

GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.]

keeper?

"Yes."

"Well, give me a pipe and tobacco, and I'll smoke it out via my brain."

Paddie read and reread the letters carefully, amid a cloud of smoke.

"My impression is," said he, "that Blanche didn't write these last two."

"Prove it," cried Charlie.

"That's what I'm going to do. But an impression is one thing, you know, and proof is another. I give the impression first. Make the most of it. After a while, I'll give you the proof. You are as blind as a bat, Charlie. By that sign, I know that you are in love. We who are not in love can see into this thing a good deal further than you can."

"Prove me blind, an idiot, only prove that she did not write this cruel note; and I will search, as long as I have life, to find her, and beg pardon for my unbelief."

"Well," said Paddie, "look here. Observe how she crosses her t's—a little curve down, and alike in every case. Examine with this microscope. There are some few things in writing where one's personality seems to be expressed; and these are done invariably in the same manner. It's this or that letter or mark. It is by these personal signs that you can detect the most skilful forgery. In the case of Blanche, one of these marks is the crossing of her t's. Notice how peculiar it is, and unchangeable in its peculiarity in all the letters that you know to have been written by her. Have you got that into your head?"

"I have," said Charlie.

"Well, now, look at these last notes. That peculiarity is lacking in every case. It is not imitated once. That curve that invariably accompanies Blanche's handwriting is not there. Therefore, Blanche is not there; and somebody else is, who can imitate everything with consummate skill, but not these marks of identity."

"I believe you are right," said Charlie.

"Now we've got on the track, let us pursue it and satisfy ourselves thoroughly. Blanche expresses her personality in curves; and these curves, delicate, and sharp, we can trace in almost all her letters. We do not always discover them; but, when you have them in mind, you can easily catch them. Read her letters with this key, and note those persistent signs. Read these last notes, and you can't find one of them."

"Let me see," said Charlie: "you are a magician."

"That comes of studying flowers and rocks," said Paddie. "We have to be on the alert, in order to catch their secrets. We play hide and seek with many a delicate fibre,

a subtle tint, in which perchance we can discover the history of ages. Thus, we can read a woman's soul as it trembles in the flowing ink, dropping from the diamond point of her pen. Blanche can't escape me any more than the heart of a flower. Don't you see that I am right?"

"Indeed, I do, bless you! How can I thank you, Will, for your faith in her love, when I was so weak? Now for action. She is in danger, I know. I must leave this minute."

"Blind again," said Paddie. "What's the use leaving? Do you know where to go?"

"No," said Charlie.

"Then let us find out which way to go, east, west, north, or south."

"What shall we do?" cried Charlie.

"Sit still and think," said Paddie.

"I can't do it; think for me."

"First, then," said Paddie, "we want to know who has done this trick. Then, we'll find out his course, and follow."

"I can't imagine who's the rascal," said Charlie.

"Nor I, or what the motive could be!"

"I think we had better go to Blanche's house and see the housekeeper: we may start the game there."

They were soon in close conversation with the housekeeper. She was in a flutter of excitement. She believed that something was wrong, although her poor head could not see through it. That very morning, Blanche had taken her usual walk.

"She hadn't been gone long, when I missed the kitchen girl; and I haven't seen her since. I don't understand it. She went up the street. I saw that old man go by. I wonder what he wanted?"

"What old man," said Paddie.

"I don't know his name, gaunt and thin and ugly-looking. He called here once or twice; but Blanche didn't like him, and I don't wonder. He gave me a bible one day, when he went out, and a few tracts."

"Gooch, by thunder?" said Charlie. "I wonder if he's at the bottom of this?"

"Like as not," said Paddie.

"But he hasn't brains enough for any scheme."

"He doesn't look like it, I admit. He may be sharper than we think. He's no fool, with all his hypocrisy."

"Let us find out; if this trail fails, we must strike another."

A thorough search showed that Gooch was nowhere in the city. He had settled up his bills, and left word that he was going East.

"He's the one!" said Paddie. "Now, the next thing is to track him. We've worked all night; we'd better go to bed and have a good sleep, meanwhile put a detective on the

scent. By the time we wake up and get a good square meal, we shall know in what direction to go."

While they were asleep, one of the best detectives of San Francisco was engaged in following up Gooch. In a few hours, he was ready to report.

"Where is he?" said Charlie.

"On the bosom of the Pacific," said the detective.

"Did he go on a steamship?"

"No, on a sailing vessel—one of the fastest in the port."

"Was he alone?"

"Two women were with him. One was apparently unwell, and had to be carried on board."

"When did he start?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"Name of the ship?"

"'Betsy Jane,' a New England craft."

"What's the fastest ship now in port?"

"The 'Albatross.'"

"When will it sail?"

"Any time, I guess. It's unloaded. It's bound, I believe, for the Sandwich Islands."

"And the 'Betsy Jane'?"

"Is bound for Calcutta."

"Hurry for port," said Paddie, "and secure the 'Albatross.' I'll take a vacation, and bear you company. We'll have a fine race. It's good weather and good wind."

Charlie and Will found the captain of the "Albatross" a blithe old Scotchman, Furgeson by name.

"Captain Furgeson, I believe," said Charlie.

"Yes."

"When do you sail?"

"Can't tell. Business kind of dull."

"Could you sail in half an hour?"

"Yes, but I don't see any use in it."

"I want to charter your ship. I'll pay a good price."

"That's enough," said the captain.

"Pay me, and I'll go anywhere. That's my business. Do you want to discover the open polar sea?"

"Possibly. We don't know where our voyage will end. Is your ship fast?"

"That she is. She goes like a bird."

"Do you know the 'Betsy Jane'?"

"I do. She's a quick one, but the 'Albatross' can beat her. I've tried it. We had a race coming in. The wind was fair. The 'Albatross' jumped right ahead."

"The 'Betsy Jane' left last night. Can you catch it?"

"That depends. It's a big start, you see."

"I'll give you five thousand dollars, if you'll catch her before she strikes port."

"I'll do my level best. It's worth the game. I'll hoist anchor by sunset."

The three adventurers were soon ready.

At sunset, the "Albatross" weigh-

ed anchor, and under full sail was speeding down the bay. It was a wonderful scene. The city was behind, blazing in the fires of the departing day. Far up and down the shore, it stretched; and all its houses seemed like palaces in the refulgent light. Before them heaved and danced the boundless sea, its waves rolling and breaking amid a thousand varying colors. Above the gorgeously fading scene rode the silver splendor of the moon.

"It's on our right," said Paddie. "We'll take it for a sign of luck."

"I'll compel luck," said Charlie. "I won't depend on the moon."

They swept by the Golden Gates. How beautifully the bay looked in the calm embrace of the land, and tossing its multitudinous jewels ever at the feet of the queenly city that, with a tiara of many flashing lights, sat crowned upon the ample shore! Slowly, it faded away. Twinkling flame after flame was lost, and soon only the sea and sky flung their dazzling lusters about the pathway of the flying "Albatross."

CHAPTER XXII.

A ship is a world in itself. Tossing over the boundless deep, it seems something like a wandering planet. Those on board live a separate existence for the time being. Only by the link of memory are they bound to the vast outside world. On every side is the sea and on every side the sky. None can escape. Therefore, if the company is not agreeable, a sea voyage is very tedious. If there is a general harmony of disposition, the little world moves gayly on, and the bright and varied journey over the waters becomes a memorable pleasure.

Our little company on board the "Albatross" did agree very well. Besides our three old acquaintances, Morton, Burham, and McConnell, or Charlie and Will and Paddie, as we shall delight to call them on account of old associations, some new and very interesting personages appear.

The captain himself was an "Old Salt," almost born on the sea; and it was the only place where he had ever done a stroke of work. Occasionally, he had loafed a couple of weeks on shore; but he soon grew tired, and ran back to the embrace of old Neptune. The ocean was his home, and he seemed to know all about it. He had been in every nook and cranny. He was acquainted with all the storms and currents of the Atlantic and Pacific. He had touched at every shore and rode in every harbor. He was tough as the winds could make one, bronzed and hardened in flesh and muscle. He was "Jack of all trades," and could do anything connected with a vessel. He could handle any kind of tool as deftly as he could a sail. I don't know