

GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.]

"Did you believe the sun and moon did stand still?"

"Oh, no, they only seemed to. The light was somewhat refracted, and sent back. It was a kind of an after-reflection."

"I should think it was an after-reflection. I never heard of it until now. Is that in your commentaries?"

"Yes, and I believe it's considered satisfactory."

"How easily you are satisfied! But that explanation destroys the inspiration: you make it natural, though extraordinary. Therefore, it doesn't prove inspiration. Now, you remember, don't you, where it says that Jonah swallowed the whale?"

"Oh, it doesn't say that," said Bobbins. "It was the whale that swallowed Jonah."

"Aren't you mistaken?" said Bob. "I guess you'll find it says that Jonah swallowed the whale, and it stayed three days in his belly, and then Jonah threw it up again."

"Oh, that's absurd. Why, if the Bible said so," cried Bobbins. "I wouldn't believe it."

"Wouldn't believe it?" said Bob. "Why?"

"Because it's impossible"

"Oh, you don't believe the impossible," said Bob, with a shy twinkle. "Well, I think if you'll examine every miracle in the Bible, you'll find it impossible, or, if not impossible, then explainable by natural means, and so not a miracle. So your inspiration is gone again."

Bobbins had sense enough to see that he was caught, and he rapidly turned the leaves of his commentary. At length, he said:

"You will acknowledge, Mr. Ingersoll, that you don't know everything?"

"Certainly," said Bob. "I am willing to say I don't know. The trouble with you theologians is that you are not willing to say so. You think you know God as well as you know your next door neighbor."

"We know him as he has revealed himself."

"Revealed himself? How has he revealed himself in that book called the Bible? Is he not a liar, a murderer? Did he not defend slavery? Didn't he command maidens to be ravished? Wasn't David the deceiver, robber, and adulterer, and a man after God's own heart? I say that your Bible's God is a devil; and, if I thought he reigned in the sky I'd still defy him. If I believe in any God at all, I'll believe in a God of love, who works toward harmony and happiness, even as he makes sunshine and beauty. I won't

believe in a cruel and an inhuman God."

"But isn't nature cruel and inhuman?"

"It is; and, so far as it is so, we seek to make it better."

"Do you think, Mr. Ingersoll, that you could, on the whole, make this world better than it is?"

"Yes, if I had the chance."

"Pray, tell me, how would you better it?"

"I'd make health catching instead of disease."

This unexpected reply completely demolished Bobbins. He closed his books, demurely saying:

"Mr. Ingersoll, when I get home, I shall pray for you."

"All right," said Robert. "If the Almighty can stand it, I can."

The two missionaries took a solemn departure. The theological student looked more drooping and melancholy than ever. The books seemed to weigh a great deal more when he went out than when he came in. The artillery had not been effectual. The guns had been spiked before any shot were fired. As Bobbins reached the door, he turned round and bade good-by with a most sepulchral groan, as if he had no hope in this world or any other.

"I do pity them," said Bob. "They'd be decent fellows, if they were rid of theology. How it hangs about them like a curse, and keeps them lank and lean! Bobbins has the dyspepsia from reading so many commentaries."

"I'd like to take that young Pippins up into the mountains, and set him to hunting and fishing," said Moccasin Bill. "I'd fat him up a bit. He looks like a scarecrow now. If that's what they call spiritual, I'd rather not try it. I might as well be in the grave, and done with it."

"How hard these people labor to be miserable!" said Ingersoll. "They really seem to enjoy poor health. We have enough suffering without making it a duty to double it up, and crucify pleasure unto death."

"Do you really think this world is enough, Colonel?" said Sol. "Don't you have some longings for a life hereafter?"

"I am satisfied," said the Colonel. "Every moment is jewelled with hope or present joy. The summer and the winter bring benefits, each after their kind. Nature is generous. Her shadows even are beautiful. I enjoy this world, and all that is in it. I drink of it as of a delicious wine. It sparkles and it vivifies. If pain comes, we can make ourselves stronger by experience."

"Can you explain death? Isn't it an enormous tragedy right athwart the brightness of life?"

"I can't explain, neither can any robed priest of the most authentic creed. Maybe it is better to die,

that thus love is made immortal. It may be that death destroys the weeds of selfishness and pride between human hearts. It may be that the tenderness of living comes from the harshness of dying. Love gilds death; and out of the grave springs wondrous blooms of heroism and devotion to the living."

"Have you no hope of immortality?"

"So long as affection lives, so long will that hope endure. But nature made it a hope, and all the truth we know has not changed it. As a hope, it is beautiful, and in it the tendrils of our affection grow sweeter and more enduring. But the dogma of immortality has been a curse. It has flung a great horror over this human earthly existence. It has been the tool of tyrants. All we know is this life. Here, we can sow and reap; and whose fault but ours if we do not make life as a summer's garden, wherein we may pluck the flowers and wreath our own coronal? What can we do, except be helpful and loving? In this, we are the greatest. Let us trust nature. We need not live for nothing. If we pass like the dewdrop, like the dewdrop we can flash the golden light."

With these great thoughts rising within them, the company separated.

"That's what suits a fellow," said Big Dick. "He hits the nail on the head. He's got the grip of things, and strikes fire every time. These hollerin' ministers do make me so mad, a-talkin' about harps and such things. What do I want of a harp? I like this world: one world at a time—that's the tune for me. It's plain sailing here, and I know what's about right. But you try to foller these church folks, and it's like that damned Snake River down in Texas. It's so crooked that you don't know half the time which side you are on. This mixing up two worlds at a time is like mixing drinks. It makes the head swim. I prefer to take this world straight. It's all I can handle. I'm pretty rough, but I don't mean to abuse folks. If I can lend a hand, I will."

"Bob speaks to the universal human heart," said Paddie. "The highest and the lowest find in him their common manhood. Like the wind from off the sea, he voices the measureless tossings of our life. Like an impassioned harp, he thrills with all that human hope can give or human love inspire."

CHAPTER XV.

"I've been looking all day, and I can't fine her," said Charlie next evening. "I suppose I'm foolish but I can't help it."

"Do you mean to stay here until you find her?" said Will.

"I suppose it's useless. It's only

a fancy, but it haunts me with strange power. I shall try and forget it."

"That's a wise fellow. We must give up many dreams. Hard work is our fate. We must dig for gold, and then perhaps we can build a mansion in the skies."

"I suppose, as somebody says, that we find our heaven at the end of duty done. If we pursue our fancy, we land nowhere. Here comes Big Dick. He does look bunged up. I guess he's got the worst of it this time. I wonder what sort of a fight he's tumbled into now."

Big Dick did look rather dilapidated. He had a black eye, and bruises all over. It is seldom that he presented so crushed and bandaged an appearance. He must have met an enemy worthy of his steel. However, he bore it good-naturedly and came up "smiling."

"Well, Dick, I should say you are a used-up man. I thought you were never beaten."

"We can't manage everything," said Dick. "We all have to go under sometimes."

"I didn't think you'd jump into a scrape so soon after hearing Ingersoll," said Will. "I was in hopes he gave you a good setting-up, and that, for a day or two, you might go along kind of easy."

"Thunder! It was Ingersoll that put me up to it. I couldn't help doing it after what he said."

"Couldn't help doing it!" cried Will and Charlie in the same breath. "Did Ingersoll make you drunk?"

"No; but I couldn't see 'em suffering, and so I pitched in."

"What in the devil have you been doing, any way?" said Charlie.

"Why, I pulled a couple of children out of the fire, that's all; and the damned timbers knocked me endways. They had the advantage, you see; for my hands were full, and I couldn't strike back."

"What! are you that brave fellow that plunged into the burning building last night at the risk of his life, and whose praises are in the papers? Give us your hand! You are a bully boy! I thought it funny that anybody should have licked you."

"I never am licked," said Dick; "but I was glad enough to run from the fire, I'm going into the department. I've had an offer, and I think I shall like it. I want to try city life, and by practice I believe I can beat the fire. You see, last night, I didn't know exactly how to do it. It's a trade."

"I'm sorry to lose you. You'll be missed at Golden Throne. However, I don't know of anybody who could tackle the fire with any better success than you. You've made a good beginning."

So they say. It's fun. I never felt so good in my life, as I did just