

GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.]

"The same right that you had to hang him. I've got the better of you, and you might as well call it quits. You don't suffer because his neck isn't broken."

"That's a matter of opinion. I shan't be satisfied until Maddox's murder is avenged, for he did me many a good turn. We'll take you now. Seize him, men!"

The onset was so quick that Morton could not defend himself. In a moment, he was bound hand and foot, and placed upon his horse, guarded by a couple of Dick's men.

"What does this mean?" said Morton.

"It means that we are going to break your neck," said Dick.

"I don't think that'll be very satisfactory," said Morton.

"It'll satisfy us."

"You'll be sorry."

"I guess not. I'm not going to hunt a hundred miles for nothing. I've caught you, and the boy may go to the devil."

That's the trouble with lynch law. It doesn't know when to stop in its mad career. It is not order, it is simply revenge; and, therefore, at times it becomes fierce injustice. Big Dick was angry, and his impetuous spirit controlled the men who were with him. They were ready to do anything in their blind fury.

Morton saw that it was useless to reason with them, and he submitted to his fate. He might as well reason with the wind as with these men in their excited state.

"I wish you would untie me," said he to Dick.

"Oh, you'll try to escape."

"Oh, no! What's the use? You'd shoot me, if I did. Besides, I pledge my honor."

"Unloose him, men! I'll watch him." Morton was unbound, and rode along with the company.

They wound their way up the defiles of the mountain, and were soon far from any human habitation.

"I guess we are in our country," said Dick, "where we can execute our own laws."

They halted.

"Do you want anything to eat?" asked Dick.

"No, I am afraid it wouldn't digest well."

"Then perhaps we'd better hang you at once, and done with it."

"I presume so. I'm in no hurry; but you can suit yourself."

"Have you any message to leave?"

"Yes. I'd like to write a letter to Bill."

"I don't know as there's any paper in camp, or pen and ink."

"I've a pencil and paper, and this stump'll do for a table."

He sat down, or rather knelt down, by the stump, and wrote as follows:

DEAR BILL:—The little chap is safe, and I'm glad of it. He's on his way to 'Frisco; and I am going to take a long journey the other way. I am in a regular orthodox crowd, and they are going to punish the innocent in place of the guilty. They can't get Pete, and so they are going to take me. Well, if I had my choice, I'd do it over again, that's all. I'd rather live—but I would not live and do a mean thing—as I have done in the past, and for which I have been so punished.

How sweetly Madeline shines before me now! I hope I have made myself worthy of her and of your friendship. Take charge of my affairs. What I have left give to little Pete. You will hear from him, and do not tell him my fate, if you can help it; and, when you write East, you can simply say that I am dead. I wonder what it is to die. I have no fear, only I do not like the way; but so it has come, and that's the end of it, and I see no way to change it. What we can't help, we need not fret about.

Good-bye, you, and the rest of my comrades. CHARLIE.

"Here's a good tree right up here, hanging over the cliff. Fetch him along, and the rope."

Dick flung the rope over the tree. Charlie said nothing while they adjusted the noose about his neck.

"You take it easy," said Dick. "I almost think that you admire hanging."

"Not at all, but I see no use in crying."

"You are right there. Everything is ready. You see the limb hangs right over the cliff. If you prefer, you can step off."

"I don't care to save you the trouble. That's your business, not mine."

A couple of strong arms pushed him over the cliff. With a sort of convulsive lurch, he seized the rope with his hands; and, as he rolled along, the limb to which it was fastened broke, and with a quick crash he went tumbling down into the ravine.

CHAPTER XI.

"How are you," said Dick, looking over the precipice,—“safe and sound or dead?”

"Safe, but not very sound," said Morton. "I've sprained my ankle and can hardly stir."

"You can't escape then. Do you prefer to stay, or shall we help you out and finish our job?"

"Help me out. I'd rather have my neck broke than die of starvation."

"Well, I s'pose it's only fair that we should help you out, though how we are a going to do it I don't know. It's rather dangerous climbing down. I might break my neck. I'll call it quits, and let you alone."

"That's not fair. If you are going to hang, then hang fair and square; but, if you are not, then it's

your business to help a fellow."

"That's logic, and I cave in. I'll get you out somehow, and hang you on a stout limb next time."

It was a difficult matter, however, to get down to where Charlie was. Dick really did risk his neck in trying to do it; but he finally succeeded in clambering to the side of Charlie.

"I don't see how you got here without breaking your neck," said Dick.

"I suppose I should have broken it, if I had been in any other predicament," said Charlie; "but having the rope around my neck, why I escaped with the fortune of a drunken man, who, you know, always comes right side up with care."

"Well, how to lift you back again and try it over is the next question. Is your foot really sprained?"

"Yes, I can't step on it. I reckon you'll have to drag me up."

"I'll take the rope off your neck then; for I don't s'pose you want to be lifted by that. I must unfasten it too from that branch, if I can get hold of it. It's tumbled over that big rock; and, if I should slip, my neck wouldn't be worth much."

Dick clambered over the rock to the broken branch. The moment he reached it he uttered a loud cry.

"Hello!" said he. "If I haven't struck a mine. A dead body, and who in the devil is it?" And he leaped back, dragging the body with him.

"Why," said Charlie, "that's the very fellow that little Pete described. Examine him. You may find some evidence of the murder."

"Sure as you are alive, it's here," said Dick. "This is Maddox's money. I know it; and here is his pocket-book, and here are papers belonging to the chap himself. That beats me. He did the murder. By thunder, I'm glad we didn't hang the boy. Bully for you, pard! Here's my hand. Take the money and the papers. I know you'll do the right thing by 'em. Hullo, men, come down here, a couple of ye, and give a lift. We must pull Charlie out of this scrape he's the best of us all now."

The men came down and worked with a will, and almost by main force with the aid of the rope they bore him up over the rocks, and soon he was triumphantly mounted and on his way to Golden Throne.

Of course, Americans always must have a mass meeting and speeches and resolutions, when there is such a tide in the affairs of men as this of Charlie's. Judge Pilkins called all the inhabitants of Golden Throne together, that they might congratulate the conquering hero. The judge made a very elaborate speech, in the course of which he applauded everybody. Sammy Grubbins introduced a

series of resolutions, in which Mr. Charles Morton received the thanks of the whole community for his devotion to the cause of innocence. Some one, in the arder of his enthusiasm, moved that Morton be nominated for the legislature; but this was against the grain of Grubbins, for he himself wanted to be nominated, and it placed him in rather an amusing dilemma. But Morton set all things right by saying that he had no desire for office, and that he was already pledged to the support of his friend Grubbins. This made Grubbins happy, and he poured forth an eloquent speech, which was followed by Sol Jones, Paddie John, Jimmy, Prince Hal, and others, and then they all adjourned to Tim Baker's bar-room.

"Well," said Paddie, "we've been pretty much mixed up, and it's wonderful how things are straightened. It looks as if there was a providence in this."

"Luck is awful strange anyway," said Morton. "It scares one to think of it. That I should be strung up right over the dead body of this miserable tramp, and then, instead of breaking my neck, break the limb and tumble right upon him. That was a time when a special providence was very desirable."

"But there's lots of times when the special providence don't come in, and things go to the devil. So you see that providence is altogether too special. We can't depend upon it. There's good luck indeed, but there's a sight of poor luck also. If there was a real providence, there would be only good luck."

Things went on as usual at Golden Throne for about a month; and then Jimmy, the minister, came to Morton and said,—

"I've made up my mind to reform."

"What put that into your head? I thought you were in the last ditch, and didn't propose to reform any more."

"Well, I did think so. But, then, I like variety; and this lying in the ditch all the time is rather monotonous. I'm going to clean up, and see how it feels."

"But what started you? Have you had a visitation from the Holy Ghost?"

"No. This time, I act through common-sense."

"Then, I have some hopes of you. But how did you happen to be so common-sense?"

"Come to my cabin, and I'll tell you. There's always a cause for an effect, you know."

"That I admit; but I can't imagine what should so affect you. I thought the whiskey bottle was all-powerful, and that you and it were sworn friends."

"We are; but occasionally we have a lovers' quarrel. In this case, however, I have a new friend,