

Sanctity of An Oath.

"Abolish all legal punishment for perjury," said I, dogmatically, at the close of a desultory argument with some of the other clerks in the San Francisco mint.

"Do you see that oak on the other bank?" continued the man on the rock, pointing to a conspicuous pine.

"I thought the fellow must be a maniac, and I did not know just what to answer; but presently replied that I was not certain whether I saw it or not—it depended upon circumstances."

"Snow before morning," said he. "Perhaps so," said I, non-committally; "seems thickening up, but that may be an optical illusion."

"Then he wanted to know if I remembered what year General Jackson was elected President—wasn't it in '52? I told him I did not recollect. After a while he said carelessly:

"They're talking here at the bluff, about running Ben Franklin for next President."

"I made no reply. Then he came up to me and laid a hand on my shoulder. "See here, stranger," said he, "is there any subject you feel at home on? Have you got any hobby—any opinions?"

"I am not sure," I replied; "some people have opinions, and some don't have any. Some that do have them don't have them all the time; and those that have them all the time often forget them."

"Well, I swear!" said he disgusted. "I'm going to jump over these falls—bet you five dollars I will!"

"I said nothing and he continued: 'I shall be exactly three seconds and a half getting to the bottom—won't I, now?'"

"Possibly. Maybe a little more than that—maybe a little less—maybe just that. I don't remember jumping over any cascades myself!"

"He gave me one look, laid off his hat, backed up to the brink of the precipice, and dropped himself down, hanging on to the edge with his hands. Then he let go, falling three hundred feet into the boiling whirlpool below!"

"May it please the Court," shrieked the little District Attorney, lunging forward upon his hind feet. "I want to put one question to this witness now? You say, sir, you had never seen the deceased Mr. Thatcher up to the moment you met him on the rock—and never heard of him—and never heard of his relations."

At this time there was general snigger from the spectators, and Dave Thrasher's widow, who sat near, looked up with a sudden hope in her face that was cheerful to see. I resumed my testimony:

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resolved to find, at whatever cost, the strange man whom he believed to be the most murderous of scoundrels.

The unknown drover had been described to him as being rather tall, with a body and limbs as wiry and muscular as those of a gladiator; and having the look and accent of a Spaniard, being very dark with long black hair and fiery black eyes, and almost violently impetuosity of manner.

And this was the sort of man he was looking for in the low slums and gilded saloons of New York, when his chief sent him on a search after a very different kind of personage. This man whom he was expected to find and decoy into the charge of the police and whose photograph he consulted from time to time, had a complexion as fair and rosy as that of a girl, and had also blonde curls and an elegantly-dressed blonde beard.

He was described as a seeming gentleman of leisure in his manner, his associations and his extravagance. But his offence was a heinous one. He had robbed a wealthy old man of an immense sum of money and then immured his victim in an asylum for the insane, from which a liberation had been effected unsuspected by the gentlemanly sinner with the elegant blonde-beard, and who it was hoped would be speedily captured.

But day followed day, bringing to the young detective not the slightest hint of success.

He was heartily discouraged when one day he left the office, leaving the chief more than usually disappointed and dissatisfied.

"Eyes and rosy as a girl! curling blonde hair and full beard," he repeated as he walked slowly down the street, his head bent on his breast, and his hands locked on his back.

"If you are speaking of a man answer him that discretion, you have just passed him," said a brisk voice in his ear.

Oscar Tolles looked up and around quickly, in astonishment, but he did not see the polished rascal of whom he was thinking.

The stranger who had spoken to him laughed lightly.

Oscar glanced at him curiously. The intrusive stranger was more, *tout ensemble*, like a priest or clergyman than an ordinary mortal. His dress was of the finest black broadcloth, and scrupulously assuming in cut and fit.

"You are a novice in the detective business," I infer," observed the stranger, blandly.

"Somewhat," acknowledged the young fellow, and instantly wroth at his stupidity in making the confession.

And this conviction so suddenly forced upon him proved to be the truth.

His father's fate was at last known, although not the mysterious assassin.

"But I will find the murderer yet," he declared to the chief; "I will find him if the search cost me all my fortune and takes me my lifetime."

In his first perplexity he decided to call upon Abner Davidson for advice.

He was rather reluctantly admitted to the room of his sanctimonious new friend, whom he found lying in a luxurious couch, and closely wrapped in a silken counterpane.

"Well, my boy, what can I do for you?" inquired Abner Davidson, who seemed not a little annoyed at the persistence with which the young detective had forced his way to the apartment.

"You were so kind," faltered Oscar, "and seemed so interested in this peculiarly mysterious and tragic affair, that now he is dead—"

"Dead! did you say?" interrupted the man, in a strangely intense and horrified whisper, and at the same time his visage turning gray and ghastly.

Before Oscar could answer, there suddenly broke the quick silence a sound that seemed to come through the wall.

"Tick! tick! tick!"

Slow, loud, regular, like the death-watch heard in haunted houses.

The sound seemed to frenzy the man. He jumped up in his bed, his cleanly-shaven face like ashes, and over it gathered and rolled great beads of icy sweat.

"That cursed watch," he cried, as if he had suddenly gone mad. "I stopped it myself, and the devil has set it to ticking to betray me. But I did not mean to kill him—I swear I did not. I never shed human blood in my life. I would have drawn my pistol, and I struck him in self-defense. In the scuffle, perhaps, my knife was accidentally thrust into some vital part. But what am I saying? Has my brain turned that I should rave like this?"

There were thirteen of the principal politicians, as Master M. learned, each of whom required sacrifices more or less horrible.

Master M. learned that there were many other inferior gods, each of which had festivals, sacrifices, etc., proportioned to his rank and power; that nearly every hour of the day was dedicated to some god or other.

He studied the history of the temples, and learned why they were four or five stories high with the stairs on the outside; and all about the everlasting fire which burned on the tops of these temples, and that there were so many of these that the whole country for miles around was always brilliantly illuminated.

Nancy.

Arty Brass in the Elko Nov. Post.

"Yes, ma'am, I'm an old timer. Come out here in May, '49. An' have always through bad luck been drifting."

"Have busted in mine after mine." "From the east?" "Yes I come from Ohio. More'n twenty-eight long years ago. Since then I've been here in these mountains."

"A hoin' a cussed hard row." "Got a family?" "No, ma'am; or rather. None only a woman. You see God never sent kids to yours truly, 'Thar was only jist Nancy an' me. Ye see, ma'am, back thar I was farmin', An' I could never stand in with luck, An' I could't do nothin' at all. I got most doddardly stuck. One year we'd have too rainy weather. The next not a cupful 'ud fall. Misfortunes come on top o' t'other. An' I could't do nothin' at all. Then debt—'thar curse o' the poor man—Come squeezin' me tighter'n wax, An' the fust thing we knowed we was homeless."

Everything that we had sold for tax. Then I kinder got wild, an' told Nancy I was goin' to emigrate west. Thar I'd come out here to these mountains. I told her I'd bank with the rest. I told her till fortune smiled on me. I'd never come back home again. Nor I'd never write one cussed letter. I'd found a good stack o' the tin. So I left her back thar with her daddy. An' I struck to make money or bust; But bad luck kept stickin' right to me. I was never to stick to my promise. I was spunky as hell, ma'am, ye see, So I've not heard one word from Nancy. An' she's never yit heard from me. 'Is she dead?' 'Ma'am, I couldn't inform ye."

She may be fur all that I know; Old time, ma'am, makes wonderful changes. An' I left her a long time ago. But thar's one thing that's jist more'n certain—

Of thar thar is no gittin' round—She's married to some other feller. Or else she is under the ground. "Do I love her?" "Wal, ma'am, I'll jist tell ye. (Though my actions an' words don't agree, Thar through all o' these long years my prayer is—

Is that some time her dear face I'll see, I know I've no right to expect it, And I don't, ma'am, to tell ye the truth. I kin do nothin' now but remember Her love as the love o' my youth. En' what's that—ye say ye know Nancy? She's true to me all o' these years? An' for me she's still livin' an' prayin'?

Do I love her? Great God, yer jist foolin'! Let up, now, thar racket won't win; Fur God's sake jist raise up your vail, ma'am— You, NANCY? WAL, DURR MY OLD SKIN."

in love—with at least half a dozen different young ladies in as many months, felt that he had at last met his fate.

Delighted at the idea of being loved for himself alone, he had not told her of his real position, and it was not till the marriage ceremony was over that Helen discovered that she had married the eldest son of a baronet, and the heir to an estate producing £15,000 a year.

It was not without some inward misgivings that Harry wrote to his father telling him of his marriage, which were more than realized by the result, as we have seen by the letter from Sir Philip Marston, which awaited him at his club on his return to England with his bride.

But, full of confidence in his ability to maintain himself and wife by his own exertions, and thinking that surely his father would relent and be reconciled to him after a time, Harry troubled himself very little about his lost inheritance; and though their new home—consisting of three small, poorly furnished rooms in a back street—was very different from the grand old mansion to which he had hoped to take his bride, he set to work cheerfully at his favorite art, and tried hard to earn a living by painting pictures and portraits. But he soon found that it was not so easy as he thought.

It was all very well when he was heir to Marston Hall, and studied painting merely from love of art; but picture-dealers, who in those days had been all flattery and obsequiousness to the young heir, now that he finally wanted to sell his pictures, and sketches, shook their heads, and politely but firmly declined to purchase.

At last, one dreary afternoon, when Harry was sitting in the little room he called his studio, trying to devise some new scheme to replenish his slender purse, the servant opened the door and ushered a white-haired old gentleman into the room.

Placing his chair by the fire for his visitor, Harry inquired his business.

"You are a portrait-painter, I believe, sir," said the old gentleman, looking at him through his gold spectacles.

"That is my profession, sir," replied Harry, delighted at the thought of having found a commission at last.

"Well, sir, I want you to paint the portrait of my daughter."

"With pleasure, sir," said Harry eagerly. "When can the lady give me the first sitting?"

"Alas! sir, she is dead—dead to these twenty years, and I killed her—broke her heart with my harshness and cruelty!" exclaimed the old man, in an excited, trembling voice.

A strange chill came over Harry, as the idea that his mysterious visitor must be an escaped lunatic crossed his mind; but mustering, with an effort, his emotion, the stranger continued:

"Pardon me, young sir. This is of no interest to you. My daughter is dead, and I want you to paint her portrait from my description, as I perfectly well remember her twenty years ago."

"I will do my best, sir, but it will be no easy task, and you must be prepared for many disappointments," said Harry, when, having given a long description of the form and features of his long-lost daughter, the old man rose to depart, and for weeks he worked incessantly upon the mysterious portrait of the dead girl, making sketch after sketch, each of which was rejected by the remorse-stricken father, until the work began to exercise a strange kind of fascination over him, and he sketched face after face, as if under the influence of a spell.

At last, one evening, wearied with a day of fruitless exertion, he was sitting over the fire watching his wife, who sat opposite, busily with some needlework, when an idea suddenly flashed upon him.

"Tall, fair, with golden hair and dark blue eyes? Why, Helen, it is the very picture of yourself!" he exclaimed, starting from his seat, taking his wife's fair face between his two hands, and gazing intently into her eyes.

Without losing a moment he set down and commenced to sketch Helen's face; and when his strange patron called the next day, Harry was so busily engaged putting the finishing touches to his portrait that he did not hear him enter the room, and worked for some moments unconscious of his presence, until, with the cry of "Helen, my daughter!" the old man hurried him aside, and stood entranced before the portrait.

After gazing for some minutes in silence, broken only by his own half-suppressed sobs of remorse, the old man turned slowly around to Harry, and asked him in an eager voice where he had obtained the original of the picture.

"It is the portrait of my wife," replied he.

"Your wife, sir! Who was she? Pardon me for asking the question," he added. "But I have heard lately that the poor Helen left an orphan daughter, and for the last six months I have been vainly trying to find the child of my lost daughter, so that by kindness and devotion to my grandchild I might, in part at least, atone for harshness toward her mother."

Harry was beginning to tell him the story of his meeting with Helen at Rome, and their subsequent marriage, when the door opened, and his wife entered the room.

Perceiving that her husband was engaged, she was about to retreat, when the old gentleman stooped her, and after looking earnestly in her face for a few moments, exclaimed, "Pardon me, madame, can you tell me your mother's maiden name?"

"Helen Treherne," replied Helen, wondering.

"I knew it, I knew it!" exclaimed the old man, in an excited voice. "At last I have found the child of my poor lost daughter!"

In a few words Mr. Treherne explained how he had cast off his only child on account of her marriage with a poor officer, and refused even to open her letters when she wrote asking for forgiveness.