

THE PARTNER'S STRUGGLE.

BY HARRY L. WELLS.

One August evening in the year 1848, a traveler passing down the beautiful Willamette would have witnessed a quiet scene of rural life that strongly spoke of happiness and peace. In the valley the hazy brightness of an Indian summer day was turning to the deep blue tints that precede the gray of twilight, while the sun, just sinking behind the pine-covered ridges of the Coast Range, was tinged with carmine, purple and gold the summit peaks and snow-capped monarchs of the Cascades. A few rods back from the stream stood a log cabin, warmly chinked and banked up around its base with dirt and sod, and roofed securely with shakes. The neatly-kept door-yard, the flower plot where still bloomed the latest blossoms of the season, the clean-thatched stable and substantial fences, all gave assurance that thrift and industry were the watchwords of the household. From the clay chimney curled upward a thin wreath of smoke, while the savory odor of a cooking dinner issued from the wide-open door.

Within the domicile a little girl sat upon the floor, playing quietly with some rude toys carved by her father's knife, and near by an infant lay in a low, box cradle, gazing wonderingly with its large baby eyes at the chubby hands held before its face. The mother, still young and bearing upon her countenance a look of contentment that showed how lightly her domestic and maternal cares bore upon her, was busily preparing the evening meal, making frequent trips to the door to take a hasty glance down the river. At last she was rewarded by the sight of a skiff coming rapidly around a bend in the stream, propelled by the sturdy strokes of its only occupant, and snatching from the floor the little player, she held her aloft in her arms for papa to see as he glanced over his shoulder towards his home.

In a few moments the rower grounded his boat, threw the painter over a stake driven in the bank, and leaping lightly out hastened up to the cabin, where a warm welcome awaited him. While the wife was placing the steaming supper upon the table, the head of the happy family attended to the wants of his horses and cattle, which being finished, he washed his face and hands in the large trough that stood beneath the pump just without the cabin door, and sat down to the table with an appetite such as a good cook delights to see.

"Well, Mary," he said, as he heaped upon his plate a quantity of provender measured by his appetite rather than the capacity of his stomach. "Guess what that old Yankee captain wanted of so many tinpans and things?"

"Why, I don't know, Peter, unless it was to set out milk in; though what he is going to do with so many is more than I can imagine."

"You're wrong, little woman; guess again."

"O, I give it up; you know I can never guess anything. Please tell me. You always keep me so in suspense that I never relish anything when you do tell it."

"Well, I'll not keep you in suspense this time. It is very easy. He simply wants them to take to California to wash dirt in."

"There, Peter Warren, I knew you would serve me like that. It's too bad you can't tell me

anything when you know I want to hear so badly."

"But its true, just as I tell you."

"Why, Peter, how absurd! How can they wash dirt? It will all dissolve in the water and run away."

"Exactly; I see your scientific attainments are considerable; that is just what they desire to have it do."

"But what good can it do that way?"

"Get gold out of it, my dear. They have discovered gold in California, and every pan on the coast is worth five dollars as quickly as it can be taken to the mines. Nearly every man I have seen is going to California, and I am too, just as soon as I can get things in shape for the winter."

It was an exciting time in Oregon when the news was spread among the settlements that gold had been discovered in almost unlimited quantities along the streams and gulches of the neighboring province so lately conquered from Mexico. The massacre of the lamented Dr. Whitman, less than a year before, and the war with the Cayuse Indians which followed, though they may have produced more temporary excitement, were far less potent and lasting in their effects upon Oregon than was Marshall's accidental discovery at Sutter's mill on the south fork of American river. There was at that time no regular communication between California and Oregon. An occasional vessel trading along the coast from Chili to Alaska, out to the Sandwich Islands and even across the Pacific to China, came up the Columbia to exchange commodities, and now and then a trader direct from the east around Cape Horn, or a vessel belonging to the great Hudson's Bay Company, put in an appearance. Annually, also, emigrants passed up and down the old trail made by the trappers years before, dissatisfied with the choice they had first made; but no emigrants left California that year—the mines absorbed them all—and thus for nearly nine months the settlers in Oregon worked quietly along subduing the wilderness, in utter ignorance of the intense fever of excitement raging in the neighboring province. How long this condition of affairs would have continued had it not been upset by the demands of trade is very uncertain. Sometime during the summer it occurred to the captain of one of these roving traders that there was a good chance to speculate in buying for almost nothing a cargo of such things needed in the mines as could be procured in Oregon, and selling them in San Francisco at the enormous prices current there. He put the idea into execution at once.

It was a quiet August morning when the vessel sailed up the Willamette and tied up to the bank where stood the little village that was then Oregon's metropolis. The population turned out en masse to receive the visitor, for the arrival of news from the outside world was an unusual event in the lives of these far western pioneers. They seized eagerly upon all papers the captain had to offer them, considering them far from stale if printed no longer than six months before. The skipper imparted what information he possessed on all subjects of interest to his questioners, except that of the discovery of gold. On this topic he preserved a judicious silence until he had secured a cargo of flour, vegetables, bacon and provisions of all kinds at the prevailing rates, and but little curiosity was aroused until he began

buying everything in the shape of a shovel or tin pan that he could lay his eyes upon. It was only when he could find no more and had his cargo completed that he unsealed his lips and informed the inquisitive people the meaning of these strange purchases, and offered to give passage to San Francisco to those who felt disposed to pay the price he demanded.

The intelligence that gold had been discovered in California spread rapidly from cabin to cabin up the Willamette valley, and the effect upon such a hardy and adventurous set as were the pioneers of this region can easily be imagined. Every man who was foot-loose, and many who were not, determined at once to seek their fortune in the mines. Some of them accepted the captain's offer and sailed in the ship, while others, in parties of twos and threes, on horseback and on foot, and one large company with wagons, started overland as rapidly as they could get ready. Oregon was suddenly drained of its young and able-bodied men, progress was checked, and the territory received a backset for which it was, a few years later, fully compensated by the trade which sprang up with the new state adjoining.

Peter Warren and Mary Sinclair had come to Oregon in the first large immigration of 1843. He was a sturdy young farmer from Illinois, intelligent and well educated for one brought up to labor from his early youth, while she was the only daughter of an elderly Missouri frontiersman, whose restless nature had led him to seek the beautiful valley so highly praised by hundreds of roving trappers. They first became acquainted one stormy night on the banks of the Platte, when Peter volunteered his services in caring for the cattle of the old gentleman, who had been taken ill on the journey. This acquaintance ripened into a closer relationship when the father died near Fort Hall, and the orphan girl was received into the family of her new friends. When they reached Oregon City the young couple were married, and taking up a section of land about a mile up the river from that place, began making for themselves a home. A year later they were made happy by the arrival of a baby girl whom they named Gracie, and about a year before our story opens little Georgie was born.

Peter Warren's announcement that he was going to California fell like a dark shadow upon that happy household. A nameless, indefinable dread took possession of the mother. She felt that if he went away she would never see him again.

"Don't go, Peter," she entreated; "We are so happy now, and have such a nice, pretty home. Why do you want to go away from us? We have all we need to eat and wear, and are getting in better circumstances every year, and why do you want to get rich so fast? You may die or get killed in those horrid mines. I fear if you go away you will never come back to us."

But he only laughed at her fears and said that women were always imagining something bad was about to happen. "I'll be back in the spring with all the gold my horse can carry, and we will take life easy the rest of our days."

The gold fever had a stronger hold upon him than his family, and so, early one morning in October, in spite of his wife's tears and entreaties, in spite of little Gracie's protest that she "did not want papa to go away to those nasty mines," and in spite of Georgie's crowing and scolding as