

GOLDEN THRONE

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM]

CHAPTER III.

It was only a little brawl, such as takes place almost every evening in a mining town. Having nothing else to amuse them, the inhabitants take to this form of recreation. It is the entertainment of savages, which, as civilization progresses, gives way to the opera and theatre for the more lively, and the prayer-meeting and the funeral for those who are of a more sober disposition. It is impossible for people to keep quiet; and, if they can have no other channel, they will insist upon "bloody noses and cracked crowns."

Little Pete came running up to Charlie, as if to claim his protection. He was a queer-looking boy, rather tall for his apparent age, but very slightly built, as if the wind might blow him away. He looked constantly scared. His bright eyes were wide open and restless. He shrank from companionship, and liked to be alone. Nobody knew whence he came. He seemed like an apparition. He was well behaved, and kept himself scrupulously clean, though his clothes were almost nothing but rags. Golden Throne was troubled but little about the waif. It was sublimely indifferent, even like a great city, to any body and everybody. Pete might have disappeared as mysteriously as he came, and not a word would have been said. He managed to pick up enough gold to obtain a decent living. Sometimes, he did a bit of cooking for the miners.

"Why, little Pete," said Charlie, "you are scared again, and all for nothing."

"I know it," said Pete; "but Dick's a fighting, and I thought he'd fight me."

"Oh, he wouldn't touch you. He takes those of his own size."

"But he swears terribly, and he looks ugly."

"Well, he is ugly, and so its well enough to keep out of his way."

"There was a fight however; but it didn't last long."

Big Dick was the bully of the settlement. He was over six feet high, and strong as a bull, and ugly as the devil. He was a perfect barbarian. He was born in the wilds of Texas, and had been a cowboy all his life till he came to the mines. He worked hard during the day, and caroused at night and kept things lively. It was seldom that he could get any one to fight with him, and so he had the field to himself; but tonight the "minister" pitched into him, and was ignominiously defeated.

Golden Throne could boast of a minister as well as a deacon; but the minister wasn't quite so sober and well-behaved as the deacon, and made no pretence at praying. He

was drunk about all the time, and like the rest of the ministerial tribe did nothing but loaf. That's the chief end of a minister to loaf gracefully; and though "Jimmy," as he was sometimes called, had given up everything else pertaining to the profession, he hadn't given that up, which is the last privilege that clergymen yield. It is the most difficult thing in the world for them to go to work.

Jimmy had been a brilliant Methodist minister. He could count his converts by the thousand. He was a man of marvelous eloquence. He was full of sentiment and poetry. Religion was really a luxury to him, and he enjoyed it as such. It was a species of sensuous delight, and I suppose that is the reason why he at last came to his ruin. He had no moral principle, only good-feeling. He had no intellectual conviction; for, though his mind was bright, yet it was just bright enough to reject the old ideas, and not strong enough to go forth and build in accordance with the new. He was a child of passion, and it is no wonder that in the midst of dazzling temptations he fell. He must indeed have been an angel of light to have been able to play so powerfully as he did upon the passions of men and women, exalting and sweeping them away on tides of splendid eloquence, without himself being moved to the very depths of his sensitive nature, and so ravished by physical beauty that the influence was almost overpowering. A sublime mental belief would have saved him; but he lacked that, and his preaching was only a form of passion, and is it strange that that passion found other channels?

So here he was at last, a disreputable wreck, with no hope, living from hand to mouth in this corner of the world, among rude men, he who had the power "the applause of listening senates to command."

He was generally peaceable, and the camp delighted to hear him tell stories, which he could do with remarkable dramatic ability. Tonight, however, he felt his oats, having a sort of extra drunk, and he imagined that he could master Dick. He soon lay with bloody nose upon the ground, not much hurt however, but convinced that in meeting Big Bill upon the field of the "noble art of self-defence" he had mistaken his calling.

"I'm much obliged to yer, preacher, for giving me a chance. I wish yer were bigger, so we could have a longer tussle. I've no chance at all among these fellers, they all back down so quick."

"We ought to import a bull for your especial benefit," said Charlie, "then we'd have some fun, sure."

"I'd give fifty dollars to try it," said Dick.

"I'd give another, for I would like to see you bite the dust," said

Jimmy.

"Well, fetch the bull along. I'm ready."

Indeed, it seemed as if he was ready, he looked so mighty in his superb physical development.

"Well, Jimmy," said Charlie, "this wasn't a successful revival-meeting, was it?"

"You didn't begin to pray quick enough," said Paddie.

"Well, I had the fun of trying, at any rate," said Jimmy. "I am satisfied now that I can't whollop Dick. I feel discouraged, like the bull when he undertook to stop the engine."

"You have many things to discourage you, I see," said Charlie. "I should think you would want to turn over a new leaf."

"Oh, I have turned over all the leaves, and have come to the finish. I can't turn any more. Why, I have been converted nigh on to a hundred times."

"But you can try it a hundred times more," said Paddie. "Long as the lamp holds out to burn, the vilest sinner may return."

"Well, I've got tired of it. I am in the last ditch, and I think I will stay there."

"But it's a pity, when you could be so respectable, if you only would."

"If I only would! How do you know that? I would, and yet I can't."

"Don't you believe in the freedom of will?"

"That is a pretty deep question for a drunken man to answer."

"Well, I think a drunken man can answer it as well as anybody," said Paddie. "We are free to do what we are fated to do, and that's all."

"I believe you," said Jimmy. "I have given up the struggle. I can't do anything. They who say I can do not understand me. Can I leave off drinking whiskey? No. Another man might in my circumstances; and I might in the circumstances of another man. But I, in my circumstances, can do no other than I do do, and that is to drink this bottle to the dregs."

"That's a good swig, and I guess you had better go to bed on it. You won't be able to talk theology after such a dose."

"Oh, yes. I'm in just the mood for theology. I never understood the universe so well as I do now. I really believe that I could evolve a system. I am full of the ideas of Plato, and I penetrate the secret of Hegel. "I am never so ignorant as when I'm sober, and am never so wise as when I'm drunk; and I think that's the way with the rest of mankind. To be a philosopher, one must be intoxicated."

"You are a first-class philosopher then," said Charlie. "I suppose you can solve us any riddle. Tell us who was the father of Abraham's children. If you can answer that, you will do as much

as any philosopher ever did."

"I will solve the mystery a la Descartes. I think, therefore I exist. I exist, therefore I live. I live, therefore I eat and drink. I eat and drink, therefore I discourse. I discourse, and therefore I think. What can be more plain than that? The logical conclusion of which is that I am going to sleep, and my philosophy will dissolve in dreams."

"I wouldn't sleep on the ground, though. Let me put you in your little bed." And they led the reeling philosopher and preacher to his quarters.

"Come, Pete, you can stay with me, if you want to. There's plenty of room."

"Oh, no. I'm all right now. I'll go home." And off he went.

"I don't know what to think of that little chap," said Charlie. "I guess he's a rascal. I never can get a square look at him, he's so shy. He's nice-looking, but you can't tell anybody by their looks. He may be up to some deviltry. Good-night, Paddie. I guess we can sleep now. We've had our usual entertainment."

We will return to our friend Bill now, whose home was in a distant and solitary spot. He leaped lightly across a narrow ravine, and followed through the straggling timber a somewhat beaten pathway up the mountains. He soon came to a large, open space or "pocket," from whence could be seen a vast extent of country. A dozen lofty oaks were scattered about, in the midst of which was a cabin with an exquisitely kept garden in front. It was, indeed, a scene fresh and beautiful as paradise. The golden sunlight was flooding it, and the many peaks seen for miles away were shining as if covered with jewels. The wildness and grandeur of the view were inexpressible. The tall trees; the vast defiles; the huge rocks tumbled about, as if long ago there had been some fantastic battle of the giants; the gleaming cliffs and superb mountain-tops, many of them clothed with dazzling snow, all suffused and glorified with the ineffable tints of sunset,—made a spectacle of wondrous magnificence. One seemed to be in fairyland, and could almost forget that he had ever heard the "still sad music of humanity" in crowded thoroughfares. It was like a vast, sweet temple of nature, where the spirit could commune with noblest forms, and revel in pure and beautiful existence, and forget the superstitions of blinded men and the traumas of custom. There are times when solitude is inspiring, and the rude aspects of nature delightful; and it is a rich experience in one's life to dwell among these savage surroundings, so grand and terrible, and drink in the spirit of the universe, and become heroic in thought and purpose.

(To Be Continued.)