NATHAN HALE.

By Francis M. Finch.

To drum beat and heart beat
A soldier marches by;
There is color in his cheek,
There is courage in his eye;
Yet to drum beat and heart beat
In a moment he must die!

By starlight and moonlight
He seeks the Briton's camp,
He hears the rustling flag,
And the armed sentry's tramp,
And the starlight and moonlight
His silent wanderings lamp.

With slow tread and still tread
He scans the tented line,
And he counts the battery-guns
By the gaunt and shadowy pine;
And his slow tread and still tread
Give no warning sign.

The dark wave, the plumed wave!
It meets his eager glance;
And it sparkles 'neath the stars
Like the glimmer of a lance;
A dark wave, a plumed wave,
On an emerald expanse.

A sharp clang, a steel clang!
And terror in the sound;
For the sentry, falcon-eyed,
In the camp a spy hath found;
With a sharp clang, a steel clang,
The patriot is bound.

With calm brow, steady brow,
He listens to his doom;
In his look there is no fear
Nor a shadow-trace of gloom;
But with calm brow and steady brow
He robes him for the tomb.

In the long night, the still night,
He kneels upon the sod;
And the brutal guards withhold
E'en the solemn Word of God!
In the long night, the still night,
He walks where Christ hath trod.

'Neath the blue morn, the sunny morn,
He dies upon the tree;
And he mourns that he can lose
But one life for Liberty;
And in the blue morn, the sunny morn,
His spirit-wings are free.

His last words, his message words,
They burn, lest friendly eye
Should read how proud and calm
A patriot could die.
With his last words, his dying words,
A soldier's battle-cry!

CALIFORNIA TALES.

I.

FINNEGAN'S ABSALOM.

I knew him from the time his birth, twenty-four years ago, shook the nurseless and physicianless frontier community in Jack County, which was then on the foremost edge of advancing civilization, to its foundation.

Finnegan had been a respectable clerk in his native Ireland, at a starvation salary, and Mrs. Finnegan a póor dependant who acted as nursery governess and general slave and scapegoat in the family of a coarse, unfeeling, well-to-do relative.

They had loved each other long and faithfully, but timidly, and dared not venture marriage on poor Finnegan's pittance of salary. But things come to people—even so far off as Ireland—who wait patiently long enough, and do not die; and when this pathetic couple were middle-aged a legacy came to Finnegan—without apology for its tardiness—which enabled them to marry, and with which they immediately came to Texas, of all places, and bought, of all things, a cattle ranch.

However, Fate appears, sometimes positively ashamed to be unkind to such innocents, when they are delivered over into her hands; and the Finnegans were as prosperous as most of their neighbors.

Their loneliness was dispelled in the course of a year or two by the arrival of a son, the only child of this gentle pair, and the or'nariest baby that ever howled the roof off a shack. At two or three years old, when he got to be an expert on his feet and with his fists and his voice, he made the ranch-house so hot that the boys were glad to give it the cold shake, and be out on the range or in camp; and by the time he was four he ran the ranch, whaled and hit any one that interfered with him, and made himself such a terror that not a Mexican would stay on the place. Finnegan had to build a messhouse for the men, although the headquarters house had not long since been made large purposely to have them all together.

The foreman, who was myself, and the cowboys only stayed for love of Mrs. Finnegan—Aunt Mary, we called her—and I was always losing my best hands on account of the little cuss.

He was smart enough; he didn't lack enterprise and savey. He learned to ride—and ride like the dickens, too—before he was six. He used fairly to roar and cavort because the men would not stand still and let him rope them. He practiced on every animate and inanimate object about the ranch; and by the time he was eight he could ride a cutting pony that was just lightning, and rope a calf, or even a yearling, with the best of us.

In the course of a couple of years things got very much worse. Heretofore we had only to stay away from the headquarters house to be rid of him; but now, on his pony, he haunted the camps, the outfits, and roundups, and was the most everlasting, lively, ingenious torment.

When he was about ten or twelve I remember he was in the camp one day when we were moving about, getting ready to go to a roundup. He had a new California rope he was awfully tickled with, and he kept riding up behind the men, roping them, jerking the noose tight around them, arms and all, so they were helpless till he got done whooping and laughing and slacked up on them.

I saw Frosty get out his big-bladed knife, as sharp as a razor, and when the kid, after awhile, threw his rope over him, Frosty slashed it smooth in two at the point where it lay for a moment on his saddle horn. Robbie went back almost out of his saddle, as he braced backward for the jerk that never came; and when he saw his new California rope cut in two he yelled with rage.

He ran his pony up to Frosty's, and raised his quirt, blubbering like a great baby:

"You cut my ro-o-ope! I'll ki-i-ill you!"

"You little gadfly," said Frosty, catching his arm, "you touch me with that quirt, and I'll pull you off your pony and wear you to frazzles with it. I'll stripe you like a zebra—I'll skin you. You'll get it once in your life, if I'm fired for it before sundown. Now cut loose and quirt me if you want to!"

But the kid didn't want to any more. He had had a taste of the sort of thing that would have cured him all along; and he went off as quiet as a lamb, and never did monkey with Frosty any more.

He followed Alex McRaven's outfit along one day—Alex was one of my wagon bosses—and kept up his usual tricks of roping the riders, stealing things out of the mess case, and charging into the middle of the remuda, scattering the horses in every direction.

Finally Alex, a slow, serious Scotchman, but as hard to turn as a buffalo bull when his blood is hot, jerked him off his pony, and gave him a regular Scotch Covenanter thrashing.

Those who witnessed the spectacle say it was a most pleasing and diverting one—Robbie howling like a pack of timber wolves, with grief, terror and amazement, Alex thrashing away conscientiously and methodically, almost with tears in his eyes, as he reflected that Aunt Mary would execrate him, and Finnegan fire him immediately; but determined to finish the Lord's work at any cost to young Finnegan's anatomy or his own feelings. When he had done, he hog-tied the bellowing victim, dropped him in the wagon like a pig, pulled the little saddle off his pony and turned it into the remuda.

Toward evening the outfit came to headquarters, and Alex untied the entirely extinguished Robbie, set him out of the wagon without looking at him and after putting the pony in the pasture and the saddle in its place, went to the messhouse.

Not a word was ever heard from headquarters about this awful, treasonable deed, any more than there had been about Frosty's little scrap with the kid, which made us all wonder if Robbie hadn't some decent points about him, and if plenty of thrashing might not, after all, make a man of him.

At sixteen the boy had a little brand of his own—all stolen except what his father had given him for he was beginning to be the most audacious, skilful, and successful thief in the Panhandle. His earlier, and always his most extensive stealings, were from his father; and from them he graduated into a regular full-fledged rustler.

The foreman of the Quarter Circle Z ranch met him one morning, skirting around their pastures with his rope out and swinging, and Robbie had a very lame explanation of why he was there. He had always a branding iron in his boot or about his saddle.

He mavericked his father's calves more freely than any others, and under the very noses of the old man's cowboys; and it was this heartless ingratitude, and his poor old father's untiring love, and inexhaustible admiration and fondness—a tenderness which followed and protected the young scamp from the consequences of his rascality, and which refused to see or hear anything wrong about the boy—that suggested to some one the descriptive title of "Finnegan's Absalom," which immediately stuck and entirely superseded his proper name. I don't believe half the people in the Panhandle—to which newly opened country I had come to ranch for myself, and they had followed later, when he was about twelve—knew that his name was Robert Emmet Finnegan.

When he was about nineteen, the old folks gathered him up rather suddenly and sent him to college. He had got to be a big, fresh-colored, rather fine-looking fellow, with an investigating blue eye, and a peevish under lip; the kind of fellow all the girls naturally go wild over, but no man could see without wanting to kick, unless his legs were paralyzed.

I knew the whole Panhandle to a man thirsted for his blood, and yet he was safe from bodily injury for the sake of his poor old father and mother. But everything could not be borne; the old man was gently but firmly offered an alternative; so off to college Absalom went.

An account I incidentally overheard one day ran like this:

"Say! Finnegan's Absalom's gone off to college."

"No!"

"Yes. Country got too hot for him, and Finnegan sent him away.

"What was it?"

"Oh, they said he swung too long a loop for them, and they wasn't going to stand it any more."

And this was a clear statement of the case, in cattle vernacular.

He was two years at college, spending his vacations at San Antonio and other cities. Then they had to bring him home. In the first place, his prodigality was about to ruin them; the cattle just wouldn't hold out. Then, too, it was judicious to withdraw him when they did, instead of waiting for expulsion.

Shortly after Finnegan's Absalom was sent away to Austin, the Finnegan household had acquired a new member. This was a half Mexican girl of about fifteen, whose parents, attempting to cross the treacherous Canadian at night, when the river was up, had missed the ford, gotten into the quicksands and been drowned—a thing easy enough of accomplishment in the Canadian, even in daylight, and without an extra big stream.

Ysabel was the offspring of one of those strange, incongruous unions you see sometimes on the frontier, where such old jetsam and flotsam from the great sea of life are drifted and tossed together in fantastical combination.

Her peregrinating father had long been a sort of institution in all north and west Texas, in the guise of the harmless, necessary pedler.

A Yankee of the Yankees, selling patent churns, new-fangled household implements and recipes for making everything in the world you wouldn't want—in Texas—including all sorts of perfumes, marvellous cements, furniture polish and fancy temperance drinks. A man of iron muscles and tremendous will power, there seemed to be a lack in him that prevented him from using his remarkable and varied forces except to the most trivial ends. A crank, that lacked but a balancing touch to be a genius; full of strange contrivances and inventions, a devourer of all books and papers, author and admirer of all sorts of wild social, financial and political schemes.

Only a little weight, a touch of continuity, a little sequence in his ideas, persistence in any one line of thought or effort, and he might have been a statesman, a financier, a leader of men, and left his mark upon his time and place, instead of one of Fate's blank cartridges—an adventitious Bohemian, blown idly hither and thither by every little gust of destiny.

It was in one of his outbursts of reforming social conditions, wiping out prejudices and breaking down race distinctions, that Jason Tuttle married Felice Gomez.

This girl was of a Mexican family of some traditions, a little property in land and cattle, and much pride, refusing to associate upon terms of equality with the run of poor Mexicans in the country, and insisting apoplectically upon Castilian blood whenever such a matter was broached. They had some teaching, and a few old Spanish books which they read persistently; and not one of them could be got to confess to the understanding of an English sentence by so much as the turning of an eyelash.

The funny part of the matter came in the attitude of the Gomez family toward this marriage. They were furious. They proceeded to regard the connection as little better than a disgrace, and to cast Felice off, in the most correct and edifying old Spanish manner.

And so it came about that when, sixteen years later, Tuttle and his Mexican wife were drowned in the greedy, faithless Canadian, that has stolen away so many lives intrusted to it, their fifteen-year-old Ysabel was left as utterly alone and forlorn as a little woodpecker or squirrel, orphaned before yet old enough to leave the nest; and the kind-hearted Finnegans, hearing of it, went and got the child and brought her home. Her position in the household was a mixture of adopted daughter and petted, indulged servant.

Being the only child, Ysabel was much educated and trained, in the most singular, erratic and contradictory manner, by her strangely assorted parents; her mother watching and laboring incessantly to the end that the child should read and speak only Spanish, and grow up an ideal Spanish señorita; and her father feeding her active brain upon the most emancipated literature, and industriously pumping the most advanced of his radical ideas into her receptive mind. It spoke well for the girl's native force and judgment that she really found out some things, formed some ideas, and drew some conclusions of her own from this bewildering process.

When she first became a member of the Finnegan household she was a slender slip of a girl, quiet as a little shadow, but with ample promise of beauty if any eye had looked discerningly at her. And in the two years that elapsed before the son and heir came home, that promise bloomed into a most opulent fulfilment.

Her form was pretty and graceful; but it was a curious air of individuality, a strong personal and original note in her bearing, despite its still demureness, that piqued and attracted. And then, the rich red shining lambently through her creamy cheeks and breaking into open crimson on her full lips, the big black eyes, with their long fringes downcast, and the flashing white teeth that helped to make dazzling her rather rare smile—all of these were calculated to inflame the susceptible masculine heart.

All the unattached cowboys and cattlemen in all the adjoining counties cast approving eyes upon this glowing beauty, and some had endeavored to do a little covert sighing at her shrine, but the old people, who had come to be very fond of her, were now as careful and watchful of her as of a daughter; and Ysabel herself was a model of demure discretion.

When Absalom came home and found this enchanting creature in the house, his instinct was just to reach out and take possession of it—to have and please himself with it. Wasn't it the same as everything else on the ranch, his?

For once the old people opposed him stoutly and unflinchingly, and prepared to send her to a convent school at Trinidad. Upon the heels of a long and somewhat stormy interview with Ysabel, in which he found her as determined in her views as the old people, and entirely satisfied to go away to school, he flung in upon his parents with the announcement that he was going to marry her.

At first blush this seemed as terrible to them, with their strict Old World ideas of caste, as that he should entertain less honorable intentions toward her. But their resistance was, as usual when the boy wanted anything, short-lived, and their final capitulation entire.

Of course everybody's notion of the matter was that Finnegan's had simply gotten another adoring slave; and squadrons and battalions of her masculine admirers, with their weapons and munitions of war all cleaned and primed, were breathing fire and waiting to defend her against the wrongs and insults they felt sure would be heaped upon her attractive little head, or avenge them in large quantities of the very best blood her wronger and insulter had about him.

Vain solicitude! Ysabel needed no defence.

As with all the women of her race and class, marriage made a great change in her. From being nobody, with nothing to say, she became suddenly very much somebody, with a great deal, entirely to the point, to say. The dignity of her titles, her possessions and position, was strong within her, and she showed herself entirely capable of managing not only Finnegan's Absalom, but Finnegan himself, in a daughterly and deferential manner, when he gently counselled her to a conciliatory policy toward the young bully.

Capable of managing Finnegan! She was only too able to manage the entire ranch, and could have run the whole Panhandle, financially, politically and socially, had she ever got any sort of cinch on it.

It was not for nothing that she was the daughter of her father, with her mother's balance-weight of unpretending, dogged persistence. Finnegan's didn't know itself. The ranch was gradually metamorphosed, and run on a plan that came directly from behind those black brows of Ysabel's. And its transformation partook humorously of the dual strands intertwisted in her nature. Through her suggestion a live, hustling young business man was brought from Kansas City to do the clerical work, and the handsome stationery upon which he wrote with his typewriter the able and diplomatic letters evolved by himself and Ysabel in conclave bore a neat lithographed head which read: "Rancho del Santa Cruz. Graded Hereford cattle; Merino sheep; Imported Norman Percherons. Cattle and sheep grazed and herded on shares."

The cowboys used to assert that the cows on remote ranges were mysteriously aware of the stern régime, and forebore straying off to the Salt Fork for the purpose of begging up as heretofore; that they came meekly in, unpersuaded, at branding time, and presented their calves to be monogramed; and that even the infrequent maverick—that Arab of the plains who owns no master—showed a chastened joy and pride in having Ysabel's rapidly increasing brand—Y. T. F., over a Roman cross—singed on his unfettered ribs, and sported it thereafter as a decoration, not a badge of serfdom.

Absalom had his allowance—a liberal enough one—and was not permitted to overrun it; and the place emerged from debt as time went on. Ysabel's besom made a clean sweep of sweaters, loafers, shirks, abuses and all sorts of superfluities, which had accumulated like barnacles upon the easy-going old Irishman and his soft-hearted wife; and the Finnegans were on the road to wealth.

She relapsed, almost immediately after her marriage, into her beloved mother tongue; and compelled her husband, if he wished to hold communication with her, to speak and understand Spanish. It was as comical as it was amazing to see how she tamed him. When he sought, in the early days of his subjugation, to relieve his overstrained heart by abusing his father and mother, saying to them what he would not dare to so much as look at her, he met with a violent and unexpected check.

Ysabel was tenderly and gratefully attached to the old people. She would roll those great black eyes on him, fairly nailing him, and with her arm stretched straight out at him would ejaculate in her sonorous Spanish:

"What, ungrateful one! Wilt thou speak so to my honored father and my beloved mother? Go hence with thy evil words! Take thy face away from me till I have patience to look upon it! Go!"

And Absalom would stand irresolute, evading those compelling eyes, making desperate efforts to get himself to the point of revolt; but always doing eventually as he was bidden. This fellow, the holy terror of an entire section, was thoroughly broke to all sorts of gaits and any kind of harness by a little, soft, plump scrap of a girl that wouldn't weigh more than a hundred pounds!

He that was bellicose is meek; he that was insolent is polite; he, the arch tyrant of Finnegan's, speaks civilly to his inferiors; he that thought it brave to blaspheme, and witty to be profane and impious, goes to mass—ay, to early mass—of a raw and nipping February morning!

All these wonders were worked simply by the ascendancy of her strong, intent spirit over his noisy, ungoverned weakness.

If she doesn't convert the goods she has on hand into a man, it will not be from lack of skilful, intelligent and persistent effort in its evolution, development, manufacture, manipulation; and, further, if she doesn't finally achieve her idea of a Spanish gentleman, it will only be because the stuff wasn't there.—(Alice MacGowan.

II.

THE RICH FOOL

AND THE CLEVER PAUPER.

"You might horsewhip him," suggested Tom Van Shyster, flipping the ash from his cigarette. "You are big enough, Jimmy, and strong enough to knock the stuffing out of him in two minutes."

The two men were standing in front of the pretty fireplace in the reading-room of the University Club, and one of them, judging by his flushed face and excited gestures, was laboring under much mental distress.

"That's just the worst feature of the business. There would be no satisfaction in lickin' such a bag of bones as Blagg. Confound it"—he continued, gazing ruefully at a copy of that morning's 'Enquirer,' which he held in his right hand—"what have I done to the Johnny that he should pillory me like this? It's a beastly shame. If I'd known I was goin' to drop into such a slatin' in the papers I'd have stayed in England. I've a deuced good mind to chuck the States and become a British subject. I have, indeed."

His friend trembled at this threat.

"Don't do that, Jimmy. We can't spare you, old man. You'll get over this. Nobody here pays any attention to Blagg. He's given me many a dose. Of course, he ought to be tarred and feathered, but who's going to do it?"

"I don't care so much about myself, Tom, but I draw the line at my mother."

He read as follows: "What can we expect from the son of a woman who deliberately sold herself for a paltry title, and took honest American gold to gild the tarnished escutcheon of a spendthrift English baronet?"

It is necessary to explain that Jimmy Bagster was an American citizen. Old Bagster, early in the sixties, accumulated an enormous fortune, variously estimated at from one to five millions. When he died half of his estate, being community property, went to his wife, and the other half fell to Jimmy, then a freckle-faced boy of five. Mrs. Bagster, who hated San Francisco because some of the best houses there were closed to her, took herself and her diamonds to Mayfair, where, thanks to a house in Park Lane, a first-class chef, and the most ravishing toilets, she captured the hand and heart of a hard-riding baronet. Jimmy was duly sent to Eton and Christchurch. At Eton he achieved distinction on the river, but soared no higher in his studies than the lower fifth form. At Christchurch his career was cut ruthlessly short by the Dean, who sent him down at the end of his third term. Jimmy shed no tears, and announced his intention of visiting San Francisco.

"I'm a son of the Golden West," he told his mother, "and I'm goin' to look after my property. The master's eye, you know."

So Jimmy and his valet registered at the best hotel, and occupied a handsome suite of rooms upon the third floor. Nob Hill welcomed him effusively, and clubdom opened wide its portals. Jimmy was young, rich, healthy and good-natured. His English accent was the genuine thing, and all his coats were cut in Conduit Street. Of course, he became the fashion. At the present writing he had been exactly six months in California.

Van Shyster pleasantly cursed Blagg and all his tribe as soon as Jimmy had finished quoting from the article in "The Enquirer."

"It's really too bad," he admitted. "Say, let's crack a small bottle, and see if we can't evolve something out of our inner consciousness. Two heads are better than one."

"I'm afraid, Tommy, that our heads don't amount to much. This fellow Blagg has the bulge on us when it comes to heads. Hang it all, who is he, anyway, that he sneers at polo and pigeon shooting? He couldn't sit a horse over a fence to save his life, and looks a regular duffer at all kinds of sport. I should like to know more about him."

"He's no friend of mine," said Van Shyster. "But McLeod over there"—he indicated with his hand a rising young lawyer—"was at college with him, and is posted. We'll find out what there is to know from him. Come over here, Mac, and tell us about Homer Blagg."

"Homer?"—McLeod sighed reflectively—poor old Homer. He used to be a chum of mine. Clever? Oh, yes, but soured. He's made an awful mess of life, somehow. At Harvard we expected great things of Blagg, but he has had hard luck. He took a high degree in medicine, but I never heard of his practising. Then he tried law and gave that up. He has made heaps of enemies, and since he took to borrowing from his old friends, I've fought rather shy of him. He struck me for five dollars only last week. Poor Homer! Poor fellow!"

Van Shyster and Jimmy listened with interest.

"He's married, too," pursued McLeod, "has a wife and a half a dozen children. To support them he writes. I see he's been after you, Bagster. Given you a scorching, too. He's always down upon millionaires. Well, you can afford to laugh at Homer Blagg. He makes capital—bread and butter, to put it plainly—out of your polo breeches and brown boots. Apparently the perfection of their cut is not appreciated in the woolly West, but give us time and we'll get there. It will pay you as a wise man to join in the general laugh. You can't sue 'The Enquirer' for libel, and you can't make a punching bag out of Homer Blagg, because the sympathy of your fellow-citizens would be on the side of the poor newspaper man. After all, nobody you care about pays any attention to those periodical diatribes. The wise man can read between the lines the envy and jealousy that inspires them. Blagg vents his spleen upon you and Tommy here, because you're at the top of the social ladder and he's at the bottom. It's hard luck upon you, because you're a stranger to our ways, and I know you've taken the keenest interest in this polo and football. Remember, to your comfort, that all decent people are cordially grateful to you. When you get your bearings you'll find out that 'The Enquirer' is written for the masses. They demand pungent, spicy nonsense, and the editor—very properly from the dollar and cents point of view—sees that they get it. It's an easy matter to poke fun at any manly amusement. I think it's Aristotle who says that the ludicrous is always on the surface, and men like Blagg are constitutionally superficial. No, thank you, no champagne for me. I never drink before lunch. Goodby."

"Hang on a minute," cried Jimmy. "Can you give me Blagg's address?"

"He lives in a miserable flat on Mission-st. You will find the exact number in the directory."

The young men consumed their pint of extra dry in meditative silence. They both respected McLeod, whose opinions generally carried weight, both in the University Club and elsewhere. Moreover, he had inspired in the simple heart of Jimmy a certain interest in the misfortunes of Blagg and his family; an interest which was doubtless stimulated by the curious discovery that Blagg occupied No. 3,000½ Mission-st., which formed part and parcel of the great Bagster estate.

After luncheon, which consisted of blue points, potted char, eggs a la Benedict, and a remarkable Maraschino jelly, Jimmy announced his intention of taking a walk by himself. Accordingly he selected a large, full-flavored Carolina, which he lit and stuck aggressively in the corner of his mouth, then turned up the bottom of his pants—Jimmy always called them trousers—screwed an eyeglass tightly into his right eye, grasped an Irish blackthorn firmly in the middle and sauntered leisurely down the steps of the club and out into the street. On his road downtown he was hailed by several of his friends, but contrary to custom continued his solitary progress until he reached the offices of his lawyer.

"I see," he began, blushing through his freckles, "that a fellow called Homer Blagg lives in one of my flats."

"Yes," replied his lawyer, "and he is one of the worst tenants you have."

"Does he know that I'm his landlord?"

"No; all your business is conducted in my name."

"Ah," said Jimmy. He settled himself comfortably in his chair, lighted another Carolina and remarked genially that it was an uncommonly pleasant day.

The lawyer laughed. "You've not come here, Jimmy, to talk to me about the weather. I'm a busy man, so excuse my abruptness. I presume you are annoyed about this article of Blagg's. He goes for you without the gloves."

"He does."

"Well, you have an excellent chance to get even. He owes you a considerable sum of money. You can attach his furniture, and make it generally hot for him. He ought to be made an example of, and your name needn't appear."

"I hear he's hard up," remarked Mr. Bagster.

"The Bank of San Francisco has some of his paper," said the lawyer, in the petulant tone of a man who settles all his bills promptly upon the first of the month.

"Did they lend him money without security?"

"Humph, the wisest make mistakes, my boy. They thought the security was good at the time they made the loan. Blagg was then editor and proprietor of a society paper that had quite a vogue, and seemed on the high road of prosperity. The fellow has talent, but his pen runs away with him. He involved himself in a libel suit that ruined him, and the paper went to the bow-wows. The cashier of the bank, who was a personal friend of his wife's, took his note for three thousand dollars. Perhaps, under the circumstances, I should have done the same myself."

"I suppose the bank would be glad to sell Blagg's paper?"

"At a large discount, yes."

Jimmy sucked silently at his cigar for the space of a minute, then he spoke out boldly:

"I'll tell you what I want you to do. Buy this note from the bank, find out all you can about Blagg's outside indebtedness, do nothing for the present about selling him up, and advise me as soon as you have the necessary information. Good morning."

The lawyer stared at his trim, retreating figure in astonished silence.

"Great Scott!" he murmured. "Jimmy is on the warpath. Nothing short of Blagg's scalp will satisfy him. Well, well, this world is full of surprises. Who, in the name of the Sphinx, would have accused Jimmy Bagster of being revengeful? I always considered him the most good-natured fool of my acquaintance."

Before the end of the week Jimmy received a note from his lawyer informing him that according to instructions he was prepared to lay before him a succinct statement of Homer Blagg's financial condition. A few more days elapsed, and Blagg received a letter from the attorney asking him to meet a client—no name mentioned—at his office. Thus it came to pass that Jimmy and the Juvenal of the Pacific Slope met face to face. It is pertinent to add that during the preceding week two more articles dealing with the idiosyncracies of Jimmy and his friends had appeared in the columns of "The Enquirer." Both were the fruit of Blagg's caustic pen. Both were offensively personal. Both, if possible, more cruelly cutting than the first.

The contrast between stout, smiling, red-faced Jimmy and Blagg impressed the lawyer, who albeit was no sentimentalist, as pathetic in the extreme. Jimmy, lying back in his chair, clothed in spotless homespun, smoothing his blond mustache and indolently surveying Homer Blagg through his eyeglass, looked the incarnation of well-groomed, well-fed prosperity. Poor Blagg, dark and saturnine, out of elbows and out of temper, sat rigidly upright in his chair, scowling fiercely at Jimmy and chewing the cud of bitter introspection. Physically he was the wreck of a once handsome man. The habitual stoop of the hack writer had twisted his slender, graceful figure. Insufficient nourishment had hollowed his cheeks and temples. Care and disappointment had traced their indelible lines upon his sunken features, but his fine eye still glowed with the fire of intense vitality.

The lawyer addressed him in the bland tones of the advocate.

"Mr. Blagg, my client, Mr. James Bagster, holds your note of hand for three thousand dollars, principal and interest unpaid. What are you going to do about it?"

"I thought the Bank of San Francisco held it."

"They have assigned it to Mr. Bagster. My client also holds certain orders on you payable at sight, and representing in the aggregate some $495. He wishes to know if you are in a position to meet this indebtedness. Lastly, he is your landlord, and I find you are in arrears to him for over a year's rent."

"Is Mr. Bagster my landlord?"

"He is."

Blagg glanced at the two men in consternation. Then he said in a low voice, that trembled in spite of his efforts to control it:

"I am completely in your power. For myself I ask nothing, but in the name of my wife and children I plead for forbearance. Give me time! Give me time!"

"I have one more question to ask you, Mr. Blagg. What excuse can you offer for persecuting my client and his friends through the medium of the metropolitan press?"

Blagg, galvanized into passion, sprang to his feet.

"Curse you," he cried, "you have conspired to ruin me. I see the trap into which I have fallen, but I'll die game. You wish to know the motive that inspired those articles?"

He turned to Jimmy, who met his furious glance with a half smile.

"I do, Mr. Blagg. To my knowledge I never injured you. I'm a harmless sort of chap, I believe. What have I done to bring all this unkind ridicule upon my head?"

"Ye gods!" cried Blagg. "He asks what he has done!"

"Yes, what have I done? Tell me?"

"You exist," hissed Homer. "You cumber the ground. You rot at ease like the fat weed. You eat, drink, and are merry, while men with a hundred times your brains and a thousand times your energy and ability starve! Ah, Heaven! the injustice of it!"

"Do you blame me for eatin' and drinkin' and makin' merry?"

"I blame you because you belong to a class that is trying to corrupt our Western simplicity (save the mark!) with the vices of effete monarchies. Because you are trying to introduce foreign customs and manners that may not be tolerated here. Because, in short, you are a snob, sir, from the tip of your ten-dollar shoe to the crown of your ten-dollar hat. It is not your miserable carcass that excites my spleen, but the principle you represent—the principle of monopoly and greed. Tell me of one good deed you have done, and I will beg your pardon."

"I cannot lay claim to even one," said Jimmy slowly, the same half-smile hovering around the corners of his mouth. "I've had a good time so far, and in my humble way tried to give my pals a good time, and the people generally whom I've rubbed up against. It's true enough that I've not hunted out misery. I'm not built for slummin'. It may surprise you, but I'd no idea that a clever man like yourself could be knocked out in the fight for existence. There must be something rotten somewhere—some joint loose. Well, Mr. Blagg, you've answered my question fairly, and you've given me an idea or two, which, as you said in your Sunday article, I am sadly in need of. As this is a business affair, you will allow me to pay for my lesson in my own way."

As he finished speaking Jimmy drew an elaborate matchbox from his pocket, and extracted therefrom a vesta. Then he coolly proceeded to set alight the promissory note and the other orders. Homer Blagg sprang forward, but Jimmy, waving aloft the flaming papers in his left hand, extended a good right arm, and grasping Blagg firmly by the coat collar, held him powerless until the documents were consumed. Then he pushed Blagg back into his chair, and laughed.

"Quid," he said, "pro quo. That and Floreat Etona is all the Latin I remember."

"Why," stammered Blagg at length, when he had mastered his emotion—"Why, Mr. Bagster, have you heaped these coals of fire upon my head?"

Thereupon Jimmy made the longest speech of his life.

"Ask McLeod, Mr. Blagg. Really you owe this to him, not to me. Candidly I was thinking of punching your head. Not on my own account, but because you wrote a lot of lies about my mother. My own father, an American, mark you, treated her badly. Sir Ralph Nimrod—who is not a spendthrift, by the way—worships the ground she walks on. I was speakin' about McLeod. He made me see this thing with his eyes. He assured me that no man of sense paid any attention to 'The Enquirer.' He advised me to join in the laugh against myself. But that wasn't all. He spoke about you and your talents, and the hard luck you had had. That set me to thinkin'. I'm a bit of a Juggins, but my heart, I hope, is in the right place. I felt sorry for you and your family; and I thought to myself that a chap soured and flattened out by misfortune was not to be held accountable for every harsh word. It's queer, but if a man gives his kindly feelings a loose reign he'll ride through life a deuced sight easier. I'll say no more, Mr. Blagg. My lawyer here will tell you that if I can help you to a more independent position I'll gladly do so. I'm not afraid of losing my money. Goodby."

Blagg impetuously thrust himself between Jimmy and the door.

"Shake hands," he cried, the tears standing in his eyes," and may God bless you! I'll accept your material help humbly and thankfully, hoping and believing that the day will come when I can repay you. The moral obligation can never be cancelled in this world."

The lawyer, as soon as he was alone, addressed a plaster cast of Plato that adorned one of his bookshelves:

"Truth, O Plato, is stronger than fiction. Jimmy Bagster has masqueraded as a Fool, and lo, he is a Sage!"—(Horace Annesley Vachell. The Overland Monthly.

SOCIAL CLEARING-HOUSE SYSTEMS.

COUSIN "JACK" THINKS THAT HIS COUSIN'S GENIUS IS AGAIN PROVED.

The New-York bachelor, who relies upon his married cousin "Bess" to supply genius for him when he needs it, tried to give her a good idea at dinner the other evening. She had been making calls all afternoon, and any other woman in the world would have been so tired that her cousin would have wished that he had gone to the club to dine. Not so with her, however. She was as bright as a newly coined gold piece, and smiled and chatted as pleasantly as if she had been resting all day to get ready for a brilliant dinner. But she confessed that calling was sometimes hard work.

"Well you know," said Jack indolently, "I don't believe in it. I don't believe it pays to be bored. I don't make calls when I don't want to (though that isn't wholly true). I think it's a waste of time; but I am willing to help you out, Bess, with a brilliant suggestion."

"You are a good boy, Jack," she answered, "but you know your suggestions about women and their ways are generally—well, we'll say not feasible."

"That may be all true," he replied, "though I don't admit it. Now listen to this. The only way to solve this calling problem is to establish a social clearing-house. It would be just like this: Mrs. A owes Mrs. B a call, but Mrs. B owes Mrs. C a call. Mrs. C is intending to call on Mrs. A, when she is informed by the clearing-house secretary how the social account of Mrs. A and Mrs. B stands. She cancels her indebtedness to Mrs. A by accepting Mrs. B's claim against Mrs. A. That wipes out the whole account, don't you see? Pretty good idea, isn't it?" he added in a self-satisfied voice.

"Let me see," said Mrs. Cousin thoughtfully. "Suppose Mrs. A were a charming woman whom I am always glad to see. Suppose I owed her a call and was planning with pleasure to return it. Suppose Mrs. A owed a call to Mrs. B who was—well, just not charming. Suppose your clearing-house arrangement, after figuring out all our debts, should announce that I must call on Mrs. B to 'clear' for several of us. How about calling being a bore then, Jack?"

"Right," answered the man without genius. "I guess you'll just have to go on and bear your punishment as you do now, cheerfully as possible."

"But now," said the woman, "let me give you one of my ideas, Jack. It came to me the other evening when we were at supper in ——'s. You know the great difficulty about making calls in these days is getting over so much ground. It takes a whole afternoon to get from where I live on this side of the Park over to the West Side, say Riverside Drive, make a call or two and get back. What I thought of when we were at supper in ——'s was that the rooms were very pretty and very homelike, and that there was enough room for dozens of receptions. Suppose women should have such rooms, not a clubhouse, but a reception house. Every woman would go there on her receiving day, and when you wanted to call on her you could call on every other woman who had that day, if you wanted to. Why, five or six women could receive together, and you could see them all in the same room inside of ten minutes and then go on to the next room and see several more. What do you thing of that idea?" she asked, triumphantly.

"You certainly are a wonder for thinking," answered her cousin. "Bess," he added, solemnly, "I wish you and I were in Wall Street together."

FIXING THE OLD THING RIGHT.

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Said Adam unto Seth, his son,
"My boy, my life is nearly done.
I am the first man ever made,
And yet a failure I'm afraid.
And you, my boy, must bring to men
Your father's Eden back again.
You must correct our great mistake—
Our foolish blunder with the snake;
The world has wandered from the light;
Go in and fix the old thing right."

Said Seth to Enos, his first-born,
"My boy, your life is in its morn.
You've scarcely passed from boyhood's stage
You're but four hundred years of age.
I've struggled on through hopes and fears
And lived above five hundred years.
And now I feel that there can be
But a few centuries more for me.
I've tried my prettiest since my birth
To steer and regulate the earth;
But all of Nature's plan, I fear,
Is pretty badly out of gear;
So, while I travel toward the night,
Go in and fix the old thing right."

Said Enos unto Cainan, "Lad,
I fear the world is growing bad;
But when I see before me spread
Your large development of head,
And know you deem all wisdom shut
And focussed in your occiput,
I feel that here is one at last
Who should redeem the wretched past;
And so I say, take up the fight,
Go in and fix the old thing right."

Said Cainan to Mahalaleel,
"The envious years upon me steal,
And I now feel me old and dried
As father Enos when he died.
Though I possessed, as father said,
A large development of head,
The world would 'haw' when I said 'gee,'
And 'gee' when I said 'haw.' Ah, me!
I've tried for these nine hundred years
To drive this balky yoke of steers,
And now I pass the goad to you
To do the best that you can do.
And when old Cainan fades from sight
Go in and fix the old thing right."

Mahalaleel to Jared said,
"My son, 'tis time that I were dead,
And in this view of mine, I guess,
You, too, have come to acquiesce.
The world has reached a sorry plight—
Go in and fix the old thing right."

So Jared, when his life was done,
The same to Enoch talked, his son.
And Enoch, like a faithful pa,
The same to young Methuselah,
Who near a thousand years of strife
Mourned over the brevity of life.
And said to Lamech, "Life is short,
And very little I have wrought.
Though I might make the world sublime
And perfect, if I had the time.
But in my life's contracted span
I but merely just began.
No earthly power my life can save—
I seek my premature grave;
My son, take up the unfinished fight—
Go in and fix the old thing right."

Soon Lamech left the world to Noah
Just as his fathers had before.
And then the Flood came on to rout
And drown the whole creation out.
Though all had tried with might and right,
They failed to fix the old thing right.

But when a man is born to-day
He starts out in the good old way,
And bravely works from dawn till night
To try and fix the old thing right.
The same old lightning is in the blood
That thrilled men's hearts before the Flood
Drives all men to the endless fight
To try and fix the old thing right.
And though the clouds of death draw nigh
And shut the clouds from out the sky,
And though life marches through the gloom
To music of the steps of doom,
A voice comes through the darkness far
And smites the cloud-wrack like a star,
And makes its thunder-blackness bright,
"Go in and fix the old thing right."

SAM WALTER FOSS.

VERDI VERSUS MASCAGNI.

From The St. James Gazette.

May I be allowed to break a lance on behalf of poor old Verdi, who is reported by the writer of your musical column to have "scarcely begun to compose at the age of thirty," while Mascagni, who has just celebrated his thirtieth birthday, had already brought out three operas and has three ready for production? First of all, and simply for the sake of precision, let me say that only one of Mascagni's new works is ready for production, at encore, and that is "Radcliff"; only two acts of "Vestilia" are orchestrated, and the third is merely sketched out; as to "Romano" (not "Rossmaslo"), it exists as yet as much in Mascagni's brains as on paper.

As to Verdi. If we take into no account the music he has written in his student days at Busseto—choruses, marches, dance music, sacred music, overtures, etc., the MSS. of which are jealously kept in the archives of the Philharmonic Society at Busseto (among others, a "Sinfonia" performed in 1828, when Verdi was hardly fifteen years of age); if we pass over all the music the master has composed when he came first to Milan; and if we