

GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.]

Old Chum—Once more in New England! And I can't tell you how jolly I feel, with the gold jingling in my pockets, and the world fresh as a May day. I've had some fun, and I don't know where to begin. There's a volume to write, and a lot of postscripts in addition. I pointed for New York the first thing, and went to Delmonico's and then to Wallack's, and begin to feel like a man. A good meal and a splendid play are mighty good enliveners. Of course, I went to church on Sunday; but I wanted to get as near as possible to something like a theatre, and so I went to hear Talmage. I happened to catch him when he attacked Ingersoll, and it was quite amusing. He fixed things up to suit himself very nicely. His interpretations of scripture would have made John Calvin turn in his grave. He didn't stick to the bible, but he stuck to Talmage; and, when the bible wasn't sufficient, he pieced it out with a plenty of himself, and his audience took it for the genuine gospel. If he said the flood wasn't universal, why, they all believed it, although from childhood they had been taught that it was universal, and the shells on the mountain-tops had been adduced as evidence of it. Poor old by-gone interpreters of the bible, how the orator did demolish them! And I was thinking just how easily his own new version would be rejected when the exigencies of science demands it. What a kaleidoscope the Bible is! It takes new colors and shapes every time the fingers of science give it a turn. You see, the christian apologist nowadays don't read the bible first to learn what it says and means but, he studies science, and finds what its demands are; and then he shrewdly twists the scriptures into any form to suit those demands. If science says six periods, then the bible says six periods, and now six days; and so on. Science goes ahead, and the bible tamely follows. It amused me to notice that Talmage in his reply to Ingersoll said those things that three hundred years ago would have convicted him of heresy and burned him at the stake. So the world does progress, and Talmage is a straw to show it. He is valuable as a straw, otherwise he is of little note. He dances on the stream of public opinion, and helps to show just about how things are going.

I was delighted with Boston. I felt aesthetic at once. I went to the Common and quoted Greek, and in the evening went to the Greek play, and applauded just in the right place—thanks to a libretto. Isn't it queer that Boston should be going crazy over a pagan drama? What would the Puritans say? I

hear I Savage while here—a tip-top liberal preacher, who don't mince matters at all. It stirred me like a trumpet to hear him. I only wish I could take the same stand he does, and be as bold and manly. But I can't. I'm all bound up and twisted with the past, so far as my feelings are concerned, and I can't follow my head. But I like to have the truth spoken bravely, though I haven't the backbone to do it myself. I suppose I must always belong to the Methodist Church. I can't sunder myself. A thousand associations cling about my heart, tender and subtle, and I cannot fling them off and go fourth untrammelled. I cannot express the feeling that swept over me like a flood, when I reached old scenes, when I saw the old church where I used to preach, the village so lovely, the trees, the hills, the sky. I flung myself down and kissed the earth, sweet to me as a mother's bosom.

But the way people met me was, as you might say, edifying. They regarded me as a lost sheep, most of them, and were very careful what they said and did. They didn't want to commit themselves. I saw a great many, when I happened along, walk over to the other side like the priest and Levite, and pass me by. They didn't wish to snub me, and they didn't want to shake hands with me. I quietly suffered myself to be tabooed, for I knew it would come out all right in the end. You see, I didn't put on any new clothes to begin with, nor even a new hat. I didn't even consult a boot-black or a barber. I just wanted to see how much genuine humanity there is in the church. Some of course treated me decently, and were really glad to give me a hearty shake of the hand; but, on the whole, my reception was very formal. I felt almost as if I had discovered the North Pole, without making an Arctic journey. It is quite cool weather.

Grandmother Harris was as true as steel, and greeted me as warmly as if I were her child, though I did look so outlandish. You don't know her. Well, she is one of those dear souls that live to be almost a hundred years old, but are as lively as a cricket, and chock-full of human kindness. She has lived, I don't know how long, in the village. She isn't rich, but somehow she manages to help everybody. Oh, the good talks I used to have with her! Moreover, she was one of the best of cooks, and such delicious meals as she used to provide when I made pastoral calls! I was just hungry for one of them, and I dropped in almost the first thing. She never said a word about my shortcomings. You wouldn't have known by her talk but what I was the bishop himself, and immaculate as an angel. She didn't seem to have the

least suspicion that I was a miserable sinner. In fact, she made me feel like a man, and put a hope and courage into me that ten thousand gospels could not. I know this world won't go to the dogs with such women in it. You ought to have seen how it helped things, when I put on a new coat and a stove-pipe hat. People were much more respectful, though many still hung off. Then, I went to Conference. My ministerial brethren were dead set against me. They felt well enough toward me at heart, the generality of them; but they didn't dare to make any public expressions, for they didn't know exactly what people might think. And you know ministers never do anything, unless they feel pretty sure that the crowd will back them up. Well, I kept a stiff upper lip, and jingled the gold in my pocket. I knew my time was coming. There was one old elder awfully stiff. He looked as if my presence were a contamination. I only said, You'll come down, old fellow. Wait until they take up a collection. I'll join in that religious service, and make you smile. So I listened to the speeches and prayers, and stood the cold weather until the contribution-box came round. Then, with a good deal of quiet observation, I dropped in five twenty-dollar gold pieces. Well, I was in the tropics at once. You ought to have seen the elder. He smiled all over, and cried out, "Thank the Lord, brother." The welcome that I received, and the hand-shakings! I subscribed five hundred dollars to the missionary cause. From that moment, my triumph was complete. The bishops all crowded about, and I was invited to preach at once before some of the most fashionable churches. I have received several calls, and my sins are now all forgiven.

I have indeed preached, and have been applauded to the echo. I haven't given them a bit of hell-fire, and they all like it. They say, How beautiful, how gospel-like! People don't like hell-fire now; and yet, if I should say that I didn't believe in hell-fire, they would hold up their hands in holy horror, and wouldn't listen to me. Isn't it a queer mess?

But the best is to come yet. I'm in love, and that's the solvent of all the problems of life. If a man can find a good woman to love and be true to, he can let all the theologies go by the board. But love is a thing of chance. It comes and goes like the wind, and we cannot tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth. I've never such an experience before; for the whole depth of my nature is stirred, and I seem to be in a new heaven and earth.

Maddox's daughter lived away up in the Connecticut valley, in Guilford, where I myself was born.

I had about a thousand dollars for her. I discovered her hard at work, struggling along, with scarcely a friend to help. The money was a joyful surprise to her, and it did my soul good to pour the shining dollars into her lap. But I want to tell you she's just the prettiest, sweetest girl I ever saw, and I loved her at first sight, and it didn't take me long to find out that she loved me. I assure you she is no ordinary woman. She has a wonderful strength of mind, overflowing with vivacity. She is like a fairy. She is like a bird too, full of melody. But I won't trouble you with my ecstasies. I am happy, and that's enough. I haven't any plan for the future. Possibly, I may come to California, but the marriage bells must ring first. Yours truly,

JAMES DEMOREST,
or Jimmy, if you like.

"That's good," said Charlie. "A lost sheep is comfortably fixed the moment he gets money."

"I am sorry he is in love," said the deacon. "I am afraid it will ruin him, and make him forget God. He ought to turn to the Saviour."

"Bosh!" said Charlie. "Love is the only thing that can save him. It's the best religion a man can have. What's the use of talking about God? If one can't love a pretty woman that he sees, I am sure he can't love God whom he doesn't see. That's Scripture, isn't it?"

"It's a carnal affection," snuffed the deacon. "We must give up all such things, and serve the Lord."

"What do you mean by serving the Lord?" asked Charlie.

"Why, praying and fasting, and reading the bible and thinking of your sins."

"What good does that do the Lord?"

"He demands it, and we should obey," said the deacon, humbly.

"How do you know he demands it? If there is a God, it seems to me the best way to worship him is to help our neighbor."

"That won't do," said the deacon. "That's natural goodness, and it don't count. We must do something we don't want to do. We must crucify ourselves."

"I don't care to go to heaven that way. It's a poor bargain. I prefer to enjoy life as I go long. As for Jimmy, I'll bet on him, now that he's in love."

The deacon turned away, groaning. He was indeed a melancholy saint. But with all his melancholy he was shrewd enough to look after the dollars. He didn't serve the Lord so faithfully but what he could dig gold and pack it away. He was a cold-blooded fellow, and was careful to turn everything to his advantage. As luck would have it, he struck a pretty rich