

GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.]
CHAPTER V.

"It is delicious, but it makes one feel shadowy. It is the moonlight that makes the gods, I think, and is the mother of superstition. In the broad daylight, we are ourselves, we have no fears; but now how haunted everything seems to be, and yet how beautiful it all is!"

"Beautiful, indeed; and I'm sure it is delightful to be haunted by these wonderful imaginations. I like to think that nature is a vast palace, and to roam away through her glittering halls. And is it not a palace? Are not these mountains and these rocks jewelled? Nature is order; and, if we could see her as she really is, would she not seem even in her rudest aspects to be as magnificent as anything that we call a work of art?"

"That's a question. Nature is order; but from our stand-point she is both good and bad. She helps us, and she hurts us. She gives us birth and she destroys us. I trust in nature and yet I hope to make her better than she really is. She furnishes the raw material, but we have to make the ideals."

"So art is superior to nature in that sense, I suppose; but as Shakespeare says, it is perhaps a greater nature that works upon us to do these things. But, if our humanity is greater than nature, there is nothing greater than our humanity. That, after all, is the fountain of wonder."

"We are a mystery: that I admit. I never expect to explain the universe. I have to say I don't know to a thousand questions, and I must say that I find very little satisfaction in those systems of philosophy that profess to make everything understandable. They either do so by making the universe a very small affair; or it is a mere play of words, and equivalent to saying that heat is caloric. This is all the information that they deign to give."

"Well, whatever nature is, I rejoice that I can some time lie upon her bosom and be at rest. I feel like saying with the noble English thinker whose books I have just been reading, 'I was not and I was conceived, I loved and did a little work. I am not and I grieve not.' I sometimes think that it would be tedious to live forever. I should get tired even of growing. We desire change; and therefore, in the end, we shall desire the greatest of all changes, the change from life to death."

"I am ready for death, even as I am ready for life, provided that it comes by law, and not by my own carelessness; and so I don't want to die of fever or accident, but of good old age. And I think that everybody after arriving at old age would be perfectly willing to die.

The curse of death is dying not through the law, but because we break the law."

"Death is beautiful and terrible, even like life itself; and its beauty, like the beauty of life, depends upon our obedience to nature. Death might be like a blooming of a flower, a rich effulgence into something so fine that we cannot be conscious of it."

How wonderfully thought flows on into a thousand sparkling channels, when the soul is touched by the weird and beautiful aspects of this visible world! Whether mind comes first, or matter, who can tell; yet this is true, that mind cannot discourse apart from matter, and it is when matter is most magnificent and potent that the mind is the most illustrious and commanding. Yet mind seeks mind, and through the contact of one conscious existence with another what glories are evolved, what visions are flung forth, what fire is struck that illuminates the world!

So they sat in the radiant presence of nature, of the moon and the stars and the limitless sky, and great mountains and the shadowy forests,—like two fearless children, they sat and discoursed of the lights and shadows of the infinite universe from whence they sprang, jubilant because life was theirs for one sweet moment, and submissive because they knew that all cries and tears would be in vain, that fate went on, whatever our desires might be, and therefore the wisest way is to let the desire flow in harmony with fate. If it is not the best, still the brave and patient soul must make the best of it and surrender the ideal and accept the real. The universe is probably not so good as it might be, still it is infinitely rich and wonderful, and, in spite of all its wrong and miseries, the breath of life we have upon its bosom is very sweet, so sweet that we would fain preserve it a little longer; therefore, how thankful we should be for the exhilarating glory of which we are permitted to quaff. Let us not find fault that we cannot drink forever.

With these wise and quiet thoughts, and the tender and courageous surrender to nature; with no prayer, but submission to law, and a determination to enjoy its many fruits, the brother and sister retired to peaceful slumber; and just as quietly and courageously, with no prayers nor tears, would they have gone to sleep, if they had known that that sleep would have no waking.

The morning came fresh and sparkling from the bosom of the infinite life. From the solemn silence awoke a world of music. How wonderful it all is! The march of day and night, when did it begin in the far ages out of the rolling chaos? and when will the musical motion come to an end? Sometime,

of course; but always the atoms dance to the measureless melody of existence. And, though day and night pass, yet new glories will advance to take their place.

Bill, the miner, was up early, as was his wont; for he liked to greet the sun as it came flaming over the distant hill tops. Madeline usually was up with him, and busy about their simple morning meal; but now she did not greet him with her ready smile. He wondered a bit, but supposed that she was wearied, and desired a longer repose than usual. So he quietly kept at work, and indeed prepared the breakfast, and yet she did not appear. He tapped gently at her door. No answer came, and so he softly opened it.

How beautifully she lay in gentle slumber! Almost like a marble statue, so still, so white. Evidently, she was in a deep sleep, which was unusual for one of her bright and active temperament. With a little uneasiness, he approached her bedside. Then a vague terror seized him as he touched the so silent form. Then he knew, as he passed the icy splendor of her brow, that she was—dead.

It was awful, as if a knife had pierced his heart; and the blood almost stopped in his veins, and he himself seemed dead, the shock was so sudden and so terrible. Then he flung himself passionately upon her bosom; and wept like a child.

How cold all the sunshine seemed now! What a spirit was gone out of the things that were once so thrilling. O death! Talk as we may, it is a fearful tragedy: it is that which makes life an intense agony as well as an intense joy. It is an unexplainable horror. We submit to it because we must.

But, if we could remove the terror, we would; for we see no flowers springing from the grave, except those that we plant and water with our tears. Surley, death is not the outcome of an infinite benevolence. There could be no such sundering of our affections, if there were a God in the universe; for our affections in themselves are pure, and should ever flow to the most ample enjoyment, and no God could be so cruel as to bring death into the midst of such ennobling happiness. The fact of death is proof that there is no God: it is the one fact that absolute perfection would not brook. There is no rainbow over death: it is the sad inevitable, it is the law of decay, it is the infinite sorrow of fate. There must be action and reaction in the universe, growth and decomposition. The blooming of this renders necessary the destruction of that: this is all we can guess at, and the only wise philosophy that we can adopt is to enjoy the blooming to the utmost when it comes; and, when the blast pierces, then we must submit. Prayers will avail nothing, nor any belief we may try to have concerning the

unsounded woe.

Madeline's brother let the agony sweep over him. He did not try to resist. He clasped the dear form, but he knew that life would never return. He did not expect to see that noble spirit again. Hereafter, it could dwell only in memory. It seemed unendurable that so much should be taken out of his life, that such a fountain of joy should cease to flow.

It was the greatest sorrow of his life. When his father and mother died, he expected them to pass away; for they were old, and the full fruit of their lives had been borne, and it seemed but natural that they should drop into the grave, since the best had been accomplished, though even then the sorrow was keen and overwhelming. But his sister was all and all to his affectionate soul. He lived and dreamed and hoped in her, and she was a constant inspiration and delight. Now, she was cut off in the very exquisite blossom of her being, and there were no amelioration to the sorrow that flooded him like a desolate sea. He sat by her bedside in a sort of stupor, while these strange and bitter thoughts rolled over him, while he kissed her and stroked her brow as if she was still alive. He was unconscious of the hours as they swept by. It seemed scarcely a moment and yet, when a knock at the door aroused him, he found that it was passed noon.

He went to greet the somewhat unwelcome visitor, but he was glad to find that it was his friend Charlie. His presence was a blessing in that unhappy moment. It recalled him to the living world.

"She is dead," was all that he could say, as he grasped the hand of Charlie.

"Dead? Your sister?"

"Yes."

"How did it happen?"

"I cannot tell. It came as sudden as lightning."

For several moments, not a word was spoken. There was only the intense sympathy of soul with soul, of which any expression is useless. It is that which must be felt, not uttered. "Please go for Jennie. She must come at once. Madeline must be prepared for her burial. It is all over with, and I must make the best of it."

"I will go," said Charlie.

Jennie Baker was the wife of Tim Baker, the saloon-keeper, and one of the rich rare souls of the world. She was rough-looking, and hardly ever wore anything but a calico dress, and not a very clean one at that; but her face, though homely, was exceedingly pleasant, there was so much good-nature in it. She was always ready to help anybody in distress. She would sit up all night long with any poor devil that was sick, and treat him as tenderly as if he were her own child. She had a constitution of