RICHARD DODDRIDGE BLACKMORE

EREMA; OR, MY FATHER'S SIN

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
A LOST LANDMARK

"The sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."

These are the words that have followed me always. This is the curse which has fallen on my life.

If I had not known my father, if I had not loved him, if I had not closed his eyes in desert silence deeper than the silence of the grave, even if I could have buried and bewailed him duly, the common business of this world and the universal carelessness might have led me down the general track that leads to nothing.

Until my father fell and died I never dreamed that he could die. I knew that his mind was quite made up to see me safe in my new home, and then himself to start again for still remoter solitudes. And when his mind was thus made up, who had ever known him fail of it?

If ever a resolute man there was, that very man was my father. And he showed it now, in this the last and fatal act of his fatal life. "Captain, here I leave you all," he shouted to the leader of

our wagon train, at a place where a dark, narrow gorge departed from the moilsome mountain track. “My reasons are my own; let no man trouble himself about them. All my baggage I leave with you. I have paid my share of the venture, and shall claim it at Sacramento. My little girl and I will take this short-cut through the mountains.”

“General!” answered the leader of our train, standing up on his board in amazement. “Forgive and forget, Sir; forgive and forget. What is a hot word spoken hotly? If not for your own sake, at least come back for the sake of your young daughter.”

“A fair haven to you!” replied my father. He offered me his hand, and we were out of sight of all that wearisome, drearisome, uncompanionable company with whom, for eight long weeks at least, we had been dragging our rough way. I had known in a moment that it must be so, for my father never argued. Argument, to his mind, was a very nice amusement for the weak. My spirits rose as he swung his bear-skin bag upon his shoulder, and the last sound of the laboring caravan groaned in the distance, and the fresh air and the freedom of the mountains moved around us. It was the 29th of May—Oak-apple Day in England—and to my silly youth this vast extent of snowy mountains was a nice place for a cool excursion.

Moreover, from day to day I had been in most wretched anxiety, so long as we remained with people who could not allow for us. My father, by his calm reserve and dignity and largeness, had always, among European people, kept himself

secluded; but now in this rough life, so pent in trackless tracts, and pressed together by perpetual peril, every body's manners had been growing free and easy. Every man had been compelled to tell, as truly as he could, the story of his life thus far, to amuse his fellow-creatures—every man, I mean, of course, except my own poor father. Some told their stories every evening, until we were quite tired—although they were never the same twice over; but my father could never be coaxed to say a syllable more than, "I was born, and I shall die."

This made him very unpopular with the men, though all the women admired it; and if any rough fellow could have seen a sign of fear, the speaker would have been insulted. But his manner and the power of his look were such that, even after ardent spirits, no man saw fit to be rude to him. Nevertheless, there had always been the risk of some sad outrage.

"Erema," my father said to me, when the dust from the rear of the caravan was lost behind a cloud of rocks, and we two stood in the wilderness alone—"do you know, my own Erema, why I bring you from them?"

"Father dear, how should I know? You have done it, and it must be right."

"It is not for their paltry insults. Child, you know what I think all that. It is for you, my only child, that I am doing what now I do."

I looked up into his large, sad eyes without a word, in such a way that he lifted me up in his arms and kissed me, as if I were

a little child instead of a maiden just fifteen. This he had never done before, and it made me a little frightened. He saw it, and spoke on the spur of the thought, though still with one arm round me.

"Perhaps you will live to be thankful, my dear, that you had a stern, cold father. So will you meet the world all the better; and, little one, you have a rough world to meet."

For a moment I was quite at a loss to account for my father's manner; but now, in looking back, it is so easy to see into things. At the time I must have been surprised, and full of puzzled eagerness.

Not half so well can I recall the weakness, anguish, and exhaustion of body and spirit afterward. It may have been three days of wandering, or it may have been a week, or even more than that, for all that I can say for certain. Whether the time were long or short, it seemed as if it would never end. My father believed that he knew the way to the house of an old settler, at the western foot of the mountains, who had treated him kindly some years before, and with whom he meant to leave me until he had made arrangements elsewhere. If we had only gone straightway thither, night-fall would have found us safe beneath that hospitable roof.

My father was vexed, as I well remember, at coming, as he thought, in sight of some great landmark, and finding not a trace of it. Although his will was so very strong, his temper was good about little things, and he never began to abuse all the world because he had made a mistake himself.

"Erema," he said, "at this corner where we stand there ought to be a very large pine-tree in sight, or rather a great redwood-tree, at least twice as high as any tree that grows in Europe, or Africa even. From the plains it can be seen for a hundred miles or more. It stands higher up the mountainside than any other tree of even half its size, and that makes it so conspicuous. My eyes must be failing me, from all this glare; but it must be in sight. Can you see it now?"

"I see no tree of any kind whatever, but scrubby bushes and yellow tufts; and oh, father, I am so thirsty!"

"Naturally. But now look again. It stands on a ridge, the last ridge that bars the view of all the lowland. It is a very straight tree, and regular, like a mighty column, except that on the northern side the wind from the mountains has torn a gap in it. Are you sure that you can not see it—a long way off, but conspicuous?"

"Father, I am sure that I can not see any tree half as large as a broomstick. Far or near, I see no tree."

"Then my eyes are better than my memory. We must cast back for a mile or two; but it can not make much difference."

"Through the dust and the sand?" I began to say; but a glance from him stopped my murmuring. And the next thing I can call to mind must have happened a long time afterward.

Beyond all doubt, in this desolation, my father gave his life for mine. I did not know it at the time, nor had the faintest dream of it, being so young and weary-worn, and obeying him by instinct. It is a fearful thing to think of—now that I can think of it—but

to save my own little worthless life I must have drained every drop of water from his flat half-gallon jar. The water was hot and the cork-hole sandy, and I grumbled even while drinking it; and what must my father (who was dying all the while for a drop, but never took one)—what must he have thought of me?

But he never said a word, so far as I remember; and that makes it all the worse for me. We had strayed away into a dry, volcanic district of the mountains, where all the snow-rivers run out quite early; and of natural springs there was none forth-coming. All we had to guide us was a little traveler's compass (whose needle stuck fast on the pivot with sand) and the glaring sun, when he came to sight behind the hot, dry, driving clouds. The clouds were very low, and flying almost in our faces, like vultures sweeping down on us. To me they seemed to shriek over our heads at the others rushing after them. But my father said that they could make no sound, and I never contradicted him.

CHAPTER II
A PACIFIC SUNSET

At last we came to a place from which the great spread of the earth was visible. For a time—I can not tell how long—we had wholly lost ourselves, going up and down, and turning corners, without getting further. But my father said that we must come right, if we made up our minds to go long enough. We had been in among all shapes, and want of shapes, of dreariness, through and in and out of every thrup and thrum of weariness, scarcely hoping ever more to find our way out and discover memory of men for us, when all of a sudden we saw a grand sight. The day had been dreadfully hot and baffling, with sudden swirls of red dust arising, and driving the great drought into us. To walk had been worse than to drag one's way through a stubbly bed of sting-nettles. But now the quick sting of the sun was gone, and his power descending in the balance toward the flat places of the land and sea. And suddenly we looked forth upon an immeasurable spread of these.

We stood at the gate of the sandy range, which here, like a vast brown patch, disfigures the beauty of the sierra. On either side, in purple distance, sprang sky-piercing obelisks and vapor-mantled glaciers, spangled with bright snow, and shodden with eternal forest. Before us lay the broad, luxuriant plains of California,

checkered with more tints than any other piece of earth can show, sleeping in alluvial ease, and veined with soft blue waters. And through a gap in the brown coast range, at twenty leagues of distance, a light (so faint as to seem a shadow) hovered above the Pacific.

But none of all this grandeur touched our hearts except the water gleam. Parched with thirst, I caught my father's arm and tried to urge him on toward the blue enchantment of ecstatic living water. But, to my surprise, he staggered back, and his face grew as white as the distant snow. I managed to get him to a sandy ledge, with the help of his own endeavors, and there let him rest and try to speak, while my frightened heart throbbed over his.

"My little child," he said at last, as if we were fallen back ten years, "put your hand where I can feel it."

My hand all the while had been in his, and to let him know where it was, it moved. But cold fear stopped my talking.

"My child, I have not been kind to you," my father slowly spoke again, "but it has not been from want of love. Some day you will see all this, and some day you will pardon me."

He laid one heavy arm around me, and forgetting thirst and pain, with the last intensity of eyesight watched the sun departing. To me, I know not how, great awe was every where, and sadness. The conical point of the furious sun, which like a barb had pierced us, was broadening into a hazy disk, inefficient, but benevolent. Underneath him depth of night was waiting to come upward (after letting him fall through) and stain his track with

redness. Already the arms of darkness grew in readiness to receive him: his upper arc was pure and keen, but the lower was flaked with atmosphere; a glow of hazy light soon would follow, and one bright glimmer (addressed more to the sky than to the earth), and after that a broad, soft gleam; and after that how many a man should never see the sun again, and among them would be my father.

He, for the moment, resting there, with heavy light upon him, and the dark jaws of the mountain desert yawning wide behind him, and all the beautiful expanse of liberal earth before him—even so he seemed to me, of all the things in sight, the one that first would draw attention. His face was full of quiet grandeur and impressive calm, and the sad tranquillity which comes to those who know what human life is through continual human death. Although, in the matter of bodily strength, he was little past the prime of life, his long and abundant hair was white, and his broad and upright forehead marked with the meshes of the net of care. But drought and famine and long fatigue had failed even now to change or weaken the fine expression of his large, sad eyes. Those eyes alone would have made the face remarkable among ten thousand, so deep with settled gloom they were, and dark with fatal sorrow. Such eyes might fitly have told the grief of Adrastus, son of Gordias, who, having slain his own brother unwitting, unwitting slew the only son of his generous host and savior.

The pale globe of the sun hung trembling in the haze himself

had made. My father rose to see the last, and reared his tall form upright against the deepening background. He gazed as if the course of life lay vanishing below him, while level land and waters drew the breadth of shadow over them. Then the last gleam flowed and fled upon the face of ocean, and my father put his dry lips to my forehead, saying nothing.

His lips might well be dry, for he had not swallowed water for three days; but it frightened me to feel how cold they were, and even tremulous. "Let us run, let us run, my dear father!" I cried. "Delicious water! The dark falls quickly; but we can get there before dark. It is all down hill. Oh, do let us run at once!"

"Erema," he answered, with a quiet smile, "there is no cause now for hurrying, except that I must hurry to show you what you have to do, my child. For once, at the end of my life, I am lucky. We have escaped from that starving desert at a spot—at a spot where we can see—"

For a little while he could say no more, but sank upon the stony seat, and the hand with which he tried to point some distant landmark fell away. His face, which had been so pale before, became of a deadly whiteness, and he breathed with gasps of agony. I knelt before him and took his hands, and tried to rub the palms, and did whatever I could think of.

"Oh, father, father, you have starved yourself, and given every thing to me! What a brute I was to let you do it! But I did not know; I never knew! Please God to take me also!"

He could not manage to answer this, even if he understood it;

but he firmly lifted his arm again, and tried to make me follow it.

"What does it matter? Oh, never mind, never mind such, a wretch as I am! Father, only try to tell me what I ought to do for you."

"My child! my child!" were his only words; and he kept on saying, "My child! my child!" as if he liked the sound of it.

At what time of the night my father died I knew not then or afterward. It may have been before the moon came over the snowy mountains, or it may not have been till the worn-out stars in vain repelled the daybreak. All I know is that I ever strove to keep more near to him through the night, to cherish his failing warmth, and quicken the slow, laborious, harassed breath. From time to time he tried to pray to God for me and for himself; but every time his mind began to wander and to slip away, as if through want of practice. For the chills of many wretched years had deadened and benumbed his faith. He knew me, now and then, betwixt the conflict and the stupor; for more than once he muttered feebly, and as if from out a dream,

"Time for Erema to go on her way. Go on your way, and save your life; save your life, Erema."

There was no way for me to go, except on my knees before him. I took his hands, and made them lissome with a soft, light rubbing. I whispered into his ear my name, that he might speak once more to me; and when he could not speak, I tried to say what he would say to me.

At last, with a blow that stunned all words, it smote my stupid,

wandering mind that all I had to speak and smile to, all I cared to please and serve, the only one left to admire and love, lay here in my weak arms quite dead. And in the anguish of my sobbing, little things came home to me, a thousand little things that showed how quietly he had prepared for this, and provided for me only. Cold despair and self-reproach and strong rebellion dazed me, until I lay at my father's side, and slept with his dead hand in mine. There in the desert of desolation pious awe embraced me, and small phantasms of individual fear could not come nigh me.

By-and-by long shadows of morning crept toward me dismally, and the pallid light of the hills was stretched in weary streaks away from me. How I arose, or what I did, or what I thought, is nothing now. Such times are not for talking of. How many hearts of anguish lie forlorn, with none to comfort them, with all the joy of life died out, and all the fear of having yet to live, in front arising!

Young and weak, and wrong of sex for doing any valiance, long I lay by my father's body, wringing out my wretchedness. Thirst and famine now had flown into the opposite extreme; I seemed to loathe the thought of water, and the smell of food would have made me sick. I opened my father's knapsack, and a pang of new misery seized me. There lay nearly all his rations, which he had made pretense to eat as he gave me mine from time to time. He had starved himself; since he failed of his mark, and learned our risk of famishing, all his own food he

had kept for me, as well as his store of water. And I had done nothing but grumble and groan, even while consuming every thing. Compared with me, the hovering vultures might be considered angels.

When I found all this, I was a great deal too worn out to cry or sob. Simply to break down may be the purest mercy that can fall on truly hopeless misery. Screams of ravenous maws and flaps of fetid wings came close to me, and, fainting into the arms of death, I tried to save my father's body by throwing my own over it.

CHAPTER III
A STURDY COLONIST

For the contrast betwixt that dreadful scene and the one on which my dim eyes slowly opened, three days afterward, first I thank the Lord in heaven, whose gracious care was over me, and after Him some very simple members of humanity.

A bronze-colored woman, with soft, sad eyes, was looking at me steadfastly. She had seen that, under tender care, I was just beginning to revive, and being acquainted with many troubles, she had learned to succor all of them. This I knew not then, but felt that kindness was around me.

"Arauna, arauna, my shild," she said, in a strange but sweet and soothing voice, "you are with the good man in the safe, good house. Let old Suan give you the good food, my shild."

"Where is my father? Oh, show me my father?" I whispered faintly, as she raised me in the bed and held a large spoon to my lips.

"You shall—you shall; it is too very much Inglese; me tell you when have long Sunday time to think. My shild, take the good food from poor old Suan."

She looked at me with such beseeching eyes that, even if food had been loathsome to me, I could not have resisted her; whereas I was now in the quick-reviving agony of starvation. The Indian

woman fed me with far greater care than I was worth, and hushed me, with some soothing process, into another abyss of sleep.

More than a week passed by me thus, in the struggle between life and death, before I was able to get clear knowledge of any body or any thing. No one, in my wakeful hours, came into my little bedroom except this careful Indian nurse, who hushed me off to sleep whenever I wanted to ask questions. Suan Isco, as she was called, possessed a more than mesmeric power of soothing a weary frame to rest; and this was seconded, where I lay, by the soft, incessant cadence and abundant roar of water. Thus every day I recovered strength and natural impatience.

"The master is coming to see you, shild," Suan said to me one day, when I had sat up and done my hair, and longed to be down by the water-fall; "if, if—too much Inglese—old Suan say no more can now."

"If I am ready and able and willing! Oh, Suan, run and tell him not to lose one moment."

"No sure; Suan no sure at all," she answered, looking at me calmly, as if there were centuries yet to spare. "Suan no hurry; shild no hurry; master no hurry: come last of all."

"I tell you, Suan, I want to see him. And I am not accustomed to be kept waiting. My dear father insisted always—But oh, Suan, Suan, he is dead—I am almost sure of it."

"Him old man quite dead enough, and big hole dug in the land for him. Very good; more good than could be. Suan no more Inglese."

Well as I had known it long, a catching of the breath and hollow, helpless pain came through me, to meet in dry words thus the dread which might have been but a hovering dream. I turned my face to the wall, and begged her not to send the master in.

But presently a large, firm hand was laid on my shoulder softly, and turning sharply round, I beheld an elderly man looking down at me. His face was plain and square and solid, with short white curls on a rugged forehead, and fresh red cheeks, and a triple chin—fit base for remarkably massive jaws. His frame was in keeping with his face, being very large and powerful, though not of my father's commanding height. His dress and appearance were those of a working—and a really hard-working—man, sober, steadfast, and self-respecting; but what engaged my attention most was the frank yet shrewd gaze of deep-set eyes. I speak of things as I observed them later, for I could not pay much heed just then.

"'Tis a poor little missy," he said, with a gentle tone. "What things she hath been through! Will you take an old man's hand, my dear? Your father hath often taken it, though different from his rank of life. Sampson Gundry is my name, missy. Have you ever heard your father tell of it?"

"Many and many a time," I said, as I placed my hot little hand in his. "He never found more than one man true on earth, and it was you, Sir."

"Come, now," he replied, with his eyes for a moment sparkling at my warmth of words; "you must not have that in your young

head, missy. It leads to a miserable life. Your father hath always been unlucky—the most unlucky that ever I did know. And luck cometh out in nothing clearer than in the kind of folk we meet. But the Lord in heaven ordereth all. I speak like a poor heathen."

"Oh, never mind that!" I cried: "only tell me, were you in time to save—to save—" I could not bear to say what I wanted.

"In plenty of time, my dear; thanks to you. You must have fought when you could not fight: the real stuff, I call it. Your poor father lies where none can harm him. Come, missy, missy, you must not take on so. It is the best thing that could befall a man so bound up with calamity. It is what he hath prayed for for many a year—if only it were not for you. And now you are safe, and for sure he knows it, if the angels heed their business."

With these words he withdrew, and kindly sent Suan back to me, knowing that her soothing ways would help me more than argument. To my mind all things lay in deep confusion and abasement. Overcome with bodily weakness and with bitter self-reproach, I even feared that to ask any questions might show want of gratitude. But a thing of that sort could not always last, and before very long I was quite at home with the history of Mr. Gundry.

Solomon Gundry, of Mevagissey, in the county of Cornwall, in England, betook himself to the United States in the last year of the last century. He had always been a most upright man, as well as a first-rate fisherman; and his family had made a rule—as most respectable families at that time did—to run a nice cargo

of contraband goods not more than twice in one season. A highly querulous old lieutenant of the British navy (who had served under Nelson and lost both, arms, yet kept "the rheumatics" in either stump) was appointed, in an evil hour, to the Cornish coast-guard; and he never rested until he had caught all the best county families smuggling. Through this he lost his situation, and had to go to the workhouse; nevertheless, such a stir had been roused that (to satisfy public opinion) they made a large sacrifice of inferior people, and among them this Solomon Gundry. Now the Gundries had long been a thickset race, and had furnished some champion wrestlers; and Solomon kept to the family stamp in the matter of obstinacy. He made a bold mark at the foot of a bond for 150 pounds; and with no other sign than that, his partner in their stanch herring-smack (the Good Hope, of Mevagissey) allowed him to make sail across the Atlantic with all he cared for.

This Cornish partner deserved to get all his money back; and so he did, together with good interest. Solomon Gundry throve among a thrifty race at Boston; he married a sweet New England lass, and his eldest son was Sampson. Sampson, in the prime of life, and at its headstrong period, sought the far West, overland, through not much less of distance, and through even more of danger, than his English father had gone through. His name was known on the western side of the mighty chain of mountains before Colonel Fremont was heard of there, and before there was any gleam of gold on the lonely sunset frontage.

Here Sampson Gundry lived by tillage of the nobly fertile

soil ere Sacramento or San Francisco had any name to speak of. And though he did not show regard for any kind of society, he managed to have a wife and son, and keep them free from danger. But (as it appears to me the more, the more I think of every thing) no one must assume to be aside the reach of Fortune because he has gathered himself so small that she should not care to strike at him. At any rate, good or evil powers smote Sampson Gundry heavily.

First he lost his wife, which was a "great denial" to him. She fell from a cliff while she was pegging out the linen, and the substance of her frame prevented her from ever getting over it. And after that he lost his son, his only son—for all the Gundries were particular as to quality; and the way in which he lost his son made it still more sad for him.

A reputable and valued woman had disappeared in a hasty way from a cattle-place down the same side of the hills. The desire of the Indians was to enlarge her value and get it. There were very few white men as yet within any distance to do good; but Sampson Gundry vowed that, if the will of the Lord went with him, that woman should come back to her family without robbing them of sixpence. To this intent he started with a company of some twenty men—white or black or middle-colored (according to circumstances). He was their captain, and his son Elijah their lieutenant. Elijah had only been married for a fortnight, but was full of spirit, and eager to fight with enemies; and he seems to have carried this too far; for all that came back to his poor bride

was a lock of his hair and his blessing. He was buried in a bed of lava on the western slope of Shasta, and his wife died in her confinement, and was buried by the Blue River.

It was said at the time and long afterward that Elijah Gundry —thus cut short—was the finest and noblest young man to be found from the mountains to the ocean. His father, in whose arms he died, led a sad and lonely life for years, and scarcely even cared (although of Cornish and New England race) to seize the glorious chance of wealth which lay at his feet beseeching him. By settlement he had possessed himself of a large and fertile district, sloping from the mountain-foot along the banks of the swift Blue River, a tributary of the San Joaquin. And this was not all; for he also claimed the ownership of the upper valley, the whole of the mountain gorge and spring head, whence that sparkling water flows. And when that fury of gold-digging in 1849 arose, very few men could have done what he did without even thinking twice of it.

For Sampson Gundry stood, like a bull, on the banks of his own river, and defied the worst and most desperate men of all nations to pollute it. He had scarcely any followers or steadfast friends to back him; but his fame for stern courage was clear and strong, and his bodily presence most manifest. Not a shovel was thrust nor a cradle rocked in the bed of the Blue River.

But when a year or two had passed, and all the towns and villages, and even hovels and way-side huts, began to clink with money, Mr. Gundry gradually recovered a wholesome desire to

have some. For now his grandson Ephraim was growing into biped shape, and having lost his mother when he first came into the world, was sure to need the more natural and maternal nutriment of money.

Therefore Sampson Gundry, though he would not dig for gold, wrought out a plan which he had long thought of. Nature helped him with all her powers of mountain, forest, and headlong stream. He set up a saw-mill, and built it himself; and there was no other to be found for twelve degrees of latitude and perhaps a score of longitude.

CHAPTER IV
THE "KING OF THE MOUNTAINS."

If I think, and try to write forever with the strongest words, I can not express to any other mind a thousandth part of the gratitude which was and is, and ought to be forever, in my own poor mind toward those who were so good to me. From time to time it is said (whenever any man with power of speech or fancy gets some little grievances) that all mankind are simply selfish, miserly, and miserable. To contradict that saying needs experience even larger, perhaps, than that which has suggested it; and this I can not have, and therefore only know that I have not found men or women behave at all according to that view of them.

Whether Sampson Gundry owed any debt, either of gratitude or of loyalty, to my father, I did not ask; and he seemed to be (like every one else) reserved and silent as to my father's history. But he always treated me as if I belonged to a rank of life quite different from and much above his own. For instance, it was long before he would allow me to have my meals at the table of the household.

But as soon as I began in earnest to recover from starvation, loss, and loneliness, my heart was drawn to this grand old man,

who had seen so many troubles. He had been here and there in the world so much, and dealt with so many people, that the natural frankness of his mind was sharpened into caution. But any weak and helpless person still could get the best of him; and his shrewdness certainly did not spring from any form of bitterness. He was rough in his ways sometimes, and could not bear to be contradicted when he was sure that he was right, which generally happened to him. But above all things he had one very great peculiarity, to my mind highly vexatious, because it seemed so unaccountable. Sampson Gundry had a very low opinion of feminine intellect. He never showed this contempt in any unpleasant way, and indeed he never, perhaps, displayed it in any positive sayings. But as I grew older and began to argue, sure I was that it was there; and it always provoked me tenfold as much by seeming to need no assertion, but to stand as some great axiom.

The other members of the household were his grandson Ephraim (or "Firm" Gundry), the Indian woman Suan Isco, and a couple of helps, of race or nation almost unknown to themselves. Suan Isco belonged to a tribe of respectable Black Rock Indians, and had been the wife of a chief among them, and the mother of several children. But Klamath Indians, enemies of theirs (who carried off the lady of the cattle ranch, and afterward shot Elijah), had Suan Isco in their possession, having murdered her husband and children, and were using her as a mere beast of burden, when Sampson Gundry fell on them. He, with his followers,

being enraged at the cold-blooded death of Elijah, fell on those miscreants to such purpose that women and children alone were left to hand down their bad propensities.

But the white men rescued and brought away the stolen wife of the stockman, and also the widow of the Black Rock chief. She was in such poor condition and so broken-hearted that none but the finest humanity would have considered her worth a quarter of the trouble of her carriage. But she proved to be worth it a thousandfold; and Sawyer Gundry (as now he was called) knew by this time all the value of uncultivated gratitude. And her virtues were so many that it took a long time to find them out, for she never put them forward, not knowing whether they were good or bad.

Until I knew these people, and the pure depth of their kindness, it was a continual grief to me to be a burden upon them. But when I came to understand them and their simple greatness, the only thing I was ashamed of was my own mistrust of them. Not that I expected ever that any harm would be done to me, only that I knew myself to have no claim on any one.

One day, when I was fit for nothing but to dwell on trouble, Sampson Gundry's grandson "Firm"—as he was called for Ephraim—ran up the stairs to the little room where I was sitting by myself.

"Miss Rema, will you come with us?" he said, in his deep, slow style of speech. "We are going up the mountain, to haul down the great tree to the mill."

"To be sure I will come," I answered, gladly. "What great tree is it, Mr. Ephraim?"

"The largest tree any where near here—the one we cut down last winter. Ten days it took to cut it down. If I could have saved it, it should have stood. But grandfather did it to prove his rights. We shall have a rare job to lead it home, and I doubt if we can tackle it. I thought you might like to see us try."

In less than a minute I was ready, for the warmth and softness of the air made cloak or shawl unbearable. But when I ran down to the yard of the mill, Mr. Gundry, who was giving orders, came up and gave me an order too.

"You must not go like this, my dear. We have three thousand feet to go upward. The air will be sharp up there, and I doubt if we shall be home by night-fall. Run, Suan, and fetch the young lady's cloak, and a pair of thicker boots for change."

Suan Isco never ran. That manner of motion was foreign to her, at least as we accomplish it. When speed was required, she attained it by increased length of stride and great vigor of heel. In this way she conquered distance steadily, and with very little noise.

The air, and the light, and the beauty of the mountains were a sudden joy to me. In front of us all strode Sampson Gundry, clearing all tangles with a short, sharp axe, and mounting steep places as if twoscore were struck off his threescore years and five. From time to time he turned round to laugh, or see that his men and trained bullocks were right; and then, as his bright eyes

met my dark ones, he seemed to be sorry for the noise he made. On the other hand, I was ashamed of damping any one's pleasure by being there.

But I need not have felt any fear about this. Like all other children, I wrapped myself up too much in my own importance, and behaved as if my state of mind was a thing to be considered. But the longer we rose through the freedom and the height, the lighter grew the heart of every one, until the thick forest of pines closed round us, and we walked in a silence that might be felt.

Hence we issued forth upon the rough bare rock, and after much trouble with the cattle, and some bruises, stood panting on a rugged cone, or crest, which had once been crowned with a Titan of a tree. The tree was still there, but not its glory; for, alas! the mighty trunk lay prostrate—a grander column than ever was or will be built by human hands. The tapering shaft stretched out of sight for something like a furlong, and the bulk of the butt rose over us so that we could not see the mountains. Having never seen any such tree before, I must have been amazed if I had been old enough to comprehend it.

Sampson Gundry, large as he was, and accustomed to almost every thing, collected his men and the whole of his team on the ground-floor or area of the stump before he would say any thing. Here we all looked so sadly small that several of the men began to laugh; the bullocks seemed nothing but raccoons or beavers to run on the branches or the fibres of the tree; and the chains and the shackles, and the blocks and cranes, and all the rest of the

things they meant to use, seemed nothing whatever, or at all to be considered, except as a spider's web upon this tree.

The sagacious bullocks, who knew quite well what they were expected to do, looked blank. Some rubbed their horns into one another's sadly, and some cocked their tails because they felt that they could not be called upon to work. The light of the afternoon sun came glancing along the vast pillar, and lit its dying hues —cinnamon, purple, and glabrous red, and soft gray where the lichens grew.

Every body looked at Mr. Gundry, and he began to cough a little, having had lately some trouble with his throat. Then in his sturdy manner he spoke the truth, according to his nature. He set his great square shoulders against the butt of the tree, and delivered himself:

"Friends and neighbors, and hands of my own, I am taken in here, and I own to it. It serves me right for disbelieving what my grandson, Firm Gundry, said. I knew that the tree was a big one, of course, as every body else does; but till you see a tree laid upon earth you get no grip of his girth, no more than you do of a man till he lieth a corpse. At the time of felling I could not come anigh him, by reason of an accident; and I had some words with this boy about it, which kept me away ever since that time. Firm, you were right, and I was wrong. It was a real shame, now I see it, to throw down the 'King of the Mountains.' But, for all that, being down, we must use him. He shall be sawn into fifty-foot lengths. And I invite you all to come again, for six or seven good

turns at him."

At the hearing of this, a cheer arose, not only for the Sawyer's manly truth, but also for his hospitality; because on each of these visits to the mountain he was the host, and his supplies were good. But before the descent with the empty teams began, young Ephraim did what appeared to me to be a gallant and straightforward thing. He stood on the chine of the fallen monster, forty feet above us, having gained the post of vantage by activity and strength, and he asked if he might say a word or two.

"Say away, lad," cried his grandfather, supposing, perhaps, in his obstinate way (for truly he was very obstinate), that his grandson was going now to clear himself from art or part in the murder of that tree—an act which had roused indignation over a hundred leagues of lowland.

"Neighbors," said Firm, in a clear young voice, which shook at first with diffidence, "we all have to thank you, more than I can tell, for coming to help us with this job. It was a job which required to be done for legal reasons which I do not understand, but no doubt they were good ones. For that we have my grandfather's word; and no one, I think, will gainsay it. Now, having gone so far, we will not be beaten by it, or else we shall not be Americans."

These simple words were received with great applause; and an orator, standing on the largest stump to be found even in America, delivered a speech which was very good to hear, but need not now be repeated. And Mr. Gundry's eyes were moist

with pleasure at his grandson's conduct.

"Firm knoweth the right thing to do," he said; "and like a man he doeth it. But whatever aileth you, Miss Rema, and what can 'e see in the distance yonner? Never mind, my dear, then. Tell me by-and-by, when none of these folk is 'longside of us."

But I could not bear to tell him, till he forced it from me under pain of his displeasure. I had spied on the sky-line far above us, in the desert track of mountain, the very gap in which my father stood and bade me seek this landmark. His memory was true, and his eyesight also; but the great tree had been felled. The death of the "King of the Mountains" had led to the death of the king of mankind, so far as my little world contained one.

CHAPTER V
UNCLE SAM

The influence of the place in which I lived began to grow on me. The warmth of the climate and the clouds of soft and fertile dust were broken by the refreshing rush of water and the clear soft green of leaves. We had fruit trees of almost every kind, from the peach to the amber cherry, and countless oaks by the side of the river—not large, but most fantastic. Here I used to sit and wonder, in a foolish, childish way, whether on earth there was any other child so strangely placed as I was. Of course there were thousands far worse off, more desolate and destitute, but was there any more thickly wrapped in mystery and loneliness?

A wanderer as I had been for years, together with my father, change of place had not supplied the knowledge which flows from lapse of time. Faith, and warmth, and trust in others had not been dashed out of me by any rude blows of the world, as happens with unlucky children huddled together in large cities. My father had never allowed me much acquaintance with other children; for six years he had left me with a community of lay sisters, in a little town of Languedoc, where I was the only pupil, and where I was to remain as I was born, a simple heretic. Those sisters were very good to me, and taught me as much as I could take of secular accomplishment. And it was a bitter day for me

when I left them for America.

For during those six years I had seen my father at long intervals, and had almost forgotten the earlier days when I was always with him. I used to be the one little comfort of his perpetual wanderings, when I was a careless child, and said things to amuse him. Not that he ever played with me any more than he played with any thing; but I was the last of his seven children, and he liked to watch me grow. I never knew it, I never guessed it, until he gave his life for mine; but, poor little common thing as I was, I became his only tie to earth. Even to me he was never loving, in the way some fathers are. He never called me by pet names, nor dandled me on his knee, nor kissed me, nor stroked down my hair and smiled. Such things I never expected of him, and therefore never missed them; I did not even know that happy children always have them.

But one thing I knew, which is not always known to happier children: I had the pleasure of knowing my own name. My name was an English one—Castlewood—and by birth I was an English girl, though of England I knew nothing, and at one time spoke and thought most easily in French. But my longing had always been for England, and for the sound of English voices and the quietude of English ways. In the chatter and heat and drought of South France some faint remembrance of a greener, cooler, and more silent country seemed to touch me now and then. But where in England I had lived, or when I had left that country, or whether I had relations there, and why I was doomed to be

a foreign girl—all these questions were but as curling wisps of cloud on memory's sky.

Of such things (much as I longed to know a good deal more about them) I never had dared to ask my father; nor even could I, in a roundabout way, such as clever children have, get second-hand information. In the first place, I was not a clever child; for the next point, I never had underhand skill; and finally, there was no one near me who knew any thing about me. Like all other girls—and perhaps the very same tendency is to be found in boys—I had strong though hazy ideas of caste. The noble sense of equality, fraternity, and so on, seems to come later in life than childhood, which is an age of ambition. I did not know who in the world I was, but felt quite sure of being somebody.

One day, when the great tree had been sawn into lengths, and with the aid of many teams brought home, and the pits and the hoisting tackle were being prepared and strengthened to deal with it, Mr. Gundry, being full of the subject, declared that he would have his dinner in the mill yard. He was anxious to watch, without loss of time, the settlement of some heavy timbers newly sunk in the river's bed, to defend the outworks of the mill. Having his good leave to bring him his pipe, I found him sitting upon a bench with a level fixed before him, and his empty plate and cup laid by, among a great litter of tools and things. He was looking along the level with one eye shut, and the other most sternly intent; but when I came near he rose and raised his broad pith hat, and made me think that I was not interrupting him.

"Here is your pipe, Uncle Sam," I said; for, in spite of all his formal ways, I would not be afraid of him. I had known him now quite long enough to be sure he was good and kind. And I knew that the world around these parts was divided into two hemispheres, the better half being of those who loved, and the baser half made of those who hated, Sawyer Sampson Gundry.

"What a queer world it is!" said Mr. Gundry, accepting his pipe to consider that point. "Who ever would have dreamed, fifty years agone, that your father's daughter would ever have come with a pipe to light for my father's son?"

"Uncle Sam," I replied, as he slowly began to make those puffs which seem to be of the highest essence of pleasure, and wisps of blue smoke flitted through his white eyebrows and among the snowy curls of hair—"dear Uncle Sam, I am sure that it would be an honor to a princess to light a pipe for a man like you."

"Miss Rema, I should rather you would talk no nonsense," he answered, very shortly, and he set his eye along his level, as if I had offended him. Not knowing how to assert myself and declare that I had spoken my honest thoughts, I merely sat down on the bench and waited for him to speak again to me. But he made believe to be very busy, and scarcely to know that I was there. I had a great mind to cry, but resolved not to do it.

"Why, how is this? What's the matter?" he exclaimed at last, when I had been watching the water so long that I sighed to know where it was going to. "Why, missy, you look as if you had never a friend in all the wide world left."

"Then I must look very ungrateful," I said; "for at any rate I have one, and a good one."

"And don't you know of any one but me, my dear?"

"You and Suan Isco and Firm—those are all I have any knowledge of."

"'Tis a plenty—to my mind, almost too many. My plan is to be a good friend to all, but not let too many be friends with me. Rest you quite satisfied with three, Miss Rema. I have lived a good many years, and I never had more than three friends worth a puff of my pipe."

"But one's own relations, Uncle Sam—people quite nearly related to us: it is impossible for them to be unkind, you know."

"Do I, my dear? Then I wish that I did. Except one's own father and mother, there is not much to be hoped for out of them. My own brother took a twist against me because I tried to save him from ruin; and if any man ever wished me ill, he did. And I think that your father had the same tale to tell. But there! I know nothing whatever about that."

"Now you do, Mr. Gundry; I am certain that you do, and beg you to tell me, or rather I demand it. I am old enough now, and I am certain my dear father would have wished me to know every thing. Whatever it was, I am sure that he was right; and until I know that, I shall always be the most miserable of the miserable."

The Sawyer looked at me as if he could not enter into my meaning, and his broad, short nose and quiet eyes were beset with wrinkles of inquiry. He quite forgot his level and his great post in

the river, and tilted back his ancient hat, and let his pipe rest on his big brown arm. "Lord bless me!" he said, "what a young gal you are! Or, at least, what a young Miss Rema. What good can you do, miss, by making of a rout? Here you be in as quiet a place as you could find, and all of us likes and pities you. Your father was a wise man to settle you here in this enlightened continent. Let the doggoned old folk t'other side of the world think out their own flustrations. A female young American you are now, and a very fine specimen you will grow. 'Tis the finest thing to be on all God's earth."

"No, Mr. Gundry, I am an English girl, and I mean to be an Englishwoman. The Americans may be more kind and generous, and perhaps my father thought so, and brought me here for that reason. And I may be glad to come back to you again when I have done what I am bound to do. Remember that I am the last of seven children, and do not even know where the rest are buried."

"Now look straight afore you, missy. What do you see yonner?" The Sawyer was getting a little tired, perhaps, of this long interruption.

"I see enormous logs, and a quantity of saws, and tools I don't even know the names of. Also I see a bright, swift river."

"But over here, missy, between them two oaks. What do you please to see there, Miss Rema?"

"What I see there, of course, is a great saw-mill."

"But it wouldn't have been 'of course,' and it wouldn't have been at all, if I had spent all my days a-dwelling on the injuries of

my family. Could I have put that there unekaled sample of water-power and human ingenuity together without laboring hard for whole months of a stretch, except upon the Sabbath, and laying awake night after night, and bending all my intellect over it? And could I have done that, think you now, if my heart was a-mooning upon family wrongs, and this, that, and the other?"

Here Sampson Gundry turned full upon me, and folded his arms, and spread his great chin upon his deer-skin apron, and nodded briskly with his deep gray eyes, surveying me in triumph. To his mind, that mill was the wonder of the world, and any argument based upon it, with or without coherence, was, like its circular saws, irresistible. And yet he thought that women can not reason! However, I did not say another word just then, but gave way to him, as behooved a child. And not only that, but I always found him too good to be argued with—too kind, I mean, and large of heart, and wedded to his own peculiar turns. There was nothing about him that one could dislike, or strike fire at, and be captious; and he always proceeded with such pity for those who were opposed to him that they always knew they must be wrong, though he was too polite to tell them so. And he had such a pleasant, paternal way of looking down into one's little thoughts when he put on his spectacles, that to say any more was to hazard the risk of ungrateful inexperience.

CHAPTER VI
A BRITISHER

The beautiful Blue River came from the jagged depths of the mountains, full of light and liveliness. It had scarcely run six miles from its source before it touched our mill-wheel; but in that space and time it had gathered strong and copious volume. The lovely blue of the water (like the inner tint of a glacier) was partly due to its origin, perhaps, and partly to the rich, soft tone of the granite sand spread under it. Whatever the cause may have been, the river well deserved its title.

It was so bright and pure a blue, so limpid and pellucid, that it even seemed to out-vie the tint of the sky which it reflected, and the myriad sparks of sunshine on it twinkled like a crystal rain. Plodding through the parched and scorching dust of the mountain-foot, through the stifling vapor and the blinding, ochreous glare, the traveler suddenly came upon this cool and calm delight. It was not to be descried afar, for it lay below the level, and the oaks and other trees of shelter scarcely topped the narrow comb. There was no canyon, such as are—and some of them known over all the world—both to the north and south of it. The Blue River did not owe its birth to any fierce convulsion, but sparkled on its cheerful way without impending horrors. Standing here as a child, and thinking, from the manner of

my father, that strong men never wept nor owned the conquest of emotion, I felt sometimes a fool's contempt for the gushing transport of brave men. For instance, I have seen a miner, or a tamer of horses, or a rough fur-hunter, or (perhaps the bravest of all) a man of science and topography, jaded, worn, and nearly dead with drought and dearth and choking, suddenly, and beyond all hope, strike on this buried Eden. And then he dropped on his knees and spread his starved hands upward, if he could, and thanked the God who made him, till his head went round, and who knows what remembrance of loved ones came to him? And then, if he had any moisture left, he fell to a passion of weeping.

In childish ignorance I thought that this man weakly degraded himself, and should have been born a woman. But since that time I have truly learned that the bravest of men are those who feel their Maker's Land most softly, and are not ashamed to pay the tribute of their weakness to Him.

Living, as we did, in a lonely place, and yet not far from a track along the crest of the great Californian plain from Sacramento southward, there was scarcely a week which did not bring us some traveler needing comfort. Mr. Gundry used to be told that if he would set up a rough hotel, or house of call for cattle-drovers, miners, loafers, and so on, he might turn twice the money he could ever make by his thriving saw-mill. But he only used to laugh, and say that nature had made him too honest for that; and he never thought of charging any thing for his hospitality, though if a rich man left a gold piece, or even a nugget, upon a shelf,

as happened very often, Sawyer Gundry did not disdain to set it aside for a rainy day. And one of his richest or most lavish guests arrived on my account, perhaps.

It happened when daylight was growing shorter, and the red heat of the earth was gone, and the snow-line of distant granite peaks had crept already lower, and the chattering birds that spent their summer in our band of oak-trees were beginning to find their food get short, and to prime swift wings for the lowland; and I, having never felt bitter cold, was trembling at what I heard of it. For now it was clear that I had no choice but to stay where I was for the present, and be truly thankful to God and man for having the chance of doing so. For the little relics of my affairs—so far as I had any—had taken much time in arrangement, perhaps because it was so hard to find them. I knew nothing, except about my own little common wardrobe, and could give no information about the contents of my father's packages. But these, by dint of perseverance on the part of Ephraim (who was very keen about all rights), had mainly been recovered, and Mr. Gundry had done the best that could be done concerning them. Whatever seemed of a private nature, or likely to prove important, had been brought home to Blue River Mills; the rest had been sold, and had fetched large prices, unless Mr. Gundry enlarged them.

He more than enlarged, he multiplied them, as I found out long afterward, to make me think myself rich and grand, while a beggar upon his bounty. I had never been accustomed to think of money, and felt some little contempt for it—not, indeed, a lofty

hatred, but a careless wonder why it seemed to be always thought of. It was one of the last things I ever thought of; and those who were waiting for it were—until I got used to them—obliged in self-duty to remind me.

This, however, was not my fault. I never dreamed of wronging them. But I had earned no practical knowledge of the great world any where, much though I had wandered about, according to vague recollections. The duty of paying had never been mine; that important part had been done for me. And my father had such a horror always of any growth of avarice that he never gave me sixpence.

And now, when I heard upon every side continual talk of money, from Suan Isco upward, I thought at first that the New World must be different from the Old one, and that the gold mines in the neighborhood must have made them full of it; and once or twice I asked Uncle Sam; but he only nodded his head, and said that it was the practice every where. And before very long I began to perceive that he did not exaggerate.

Nothing could prove this point more clearly than the circumstance above referred to—the arrival of a stranger, for the purpose of bribing even Uncle Sam himself. This happened in the month of November, when the passes were beginning to be blocked with snow, and those of the higher mountain tracts had long been overwhelmed with it. On this particular day the air was laden with gray, oppressive clouds, threatening a heavy downfall, and instead of faring forth, as usual, to my beloved

river, I was kept in-doors, and even up stairs, by a violent snow-headache. This is a crushing weight of pain, which all new-comers, or almost all, are obliged to endure, sometimes for as much as eight-and-forty hours, when the first great snow of the winter is breeding, as they express it, overhead. But I was more lucky than most people are; for after about twelve hours of almost intolerable throbbing, during which the sweetest sound was odious, and the idea of food quite loathsome, the agony left me, and a great desire for something to eat succeeded. Suan Isco, the kindest of the kind, was gone down stairs at last, for which I felt ungrateful gratitude—because she had been doing her best to charm away my pain by low, monotonous Indian ditties, which made it ten times worse; and yet I could not find heart to tell her so.

Now it must have been past six o'clock in the evening of the November day when the avalanche slid off my head, and I was able to lift it. The light of the west had been faint, and was dead; though often it used to prolong our day by the backward glance of the ocean. With pangs of youthful hunger, but a head still weak and dazy, I groped my way in the dark through the passage and down the stairs of redwood.

At the bottom, where a railed landing was, and the door opened into the house-room, I was surprised to find that, instead of the usual cheerful company enjoying themselves by the fire-light, there were only two people present. The Sawyer sat stiffly in his chair of state, delaying even the indulgence of his pipe,

and having his face set sternly, as I had never before beheld it. In the visitor's corner, as we called it, where people sat to dry themselves, there was a man, and only one.

Something told me that I had better keep back and not disturb them. The room was not in its usual state of comfort and hospitality. Some kind of meal had been made at the table, as always must be in these parts; but not of the genial, reckless sort which random travelers carried on without any check from the Sawyer. For he of all men ever born in a civilized age was the finest host, and a guest beneath his roof was sacred as a lady to a knight. Hence it happened that I was much surprised. Proper conduct almost compelled me to withdraw; but curiosity made me take just one more little peep, perhaps. Looking back at these things now, I can not be sure of every thing; and indeed if I could, I must have an almost supernatural memory. But I remember many things; and the headache may have cleared my mind.

The stranger who had brought Mr. Gundry's humor into such stiff condition was sitting in the corner, a nook where light and shadow made an eddy. He seemed to be perfectly unconcerned about all the tricks of the hearth flame, presenting as he did a most solid face for any light to play upon. To me it seemed to be a weather-beaten face of a bluff and resolute man, the like of which we attribute to John Bull. At any rate, he was like John Bull in one respect: he was sturdy and square, and fit to hold his own with any man.

Strangers of this sort had come (as Englishmen rove every

where), and been kindly welcomed by Uncle Sam, who, being of recent English blood, had a kind of hankering after it, and would almost rather have such at his board than even a true-born American; and infinitely more welcome were they than Frenchman, Spaniard, or German, or any man not to be distinguished, as was the case with some of them. Even now it was clear that the Sawyer had not grudged any tokens of honor, for the tall, square, brazen candlesticks, of Boston make, were on the table, and very little light they gave. The fire, however, was grandly roaring of stub-oak and pine antlers, and the black grill of the chimney bricks was fringed with lifting filaments. It was a rich, ripe light, affording breadth and play for shadow; and the faces of the two men glistened, and darkened in their creases.

I was dressed in black, and could not be seen, though I could see them so clearly; and I doubted whether to pass through, upon my way to the larder, or return to my room and starve a little longer; for I did not wish to interrupt, and had no idea of listening. But suddenly I was compelled to stop; and to listen became an honest thing, when I knew what was spoken of—or, at any rate, I did it.

"Castlewood, Master Colonist; Castlewood is the name of the man that I have come to ask about. And you will find it worth your while to tell me all you know of him." Thus spoke the Englishman sitting in the corner; and he seemed to be certain of producing his effect.

"Wal," said Uncle Sam, assuming what all true Britons believe

to be the universal Yankee tone, while I knew that he was laughing in his sleeve, "Squire, I guess that you may be right. Considerations of that 'ere kind desarves to be considered of."

"Just so. I knew that you must see it," the stranger continued, bravely. "A stiff upper lip, as you call it here, is all very well to begin with. But all you enlightened members of the great republic know what is what. It will bring you more than ten years' income of your saw-mill, and farm, and so on, to deal honestly with me for ten minutes. No more beating about the bush and fencing with me, as you have done. Now can you see your own interest?"

"I never were reckoned a fool at that. Squire, make tracks, and be done with it."

"Then, Master Colonist, or Colonel—for I believe you are all colonels here—your task is very simple. We want clear proof, sworn properly and attested duly, of the death of a villain—George Castlewood, otherwise the Honorable George Castlewood, otherwise Lord Castlewood: a man who murdered his own father ten years ago this November: a man committed for trial for the crime, but who bribed his jailers and escaped, and wandered all over the Continent. What is that noise? Have you got rats?"

"Plenty of foreign rats, and native 'coons, and skunks, and other varmint. Wal, Squire, go on with it."

The voice of Uncle Sam was stern, and his face full of rising fury, as I, who had made that noise in my horror, tried to hush my heart with patience.

"The story is well known," continued the stranger: "we need make no bones of it. George Castlewood went about under a curse—"

"Not quite so loud, Squire, if you please. My household is not altogether seasoned."

"And perhaps you have got the young lady somewhere. I heard a report to that effect. But here you think nothing of a dozen murders. Now, Gundry, let us have no squeamishness. We only want justice, and we can pay for it. Ten thousand dollars I am authorized to offer for a mere act of duty on your part. We have an extradition treaty. If the man had been alive, we must have had him. But as he has cheated the hangman by dying, we can only see his grave and have evidence. And all well-disposed people must rejoice to have such a quiet end of it. For the family is so well known, you see."

"I see," Mr. Gundry answered, quietly, laying a finger on his lips. "Guess you want something more than that, though, Squire. Is there nothing more than the grave to oblige a noble Britisher with?"

"Yes, Colonel; we want the girl as well. We know that she was with him in that caravan, or wagon train, or whatever you please to call it. We know that you have made oath of his death, produced his child, and obtained his trunks, and drawn his share in the insurance job. Your laws must be queer to let you do such things. In England it would have taken at least three years, and cost a deal more than the things were worth, even without

a Chancery suit. However, of his papers I shall take possession; they can be of no earthly use to you."

"To be sure. And possession of his darter too, without so much as a Chancery suit. But what is to satisfy me, Squire, agin goin' wrong in this little transaction?"

"I can very soon satisfy you," said the stranger, "as to their identity. Here is their full, particular, and correct description—names, weights, and colors of the parties."

With a broad grin at his own exquisite wit, the bluff man drew forth his pocket-book, and took out a paper, which he began to smooth on his knee quite leisurely. Meanwhile, in my hiding-place, I was trembling with terror and indignation. The sense of eavesdropping was wholly lost, in that of my own jeopardy. I must know what was arranged about me; for I felt such a hatred and fear of that stranger that sooner than be surrendered to him I would rush back to my room and jump out of the window, and trust myself to the trackless forest and the snowy night. I was very nearly doing so, but just had sense enough to wait and hear what would be said of me. So I lurked in the darkness, behind the rails, while the stranger read slowly and pompously.

CHAPTER VII
DISCOMFITURE

The Englishman drew forth a double eyeglass from a red velvet waistcoat, and mounting it on his broad nose, came nearer to get the full light of the candles. I saw him as clearly as I could wish, and, indeed, a great deal too clearly; for the more I saw of the man, the more I shrank from the thought of being in his power. Not that he seemed to be brutal or fierce, but selfish, and resolute, and hard-hearted, and scornful of lofty feelings. Short dust-colored hair and frizzly whiskers framed his large, thick-featured face, and wearing no mustache, he showed the clumsy sneer of a wide, coarse mouth. I watched him with all my eyes, because of his tone of authority about myself. He might even be my guardian or my father's nearest relation—though he seemed to be too ill-bred for that.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Colonel," he went on, in a patronizing tone, such as he had assumed throughout. "Here it is. Now prick your ears up, and see if these candid remarks apply. I am reading from a printed form, you see:

"'George Castlewood is forty-eight years old, but looks perhaps ten years older. His height is over six feet two, and he does not stoop or slouch at all. His hair is long and abundant, but white; his eyes are dark, piercing, and gloomy. His features are

fine, and of Italian cast, but stern, morose, and forbidding, and he never uses razor. On the back of his left hand, near the wrist, there is a broad scar. He dresses in half-mourning always, and never wears any jewelry, but strictly shuns all society, and prefers uncivilized regions. He never stays long in any town, and follows no occupation, though his aspect and carriage are military, as he has been a cavalry officer. From time to time he has been heard of in Europe, Asia, and Africa, and is now believed to be in America.

"'His only surviving child, a girl of about fifteen, has been seen with him. She is tall and slight and very straight, and speaks French better than English. Her hair is very nearly black, and her eyes of unusual size and lustre. She is shy, and appears to have been kept under, and she has a timid smile. Whether she knows of her father's crime or not is quite uncertain; but she follows him like a dog almost.'

"There now, Colonel," cried the Englishman, as he folded the paper triumphantly; "most of that came from my information, though I never set eyes upon the child. Does the cap fit or not, Brother Jonathan?"

Mr. Gundry was leaning back in his own corner, with a favorite pipe, carved by himself, reposing on his waistcoat. And being thus appealed to, he looked up and rubbed his eyes as if he had been dozing, though he never had been more wide awake, as I, who knew his attitudes, could tell. And my eyes filled with tears of love and shame, for I knew by the mere turn of his chin

that he never would surrender me.

"Stranger," he said, in a most provoking drawl, "a hard day's work tells its tale on me, you bet. You do read so bootiful, you read me hard asleep. And the gutturals of that furrin English is always a little hard to catch. Mought I trouble you just to go through it again? You likes the sound of your own voice; and no blame to you, being such a swate un."

The Englishman looked at him keenly, as if he had some suspicion of being chaffed; but the face of the Sawyer was so grave and the bend of his head so courteous that he could not refuse to do as he was asked. But he glanced first at the whiskey bottle standing between the candlesticks; and I knew it boded ill for his errand when Uncle Sam, the most hospitable of men, feigned pure incomprehension of that glance. The man should have no more under that roof.

With a sullen air and a muttered curse, at which Mr. Gundry blew a wreath of smoke, the stranger unfolded his paper again, and saying, "Now I beg you to attend this time," read the whole of his description, with much emphasis, again, while the Sawyer turned away and beat time upon the hearth, with his white hair, broad shoulders, and red ears prominent. The Englishman looked very seriously vexed, but went through his business doggedly. "Are you satisfied now?" he asked when he had finished.

"Wal, now, Squire," replied Uncle Sam, still keeping up his provoking drawl, but turning round and looking at the stranger very steadfastly, "some thin's is so pooty and so ilegantly done,

they seems a'most as good as well-slung flapjacks. A natteral honest stomick can't nohow have enough of them. Mought I be so bold, in a silly, mountaneous sort of a way, as to ax for another heerin' of it?"

"Do you mean to insult me, Sir?" shouted the visitor, leaping up with a flaming face, and throwing himself into an attitude of attack.

"Stranger, I mought," answered Mr. Gundry, standing squarely before him, and keeping his hands contemptuously behind his back—"I mought so do, barrin' one little point. The cutest commissioner in all the West would have to report 'Non compos' if his orders was to diskiver somethin' capable of bein' insulted in a fellow of your natur'."

With these words Uncle Sam sat down, and powerfully closed his mouth, signifying that now the matter was taken through every phase of discussion, and had been thoroughly exhausted. His visitor stared at him for a moment, as if at some strange phenomenon, and then fell back into self-command, without attempting bluster.

"Colonel, you are a 'cure,' as we call it on our side of the herring pond. What have I done to 'riz your dander,' as you elegantly express it here?"

"Britisher, nothing. You know no better. It takes more than that to put my back up. But forty years agone I do believe I must 'a heaved you out o' window."

"Why, Colonel, why? Now be reasonable. Not a word have I

said reflecting either upon you or your country; and a finer offer than I have made can not come to many of you, even in this land of gold. Ten thousand dollars I offer, and I will exceed my instructions and say fifteen, all paid on the nail by an order on Frisco, about which you may assure yourself. And what do I ask in return? Legal proof of the death of a man whom we know to be dead, and the custody of his child, for her own good."

"Squire, I have no other answer to make. If you offered me all the gold dug in these mountains since they were discovered, I could only say what I have said before. You came from Sylvester's ranch—there is time for you to get back ere the snow begins."

"What a hospitable man you are! Upon my word, Gundry, you deserve to have a medal from our Humane Society. You propose to turn me out of doors to-night, with a great fall of snow impending?"

"Sir, the fault is entirely your own. What hospitality can you expect after coming to buy my guest? If you are afraid of the ten-mile ride, my man at the mill will bed you. But here you must not sleep, because I might harm you in the morning. I am apt to lose my temper sometimes, when I go on to think of things."

"Colonel, I think I had better ride back. I fear no man, nor his temper, nor crotchets. But if I were snowed up at your mill, I never might cross the hill-foot for months; but from Sylvester's I can always get to Minto. You refuse, then, to help me in any way?"

"More than that. I will do every thing in my power to confound

you. If any one comes prowling after that young lady, he shall be shot."

"That is most discouraging. However, you may think better of it. Write to this address if you do. You have the girl here, of course?"

"That is her concern and mine. Does your guide know the way right well! The snow is beginning. You do not know our snows, any more than you know us."

"Never mind, Mr. Gundry. I shall do very well. You are rough in your ways, but you mean to do the right; and your indignation is virtuous. But mark my words upon one little point. If George Castlewood had been living, I have such credentials that I would have dragged him back with me in spite of all your bluster. But over his corpse I have no control, in the present condition of treaties. Neither can I meddle with his daughter, if it were worth while to do so. Keep her and make the best of her, my man. You have taken a snake in the grass to your bosom, if that is what you are up for. A very handsome girl she may be, but a bad lot, as her father was. If you wish the name of Gundry to have its due respect hereafter, let the heir of the sawmills have nothing to do with the Honorable Miss Castlewood."

"Let alone, let alone," Uncle Sam said, angrily. "It is well for you that the 'heir of the saw-mills' hath not heard your insolence. Firm is a steady lad; but he knoweth well which foot to kick with. No fear of losing the way to Sylvester's ranch with Firm behind you. But, meddlesome as you be, and a bitter weed to my

experience, it shall not be said that Sampson Gundry sent forth a fellow to be frozen. Drink a glass of hot whiskey before you get to saddle. Not in friendship, mind you, Sir, but in common human nature."

That execrable man complied, for he began to be doubtful of the driving snow, now huddling against the window-frames. And so he went out; and when he was gone, I came forth into the fire-light, and threw my arms round the Sawyer's neck and kissed him till he was ashamed of me.

"Miss Rema, my dear, my poor little soul, what makes you carry on so?"

"Because I have heard every word, Uncle Sam, and I was base enough to doubt you."

CHAPTER VIII
A DOUBTFUL LOSS

When I tried to look out of my window in the morning, I was quite astonished at the state of things. To look out fairly was impossible; for not only was all the lower part of the frame hillocked up like a sandglass, and the sides filled in with dusky plaits, but even in the middle, where some outlook was, it led to very little. All the air seemed choked with snow, and the ground coming up in piles to meet it; all sounds were deadened in the thick gray hush, and nothing had its own proportion. Never having seen such a thing before, I was frightened, and longed to know more of it.

Mr. Gundry had a good laugh at me, in which even Suan Isco joined, when I proposed to sweep a path to the mill, and keep it open through the winter.

"It can be done—I am sure it can," I exclaimed, with vigorous ignorance. "May I do it if I can? It only requires perseverance. If you keep on sweeping as fast as it falls, you must overcome it. Don't you see, Uncle Sam?"

"To be sure I do, Miss Rema, as plain as any pikestaff. Suan, fetch a double bundle of new brooms from top loft, and don't forget while you be up there to give special orders—no snow is to fall at night or when missy is at dinner."

"You may laugh as much as you please, Uncle Sam, but I intend to try it. I must try to keep my path to—somewhere."

"What a fool I am, to be sure!" said Mr. Gundry, softly. "There, now, I beg your pardon, my dear, for never giving a thought to it. Firm and I will do it for you, as long as the Lord allows of it. Why, the snow is two foot deep a'ready, and twenty foot in places. I wonder whether that rogue of a Goad got home to Sylvester's ranch last night? No fault of mine if he never did, for go he would in spite of me."

I had not been thinking of Mr. Goad, and indeed I did not know his name until it was told in this way. My mind was dwelling on my father's grave, where I used to love to sit and think; and I could not bear the idea of the cold snow lying over it, with nobody coming to care for him. Kind hands had borne him down the mountains (while I lay between life and death) and buried him in the soft peach orchard, in the soothing sound of the mill-wheel. Here had been planted above his head a cross of white un-painted wood, bearing only his initials, and a small "Amen" below them.

With this I was quite content, believing that he would have wished no better, being a very independent man, and desirous of no kind of pomp. There was no "consecrated ground" within miles and miles of traveling; but I hoped that he might rest as well with simple tears to hallow it. For often and often, even now, I could not help giving way and sobbing, when I thought how sad it was that a strong, commanding, mighty man, of great will and

large experience, should drop in a corner of the world and die, and finally be thought lucky—when he could think for himself no longer—to obtain a tranquil, unknown grave, and end with his initials, and have a water-wheel to sing to him. Many a time it set me crying, and made me long to lie down with him, until I thought of earth-worms.

All that could be done was done by Sampson and Firm Gundry, to let me have my clear path, and a clear bourne at the end of it. But even with a steam snow-shovel they could not have kept the way unstopped, such solid masses of the mountain clouds now descended over us. And never had I been so humored in my foolish wishes: I was quite ashamed to see the trouble great men took to please me.

"Well, I am sorry to hear it, Firm," said the Sawyer, coming in one day, with clouts of snow in his snowy curls. "Not that I care a cent for the fellow—and an impudenter fellow never sucked a pipe. Still, he might have had time to mend, if his time had been as good as the room for it. However, no blame rests on us. I told him to bed down to saw-mill. They Englishmen never know when they are well off. But the horse got home, they tell me?"

"The horse got home all right, grandfather, and so did the other horse and man. But Sylvester thinks that a pile of dollars must have died out in the snow-drift. It is a queer story. We shall never know the rights."

"How many times did I tell him," the Sawyer replied, without much discontent, "that it were a risky thing to try the gulches,

such a night as that? His own way he would have, however; and finer liars than he could ever stick up to be for a score of years have gone, time upon time, to the land of truth by means of that same view of things. They take every body else for a liar."

"Oh, Uncle Sam, who is it?" I cried. "Is it that dreadful—that poor man who wanted to carry me away from you?"

"Now you go in, missy; you go to the fire-hearth," Mr. Gundry answered, more roughly than usual. "Leave you all such points to the Lord. They are not for young ladies to talk about."

"Grandfather, don't you be too hard," said Firm, as he saw me hurrying away. "Miss Rema has asked nothing unbecoming, but only concerning her own affairs. If we refuse to tell her, others will."

"Very well, then, so be it," the Sawyer replied; for he yielded more to his grandson than to the rest of the world put together. "Turn the log up, Firm, and put the pan on. You boys can go on without victuals all day, but an old man must feed regular. And, bad as he was, I thank God for sending him on his way home with his belly full. If ever he turneth up in the snow, that much can be proved to my account."

Young as I was, and little practiced in the ways of settlers, I could not help perceiving that Uncle Sam was very much put out—not at the death of the man so sadly, as at the worry of his dying so in going from a hospitable house. Mr. Gundry cared little what any body said concerning his honor, or courage, or such like; but the thought of a whisper against his hospitality would rouse him.

"Find him, Firm, find him," he said, in his deep sad voice, as he sat down on the antlered stump and gazed at the fire gloomily. "And when he is found, call a public postmortem, and prove that we gave him his bellyful."

Ephraim, knowing the old man's ways, and the manners, perhaps, of the neighborhood, beckoned to Suan to be quick with something hot, that he might hurry out again. Then he took his dinner standing, and without a word went forth to seek.

"Take the snow-harrow, and take Jowler," the old man shouted after him, and the youth turned round at the gate and waved his cap to show that he heard him. The snow was again falling heavily, and the afternoon was waning; and the last thing we saw was the brush of the mighty tail of the great dog Jowler.

"Oh, uncle, Firm will be lost himself!" I cried, in dismay at the great white waste. "And the poor man, whoever he is, must be dead. Do call him back, or let me run."

Mr. Gundry's only answer was to lead me back to the fireside, where he made me sit down, and examined me, while Suan was frying the butter-beans.

"Who was it spied you on the mountains, missy, the whole of the way from the redwood-tree, although you lay senseless on the ground, and he was hard at work with the loppings?"

"Why, Ephraim, of course, Uncle Sam; every body says that nobody else could have noticed such a thing at such a distance."

"Very well, my dear; and who was it carried you all the way to this house, without stopping, or even letting your head droop

down, although it was a burning hot May morn?"

"Mr. Gundry, as if you did not know a great deal better than I do! It was weeks before I could thank him, even. But you must have seen him do it all."

The Sawyer rubbed his chin, which was large enough for a great deal of rubbing; and when he did that, I was always sure that an argument went to his liking. He said nothing more for the present, but had his dinner, and enjoyed it.

"Supposing now that he did all that," he resumed, about an hour afterward, "is Firm the sort of boy you would look to to lose his own self in a snow-drift? He has three men with him, and he is worth all three, let alone the big dog Jowler, who has dug out forty feet of snow ere now. If that rogue of an Englishman, Goad, has had the luck to cheat the hangman, and the honor to die in a Californy snow-drift, you may take my experience for it, missy, Firm and Jowler will find him, and clear Uncle Sam's reputation."

CHAPTER IX
WATER-SPOUT

If Mr. Gundry was in one way right, he was equally wrong in the other. Firm came home quite safe and sound, though smothered with snow and most hungry; but he thought that he should have staid out all the night, because he had failed of his errand. Jowler also was full of discontent and trouble of conscience. He knew, when he kicked up his heels in the snow, that his duty was to find somebody, and being of Alpine pedigree, and trained to act up to his ancestry, he now dropped his tail with failure.

"It comes to the same thing," said Sawyer Gundry; "it is foolish to be so particular. A thousand better men have sunk through being so pig-headed. We shall find the rogue toward the end of March, or in April, if the season suits. Firm, eat your supper and shake yourself."

This was exactly the Sawyer's way—to take things quietly when convinced that there was no chance to better them. He would always do his best about the smallest trifle; but after that, be the matter small or great, he had a smiling face for the end of it.

The winter, with all its weight of sameness and of dreariness, went at last, and the lovely spring from the soft Pacific found

its gradual way to us. Accustomed as I was to gentler climates and more easy changes, I lost myself in admiration of this my first Californian spring. The flowers, the leagues and leagues of flowers, that burst into color and harmony—purple, yellow, and delicate lilac, woven with bright crimson threads, and fringed with emerald-green by the banks, and blue by the course of rivers, while deepened here and there by wooded shelter and cool places, with the silver-gray of the soft Pacific waning in far distance, and silken vapor drawing toward the carding forks of the mountain range; and over all the never-wearying azure of the limpid sky: child as I was, and full of little worldly troubles on my own account, these grand and noble sights enlarged me without any thinking.

The wheat and the maize were grown apace, and beans come into full blossom, and the peaches swinging in the western breeze were almost as large as walnuts, and all things in their prime of freshness, ere the yellow dust arrived, when a sudden melting of snow in some gully sent a strong flood down our Blue River. The saw-mill happened to be hard at work; and before the gear could be lifted, some damage was done to the floats by the heavy, impetuous rush of the torrent. Uncle Sam was away, and so was Firm; from which, perhaps, the mischief grew. However, the blame was all put on the river, and little more was said of it.

The following morning I went down before even Firm was out-of-doors, under some touch, perhaps, of natural desire to know things. The stream was as pure and bright as ever, hastening down

its gravel-path of fine granite just as usual, except that it had more volume and a stronger sense of freshness. Only the bent of the grasses and the swath of the pendulous twigs down stream remained to show that there must have been some violence quite lately.

All Mr. Gundry's strengthening piles and shores were as firm as need be, and the clear blue water played around them as if they were no constraint to it. And none but a practiced eye could see that the great wheel had been wounded, being undershot, and lifted now above the power of the current, according to the fine old plan of locking the door when the horse is gone.

When I was looking up and wondering where to find the mischief, Martin, the foreman, came out and crossed the plank, with his mouth full of breakfast.

"Show me," I said, with an air, perhaps, of very young importance, "where and what the damage is. Is there any strain to the iron-work?"

"Lor' a mercy, young missus!" he answered, gruffly, being by no means a polished man, "where did you ever hear of ironwork? Needles and pins is enough for you. Now don't you go and make no mischief."

"I have no idea what you mean," I answered. "If you have been careless, that is no concern of mine."

"Careless, indeed! And the way I works, when others is a-snorin' in their beds! I might just as well do nort, every bit, and get more thanks and better wages. That's the way of the world all

over. Come Saturday week, I shall better myself."

"But if it's the way of the world all over, how will you better yourself, unless you go out of the world altogether!" I put this question to Martin with the earnest simplicity of the young, meaning no kind of sarcasm, but knowing that scarcely a week went by without his threatening to "better himself." And they said that he had done so for seven years or more.

"Don't you be too sharp," he replied, with a grim smile, partly at himself, perhaps. "If half as I heard about you is true, you'll want all your sharpness for yourself, Miss Remy. And the Britishers are worse than we be."

"Well, Martin, I am sure you would help me," I said, "if you saw any person injuring me. But what is it I am not to tell your master?"

"My master, indeed! Well, you need not tell old Gundry any thing about what you have seen. It might lead to hard words; and hard words are not the style of thing I put up with. If any man tries hard words with me, I knocks him down, up sticks, and makes tracks."

I could not help smiling at the poor man's talk. Sawyer Gundry could have taken him with one hand and tossed him over the undershot wheel.

"You forget that I have not seen any thing," I said, "and understand nothing but 'needles and pins.' But, for fear of doing any harm, I will not even say that I have been down here, unless I am asked about it."

"Miss Remy, you are a good girl, and you shall have the mill some day. Lord, don't your little great eyes see the job they are a-doin' of? The finest stroke in all Californy, when the stubborn old chap takes to quartz-crushing."

All this was beyond me, and I told him so, and we parted good friends, while he shook his long head and went home to feed many pappooses. For the strangest thing of all things was, though I never at that time thought of it, that there was not any one about this place whom any one could help liking. Martin took as long as any body to be liked, until one understood him; but after that he was one of the best, in many ways that can not be described. Also there was a pair of negroes, simply and sweetly delightful. They worked all day and they sang all night, though I had not the pleasure of hearing them; and the more Suan Isco despised them—because they were black, and she was only brown—the more they made up to her, not at all because she governed the supply of victuals. It was childish to have such ideas, though Suan herself could never get rid of them. The truth, as I came to know afterward, was that a large, free-hearted, and determined man was at the head of every thing. Martin was the only one who ever grumbled, and he had established a long right to do so by never himself being grumbled at.

"I'll be bound that poor fellow is in a sad way," Mr. Gundry said at breakfast-time. "He knows how much he is to blame, and I fear that he won't eat a bit for the day. Martin is a most conscientious man. He will offer to give up his berth, although

it would be his simple ruin."

I was wise enough not to say a word, though Firm looked at me keenly. He knew that I had been down at the mill, and expected me to say something.

"We all must have our little mistakes," continued Sawyer Gundry; "but I never like to push a man when he feels it. I shall not say a syllable to Martin; and, Ephraim, you will do the like. When a fellow sticks well to his work like Martin, never blame him for a mere accident."

Firm, according to his habit, made no answer when he did not quite agree. In talking with his own age he might have argued, but he did not argue with his grandfather.

"I shall just go down and put it right myself. Martin is a poor hand at repairing. Firm, you go up the gulch, and see if the fresh has hurt the hurdles. Missy, you may come with me, if you please, and sketch me at work in the mill-wheel. You have drawn that wheel such a sight of times, you must know every feather of it better than the man who made it."

"Uncle Sam, you are too bad," I said. "I have never got it right, and I never shall."

I did not dare as yet to think what really proved to be true in the end—that I could not draw the wheel correctly because itself was incorrect. In spite of all Mr. Gundry's skill and labor and ingenuity, the wheel was no true circle. The error began in the hub itself, and increased, of course, with the distance; but still it worked very well, like many other things that are not perfect.

Having no idea of this as yet, and doubting nothing except my own perception of "perspective," I sat down once more in my favorite spot, and waited for the master to appear as an active figure in the midst of it. The air was particularly bright and clear, even for that pure climate, and I could even see the blue-winged flies darting in and out of the oozy floats. But half-way up the mountains a white cloud was hanging, a cloud that kept on changing shape. I only observed it as a thing to put in for my background, because I was fond of trying to tone and touch up my sketches with French chalks.

Presently I heard a harsh metallic sound and creaking of machinery. The bites, or clamps, or whatever they are called, were being put on, to keep the wheel from revolving with the Sawyer's weight. Martin, the foreman, was grumbling and growling, according to his habit, and peering through the slot, or channel of stone, in which the axle worked, and the cheery voice of Mr. Gundry was putting down his objections. Being much too large to pass through the slot, Mr. Gundry came round the corner of the building, with a heavy leathern bag of tools strapped round his neck, and his canvas breeches girt above his knees. But the foreman staid inside to hand him the needful material into the wheel.

The Sawyer waded merrily down the shallow blue water, for he was always like a boy when he was at work, and he waved his little skull-cap to me, and swung himself up into the wheel, as if he were nearer seventeen than seventy. And presently I could

only see his legs and arms as he fell to work. Therefore I also fell to work, with my best attempts at penciling, having been carefully taught enough of drawing to know that I could not draw. And perhaps I caught from the old man's presence and the sound of his activity that strong desire to do my best which he seemed to impart to every one.

At any rate, I was so engrossed that I scarcely observed the changing light, except as a hindrance to my work and a trouble to my distance, till suddenly some great drops fell upon my paper and upon my hat, and a rush of dark wind almost swept me from the log upon which I sat. Then again all was a perfect calm, and the young leaves over the stream hung heavily on their tender foot-stalks, and the points of the breeze-swept grass turned back, and the ruffle of all things smoothed itself. But there seemed to be a sense of fear in the waiting silence of earth and air.

This deep, unnatural stillness scared me, and I made up my mind to run away. But the hammer of the Sawyer sounded as I had never heard it sound. He was much too hard at work to pay any heed to sky or stream, and the fall of his strokes was dead and hollow, as if the place resented them.

"Come away, come away," I cried, as I ran and stood on the opposite bank to him; "there is something quite wrong in the weather, I am sure. I entreat you to come away at once, Uncle Sam. Every thing is so strange and odd."

"Why, what's to do now?" asked the Sawyer, coming to my side of the wheel and looking at me, with his spectacles tilted up,

and his apron wedged in a piece of timber, and his solid figure resting in the impossibility of hurry. "Missy, don't you make a noise out there. You can't have your own way always."

"Oh, Uncle Sam, don't talk like that. I am in such a fright about you. Do come out and look at the mountains."

"I have seen the mountains often enough, and I am up to every trick of them. There may be a corn or two of rain; no more. My sea-weed was like tinder. There can't be no heavy storm when it is like that. Don't you make pretense, missy, to know what is beyond you."

Uncle Sam was so seldom cross that I always felt that he had a right to be so. And he gave me one of his noble smiles to make up for the sharpness of his words, and then back he went to his work again. So I hoped that I was altogether wrong, till a bolt of lightning, like a blue dagger, fell at my very feet, and a crash of thunder shook the earth and stunned me. These opened the sluice of the heavens, and before I could call out I was drenched with rain. Clinging to a bush, I saw the valley lashed with cloudy blasts, and a whirling mass of spiral darkness rushing like a giant toward me. And the hissing and tossing and roaring mixed whatever was in sight together.

Such terror fell upon me at first that I could not look, and could scarcely think, but cowered beneath the blaze of lightning as a singed moth drops and shivers. And a storm of wind struck me from my hold, so that I fell upon the wet earth. Every moment I expected to be killed, for I never could be brave in a thunder-

storm, and had not been told much in France of God's protection around me. And the darts of lightning hissed and crossed like a blue and red web over me. So I laid hold of a little bent of weed, and twisted it round my dabbled wrist, and tried to pray to the Virgin, although I had often been told it was vanity.

Then suddenly wiping my eyes, I beheld a thing which entirely changed me. A vast, broad wall of brown water, nearly as high as the mill itself, rushed down with a crest of foam from the mountains. It seemed to fill up all the valley and to swallow up all the trees; a whole host of animals fled before it, and birds, like a volley of bullets, flew by. I lost not a moment in running away, and climbing a rock and hiding. It was base, ungrateful, and a nasty thing to do; but I did it almost without thinking. And if I had staid to cry out, what good could I have done—only to be swept away?

Now, as far as I can remember any thing out of so much horror, I must have peeped over the summit of my rock when the head of the deluge struck the mill. But whether I saw it, or whether I knew it by any more summary process, such as outruns the eyes sometimes, is more than I dare presume to say. Whichever way I learned it, it was thus:

A solid mass of water, much bigger than the mill itself, burst on it, dashed it to atoms, leaped off with it, and spun away the great wheel anyhow, like the hoop of a child sent trundling. I heard no scream or shriek; and, indeed, the bellow of a lion would have been a mere whisper in the wild roar of the elements.

Only, where the mill had been, there was nothing except a black streak and a boil in the deluge. Then scores of torn-up trees swept over, as a bush-harrow jumps on the clods of the field; and the unrelenting flood cast its wrath, and shone quietly in the lightning.

"Oh, Uncle Sam! Uncle Sam!" I cried. But there was not a sign to be seen of him; and I thought of his gentle, good, obstinate ways, and my heart was almost broken. "What a brute—what a wretch I am!" I kept saying, as if I could have helped it; and my fear of the lightning was gone, and I stood and raved with scorn and amazement.

In this misery of confusion it was impossible to think, and instinct alone could have driven my despair to a desperate venture. With my soaked clothes sticking between my legs, I ran as hard as they would go, by a short-cut over a field of corn, to a spot where the very last bluff or headland jutted into the river. This was a good mile below the mill according to the bends of channel, but only a furlong or so from the rock upon which I had taken refuge. However, the flood was there before me, and the wall of water dashed on to the plains, with a brindled comb behind it.

Behind it also came all the ruin of the mill that had any floatage, and bodies of bears and great hogs and cattle, some of them alive, but the most part dead. A grand black bull tossed back his horns, and looked at me beseechingly: he had frightened me often in quiet days, but now I was truly grieved for him. And

then on a wattle of brush-wood I saw the form of a man—the Sawyer.

His white hair draggled in the wild brown flood, and the hollow of his arms was heaped with froth, and his knotted legs hung helpless. Senseless he lay on his back, and sometimes the wash of the waves went over him. His face was livid, but his brave eyes open, and a heavy weight hung round his neck. I had no time to think, and deserve no praise, for I knew not what I did. But just as an eddy swept him near me, I made a desperate leap at him, and clutched at something that tore my hands, and then I went under the water. My senses, however, were not yet gone, and my weight on the wattle stopped it, and I came up gurgling, and flung one arm round a fat, woolly sheep going by me. The sheep was water-logged, and could scarcely keep his own poor head from drowning, and he turned his mild eyes and looked at me, but I could not spare him. He struck for the shore in forlorn hope, and he towed us in some little.

It is no good for me to pretend to say how things were managed for us, for of course I could do nothing. But the sheep must have piloted us to a tree, whose branches swept the torrent. Here I let him go, and caught fast hold; and Uncle Sam's raft must have stuck there also, for what could my weak arm have done? I remember only to have felt the ground at last, as the flood was exhausted; and good people came and found him and me, stretched side by side, upon rubbish and mud.

CHAPTER X
A NUGGET

In a sacred corner (as soon as ever we could attend to any thing) we hung up the leathern bag of tools, which had done much more toward saving the life of Uncle Sam than I did; for this had served as a kind of kedge, or drag, upon his little craft, retarding it from the great roll of billows, in which he must have been drowned outright. And even as it was, he took some days before he was like himself again.

Firm, who had been at the head of the valley, repairing some broken hurdles, declared that a water-spout had burst in the bosom of the mountain gorge where the Blue River has its origin, and the whole of its power got ponded back by a dam, which the Sawyer himself had made, at about five furlongs above the mill. Ephraim, being further up the gulch, and high above the roaring flood, did his utmost with the keen edge of his eyes to pierce into the mischief; but it rained so hard, and at the same time blew so violently around him, that he could see nothing of what went on, but hoped for the best, with uneasiness.

Now when the Sawyer came round so well as to have a clear mind of things, and learn that his mill was gone and his business lost, and himself, at this ripe time of life, almost driven to begin the world again, it was natural to expect that he ought to indulge

in a good deal of grumbling. Many people came to comfort him, and to offer him deep condolence and the truest of true sympathy, and every thing that could be thought of, unless it were a loan of money. Of that they never thought, because it was such a trifling matter; and they all had confidence in his power to do any thing but pay them. They told him that he was a young man still, and Providence watched over him; in a year or two he would be all the better for this sad visitation. And he said yes to their excellent advice, and was very much obliged to them. At the same time it was clear to me, who watched him like a daughter, that he became heavy in his mind, and sighed, as these kind friends, one after the other, enjoyed what he still could do for them, but rode away out of his gate with too much delicacy to draw purse-strings. Not that he would have accepted a loan from the heartiest heart of all of them, only that he would have liked the offer, to understand their meaning. And several of them were men—as Firm, in his young indignation, told me—who had been altogether set up in life by the kindness of Sampson Gundry.

Perhaps the Sawyer, after all his years, had no right to be vexed by this. But whether he was right or wrong, I am sure that it preyed upon his mind, though he was too proud to speak of it. He knew that he was not ruined, although these friends assumed that he must be; and some of them were quite angry with him because they had vainly warned him. He could not remember these warnings, yet he contradicted none of them; and fully believing in the goodness of the world, he became convinced that

he must have been hard in the days of his prosperity.

No sooner was he able to get about again than he went to San Francisco to raise money on his house and property for the rebuilding of the mill. Firm rode with him to escort him back, and so did Martin, the foreman; for although the times were not so bad as they used to be some ten years back, in the height of the gold fever, it still was a highly undesirable thing for a man who was known to have money about him to ride forth alone from San Francisco, or even Sacramento town. And having mentioned the foreman Martin, in justice to him I ought to say that although his entire loss from the disaster amounted only to a worn-out waistcoat of the value of about twenty cents, his vehemence in grumbling could only be equaled by his lofty persistence. By his great activity in running away and leaving his employer to meet the brunt, he had saved not only himself, but his wife and children and goods and chattels. This failed, however, to remove or even assuage his regret for the waistcoat; and he moaned and threatened to such good purpose that a speedy subscription was raised, which must have found him in clothes for the rest of his life, as well as a silver tea-pot with an inscription about his bravery.

When the three were gone, after strict injunctions from Mr. Gundry, and his grandson too, that I was on no account to venture beyond calling distance from the house, for fear of being run away with, I found the place so sad and lonesome that I scarcely knew what to do. I had no fear of robbers, though there were

plenty in the neighborhood; for we still had three or four men about, who could be thoroughly trusted, and who staid with us on half wages rather than abandon the Sawyer in his trouble. Suan Isco, also, was as brave as any man, and could shoot well with a rifle. Moreover, the great dog Jowler was known and dreaded by all his enemies. He could pull down an Indian, or two half-castes, or three Mexicans, in about a second; and now he always went about with me, having formed a sacred friendship.

Uncle Sam had kissed me very warmly when he said "good-by," and Firm had shown some disposition to follow his example; but much as I liked and admired Firm, I had my own ideas as to what was unbecoming, and now in my lonely little walks I began to think about it. My father's resting-place had not been invaded by the imperious flood, although a line of driftage, in a zigzag swath, lay near the mound. This was my favorite spot for thinking, when I felt perplexed and downcast in my young unaided mind. For although I have not spoken of my musings very copiously, any one would do me wrong who fancied that I was indifferent. Through the great kindness of Mr. Gundry and other good friends around me, I had no bitter sense as yet of my own dependence and poverty. But the vile thing I had heard about my father, the horrible slander and wicked falsehood—for such I was certain it must be—this was continually in my thoughts, and quite destroyed my cheerfulness. And the worst of it was that I never could get my host to enter into it. Whenever I began, his face would change and his manner grow constrained, and his

chief desire always seemed to lead me to some other subject.

One day, when the heat of the summer came forth, and the peaches began to blush toward it, and bronze-ribbed figs grew damask-gray with a globule of sirup in their eyes, and melons and pumpkins already had curved their fluted stalks with heaviness, and the dust of the plains was beginning to fly, and the bright spring flowers were dead more swiftly even than they first were born, I sat with Suan Isco at my father's cross, and told her to make me cry with some of all the many sad things she knew. She knew a wondrous number of things insatiably sad and wild; and the quiet way in which she told them (not only without any horror, but as if they were rightly to be expected), also the deep and rather guttural tone of voice, and the stillness of the form, made it impossible to help believing verily every word she said.

That there should be in the world such things, so dark, unjust, and full of woe, was enough to puzzle a child brought up among the noblest philosophers; whereas I had simply been educated by good unpretentious women, who had partly retired from the world, but not to such a depth as to drown all thought of what was left behind them. These were ready at any time to return upon good opportunity; and some of them had done so, with many tears, when they came into property.

"Please to tell me no more now," I said at last to Suan; "my eyes are so sore they will be quite red, and perhaps Uncle Sam will come home to-night. I am afraid he has found some trouble with the money, or he ought to have been at home before. Don't

you think so, Suan?"

"Yes, yes; trouble with the money. Always with the white mans that."

"Very well. I shall go and look for some money. I had a most wonderful dream last night. Only I must go quite alone. You had better go and look to the larder, Suan. If they come, they are sure to be hungry."

"Yes, yes; the white mans always hungry, sep when thirsty."

The Indian woman, who had in her heart a general contempt for the white race, save those of our own household, drew her bright-colored shawl around her, and set off with her peculiar walk. Her walk was not ungraceful, because it was so purely natural; but it differed almost as much as the step of a quadruped from what we are taught. I, with heavy thoughts but careless steps, set off on my wanderings. I wanted to try to have no set purpose, course, or consideration, but to go wherever chance should lead me, without choice, as in my dream. And after many vague turns, and even closings of rebellious eyes, I found myself, perhaps by the force of habit, at the ruins of the mill.

I seemed to recognize some resemblance (which is as much as one can expect) to the scene which had been in my sleep before me. But sleeping I had seen roaring torrents; waking, I beheld a quiet stream. The little river, as blue as ever, and shrinking from all thoughts of wrath, showed nothing in its pure gaze now but a gladness to refresh and cool. In many nicely sheltered corners it was full of soft reflection as to the good it had to do; and then,

in silver and golden runnels, on it went to do it. And the happy voice and many sweetly flashing little glances told that it knew of the lovely lives beside it, created and comforted by itself.

But I looked at the dark ruin it had wrought, and like a child I was angry with it for the sake of Uncle Sam. Only the foundations and the big heavy stones of the mill were left, and the clear bright water purled around, or made little eddies among them. All were touched with silvery sound, and soft caressing dimples. But I looked at the passionate mountains first, to be sure of no more violence; for if a burned child dreads the fire, one half drowned may be excused for little faith in water. The mountains in the sunshine looked as if nothing could move their grandeur, and so I stepped from stone to stone, in the bed of the placid brightness.

Presently I came to a place where one of the great black piles, driven in by order of the Sawyer, to serve as a back-stay for his walls, had been swept by the flood from its vertical sinking, but had not been swept away. The square tarred post of mountain pine reclined down stream, and gently nodded to the current's impact. But overthrown as it was, it could not make its exit and float away, as all its brethren had done. At this I had wondered before, and now I went to see what the reason was. By throwing a short piece of plank from one of the shattered foundations into a nick in the shoulder of the reclining pile, I managed to get there and sit upon it, and search for its obstruction.

The water was flowing smoothly toward me, and as clear as crystal, being scarcely more than a foot in depth. And there, on

the upper verge of the hole, raised by the leverage of the butt from the granite sand of the river-bed, I saw a great bowlder of rich yellow light. I was so much amazed that I cried out at once, "Oh! what a beautiful great yellow fish!" And I shouted to Jowler, who had found where I was, and followed me, as usual. The great dog was famous for his love of fishing, and had often brought a fine salmon forth.

Jowler was always a zealous fellow, and he answered eagerly to my call by dashing at once into the water, and following the guidance of my hand. But when he saw what I pointed at, he was bitterly disappointed, and gave me to understand as much by looking at me foolishly. "Now don't be a stupid dog," I said; "do what I tell you immediately. Whatever it is, bring it out, Sir."

Jowler knew that I would be obeyed whenever I called him "Sir;" so he ducked his great head under the water, and tugged with his teeth at the object. His back corded up, and his tail grew rigid with the intensity of his labor, but the task was quite beyond him. He could not even stir the mighty mass at which he struggled, but he bit off a little projecting corner, and came to me with it in his mouth. Then he laid his dripping jaws on my lap, and his ears fell back, and his tail hung down with utter sense of failure.

I patted his broad intelligent forehead, and wiped his black eyes with his ears, and took from his lips what he offered to me. Then I saw that his grinders were framed with gold, as if he had been to a dentist regardless of expense, and into my

hand he dropped a lump of solid glittering virgin ore. He had not the smallest idea of having done any thing worthy of human applause; and he put out his long red tongue and licked his teeth to get rid of uneatable dross, and gave me a quiet nudge to ask what more I wanted of him.

CHAPTER XI
ROVERS

From Jowler I wanted nothing more. Such matters were too grand for him. He had beaten the dog of Hercules, who had only brought the purple dye—a thing requiring skill and art and taste to give it value. But gold does well without all these, and better in their absence. From handling many little nuggets, and hearkening to Suan Isco's tales of treachery, theft, and murder done by white men for the sake of this, I knew that here I had found enough to cost the lives of fifty men.

At present, however, I was not possessed with dread so much as I was with joy, and even a secret exultation, at the power placed in my hands. For I was too young to moralize or attempt philosophy. Here I had a knowledge which the wisest of mankind might envy, much as they despise it when they have no chance of getting it. I looked at my father's grave, in the shadow of the quiet peach-trees, and I could not help crying as I thought that this was come too late for him. Then I called off Jowler, who wished (like a man) to have another tug at it; and home I ran to tell my news, but failing of breath, had time to think.

It was lucky enough that this was so, for there might have been the greatest mischief; and sadly excited as I was, the trouble I had seen so much of came back to my beating heart and told me

to be careful. But surely there could be no harm in trusting Suan Isco. However, I looked at her several times, and was not quite so sure about it. She was wonderfully true and faithful, and scarcely seemed to concede to gold its paramount rank and influence. But that might only have been because she had never known the want of it, or had never seen a lump worth stealing, which I was sure that this must be; and the unregenerate state of all who have never been baptized had been impressed on me continually. How could I mistrust a Christian, and place confidence in an Indian? Therefore I tried to sleep without telling any one, but was unable.

But, as it happened, my good discovery did not keep me so very long awake, for on the following day our troop of horsemen returned from San Francisco. Of course I have done very foolish things once and again throughout my life, but perhaps I never did any thing more absurd than during the whole of that day. To begin with, I was up before the sun, and down at the mill, and along the plank, which I had removed overnight, but now replaced as my bridge to the pine-wood pile. Then I gazed with eager desire and fear—which was the stronger I scarcely knew—for the yellow under-gleam, to show the safety of my treasure. There it lay, as safe as could be, massive, grand, and beautiful, with tones of varying richness as the ripples varied over it. The pale light of the morning breathed a dewy lustre down the banks; the sun (although unrisen yet) drew furrows through the mountain gaps; the birds from every hanging tree addressed the day with melody; the crystal water, purer than religion's brightest

dream, went by; and here among them lay, unmoved, unthought of, and inanimate, the thing which to a human being is worth all the rest put together.

This contemplation had upon me an effect so noble that here I resolved to spend my time, for fear of any robbery. I was afraid to gaze more than could be helped at this grand sight, lest other eyes should spy what was going on, and long to share it. And after hurrying home to breakfast and returning in like haste, I got a scare, such as I well deserved, for being so extremely foolish.

The carpentry of the mill-wheel had proved so very stanch and steadfast that even in that raging deluge the whole had held together. It had been bodily torn from its hold and swept away down the valley; but somewhere it grounded, as the flood ebbed out, and a strong team had tugged it back again. And the Sawyer had vowed that, come what would, his mill should work with the self-same wheel which he with younger hands had wrought. Now this wheel (to prevent any warp, and save the dry timber from the sun) was laid in a little shady cut, where water trickled under it. And here I had taken up my abode to watch my monster nugget.

I had pulled my shoes and stockings off, and was paddling in the runnel, sheltered by the deep rim of the wheel, and enjoying the water. Little fish darted by me, and lovely spotted lizards played about, and I was almost beginning even to forget my rock of gold. In self-defense it is right to say that for the gold, on my own account, I cared as much as I might have done for a fig worm-eaten. It was for Uncle Sam, and all his dear love,

that I watched the gold, hoping in his sad disaster to restore his fortunes. But suddenly over the rim of the wheel (laid flat in the tributary brook) I descried across the main river a moving company of horsemen.

These men could have nothing to do with Uncle Sam and his party, for they were coming from the mountain-side, while he would return by the track across the plains. And they were already so near that I could see their dress quite plainly, and knew them to be Mexican rovers, mixed with loose Americans. There are few worse men on the face of the earth than these, when in the humor, and unluckily they seem almost always to be in that humor. Therefore, when I saw their battered sun-hats and baggy slouching boots, I feared that little ruth, or truth, or mercy dwelt between them.

On this account I shrank behind the shelter of the mill-wheel, and held my head in one trembling hand, and with the other drew my wind-tossed hair into small compass. For my blood ran cold at the many dreadful things that came into my mind. I was sure that they had not spied me yet, and my overwhelming desire was to decline all introduction.

I counted fourteen gentlemen, for so they always styled themselves, and would pistol any man who expressed a contrary opinion. Fourteen of them rode to the brink of the quiet blue river on the other side; and there they let their horses drink, and some dismounted and filled canteens, and some of longer reach stooped from the saddle and did likewise. But one, who seemed

to be the captain, wanted no water for his rum.

"Cut it short, boys," I heard him say, with a fine South Californian twang (which, as well as his free swearing, I will freely omit). "If we mean to have fair play with the gal, now or never's the time for it: old Sam may come home almost any time."

What miserable cowards! Though there were so many of them, they really had no heart to face an old man known for courage. Frightened as I was, perhaps good indignation helped me to flutter no more, and not faint away, but watch those miscreants steadily.

The horses put down their sandy lips over and over again to drink, scarcely knowing when they ought to stop, and seemed to get thicker before my eyes. The dribbling of the water from their mouths prepared them to begin again, till the riders struck the savage unroweled spur into their refreshment. At this they jerked their noses up, and looked at one another to say that they expected it, and then they lifted their weary legs and began to plash through the river.

It is a pretty thing to see a skillful horse plod through a stream, probing with his eyes the depth, and stretching his head before his feet, and at every step he whisks his tail to tell himself that he is right. In my agony of observation all these things I heeded, but only knew that I had done so when I thought long afterward. At the moment I was in such a fright that my eyes worked better than my mind. However, even so, I thought of my golden millstone, and was aware that they crossed below, and could not see it.

They gained the bank upon our side within fifty yards of where I crouched; and it was not presence of mind, but abject fear, which kept me crouching. I counted them again as they leaped the bank and seemed to look at me. I could see the dark array of eyes, and could scarcely keep from shrieking. But my throat was dry and made no sound, and a frightened bird set up a scream, which drew off their attention.

In perils of later days I often thought of this fear, and almost felt that the hand of Heaven had been stretched forth on purpose to help my helplessness.

For the moment, however, I lay as close as if under the hand of the evil one; and the snorting of the horses passed me, and wicked laughter of the men. One was telling a horrible tale, and the rest rejoicing in it; and the bright sun, glowing on their withered skin, discovered perhaps no viler thing in all the world to shine upon. One of them even pointed at my mill-wheel with a witty gibe—at least, perhaps, it was wit to him—about the Sawyer's misfortune; but the sun was then in his eyes, and my dress was just of the color of the timber. So on they rode, and the pleasant turf (having lately received some rain) softly answered to the kneading of their hoofs as they galloped away to surround the house.

I was just at the very point of rising and running up into the dark of the valley, when a stroke of arithmetic stopped me. Fourteen men and fourteen horses I had counted on the other side; on this side I could not make any more than thirteen of them. I might have made a mistake; but still I thought I would

stop just a minute to see. And in that minute I saw the other man walking slowly on the opposite bank. He had tethered his horse, and was left as outpost to watch and give warning of poor Uncle Sam's return.

At the thought of this, my frightened courage, in some extraordinary way, came back. I had played an ignoble part thus far, as almost any girl might have done. But now I resolved that, whatever might happen, my dear friend and guardian should not be entrapped and lose his life through my cowardice. We had been expecting him all the day; and if he should come and fall into an ambush, I only might survive to tell the tale. I ought to have hurried and warned the house, as my bitter conscience told me; but now it was much too late for that. The only amends that I could make was to try and warn our travelers.

Stooping as low as I could, and watching my time to cross the more open places when the sentry was looking away from me, I passed up the winding of the little watercourse, and sheltered in the swampy thicket which concealed its origin. Hence I could see for miles over the plain—broad reaches of corn land already turning pale, mazy river fringed with reed, hamlets scattered among clustering trees, and that which I chiefly cared to see, the dusty track from Sacramento.

Whether from ignorance of the country or of Mr. Gundry's plans, the sentinel had been posted badly. His beat commanded well enough the course from San Francisco; but that from Sacramento was not equally clear before him. For a jut of pine

forest ran down from the mountains and cut off a part of his view of it. I had not the sense or the presence of mind to perceive this great advantage, but having a plain, quick path before me, forth I set upon it. Of course if the watchman had seen me, he would have leaped on his horse and soon caught me; but of that I scarcely even thought, I was in such confusion.

When I had run perhaps a mile (being at that time very slight, and of active figure), I saw a cloud of dust, about two miles off, rising through the bright blue haze. It was rich yellow dust of the fertile soil, which never seems to cake or clot. Sometimes you may walk for miles without the smallest fear of sinking, the earth is so elastic. And yet with a slight exertion you may push a walking-stick down through it until the handle stops it. My heart gave a jump: that cloud of dust was a sign of men on horseback. And who could it be but Uncle Sam and Firm and the foreman Martin?

As soon as it began to show itself, it proved to be these very three, carelessly lounging on their horses' backs, overcome with heat and dust and thirst. But when they saw me there all alone under the fury of the sun, they knew that something must have gone amiss, and were all wide awake in a moment.

"Well, now," said the Sawyer, when I had told my tale as well as short breath allowed, "put this thing over your head, my dear, or you may gain a sun-stroke. I call it too bad of them skunks to drive you in Californy noon, like this."

"Oh, Uncle Sam, never think of me; think of your house and

your goods and Suan, and all at those bad men's mercy!"

"The old house ain't afire yet," he answered, looking calmly under his hand in that direction. "And as for Suan, no fear at all. She knows how to deal with such gallowses; and they will keep her to cook their dinner. Firm, my lad, let us go and embrace them. They wouldn't 'a made much bones of shooting us down if we hadn't known of it, and if they had got miss afore the saddle. But if they don't give bail, as soon as they see me ride up to my door, my name's not Sampson Gundry. Only you keep out of the way, Miss Remy. You go to sleep a bit, that's a dear, in the graywitch spinny yonder, and wait till you hear Firm sound the horn. And then come you in to dinner-time; for the Lord is always over you."

I hastened to the place which he pointed out—a beautiful covert of birch-trees—but to sleep was out of the question, worn out though I was with haste and heat, and (worst of all) with horror. In a soft mossy nest, where a breeze from the mountains played with the in and out ways of the wood, and the murmurous dream of genial insects now was beginning to drowse upon the air, and the heat of the sun could almost be seen thrilling through the alleys like a cicale's drum—here, in the middle of the languid peace, I waited for the terror of the rifle-crack.

For though Uncle Sam had spoken softly, and made so little of the peril he would meet, I had seen in his eyes some token of the deep wrath and strong indignation which had kept all his household and premises safe. And it seemed a most ominous sign

that Firm had never said a word, but grasped his gun, and slowly got in front of his grandfather.

CHAPTER XII
GOLD AND GRIEF

It may have been an hour, but it seemed an age, ere the sound of the horn, in Firm's strong blast, released me from my hiding-place. I had heard no report of fire-arms, nor perceived any sign of conflict; and certainly the house was not on fire, or else I must have seen the smoke. For being still in great alarm, I had kept a very sharp lookout.

Ephraim Gundry came to meet me, which was very kind of him. He carried his bugle in his belt, that he might sound again for me, if needful. But I was already running toward the house, having made up my mind to be resolute. Nevertheless, I was highly pleased to have his company, and hear what had been done.

"Please to let me help you," he said, with a smile. "Why, miss, you are trembling dreadfully. I assure you there is no cause for that."

"But you might have been killed, and Uncle Sam, and Martin, and every body. Oh, those men did look so horrible!"

"Yes, they always do till you come to know them. But bigger cowards were never born. If they can take people by surprise, and shoot them without any danger, it is a splendid treat to them. But if any one like grandfather meets them face to face in the

daylight, their respect for law and life returns. It is not the first visit they have paid us. Grandfather kept his temper well. It was lucky for them that he did."

Remembering that the Rovers must have numbered nearly three to one, even if all our men were stanch, I thought it lucky for ourselves that there had been no outbreak. But Firm seemed rather sorry that they had departed so easily. And knowing that he never bragged, I began to share his confidence.

"They must be shot, sooner or later," he said, "unless, indeed, they should be hanged. Their manner of going on is out of date in these days of settlement. It was all very well ten years ago. But now we are a civilized State, and the hand of law is over us. I think we were wrong to let them go. But of course I yield to the governor. And I think he was afraid for your sake. And to tell the truth, I may have been the same."

Here he gave my arm a little squeeze, which appeared to me quite out of place; therefore I withdrew and hurried on. Before he could catch me I entered the door, and found the Sawyer sitting calmly with his own long pipe once more, and watching Suan cooking.

"They rogues have had all the best of our victuals," he said, as soon as he had kissed me. "Respectable visitors is my delight, and welcome to all of the larder; but at my time of life it goes agin the grain to lease out my dinner to galley-rakers. Suan, you are burning the fat again."

Suan Isco, being an excellent cook (although of quiet temper),

never paid heed to criticism, but lifted her elbow and went on. Mr. Gundry knew that it was wise to offer no further meddling, although it is well to keep them up to their work by a little grumbling. But when I came to see what broken bits were left for Suan to deal with, I only wondered that he was not cross.

"Thank God for a better meal than I deserve," he said, when they all had finished. "Suan, you are a treasure, as I tell you every day a'most. Now if they have left us a bottle of wine, let us have it up. We be all in the dumps. But that will never do, my lad."

He patted Firm on the shoulder, as if he were the younger man of the two, and his grandson went down to the wreck of the cellar; while I, who had tried to wait upon them in an eager, clumsy way, perceived that something was gone amiss, something more serious and lasting than the mischief made by the robber troop. Was it that his long ride had failed, and not a friend could be found to help him?

When Martin and the rest were gone, after a single glass of wine, and Ephraim had made excuse of something to be seen to, the Sawyer leaned back in his chair, and his cheerful face was troubled. I filled his pipe and lit it for him, and waited for him to speak, well knowing his simple and outspoken heart. But he looked at me and thanked me kindly, and seemed to be turning some grief in his mind.

"It ain't for the money," he said at last, talking more to himself than to me; "the money might 'a been all very well and useful in a sort of way. But the feelin'—the feelin' is the thing I look at,

and it ought to have been more hearty. Security! Charge on my land, indeed! And I can run away, but my land must stop behind! What security did I ask of them? 'Tis enough a'most to make a rogue of me."

"Nothing could ever do that, Uncle Sam," I exclaimed, as I came and sat close to him, while he looked at me bravely, and began to smile.

"Why, what was little missy thinking of?" he asked. "How solid she looks! Why, I never see the like!"

"Then you ought to have seen it, Uncle Sam. You ought to have seen it fifty times, with every body who loves you. And who can help loving you, Uncle Sam?"

"Well, they say that I charged too much for lumber, a-cuttin' on the cross, and the backstroke work. And it may 'a been so, when I took agin a man. But to bring up all that, with the mill strown down, is a cowardly thing, to my thinking. And to make no count of the beadin' I threw in, whenever it were a straightforrard job, and the turpsy knots, and the clogging of the teeth—'tis a bad bit to swallow, when the mill is strown."

"But the mill shall not be strown, Uncle Sam. The mill shall be built again. And I will find the money."

Mr. Gundry stared at me and shook his head. He could not bear to tell me how poor I was, while I thought myself almost made of money. "Five thousand dollars you have got put by for me," I continued, with great importance. "Five thousand dollars from the sale and the insurance fund. And five thousand dollars

must be five-and-twenty thousand francs. Uncle Sam, you shall have every farthing of it. And if that won't build the mill again, I have got my mother's diamonds."

"Five thousand dollars!" cried the Sawyer, in amazement, opening his great gray eyes at me. And then he remembered the tale which he had told, to make me seem independent. "Oh yes, to be sure, my dear; now I recollect. To be sure—to be sure—your own five thousand dollars. But never will I touch one cent of your nice little fortune; no, not to save my life. After all, I am not so gone in years but what I can build the mill again myself. The Lord hath spared my hands and eyes, and gifted me still with machinery. And Firm is a very handy lad, and can carry out a job pretty fairly, with better brains to stand over him, although it has not pleased the Lord to gift him with sense of machinery, like me. But that is all for the best, no doubt. If Ephraim had too much of brains, he might have contradicted me. And that I could never abide, God knows, from any green young jackanapes."

"Oh, Uncle Sam, let me tell you something—something very important!"

"No, my dear, nothing more just now. It has done me good to have a little talk, and scared the blue somethings out of me. But just go and ask whatever is become of Firm. He was riled with them greasers. It was all I could do to keep the boy out of a difficulty with them. And if they camp any where nigh, it is like enough he may go hankerin' after them. The grand march of intellect hathn't managed yet to march old heads upon young

shoulders. And Firm might happen to go outside the law."

The thought of this frightened me not a little; for Firm, though mild of speech, was very hot of spirit at any wrong, as I knew from tales of Suan Isco, who had brought him up and made a glorious idol of him. And now, when she could not say where he was, but only was sure that he must be quite safe (in virtue of a charm from a great medicine man which she had hung about him), it seemed to me, according to what I was used to, that in these regions human life was held a great deal too lightly.

It was not for one moment that I cared about Firm, any more than is the duty of a fellow-creature. He was a very good young man, and in his way good-looking, educated also quite enough, and polite, and a very good carver of a joint; and when I spoke, he nearly always listened. But of course he was not to be compared as yet to his grandfather, the true Sawyer.

When I ran back from Suan Isco, who was going on about her charm, and the impossibility of any one being scalped who wore it, I found Mr. Gundry in a genial mood. He never made himself uneasy about any trifles. He always had a very pure and lofty faith in the ways of Providence, and having lost his only son Elijah, he was sure that he never could lose Firm. He had taken his glass of hot whiskey and water, which always made him temperate; and if he felt any of his troubles deeply, he dwelt on them now from a high point of view.

"I may 'a said a little too much, my dear, about the badness of mankind," he observed, with his pipe lying comfortably on his

breast; “all sayings of that sort is apt to go too far. I ought to have made more allowance for the times, which gets into a ticklish state, when a old man is put about with them. Never you pay no heed whatever to any harsh words I may have used. All that is a very bad thing for young folk.”

“But if they treated you badly, Uncle Sam, how can you think that they treated you well?”

He took some time to consider this, because he was true in all his thoughts; and then he turned off to something else.

“Why, the smashing of the mill may have been a mercy, although in disguise to the present time of sight. It will send up the price of scantlings, and we was getting on too fast with them. By the time we have built up the mill again we shall have more orders than we know how to do with. When I come to reckon of it, to me it appears to be the reasonable thing to feel a lump of grief for the old mill, and then to set to and build a stronger one. Yes, that must be about the right thing to do. And we’ll have all the neighbors in when we lay foundations.”

“But what will be the good of it, Uncle Sam, when the new mill may at any time be washed away again?”

“Never, at any time,” he answered, very firmly, gazing through the door as if he saw the vain endeavor. “That little game can easily be stopped, for about fifty dollars, by opening down the bank toward the old track of the river. The biggest waterspout that ever came down from the mountains could never come anigh the mill, but go right down the valley. It hath been in my mind

to do it often, and now that I see the need, I will. Firm and I will begin tomorrow."

"But where is all the money to come from, Uncle Sam? You said that all your friends had refused to help you."

"Never mind, my dear. I will help myself. It won't be the first time, perhaps, in my life."

"But supposing that I could help you, just some little? Supposing that I had found the biggest lump of gold ever found in all California?"

Mr. Gundry ought to have looked surprised, and I was amazed that he did not; but he took it as quietly as if I had told him that I had just picked up a brass button of his; and I thought that he doubted my knowledge, very likely, even as to what gold was.

"It is gold, Uncle Sam, every bit of it gold—here is a piece of it; just look—and as large, I am sure, as this table. And it may be as deep as this room, for all that one can judge to the contrary. Why, it stopped the big pile from coming to the top, when even you went down the river."

"Well, now, that explains a thing or two," said the Sawyer, smiling peacefully, and beginning to think of another pipe, if preparation meant any thing. "Two things have puzzled me about that stump, and, indeed, I might say three things. Why did he take such a time to drive? and why would he never stand up like a man? and why wouldn't he go away when he ought to?"

"Because he had the best of all reasons, Uncle Sam. He was anchored on his gold, as I have read in French, and he had a good

right to be crooked about it, and no power could get him away from it."

"Hush, my dear, hush! It is not at all good for young people to let their minds run on so. But this gold looks very good indeed. Are you sure that it is a fair sample, and that there is any more of it?"

"How can you be so dreadfully provoking, Uncle Sam, when I tell you that I saw it with my own eyes? And there must be at least half a ton of it."

"Well, half a hundred-weight will be enough for me. And you shall have all the rest, my dear—that is, if you will spare me a bit, Miss Remy. It all belongs to you by discovery, according to the diggers' law. And your eyes are so bright about it, miss, that the whole of your heart must be running upon it."

"Then you think me as bad as the rest of the world! How I wish that I had never seen it! It was only for you that I cared about it—for you, for you; and I will never touch a scrap of it."

Mr. Gundry had only been trying me, perhaps. But I did not see it in that light, and burst into a flood of childish tears, that he should misunderstand me so. Gold had its usual end, in grief. Uncle Sam rose up to soothe me and to beg my pardon, and to say that perhaps he was harsh because of the treatment he had received from his friends. He took me in his arms and kissed me; but before I could leave off sobbing, the crack of a rifle rang through the house, and Suan Isco, with a wail, rushed out.

CHAPTER XIII
THE SAWYER'S PRAYER

The darkness of young summer night was falling on earth and tree and stream. Every thing looked of a different form and color from those of an hour ago, and the rich bloom of shadow mixed with color, and cast by snowy mountains, which have stored the purple adieu of the sun, was filling the air with delicious calm. The Sawyer ran out with his shirt sleeves shining, so that any sneaking foe might shoot him; but, with the instinct of a settler, he had caught up his rifle. I stood beneath a carob-tree, which had been planted near the porch, and flung fantastic tassels down, like the ear-rings of a negress. And not having sense enough to do good, I was only able to be frightened.

Listening intently, I heard the sound of skirring steps on the other side of and some way down the river; and the peculiar tread, even thus far off, was plainly Suan Isco's. And then in the stillness a weary and heavy foot went toiling after it. Before I could follow, which I longed to do, to learn at once the worst of it, I saw the figure of a man much nearer, and even within twenty yards of me, gliding along without any sound. Faint as the light was, I felt sure that it was not one of our own men, and the barrel of a long gun upon his shoulder made a black line among silver leaves. I longed to run forth and stop him, but my courage was not prompt

enough, and I shamefully shrank away behind the trunk of the carob-tree. Like a sleuth, compact, and calm-hearted villain, he went along without any breath of sound, stealing his escape with skill, till a white bower-tent made a background for him, and he leaped up and fell flat without a groan. The crack of a rifle came later than his leap, and a curl of white smoke shone against a black rock, and the Sawyer, in the distance, cried, "Well, now!" as he generally did when satisfied.

So scared was I that I caught hold of a cluster of pods to steady me; and then, without any more fear for myself, I ran to see whether it was possible to help. But the poor man lay beyond earthly help; he was too dead to palpitate. His life must have left him in the air, and he could not even have felt his fall.

In violent terror, I burst into tears, and lifted his heavy head, and strove to force his hot hands open, and did I know not what, without thinking, laboring only to recall his life.

"Are you grieving for the skulk who has shot my Firm?" said a stern voice quite unknown to me; and rising, I looked at the face of Mr. Gundry, unlike the countenance of Uncle Sam. I tried to speak to him, but was too frightened. The wrath of blood was in his face, and all his kind desires were gone.

"Yes, like a girl, you are sorry for a man who has stained this earth, till his only atonement is to stain it with his blood. Captain Pedro, there you lie, shot, like a coward, through the back. I wish you were alive to taste my boots. Murderer of men and filthy ravisher of women, miscreant of God, how can I keep

from trampling on you?"

It never had been in my dream that a good man could so entirely forget himself. I wanted to think that it must be somebody else, and not our Uncle Sam. But he looked toward the west, as all men do when their spirits are full of death, and the wan light showed that his chin was triple.

Whether it may have been right or wrong, I made all haste to get away. The face of the dead man was quite a pleasant thing, compared with the face of the old man living. He may not have meant it, and I hope he never did, but beyond all controversy he looked barbarous for the moment.

As I slipped away, to know the worst, there I saw him standing still, longing to kick the vile man's corpse, but quieted by the great awe of death. If the man had stirred, or breathed, or even moaned, the living man would have lost all reverence in his fury. But the power of the other world was greater than even revenge could trample on. He let it lie there, and he stooped his head, and went away quite softly.

My little foolish heart was bitterly visited by a thing like this. The Sawyer, though not of great human rank, was gifted with the largest human nature that I had ever met with. And though it was impossible as yet to think, a hollow depression, as at the loss of some great ideal, came over me.

Returning wretchedly to the house, I met Suan Isco and two men bringing the body of poor Firm. His head and both his arms hung down, and they wanted somebody to lift them; and this I

ran to do, although they called out to me not to meddle. The body was carried in, and laid upon three chairs, with a pillow at the head; and then a light was struck, and a candle brought by somebody or other. And Suan Isco sat upon the floor, and set up a miserable Indian dirge.

"Stow away that," cried Martin of the mill, for he was one of those two men; "wait till the lad is dead, and then pipe up to your liking. I felt him try to kick while we carried him along. He come forth on a arrand of that sort, and he seem to 'a been disappointed. A very fine young chap I call him, for to try to do it still, howsomever his mind might be wandering. Missy, keep his head up."

I did as I was told, and watched poor Firm as if my own life hung upon any sign of life in him. When I look back at these things, I think that fright and grief and pity must have turned an excitable girl almost into a real woman. But I had no sense of such things then.

"I tell you he ain't dead," cried Martin; "no more dead than I be. He feels the young gal's hand below him, and I see him try to turn up his eyes. He has taken a very bad knock, no doubt, and trouble about his breathing. I seed a fellow scalped once, and shot through the heart; but he came all round in about six months, and protected his head with a document. Firm, now, don't you be a fool. I have had worse things in my family."

Ephraim Gundry seemed to know that some one was upbraiding him. At any rate, his white lips trembled with a weak

desire to breathe, and a little shadow of life appeared to flicker in his open eyes. And on my sleeve, beneath his back, some hot bright blood came trickling.

"Keep him to that," said Martin, with some carpenter sort of surgery; "less fear of the life when the blood begins to run. Don't move him, missy; never mind your arm. It will be the saving of him."

I was not strong enough to hold him up, but Suan ran to help me; and they told me afterward that I fell faint, and no doubt it must have been so. But when the rest were gone, and had taken poor Firm to his straw mattress, the cold night air must have flowed into the room, and that, perhaps, revived me. I went to the bottom of the stairs and listened, and then stole up to the landing, and heard Suan Isco, who had taken the command, speaking cheerfully in her worst English. Then I hoped for the best, and, without any knowledge, wandered forth into the open air.

Walking quite as in a dream this time (which I had vainly striven to do when seeking for my nugget), I came to the bank of the gleaming river, and saw the water just in time to stop from stepping into it. Careless about this and every other thing for the moment, I threw myself on the sod, and listened to the mournful melody of night. Sundry unknown creatures, which by day keep timid silence, were sending timid sounds into the darkness, holding quiet converse with themselves, or it, or one another. And the silvery murmur of the wavelets soothed the twinkling sleep of leaves.

I also, being worn and weary, and having a frock which improved with washing, and was spoiled already by nursing Firm, was well content to throw myself into a niche of river-bank and let all things flow past me. But before any thing had found time to flow far, or the lullaby of night had lulled me, there came to me a sadder sound than plaintive Nature can produce without her Master's aid, the saddest sound in all creation—a strong man's wail.

Child as I was—and, perhaps, all the more for that reason as knowing so little of mankind—I might have been more frightened, but I could not have been a bit more shocked, by the roaring of a lion. For I knew in a moment whose voice it was, and that made it pierce me tenfold. It was Uncle Sam, lamenting to himself, and to his God alone, the loss of his last hope on earth. He could not dream that any other than his Maker (and his Maker's works, if ever they have any sympathy) listened to the wild outpourings of an aged but still very natural heart, which had always been proud of controlling itself. I could see his great frame through a willow-tree, with the sere grass and withered reeds around, and the faint gleam of fugitive water beyond. He was kneeling toward his shattered mill, having rolled his shirt sleeves back to pray, and his white locks shone in the starlight; then, after trying several times, he managed to pray a little. First (perhaps partly from habit), he said the prayer of Our Lord pretty firmly, and then he went on to his own special case, with a doubting whether he should mention it. But as he went on he

gathered courage, or received it from above, and was able to say what he wanted.

"Almighty Father of the living and the dead, I have lived long, and shall soon be dead, and my days have been full of trouble. But I never had such trouble as this here before, and I don't think I ever shall get over it. I have sinned every day of my life, and not thought of Thee, but of victuals, and money, and stuff; and nobody knows, but myself and Thou, all the little bad things inside of me. I cared a deal more to be respectable and get on with my business than to be prepared for kingdom come. And I have just been proud about the shooting of a villain, who might 'a gone free and repented. There is nobody left to me in my old age. Thou hast taken all of them. Wife, and son, and mill, and grandson, and my brother who robbed me—the whole of it may have been for my good, but I have got no good out of it. Show me the way for a little time, O Lord, to make the best of it; and teach me to bear it like a man, and not break down at this time of life. Thou knowest what is right. Please to do it. Amen."

CHAPTER XIV
NOT FAR TO SEEK

In the present state of controversies most profoundly religious, the Lord alone can decide (though thousands of men would hurry to pronounce) for or against the orthodoxy of the ancient Sawyer's prayer. But if sound doctrine can be established by success (as it always is), Uncle Sam's theology must have been unusually sound; for it pleased a gracious Power to know what he wanted, and to grant it.

Brave as Mr. Gundry was, and much-enduring and resigned, the latter years of his life on earth must have dragged on very heavily, with abstract resignation only, and none of his blood to care for him. Being so obstinate a man, he might have never admitted this, but proved against every one's voice, except his own, his special blessedness. But this must have been a trial to him, and happily he was spared from it.

For although Firm had been very badly shot, and kept us for weeks in anxiety about him, his strong young constitution and well-nourished frame got over it. A truly good and learned doctor came from Sacramento, and we hung upon his words, and found that there he left us hanging. And this was the wisest thing perhaps that he could do, because in America medical men are not absurdly expected, as they are in England, to do any good,

but are valued chiefly upon their power of predicting what they can not help. And this man of science perceived that he might do harm to himself and his family by predicting amiss, whereas he could do no good to his patient by predicting rightly. And so he foretold both good and evil, to meet the intentions of Providence.

He had not been sent for in vain, however; and to give him his due, he saved Ephraim's life, for he drew from the wound a large bullet, which, if left, must have poisoned all his circulation, although it was made of pure silver. The Sawyer wished to keep this silver bullet as a token, but the doctor said that it belonged to him according to miners' law; and so it came to a moderate argument. Each was a thoroughly stubborn man, according to the bent of all good men, and reasoning increased their unreason. But the doctor won—as indeed he deserved, for the extraction had been delicate—because, when reason had been exhausted, he just said this:

"Colonel Gundry, let us have no more words. The true owner is your grandson. I will put it back where I took it from."

Upon this, the Sawyer being tickled, as men very often are in sad moments, took the doctor by the hand, and gave him the bullet heartily. And the medical man had a loop made to it, and wore it upon his watch chain. And he told the story so often (saying that another man perhaps might have got it out, but no other man could have kept it), that among a great race who judge by facts it doubled his practice immediately.

The leader of the robbers, known far and wide as "Captain

Pedro," was buried where he fell; and the whole so raised Uncle Sam's reputation that his house was never attacked again; and if any bad characters were forced by circumstances to come near him, they never asked for any thing stronger than ginger-beer or lemonade, and departed very promptly. For as soon as Ephraim Gundry could give account of his disaster, it was clear that Don Pedro owed his fate to a bottle of the Sawyer's whiskey. Firm had only intended to give him a lesson for misbehavior, being fired by his grandfather's words about swinging me on the saddle. This idea had justly appeared to him to demand a protest; to deliver which he at once set forth with a valuable cowhide whip. Coming thus to the Rovers' camp, and finding their captain sitting in the shade to digest his dinner, Firm laid hold of him by the neck, and gave way to feelings of severity. Don Pedro regretted his misconduct, and being lifted up for the moment above his ordinary view, perceived that he might have done better, and shaped the pattern of his tongue to it. Firm, hearing this, had good hopes of him; yet knowing how volatile repentance is, he strove to form a well-marked track for it. And when the captain ceased to receive cowhide, he must have had it long enough to miss it.

Now this might have ended honorably and amicably for all concerned, if the captain had known when he was well off. Unluckily he had purloined a bottle of Mr. Gundry's whiskey, and he drew the cork now to rub his stripes, and the smell of it moved him to try it inside. And before very long his ideas of

honor, which he had sense enough to drop when sober, began to come into his eyes again, and to stir him up to mischief. Hence it was that he followed Firm, who was riding home well satisfied, and appeased his honor by shooting in cold blood, and justice by being shot anyhow.

It was beautiful, through all this trying time, to watch Uncle Sam's proceedings: he appeared so delightfully calm and almost careless whenever he was looked at. And then he was ashamed of himself perpetually, if any one went on with it. Nobody tried to observe him, of course, or remark upon any of his doings, and for this he would become so grateful that he would long to tell all his thoughts, and then stop. This must have been a great worry to him, seeing how open his manner was; and whenever he wanted to hide any thing, he informed us of that intention. So that we exhorted Firm every day to come round and restore us to our usual state. This was the poor fellow's special desire; and often he was angry with himself, and made himself worse again by declaring that he must be a milksop to lie there so long. Whereas, it was much more near the truth that few other men, even in the Western States, would ever have got over such a wound. I am not learned enough to say exactly where the damage was, but the doctor called it, I think, the sternum, and pronounced that "a building-up process" was required, and must take a long time, if it ever could be done.

It was done at last, thanks to Suan Isco, who scarcely ever left him by day or night, and treated him skillfully with healing

herbs. But he, without meaning it, vexed her often by calling for me—a mere ignorant child. Suan was dreadfully jealous of this, and perhaps I was proud of that sentiment of hers, and tried to justify it, instead of laboring to remove it, as would have been the more proper course. And Firm most ungratefully said that my hand was lighter than poor Suan's, and every thing I did was better done, according to him, which was shameful on his part, and as untrue as any thing could be. However, we yielded to him in all things while he was so delicate; and it often made us poor weak things cry to be the masters of a tall strong man.

Firm Gundry received that shot in May, about ten days before the twelvemonth was completed from my father's death. The brightness of summer and beauty of autumn went by without his feeling them, and while his system was working hard to fortify itself by walling up, as the learned man had called it. There had been some difficulties in this process, caused partly, perhaps, by our too lavish supply of the raw material; and before Firm's gap in his "sternum" was stopped, the mountains were coming down upon us, as we always used to say when the snow-line stooped. In some seasons this is a sharp time of hurry, broken with storms, and capricious, while men have to slur in the driving weather tasks that should have been matured long since. But in other years the long descent into the depth of winter is taken not with a jump like that, but gently and softly and windingly, with a great many glimpses back at the summer, and a good deal of leaning on the arm of the sun.

And so it was this time. The autumn and the winter for a fortnight stood looking quietly at each other. They had quite agreed to share the hours, to suit the arrangements of the sun. The nights were starry and fresh and brisk, without any touch of tartness; and the days were sunny and soft and gentle, without any sense of languor. It was a lovely scene—blue shadows gliding among golden light.

The Sawyer came forth, and cried, "What a shame! This makes me feel quite young again. And yet I have done not a stroke of work. No excuse; make no excuse. I can do that pretty well for myself. Praise God for all His mercies. I might do worse, perhaps, than have a pipe."

Then Firm came out to surprise him, and to please us all with the sight of himself. He steadied his steps with one great white hand upon his grandfather's Sunday staff, and his clear blue eyes were trembling with a sense of gratitude and a fear of tears. And I stepped behind a red strawberry-tree, for my sense of respect for him almost made me sob.

Then Jowler thought it high time to appear upon the scene, and convince us that he was not a dead dog yet. He had known tribulation, as his master had, and had found it a difficult thing to keep from the shadowy hunting ground of dogs who have lived a conscientious life. I had wondered at first what his reason could have been for not coming forward, according to his custom, to meet that troop of robbers. But his reason, alas! was too cogent to himself, though nobody else in that dreadful time

could pay any attention to him. The Rovers, well knowing poor Jowler's repute, and declining the fair mode of testing it, had sent in advance a very crafty scout, a half-bred Indian, who knew as much about dogs as they could ever hope to know about themselves. This rogue approached faithful Jowler—so we were told long afterward—not in an upright way, but as if he had been a brother quadruped. And he took advantage of the dog's unfeigned surprise and interest to accost him with a piece of kidney containing a powerful poison. According to all sound analogy, this should have stopped the dear fellow's earthly tracks; but his spirit was such that he simply went away to nurse himself up in retirement. Neither man nor dog can tell what agonies he suffered; and doubtless his tortures of mind about duty unperformed were the worst of all. These things are out of human knowledge in its present unsympathetic state. Enough that poor Jowler came home at last, with his ribs all up and his tail very low.

Like friends who have come together again, almost from the jaws of death, we sat in the sunny noon, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. The trees above us looked proud and cheerful, laying aside the mere frippery of leaves with a good grace and contented arms, and a surety of having quite enough next spring. Much of the fruity wealth of autumn still was clustering in our sight, heavily fetching the arched bough down to lessen the fall, when fall they must. And against the golden leaves of maple behind the unpretending roof a special wreath of blue shone like a climbing

Ipomaea. But coming to examine this, one found it to be nothing more nor less than the smoke of the kitchen chimney, busy with a quiet roasting job.

This shows how clear the air was; but a thousand times as much could never tell how clear our spirits were. Nobody made any "demonstration," or cut any frolicsome capers, or even said any thing exuberant. The steadfast brooding breed of England, which despises antics, was present in us all, and strengthened by a soil whose native growth is peril, chance, and marvel. And so we nodded at one another, and I ran over and courtesied to Uncle Sam, and he took me to him.

"You have been a dear good child," he said, as he rose, and looked over my head at Firm. "My own granddarter, if such there had been, could not have done more to comfort me, nor half so much, for aught I know. There is no picking and choosing among the females, as God gives them. But he has given you for a blessing and saving to my old age, my dearie."

"Oh, Uncle Sam, now the nugget!" I cried, desiring like a child to escape deep feeling, and fearing any strong words from Firm. "You have promised me ever so long that I should be the first to show Firm the nugget."

"And so you shall, my dear, and Firm shall see it before he is an hour older, and Jowler shall come down to show us where it is."

Firm, who had little faith in the nugget, but took it for a dream of mine, and had proved conclusively from his pillow that it could

not exist in earnest, now with a gentle, satirical smile declared his anxiety to see it; and I led him along by his better arm, faster, perhaps, than he ought to have walked.

In a very few minutes we were at the place, and I ran eagerly to point it; but behold, where the nugget had been, there was nothing except the white bed of the river! The blue water flowed very softly on its way, without a gleam of gold to corrupt it.

"Oh, nobody will ever believe me again!" I exclaimed, in the saddest of sad dismay. "I dreamed about it first, but it never can have been a dream throughout. You know that I told you about it, Uncle Sam, even when you were very busy, and that shows that it never could have been a dream."

"You told me about it, I remember now," Mr. Gundry answered, dryly; "but it does not follow that there was such a thing. My dear, you may have imagined it; because it was the proper time for it to come, when my good friends had no money to lend. Your heart was so good that it got into your brain, and you must not be vexed, my dear child; it has done you good to dream of it."

"I said so all along," Firm observed. "Miss Rema felt that it ought to be, and so she believed that it must be, there. She is always so warm and trustful."

"Is that all you are good for?" I cried, with no gratitude for his compliment. "As sure as I stand here, I saw a great bowlder of gold, and so did Jowler, and I gave you the piece that he brought up. Did you take them all in a dream, Uncle Sam? Come, can

you get over that?"

I assure you that for the moment I knew not whether I stood upon my feet or head, until I perceived an extraordinary grin on the Sawyer's ample countenance; but Firm was not in the secret yet, for he gazed at me with compassion, and Uncle Sam looked at us both as if he were balancing our abilities.

"Send your dog in, missy," at last he said. "He is more your dog than mine, I believe, and he obeys you like a Christian. Let him go and find it if he can."

At a sign from me, the great dog dashed in, and scratched with all four feet at once, and made the valley echo with the ring of mighty barkings; and in less than two minutes there shone the nugget, as yellow and as big as ever.

"Ha! ha! I never saw a finer thing," shouted Uncle Sam, like a school-boy. "I were too many for you, missy dear; but the old dog wollops the whole of us. I just shot a barrow-load of gravel on your nugget, to keep it all snug till Firm should come round; and if the boy had never come round, there the gold might have waited the will of the Almighty. It is a big spot, anyhow."

It certainly was not a little spot, though they all seemed to make so light of it—which vexed me, because I had found it, and was as proud as if I had made it. Not by any means that the Sawyer was half as careless as he seemed to be; he put on much of this for my sake, having very lofty principles, especially concerning the duty of the young. Young people were never to have small ideas, so far as he could help it, particularly upon such

matters as Mammon, or the world, or fashion; and not so very seldom he was obliged to catch himself up in his talking, when he chanced to be going on and forgetting that I, who required a higher vein of thought for my youth, was taking his words downright; and I think that all this had a great deal to do with his treating all that gold in such an exemplary manner; for if it had really mattered nothing, what made him go in the dark and shoot a great barrow-load of gravel over it?

CHAPTER XV
BROUGHT TO BANK

The sanity of a man is mainly tested among his neighbors and kindred by the amount of consideration which he has consistently given to cash. If money has been the chief object of his life, and he for its sake has spared nobody, no sooner is he known to be successful than admiration overpowers all the ill-will he has caused. He is shrewd, sagacious, long-headed, and great; he has earned his success, and few men grudge, while many seek to get a slice of it; but he, as a general rule, declines any premature distribution, and for this custody of his wealth he is admired all the more by those who have no hope of sharing it.

As soon as ever it was known that Uncle Sam had lodged at his banker's a tremendous lump of gold, which rumor declared to be worth at least a hundred thousand dollars, friends from every side poured in, all in hot haste, to lend him their last farthing. The Sawyer was pleased with their kindness, but thought that his second-best whiskey met the merits of the case. And he was more particular than usual with his words; for, according to an old saying of the diggers, a big nugget always has children, and, being too heavy to go very far, it is likely to keep all its little ones at home. Many people, therefore, were longing to seek for the frogs of this great toad; for so in their slang the miners called them,

with a love of preternatural history. But Mr. Gundry allowed no search for the frogs, or even the tadpoles, of his patriarchal nugget. And much as he hated the idea of sowing the seeds of avarice in any one, he showed himself most consistent now in avoiding that imputation; for not only did he refuse to show the bed of his great treasure, after he had secured it, but he fenced the whole of it in, and tarred the fence, and put loopholes in it; and then he established Jowler where he could neither be shot nor poisoned, and kept a man with a double-barreled rifle in the ruin of the mill, handy to shoot, but not easy to be shot; and this was a resolute man, being Martin himself, who had now no business. Of course Martin grumbled; but the worse his temper was, the better for his duty, as seems to be the case with a great many men; and if any one had come to console him in his grumbling, never would he have gone away again.

It would have been reckless of me to pretend to say what any body ought to do; from the first to the last I left every thing to those who knew so much better; at the same time I felt that it might have done no harm if I had been more consulted, though I never dreamed of saying so, because the great gold had been found by me, and although I cared for it scarcely more than for the tag of a boot-lace, nobody seemed to me able to enter into it quite as I did; and as soon as Firm's danger and pain grew less, I began to get rather impatient, but Uncle Sam was not to be hurried.

Before ever he hoisted that rock of gold, he had made up

his mind for me to be there, and he even put the business off, because I would not come one night, for I had a superstitious fear on account of its being my father's birthday. Uncle Sam had forgotten the date, and begged my pardon for proposing it; but he said that we must not put it off later than the following night, because the moonlight would be failing, and we durst not have any kind of lamp, and before the next moon the hard weather might begin. All this was before the liberal offers of his friends, of which I have spoken first, although they happened to come after it.

While the Sawyer had been keeping the treasure perdu, to abide the issue of his grandson's illness, he had taken good care both to watch it and to form some opinion of its shape and size; for, knowing the pile which I had described, he could not help finding it easily enough; and indeed the great fear was that others might find it, and come in great force to rob him; but nothing of that sort had happened, partly because he held his tongue rigidly, and partly, perhaps, because of the simple precaution which he had taken.

Now, however, it was needful to impart the secret to one man at least; for Firm, though recovering, was still so weak that it might have killed him to go into the water, or even to exert himself at all; and strong as Uncle Sam was, he knew that even with hoisting-tackle, he alone could never bring that piece of bullion to bank; so, after much consideration, he resolved to tell Martin of the mill, as being the most trusty man about the place,

as well as the most surly; but he did not tell him until every thing was ready, and then he took him straightway to the place.

Here, in the moonlight, we stood waiting, Firm and myself and Suan Isco, who had more dread than love of gold, and might be useful to keep watch, or even to lend a hand, for she was as strong as an ordinary man. The night was sultry, and the fire-flies (though dull in the radiance of the moon) darted, like soft little shooting-stars, across the still face of shadow, and the flood of the light of the moon was at its height, submerging every thing.

While we were whispering and keeping in the shade for fear of attracting any wanderer's notice, we saw the broad figure of the Sawyer rising from a hollow of the bank, and behind him came Martin the foreman, and we soon saw that due preparation had been made, for they took from under some drift-wood (which had prevented us from observing it) a small movable crane, and fixed it on a platform of planks which they set up in the river-bed.

"Palefaces eat gold," Suan Isco said, reflectively, and as if to satisfy herself. "Dem eat, drink, die gold; dem pull gold out of one other's ears. Welly hope Mellican mans get enough gold now."

"Don't be sarcastic, now, Suan," I answered; "as if it were possible to have enough!"

"For my part," said Firm, who had been unusually silent all the evening, "I wish it had never been found at all. As sure as I stand here, mischief will come of it. It will break up our household. I hope it will turn out a lump of quartz, gilt on the face, as those

big nuggets do, ninety-nine out of a hundred. I have had no faith in it all along."

"Because I found it, Mr. Firm, I suppose," I answered, rather pettishly, for I never had liked Firm's incessant bitterness about my nugget. "Perhaps if you had found it, Mr. Firm, you would have had great faith in it."

"Can't say, can't say," was all Firm's reply; and he fell into the silent vein again.

"Heave-ho! heave-ho! there, you sons of cooks!" cried the Sawyer, who was splashing for his life in the water. "I've tackled 'un now. Just tighten up the belt, to see if he biteth centre-like. You can't lift 'un! Lord bless 'ee, not you. It 'll take all I know to do that, I guess; and Firm ain't to lay no hand to it. Don't you be in such a doggoned hurry. Hold hard, can't you?"

For Suan and Martin were hauling for their lives, and even I caught hold of a rope-end, but had no idea what to do with it, when the Sawyer swung himself up to bank, and in half a minute all was orderly. He showed us exactly where to throw our weight, and he used his own to such good effect that, after some creaking and groaning, the long horn of the crane rose steadily, and a mass of dripping sparkles shone in the moonlight over the water.

"Hurrah! what a whale! How the tough ash bends!" cried Uncle Sam, panting like a boy, and doing nearly all the work himself. "Martin, lay your chest to it. We'll grass him in two seconds. Californy never saw a sight like this, I reckon."

There was plenty of room for us all to stand round the monster

and admire it. In shape it was just like a fat toad, squatting with his shoulders up and panting. Even a rough resemblance to the head and the haunches might be discovered, and a few spots of quartz shone here and there on the glistening and bossy surface. Some of us began to feel and handle it with vast admiration; but Firm, with his heavy boots, made a vicious kick at it, and a few bright scales, like sparks, flew off.

"Why, what ails the lad?" cried the Sawyer, in some wrath; "what harm hath the stone ever done to him? To my mind, this here lump is a proof of the whole creation of the world, and who hath lived long enough to gainsay? Here this lump hath lain, without changing color, since creation's day; here it is, as big and heavy as when the Lord laid hand to it. What good to argue agin such facts? Supposin' the world come out o' nothing, with nobody to fetch it, or to say a word of orders, how ever could it 'a managed to get a lump of gold like this in it? They clever fellers is too clever. Let 'em put all their heads together, and turn out a nugget, and I'll believe them."

Uncle Sam's reasoning was too deep for any but himself to follow. He was not long in perceiving this, though we were content to admire his words without asking him to explain them; so he only said, "Well, well," and began to try with both hands if he could heft this lump. He stirred it, and moved it, and raised it a little, as the glisten of the light upon its roundings showed; but lift it fairly from the ground he could not, however he might bow his sturdy legs and bend his mighty back to it; and, strange to say,

he was pleased for once to acknowledge his own discomfiture.

"Five hundred and a half I used to lift to the height of my knee-cap easily; I may 'a fallen off now a hundred-weight with years, and strings in my back, and rheumatics; but this here little toad is a clear hundredweight out and beyond my heftage. If there's a pound here, there's not an ounce under six hundred-weight, I'll lay a thousand dollars. Miss Rema, give a name to him. All the thundering nuggets has thundering names."

"Then this shall be called 'Uncle Sam,'" I answered, "because he is the largest and the best of all."

"It shall stand, miss," cried Martin, who was in great spirits, and seemed to have bettered himself forever. "You could not have given it a finer name, miss, if you had considered for a century. Uncle Sam is the name of our glorious race, from the kindness of our natur'. Every body's uncle we are now, in vartue of superior knowledge, and freedom, and giving of general advice, and stickin' to all the world, or all the good of it. Darned if old Sam aren't the front of creation!"

"Well, well," said the Sawyer, "let us call it 'Uncle Sam,' if the dear young lady likes it; it would be bad luck to change the name; but, for all that, we must look uncommon sharp, or some of our glorious race will come and steal it afore we unbutton our eyes."

"Pooh!" cried Martin; but he knew very well that his master's words were common-sense; and we left him on guard with a double-barreled gun, and Jowler to keep watch with him. And the next day he told us that he had spent the night in such a frame

of mind from continual thought that when our pet cow came to drink at daybreak, it was but the blowing of her breath that saved her from taking a bullet between her soft tame eyes.

Now it could not in any kind of way hold good that such things should continue; and the Sawyer, though loath to lose sight of the nugget, perceived that he must not sacrifice all the morals of the neighborhood to it, and he barely had time to dispatch it on its road at the bottom of a load of lumber, with Martin to drive, and Jowler to sit up, and Firm to ride behind, when a troop of mixed robbers came riding across, with a four-wheel cart and two sturdy mules—enough to drag off every thing. They had clearly heard of the golden toad, and desired to know more of him; but Uncle Sam, with his usual blandness, met these men at the gate of his yard, and upon the top rail, to ease his arm, he rested a rifle of heavy metal, with seven revolving chambers. The robbers found out that they had lost their way, and Mr. Gundry answered that so they had, and the sooner they found it in another direction, the better it would be for them. They thought that he had all his men inside, and they were mighty civil, though we had only two negroes to help us, and Suan Isco, with a great gun cocked. But their curiosity was such that they could not help asking about the gold; and, sooner than shoot them, Uncle Sam replied that, upon his honor, the nugget was gone. And the fame of his word was so well known that these fellows (none of whom could tell the truth, even at confession) believed him on the spot, and begged his pardon for trespassing on his premises. They hoped that he

would not say a word to the Vigilance Committee, who hanged a poor fellow for losing his road; and he told them that if they made off at once, nobody should pursue them; and so they rode off very happily.

CHAPTER XVI
FIRM AND INFIRM

Strange as it may appear, our quiet little home was not yet disturbed by that great discovery of gold. The Sawyer went up to the summit of esteem in public opinion; but to himself and to us he was the same as ever. He worked with his own hard hands and busy head just as he used to do; for although the mill was still in ruins, there was plenty of the finer work to do, which always required hand-labor. And at night he would sit at the end of the table furthest from the fire-place, with his spectacles on, and his red cheeks glowing, while he designed the future mill, which was to be built in the spring, and transcend every mill ever heard, thought, or dreamed of.

We all looked forward to a quiet winter, snug with warmth and cheer in-doors, and bright outside with sparkling trees, brisk air, and frosty appetite, when a foolish idea arose which spoiled the comfort at least of two of us. Ephraim Gundry found out, or fancied, that he was entirely filled with love of a very young maid, who never dreamed of such things, and hated even to hear of them; and the maid, unluckily, was myself.

During the time of his ailment I had been with him continually, being only too glad to assuage his pain, or turn his thoughts away from it. I partly suspected that he had incurred

his bitter wound for my sake; though I never imputed his zeal to more than a young man's natural wrath at an outrage. But now he left me no longer in doubt, and made me most uncomfortable. Perhaps I was hard upon him, and afterward I often thought so, for he was very kind and gentle; but I was an orphan child, and had no one to advise me in such matters. I believe that he should have considered this, and allowed me to grow a little older; but perhaps he himself was too young as yet and too bashful to know how to manage things. It was the very evening after his return from Sacramento, and the beauty of the weather still abode in the soft warm depth around us. In every tint of rock and tree and playful glass of river a quiet clearness seemed to lie, and a rich content of color. The grandeur of the world was such that one could only rest among it, seeking neither voice nor thought.

Therefore I was more surprised than pleased to hear my name ring loudly through the echoing hollows, and then to see the bushes shaken, and an eager form leap out. I did not answer a word, but sat with a wreath of white bouvardia and small adiantum round my head, which I had plaited anyhow.

"What a lovely dear you are!" cried Firm, and then he seemed frightened at his own words.

"I had no idea that you would have finished your dinner so soon as this, Mr. Firm."

"And you did not want me. You are vexed to see me. Tell the truth, Miss Rema."

"I always tell the truth," I answered; "and I did not want to be

disturbed just now. I have so many things to think of."

"And not me among them. Oh no, of course you never think of me, Erema."

"It is very unkind of you to say that," I answered, looking clearly at him, as a child looks at a man. "And it is not true, I assure you, Firm. Whenever I have thought of dear Uncle Sam, I very often go on to think of you, because he is so fond of you."

"But not for my own sake, Erema; you never think of me for my own sake."

"But yes, I do, I assure you, Mr. Firm; I do greatly. There is scarcely a day that I do not remember how hungry you are, and I think of you."

"Tush!" replied Firm, with a lofty gaze. "Even for a moment that does not in any way express my meaning. My mind is very much above all eating when it dwells upon you, Erema. I have always been fond of you, Erema."

"You have always been good to me, Firm," I said, as I managed to get a great branch between us. "After your grandfather, and Suan Isco, and Jowler, I think that I like you best of almost any body left to me. And you know that I never forget your slippers."

"Erema, you drive me almost wild by never understanding me. Now will you just listen to a little common-sense? You know that I am not romantic."

"Yes, Firm; yes, I know that you never did any thing wrong in any way."

"You would like me better if I did. What an extraordinary

thing it is! Oh, Erema, I beg your pardon."

He had seen in a moment, as men seem to do, when they study the much quicker face of a girl, that his words had keenly wounded me—that I had applied them to my father, of whom I was always thinking, though I scarcely ever spoke of him. But I knew that Firm had meant no harm, and I gave him my hand, though I could not speak.

"My darling," he said, "you are very dear to me—dearer than all the world besides. I will not worry you any more. Only say that you do not hate me."

"How could I? How could any body? Now let us go in and attend to Uncle Sam. He thinks of every body before himself."

"And I think of every body after myself. Is that what you mean, Erema?"

"To be sure! if you like. You may put any meaning on my words that you think proper. I am accustomed to things of that sort, and I pay no attention whatever, when I am perfectly certain that I am right."

"I see," replied Firm, applying one finger to the side of his nose in deep contemplation, which, of all his manners, annoyed me most. "I see how it is; Miss Rema is always perfectly certain that she is right, and the whole of the rest of the world quite wrong. Well, after all, there is nothing like holding a first-rate opinion of one's self."

"You are not what I thought of you," I cried, being vexed beyond bearance by such words, and feeling their gross injustice.

"If you wish to say any thing more, please to leave it until you recover your temper. I am not quite accustomed to rudeness."

With these words, I drew away and walked off, partly in earnest and partly in joke, not wishing to hear another word; and when I looked back, being well out of sight, there he sat still, with his head on his hands, and my heart had a little ache for him.

However, I determined to say no more, and to be extremely careful. I could not in justice blame Ephraim Gundry for looking at me very often. But I took good care not to look at him again unless he said something that made me laugh, and then I could scarcely help it. He was sharp enough very soon to find out this; and then he did a thing which was most unfair, as I found out long afterward. He bought an American jest-book, full of ideas wholly new to me, and these he committed to heart, and brought them out as his own productions. If I had only known it, I must have been exceedingly sorry for him. But Uncle Sam used to laugh and rub his hands, perhaps for old acquaintance' sake; and when Uncle Sam laughed, there was nobody near who could help laughing with him. And so I began to think Firm the most witty and pleasant of men, though I tried to look away.

But perhaps the most careful and delicate of things was to see how Uncle Sam went on. I could not understand him at all just then, and thought him quite changed from my old Uncle Sam; but afterward, when I came to know, his behavior was as clear and shallow as the water of his own river. He had very strange ideas about what he generally called "the female kind." According to

his ideas (and perhaps they were not so unusual among mankind, especially settlers), all "females" were of a good but weak and consistently inconsistent sort. The surest way to make them do whatever their betters wanted, was to make them think that it was not wanted, but was hedged with obstacles beyond their power to overcome, and so to provoke and tantalize them to set their hearts upon doing it. In accordance with this idea (than which there can be none more mistaken), he took the greatest pains to keep me from having a word to say to Firm; and even went so far as to hint, with winks and nods of pleasantry, that his grandson's heart was set upon the pretty Miss Sylvester, the daughter of a man who owned a herd of pigs, much too near our saw-mills, and herself a young woman of outrageous dress, and in a larger light contemptible. But when Mr. Gundry, without any words, conveyed this piece of news to me, I immediately felt quite a liking for gaudy but harmless Pennsylvania—for so her parents had named her when she was too young to help it; and I heartily hoped that she might suit Firm, which she seemed all the more likely to do as his conduct could not be called noble. Upon that point, however, I said not a word, leaving him purely to judge for himself, and feeling it a great relief that now he could not say any thing more to me. I was glad that his taste was so easily pleased, and I told Suan Isco how glad I was.

This I had better have left unsaid, for it led to a great explosion, and drove me away from the place altogether before the new mill was finished, and before I should otherwise have gone from

friends who were so good to me; not that I could have staid there much longer, even if this had never come to pass; for week by week and month by month I was growing more uneasy: uneasy not at my obligations or dependence upon mere friends (for they managed that so kindly that I seemed to confer the favor), but from my own sense of lagging far behind my duty.

For now the bright air, and the wholesome food, and the pleasure of goodness around me, were making me grow, without knowledge or notice, into a tall and not altogether to be overlooked young woman. I was exceedingly shy about this, and blushed if any one spoke of it; but yet in my heart I felt it was so; and how could I help it? And when people said, as rough people will, and even Uncle Sam sometimes, "Handsome is as handsome does," or "Beauty is only skin-deep," and so on, I made it my duty not to be put out, but to bear it in mind and be thankful. And though I had no idea of any such influence at the moment, I hope that the grandeur of nature around and the lofty style of every thing may have saved me from dwelling too much on myself, as Pennsylvania Sylvester did.

Now the more I felt my grown-up age and health and buoyant vigor, the surer I knew that the time was come for me to do some good with them; not to benefit the world in general, in a large and scattery way (as many young people set out to do, and never get any further), but to right the wrong of my own house, and bring home justice to my own heart. This may be thought a partial and paltry object to set out with; and it is not for me to say otherwise.

At the time, it occurred to me in no other light except as my due business, and I never took any large view at all. But even now I do believe (though not yet in pickle of wisdom) that if every body, in its own little space and among its own little movements, will only do and take nothing without pure taste of the salt of justice, no reeking atrocity of national crimes could ever taint the heaven.

Such questions, however, become me not. I have only to deal with very little things, sometimes too slim to handle well, and too hazy to be woven; and if they seem below my sense and dignity to treat of, I can only say that they seemed very big at the time when I had to encounter them.

For instance, what could be more important, in a little world of life, than for Uncle Sam to be put out, and dare even to think ill of me? Yet this he did; and it shows how shallow are all those theories of the other sex which men are so pleased to indulge in. Scarcely any thing could be more ridiculous from first to last, when calmly and truly considered, than the firm belief which no power of reason could for the time root out of him.

Uncle Sam, the dearest of all mankind to me, and the very kindest, was positively low-enough to believe, in his sad opinion of the female race, that my young head was turned because of the wealth to which I had no claim, except through his own justice. He had insisted at first that the whole of that great nugget belonged to me by right of sole discovery. I asked him whether, if any stranger had found it, it would have been considered his, and whether he would have allowed a “greaser,” upon finding, to

make off with it. At the thought of this, Mr. Gundry gave a little grunt, and could not go so far as to maintain that view of it. But he said that my reasoning did not fit; that I was not a greaser, but a settled inhabitant of the place, and entitled to all a settler's rights; that the bed of the river would have been his grave but for the risk of my life, and therefore whatever I found in the bed of the river belonged to me, and me only.

In argument he was so much stronger than I could ever attempt to be that I gave it up, and could only say that if he argued forever it could never make any difference. He did not argue forever, but only grew obstinate and unpleasant, so that I yielded at last to own the half share of the bullion.

Very well. Every body would have thought, who has not studied the nature of men or been dragged through it heavily, that now there could be no more trouble between two people entirely trusting each other, and only anxious that the other should have the best of it. Yet, instead of that being the case, the mischief, the myriad mischief, of money set in, until I heartily wished sometimes that my miserable self was down in the hole which the pelf had left behind it.

For what did Uncle Sam take into his head (which was full of generosity and large ideas, so loosely packed that little ones grew between them, especially about womankind)—what else did he really seem to think, with the downright stubbornness of all his thoughts, but that I, his poor debtor and pensioner and penniless dependent, was so set up and elated by this sudden access of

fortune that henceforth none of the sawing race was high enough for me to think of? It took me a long time to believe that so fair and just a man ever could set such interpretation upon me. And when it became too plain that he did so, truly I know not whether grief or anger was uppermost in my troubled heart.

CHAPTER XVII
HARD AND SOFT

Before very long it was manifest enough that Mr. Gundry looked down upon Miss Sylvester with a large contempt. But while this raised my opinion of his judgment, it almost deprived me of a great relief—the relief of supposing that he wished his grandson to marry this Pennsylvania. For although her father, with his pigs and cattle, and a low sort of hostelry which he kept, could settle "a good pile of dollars" upon her, and had kept her at the "learnedest ladies' college" even in San Francisco till he himself trembled at her erudition, still it was scarcely to be believed that a man of the Sawyer's strong common-sense and disregard of finery would ever accept for his grandchild a girl made of affectation, vulgarity, and conceit. And one day, quite in the early spring, he was so much vexed with the fine lady's airs that he left no doubt about his meaning.

Miss Sylvester was very proud of the figure she made on horseback; and having been brought up, perhaps as a child, to ride after pigs and so on, she must have had fine opportunities of acquiring a graceful style of horsemanship. And now she dashed through thick and thin in a most commanding manner, caring no more for a snow-drift than ladies do for a scraping of the road. No one with the least observation could doubt that this young

woman was extremely anxious to attract Firm Gundry's notice; and therefore, on the day above spoken of, once more she rode over, with her poor father in waiting upon her as usual.

Now I know very well how many faults I have, and to deny them has never been my practice; but this is the honest and earnest truth, that no smallness of mind, or narrowness of feeling, or want of large or fine sentiments made me bolt my door when that girl was in the house. I simply refused, after seeing her once, to have any thing more to say to her; by no means because of my birth and breeding (which are things that can be most easily waived when the difference is acknowledged), nor yet on account of my being brought up in the company of ladies, nor even by reason of any dislike which her bold brown eyes put into me. My cause was sufficient and just and wise. I felt myself here as a very young girl, in safe and pure and honest hands, yet thrown on my own discretion, without any feminine guidance whatever. And I had learned enough from the wise French sisters to know at a glance that Miss Sylvester was not a young woman who would do me good.

Even Uncle Sam, who was full of thought and delicate care about me, so far as a man can understand, and so far as his simple shrewdness went, in spite of all his hospitable ways and open universal welcome, though he said not a word (as on such a point he was quite right in doing)—even he, as I knew by his manner, was quite content with my decision. But Firm, being young and in many ways stupid, made a little grievance of it. And, of course,

Miss Sylvester made a great one.

"Oh, I do declare, I am going away," through my open window I heard her exclaim in her sweetly affected tone, at the end of that long visit, "without even having the honor of saying a kind word to your young visitor. Do not wait for me, papa; I must pay my devoirs. Such a distinguished and travelled person can hardly be afflicted with mauvaise honte. Why does she not rush to embrace me? All the French people do; and she is so French! Let me see her, for the sake of my accent."

"We don't want no French here, ma'am," replied Uncle Sam, as Sylvester rode off, "and the young lady wants no Doctor Hunt. Her health is as good as your own, and you never catch no French actions from her. If she wanted to see you, she would 'a come down."

"Oh, now, this is too barbarous! Colonel Gundry, you are the most tyrannous man; in your own dominions an autocrat. Every body says so, but I never would believe it. Oh, don't let me go away with that impression. And you do look so good-natured!"

"And so I mean to look, Miss Penny, until you are out of sight."

The voice of the Sawyer was more dry than that of his oldest and rustiest saw. The fashionable and highly finished girl had no idea what to make of him; but gave her young horse a sharp cut, to show her figure as she reined him; and then galloping off, she kissed her tan gauntlet with crimson net-work down it, and left Uncle Sam to revolve his rudeness, with the dash of the wet road

scattered in the air.

"I wouldn't 'a spoke to her so course," he said to Firm, who now returned from opening the gate and delivering his farewell, "if she wasn't herself so extra particular, gild me, and sky-blue my mouldings fine. How my mother would 'a stared at the sight of such a gal! Keep free of her, my lad, keep free of her. But no harm to put her on, to keep our missy alive and awake, my boy."

Immediately I withdrew from ear-shot, more deeply mortified than I can tell, and perhaps doing Firm an injustice by not waiting for his answer. I knew not then how lightly men will speak of such delicate subjects; and it set me more against all thoughts of Firm than a month's reflection could have done. When I came to know more of the world, I saw that I had been very foolish. At the time, however, I was firmly set in a strong resolve to do that which alone seemed right, or even possible—to quit with all speed a place which could no longer be suited for me.

For several days I feared to say a single word about it, while equally I condemned myself for having so little courage. But it was not as if there were any body to help me, or tell me what to do; sometimes I was bold with a surety of right, and then again I shook with the fear of being wrong. Because, through the whole of it, I felt how wonderfully well I had been treated, and what a great debt I owed of kindness; and it seemed to be only a nasty little pride which made me so particular. And being so unable to settle for myself, I waited for something to settle it.

Something came, in a way which I had not by any means

expected. I had told Suan Isco how glad I was that Firm had fixed his liking steadily upon Miss Sylvester. If any woman on earth could be trusted not to say a thing again, that one was this good Indian. Not only because of her provident habits, but also in right of the difficulty which encompassed her in our language. But she managed to get over both of these, and to let Mr. Ephraim know, as cleverly as if she had lived in drawing-rooms, whatever I had said about him. She did it for the best; but it put him in a rage, which he came at once to have out with me.

"And so, Miss Erema," he said, throwing down his hat upon the table of the little parlor, where I sat with an old book of Norman ballads, "I have your best wishes, then, have I, for a happy marriage with Miss Sylvester?"

I was greatly surprised at the tone of his voice, while the flush on his cheeks and the flash of his eyes, and even his quick heavy tread, showed plainly that his mind was a little out of balance. He deserved it, however, and I could not grieve.

"You have my best wishes," I replied, demurely, "for any state of life to which you may be called. You could scarcely expect any less of me than that."

"How kind you are! But do you really wish that I should marry old Sylvester's girl?"

Firm, as he asked this question, looked so bitterly reproachful (as if he were saying, "Do you wish to see me hanged?"), while his eyes took a form which reminded me so of the Sawyer in a furious puzzle, that it was impossible for me to answer as lightly

as I meant to do.

"No, I can not say, Firm, that I wish it at all; unless your heart is set on it—"

"Don't you know, then, where my heart is set?" he asked me, in a deep voice, coming nearer, and taking the ballad-book from my hands. "Why will you feign not to know, Erema, who is the only one I can ever think of twice? Above me, I know, in every possible way—birth and education and mind and appearance, and now far above me in money as well. But what are all these things? Try to think if only you could like me. Liking gets over every thing, and without it nothing is any thing. Why do I like you so, Erema? Is it because of your birth, and teaching, and manners, and sweet looks, and all that, or even because of your troubles?"

"How can I tell, Firm—how can I tell? Perhaps it is just because of myself. And why do you do it at all, Firm?"

"Ah, why do I do it? How I wish I knew! Perhaps then I might cure it. To begin with, what is there, after all, so very wonderful about you?"

"Oh, nothing, I should hope. Most surely nothing. It would grieve me to be at all wonderful. That I leave for American ladies."

"Now you don't understand me. I mean, of course, that you are wonderfully good and kind and clever; and your eyes, I am sure, and your lips and smile, and all your other features—there is nothing about them that can be called any thing else but

wonderful."

"Now, Firm, how exceedingly foolish you are! I did hope that you knew better."

"Erema, I never shall know better. I never can swerve or change, if I live to be a hundred and fifty. You think me presumptuous, no doubt, from what you are brought up to. And you are so young that to seek to bind you, even if you loved me, would be an unmanly thing. But now you are old enough, and you know your own mind surely well enough, just to say whether you feel as if you could ever love me as I love you."

He turned away, as if he felt that he had no right to press me so, and blamed himself for selfishness; and I liked him better for doing that than for any thing he had done before. Yet I knew that I ought to speak clearly, and though my voice was full of tears, I tried.

"Dear Firm," I said, as I took his hand and strove to look at him steadily, "I like and admire you very much; and by-and-by —by-and-by, I might, that is, if you did not hurry me. Of all the obstacles you have mentioned, none is worth considering. I am nothing but a poor castaway, owing my life to Uncle Sam and you. But one thing there is which could never be got over, even if I felt as you feel toward me. Never can I think of little matters, or of turning my thoughts to—to any such things as you speak of, as long as a vile reproach and wicked imputation lies on me. And before even that, I have to think of my father, who gave his life for me. Firm, I have been here too long delaying, and wasting

my time in trifles. I ought to have been in Europe long ago. If I am old enough for what you talk of, I am old enough to do my duty. If I am old enough for love, as it is called, I am old enough for hate. I have more to do with hate than love, I think."

"Erema," cried Firm, "what a puzzle you are! I never even dreamed that you could be so fierce. You are enough to frighten Uncle Sam himself."

"If I frighten you, Firm, that is quite enough. You see now how vain it is to say another word."

"I do not see any thing of the sort. Come back, and look at me quite calmly."

Being frightened at the way in which I had spoken, and having passed the prime of it, I obeyed him in a moment, and came up gently and let him look at me to his liking. For little as I thought of such things till now, I seemed already to know more about them, or at least to wonder—which is the stir of the curtain of knowledge. I did not say any thing, but labored to think nothing and to look up with unconscious eyes. But Firm put me out altogether by his warmth, and made me flutter like a stupid little bird.

"My darling," he said, smoothing back my hair with a kindness such as I could not resent, and quieting me with his clear blue eyes, "you are not fit for the stormy life to which your high spirit is devoting you. You have not the hardness and bitterness of mind, the cold self-possession and contempt of others, the power of dissembling and the iron will—in a word, the fundamental

nastiness, without which you never could get through such a job. Why, you can not be contemptuous even to me!"

"I should hope not. I should earn your contempt, if I could."

"There, you are ready to cry at the thought. Erema, do not mistake yourself. Remember that your father would never have wished it—would have given his life ten thousand times over to prevent it. Why did he bring you to this remote, inaccessible part of the world except to save you from further thought of evil? He knew that we listen to no rumors here, no social scandals, or malignant lies; but we value people as we find them. He meant this to be a haven for you; and so it shall be if you will only rest; and you shall be the queen of it. Instead of redressing his memory now, you would only distress his spirit. What does he care for the world's gossip now? But he does care for your happiness. I am not old enough to tell you things as I should like to tell them. I wish I could—how I wish I could! It would make all the difference to me."

"It would make no difference, Firm, to me; because I should know it was selfishness. Not selfishness of yours, I mean, for you never could be selfish; but the vilest selfishness of mine, the same as starved my father. You can not see things as I see them, or else you would not talk so. When you know that a thing is right, you do it. Can you tell me otherwise? If you did, I should despise you."

"If you put it so, I can say no more. You will leave us forever, Erema?"

“No, not forever. If the good God wills it, I will come back when my work is done. Forgive me, dear Firm, and forget me.”

“There is nothing to forgive, Erema; but a great deal I never can hope to forgot.”

CHAPTER XVIII
OUT OF THE GOLDEN GATE

Little things, or what we call little, always will come in among great ones, or at least among those which we call great. Before I passed the Golden Gate in the clipper ship Bridal Veil (so called from one of the Yosemite cascades) I found out what I had long wished to know—why Firm had a crooked nose. At least, it could hardly be called crooked if any body looked aright at it; but still it departed from the bold straight line which nature must have meant for it, every thing else about him being as straight as could be required. This subject had troubled me more than once, though of course it had nothing whatever to do with the point of view whence I regarded him.

Suan Isco could not tell me, neither could Martin of the mill; I certainly could not ask Firm himself, as the Sawyer told me to do when once I put the question, in despair, to him. But now, as we stood on the wharf exchanging farewells, perhaps forever, and tears of anguish were in my eyes, and my heart was both full and empty, ample and unexpected light was thrown on the curvature of Firm's nose.

For a beautiful girl, of about my own age, and very nicely dressed, came up and spoke to the Sawyer (who stood at my side), and then, with a blush, took his grandson's hand. Firm took off

his hat to her very politely, but allowed her to see perhaps by his manner that he was particularly engaged just now; and the young lady, with a quick glance at me, walked off to rejoin her party. But a garrulous old negro servant, who seemed to be in attendance upon her, ran up and caught Firm by his coat, and peered up curiously at his face.

"How young massa's poor nose dis long time? How him feel, spose now again?" he inquired, with a deferential grin. "Young massa ebber able take a pinch of good snuff? He! he! missy berry heavy den? Missy no learn to dance de nose polka den?"

"What on earth does he mean?" I could not help asking, in spite of our sorrowful farewell, as the negro went on with sundry other jokes and cackles at his own facetiousness. And then Uncle Sam, to divert my thoughts, while I waited for signal to say good-by, told me how Firm got a slight twist to his nose.

Ephraim Gundry had been well taught, in all the common things a man should learn, at a good quiet school at Frisco, which distinguished itself from all other schools by not calling itself a college. And when he was leaving to begin home life, with as much put into him as he could manage—for his nature was not bookish—when he was just seventeen years old, and tall and straight and upright, but not set into great bodily strength, which could not yet be expected, a terrible fire broke out in a great block of houses newly occupied, over against the school-house front. Without waiting for master's leave or matron's, the boys, in the Californian style, jumped over the fencing and went to help.

And they found a great crowd collected, and flames flaring out of the top of the house. At the top of the house, according to a stupid and therefore general practice, was the nursery, made of more nurses than children, as often happens with rich people. The nurses had run away for their lives, taking two of the children with them; but the third, a fine little girl of ten, had been left behind, and now ran to the window with red hot flames behind her. The window was open, and barbs of fire, like serpents' tongues, played over it.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.