

Albany Register.

THE IDYL OF RED GULCH.

BY FRANCIS FRET HARTE.

Sandy was very drunk. He was lying under an azalea-bush, in pretty much the same attitude in which he had fallen some hours before.

The spectacle of a drunken man, and of this drunken man in particular, was not, I grieve to say, of sufficient novelty in Red Gulch to attract attention.

Meanwhile the shadows of the pine-trees had slowly swung around until they crossed the road, and their trunks barred the open meadow with gigantic parallels of black and yellow.

"Miss Mary," as she was known to the little flock that she had just dismissed from the log school-house beyond the pines, was taking her afternoon walk.

Of course she uttered the little *shoo-o-o* cry of her sex. But when she had paid that tribute to her physical weakness she became overbold, and halted for a moment—at least six feet from this prostrate monster, with her white skirts gathered in her hand, ready for flight.

As she stood there she noticed, also, that the slant sunbeams were heating Sandy's head to what she judged to be an unhealthy temperature, and that his hat was lying uselessly at his side.

The truth was that in the calm depths of Sandy's mind he was satisfied that the rays of the sun were beneficial and healthful; that from childhood he had objected to lying down in a hat; that no people but condemned fools, past redemption, ever wore hats; and that his right to dispense with them when he pleased was inalienable.

Miss Mary stopped, and, taking fresh courage from her advantage of distance, asked him if there was anything that he wanted.

"Was up? Wasser maar?" continued Sandy, in a very high kee.

"Get up, you horrid man!" said Miss Mary, now thoroughly incensed; "Get up and go home."

"Was I go home for?" he suddenly asked with great gravity.

"Go take a bath," replied Miss Mary, eyeing his grimy person with great disdain.

To her infinite dismay, Sandy suddenly pulled off his coat and vest, threw them on the ground, kicked off his boots, and plunging wildly forward, darted headlong over the hill, in the direction of the river.

"Goodness Heavens! the man will be drowned!" said Miss Mary; and then with feminine inconsistency, she ran back to the school-house, and locked herself in.

That night, while seated at supper with her hostess, the blacksmith's wife, it came to Miss Mary to ask, demurely, if her husband ever got drunk. "Abner," responded Mrs. Stidger, reflectively, "let's see; Abner hasn't been tight since last lecture."

In less than a week Miss Mary had forgotten this episode, except that her afternoon walks took thereafter, almost unconsciously, another direction. She noticed, however, that every morning a fresh cluster of azalea-blossoms appeared among the flowers on her desk.

These facts Miss Mary was not slow to take a feminine advantage of, in her present humor. But it was somewhat confusing to observe, also, that the beast, despite some faint signs of disputation, was amiable looking—in fact a kind of blond Sampson, whose corn-colored, silken beard apparently had never yet known the touch of a barber's razor of Delilah's shears.

It was on a hot day—not long after this—that two short legged boys came to grief on the threshold of the school with a pail of water, which they had laboriously brought from the spring, and that Miss Mary compassionately seized the pail and started for the spring herself.

Nor was this superior young person without other quiet attentions. "Profane Bill," driver of the Stungullion Stage, widely known in the newspapers for his "gallantry" in invariably offering the box-seat to the fair sex, had excepted Miss Mary from this attention, on the ground that he had a habit of "cushin' on up grades," and gave her half the coach to herself.

With such unconscious intervals the monotonous procession of blue skies, glittering sunshine, brief twilights, and starlit nights passed over Red Gulch. Miss Mary grew fond of wandering in the sedate and proper woods. Perhaps she believed, with Mrs. Stidger, that the balsamic odors of the first "old her chest good," for certainly her slight cough was less frequent and her step was firmer; perhaps she had

learned the mending lesson which the patient plies are never weary of repeating to heedful or listless ears. As so, one day, she planned a picnic on Buckeye Hill, and took the children with her. Away from the dusty road, the straggling shanties, the yellow ditches, the clamor of restless engines, the cheap finery of shop windows, the deeper glitter of paint and colored glass, and the thin veneering which barbarism takes upon itself in such localities—what infinite relief was theirs!

The explanations, apologies, and not overwise conversation that ensued, need not be indicated here. It would seem, however, that Miss Mary had already established some acquaintance with this ex-drunkard. Enough that he was soon accepted as one of the party; that the children, with that quick intelligence which Providence gives the helpless, recognized a friend, and played with his blond beard, and long silken moustache, and took other liberties—as the helpless are apt to do. And when he had built a fire against a tree, and had shown them other mysteries of wood-craft, their admiration knew no bounds.

I think that Sandy was dimly conscious of this himself. I know he longed to be doing something,—slaying a grizzly, scalping a savage, or sacrificing himself in some way for the sake of this sallow-faced, gray-eyed schoolmistress. As I should like to present him in a heroic attitude, I stay my hand with great difficulty at this moment, being only withheld from introducing such an episode by a strong conviction that it does not usually occur at such times.

As the long, dry summer withered to its roots, the school term of Red Gulch—to use a local euphuism—"dried up" also. In another day Miss Mary would be free; and for a season, at least, Red Gulch would know her no more. She was seated alone in her school-house, her cheek resting on her hand, her eyes half closed in one of those day-dreams in which Miss Mary—I fear to the danger of school discipline—was lately in the habit of indulging. Her lap was full of mosses, ferns and other woodland memories. She was so preoccupied with these and her own thoughts that a gentle tapping at the door passed unheard, or translated itself into the remembrance of far-off woodpeckers. When at last it asserted itself more distinctly, she started up with a flushed cheek and opened the door. On the threshold stood a woman, the self-assertion and audacity of whose dress were in singular contrast to her timid, irresolute bearing.

Miss Mary recognized at a glance the dubious mother of her anonymous pupil. Perhaps she was disappointed, perhaps she was only fastidious; but as she coldly invited her to enter, she half unconsciously settled her white cuffs and collar, and gathered closer her own chaste skirts. It was perhaps, for this reason that the embarrassed stranger, after a moment's hesitation, left her gorgeous parasol open and sticking in the dust beside the door, and then sat down at the farther end of a long bench. Her voice was husky as she began:

"I heard tell that you were goin' down to the Bay to-morrow and I couldn't let you go until I came to thank you for your kindness to my Tommy."

Tommy, Miss Mary said, was a good boy, and deserved more than the poor attention she could give him.

"Thank you, miss; thank ye!" cried the stranger, brightening even through the color which Red Gulch knew facetiously as her "war paint."

Miss Mary, sitting primly behind her desk, with a ruler over her shoulder, opened her gray eyes widely at this, but said nothing.

"It ain't for you to be complimented by the like of me, I know," she went on, hurriedly. "It ain't for me to be couin' here, in broad day, to do it, either; but I come to ask a favor,—not for me, miss,—not for me, but for the darlin' boy."

Encouraged by a look in the young schoolmistress's eye, and putting her blue gloved hands together, the fingers downward, between her knees, she went on, in a low voice:

"You see, miss, there's no one has any claim on the boy but me, and I ain't the proper person to bring him up. I thought some, last year, of sending him away to 'Priso to school, but when they talked of bringing a schoolma'am here, I waited till I saw you, and then I knew it was all right, and I could keep my boy a little longer. And O, miss, he loves you so much; and if you could only hear him talk about you, in his pretty way, and if he could ask you what I ask you now, you couldn't refuse him."

"It is natural," she went on, rapidly, in a voice that trembled strangely between pride and humility. "It's natural that he should take to you, miss, for his father, when I first knew him, was a gentleman,—and the boy must forget me, sooner or later,—and so I ain't a golin' to cry about that. For I come to ask you to take my Tommy,—God bless him for the best, sweetest boy that lives,—to—to—take him with you!"

She had risen and caught the young girl's hand in her own, and had fallen on her knees beside her.

"I've money plenty, and it's all yours and his. Put him in some good school, where you can go and see him, and help him to—to to forget his mother. Do with him what you like. The worst you can do will be kindness to what he will learn with me. Only take him out of this wicked life, this cruel place, this home of shame and sorrow. You will; I know you will,—won't you? You will,—you must not, you cannot say no! You will make him as pure, as gentle a yourself; and when he is grown up, you will tell him his father's name, the name that hasn't passed my lips for years, the name of Alexander Morton, whom they call here Sandy! Miss Mary! do not take your hand away! Miss Mary, speak to me! You will take my boy? Do not put your face from me. I know it ought not to look on such as me. Miss Mary! My God, be merciful! she is leaving me!"

Miss Mary had risen, and, in the gathering twilight, had felt her way to the open window. She stood there, leaning against the casement, her eyes fixed on the last rosy tints that were fading from the western sky. There was still some of its light on her pure young forehead, on her white collar, on her clasped white hands, but all fading slowly away. The suppliant had dragged herself, still on her knees, beside her.

"I know it takes time to consider. I will wait here all night; but I cannot go until you speak. Do not deny me now. You will! I see it in your sweet face, such a face as I have seen in my dreams. I see it in your eyes, Miss Mary! you will take my boy!"

The last red beam crept higher, suffused Miss Mary's eyes with something of its glory, flickered, and faded, and went out. The sun had set on Red Gulch. In the twilight and silence Miss Mary's voice sounded pleasantly.

"I will take the boy. Send him to me to-night."

The happy mother raised the hem of Miss Mary's skirts to her lips. She would have buried her hot face in its virgin folds, but she dared not. She rose to her feet.

"Does this man—know of your intention?" said Miss Mary suddenly.

"No, nor cares. He has never seen the child to know it."

"Go to him at once, to-night, now! Tell him what you have done. Tell him I have taken his child, and tell him he must never see—see—the child again. Wherever it may be, he must not come; wherever I may take it, he must not follow! There, go now, please,—I'm weary, and—have much yet to do!"

They walked together to the door. On the threshold the woman turned.

"Goodnight." She would have fallen at Miss Mary's feet. But at the same moment the young girl reached out her arms, caught the sinful woman to her own pure breast for one brief moment, and then closed and locked the door.

It was with a sudden sense of great responsibility that Profane Bill took the reins of the Stungullion Stage the next morning, for the schoolmistress was one of his passengers. As he entered the high-road, in obedience to a pleasant voice from the "inside" he suddenly reined up his horses and respectfully waited, as Tommy hopped out at the command of Miss Mary.

"Not that bush, Tommy, the next." Tommy whipped out his new pocket knife, and, cutting a branch from a tall azalea-bush, returned with it to Miss Mary.

"All right now?" "All right."

And the stage-door closed on the idyl of Red Gulch.

HUMORS.

"Transactions in Hair" is the heading given by a Detroit editor to an account of a street fight.

A Kansas man who went to a circus thought that the Egyptian mummy was "nothing but jerked injun."

A western paper advertises for girls for cooking. We prefer them raw; no matter what variety.

To the anxious inquiry "How shall we keep our boys in nights?" we would respectfully suggest a total abstinence from unripe fruits.

An Iowa editor recently announced that a certain patron of his was "thieving as usual." He declares he wrote it "thiving."

A gushing poet asks in the first line of a recent effusion, "How many weary pilgrims lie?" We give it up, but experience has taught us that there are a good many.

A South street boy can make one hundred and sixty-five "faces" without sitting down. The feelings of his broken-hearted father, when reaching for him with a strap, can better be imagined than described.

We didn't think there was anybody so insane as to practice on a holiday with a pistol loaded with lead, but as there is such a person in Danbury, we hope he may be caught, and respectably buried.

Mrs. Emery, of Indiana, warns all women against her fickle, faithless husband, who has deserted her. She says he may be recognized by a broken nose, which she demolished with a skillet.

A German, while crossing the mountains during the winter, states: "Dat ven going up de mountain his foot slipped him off on de ice, and he coom down on de broad of his back mit his face stickin' in de mud, and dere he stood."

A Greenwich man has invented something that goes into a cow or horse and brings out anything like an apple or potato that may be misplaced. A good deal of enjoyment in the animal's eating is marred by the apprehension of accidents in swallowing. The Greenwich man's invention will be apt to give the animal more confidence.

"I wish you would give me that gold ring on your finger," said a dandy to a country girl, "for it resembles the duration of my love for you—it has no end." "Excuse me, sir," she said, "I choose to keep it; for it is likewise emblematical of my love for you—it has no beginning."

A Frackville, Pennsylvania, cow ate an entire barrel of sauer-kraut for lunch, and then refreshed herself with a tub of elder vinegar that was standing near. She gave sour milk for a week afterward, and her owner says he is going to move. He says he can't stand it in a German community.

"Girls for cooking," is the latest advertising dodge.

A Charleston lady wants a place as "assistant in the duties of a family."

Why is a newspaper like an arry? Because it has leaders, columns and reviews.

A Chicago poet begins an apostrophe to the ocean with "Prodigious dampness!"

One Missouri editor says of another, that "his ears would do for awnings to a ten-story wholesale hog packing establishment."

A Leavenworth editor sat down in a reserved seat already occupied by a hornet. He stands up when scissoring his editorials now.

Many persons write articles and send them to the editor to be corrected—as if an editor's office was a house of correction.

Plus IX, is a very handsome old man, with a manner at once shrewd and bland. He appears to be in excellent health for a person of his advanced years, and though he has a shuffling gait, inseparable, perhaps, from his rather inconvenient costume, there is nothing in his actions to denote physical weakness or anything like decrepitude.