

## A SUPERSTITION OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

IT was in the early days of 1857, when Brandy City, a hydraulic mining camp, located on a ridge twenty miles west of Downieville, Sierra county, California, was a superlatively thriving town. The population did not exceed six hundred souls, most of whom were engaged in the then remunerative pursuit of wresting the precious metal from the hearts of the surrounding mountains. Brandy City, like all mining camps of that epoch, was graced, as well as disgraced, by the most elevated and degenerate types of manhood. Every third or fourth house on the main thoroughfare of the camp was occupied as a gambling or "hurdy-gurdy" (dance) house.

In those days, respectable women were rare, indeed, in the small mining camps of California, and as money was easily obtained, a miner readily gave a "hurdy-gurdy" girl five dollars for a "barn-door" dance, and in many instances ten dollars, if she proved pleasant of speech and fascinated the greedy eye. The saloon keepers and conductors of the gambling and dance houses contrived to gather in the greater portion of the miners' earnings; yet the camp failed not in prosperity, and there were few who could not, at any time, jingle several double eagles in their pockets.

Among the gamblers living in Brandy City then, was one George Wilson, an intelligent, still a superlatively superstitious, man. He was possessed of the hallucination that there were some men in that small community acting as "coppers" on the camp. Wilson had preached this doctrine so long and so

earnestly, and pointed out so many imaginary proofs of its reliability, that not only all the gamblers, but many miners, were converted to his insane belief.

One instance will illustrate how unreasonably superstitious this man was. His headquarters were established in a saloon owned by one Bill Hill (yet living), where, of course, gambling of every conceivable nature was the order of the day, and the night. This place was frequented, also, by one Peter Simpson, an honest miner. This person had never been known to risk a dollar on a card, but amused himself with seeing others win or lose, and often annoyed the players by dropping unasked-for advice. Wilson had long regarded Simpson as a "copper," because, whenever he played at a table, and the latter was present, he invariably lost his money. Once, he incurred an uncommonly great loss under this circumstance, and he communicated his suspicion to others who had been inoculated with his superstitious fancies, resulting in an indignant uprising against unsuspecting Simpson. The gamblers forbade him entering Hill's saloon; but as he was a man of undaunted courage, he declined to obey the behest, and continued his visits. A few nights later, he was waited upon by a deputation of miners and gamblers, in his cabin, and ordered to leave the camp without delay, under penalty of serious personal injury. It may, perhaps, be needless to add that unfortunate Simpson vacated his premises the following day, sacrificing his mining claim and all else, and moved to Downieville, where he remained up to the hour of his death.