

AN IDYL OF DEVIL'S GULCH.

PART FIRST.

CLIMBING high up among the Sierras, is a deep, wide gorge, known as Devil's gulch. The head of this chasm widens out into a small, but lovely, plateau, almost among the clouds, yet still encircled by a high wall of mountains. It is shaped like a horse-shoe, with the opening toward the gulch. Here, more than a score of years ago, was a prosperous mining camp, called the "Horsehoe," where the sound of the pick resounded around the rocky walls and down the gulch all day long, and sometimes far into the night. A well-beaten road wound tortuously down the precipitous sides of the gorge, now on this side and now on that, to the great Sacramento valley below; for the camp had grown to such importance as to justify weekly trips of a lumbering old stage.

All mining camps are essentially cosmopolitan in character, combining both simple and complex elements. Human passion, in all its multiform phases, is here intensified, it may be, by their narrow, isolated lives, and the narrowness of their one dominant purpose. The "Horsehoe" did not differ, materially, from its class.

On a certain morning in late spring, there was unusual commotion in the camp. The snow still lay, white and glistening, upon the summits; but on the plateau, and down the gulch, the annual thaw had removed every vestige of it. Ferns and lichens were growing luxuriantly among the rocks, and about the camp was springing up a mossy carpet of green; yet the air was crisp and cool. The miners, interrupted by the winter snows, had again resumed work on their

respective claims. Hitherto, only surface gold had been taken, in such quantities, however, as to justify the most sanguine hopes; but the prospect of a rich "find," somewhere along their line of operations, had gradually taken more definite shape. So they worked with a will at their chanceful game. No one could tell just where the luck would fall, but each hoped the utmost for his claim.

On this particular morning, Ben Hepworth had repaired to his work earlier than was his wonted custom. He was the recognized leader among the miners. This was owing, partly, to his superior business qualifications and thorough knowledge of all mining principles and technicalities, but chiefly, to an acute discernment, and a certain innate, indescribable power, which he possessed, of moving persons at his will. On the preceding evening, when Hepworth had left off digging, he had seen certain indications that fairly took his breath away. He was not a man to make a stir over uncertainties. He must have something tangible before he would proclaim his good fortune. He slept little during the night, and was up and at work with the dawn. The indications were even more positive and more clearly defined in the gray light of early morning. There was the unmistakable showing of a quartz gangue, which he had been almost certain he should find from the beginning. That it would prove auriferous, his well-trained eye told him was equally certain, though the value of its deposit would altogether depend upon the kind of vein discovered. Should he be fortunate enough to strike the true fi-