

GOLDEN THRONE

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM]

CHAPTER IV.

Bill, the miner, was a man of considerable culture. He had dwelt most of his life in New-England, on the banks of one of its loveliest streams. But, being of an adventurous disposition and somewhat ambitious, he had come to California in search of a fortune. He loved the mountains, and to a certain extent dwelt apart from his comrades,—not from any spirit of misanthropy, but because he enjoyed lonely studies, and also because, in the little cabin toward which he wended his way, lived with him the only surviving member of his family, besides himself, his sister Madeline.

She was at the door to greet him with a smile and kiss. She was very beautiful,—pale and delicate, with an unusual brilliancy in her eyes. Indeed, it required but little observation to discover that she was slightly deranged. Yet she was charming, intelligent, graceful, and full of sunshine. She was neatly attired, and the cabin was in the best of order, and a supper that would have tempted a king was ready for the tired worker.

"I am glad to get home," said Bill. "I haven't had much luck today,—enough to pay for my supper, though; and, since I have no landlord to demand rent, I guess I can make out to live. Don't you think so Maddie?"

"It looks like it," she replied. "I don't think one can starve in this country. We have all we want."

"Yet I hope to be rich. It seems as if I would not always live here. There is a strange magic in wealth; and, if I had it, it seems as if I could dwell in fairyland."

"This is fairy land. Here we are happy."

"Happy,—yes; but it is our fate, I suppose, always to be dissatisfied. I never expect to have a sweeter life than I do now; and yet I always want to strike luck and fill my pockets with gold."

"I hope you will. It can do no hurt to have the gold, whether you can spend it or not. I do not care to have it. I prefer the flowers."

"I am glad you do; and how plenty they are! So we are rich if we only knew it."

"Rich, indeed; and yet, Willie, I was feeling homesick today."

"Homesick! Did you want to see the old farm once more?"

"Oh, I did. How beautiful it looked in my dreams! The great trees, the fields and the rocks, and the brook,—how they shone with wonderful light! It almost seemed as if I were there."

"Yet how changed all would be, if we should visit it."

"Oh, yes," sighed Madeline. "I could not go back; and yet I have

such a longing for the old life. I can hardly endure the thought that it is gone forever. It seems as if I must live it once again."

"Perhaps we shall. Some philosophers say that this life is but a reliving of some former one, and that our knowledge is but a remembering; and, if we lived it once, why not again? I'm sure I've no objection. I'd rather live this life over again than go to heaven and play on a harp of gold."

"I wonder if we shall live again," mused Madeline. "It seems as if all this beauty of thought and feeling that we have cannot come to an end, that something at least must remain; and yet I know not. Father and mother never gave us any hope, and yet I cannot feel that they have quite passed away, even though they said they should, and were satisfied to rest in the bosom of nature in sweet sleep."

"There they are in the quiet valley; and all that is left is the influence of their devoted lives. I can see no greater immortality. That is all they taught me, and it is all that I believe. It is all that my reason can assent to. And yet we have these hopes and dreams within us. It may be there is something beyond."

"I hardly care to live, unless I can live as fully and as freely as I do now, with as much enjoyment of nature. What is the use of a vague, shadowy, unsubstantial existence? We might as well mingle with the wind, and forget ourselves."

"That's what I think. I want life, if I am going to live,—life with flesh and blood in it, like this. I don't want to be a ghost."

"How can we have an existence like this, unless we have a body like this? And we know that the body perishes. We can think of no life outside of the body."

"It's a puzzle, isn't it? And I always end by giving it up."

"Yet we constantly recur to the puzzle. It haunts us. Why is the world always talking about it?"

"Perhaps because it is in its childhood. If it were grown up, it would devote itself to this life and think of no other."

"That would be wiser, I admit; and yet how hard it is to be wise or cease to be childish. Even now, I like to see the new moon, as I do at this moment, over my right shoulder."

"We are children of the past, and can't escape what it has taught us."

"It does seem at times as if I had lived for ages. I feel as if I had breathed and thought long ago, when these mountains first began to be. I know I was with them at their birth."

"Probably you were, in some shape. You have weird fancies at times."

"I do. I sometimes think I hear voices and see visions. I thought

today I saw mother. It could not have been a dream it was so real."

"We will call it a reality, for we hardly know where to draw the line between a dream and a fact."

"I care not to settle it. I like to have some things uncertain,—other-wise life would be a dead calm,—but now it is full of ripples that catch with varying light the changing heaven. I am content, though I feel as if I knew but very little, and must guess at a great deal."

"Some things we know at least. I know that I have had a good supper; that the beefsteak was nicely broiled, and the gems delightful. And I know that this evening is beautiful, with the moon shedding its light, and the mountains lying about in grand majesty, and the trees whispering—I don't know what—but something very pleasant. Indeed what little knowledge I have gives me infinite joy."

"I am glad you enjoyed the supper, and I presume that, if you didn't enjoy that, you wouldn't enjoy any thing else. So we are creatures of the flesh, after all."

"That's to our credit. Why shouldn't we rejoice in the flesh? Isn't it divine? Give good flesh, and we have a good mind. Give poor flesh, and of what value is the soul? I don't want to be born again. I'd rather stick to the first birth, and revel in the blood that it gives me."

"I wish I had a body like yours, Willie. I feel like a shadow myself. It sometimes seems as if I was going to melt away."

Her delicate and frail body did contrast with the sturdy and almost giant frame of her brother. She was like a lily indeed, swaying in the wind; and almost any rude blast might take her off, while her brother seemed capable of enduring any storm. His strong body kept him in perfect and healthful contact with nature; while her delicate and slightly diseased organization was the source of fantastic and melancholy visions and thoughts. But her mind was highly cultivated, and being free from any superstition, she did not suffer as she otherwise might. She did not believe in any God outside of nature, and so was not tortured by any anxiety concerning her relations toward him. She touched nature fully and frankly, and had no fear; while her finely wrought spirit seemed to realize more of the subtle light and shades of the universe than the mind of her brother. She had an element within her of that mysterious genius that somehow seems to be lighted with fires from the innermost soul of things, and knows by flashes of intuition. Evidently some great sorrow had swept over her. She had passed through hours of immense agony. But now she was calm, like a sweet lake hidden in the bosom of mighty hills. There was an unfathomable

depth in the expression of her brilliant eyes.

How differently her brother looked! He was a genuine man from head to foot. He had always enjoyed life, as a strong swimmer does the sea. He was ready for any fortune and for any blow. Put him in the midst of the Atlantic, with but a single plank, and somehow he would make his way ashore; and, if he landed on a desert island, he would build him a house, and make out to live comfortably. This life to him was all in all. He had no thought beyond the present world. He expected when he died to return to dust. His father and mother both were infidels of the "straitest sect," and gave him nothing to hope for beyond nature. Hence his organization and mind were thoroughly adapted to his surroundings. His education had been complete. Not a single moment had been wasted upon theology. He had never entered a church, or spent one breath in prayer. He had always walked upright. He had read the best of books, and understood the system of nature as it really is, but he was gloriously ignorant of metaphysics, and all the quiddities of the philosophers.

He was, therefore, a royal good fellow. Meet him anywhere, and he would give you a cheery greeting. When he swore, he swore with such splendid gusto that it would destroy the melancholy effects of a thousand sermons, and make one feel better. There was so much genuine justice and sincerity in what he thundered forth. Besides, he could be as gentle as a woman, and serve any suffering mortal with infinite kindness.

How happily they lived together,—these two strangely contrasted yet harmonious souls! Subtle links of thrilling and fine associations bound them together.

They sat closely while the night came on, and the moon in silver glory shone in the cloudless blue. It was a fascinating scene. The hoary mountains seemed to sleep in the calm splendor, freighted with wondrous dreams, as if the gleaming life of centuries was throbbing in their mystic veins. How deeply nature moves the soul at times in her mighty repose! Then, indeed does the "feeling infinite" stir and exalt, even more than we see nature in her superb activity. There is an unspeakable power in silence, especially the silence of great hills and vast forests. The voiceless glory fills the heart with unutterable emotions.

The great expanse swept before these two brooding and communing spirits. They talked fitfully, while possessed with the sweet and ineffable thoughts of the hour.

"This is intoxicating," said Madeline. "The moonlight is like wine. I do not wonder that Luna