

GOLDEN THRONE.

[A ROMANCE BY SAMUEL P. PUTNAM.]

I am glad to get rid of them, though I should like to repeat a little more Scripture for their edification."

Charlie and his stanch little crew had to return with melancholy faces. Slowly, they pulled back to the "Albatross."

"I expect we'll have to rely on the Doctor," said Paddie. "My wits have gone a wool-gathering. I can't imagine any way out of this difficulty. Sockdolliger is a stubborn fact, which you can't go round or over. It is strange that one can hold these foolish opinions with such grim intensity."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"You look as if you had lost the battle," said the doctor, as he met them at the ship's side.

"We have," said Charlie. "With victory in our grasp, we have been obliged to retreat."

"Didn't you find the lady?"

"Yes; but in the clutches of a greater monster than Gooch himself,—namely, law, that, like an invisible giant, drives us off."

"That deacon of yours must be deucedly cunning."

"Indeed, he is a veritable Mephistopheles. In some strange way, by force and fraud, he has been through some form of marriage ceremony with Blanche. Therefore, in law, she is his wife. To bind her still closer, and to condemn to eternal silence in her own defence, he has the certificate of two physicians that she is insane.

"Through these legal instruments, he has the most perfect control over her body; and it happens that the captain of the 'Betsy Jane,' who is a Down-East theologian, born in the very bosom of Orthodoxy, sticks to the letter of the law. He holds the heathenish nonsense that the wife must obey the husband, and he won't even give us a chance to see Blanche. Gooch is her protector according to Sockdolliger, and Sockdolliger is master of the ship. So what can we do? I had no idea that law could be turned to such a curse. I believe that it was decided not to have any lawyers in the model kingdom of Utopia, and I don't wonder. It seems a question if there is not more rascality committed through law than in violation of it."

"It's cunning against cunning," said the doctor; "and justice generally goes by the board. In old times, it was the strongest arm; now, it is the keenest brain."

"What shall we do? What cunning can avail now? The courts of law are absent, and we can have no habeas corpus."

"Law has exhausted itself in favor of Gooch, and there's nothing left to which you can appeal. You are pretty thoroughly check-mated."

"But," said Paddie, "there must

be a way out of it. It's a Chinese puzzle, but it can be solved."

"Solved when it is too late," said Charlie. "We can't always keep close to the 'Betsy Jane.' The moment a breeze springs up, he's off. We may follow; but wherever we go Gooch has the same advantage. If we once had Blanche in our possession we could defy him,—for possession is nine points of law,—but now she is in Bastille, and the deacon has got the key."

"He has one key, I grant," said the doctor; "but I have another."

"You! Do you mean to say that you can unlock the prison doors, and in spite of law and gospel make her free?"

"That I can do. As Paddie says, there's a way out of it. What man can invent, man can circumvent. We are dealing with human beings; and they can not be so shrewd, but somebody can be more so. The evil is not so wise as the good."

"I must confess that I am discouraged," said Charlie. "I can see no possible resource."

"We appeal to nature," said the Doctor, "and we call to our aid her infinite means."

"Nature is vast, I grant; but she is bound in iron law."

"Law is not iron all together. We can make it flow with wondrous results. Through law and nature, we can transcend nature. I can lay your beautiful mistress at your feet," said the doctor.

"You are wise, I know. You have penetrated my secret, but this seems more than any knowledge can attain. What ally have you?"

"Science," said the doctor, enthusiastically, with burning eyes. "Have I not followed it for many a day and many a year? Is it not the angel of human life, patient and wise and all-conquering? Has it not gone before man and hewn his way? Has it not crossed for him the boundless ocean? Has it not traversed the brilliant heavens and made the stars his guide, so that, in his wildest wanderings, he can sweep calmly to his home, and even in the midnight know where to drop his anchor? Has not science woven from the floating vapor a giant mightier than any god, to toil day and night? Has it not trod the heights of the mountains and the depths of the sea? Has it not prophesied of the wind and the cloud? Has it not made the lightning our gentle messenger? Has it not borne the human voice in its dainty fingers until the whispered word is heard farther than the loudest thunder? Has it not wreathed two thousand constellations about its ample brow? What is there mightier or more subtle than science? What has it not accomplished, what will it not accomplish? What Canute can say to it, 'Thus far, and no farther?'"

"All this is true. I grant the

marvel of science, but what can it do for us in this difficulty?"

"It can do all."

"I am amazed! Explain."

"Have you read Shakspeare?"

"I have."

"Well, part of our plot must come from him: we must resort to the apothecary."

"How's that?"

"Don't you remember that Juliet took a little powder, and thereby apparently died?"

"I do; but the plot failed."

"We will be more careful, and learn from that failure to win success."

"But how success? If by any means this powder be administered, that makes for the time being the semblance of death, Blanche is thrown into the sea, and there she will surely drown."

"No we won't let her."

"How prevent?"

"She will not drown or suffer any danger, scarcely, for half an hour. Before that time, she will be on board the 'Albatross,' and in twenty-four hours as lively as a cricket."

"This is a marvel, indeed. I can see a glimmer of a possibility, but scarcely a chance of realization."

"To administer the powder is easy enough. It will give her the very image of death, even like the lovely Juliet. Then, as you say, she will be thrown into the sea. We shall be ready to receive her in those liquid halls, and bear her to a safe and honorable couch. Follow me."

They went down into the doctor's little cabin.

"Here," said he, "is the little powder. It was given to me by a celebrated chemist. Its action is wonderful. It simply arrests life, and one becomes like marble. Now for our armor wherewith to battle with the deep."

He opened a huge box, and brought forth therefrom two grotesquely shaped rubber suits, with complicated machinery about the head-gear. They were made of very strong and elastic material.

"See how this is arranged," said the doctor. "This is for ventilating purposes. These little tubes are slight, yet strong as iron. They will stretch for the length of a mile, and through them one can have a constant supply of fresh air, the amount of which can be regulated by this nut, so that there can be no danger of suffocation. I myself have been in the sea for an hour at a time, as the captian will testify. He understands the operation of the air machinery, one part of which is on board of the vessel. Besides, I have little air reservoirs all over the armor; these can be filled at will, so that we can ascend and descend. Through these also, we can supply ourselves with air, if at any time the tubes should be at fault. Thus, you see that science gives us victory over the sea; and

we can travel through its depths. We might chloroform a shark and catch him alive. We can be sea-gods, and behold innumerable curiosities where never foot of man has trod. If we could catch a fish, even so could we carry a human body safely to the 'Albatross.' I have also a rubber mask. It can be placed over the face, and no more water will be swallowed. So there is but little chance of drowning."

"This is a daring speculation. Can it possibly be carried out?"

"Yes, if you have courage. Do you dare to venture in this armor into the dark and slimy caverns of the sea?"

"Dare!" said Charlie. "I dare anything if I could but save her in the end, but it seems hopeless still. If successful at one point, I fear disaster at another."

"There are two suits. I will go with you," said the doctor. "You can easily learn how to handle your self. It requires presence of mind, coolness, and determination. You will admit that, if Blanche were in the sea, we could carry her safely to the 'Albatross,' so long as the ocean is calm. The problem is for Blanche to get into the sea, not for us to get her out."

"I see. So far the path is clear. I am not afraid; but there's a terrible risk. Can you trust this potion?"

"I took it myself once. It is harmless."

"They would throw Blanche into the sea. It seems horrible."

"But we shall be in the sea. Instantly, almost, we can bear her to our ship."

"It must be done. Yet how awful it seems that we shall thus toy with death and the sea! It is a dreadful alternative. And Blanche, will she dare to do it? Can she do it? Can I communicate with her?"

"That's the rub," said the doctor.

"You must do it somehow."

"I will do it this very night. She shall know what we are willing to do; and, if she dares to traverse this gloomy path to liberty, we will lead her through. Orpheus went down to hell for his wife. This seems like it."

The doctor was almost gay in the contemplation of the terrible adventure. It suited his daring and original mind. He had no doubt of success. He went to work at once to furbish up his suits of armor, and to prepare for active service in the liquid fields of war.

"This warms my blood," said he. "I've been longing for something like it,—the impossible,—and it has come at last. I knew I didn't invent this machine for nothing. Everything comes into play some time, and now that over which I have spent the best part of my life takes its place among the useful forces. It is no longer a dream. It has been my favorite fancy that we could live in the sea, camp out in it.