GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.]

"You must only drop off with old age. And Independent, well, I don't exactly know what that does mean. It means anything and everything, just what folks want you to be. It's a nice word that can cover a multitude of things. Call yourself independent, and people will think you have every virtue. It's a very accommodating word. You can stand on any platform and make all sorts of promises; and, if you don't fulfil them, why, it's because you are independent. You see I have a broad platform to run on; and there are lots of discontented folks ready to take up with anything, and that makes a chance for me. I've a railroad pass, and I shall run down and fix things."

"A railroad pass, and you are Independent? I don't understand that,"

"That's the idea: I am anti-monopoly, and I shall pledge myself to resist the inroads of these grasping corporations. But, when it comes to riding and voting, why, that's a different thing. I don't want to walk, and I can't pay my fare. And then, you know, what's a vote? I can offset it any time by a speech. There's nothing like dividing yourself up and going all around and belonging to every side of a question. That's statesmanship, and I'm going in on it."

"Well, go it. Some people are fools, and I guess you might as well shear 'em as anybody. For me, I'd rather dig for a bare pittance than succeed through the whims and caprices of the ignorant multitude."

"I wish I could dig," said Sol, "but I can't, and I'm ashamed to beg; and so, like the unjust steward, I must make friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, and go in on my cheek. I was born to it and bred to it, and I must make the best of it."

"We are on a whirligig of life," said Paddie, "and we must whirl."

"We'll whirl off to the mountains tomorrow, said Charlie. "Jumble as we may, I believe in the survival of the fittest."

The next morning, they started on their homeward journey, Charlie and Will and Tim and Jennie and Moccasin Bill. Charlie was not feeling in the best of spirits. He left his heart behind him, and so he dragged a lengthening chain. However, his strong will bore him along. He was not foolish enough to let his passion predominate over his reason.

"Let me get to work, and I shall be all right," said he to Will. I do not forget Madeline, yet other loves will boom and blossom in the heart."

"They should," said Will. "The dead reign in memory, while we must mingle with the living and feed our hearts from new fountains. We do not forget the old when we press forward to the new."

"I do not know as I can love again," said Charlie. "Love is such a deep and terrible thing that I almost dread it; for it takes hold of every fibre of the being, and its joy is constantly trembling on the verge of pain. I connot forget this woman's face; and it does seem, at times, as if I must give up every other plan in life, and go and seek her, though I never find her. Isn't it strange that one glance can so affect a man? Why is it that some faces do so enchant and haunt us?"

"I suppose we can never explain the rose on a woman's cheek or the flash of her dark eye. But the comfort of it is, out of sight, out of mind; and we soon forget these fancies, or, if we do not, it is because we are doomed to meet again."

"That's romantic, and very good, as sentiment; but how far will it go for a fact? I don't forget some nice apples that I saw yesterdy; but I don't expect to eat them."

"Folks are different from apples," said Well. "I know I'm romantic, but not enough to hurt. I trust only in what I see, when it comes to the real tussle. For all that, we can roam in fairy-land, when there's nothing else to do. We are all contraditions, and that is what gives zeal to life. I wonder at myself sometimes. If I did not, what a dunce I should be!"

Moccasin Bill gave them a hearty good-by, as, in the bright, early dawn, they prepared to leave his hospitable dug-out where they had spent the previous night.

"I've had a good tramp,' said he, "and I'm full. I know myself now, because I've heard another man tell me what I knew already, but didn't know that I knew it as I do now. It is the best of truth to have one speak your innermost thought. Somehow, it becomes more real then. I've always been kind of solitary among these hills. They have been my best companions. I've got suited to them and they to me. We've never had any trouble. Men more or less bother, at least they do me; and I keep them a little off. That's my way. I like it better, and it's liberty. If I mingle with men, I have to give up too much. Yet, through Ingersoll, I feel that man is more than anything; for he has given me a feeling and a joy that I never had before, more respect for myself and for everybody. He has touched my solitude with what you call genius, or inspiration. He has spoken to me with the voice of the mountain and the thunder of the cataract. He has given a new meaning to the night and the stars that look down upon me. I see more and I am more, because Bob, as you call him, and as I like to call him, has introduced me to myself; and I understand Moccasin Bill better than I ever did, and he me. I know you better, too, and all the race of men. I can't be civilized. I hate to be. I like these wild woods. They are my home. Here will I live, and here will I die, free to my last breath as the winds of heaven. I am afraid of nothing—of beasts or Indians or storm or lightning. I have all I want. This is my palace, in the bosom of earth. I have no pains or aches. I have never injured a mortal man. I have done what I could to help them; and now I have heard Ingersoll, and his thoughts are with me, companions of the mountains and the trees and the rivers. Good-by."

Charlie and Will never forgot the picture of the noble hermit as he stood leaning on his long rifle, so sturdy in his independence, so indomitable in his unique personality, a living expression of the wildness and grandeur of the mountains.

That evening, the company, dwindled to four, arrived at Pilgrim's Rest.

Jennie was quite a study to Charlie, and he watched her as she deftly built the fire and prepared the meal. She was indeed a wonderful woman, a born Stoic; and all the ills of life did not seem to disturb her equanimity. Whatever happened, she was ready for it—the measles, smallpox, the storm, the flood, the "Injun," or the devil himself. Her experience was varied. From girlhood she had lived on the plains or among the mines. She had "teamed it," and "tramped it," rode wild horses and shot buffaloes, and even scalped an Indian. No man had endured more than she, or could boast of greater prowess. She had borne several children, and had been stripped of them all; but I doubt if she ever wept. She was a mother to everybody. No one could ask her for help in vain. Yet she was not demonstrative. She was a woman of few words. She tended the sick with grave quiet, stood by them to the death, if need be, no matter how malignant the disease. She had stood by the bedside of hundreds of suffering miners and teamsters, and many of them had she pulled through an almost hopeless case. Yet she had no religion. She never prayed or sang. The only men that she really hated were the ministers; but she always fed them well and gave them her best whiskey, and they always drank it "for their stomach's sake." She didn't have any Bible or any cross. She would swear like a trooper sometimes, and cuff the ears of the recalcitrant. She wouldn't stand any nonsense. She was a sublime heroine, worthy to stand by the side of any of the great ones of history or romance.

Tim Baker, in his way, was a curious specimen of roving American. He had been all over the country. He would leave his wife sometimes for months, and nobody would know where he was. He had lived among the Indians, and, in fact, had been adopted by one of the tribes. He had met with all sorts of adventures, and could tell of many hair-breadth escapes. He was a right good story-teller, and around many a camp-fire had exploited the thrilling romance of his life. When on the borders of civiilization, he kept a saloon that was his only way of making a living. He was a keen judge of liquor of all sorts. He could tell the flavor to a nicety. He believed in the genuine stuff, and would have no adulterations. So he always kept the most popular saloon, and made money which he spent like water. He loved his wife and feared her, and always obeyed her.

Tim whiled away the evening with some stories, and then fell asleep. Jennie was still wakeful, and kept the fire blazing. Charlie watched her in a half dreamy sort of way, as the flames danced upon her massive and weather-beaten features. Will tumbled into his blanket by the side of Tim.

"I'd like to swap with you, Jennie," said Charlie. "I never saw anybody that enjoyed life, under all circumstances, so well as you. I think you must have a lien upon fate."

"I don't understand that." said Jennie. "I don't kuow about fate. That's beyond me. I know that I live, and don't see the use of knowing any more."

"You don't care, then, to know where you came from?"

"No. It wouldn't make me any happier or any wiser for what I've got to do to-day."

"And you don't care whither you go?"

"No. The present is all I can handle. Every moment keeps me busy. I haven't time to trouble myself about eternity, as the ministers call it. I don't know what it is, and I guess they don't."

"You've suffered a good deal?"

"Yes, I have."

"And you have seen a good deal of suffering?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you think of it?"

"I don't think anything about it. When it's over with, I forget it."

"Have you forgotten your children?"

"No; but I have forgotten that they are dead."

"Do you wish they were alive?"

"I wish nothing. What's the use?"

"Then, you believe that whatever is is right?"

"No I don't. I don't believe anything about it. How can I, when I don't know anything about it?"