The first house," said Addy, peering through the gathering darkness, "is Squire Robinson's." She darted a mischievous glance at Carry that, even in her discomfort and fear, brought the quick blood to her cheek.

"Oh, yes!" said Kate with gloomy irony, "certainly; stop at the squire's by all means, and be invited to tea, and be driven home after by your dear friend Mr. Harry, with a formal apology from Mrs. Robinson, and hopes that the young ladies may be excused this time. No!" continued Kate with sudden energy. "That may suit YOU; but I'm going back as I came--by the window, or not at all" Then she pounced suddenly, like a hawk, on Carry, who was betraying a tendency to sit down on a snowbank and whimper, and shook her briskly. "You'll be going to sleep next. Stay, hold your tongues, all of you--what's that?"

It was the sound of sleigh bells. Coming down toward them out of the darkness was a sleigh with a single occupant. "Hold down your heads, girls: if it's anybody that knows us, we're lost." But it was not, for a voice strange to their ears, but withal very kindly and pleasant, asked if its owner could be of any help to them. As they turned toward him, they saw it was a man wrapped in a handsome sealskin cloak, wearing a sealskin cap; his face, half-concealed by a muffler of the same material, disclosing only a pair of long mustaches, and two keen dark eyes. "It's a son of old Santa Claus!" whispered Addy. The girls tittered audibly as they tumbled into the sleigh; they had regained their former spirits. "Where shall I take you?" said the stranger quietly. There was a hurried whispering; and then Kate said boldly, "To the Institute." They drove silently up the hill, until the long, ascetic building loomed up before them. The stranger reined up

suddenly. "You know the way better than I," he said. "Where do you go in?" "Through the back window," said Kate with sudden and appalling frankness. "I see!" responded their strange driver quietly and, alighting quickly, removed the bells from the horses. "We can drive as near as you please now," he added by way of explanation. "He certainly is a son of Santa Claus," whispered Addy. "Hadn't we better ask after his father?" "Hush!" said Kate decidedly. "He is an angel, I dare say." She added with a delicious irrelevance, which was, however, perfectly understood by her feminine auditors, "We are looking like three frights."

Cautiously skirting the fences, they at last pulled up a few feet from a dark wall. The stranger proceeded to assist them to alight. There was still some light from the reflected snow; and as he handed his fair companions to the ground, each was conscious of undergoing an intense though respectful scrutiny. He assisted them gravely to open the window, and then discreetly retired to the sleigh until the difficult and somewhat discomposing ingress was made. He then walked to the window. "Thank you and good night!" whispered three voices. A single figure still lingered. The stranger leaned over the window sill. "Will you permit me to light my cigar here? It might attract attention if I struck a match outside." By the upspringing light he saw the figure of Kate very charmingly framed in by the window. The match burnt slowly out in his fingers. Kate smiled mischievously. The astute young woman had detected the pitiable subterfuge. For what else did she stand at the head of her class, and had doting parents paid three years' tuition?

The storm had passed, and the sun was shining quite cheerily in the eastern recitation room the next morning when Miss Kate, whose seat was nearest the window, placing her hand pathetically upon her heart, affected to fall in bashful and extreme agitation upon the shoulder of Carry, her neighbor. "HE has come," she gasped in a thrilling whisper. "Who?" asked Carry sympathetically, who never clearly understood when Kate was in earnest. "Who?--Why, the man who rescued us last

night! I saw him drive to the door this moment. Don't speak; I shall be better in a moment--there!" she said, and the shameless hypocrite passed her hand pathetically across her forehead with a tragic air.

"What can he want?" asked Carry, whose curiosity was excited. "I don't know," said Kate, suddenly relapsing into gloomy cynicism. "Possibly to put his five daughters to school; perhaps to finish his young wife, and warn her against us."

"He didn't look old, and he didn't seem like a married man," rejoined Addy thoughtfully.

"That was his art, you poor creature!" returned Kate scornfully. "You can never tell anything of these men, they are so deceitful. Besides, it's just my fate!"

"Why, Kate," began Carry, in serious concern.

"Hush! Miss Walker is saying something," said Kate, laughing.

"The young ladies will please give attention," said a slow, perfunctory voice. "Miss Carry Tretherick is wanted in the parlor."

Meantime Mr. Jack Prince, the name given on the card, and various letters and credentials submitted to the Rev. Mr. Crammer, paced the somewhat severe apartment known publicly as the "reception parlor" and privately to the pupils as "purgatory." His keen eyes had taken in the various rigid details, from the flat steam "radiator," like an enormous japanned soda cracker, that heated one end of the room to the monumental bust of Dr. Crammer that hopelessly chilled the other; from the Lord's Prayer, executed by a former writing master in such gratuitous variety of elegant calligraphic trifling as to abate considerably the serious value of the composition, to three views of Genoa from the Institute, which nobody ever recognized, taken on the spot by the drawing teacher; from two illuminated texts of Scripture in

an English letter, so gratuitously and hideously remote as to chill all human interest, to a large photograph of the senior class, in which the prettiest girls were Ethiopian in complexion, and sat, apparently, on each other's heads and shoulders. His fingers had turned listlessly the leaves of school-catalogues, the SERMONS of Dr. Crammer, the POEMS of Henry Kirke White, the LAYS OF THE SANCTUARY and LIVES OF CELEBRATED WOMEN. His fancy, and it was a nervously active one, had gone over the partings and greetings that must have taken place here, and wondered why the apartment had yet caught so little of the flavor of humanity; indeed, I am afraid he had almost forgotten the object of his visit when the door opened, and Carry Tretherick stood before him.

It was one of those faces he had seen the night before, prettier even than it had seemed then; and yet I think he was conscious of some disappointment, without knowing exactly why. Her abundant waving hair was of a guinea-golden tint, her complexion of a peculiar flowerlike delicacy, her brown eyes of the color of seaweed in deep water. It certainly was not her beauty that disappointed him.

Without possessing his sensitiveness to impression, Carry was, on her part, quite as vaguely ill at ease. She saw before her one of those men whom the sex would vaguely generalize as "nice," that is to say, correct in all the superficial appointments of style, dress, manners, and feature. Yet there was a decidedly unconventional quality about him: he was totally unlike anything or anybody that she could remember; and as the attributes of originality are often as apt to alarm as to attract people, she was not entirely prepossessed in his favor.

"I can hardly hope," he began pleasantly, "that you remember me. It is eleven years ago, and you were a very little girl. I am afraid I cannot even claim to have enjoyed that familiarity that might exist between a child of six and a young man of twenty-one. I don't think I was fond of children. But I knew your mother very well. I was editor of the AVALANCHE in Fiddletown when she took you to San Francisco."

"You mean my stepmother; she wasn't my mother, you know," interposed Carry hastily.

Mr. Prince looked at her curiously. "I mean your stepmother," he said gravely. "I never had the pleasure of meeting your mother."

"No; MOTHER hasn't been in California these twelve years."

There was an intentional emphasizing of the title and of its distinction that began to interest coldly Prince after his first astonishment was past.

"As I come from your stepmother now," he went on with a slight laugh, "I must ask you to go back for a few moments to that point. After your father's death, your mother--I mean your stepmother--recognized the fact that your mother, the first Mrs. Tretherick, was legally and morally your guardian and, although much against her inclination and affections, placed you again in her charge."

"My stepmother married again within a month after father died, and sent me home," said Carry with great directness, and the faintest toss of her head.

Mr. Prince smiled so sweetly, and apparently so sympathetically, that Carry began to like him. With no other notice of the interruption he went on, "After your stepmother had performed this act of simple justice, she entered into an agreement with your mother to defray the expenses of your education until your eighteenth year, when you were to elect and choose which of the two should thereafter be your guardian, and with whom you would make your home. This agreement, I think, you are already aware of, and, I believe, knew at the time."

"I was a mere child then," said Carry.

"Certainly," said Mr. Prince, with the same smile. "Still the conditions, I think, have never been oppressive to you nor your mother; and the only time they are likely to give you the least uneasiness will be when you come to make up your mind in the choice of your guardian. That will be on your eighteenth birthday--the twentieth, I think, of the present month."

Carry was silent.

"Pray do not think that I am here to receive your decision, even if it be already made. I only came to inform you that your stepmother, Mrs. Starbottle, will be in town tomorrow, and will pass a few days at the hotel. If it is your wish to see her before you make up your mind, she will be glad to meet you. She does not, however, wish to do anything to influence your judgment.

"Does Mother know she is coming?" said Carry hastily.

"I do not know," said Prince gravely. "I only know that if you conclude to see Mrs. Starbottle, it will be with your mother's permission. Mrs. Starbottle will keep sacredly this part of the agreement, made ten years ago. But her health is very poor; and the change and country quiet of a few days may benefit her." Mr. Prince bent his keen, bright eyes upon the young girl, and almost held his breath until she spoke again.

"Mother's coming up today or tomorrow," she said, looking up.

"Ah!" said Mr. Prince with a sweet and languid smile.

"Is Colonel Starbottle here too?" asked Carry, after a pause.

"Colonel Starbottle is dead. Your stepmother is again a widow."

"Dead!" repeated Carry.

"Yes," replied Mr. Prince. "Your stepmother has been singularly unfortunate in surviving her affections."

Carry did not know what he meant, and looked so. Mr. Prince smiled reassuringly.

Presently Carry began to whimper.

Mr. Prince softly stepped beside her chair.

"I am afraid," he said with a very peculiar light in his eye, and a singular dropping of the corners of his mustache--"I am afraid you are taking this too deeply. It will be some days before you are called upon to make a decision. Let us talk of something else. I hope you caught no cold last evening."

Carry's face shone out again in dimples.

"You must have thought us so queer! It was too bad to give you so much trouble."

"None whatever, I assure you. My sense of propriety," he added demurely, "which might have been outraged had I been called upon to help three young ladies out of a schoolroom window at night, was deeply gratified at being able to assist them in again." The doorbell rang loudly, and Mr. Prince rose. "Take your own time, and think well before you make your decision." But Carry's ear and attention were given to the sound of voices in the hall. At the same moment, the door was thrown open, and a servant announced, "Mrs. Tretherick and Mr. Robinson."

The afternoon train had just shrieked out its usual indignant protest at stopping at Genoa at all as Mr. Jack Prince entered the outskirts of the

town, and drove toward his hotel. He was wearied and cynical. A drive of a dozen miles through unpicturesque outlying villages, past small economic farmhouses, and hideous villas that violated his fastidious taste, had, I fear, left that gentleman in a captious state of mind. He would have even avoided his taciturn landlord as he drove up to the door; but that functionary waylaid him on the steps. "There's a lady in the sittin'-room, waitin' for ye." Mr. Prince hurried upstairs, and entered the room as Mrs. Starbottle flew toward him.

She had changed sadly in the last ten years. Her figure was wasted to half its size. The beautiful curves of her bust and shoulders were broken or inverted. The once full, rounded arm was shrunken in its sleeve; and the golden hoops that encircled her wan wrists almost slipped from her hands as her long, scant fingers closed convulsively around Jack's. Her cheekbones were painted that afternoon with the hectic of fever: somewhere in the hollows of those cheeks were buried the dimples of long ago, but their graves were forgotten. Her lustrous eyes were still beautiful, though the orbits were deeper than before. Her mouth was still sweet, although the lips parted more easily over the little teeth, even in breathing, and showed more of them than she was wont to do before. The glory of her blond hair was still left: it was finer, more silken and ethereal, yet it failed even in its plenitude to cover the hollows of the blue-veined temples.

"Clara!" said Jack reproachfully.

"Oh, forgive me, Jack!" she said, falling into a chair, but still clinging to his hand--"forgive me, dear; but I could not wait longer. I should have died, Jack--died before another night. Bear with me a little longer (it will not be long), but let me stay. I may not see her, I know; I shall not speak to her: but it's so sweet to feel that I am at last near her, that I breathe the same air with my darling. I am better already, Jack, I am indeed. And you have seen her today? How did she look? What did she say? Tell me all, everything, Jack. Was she beautiful? They say she is. Has she grown? Would you have known her again?"

Will she come, Jack? Perhaps she has been here already; perhaps"-- she had risen with tremulous excitement, and was glancing at the door--"perhaps she is here now. Why don't you speak, Jack? Tell me all."

The keen eyes that looked down into hers were glistening with an infinite tenderness that none, perhaps, but she would have deemed them capable of. "Clara," he said gently and cheerily, "try and compose yourself. You are trembling now with the fatigue and excitement of your journey. I have seen Carry; she is well and beautiful. Let that suffice you now."

His gentle firmness composed and calmed her now, as it had often done before. Stroking her thin hand, he said, after a pause, "Did Carry ever write to you?"

"Twice, thanking me for some presents. They were only schoolgirl letters," she added, nervously answering the interrogation of his eyes.

"Did she ever know of your own troubles? of your poverty, of the sacrifices you made to pay her bills, of your pawning your clothes and jewels, of your--"

"No, no!" interrupted the woman quickly: "no! How could she? I have no enemy cruel enough to tell her that."

"But if she--or if Mrs. Tretherick--had heard of it? If Carry thought you were poor, and unable to support her properly, it might influence her decision. Young girls are fond of the position that wealth can give. She may have rich friends, maybe a lover."

Mrs. Starbottle winced at the last sentence. "But," she said eagerly, grasping Jack's hand, "when you found me sick and helpless at Sacramento, when you--God bless you for it, Jack!--offered to help

me to the East, you said you knew of something, you had some plan, that would make me and Carry independent."

"Yes," said Jack hastily; "but I want you to get strong and well first. And, now that you are calmer, you shall listen to my visit to the school."

It was then that Mr. Jack Prince proceeded to describe the interview already recorded, with a singular felicity and discretion that shames my own account of that proceeding. Without suppressing a single fact, without omitting a word or detail, he yet managed to throw a poetic veil over that prosaic episode, to invest the heroine with a romantic roseate atmosphere, which, though not perhaps entirely imaginary, still, I fear, exhibited that genius which ten years ago had made the columns of *THE FIDDLETOWN AVALANCHE* at once fascinating and instructive. It was not until he saw the heightening color, and heard the quick breathing, of his eager listener, that he felt a pang of self-reproach. "God help her and forgive me!" he muttered between his clinched teeth; "but how can I tell her ALL now!"

That night, when Mrs. Starbottle laid her weary head upon her pillow, she tried to picture to herself Carry at the same moment sleeping peacefully in the great schoolhouse on the hill; and it was a rare comfort to this yearning, foolish woman to know that she was so near. But at this moment Carry was sitting on the edge of her bed, half-undressed, pouting her pretty lips and twisting her long, leonine locks between her fingers as Miss Kate Van Corlear--dramatically wrapped in a long white counterpane, her black eyes sparkling, and her thoroughbred nose thrown high in air--stood over her like a wrathful and indignant ghost; for Carry had that evening imparted her woes and her history to Miss Kate, and that young lady had "proved herself no friend" by falling into a state of fiery indignation over Carry's "ingratitude," and openly and shamelessly espousing the claims of Mrs. Starbottle. "Why, if the half you tell me is true, your mother and those Robinsons are making of you not only a little coward, but a little

snob, miss. Respectability, forsooth! Look you, my family are centuries before the Trethericks; but if my family had ever treated me in this way, and then asked me to turn my back on my best friend, I'd whistle them down the wind;" and here Kate snapped her fingers, bent her black brows, and glared around the room as if in search of a recreant Van Corlear.

"You just talk this way because you have taken a fancy to that Mr. Prince," said Carry.

In the debasing slang of the period, that had even found its way into the virgin cloisters of the Crammer Institute, Miss Kate, as she afterward expressed it, instantly "went for her."

First, with a shake of her head, she threw her long black hair over one shoulder, then, dropping one end of the counterpane from the other like a vestal tunic, she stepped before Carry with a purposely exaggerated classic stride. "And what if I have, miss! What if I happen to know a gentleman when I see him! What if I happen to know that among a thousand such traditional, conventional, feeble editions of their grandfathers as Mr. Harry Robinson, you cannot find one original, independent, individualized gentleman like your Prince! Go to bed, miss, and pray to Heaven that he may be YOUR Prince indeed. Ask to have a contrite and grateful heart, and thank the Lord in particular for having sent you such a friend as Kate Van Corlear." Yet, after an imposing dramatic exit, she reappeared the next moment as a straight white flash, kissed Carry between the brows, and was gone.

The next day was a weary one to Jack Prince. He was convinced in his mind that Carry would not come; yet to keep this consciousness from Mrs. Starbottle, to meet her simple hopefulness with an equal degree of apparent faith, was a hard and difficult task. He would have tried to divert her mind by taking her on a long drive; but she was fearful that Carry might come during her absence; and her strength, he was

obliged to admit, had failed greatly. As he looked into her large and awe-inspiring clear eyes, a something he tried to keep from his mind--to put off day by day from contemplation--kept asserting itself directly to his inner consciousness. He began to doubt the expediency and wisdom of his management. He recalled every incident of his interview with Carry, and half-believed that its failure was due to himself. Yet Mrs. Starbottle was very patient and confident; her very confidence shook his faith in his own judgment. When her strength was equal to the exertion, she was propped up in her chair by the window, where she could see the school and the entrance to the hotel. In the intervals she would elaborate pleasant plans for the future, and would sketch a country home. She had taken a strange fancy, as it seemed to Prince, to the present location; but it was notable that the future, always thus outlined, was one of quiet and repose. She believed she would get well soon; in fact, she thought she was now much better than she had been, but it might be long before she should be quite strong again. She would whisper on in this way until Jack would dash madly down into the barroom, order liquors that he did not drink, light cigars that he did not smoke, talk with men that he did not listen to, and behave generally as our stronger sex is apt to do in periods of delicate trials and perplexity.

The day closed with a clouded sky and a bitter, searching wind. With the night fell a few wandering flakes of snow. She was still content and hopeful; and, as Jack wheeled her from the window to the fire, she explained to him how that, as the school term was drawing near its close, Carry was probably kept closely at her lessons during the day, and could only leave the school at night. So she sat up the greater part of the evening, and combed her silken hair, and as far as her strength would allow, made an undress toilet to receive her guest. "We must not frighten the child, Jack," she said apologetically, and with something of her old coquetry.

It was with a feeling of relief that, at ten o'clock, Jack received a message from the landlord, saying that the doctor would like to see

him for a moment downstairs. As Jack entered the grim, dimly lighted parlor, he observed the hooded figure of a woman near the fire. He was about to withdraw again when a voice that he remembered very pleasantly said:

"Oh, it's all right! I'm the doctor."

The hood was thrown back, and Prince saw the shining black hair and black, audacious eyes of Kate Van Corlear.

"Don't ask any questions. I'm the doctor, and there's my prescription," and she pointed to the half-frightened, half-sobbing Carry in the corner--"to be taken at once."

"Then Mrs. Tretherick has given her permission?"

"Not much, if I know the sentiments of that lady," replied Kate saucily.

"Then how did you get away?" asked Prince gravely.

"BY THE WINDOW."

When Mr. Prince had left Carry in the arms of her stepmother, he returned to the parlor.

"Well?" demanded Kate.

"She will stay--YOU will, I hope, also--tonight."

"As I shall not be eighteen, and my own mistress on the twentieth, and as I haven't a sick stepmother, I won't."

"Then you will give me the pleasure of seeing you safely through the window again?"

When Mr. Prince returned an hour later, he found Carry sitting on a low stool at Mrs. Starbottle's feet. Her head was in her stepmother's lap, and she had sobbed herself to sleep. Mrs. Starbottle put her finger to her lip. "I told you she would come. God bless you, Jack! and good night."

The next morning Mrs. Tretherick, indignant, the Rev. Asa Crammer, principal, injured, and Mr. Joel Robinson, Sr., complacently respectable, called upon Mr. Prince. There was a stormy meeting, ending in a demand for Carry. "We certainly cannot admit of this interference," said Mrs. Tretherick, a fashionably dressed, indistinctive-looking woman. "It is several days before the expiration of our agreement; and we do not feel, under the circumstances, justified in releasing Mrs. Starbottle from its conditions." "Until the expiration of the school term, we must consider Miss Tretherick as complying entirely with its rules and discipline," imposed Dr. Crammer. "The whole proceeding is calculated to injure the prospects, and compromise the position, of Miss Tretherick in society," suggested Mr. Robinson.

In vain Mr. Prince urged the failing condition of Mrs. Starbottle, her absolute freedom from complicity with Carry's flight, the pardonable and natural instincts of the girl, and his own assurance that they were willing to abide by her decision. And then, with a rising color in his cheek, a dangerous look in his eye, but a singular calmness in his speech, he added:

"One word more. It becomes my duty to inform you of a circumstance which would certainly justify me, as an executor of the late Mr. Tretherick, in fully resisting your demands. A few months after Mr. Tretherick's death, through the agency of a Chinaman in his employment, it was discovered that he had made a will, which was subsequently found among his papers. The insignificant value of his bequest--mostly land, then quite valueless--prevented his executors

from carrying out his wishes, or from even proving the will, or making it otherwise publicly known, until within the last two or three years, when the property had enormously increased in value. The provisions of that bequest are simple, but unmistakable. The property is divided between Carry and her stepmother, with the explicit condition that Mrs. Starbottle shall become her legal guardian, provide for her education, and in all details stand to her IN LOCO PARENTIS."

"What is the value of this bequest?" asked Mr. Robinson. "I cannot tell exactly, but not far from half a million, I should say," returned Prince. "Certainly, with this knowledge, as a friend of Miss Tretherick I must say that her conduct is as judicious as it is honorable to her," responded Mr. Robinson. "I shall not presume to question the wishes, or throw any obstacles in the way of carrying out the intentions, of my dead husband," added Mrs. Tretherick; and the interview was closed.

When its result was made known to Mrs. Starbottle, she raised Jack's hand to her feverish lips. "It cannot add to MY happiness now, Jack; but tell me, why did you keep it from her?" Jack smiled, but did not reply.

Within the next week the necessary legal formalities were concluded, and Carry was restored to her stepmother. At Mrs. Starbottle's request, a small house in the outskirts of the town was procured; and thither they removed to wait the spring, and Mrs. Starbottle's convalescence. Both came tardily that year.

Yet she was happy and patient. She was fond of watching the budding of the trees beyond her window--a novel sight to her Californian experience--and of asking Carry their names and seasons. Even at this time she projected for that summer, which seemed to her so mysteriously withheld, long walks with Carry through the leafy woods, whose gray, misty ranks she could see along the hilltop. She even thought she could write poetry about them, and recalled the fact

as evidence of her gaining strength; and there is, I believe, still treasured by one of the members of this little household a little carol so joyous, so simple, and so innocent that it might have been an echo of the robin that called to her from the window, as perhaps it was.

And then, without warning, there dropped from Heaven a day so tender, so mystically soft, so dreamily beautiful, so throbbing and alive with the fluttering of invisible wings, so replete and bounteously overflowing with an awakening and joyous resurrection not taught by man or limited by creed, that they thought it fit to bring her out and lay her in that glorious sunshine that sprinkled like the droppings of a bridal torch the happy lintels and doors. And there she lay beatified and calm.

Wearied by watching, Carry had fallen asleep by her side; and Mrs. Starbottle's thin fingers lay like a benediction on her head. Presently she called Jack to her side.

"Who was that," she whispered, "who just came in?"

"Miss Van Corlear," said Jack, answering the look in her great hollow eyes.

"Jack," she said, after a moment's silence, "sit by me a moment; dear Jack: I've something I must say. If I ever seemed hard, or cold, or coquettish to you in the old days, it was because I loved you, Jack, too well to mar your future by linking it with my own. I always loved you, dear Jack, even when I seemed least worthy of you. That is gone now. But I had a dream lately, Jack, a foolish woman's dream--that you might find what I lacked in HER," and she glanced lovingly at the sleeping girl at her side; "that you might love her as you have loved me. But even that is not to be, Jack, is it?" and she glanced wistfully in his face. Jack pressed her hand, but did not speak. After a few moments' silence, she again said: "Perhaps you are right in your choice. She is a goodhearted girl, Jack--but a little bold."

And with this last flicker of foolish, weak humanity in her struggling spirit, she spoke no more. When they came to her a moment later, a tiny bird that had lit upon her breast flew away; and the hand that they lifted from Carry's head fell lifeless at her side.