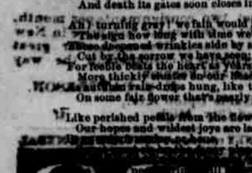
Turning Gray.

Life's sands are running fast away;
The buoyant step of youth has gone;
The falling hair is turning gray,
And time seems now to hurry on
More freely than in days of yore—
Before the beard became its prey—
Before 'twas saddened to the core—
Before the hair was turning gray.

Yes, turning gray! Age comes like snow;
As stiff—and carves each care-worn line;
Its wrinkles on the brow will grow;
The hair with silvery streaks will shine;
The years their brightness on the hand
Will leave—and thoughtfulness and care,
For life, alas! is quickly spanned,
And death its gates soon closer in.

All turning gray! we talk would hide
The sign how long with time we've been—
The sunken wrinkles side by side,
Cut by the sorrow we have seen;
For feeble beats the heart as years
More thickly crowd the world—and to
Ourselves the false dye hung, like tears,
On some fair flower that's nearly dead.

Like perished petals from the flower
Our hopes and wildest joys are laid;



Or every wooded hill,
The light is scattered on the down,
And silvered on the rill.

The fairy fife of June, the bird
Salutes the sportsman's ear
And just above the water-fall
Old Esther sets his weir.
The soldiers leave with withered wings
Sweep lightly to the sod,
And Autumn walks the field and sings,
With rustling sandals shod.

—Scribner for October

"WHO WAS MY QUIET FRIEND?"

BY BRET HARTE.

"Stranger!"

The voice was not loud, but clear and penetrating. I looked vainly up and down the narrow darkening trail. No one in the fringe of alder ahead; no one on the gullied slope behind.

"O! stranger!"

This time a little impatiently. The Californian vocative, "O," always meant business.

I looked up, and perceived for the first time, on the ledge, thirty feet above me, another trail parallel with my own, and looking down upon me through the buckeye bushes, a small man on a black horse.

Five things to be here noted by the circumspect mountaineer. First, the locality—lonely and inaccessible and away from the regular faring of teamsters and miners. Secondly, the stranger's superior knowledge of the road from the fact that the other trail was unknown to the ordinary traveller. Thirdly, that he was well armed and equipped. Fourthly, that he was better mounted. Fifthly, that any distrust or timidity arising from contemplation of these facts, had better be kept to oneself.

All this passed rapidly through my mind as I returned his salutation.

"Got any tobacco?" he asked.

I had, and signified the fact, holding up the pouch inquiringly.

"All right, I'll come down. Ride on and I'll jine ye on the slide."

"The slide?" Here was a new geographical discovery as odd as the second trail. I had ridden over the trail a dozen times, and seen no communication between the ledge and trail. Nevertheless I went on a hundred yards or so, when there was a sharp crackling in the underbrush, a shower of stones on the trail, and my friend plunged through the bushes to my side down a grade that I should scarcely have dared to lead my horse. There was no doubt he was an accomplished rider—another fact to be noted.

As he ranged beside me I found I was not mistaken in his size; he was quite under the medium height, and, for a man, had a pair of cold gray eyes, was rather common place in feature.

"Ever to get a horse down?" I suggested.

He was filling his pipe from my pouch, but looked up a little surprised, and said, "Occasion'l. He then put it away with the nervous eagerness of a man long deprived of that sedative. Finally, between the puffs, he asked me how I came.

I replied, from "Lagrange."

He looked at me a few moments curiously, but on my adding that I had only halted there a few hours, he said: "I thought I knew every man between Lagrange and Indian Spring, but somehow I orter disremember your face and your name."

Not particularly caring that he should remember either, I replied half laughingly, that as I lived the other side of Indian Spring, it was quite natural. He took the rebuff, if such it was, so quietly, that as an act of mere perfunctory politeness, I asked him where he came from.

"Lagrange."

"And you are going to—"

"Well, that depends pretty much on how things pan out, and whether I can make the trade." He let his hand rest quite unconsciously on the leathern holster of his dragoon revolver, yet not in strong suggestion to me of his ability "to make the rifle" he had mentioned, and added: "But just now I was kind o' reckonin' on taking a little Injun with you."

There was nothing offensive in his speech, save its familiarity and the reflection, perhaps, that whether I objected or not, he was quite able to do as he said. I only replied that if our pasear was prolonged beyond Heavytree Hill, I should have to borrow his beast, or some other one. He replied quietly, "That's my business," adding that the horse was at my disposal when he wasn't using it, and half of it when he was." "Dick has carried double many a time before this," he continued, "and kind o' likes company. When your mustang gives out, I'll give you a lift, and room to spare."

I could not help smiling at the idea of appearing before the boys at Red Gulch accompanied by the stranger! I fancied the sensation this odd fellow would create, the astonishment that his horse had done double duty before. Oh what a fool I was, and why I was a question I kept to myself. We were descending long rocky flanks of the Divide, the narrowness of the trail precluding conversation, and I, for one, was glad that there was little chance for conversation. Suddenly we came out upon a little open space, the western end of which sloped down to the blank walls of a canyon, blinding gorgeous with the last glow of the sunset. Upon the other side, the trail was lost in a wilderness of boulders, which, with the shadows, made it dangerous even to the sure-footed horses. We had halted, and I was about to point out the difficulties of the descent, when my companion, with a muttered "Hold on!" disappeared in the bushes. I heard the rattle of stones, and the sound of a slide, and then, with a rush and a scramble, he was beside me, and I felt the quivering muscles of his mustang's haunches as he gathered himself for the descent. Before I could recover my breath, we had plunged into the abyss, and I felt the checking rein and heard the stranger's voice in my ear: "Let your mustang have his head, and he'll do the rest." I had ridden down many a steep trail before, but never at such a pace as this. The speed with which we passed the bushes and boulders made them blend together in a confused mass. The air whistled in my ears, and I felt the blood beating in my temples. Once or twice I felt my horse's haunches quiver and his forefeet slide from under him, and I knew we had passed the limit of his endurance, but he never faltered. At last, we struck the level, and I felt the stranger's hand upon my bridle-rein. We walked our horses for a few minutes in silence, the pickeye panting with the exertion, the western sky behind us still glowing with the last glow of sunset, but before us the blank walls of the canyon, blindingly dark with the shadow of night. The stars were out when we halted in front of a low adobe house, before which a few horses were hitched, and from which came the murmur of many voices and the clink of glasses. We had ridden down the Divide!

I was surprised at my companion's proposition to take a drink, but accepted it, and we entered the bar-room together. The room was filled with a motley crowd of miners, teamsters, and ranchers, who, at our entrance, ceased their talk and drinking, and stood silently aside to let us pass to the bar. There was something in the manner of my companion that I had noticed before, that made me feel that he was a man to be respected and feared. He returned the salutations of his acquaintances with a nod and a smile, but passed on with a quiet "Evening, gentlemen," that left them free to resume their talk and their drinking. He introduced me to the bar-keeper as his friend, and we drank together. The liquor was fiery and exciting, and I felt the blood mounting to my temples as we turned from the bar and I found himself the centre of a group of miners who had evidently been waiting our return. I remember that I drank with them, and that they drank with us, and that we sat down to a game of poker, and that I had a hand of extraordinary strength, and that I staked my pile upon it, and that I was the only man who had anything when the game was called, and that I had to take the stranger's word for the amount of my winnings, and that I lost it all the next day, except enough to pay my share of the expenses of that memorable evening.

I remember, also, that I was very silent, and that I let my companion do the talking, and that I was very much ashamed of my condition when we left the house together, and that I felt very much better when we had ridden a mile or two from the place, and that we had slackened our horses to a walk, and that I was very glad that I had not ridden down the Divide that night with a man who was not master of himself.

I remember that we had ridden for an hour in silence, and that I was wondering how I could express my gratitude for his silence and forbearance, when he suddenly reined his horse to the edge of a wide, black shadow by the roadside, and said, "This is my trail. I live over there in the canyon. Will you ride over with me and see me?"

I remember that I assented, and that we left the main trail and rode into the shadow, and that my companion dismounted and fastened his horse to a sapling, and that I did the same, and that he then took my bridle-rein and led the way into the darkness of the hillside, and that I stumbled and fell over fallen rocks, and that he caught me and helped me on my way, and that we groped our way into a low, narrow, and damp-smelling adobe house, and that he lighted a candle and threw himself upon a rude bed, and that I sat upon a rude chair and looked around me for signs of my host's occupation, and that I was very sleepy and very stupid, and that I had a headache in the morning, and that I remembered that I had ridden home with a man whose name I had not thought to ask, and that I was ashamed to ask it now, and that I lay upon my own bed and tried to think of all this, and to think why I had ever taken that first drink, and why I had ridden home with a man whose name I did not know, and why I had not asked him his name before I had ridden home with him, and why I had not asked him his name before I had taken that first drink, and why I was a fool and a coward, and why I was myself and a stranger to me, and why I was miserable and ashamed of myself, and why I was not dead instead of being so sick and miserable, and why I had not the courage to get up and end my misery, and why I was not a man like my companion, who had ridden down the Divide that night with his mind under his control, and who had ridden back to his home in the darkness, and who had slept and had forgotten his folly, while I was a coward and could not sleep for my shame.

I remember that I was very miserable for many days after that, and that I was very silent and very ashamed of myself, and that I drank no more with my companion, but that we became more and more to each other as the days went by, and that I came to look upon him as my friend, and that I came to look upon him as a man of whose acquaintance I might be proud, and that I came to look upon him as a man whose friendship was an honor to me, and that I came to look upon him as a man whose name I had not dared to ask for fear that I might be refused, and that I came to look upon him as a man whose name I had not dared to ask for fear that I might be compelled to give my own in return, and that I came to look upon him as a man whose name I had not dared to ask for fear that I might be compelled to give my own in return for his