

GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.]

That will keep 'em off our track for some time; for, you see, I want you to meet me at Conscience Pass. Then you and I will take our way by the Devil's Gap, and in due time we'll reach the Dutchman's Kitchen; and from there I'll send you flying to San Francisco."

"Will there be no danger to yourself?"

"None at all. It's you they are after. Get rid of you, and we are all right. Are you ready there?"

"Yes," said Bill; "give us the boy."

In a moment, the boy was mounted, and off they started. None too soon either, for Jennie Baker came rushing in.

"Oh, they are going to lynch him!" she said. "Big Dick has got them all excited. They say you made fools of 'em, and they won't stand it!"

"Well, they'll have to catch the boy this time, Jennie. He's taken leg-bail."

"Is he gone?" said Jennie.

"Yes, he's on his way to El Dorado, and tomorrow night he'll be on his way to 'Frisco."

"If they don't catch him."

"Well, they'll have to run to catch him."

The yelling outside increased, and the tramp of men. Big Dick's voice could be heard. He was trying to rouse the men, and they were evidently ready to obey him. The maddened and half-drunken crowd came reeling up to the door of Charlie's cabin.

"It's no use," said Big Dick. "You must give him up. We are going to hang him."

"But you've tried him, and acquitted him; and you are not going back on that, are you?"

"Yes, we are. That was a sham."

"Didn't you agree to stand by the trial?"

"Yes, if they'd hang him, but not if they acquitted him. They'd no business to acquit him."

"But they did do it fairly and squarely; and, if you hang the boy now, you'll commit murder."

"I'll take care of that. If it is murder, who'll punish us? Stand out of the way. Put up those pistols."

"Well, you are too many for me. If you must come in, come in and make yourselves at home. I haven't chairs enough for only one."

They all rushed in.

"Why, there's no boy here!" said Big Dick.

"I didn't say there was," said Charlie.

"Where in the devil has he gone?"

"Home, I guess," said Charlie. "He's quite a home boy, you know."

"He's not in his own hole, for we

looked there as we came along. By God, he's escaped!"

"I guess he has then, and really I don't blame him."

"Which way's he gone?"

"I can't say for certain, but I think he's gone to El Dorado. Billie and Paddie and Jimmy have gone that way. I shouldn't wonder if little Pete went, too; for I heard him say something about going to 'Frisco."

"Damn it, the bird has flown!" said Dick. "Well, if that's so, we'll catch him. Plenty of chance between here and El Dorado, and plenty of good trees all along."

Then there was mounting in hot haste. In fifteen minutes, a company of a hundred was ready; and, as Charlie sat calmly smoking in his cabin, he heard the thunder of their quick tramp as they went dashing from the settlement.

CHAPTER X.

The moment the sounds of the pursuing party died upon the ear, Morton left his cabin, and prepared at once to start. He was soon at Conscience Pass, waiting for the boy. It was about midnight; and everything around him was perfectly still, save the dash of waters and the slight rustle of the trees. The tall cliffs loomed up into the glittering moonlight, and the darkness of the retreating valley was pierced with a thousand silver shafts. He listened for every sound. He dreaded lest something should happen, and his plans prove of no avail. The boy might be lost, for it was a somewhat difficult path from one trail to the other. He tied his horse, and walked impatiently in the direction whence the little fugitive would come. He had not gone far, when he heard the report of a pistol. He was soon at the boy's side, who stood trembling, just at the opening of an immense defile.

"Did you see anything?" said Morton.

"I thought I did," said the boy. "I was frightened."

"Well, if there was anything, it's run off. I guess you are tired. I'll carry you to the horses."

Morton took the shrinking fellow in his strong arms, and put him upon the horse's back.

"You can ride, can't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Pete, "and as fast as you can go."

"We'll have to walk for a spell, until we get through the pass. Then we can go like the wind."

They picked their way slowly along amid the overhanging rocks that came so close together, at times, that it seemed impossible to proceed; but, always, the path wound along, and somehow there was a narrow passage still opening to the adventurous foot. Only one could pass at a time, and frequently the travellers were obliged to dismount. Finally, they reached a broad and open space, that spread

far toward the west. By morning, they had traversed many a mile. How beautifully the light came dancing over the hills and the rocky defiles and green plains and rushing rivulets!

"Here's a nice spot, and I've a good appetite for breakfast. Let us dismount and take a hasty meal."

In a little while, the coffee was made, which, with "hard-tack" and a bit of ham, refreshed them wonderfully.

"We've a long journey before us," said Morton,—considerably more than a sabbath-day's journey,—but the object is equally as good. I guess we'll fetch it, and before another morning you'll be behind the iron horse, and can say good-bye to all pursuers."

Many a long mile they went at an easy gallop. It was a gorgeous day, and the scenery on every hand was most lovely.

"Where did you come from?" said Morton.

"From New York,—from the city."

"I thought so. Were you born there?"

"I suppose so. I don't know much about it."

"Always lived there?"

"Yes."

"Where are your parents?"

"I don't know."

"What made you come West?"

"I wanted to be as far off from the city as I could."

"I don't see how you made out to come all alone to California. Haven't you any friends?"

"No, unless I have an uncle in San Francisco. He went there years and years ago. I shall try and find him."

"How about this old man that you saw? Did you really see him?"

"I did."

"What did he look like?"

"Oh, dreadful! Dark, bushy eyebrows; thick beard; a stooping back; long arms; big hands; and he had an old gray, dirty suit on."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"Oh, yes, in New York city,—and that's what frightened me so. I used to meet him there."

"And you wanted to fly away from him?"

"Yes."

"Strange we couldn't find him. What could have become of him?"

"I hope we shan't meet him," said Pete.

"I wish we could meet him, and settle this mystery. Have you any notion what you will do?"

"Only to get away. I suppose I shan't starve."

"I guess not. There is always a way to get a bite, even if we have to steal."

"I don't like to steal."

"I'm glad of that. I was afraid you would. But you can work, even if you are little."

"Indeed I can. I can do lots of things."

"Yes, you can black boots, or keep a peanut stand, or sell flowers. You'll want some capital, though, to start with; and I'll loan you some."

"Oh, thank you! I may become rich, who knows?"

Sunset came, and they stopped and rested for a couple of hours, and ate their supper.

"As far as I can judge, we've about twenty miles to go. The train is due about four in the morning. We shall be there bright and early. If it is not behind hand, we are all right. We've several hours the start of Big Dick."

They were tired out, and the horses were tired, but in good time they arrived at the Dutchman's Kitchen, a queer little sort of place, stuck away among the hills, on the line of the railroad that followed, through the mountain defiles, the serpentine course of a river. Only two or three houses were there, or rather ranches and the station-house. A faint light was burning in the window as they approached it. The depot-master was up and rubbing his eyes.

"Time for the train?" asked Morton.

"It's two hours behind time."

"Whew," said Morton, "that's a close rub. How far is it from here to El Dorado?"

"Forty miles."

"And a bad road. I guess we'll euchre 'em. Their horses must be pretty well tired out."

Nevertheless, it was pretty hard work to wait two hours for a train, especially when there was so much danger in delay.

"We'll watch for 'em," said Morton; "and, if they beat the train, we'll run again. We can dodge round pretty well among these hills."

The glorious sun came shining over the hills, and the Dutchman's Kitchen looked resplendent, filled with all sorts of sparkling jewels tossed from the hills round about.

"I think I'd like to live here," said Pete, "only I'd be afraid that old man might come round, and then I should have to run again."

"Yes, this would be a comfortable place," said Charlie. "You and I could live quite nicely together. We could hunt and fish and have a patch of potatoes."

"That would be nice," said Pete.

"We'll arrange that some time.

Let me hear from you when you are safe and sound in 'Frisco."

"I'll get somebody to write and tell you all about my fortune. I don't want to lose you."

"Nor I you," said Charlie. "I really have taken a liking to you, though you are a poor devil. I believe you might amount to something, if you had advantages."

"I hope so," said Pete.

"Don't give up. There's always a chance."

"Perhaps so, but it's mighty hard.