

A FORTNIGHT OF FOLLY

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A FORTNIGHT OF FOLLY.

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A FORTNIGHT OF FOLLY.

I.

THE Hotel Helicon stood on a great rock promontory that jutted far out into a sea of air whose currents and eddies filled a wide, wild valley in the midst of our southern mountain region. It was a new hotel, built by a Cincinnati man who founded his fortune in natural gas speculations, and who had conceived the bright thought of making the house famous at the start by a stroke of rare liberality.

Viewing the large building from any favorable point in the valley, it looked like a huge white bird sitting with outstretched wings on the gray rock far up against the tender blue sky. All around it the forests were thick and green, the ravines deep and gloomy and the rocks tumbled into fantastic heaps. When you reached it, which was after a whole day of hard zig-zag climbing, you found it a rather plain three-story house, whose broad verandas were worried with a mass of jig-saw fancies and whose windows glared at you between wide open green Venetian shutters. Everything look new, almost raw, from the stumps of fresh-cut trees on the lawn and the rope swings and long benches, upon which the paint was scarcely dry, to the resonant floor of the spacious halls and the cedar-fragrant hand-rail of the stairway.

There were springs among the rocks. Here the water trickled out with a red gleam of iron oxide, there it sparkled with an excess of carbonic acid, and yonder it bubbled up all the more limpid and clear on account of the offensive sulphuretted hydrogen it was bringing forth. Masses of fern, great cushions of cool moss and tangles of blooming shrubs and vines fringed the sides of the little ravines down which the spring-streams sang their way to the silver thread of a river in the valley.

It was altogether a dizzy perch, a strange, inconvenient, out-of-the-way spot for a summer hotel. You reached it all out of breath, confused as to the points of the compass and disappointed, in every sense of the word, with what at first glance struck you as a colossal pretense, empty, raw, vulgar, loud — a great trap into which you had been inveigled by an eloquent hand-bill! Hotel Helicon, as a name for the place, was considered a happy one. It had come to the proprietor, as if in a dream, one day as he sat smoking. He slapped his thigh with his hand and sprang to his feet. The word that went so smoothly with hotel, as he fancied, had no special meaning in his mind, for the gas man had never been guilty of classical lore-study, but it furnished a taking alliteration.

"Hotel Helicon, Hotel Helicon," he repeated; "that's just a dandy name. Hotel Helicon on Mount Boab, open for the season! If that doesn't get 'em, I'll back down."

His plans matured themselves very rapidly

in his mind. One brilliant idea followed another in swift succession, until at last he fell upon the scheme of making Hotel Helicon free for the initial season to a select company of authors chosen from among the most brilliant and famous in our country.

"Zounds!" he exclaimed, all to himself, "but won't that be a darling old advertisement! I'll have a few sprightly newspaper people along with 'em, too, to do the interviewing and puffing. By jacks, it's just the wrinkle to a dot!"

Mr. Gaslucky was of the opinion that, like Napoleon, he was in the hands of irresistible destiny which would ensure the success of whatever he might undertake; still he was also a realist and depended largely upon tricks for his results. He had felt the great value of what he liked to term legitimate advertising, and he was fond of saying to himself that any scheme would succeed if properly set before the world. He regarded it a maxim that anything which can be clearly described is a fact. His realism was the gospel of success, he declared, and needed but to be stated to be adopted by all the world.

From the first he saw how his hotel was to be an intellectual focus; moreover he designed to have it radiate its own glory like a star set upon Mt. Boab.

The difficulties inherent in this project were from the first quite apparent to Mr. Gaslucky, but he was full of expedients and cunning. He had come out of the lowest stratum of life, fight-

ing his way up to success, and his knowledge of human nature was accurate if not very broad.

Early in the summer, about the first days of June, in fact, certain well-known and somewhat distinguished American authors received by due course of mail an autograph letter from Mr. Gaslucky, which was substantially as follows:

CINCINNATI, O., May 30, 1887.

MY DEAR SIR:

The Hotel Helicon, situated on the Leucadian promontory, far up the height of Mt. Boab and overlooking the glorious valley of the Big Mash River, amid the grandest scenery of the Cumberland Mountains, where at their southern extremity they break into awful peaks, chasms and escarpments, is now thrown open to a few favored guests for the summer. The proprietor in a spirit of liberality (and for the purpose of making this charming hotel known to a select public) is issuing a few special invitations to distinguished people to come and spend the summer free of charge. You are cordially and urgently invited. The Hotel Helicon is a place to delight the artist and the *litterateur*. It is high, airy, cool, surrounded by wild scenes, good shooting and fishing at hand, incomparable mineral springs, baths, grottos, dark ravines and indeed everything engaging to the imagination. The proprietor will exhaust effort to make his chosen guests happy. The rooms are new, sweet, beautifully furnished and altogether comfortable, and the table will have every delicacy of the season served in the best style. There will be no uninvited guests, all will be chosen from the most exalted class. Come, and for

one season taste the sweets of the dews of Helicon, without money and without price.

If you accept this earnest and cordial invitation, notify me at once. Hotel Helicon is at your command.

Truly yours,

ISAIAH R. GASLUCKY.

It is needless to say that this letter was the product of a professional advertising agent employed for the occasion by the proprietor of Hotel Helicon. The reader will observe the earmarks of the creation and readily recognize its source. Of course, when the letter was addressed to a woman there was a change, not only in the gender of the terms, but in the tone, which took on a more persuasive color. The attractions of the place were described in more poetic phrasing and a cunningly half-hidden thread of romance, about picturesque mountaineers and retired and reformed bandits, was woven in.

Naturally enough, each individual who received this rather uncommon letter, read it askance, at first, suspecting a trick, but the newspapers soon cleared the matter up by announcing that Mr. Isaiah Gaslucky, of Cincinnati, had "conceived the happy idea of making his new and picturesque Hotel Helicon free this season to a small and select company of distinguished guests. The hotel will not be open to the public until next year."

And thus it came to pass that in midsummer such a company as never before was assembled, met on Mt. Boab and made the halls of Hotel

Helicon gay with their colors and noisy with their mirth. The woods, the dizzy cliffs, the bubbling springs, the cool hollows, the windy peaks and the mossy nooks were filled with song, laughter, murmuring under-tones of sentiment, or something a little sweeter and warmer, and there were literary conversations, and critical talks, and jolly satire bandied about, with some scraps of adventure and some bits of rather ludicrous mishap thrown in for variety.

Over all hung a summer sky, for the most part cloudless, and the days were as sweet as the nights were delicious.

II.

IN the afternoon of a breezy day, at the time when the shadows were taking full possession of the valley, the coach arrived at Hotel Helicon from the little railway station at the foot of Mt. Boab.

A man, the only passenger, alighted from his perch beside the driver and for a moment stood as if a little dazed by what he saw.

He was very short, rather round and stout, and bore himself quietly, almost demurely. His head was large, his feet and hands were small and his face wore the expression of an habitual good humor amounting nearly to jolliness, albeit two vertical wrinkles between his brows hinted of a sturdy will seated behind a heavy Napoleonic forehead. The stubbly tufts of grizzled hair that formed his mustaches shaded

a mouth and chin at once strong and pleasing. He impressed the group of people on the hotel veranda most favorably, and at once a little buzz of inquiry circulated. No one knew him.

That this was an important arrival could not be doubted; it was felt at once and profoundly. Great men carry an air of individuality about with them; each, like a planet, has his own peculiar atmosphere by which his light is modified. There was no mistaking the light in this instance; it indicated a luminary of the first magnitude.

Unfortunately the guests at Hotel Helicon were not required to record their names in a register, therefore the new comer could bide his own time to make himself known.

Miss Alice Moyne, of Virginia, the beautiful young author of two or three picturesque short stories lately published in a popular magazine, was in conversation with Hartley Crane, the rising poet from Kentucky, just at the moment when this new arrival caused a flutter on the veranda.

"Oh, I do wonder if he can be Edgar De Vere?" she exclaimed.

"No," said Hartley Crane, "I have seen De Vere; he is as large and as fascinating as his romances. That little pudgy individual could never make a great romantic fiction like *Solway Moss*, by De Vere."

"But that is a superb head," whispered Miss Moyne, "the head of a master, a genius."

"Oh, there are heads and heads, genius and genius," replied Crane. "I guess the new-comer off as a newspaper man from Chicago or New York. It requires first-class genius to be a good reporter."

The stranger under discussion was now giving some directions to a porter regarding his luggage. This he did with that peculiar readiness, or sleight, so to call it, which belongs to none but the veteran traveler. A moment later he came up the wooden steps of the hotel, cast a comprehensive but apparently indifferent glance over the group of guests and passed into the hall, where they heard him say to the boy in waiting: "My room is 24."

"That is the reserved room," remarked two or three persons at once.

Great expectations hung about room 24; much guessing had been indulged in considering who was to be the happy and exalted person chosen to occupy it. Now he had arrived, an utter stranger to them all. Everybody looked inquiry.

"Who can he be?"

"It must be Mark Twain," suggested little Mrs. Philpot, of Memphis.

"Oh, no; Mark Twain is tall, and very handsome; I know Mark," said Crane.

"How strange!" ejaculated Miss Moyne, and when everybody laughed, she colored a little and added hastily:

"I didn't mean that it was strange that Mr. Crane should know Mr. Twain, but ——"

They drowned her voice with their laughter and hand-clapping.

They were not always in this very light mood at Hotel Helicon, but just now they all felt in a trivial vein. It was as if the new guest had brought a breath of frivolous humor along with him and had blown it over them as he passed by.

Room 24 was the choice one of Hotel Helicon. Every guest wanted it, on account of its convenience, its size and the superb view its windows afforded; but from the first it had been reserved for this favored individual whose arrival added greater mystery to the matter.

As the sun disappeared behind the western mountains, and the great gulf of the valley became a sea of purplish gloom, conversation clung in half whispers to the subject who meantime was arraying himself in evening dress for dinner, posing before the large mirror in room 24 and smiling humorously at himself as one who, criticising his own foibles, still holds to them with a fortitude almost Christian.

He parted his hair in the middle, but the line of division was very slight, and he left a pretty, half-curled short wisp hanging over the centre of his forehead. The wide collar that hid his short neck creased his heavy well-turned jaws, giving to his chin the appearance of being propped up. Although he was quite stout, his head was so broad and his feet so small that he appeared to taper from top to toe in a way that emphasized very forcibly his expression of blended dignity and jollity, youth and middle

age, sincerity and levity. When he had finished his toilet, he sat down by the best window in the best room of Hotel Helicon, and gazed out over the dusky valley to where a line of quivering silver light played fantastically along the line of peaks that notched the delicate blue of the evening sky. The breeze came in, cool and sweet, with a sort of champagne sparkle in its freshness and purity. It whetted his appetite and blew the dust of travel out of his mind. He was glad when the dinner hour arrived.

The long table was nearly full when he went down, and he was given a seat between Miss Moyne and little Mrs. Philpot. By that secret cerebral trick we all know, but which none of us can explain, he was aware that the company had just been discussing him. In fact, some one had ventured to wonder if he were Mr. Howells, whereupon Mr. Crane had promptly said that he knew Mr. Howells quite well, and that although in a general way the new-comer was not unlike the famous realist, he was far from identical with him.

Laurens Peck, the bushy-bearded New England critic, whispered in some one's ear that it appeared as if Crane knew everybody, but that the poet's lively imagination had aided him more than his eyes, in all probability. "Fact is," said he, "a Kentuckian soon gets so that he *thinks* he has been everywhere and seen everybody, whether he has or not."

Out of this remark grew a serious affair

which it will be my duty to record at the proper place.

Little Mrs. Philpot, who wore gold eye-glasses and had elongated dimples in her cheeks and chin, dexterously managed to have a word or two with the stranger, who smiled upon her graciously without attempting to enter into a conversation. Miss Moyne fared a little better, for she had the charm of grace and beauty to aid her, attended by one of those puffs of good luck which come to none but the young and the beautiful. Mr. R. Hobbs Lucas, a large and awkward historian from New York, knocked over a bottle of claret with his elbow, and the liquor shot with an enthusiastic sparkle diagonally across the table in order to fall on Miss Moyne's lap.

With that celerity which in very short and stout persons appears to be spontaneous, a sort of elastic quality, the gentleman from room 24 interposed his suddenly outspread napkin. The historian flung himself across the board after the bottle, clawing rather wildly and upsetting things generally. It was but a momentary scene, such as children at school and guests at a summer hotel make more or less merry over, still it drew forth from the genial man of room 24 a remark which slipped into Miss Moyne's ear with the familiarity of well trained humor.

"A deluge of wine in a free hotel!" he exclaimed, just above a whisper. "Such generosity is nearly shocking."

"I am sorry you mention it," said Miss

Moyne, with her brightest and calmest smile; "I have been idealizing the place. A gush of grape-juice on Helicon is a picturesque thing to contemplate."

"But a lap-full of claret on Mt. Boab is not so fine, eh? What a farce poetry is! What a humbug is romance!"

The historian had sunk back in his chair and was scowling at the purple stain which kept slowly spreading through the fiber of the cloth.

"I always do something," he sighed, and his sincerity was obvious.

"And always with *aplomb*," remarked little Mrs. Philpot.

"It would be a genius who could knock over a claret bottle with grace," added Peck. "Now a jug of ale——"

"I was present at table once with Mr. Emerson," began the Kentucky poet, but nobody heard the rest. A waiter came with a heavy napkin to cover the stain, and as he bent over the table he forced the man from room 24 to incline very close to Miss Moyne.

"To think of making an instance of Emerson!" he murmured. "Emerson who died before he discovered that men and women have to eat, or that wine will stain a new dress!"

"But then he discovered so many things——" she began.

"Please mention one of them," he glibly interrupted. "What did Emerson ever discover? Did he ever pen a single truth?"

" Aloft in secret veins of air
Blows the sweet breath of song,"

she replied. "He trod the very headlands of truth. But you are not serious——" she checked herself, recollecting that she was speaking to a stranger.

"Not serious but emphatically in earnest," he went on, in the same genial tone with which he had begun. "There isn't a thing but cunning phrase-form in anything the man ever wrote. He didn't know how to represent life."

"Oh, I see," Miss Moyne ventured, "you are a realist."

It is impossible to convey any adequate idea of the peculiar shade of contempt she conveyed through the words. She lifted her head a little higher and her beauty rose apace. It was as if she had stamped her little foot and exclaimed: "Of all things I detest realism—of all men, I hate realists."

"But I kept the wine off your dress!" he urged, as though he had heard her thought. "There's nothing good but what is real. Romance is lie-tissue. Reality is truth-tissue."

"Permit me to thank you for your good intentions," she said, with a flash of irony; "you held the napkin just in the right position, but the wine never fell from the table. Still your kindness lost nothing in quality because the danger was imaginary."

When dinner was over, Miss Moyne sought out Hartley Crane, the Kentucky poet who knew everybody, and suggested that perhaps

the stranger was Mr. Arthur Selby, the analytical novelist whose name was on everybody's tongue.

"But Arthur Selby is thin and bald and has a receding chin. I met him often at the—I forget the club in New York," said Crane. "It's more likely that he's some reporter. He's a snob, anyway."

"Dear me, no, not a snob, Mr. Crane; he is the most American man I ever met," replied Miss Moyne.

"But Americans are the worst of all snobs," he insisted, "especially literary Americans. They adore everything that's foreign and pity everything that's home-made."

As he said this he was remembering how Tennyson's and Browning's poems were overshadowing his own, even in Kentucky. From the ring of his voice Miss Moyne suspected something of this sort, and adroitly changed the subject.

III.

It might be imagined that a hotel full of authors would be sure to generate some flashes of disagreement, but, for a time at least, everything went on charmingly at Hotel Helicon. True enough, the name of the occupant of room 24 remained a vexatious secret which kept growing more and more absorbing as certain very cunningly devised schemes for its exposure were easily thwarted; but even this gave the

gentleman a most excellent excuse for nagging the ladies in regard to feminine curiosity and lack of generalship. Under the circumstances it was not to be expected that everybody should be strictly guarded in the phrasing of speech, still so genial and good-humored was the nameless man and so engaging was his way of evading or turning aside every thrust, that he steadily won favor. Little Mrs. Philpot, whose seven year old daughter (a bright and sweet little child) had become the pet of Hotel Helicon, was enthusiastic in her pursuit of the stranger's name, and at last she hit upon a plan that promised immediate success. She giggled all to herself, like a high-school girl, instead of like a widow of thirty, as she contemplated certain victory.

"Now do you think you can remember, dear?" she said to May, the child, after having explained over and over again what she wished her to do.

"Yeth," said May, who lisped charmingly in the sweetest of child voices.

"Well, what must you say?"

"I muth thay: Pleathe write your—your——"

"Autograph."

"Yeth, your au—to—graph in my album."

"That's right, autograph, autograph, don't forget. Now let me hear you say it."

"Pleathe write your autograph in my book."

Mrs. Philpot caught the child to her breast and kissed it vigorously, and not long afterward little May went forth to try the experiment.

She was armed with her mother's autograph album. When she approached her victim he thought he never had seen so lovely a child. The mother had not spared pains to give most effect to the little thing's delicate and appealing beauty by an artistic arrangement of the shining gold hair and by the simplest but cunningest tricks of color and drapery.

With that bird-like shyness so winning in a really beautiful little girl, May walked up to the stranger and made a funny, hesitating courtesy. He looked at her askance, his smiling face shooting forth a ray of tenderness along with a gleam of shrewd suspicion, as he made out the album in her dimpled little hand.

"Good morning, little one," he said cheerily. "Have you come to make a call?"

He held out both hands and looked so kindly and good that she smiled until dimples just like her mother's played over her cheeks and chin. Half sidewise she crept into his arms and held up the book.

"Pleathe write your photograph in my book," she murmured.

He took her very gently on his knee, chuckling vigorously, his heavy jaws shaking and coloring.

"Who told you to come?" he inquired, with a guilty cunning twinkle in his gray eyes.

"Mama told me," was the prompt answer.

Again the man chuckled, and, between the shame he felt for having betrayed the child and

delight at the success of his perfidy, he grew quite red in the face. He took the autograph album and turned its stiff, ragged-edged leaves, glancing at the names.

"Ah, this is your mama's book, is it?" he went on.

"Yeth it is," said May.

"And I must write my name in it?"

"No, your—your——"

"Well what?"

"I don't 'member."

He took from his pocket a stylographic pen and dashed a picturesque sign manual across a page.

While the ink was drying he tenderly kissed the child's forehead and then rested his chin on her bright hair. He could hear the clack of balls and mallets and the creak of a lazy swing down below on the so-called lawn, and a hum of voices arose from the veranda. He looked through the open window and saw, as in a dream, blue peaks set against a shining rim of sky with a wisp of vultures slowly wheeling about in a filmy, sheeny space.

"Mama said I muthn't stay," apologized the child, slipping down from his knee, which she had found uncomfortably short.

He pulled himself together from a diffused state of revery and beamed upon her again with his cheerful smile.

She turned near the door and dropped another comical little courtesy, bobbing her curly head till her hair twinkled like a tangle of starbeams

on a brook-ripple, then she darted away, book in hand.

Little Mrs. Philpot snatched the album from May, as she ran to her, and greedily rustled the leaves in search of the new record, finding which she gazed at it while her face irradiated every shade of expression between sudden delight and utter perplexity. In fact she could not decipher the autograph, although the handwriting surely was not bad. Loath as she naturally was to sharing her secret with her friends, curiosity at length prevailed and she sought help. Everybody in turn tried to make out the two short words, all in vain till Crane, by the poet's subtle vision, cleared up the mystery, at least to his own satisfaction.

"Gaspard Dufour is the name," he asserted, with considerable show of conscious superiority. "A Canadian, I think. In fact I imperfectly recall meeting him once at a dinner given by the Governor General to Lord Rosenthal at Quebec. He writes plays."

"Another romance out of the whole cloth by the Bourbon aesthete!" whispered the critic. "There's no such a Canadian as Gaspard Dufour, and besides the man's a Westerner rather over-Bostonized. I can tell by his voice and his mixed manners."

"But Mrs. Hope would know him," suggested the person addressed. "She meets all the Hub *literati*, you know."

"*Literati!*" snarled the critic, putting an end to further discussion.

A few minutes later Mr. Gaspard Dufour came down and passed out of the hotel, taking his way into the nearest ravine. He wore a very short coat and a slouch hat. In his hand he carried a bundle of fishing-rod joints. A man of his build looks far from dignified in such dress, at best; but nothing could have accentuated more sharply his absurd grotesqueness of appearance than the peculiar waddling gait he assumed as he descended the steep place and passed out of sight, a fish basket bobbing beside him and a red kerchief shining around his throat.

Everybody looked at his neighbor and smiled inquisitively. Now that they had discovered his name, the question arose: What had Gaspard Dufour ever done that he should be accorded the place of honor in Hotel Helicon. No one (save Crane, in a shadowy way) had ever heard of him before. No doubt they all felt a little twinge of resentment; but Dufour, disappearing down the ravine, had in some unaccountable way deepened his significance.

IV.

EVERYBODY knows that a mountain hotel has no local color, no sympathy with its environment, no gift of making its guests feel that they are anywhere in particular. It is all very delightful to be held aloft on the shoulder of a giant almost within reach of the sky; but the charm of the thing is not referable to any

definite, visible cause, such as one readily bases one's love of the sea-side on, or such as accounts for our delight in the life of a great city. No matter how fine the effect of clouds and peaks and sky and gorge, no matter how pure and exhilarating the air, or how blue the filmy deeps of distance, or how mossy the rocks, or how sweet the water, or how cool the wooded vales, the hotel stands there in an indefinite way, with no *raison d'être* visible in its make-up, but with an obvious impudence gleaming from its windows. One cannot deport one's self at such a place as if born there. The situation demands—nay, exacts behavior somewhat special and peculiar. No lonely island in the sea is quite as isolated and out of the world as the top of any mountain, nor can any amount of man's effort soften in the least the savage individuality of mountain scenery so as to render those high places familiar or homelike or genuinely habitable. Delightful enough and fascinating enough all mountain hotels surely are; but the sensation that living in one of them induces is the romantic consciousness of being in a degree "out of space, out of time." No doubt this feeling was heightened and intensified in the case of the guests at Hotel Helicon who were enjoying the added novelty of entire freedom from the petty economies that usually dog the footsteps and haunt the very dreams of the average summer sojourner. At all events, they were mostly a light-hearted set given over to a

freedom of speech and action which would have horrified them on any lower plane.

Scarcely had Gaspard Dufour passed beyond sight down the ravine in search of a trout-brook, than he became the subject of free discussion. Nothing strictly impolite was said about him ; but everybody in some way expressed amazement at everybody's ignorance of a man whose importance was apparent and whose name vaguely and tauntingly suggested to each one of them a half-recollection of having seen it in connection with some notable literary sensation.

"Is there a member of the French institute by the name of Dufour?" inquired R. Hobbs Lucas, the historian, thoughtfully knitting his heavy brows.

"I am sure not," said Hartley Crane, "for I met most of the members when I was last at Paris and I do not recall the name."

"There goes that Bourbon again," muttered Laurens Peck, the critic ; "if one should mention Xenophon, that fellow would claim a personal acquaintance with him !"

It was plain enough that Peck did not value Crane very highly, and Crane certainly treated Peck very coolly. Miss Moyne, however, was blissfully unaware that she was the cause of this trouble, and for that matter the men themselves would have denied with indignant fervor any thing of the kind. Both of them were stalwart and rather handsome, the Kentuckian dark and passionate looking, the New Yorker fair, cool and willful in appearance. Miss Moyne had

been pleased with them both, without a special thought of either, whilst they were going rapidly into the worry and rapture of love, with no care for anybody but her.

She was beautiful and good, sweet-voiced, gentle, more inclined to listen than to talk, and so she captivated everybody from the first.

"I think it would be quite interesting," she said, "if it should turn out that Mr. Dufour is a genuine foreign author, like Tolstoï or Daudet or——"

"Realists, and nobody but realists," interposed Mrs. Philpot; "why don't you say Zola, and have done with it?"

"Well, Zola, then, if it must be," Miss Moyne responded; "for, barring my American breeding and my Southern conservatism, I am nearly in sympathy with—no, not that exactly, but we are so timid. I should like to feel a change in the literary air."

"Oh, you talk just as Arthur Selby writes in his critical papers. He's all the time trying to prove that fiction is truth and that truth is fiction. He lauds Zola's and Dostoieffsky's filthy novels to the skies; but in his own novels he's as prudish and Puritanish as if he had been born on Plymouth Rock instead of on an Illinois prairie."

"I wonder why he is not a guest here," some one remarked. "I should have thought that our landlord would have had *him* at all hazards. Just now Selby is monopolizing the

field of American fiction. In fact I think he claims the earth."

"It is so easy to assume," said Guilford Ferris, whose romances always commanded eulogy from the press, but invariably fell dead on the market; "but I am told that Selby makes almost nothing from the sales of his books."

"But the magazines pay him handsomely," said Miss Moyne.

"Yes, they do," replied Ferris, pulling his long brown mustache reflectively, "and I can't see why. He really is not popular; there is no enthusiasm for his fiction."

"It's a mere vogue, begotten by the critics," said Hartley Crane. "Criticism is at a very low ebb in America. Our critics are all either ignorant or given over to putting on English and French airs."

Ferris opened his eyes in a quiet way and glanced at Peck who, however, did not appear to notice the remark.

"There's a set of them in Boston and New York," Crane went on, "who watch the *Revue de Deux Mondes* and the London *Athenaeum*, ready to take the cue from them. Even American books must stand or fall by the turn of the foreign thumb."

"That is a very ancient grumble," said Ferris, in a tone indicative of impartial indifference.

"Take these crude, loose, awkward, almost obscene Russian novels," continued Crane, "and see what a furor the critics of New York and Boston have fermented in their behalf, all

because it chanced that a *coterie* of Parisian literary *roués* fancied the filthy imaginings of Dostoieffsky and the raw vulgarity of Tolstoï. What would they say of *you*, Ferris, if *you* should write so low and dirty a story as *Crime and Its Punishment* by Dostoieffsky?"

"Oh, I don't know, and, begging your grace, I don't care a straw," Ferris replied; "the publishers would steal all my profits in any event."

"Do you really believe that?" inquired Peck.

"Believe it? I know it," said Ferris. "When did you ever know of a publisher advertising a book as in its fiftieth thousand so long as the author had any royalty on the sales? The only book of mine that ever had a run was one I sold outright in the manuscript to George Dunkirk & Co., who publish all my works. That puerile effort is now in its ninetieth thousand, while the best of the other six has not yet shown up two thousand! Do you catch the point?"

"But what difference can printing a statement of the books sold make, anyway?" innocently inquired Miss Moyne

Ferris laughed.

"All the difference in the world," he said; "the publisher would have to account to the author for all those thousands, don't you see?"

"But they have to account, anyhow," replied Miss Moyne, with a perplexed smile.

"Account!" exclaimed Ferris, contemptuously; "account! yes, they have to account."

"But they account to me," Miss Moyne gently insisted.

"Who are your publishers?" he demanded.

"George Dunkirk & Co.," was the answer.

"Well," said he, "I'll wager you anything I can come within twenty of guessing the sales up to date of your book. It has sold just eleven hundred and forty copies."

She laughed merrily and betrayed the dangerous closeness of his guess by coloring a little.

"Oh, its invariably just eleven hundred and forty copies, no matter what kind of a book it is, or what publisher has it," he continued; "I've investigated and have settled the matter."

The historian was suddenly thoughtful, little Mrs. Philpot appeared to be making some abstruse calculation, Crane was silently gazing at the ground and Peck, with grim humor in his small eyes, remarked that eleven hundred and forty was a pretty high average upon the whole.

Just at this point a figure appeared in the little roadway where it made its last turn lapsing from the wood toward the hotel. A rather tall, slender and angular young woman, bearing a red leather bag in one hand and a blue silk umbrella in the other, strode forward with the pace of a *tragedienne*. She wore a bright silk dress, leaf-green in color, and a black bonnet, of nearly the Salvation Army pattern, was set far back on her head, giving full play to a mass of short, fine, loosely tumbled yellow hair.

She was very much out of breath from her walk up the mountain, but there was a plucky smile on her rather sallow face and an enterprising gleam in her light eyes.

She walked right into the hotel, as if she had always lived there, and they heard her talking volubly to the servant as she was following him to a room.

Everybody felt a waft of free Western air and knew that Hotel Helicon had received another interesting guest, original if not typical, with qualities that soon must make themselves respected in a degree.

"Walked from the station?" Mrs. Philpot ventured, in querulous, though kindly interrogation.

"Up the mountain?" Miss Moyne added, with a deprecatory inflection.

"And carried that bag!" exclaimed all the rest.

V

GASPARD DUFOUR, whose accumulations of adipose tissue appeared to serve him a good turn, as he descended the steep, rocky ravine, hummed a droll tune which was broken at intervals by sundry missteps and down-sittings and side-wise bumps against the jutting crags. He perspired freely, mopping his brow meantime with a vast silk kerchief that hung loosely about his short neck.

The wood grew denser as he descended and a damp, mouldy odor pervaded the spaces underneath the commingling boughs of the oaks, pines, cedars, and sassafras. Here and there a lizard scampered around a tree-hole or darted

under the fallen leaves. Overhead certain shadowy flittings betrayed the presence of an occasional small bird, demurely going about its business of food-getting. The main elements of the surroundings, however, were gloom and silence. The breeze-currents astir in the valley and rippling over the gray peaks of Mt. Boab could not enter the leafy chambers of this wooded gorge. Heat of a peculiarly sultry sort seemed to be stored here, for as Dufour proceeded he began at length to gasp for breath, and it was with such relief as none but the suffocating can fully appreciate, that he emerged into an open space surrounded, almost, with butting limestone cliffs, but cut across by a noisy little stream that went bubbling down into the valley through a cleft bedecked with ferns and sprinkled with perennial dew from a succession of gentle cascades. The ideal trout-brook was this, so far as appearances could go. At the foot of each tiny water-fall was a swirling pool, semi-opaque, giving forth emerald flashes and silver glints, and bearing little cones of creamy foam round and round on its bosom. A thousand noises, every one a water-note, rising all along the line of the brook's broken current, clashed together with an effect like that of hearing a far-off multitude applauding or some distant army rushing on a charge.

So much out of breath and so deluged with perspiration was Dufour that he flung himself upon the ground beside the brook and lay there panting and mopping his face. Overhead

the bit of sky was like turquoise, below a slender glimpse of the valley shone between the rock walls, like a sketch subdued almost to monochrome of crepuscular purple. A fitful breath of cool air fell into the place, fanning the man's almost purple cheeks and forehead, while a wood-thrush, whose liquid voice might have been regarded as part of the water-tumult, sang in a thorn tree hard by.

In a half-reclining attitude, Dufour gave himself over to the delicious effect of all this, indulging at the same time in the impolite and ridiculous, but quite Shakespearian, habit of soliloquizing.

"Jingo!" he remarked, "Jingo! but isn't this a daisy prospect for trout! If those pools aren't full of the beauties, then there's nothing in Waltonian lore and life isn't worth living. Ha! Jingo! there went one clean above the water—a ten ounce, at least!"

He sprang at his rod as if to break it to pieces, and the facility with which he fitted the joints and the reel and run the line and tied the cast was really a wonder.

"I knew they were here," he muttered, "just as soon as I laid my eyes on the water. Who ever did see such another brook!"

At the third cast of the fly, a brown hackle, by the way, up came a trout with a somersault and a misty gleam of royal purple and silver, attended by a spray of water and a short bubbling sound. Dufour struck deftly, hooking the beautiful fish very insecurely through the edge

of the lower lip. Immediately the reel began to sing and the rod to quiver, while Dufour's eyes glared almost savagely and his lips pursed with comical intensity.

Round and round flew the trout, now rushing to the bottom of the pool, now whisking under a projecting ledge and anon flinging itself clean above the water and shaking itself convulsively.

The angler was led hither and thither by his active prey, the exercise bedewing his face again with perspiration, whilst his feet felt the cool bath of water and the soothing embrace of tangled water-grass. The mere switch of a bamboo rod, bent almost into a loop, shook like a rush in a wind.

Dufour was ill prepared to formulate a polite response when, at the height of his sport, a gentle but curiously earnest voice exclaimed:

"Snatch 'im out, snatch 'im out, dog gone yer clumsy hide! Snatch 'im out, er I'll do it for ye!"

The trout must have heard, for as the angler turned to get a hasty glance at the stranger, up it leaped and by a desperate shake broke the snell.

"Confound you!" cried Dufour, his face redder than ever. "Confound your meddlesome tongue, why didn't you keep still till I landed him?"

There was a tableau set against the gray, lichen-bossed rocks. Two men glaring at each other. The new-comer was a tall, athletic,

brown-faced mountaineer, bearing a gun and wearing two heavy revolvers. He towered above Dufour and gazed down upon him as if about to execute him. The latter did not quail, but grew angrier instead.

"You ought to have better sense than to interfere with my sport in such a way! Who are you, anyway?" he cried in a hot, fierce tone.

The mountaineer stood silent for a moment, as if collecting words enough for what he felt like saying, then:

"See yer," he drawled, rather musically, "ef I take ye by the scruff o' yer neck an' the heel o' yer stockin' an' jest chuck ye inter thet puddle, ye'll begin to surmise who I air, ye saucy little duck-legged minny-catcher, you!"

Dufour, remembering his long training years ago at the Gentlemen's Glove-Club, squared himself with fists in position, having flung aside his tackle. In his righteous rage he forgot that his adversary was not only his superior in stature but also heavily armed.

"Well, thet' ther' do beat me!" said the mountaineer, with an incredulous ring in his voice. "The very idee! W'y ye little aggervatin' banty rooster, a puttin' up yer props at me! W'y I'll jest eternally and everlastin'ly wring yer neck an' swob the face o' nature wi' ye!"

What followed was about as indescribable as a whirlwind in dry grass. The two men appeared to coalesce for a single wild, whirling, resounding instant, and then the mountaineer went

over headlong into the middle of the pool with a great splash and disappeared. Dufour, in a truly gladiatorial attitude, gazed fiercely at the large dimple in which his antagonist was buried for the instant, but out of which he presently projected himself with great promptness, then, as a new thought came to him, he seized the fallen gun of the mountaineer, cocked it and leveled it upon its owner. There was a peculiar meaning in his words as he stormed out:

"Lie down! down with you, or I blow a hole clean through you instantly!"

Promptly enough the mountaineer lay down until the water rippled around his chin and floated his flaxen beard. Some moments of peculiar silence followed, broken only by the lapsing gurgle and murmur of the brook.

Dufour, with arms as steady as iron bars, kept the heavy gun bearing on the gasping face of the unwilling bather, whilst at the same time he was dangerously fingering the trigger. The stout, short figure really had a muscular and doughty air and the heavy face certainly looked warlike.

"Stranger, a seein' 'at ye've got the drap onto me, 'spose we swear off an' make up friends?" The man in the water said this at length, in the tone of one presenting a suggestion of doubtful propriety.

"Don't hardly think you've cooled off sufficiently, do you?" responded Dufour.

"This here's spring warter, ye must 'member," offered the mountaineer.

The gun was beginning to tire Dufour's arms.

"Well, do you knock under?" he inquired, still carelessly fumbling the trigger.

"Great mind ter say yes," was the shivering response.

"Oh, take your time to consider, I'm in no hurry," said Dufour.

If the man in the water could have known how the supple but of late untrained arms of the man on shore were aching, the outcome might have been different; but the bath was horribly cold and the gun's muzzle kept its bearing right on the bather's eye.

"I give in, ye've got me, stranger," he at last exclaimed.

Dufour was mightily relieved as he put down the gun and watched his dripping and shivering antagonist wade out of the cold pool. The men looked at each other curiously.

"Ye're the dog gone'dest man 'at ever I see," remarked the mountaineer; "who air ye, anyhow?"

"Oh, I'm a pretty good fellow, if you take me on the right tack," said Dufour.

The other hesitated a moment, and then inquired:

"Air ye one o' them people up at the tavern on the mounting?"

"Yes."

"A boardin' there?"

"Yes."

"For all summer?"

"Possibly."

Again there was a silence, during which the water trickled off the mountaineer's clothes and ran over the little stones at his feet.

"Goin' ter make fun o' me when ye git up thar?" the catechism was at length resumed. Dufour laughed.

"I could tell a pretty good thing on you," he answered, taking a sweeping observation of the stalwart fellow's appearance as he stood there with his loose jeans trousers and blue cotton shirt clinging to his shivering limbs.

"See yer, now," said the latter, in a wheedling tone, and wringing his light, thin beard with one sinewy dark hand, "see yer, now, I'd like for ye not ter do thet, strengener."

"Why?"

"Well," said the mountaineer, after some picturesque hesitation and faltering, "'cause I hev a 'quaintance o' mine up ther' at thet tavern."

"Indeed, have you? Who is it?"

"Mebbe ye mought be erquainted with Miss Sarah Anna Crabb?"

"No."

"Well, she's up ther', she stayed all night at our house las' night an' went on up ther' this mornin'; she's a literary woman an' purty, an' smart, an' a mighty much of a talker."

"Ugh!"

"Jest tell her 'at ye met me down yer, an' 'at I'm tol'ble well; but don't say nothin' 'bout this 'ere duckin' 'at ye gi' me, will ye?"

"Oh, of course, that's all right," Dufour has-

tened to say, feeling an indescribable thrill of sympathy for the man.

"Yer's my hand, strenger, an' w'en Wesley Tolliver gives a feller his hand hit means all there air ter mean," exclaimed the latter, as warmly as his condition would permit, "an' w'en ye need er friend in these parts jest come ter me."

He shouldered his gun, thereupon, and remarking that he might as well be going, strode away over a spur of the mountain, his clothes still dripping and sticking close to his muscular limbs. Dufour found his rod broken and his reel injured, by having felt the weight of Wesley Tolliver's foot, and so he too turned to retrace his steps.

Such an adventure could not fail to gain in spectacular grotesqueness as it took its place in the memory and imagination of Dufour. He had been in the habit of seeing such things on the stage and of condemning them out of hand as the baldest melodramatic nonsense, so that now he could not fairly realize the matter as something that had taken place in his life.

He was very tired and hungry when he reached Hotel Helicon.

VI.

"OH, yes, I walked all the way up the mountain from the railroad depot," explained the young woman whose arrival we chronicled in another chapter, "but I stopped over night at a cabin on the way and discovered some just

delightful characters—the Tollivers—regular Craddock sort of people, an old lady and her son.”

By some method known only to herself she had put herself upon a speaking-plane with Dufour, who, as she approached him, was standing in an angle of the wide wooden veranda waiting for the moon to rise over the distant peaks of the eastern mountains.

“I saw Mr. Tolliver to-day while whipping a brook down here,” said he, turning to look her squarely in the face.

“Oh, did you! Isn’t he a virile, villainous, noble, and altogether melodramatic looking man? I wish there was some one here who could sketch him for me. But, say, Mr. Dufour, what do you mean, please, when you speak of *whipping* a brook?”

She took from her pocket a little red notebook and a pencil as he promptly responded: “Whipping a brook? oh, that’s angler’s nonsense, it means casting the line into the water, you know.”

“That’s funny,” she remarked, making a note.

She was taller than Dufour, and so slender and angular that in comparison with his excessive plumpness she looked gaunt and bony. In speaking her lips made all sorts of wild contortions showing her uneven teeth to great effect, and the extreme rapidity of her utterance gave an explosive emphasis to her voice. Over her forehead, which projected, a fluffy mass of pale

yellow hair sprang almost fiercely as if to attack her scared and receding chin.

"You are from Michigan, I believe, Miss Crabb," remarked Dufour.

"Oh, dear, no!" she answered, growing red in the face, "No, indeed. I am from Indiana, from Ringville, associate editor of the *Star*."

"Pardon, I meant Indiana. Of course I knew you were not from Michigan."

"Thanks," with a little laugh and a shrug, "I am glad you see the point."

"I usually do—a little late," he remarked complacently.

"You are from Boston, then, I infer," she glibly responded.

"Not precisely," he said, with an approving laugh, "but I admit that I have some Bostonian qualities."

At this point in the conversation she was drooping over him, so to say, and he was sturdily looking up into her bright, insistent face.

"What a group!" said Crane to Mrs. Bridges, a New York fashion editor. "I'd give the best farm in Kentucky (so far as my title goes) for a photograph of it! Doesn't she appear to be just about to peck out his eyes!"

"Your lofty imagination plays you fantastic tricks," said Mrs. Bridges. "Is she the famous Western *lady* reporter?"

"The same, of the *Ringville Star*. I met her at the Cincinnati convention. It was there

that Bascom of the *Bugle* called her a bag of gimlets, because she bored him so."

"Oh!"

This exclamation was not in response to what Crane had said, but it was an involuntary tribute to the moon-flower just flaring into bloom between twin peaks lying dusky and heavy against the mist of silver and gold that veiled the sweet sky beyond. A semi-circle of pale straw-colored fire gleamed in the lowest angle of the notch and sent up long, wavering lines of light almost to the zenith, paling the strongest stars and intensifying the shadows in the mountain gorges and valleys. Grim as angry gods, the pines stood along the slopes, as if gloomily contemplating some dark scheme of vengeance.

"A real Sapphic," said Crane, dropping into a poetical tone, as an elocutionist does when he is hungry for an opportunity to recite a favorite sketch.

"Why a Sapphic?" inquired the matter-of-fact fashion-editor.

"Oh, don't you remember that fragment, that glorious picture Sappho's divine genius has made for us—"

He quoted some Greek.

"About as divine as Choctaw or Kickapoo," she said. "I understand the moon-shine better. In fact I have a sincere contempt for all this transparent clap-trap you poets and critics indulge in when you got upon your Greek hobby. Divine Sappho, indeed! A lot of bald bits of

jargon made famous by the comments of fogies. Let's look at the moon, please, and be sincere."

"Sincere!"

"Yes, you know very well that if you had written the Sapphic fragments the critics would—"

"The critics! What of them? They are a set of disappointed poetasters themselves. Blind with rage at their own failures, they snap right and left without rhyme or reason. Now there's Peck, a regular—"

"Well, sir, a regular *what?*" very coolly demanded the critic who had stepped forth from a shadowy angle and now stood facing Crane.

"A regular star-gazer," said Mrs. Bridges "Tell us why the planets yonder all look so ghastly through the shimmering moonlight."

Peck without reply turned and walked away.

"Is he offended?" she asked.

"No, he gives offence, but can not take it."

Mrs. Bridges grew silent.

"We were speaking of Sappho," observed Crane, again gliding into an elocutionary mood. "I have translated the fragment that I repeated a while ago. Let me give it to you.

'When on the dusky, violet sky
The full flower of the moon blooms high
The stars turns pale and die!'"

Just then Miss Moyne, dressed all in white, floated by on Peck's arm, uttering a silvery gust of laughter in response to a cynical observation of the critic.

"What a lovely girl she is," said Mrs. Bridges. "Mr. Peck shows fine critical acumen in being very fond of her."

Crane was desperately silent. "He's a handsome man, too, and I suspect it's a genuine love affair," Mrs. Bridges went on, fanning herself complacently. Back and forth, walking slowly and conversing in a soft minor key, save when now and then Miss Moyne laughed melodiously, the promenaders passed and repassed, Peck never deigning to glance toward Crane, who had forgotten both Sappho and the moon. Miss Moyne did, however, once or twice turn her eyes upon the silent poet.

"Oh," went on Miss Crabb, filling Dufour's ears with the hurried din of her words, "Oh, I'm going to write a novel about this place. I never saw a better chance for local color, real transcripts from life, original scenes and genuine romance all tumbled together. Don't you think I might do it?"

"It does appear tempting," said Dufour. "There's Tolliver for instance, a genuine Chilhowee moonshiner." He appeared to laugh inwardly as he spoke. Indeed he heard the plash of water and the dripping, shivering mountaineer stood forth in his memory down there in the gorge.

"A moonshiner!" gasped Miss Crabb, fluttering the leaves of her note-book and writing by moonlight with a celerity that amazed Dufour.

"Potentially, at least," he replied evasively. "He looks like one and he don't like water."

"If he *does* turn out to be a real moonshiner," Miss Crabb proceeded reflectively to say, "it will be just too delicious for anything. I don't mind telling you, confidentially, Mr. Dufour, that I am to write some letters while here to the *Chicago Daily Lightning Express*. So I'd take it as a great favor if you'd give me all the points you get."

"That's interesting," he said, with a keen scrutiny of her face for a second. "I shall be glad to be of assistance to you."

He made a movement to go, but lingered to say: "Pray give me all the points, too, will you?"

"Oh, are you a journalist too?" she inquired, breathlessly hanging over him. "What paper—"

"I'm not much of anything," he hurriedly interposed, "but I like to know what is going on, that's all."

He walked away without further excuse and went up to his room.

"I've got to watch him," soliloquized Miss Crabb, "or he'll get the scoop of all the news. Give him points, indeed! Maybe so, but not till after I've sent them to the *Lightning Express*! I'll keep even with him, or know the reason why."

It was a grand panorama that the climbing moon lighted up all around Mount Boab, a vast billowy sea of gloom and sheen. Here were

shining cliffs, there dusky gulches; yonder the pines glittered like steel-armed sentinels on the hill-tops, whilst lower down they appeared to skulk like cloaked assassins. Shadows came and went, now broad-winged and wavering, again slender and swift as the arrows of death. The hotel was bright within and without. Some one was at the grand piano in the hall making rich music—a fragment from Beethoven,—and a great horned owl down the ravine was booming an effective counterpoint.

Crane stood leaning on the railing of the veranda and scowling savagely as Peck and Miss Moyne continued to promenade and converse. He was, without doubt, considering sinister things. Mrs. Bridges, finding him entirely unsympathetic, went to join Miss Crabb, who was alone where she had been left by Dufour. Meantime, up in his room, with his chair tilted far back and his feet thrust out over the sill of an open window, Dufour was smoking a fragrant Cuban cigar, (fifty cents at retail) and alternating smiles with frowns as he contemplated his surroundings.

“Authors,” he thought, “are the silliest, the vainest, and the most impractical lot of human geese that ever were plucked for their valuable feathers. And newspaper people! Humph!” He chuckled till his chin shook upon his immaculate collar. “Just the idea, now, of that young woman asking me to furnish her with points!”

There was something almost jocund blent with his air of solid self-possession, and he

smoked the precious cigars one after another with prodigal indifference and yet with the perfect grace of him to the manner born.

"Hotel Helicon on Mt. Boab!" he repeated, and then betook himself to bed.

VII.

SOME people are born to find things out—to overhear, to reach a place just at the moment in which an event comes to pass there—born indeed, with the news-gatherer's instinct perfectly developed. Miss Crabb was one of these. How she chanced to over-hear some low-spoken but deadly sounding words that passed between Peck and Crane, it would be hard to say; still she overheard them, and her heart jumped almost into her mouth. It was a thrillingly dramatic passage, there under the heavy-topped oak by the west veranda in the gloom.

"Villain!" exclaimed Crane, in the hissing voice of a young tragedy-player at rehearsal, "Villain! you shall not escape me. Defend yourself!"

"Nonsense," said Peck, "you talk like a fool. I don't want to fight! What's that you've got in your hand?"

"A sword, you cowardly craven!"

"You call me a coward! If I had a good club I should soon show you what I could do, you sneaking assassin!"

More words and just as bitter followed, till at last a fight was agreed upon to take place immediately, at a certain point on the verge of a

cliff not far away. There were to be no seconds and the meeting was to end in the death of one or both of the combatants.

To Miss Crabb all this had a sound and an appearance as weird as anything in the wildest romance she ever had read. It was near midnight; the hotel was quite soundless and the moon on high made the shadows short and black.

"Meet me promptly at the Eagle's Nest in ten minutes," said Crane, "I'll fetch my other sword and give you choice."

"All right, sir," responded Peck, "but a club would do."

The peculiar hollowness of their voices affected the listener as if the sounds had come from a tomb. She felt clammy. Doubtless there is a considerable element of humorous, almost ludicrous bravado in such a scene when coolly viewed; but Miss Crabb could not take a calm, critical attitude just then. At first she was impelled almost irresistibly toward interfering and preventing a bloody encounter; but her professional ambition swept the feeling aside. Still, being a woman, she was dreadfully nervous. "Ugh!" she shuddered, "it will be just awful, but I can't afford to miss getting the full particulars for the *Lightning Express*. A sure enough duel! It will make my fortune! Oh, if I were a man, now, just only for a few hours, what a comfort it would be! But all the same I must follow them—I must see the en-

counter, describe it as an eye-witness and send it by wire early in the morning."

It occurred to her mind just then that the nearest telegraph station was twelve miles down the mountain, but she did not flinch or waver. The thought that she was required to do what a man might well have shrunk from gave an element of heroism to her pluck. She was conscious of this and went about her task with an elasticity and facility truly admirable.

Eagle's Nest was the name of a small area on the top of a beetling cliff whose almost perpendicular wall was dotted with clumps of sturdy little cedar trees growing out of the chinks. It was a dizzy place at all times, but by night the effect of its airy height was very trying on any but the best nerves. Crane and Peck both were men of fine physique and were possessed of stubborn courage and great combativeness. They met on the spot and after choosing swords, coolly and promptly proceeded to the fight. On one hand, close to the cliff's edge, was a thick mass of small oak bushes, on the other hand lay a broken wall of fragmentary stones. The footing-space was fairly good, though a few angular blocks of stone lay here and there, and some brushes of stiff wood-grass were scattered around.

Crane led with more caution than one would have expected of an irate Kentuckian, and Peck responded with the brilliant aplomb of an enthusiastic duelist.

The swords were neither rapiers nor broad-

swords, being the ordinary dress-weapons worn by Confederate Infantry officers in the war time—weapons with a history, since they had been at the thigh of father and son, the bravest of Kentucky Cranes, through many a stormy battle.

Peck's back was toward the precipice-brink at the commencement of the engagement, but neither had much the advantage, as the moon was almost directly overhead. As their weapons began to flash and clink, the slender keen echoes fell over into the yawning chasm and went rattling down the steep, ragged face of the precipice. They were vigorous and rather good fencers and it would have been evident to an onlooker of experience that the fight was to be a long one, notwithstanding the great weight of the swords they were using. They soon began to fight fiercely and grew more vehemently aggressive each second, their blows and thrusts and parries and counter-cuts following each other faster and faster until the sounds ran together and the sparks leaped and shone even in the bright moonlight. They mingled broadsword exercise with legitimate rapier fencing and leaped about each other like boxers, their weapons whirling, darting, rising, falling, whilst their breathing became loud and heavy. It was a scene to have stirred the blood of men and women four hundred years ago, when love was worth fighting for and when men were quite able and willing to fight for it.

The combatants strained every point of their

strength and skill, and not a drop of blood could either draw. Slash, thrust, whack, clink, clank, clack, click, cling! Round and round they labored, the fury of their efforts flaming out of their eyes and concentrating in the deep lines of their mouths. As if to listen, the breeze lay still in the trees and the great owl quit hooting in the ravine. Faster and faster fell the blows, swifter and keener leaped the thrusts, quicker and surer the parries were interposed. The swords were hacked and notched like hand-saws, the blades shook and hummed like lyre-cords. Now close to the cliff's edge, now over by the heap of broken stones and then close beside the clump of oak bushes, the men, panting and sweating, their muscles knotted, their sinews leaping like bow-strings, their eyes standing out, as if starting from their sockets, pursued each other without a second's rest or wavering.

At last, with an irresistible spurt of fury, Crane drove Peck right into the bushes with a great crash and would not let him out. The critic was not vanquished, however, for, despite the foliage and twigs, he continued to parry and thrust with dangerous accuracy and force.

Just at this point a strange thing happened. Right behind Peck there was a tearing, crashing sound and a cry, loud, keen, despairing, terrible, followed immediately by the noise of a body descending among the cedars growing along the face of the awful precipice.

It was a woman's voice, shrieking in deadly

horror that then came up out of the dizzy depth of space below!

The men let fall their swords and leaped to the edge of the cliff with the common thought that it was Miss Moyne who had fallen over. They reeled back giddy and sick, staggering as if drunken.

Far down they had seen something white fluttering and gleaming amid a tuft of cedars and a quavering voice had cried:

"Help, help, oh, help!"

And so the duel was at an end.

VIII.

HOTEL HELICON was shaken out of its sleep by the startling rumor to the effect that Miss Moyne had fallen down the precipice at Eagle's Nest.

Of all the rudely awakened and mightily frightened inmates, perhaps Miss Moyne herself was most excited by this waft of bad news. She had been sleeping very soundly in dreamless security and did not at first feel the absurdity of being told that she had just tumbled down the escarpment, which in fact she never yet had summoned the courage to approach, even when sustained by a strong masculine arm.

"O dear! how did it happen?" she demanded of her aunt, Mrs. Coleman Rhodes, who had rushed upon her dainty couch with the frightful announcement of her accident.

"Oh, Alice! you are here, you are not hurt at all! Oh!" Mrs. Rhodes went on, "and what *can* it all mean!"

Everybody rushed out, of course, as soon as hurried dressing would permit, and fell into the confusion that filled the halls and main veranda.

Crane was talking in a loud, but well modulated strain, explaining the accident:

"Mr. Peck and I," he went on to say, "were enjoying a friendly turn at sword-play up here at Eagle's Nest; couldn't sleep, needed exercise, and went up there so as not to disturb any one. While we were fencing she came rushing past through those bushes and leaped right over with a great shriek. She —"

"Don't stop to talk," cried Mr. R. Hobbs Lucas, with a directness and clearness quite unusual in a historian. "Don't stop to talk, let's go do something!"

"Yes, come on," quavered poor Peck, his face whiter than the moon and his beard quivering in sympathy with his voice.

"Oh, it's dreadful, awful!" moaned little Mrs. Philpot, "poor, dear Miss Moyne, to think that she is gone!" and she leaned heavily on Miss Moyne's shoulder as she spoke.

It was a strange scene, too confused for the best dramatic effect, but spectacular in the extreme. Servants swarmed out with lights that wavered fantastically in the moonshine, while the huddled guests swayed to and fro in a body. Every face was pinched with intense excitement and looked haggard under its crown of disheveled hair. Even the hotel windows stared in stupid horror, and the kindly countenances of the negro waiters took on a bewildered and mean-

ingless grin set in a black scowl of superstition and terror.

When Dufour came upon the scene, he did not appear in the least flurried, and the first thing he did was to lay his hand on Miss Moyne's shoulder and exclaim in a clear tenor strain:

"Why, here! it's all a mistake! What are you talking about? Here's Miss Moyne! Here she stands!"

"Mercy! where?" enquired little Mrs. Philpot, who was still leaning on her friend and shedding bitter tears.

Dufour, with a quiet: "Please don't take offence," put a hand on either side of Miss Moyne and lifted her so that she stood in a chair looking very sweetly down over the crowd of people.

Few indeed are they who can look beautiful under such circumstances, but Miss Moyne certainly did, especially in the eyes of Crane and Peck as they gazed up at her.

Forthwith the tragedy became a farce.

"That Kentuckian must romance, I suppose," grumbled. R. Hobbs Lucas. "Wonder what he'll tell next."

"I don't see how I could be so mistaken," said Peck, after quiet had been somewhat restored, "I would have willingly been sworn to—"

He was interrupted by a dozen voices hurling ironical phrases at him.

"It is every word truth," exclaimed Crane

testily. "Do you suppose I would trifle with so—"

"Oh, don't you absolutely know that we suppose just that very thing?" said Lucas.

With the return of self-consciousness the company began to scatter, the ladies especially scampering to their rooms with rustling celerity. The men grumbled not a little, as if being deprived of a shocking accident touched them with a sting.

"The grotesque idea!" ejaculated Dufour. "Such a practical joke—impractical joke, I might better say, could originate only between a poet and a critic."

Everybody went back to bed, feeling more or less injured by Crane and Peck, who shared in their own breasts the common impression that they had made great fools of themselves. If these crest-fallen knights, so lately militant and self-confident, had any cause of quarrel now it was based upon a question as to which should feel the meaner and which should more deeply dread to meet Miss Moyne on the morrow.

As for Miss Moyne herself she was indignant although she tried to quiet her aunt, who was ready to shake the dust of Mt. Boab from her feet at once.

Next morning, however, when it was discovered that Miss Crabb was missing and that after all something tragic probably had happened, everybody felt relieved.

IX

MR. WESLEY TOLLIVER might well have served the turn of romancer or realist, as he stood in the shadow of a cedar-clump with the mysterious stillness of midnight all around him. He was a very real and substantial looking personage, and yet his gun, his pistols, his fantastic mountain garb and the wild setting in which he was framed gave him the appearance of a strong sketch meant to illustrate a story by Craddock. Above him towered the cliff at Eagle's Nest and near by was the mountain "Pocket" in which nestled the little distillery whose lurking-place had long been the elusive dream of utopian revenue officers. In a space of brilliant moonlight, Tolliver's dog, a gaunt, brindle cur, sat in statuesque worthlessness, remembering no doubt the hares he never had caught and the meatless bones he had vainly buried during a long ignoble life.

The hotel and its inmates had rendered the distillery and its furtive operatives very uneasy of late, and now as Tolliver in his due turn stood guard by night he considered the probability of having to look for some better situation for his obscure manufactory with a species of sadness which it would be impossible to describe. He thought with deep bitterness of all the annoyance he had suffered at the hands of meddling government agents and from the outside world in general and he tried to understand how any person could pretend to see justice in

such persecution. What had he done to merit being hunted like a wild beast? Nothing but buy his neighbor's apples at the fair price of twenty cents a bushel and distil them into apple brandy! Could this possibly be any injury to any government official, or to anybody else? He paid for his still, he paid for the apples, he paid fair wages to the men who worked for him, what more could be justly demanded of him?

It was while he was wholly absorbed in trying to solve this knotty problem that far above a strange clink and clatter began, which sounded to him as if it were falling from among the stars. Nothing within his knowledge or experience suggested an explanation of such a phenomenon. He felt a thrill of superstitious terror creep through his iron nerves as the aerial racket increased and seemed to whisk itself from place to place with lightning celerity. An eccentric echo due to the angles and projections of the cliff added weird effect to the sounds.

The dog uttered a low plaintive whine and crept close to his master, and even wedged himself with tremulous desperation between the knees of that wondering and startled sentinel.

The clinking and clanging soon became loud and continuous, falling in a cataract down the escarpment, accompanied now and again by small fragments of stone and soil.

At last Tolliver got control of himself sufficiently, and looked out from his shadowy station

and up towards the dizzy crown of Eagle's Nest.

Just at that moment there was a crash and a screain. He saw a wide-winged, ghostly object come over the edge and swoop down. Another scream, another and another, a tearing sound, a crushing of cedar boughs, a shower of small stones and lumps of soil.

Tolliver, frightened as he never before had been, turned and fled, followed by his ecstatic dog.

A voice, keen, clear, high, beseeching pursued him and reached his ears.

"Help! help! Oh, help!"

Surely this was the "Harnt that walks Mt. Boab!" This syren of the mountains had lured many a bunter to his doom.

"Oh, me! Oh, my! Oh, mercy on me! Help! help!"

Tolliver ran all the faster, as the voice seemed to follow him, turn as he would. He bruised his shins on angular rocks, he ran against trees, he fell over logs, and at last found himself hopelessly entangled in a net of wild grape-vines, with his enthusiastic dog still faithfully wriggling between his knees.

The plaintive voice of the syren, now greatly modified by distance, assailed his ears with piteous persistence, as he vainly struggled to free himself. The spot was dark as Erebus, being in the bottom of a ravine, and the more he exerted himself the worse off he became.

It was his turn to call for help, but if any of

his friends heard they did not heed his supplications, thinking them but baleful echoes of the Harnt's deceitful voice.

It was at the gray of dawn when at last Tolliver got clear of the vines and made his way out of the ravine. By this time he had entirely overcome his fright, and with that stubbornness characteristic of all mountain men, he betook himself back to the exact spot whence he had so precipitately retreated. His dog, forlornly nonchalant, trotted behind him to the place and resumed the seat from which the Harnt had driven him a few hours ago. In this attitude, the animal drooped his nose and indifferently sniffed a curious object lying near.

"What's thet ther' thing, Mose?" inquired Tcolliver, addressing the dog.

"Well I'll ber dorg-goned!" he added, as he picked up a woman's bonnet. "If this here don't beat the worl' an' all camp meetin'! Hit air—well, I'll ber dorged—hit air—I'm er ghost if hit aint Miss Sara' Anna Crabb's bonnet, by Ned!"

He held it up by one silk string and gazed at it with a ludicrously puzzled stare. The dog whined and wagged his tail in humble sympathy with his master's bewilderment.

"Hit's kinder interestin', haint it, Mose?" Tolliver went on dryly. "We'll hev ter look inter this here thing, won't we, Mose?"

As for Mose, he was looking into it with all his eyes. Indeed he was beginning to show

extreme interest, and his tail was pounding the ground with great rapidity.

Suddenly a thought leaped into Tolliver's brain and with a start he glanced up the escarpment, his mouth open and his brown cheeks betraying strong emotion. Mose followed his master's movements with kindling eyes, and whined dolefully, his wolfish nose lifted almost vertically.

"Is that you, Mr. Tolliver?" fell a voice out of a cedar clump a little way up the side of the cliff.

"Hit air me," he responded, as he saw Miss Crabb perched among the thick branches. She had her little red note-book open and was writing vigorously. Her yellow hair was disheveled so that it appeared to surround her face with a flickering light which to Tolliver's mind gave it a most beautiful and altogether lovely expression.

"Well, I'll ber—" he checked himself and stood in picturesque suspense.

"Now, Mr. Tolliver, won't you please help me down from here?" she demanded, closing her note-book and placing her pencil behind her ear. "I'm awfully cramped, sitting in this position so long."

The chivalrous mountaineer did not wait to be appealed to a second time, but laying down his gun to which he had clung throughout the night, he clambered up the steep face of the rock, from projection to projection, until he reached the tree in which Miss Crabb sat.

Meantime she watched him with admiring eyes and just as he was about to take her in his arms and descend with her she exclaimed :

"Wait a moment, I might lose the thought, I'll just jot it down."

She took her note-book and pencil again and hurriedly made the following entry: *Sinewy, virile, lithe, hirsute, fearless, plucky, bronzed, vigorous, lank, Greek-eyed, Roman-nosed, prompt, large-eared, typical American. Good hero for dramatic, short, winning dialect story. The magazines never refuse dialect stories.*

"Now, if you please, Mr. Tolliver, I will go with you."

It was an Herculean labor, but Tolliver was a true hero. With one arm wound around her, after the fashion of the serpent in the group of the Laocoön, and with her long yellow hair streaming in crinkled jets over his shoulder, he slowly made his way down to the ground.

Meantime Mose, the dog, with true canine sympathy and helpfulness, had torn the bonnet into pathetic shreds, and was now lying half asleep under a tree with a bit of ribbon in his teeth.

"Well, I'll jest ber—beg parding Miss Crabb, but thet ther dog hev et up yer head-gear," said Tolliver as he viewed with dilating eyes the scattered fragments.

She comprehended her calamity with one swift glance, but she had caught a new dialect phrase at the same time.

"Head-gear, you call it, I believe?" she inquired, again producing book and pencil.

"Beg parding all over, Miss Crabb, I meant bonnet," he hurried to say.

"Oh, it's all right, I assure you," she replied, writing rapidly, "it's a delightfully fresh and artistic bit of special coloring."

Miss Crabb's clothes were badly torn and she looked as if she had spent the night wretchedly, but with the exception of a few slight scratches and bruises she was unhurt.

"Well jes' look a there, will ye!" exclaimed Tolliver as he spied Mose. There was more of admiration than anger in his voice. "Ef thet ther 'fernal dog haint got yer chin-ribbon in his ole mouth, I'm er rooster!"

"Chin-ribbon," repeated Miss Crabb, making a note, "I'm er rooster," and she smiled with intense satisfaction. "You don't know, Mr. Tolliver, how much I am indebted to you."

"Not a tall, Miss Crabb, not a tall. Don't mention of it," he humbly said, "hit taint wo'th talkin' erbout."

The morning was in full blow now and the cat-birds were singing sweetly down the ravine. Overhead a patch of blue sky gleamed and burned with the true empyrean glow. Far away, down in the valley by the little river, a breakfast horn was blown with many a mellow flourish and a cool gentle breeze with dew on its wings fanned Miss Crabb's sallow cheeks and rustled Tolliver's tawny beard. At the sound of the horn Mose sprang to his feet and

loped away with the bit of ribbon fluttering from his mouth.

X.

It was late in the forenoon before it was discovered at Hotel Helicon that Miss Crabb was missing, and even then there arose so many doubts about the tragic side of the event that before any organized search for her had been begun, she returned, appearing upon the scene mounted behind Wesley Tolliver on a small, thin, wiry mountain mule.

Crane and Peck each drew a deep, swift sigh of relief upon seeing her, for the sense of guilt in their breasts had been horrible. They had by tacit conspiracy prevented any examination of Eagle's Nest, for they dreaded what might be disclosed. Of course they did not mean to hide the awful fate of the poor girl, nor would they willingly have shifted the weight of their dreadful responsibility, but it was all so much like a vivid dream, so utterly strange and theatrical as it arose in their memories, that they could not fully believe in it.

Miss Crabb looked quite ludicrous perched behind the tall mountaineer on such a dwarfish mule. Especially comical was the effect of the sun-bonnet she wore. She had accepted this article of apparel from Tolliver's mother, and it appeared to clutch her head in its stiff folds and to elongate her face by sheer compression.

Everybody laughed involuntarily, as much

for joy at her safe return as in response to the demand of her melodramatic appearance.

"I've brung back yer runerway," said Tolliver cheerily, as he helped the young woman to dismount. "She clim down the mounting by one pertic'ler trail an' I jes' fotch her up by t'other."

Miss Crabb spoke not a word, but ran into the hotel and up to her room without glancing to the right or to the left. In her great haste the stiff old sun-bonnet fell from her head and tumbled upon the ground.

"Wush ye'd jes' be erbligin' enough ter han' thet there head-gear up ter me, Mister," said Tolliver addressing Crane, who was standing near. "My mammy 'd raise er rumpage ef I'd go back 'thout thet ther bonnet."

With evident reluctance and disgust Crane gingerly took up the fallen article and gave it to Tolliver, who thanked him so politely that all the onlooking company felt a glow of admiration for the uncouth and yet rather handsome cavalier.

"Thet gal," he observed, glancing in the direction that Miss Crabb had gone, "she hev the winnin'est ways of any gal I ever seed in my life. Ye orter seen 'er up inter thet there bush a writin' in 'er book! She'd jes' tumbled kerwhummox down the clift an' hed lodged ther' in them cedars; but as she wer' a writin' when she started ter fall w'y she struck a writin' an' jes' kep' on at it same's if nothin' had happened. She's game, thet ole gal air, I tell

ye! She don't propose for any little thing like fallin' off'n a clift, ter interfere with w'at she's a doin' at thet time, le' me say ter ye. Lord but she wer' hongry, though, settin' up ther a writin' all night, an' it'd a done ye good to a seen 'er eat thet chicken and them cake-biscuits my mammy cooked for breakfast. She air a mos' alarmin' fine gal, for a fac'."

At this point Dufour came out of the hotel, and when Tolliver saw him there was an instantaneous change in the expression of the mountaineer's face.

"Well I'll ber dorged!" he exclaimed with a smile of delight, "ef ther' haint the same leetle John the Baptis' what bapsonsed me down yer inter the branch! Give us yer baby-spanker, ole feller! How air ye!"

Dufour cordially shook hands with him, laughing in a jolly way.

"Fust an' only man at ever ducked me, I'm here ter say ter ye," Tolliver went on, in a cheery, half-bantering tone, and sitting sidewise on the mule. "Ye mus' hev' a sight o' muscle onto them duck legs and bantam arms o' your'n."

He had the last word still in his mouth when the little beast suddenly put down its head and flung high its hind feet.

"Woirp!" they heard him cry, as he whirled over in the air and fell sprawling on the ground.

Dufour leaped forward to see if the man was

hurt, but Tolliver was upright in an instant and grinning sheepishly.

"Thet's right, Bonus," he said to the mule which stood quite still in its place, 'thet's right ole fel, try ter ac' smart in comp'ny. Yer a beauty now, ain't ye?"

He replaced his hat, which had fallen from his head, patted the mule caressingly on the neck, then lightly vaulting to the old saddle-tree, he waved his hand to the company and turning dashed at a gallop down the mountain road, his spurs jingling merrily as he went.

"What a delicious character!"

"What precious dialect!"

"How typically American!"

"A veritable hero!"

Everybody at Hotel Helicon appeared to have been captivated by this droll fellow.

"How like Tolstoi's lovely Russians he is!" observed Miss Fidelia Arkwright, of Boston, a near-sighted maiden who did translations and who doted on virile literature.

"When I was in Russia, I visited Tolstoi at his shoe-shop—" began Crane, but nobody appeared to hear him, so busy were all in making notes for a dialect story.

"Tolstoi is the greatest fraud of the nineteenth century," said Peck. "That shoe-making pretence of his is about on a par with his genius in genuineness and sincerity. His novels are great chunks of raw filth, rank, garlic-garnished and hideous. We touch them only because the

French critics have called them savory. If the *Revue de Deux Mondes* should praise a Turkish novel we could not wait to read it before we joined in. Tolstoi is remarkable for two things: his coarseness and his vulgar disregard of decency and truth. His life and his writings are alike crammed with absurdities and contradictory puerilities which would be laughable but for their evil tendencies."

"But, my dear sir, how then do you account for the many editions of Tolstoi's books?" inquired the historian, R. Hobbs Lucas.

"Just as I account for the editions of Cowper and Montgomery and Wordsworth and even Shakespeare," responded Peck. "You put a ten per cent. author's royalty on all those dear classics and see how soon the publishers will quit uttering them! If Tolstoi's Russian raw meat stories were put upon the market in a fair competition with American novels the latter would beat them all hollow in selling."

"Oh, we ought to have international copyright," plaintively exclaimed a dozen voices, and so the conversation ended.

Strangely enough, each one of the company in growing silent did so in order to weigh certain suggestions arising out of Peck's assertions. It was as if a score of semi-annual statements of copyright accounts were fluttering in the breeze, and it was as if a score of wistful voices had whispered:

"How in the world do publishers grow rich when the books they publish never sell?"

Perhaps Gaspard Dufour should be mentioned as appearing to have little sympathy with Peck's theory or with the inward mutterings it had engendered in the case of the rest of the company.

If there was any change in Dufour's face it was expressed in a smile of intense self-satisfaction.

XI.

IT was, of course, not long that the newspapers of our wide-awake country were kept from giving their readers very picturesque glimpses of what was going on among the dwellers on Mt. Boab. The humorists of the press, those charming fellows whose work is so enjoyable when performed upon one's neighbor and so excruciating when turned against oneself, saw the vulnerable points of the situation and let go a broadside of ridicule that reverberated from the Atlantic to the Pacific. It became a matter of daily amusement among the inmates of Hotel Helicon to come together in little groups and discuss these humorous missiles fired upon them from California, Texas, Arkansas and Wisconsin, from Brooklyn, Pittsburgh, Atlanta, and Oil-City, Detroit and—, but from everywhere, indeed.

When it came to Miss Crabb's adventure, every humorist excelled himself in descriptive smartness and in cunning turns of ironical phrasing. The head-line experts did telling work in the same connection. All this was

perfectly understood and enjoyed at home, out foreigners, especially the English, stubbornly insisted upon viewing it as the high-water mark of American refinement and culture.

When that genial periodical, the Smartsburgh *Bulldozer*, announced with due gravity that Miss Crabb, a Western journalist, had leaped from the top of Mt. Boab to the valley below, and had been caught in the arms of a stalwart moonshiner, where she safely reposed, etc., the London *Times* copied the paragraph and made it a text for a heavy editorial upon the barbaric influences of Republican institutions, to which the American Minister felt bound to advert in a characteristic after-dinner speech at a London club. So humorous, however, were his remarks that he was understood to be vigorously in earnest, and the result was perfect confirmation of the old world's opinion as to the rudimentary character of our national culture.

Meantime Hotel Helicon continued to be the scene of varied if not startling incidents. In their search for local color and picturesque material, the litterateurs invaded every nook and corner of the region upon and round about Mt. Boab, sketching, making notes, recording suggestions, studying dialect, and filling their minds with the uncouth peculiarities of the mountain folk.

"It has come to this," grumbled Peck, "that American literature, its fiction I mean, is founded on dialect drivels and vulgar yawp. Look at our magazines; four-fifths of their

short stories are full of negro talk, or cracker lingo, or mountain jibberish, or New England farm yawp, or Hoosier dialect. It is horribly humiliating. It actually makes foreigners think that we are a nation of green-horns. Why, a day or two ago I had occasion to consult the article on American literature in the Encyclopædia Britannica and therein I was told in one breath how great a writer and how truly American Mr. Lowell is, and in the next breath I was informed that a poem beginning with the verse, 'Under the yaller pines I house' is one of his master-pieces! Do you see? Do you catch the drift of the Englishman's argument? To be truly great, *as an American*, one must be surpassingly vulgar, even in poetry!"

This off-hand shower of critical observation had as little effect upon the minds of Peck's hearers as a summer rain has on the backs of a flock of ducks. They even grew more vehement in their pursuit of local color.

"When I was spending a month at Rockledge castle with Lord Knownaught," said Crane, "his lordship frequently suggested that I should make a poem on the life of Jesse James."

"Well, why didn't you do it?" inquired Miss Crabb with a ring of impatience in her voice, "if you had you might have made a hit. You might have attracted some attention."

Dufour laughed heartily, as if he had caught some occult humor from the young woman's words.

"I did write it," said Crane retrospectively, "and sent it to George Dunkirk & Co."

"Well?" sighed Miss Crabb with intense interest.

"Well," replied Crane, "they rejected the MS. without reading it."

Again Dufour laughed, as if at a good joke.

"George Dunkirk & Co.!" cried Guilford Ferris, the romancer, "George Dunkirk & Co.!" They are thieves. They have been making false reports on copyright to me for five years or more!"

Dufour chuckled as if his jaws would fall off, and finally with a red face and gleaming, humorous eyes got up from the chair he was filling on the veranda, and went up to his room.

The rest of the company looked at one another inquiringly.

"Who is he, anyhow?" demanded Peck.

"That's just my query," said Ferris.

"Nobody in the house knows anything definite about him," remarked R. Hobbs Lucas.

"And yet he evidently is a distinguished person, and his name haunts me."

"So it does me," said Miss Moyne.

"I tell you he's a newspaper reporter. His cheek proves that," remarked Peck.

Miss Crabb made a note, her own cheek flaming. "I presume you call that humor," she observed, "it's about like New York's best efforts. In the West reporters are respectable people."

"I beg pardon," Peck said hastily, "I did not mean to insinuate that anybody is not respectable. Everybody is eminently respectable if I speak of them. I never trouble myself with the other kind."

"Well, I don't believe that Mr. Dufour is a reporter at all," replied Miss Crabb, with emphasis, "for he's not inquisitive, he don't make notes, and he don't appear to be writing any."

"In my opinion he's a realist—a genuine analytical, motive-dissecting, commonplace-recording, international novelist in disguise," said Ferris.

"Oh!"

"Ah!"

"Dear me!"

"But who?"

"It may be Arthur Selby himself, incog. Who knows?"

"Humph!" growled Crane with a lofty scowl, "I should think I ought to know Selby. I drank wine with him at—"

His remark was cut short by the arrival of the mail and the general scramble that followed.

Upon this occasion the number of newspapers that fell to the hand of each guest was much greater than usual, and it was soon discovered that Miss Crabb's latest letter had been forwarded to a "syndicate" and was appearing simultaneously in ninety odd different journals.

No piece of composition ever was more stunningly realistic or more impartially, nay, abjectly truthful than was that letter. It gave

a minute account of the quarrel between Peck and Crane over their attentions to Miss Moyne, the fight, Miss Crabb's fall, the subsequent adventures and all the hotel gossip of every sort. It was personal to the last degree, but it was not in the slightest libelous. No person could say that any untruth had been told, or even that any tinge of false-coloring had been laid upon the facts as recorded; and yet how merciless!

Of course Miss Crabb's name did not appear with the article, save as one of its subjects, and she saw at once that she had better guard her secret.

That was a breeze which rustled through Hotel Helicon. Everybody was supremely indignant; but there was no clue to the traitor who had thus betrayed everybody's secrets. It would be absurd to suppose that Miss Crabb was not suspected at once, on account of her constant and superfluous show of note-making, still there were others who might be guilty. Crane and Peck were indignant, the former especially ready to resent to the death any allusion to the details of the duel. Miss Moyne with the quick insight of a clever and gifted young woman, comprehended the situation in its general terms and was vexed as much as amused. The whole thing had to her mind the appearance of a melodramatic, broadly sensational sketch, in which she had played the part of the innocent, unconscious, but all-powerful heroine. Indeed the newspaper account placed

her in this unpleasant attitude before a million readers.

"A lucky affair for you, Miss Moyne," said Dufour to her, a few days later, "you cannot over-reckon the boom it will give to your latest book. You may expect a pretty round sum with your next copyright statement."

He spoke with the voice and air of one who knew how to read the signs of the day.

"But the ridiculous idea of having all this stuff about me going the rounds of the newspapers!" she responded, her beautiful patrician face showing just a hint of color.

"Don't care for it a moment," said Dufour, "it will not hurt you."

"The thought of having that hideous picture in all the patent inside pages of the cheap press, with my name under it, *en toutes lettres*, and—why it is horrible!" she went on, with trembling lips.

Dufour smiled upon her, as if indulgently, a curious, tender gleam in his eyes.

"Wait," he said, "and don't allow it to trouble you. The world discriminates pretty well, after all. It will not hurt you. It's a mighty boom for you."

She looked at him with a sudden flash in her cheeks and eyes, and exclaimed almost vehemently: "I will not permit it! They shall not do it. I cannot bear to be treated as if—as if I were a theatrical person—a variety actress!"

"My dear Miss Moyne," he hurriedly said, his own face showing a tinge of embarrassment,

"you are taking a wrong point of view, indeed you are. Wait till you see the out-come." His tone was humble and apologetic as he continued—"My opinion is that this very thing will quadruple the sales of your book."

"I don't want them quadrupled," she cried, "just look at that front hair and that nose!" She held up a newspaper for him to inspect a picture of herself, a miserable, distorted thing. "It is absolutely disgraceful. My dresses never fit like that, and who ever saw me with a man's collar on!"

Tears were in her beautiful eyes.

Dufour consoled her as best he could, though he could not resist the temptation to suggest that even a caricature of her face was sure to have in it the fascination of genuine loveliness, a suggestion which was phrased with consummate art and received with an appearance of innocence that was beyond all art.

XII.

SUMMER on Mt. Boab was much like summer on any other mountain, and life at Hotel Helicon was very like life at any other mountain hotel, save that a certain specialization due to the influence of literature and art was apparent in the present instance, giving to the house, the landscape and the intercourse of the guests a peculiar tinge, so to say, of self-consciousness and artificiality. Not that these authors, thus drawn together by the grace of a man grown suddenly rich, were very different from men and

women of other lines in life, the real peculiarity sprang out of the obligation by which every one felt bound to make the most, in a professional way, of the situation and the environment. Perhaps there was not a soul under the broad roof of Hotel Helicon, servants excepted, that did not secrete in its substance the material for a novel, a poem, or an essay which was to brim with the local life and flash with the local color of the region of Mt. Boab. Yes, there appeared to be one exception. Dufour constantly expressed a contempt for the mountaineers and their country.

"To be sure," he conceded, "to be sure there is a demand for dialect stories, and I suppose that they must be written; but for my part I cannot see why we Americans must stultify ourselves in the eyes of all the world by flooding our magazines, newspapers and books with yawp instead of with a truly characteristic American literature of a high order. There is some excuse for a quasi-negro literature, and even the Creoles might have a niche set apart for them, but dialect, on the whole, is growing to be a literary bore."

"But don't you think," said Miss Crabb, drawing her chin under, and projecting her upper teeth to such a degree that anything like realistic description would appear brutal, "don't you think, Mr. Dufour, that Mr. Tolliver would make a great character in a mountain romance?"

"No. There is nothing great in a clown, as

such," he promptly answered. "If Tolliver is great he would be great without his jargon."

"Yes," she admitted, "but the picturesqueness, the color, the contrast, you know, would be gone. Now Craddock —"

"Craddock is excellent, so long as there is but one Craddock, but when there are some dozens of him it is different," said Dufour, "and it is the process of multiplication that I object to. There's Cable, who is no longer a genius of one species. The writers of Creole stories are swarming by the score, and, poor old Uncle Remus! everybody writes negro dialect now. Literary claim-jumpers are utterly conscienceless. The book market will soon be utterly ruined."

Miss Crabb puffed out her lean sallow cheeks and sighed heavily.

"I had hoped," she said, "to get my novel on the market before this, but I have not yet found a publisher to suit me."

She winced inwardly at this way of expressing the fact that every publisher, high and low, far and near, had declined her MS. out of hand; but she could not say the awful truth in its simplest terms, while speaking to one so prosperous as Dufour. She felt that she must at all hazards preserve a reasonable show of literary independence. Crane came to her aid.

"One publisher is just as good as another," he said almost savagely. "They are all thieves. They report every book a failure, save those they own outright, and yet they all get rich. I shall publish for myself my next volume."

Dufour smiled grimly and turned away. It was rather monotonous, this iteration and reiteration of so grave a charge against the moral character of publishers, and this threat of Crane's to become his own publisher was a bit of unconscious and therefore irresistible humor.

"It's too pathetic to be laughed at," Dufour thought, as he strolled along to where Miss Moyne sat under a tree, "but that Kentuckian actually thinks himself a poet!"

With all his good nature and kind heartedness, Dufour could be prejudiced, and he drew the line at what he called the "prevailing tendency toward boastful prevarication among Kentucky gentlemen."

As he walked away he heard Crane saying:

"George Dunkirk & Co. have stolen at least twenty thousand dollars in royalties from me during the past three years."

It was the voice of Ferris that made interrogative response:

"Is Dunkirk your publisher?"

"Yes, or rather my robber."

"Glad of it, misery loves company."

Dufour half turned about and cast a quick glance at the speakers. He did not say anything, however, but resumed his progress toward Miss Moyne, who had just been joined by Mrs. Nancy Jones Black, a stoutish and oldish woman very famous on account of having assumed much and done little. Mrs. Nancy Jones Black was from Boston. She was president of the Woman's Antiquarian Club, of the Ladies' Greek

Association, of The Sappho Patriotic Club, of the Newport Fashionable Near-sighted Club for the study of Esoteric Transcendentalism, and it may not be catalogued how many more societies and clubs. She was a great poet who had never written any great poem, a great essayist whom publishers and editors avoided, whom critics regarded as below mediocrity, but of whom everybody stood in breathless awe, and she was an authority in many literary and philosophical fields of which she really knew absolutely nothing. She was a reformer and a person of influence who had made a large number of her kinsfolk famous as poets and novelists without any apparent relevancy between the fame and the literary work done. If your name were Jones and you could trace out your relationship to Mrs. Nancy Jones Black and could get Mrs. Nancy Jones Black interested in your behalf, you could write four novels a year with great profit ever afterward.

As Dufour approached he heard Miss Moyne say:

"I publish my poor little works with George Dunkirk & Co. and the firm has been very kind to me. I feel great encouragement, but I don't see how I can bear this horrible newspaper familiarity and vulgarity."

"My dear child," said Mrs. Nancy Jones Black, placing her plump, motherly hand on the young woman's arm, "you must not appear to notice it. Do as did my daughter Lois when they assailed her first little novel with sugar-

plum praise. Why, when it began to leak out that Lois was the author of *A Sea-Side Symphony* the poor girl was almost smothered with praise. Of course I had to take the matter in hand and under my advice Lois went abroad for six months. When she returned she found herself famous."

"Talking shop?" inquired Dufour, accepting the offer of a place on the bench beside Mrs. Black.

"Yes," said she, with a comprehensive wave of her hand, "I am taking Miss Moyne under my wing, so to say, and am offering her the comfort of my experience. She is a genius whom it doesn't spoil to praise. She's going to be the next sensation in the East."

"I suggested as much to her," said Dufour. "She is already on a strong wave, but she must try and avoid being refractory, you know." He said this in a straightforward, business way, but his voice was touched with a certain sort of admirable tenderness.

Miss Moyne was looking out over the deep, hazy valley, her cheeks still warm with the thought of that newspaper portrait with its shabby clothes and towsled bangs. What was fame, bought at such a price! She bridled a little, but did not turn her head as she said:

"I am not refractory, I am indignant, and I have a right to be. They cannot justify the liberty they have taken, besides I will not accept notoriety—I—"

"There, now, dear, that is what Lois said, and

Milton John Jones, my nephew, was at first bound that he wouldn't let Tom, my brother, advertise him; but he soon saw his way clear. I assure you, and now he publishes four serials at once. Be prudent, dear, be prudent."

"But the idea of picturing me with great barbaric rings in my ears and with a corkscrew curl on each side and—"

Dufour interrupted her with a laugh almost hearty enough to be called a guffaw, and Mrs. Black smiled indulgently as if at a clever child which must be led, not driven.

"Being conscious that you really are stylish and beautiful, you needn't care for the picture," said Dufour, in a tone of sturdy sincerity.

"There is nothing so effective as a foil," added Mrs. Black.

Miss Moyne arose and with her pretty chin slightly elevated walked away.

"How beautiful she is!" exclaimed Dufour, gazing after her, "and I am delighted to know that you are taking an interest in her."

Mrs. Black smiled complacently, and with a bland sidewise glance at him, remarked:

"She grows upon one."

"Yes," said he, with self-satisfied obtuseness, "yes, she is magnetic, she is a genuine genius."

"Precisely, she stirs one's heart strangely," replied Mrs. Black.

"Yes, I have noted that; it's very remarkable."

"You should speak of it to her at the first opportunity."

Dufour started a little, flushed and finally laughed as one does who discovers a bit of clever and harmless treachery.

"If I only dared," he presently said, with something very like fervor in his tone. "If I only dared."

Mrs. Black looked at him a moment, as if measuring in her mind his degree of worthiness, then with a wave of her hand she said:

"Never do you dare to dare. Mr. Crane stands right in your path."

Dufour leaped to his feet with the nimbleness and dangerous celerity of a tiger.

"Crane!" he exclaimed with a world of contempt in his voice, "If he—" but he stopped short and laughed at himself.

Mrs. Black looked at him with a patronizing expression in her eyes.

"Leave it to me," she said, in her most insinuating tone.

XIII.

CRANE tried not to show the bitterness he felt as he saw his hope of winning the favor of Miss Moyne fading rapidly out, but now and again a cloud of irresistible melancholy fell upon him.

At such times it was his habit to lean upon the new fence that circumscribed Hotel Helicon and dreamily smoke a cigar. He felt a blind desire to assassinate somebody, if he could only know who. Of course not Peck, for Peck, too,

was disconsolate, but somebody, anybody who would claim the place of a successful rival.

One morning while he stood thus regaling himself with his tobacco and his misery, Tolliver rode up, on a handsome horse this time, and, lifting his broad hat, bowed picturesquely and said:

"Good mornin,' Kyernel, how're ye this mornin'?"

"Good morning," growled Crane.

Tolliver looked off over the valley and up at the sky which was flecked with tags of fleece-cloud.

"Hit look like hit mought rain in er day er two," he remarked.

"Yes, I don't know, quite likely," said Crane, gazing evasively in another direction.

"Ever'body's well, I s'pose, up ther' at the tavern?" inquired Tolliver.

"I believe so," was the cold answer.

Tolliver leaned over the pommel of his saddle-tree and combed his horse's mane with his sinewy fingers. Meantime the expression in his face was one of exceeding embarrassment blent with cunning.

"Kyernel, c'u'd ye do a feller a leetle yerrant what's of importance?" he asked with peculiar faltering.

"Do what?" inquired Crane lifting his eyebrows and turning the cigar in his mouth.

"Jest a leetle frien'ly job o' kindness," said Tolliver, "jest ter please ask thet young ledly — thet Miss Crabb 'at I fotch up yer on er mule

tother day, ye know ; well, jest ax her for me ef I moughtn't come in an' see 'er on pertic'lar an' pressin' business, ef ye please, sir."

By this time the mountaineer's embarrassment had become painfully apparent. Any good judge of human nature could have seen at once that he was almost overcome with the burden and worry of the matter in hand. His cheeks were pale and his eyes appeared to be fading into utter vacancy of expression. Crane told him that there was no need to be particularly formal, that if he would go in and ask for Miss Crabb she would see him in the parlor.

"But, Kyernel, hit's er private, sort er confidential confab 'at I must hev wi' 'er, an'—"

"Oh, well, that's all right, you'll not be interrupted in the parlor."

"Air ye pine blank shore of it, Kyernel?"

"Certainly."

"Dead shore?"

"Quite, I assure you."

Crane had become interested in Tolliver's affair, whatever it might be. He could not keep from sharing the man's evident intensity of mood, and all the time he was wondering what the matter could be. Certainly no common-place subject could so affect a man of iron like Tolliver. The poet's lively imagination was all aglow over the mystery, but it could not formulate any reasonable theory of explanation.

Miss Crabb appeared in the parlor promptly and met Tolliver with a cordiality that, instead

of reassuring him, threw him into another fit of embarrassment from which he at first made no effort to recover. His wide-brimmed hat, as he twirled it on his knees, quivered convulsively in accord with the ague of excitement with which his whole frame was shaking. He made certain soundless movements with his lips, as if muttering to himself.

Miss Crabb at first did not notice his confusion, and went on talking rapidly, reiterating thanks for the kindness he had shown her in her recent mishap, and managing to put into her voice some tones that to him sounded very tender and sweet.

"You don't know—you can't imagine, Mr. Tolliver, what I suffered during that awful night," she said, turning her head to one side and drawing her chin under until it almost disappeared in the lace at her throat. "It was horrible."

Tolliver looked at her helplessly, his mouth open, his eyes dull and sunken.

"How did you happen to discover me up there, anyway, Mr. Tolliver?" she demanded, leaning toward him and laughing a little.

"The dog he treed ye, an' then I seed ye settin' up ther' er writin' away," he manged to say a wave of relief passing over his face at the sound of his own voice.

"It was perfectly ridiculous, perfectly preposterous," she exclaimed, "but I'm mighty thankful that I was not hurt."

"Yes, well ye mought be, Miss Crabb," he

stammered out. "Wonder ye wasn't scrunched inter pieces an' scattered all around ther'."

She slipped out her book, took a pencil from over her ear and made a note.

Tolliver eyed her dolefully. "How do you spell scrunched, Mr. Tolliver, in your dialect?" she paused to inquire.

His jaw fell a little lower for a moment, then he made an effort:

"S—q—r—u—" he paused and shook his head, "S—q—k—no thet's not hit—s—k—q—r—dorg ef I ken spell thet word—begging yer parding, hit air 'tirely too hard for me." He settled so low in his chair that his knees appeared almost as high as his head.

"All right," she cheerily exclaimed, "I can get it phonetically. It's a new word. I don't think either Craddock or Johnson uses it, it's valuable."

There was a silence during which Miss Crabb thoughtfully drummed on her projecting front teeth with the end of her pencil.

Tolliver nerved himself and said:

"Miss Crabb I—I, well, ye know, I—that is, begging yer parding, but I hev something' I want er say ter ye, ef ye please." He glanced furtively around, as if suspecting that some person lay secreted among the curtains of a bay window hard by. And indeed, Dufour was there, lightly indulging in a morning nap, while the mountain breeze flowed over him. He was in a deep bamboo chair behind those very curtains.

"Oh, certainly, certainly, Mr. Tolliver, go on, I shall be delighted, charmed indeed, to hear what you have to say," Miss Crabb responded, turning a fresh leaf of her note-book and putting on a hopeful look.

"I hope ye'll stick ter thet after I've done said it ter ye," he proceeded to say, "but dorg on me ef I know how ter begin sayin' it."

"Oh, just go right on, it's all right; I assure you, Mr. Tolliver, I am very anxious to hear."

"Mebbe ye air, I don't dispute yer word, but I feel mighty onery all the same."

"Onery is a Western word," mused Miss Crabb, making a note.

"Proceed, Mr. Tolliver," she continued after a pause, "proceed, I am listening with great interest."

"What I'm ergwine ter state ter ye mought mek ye mad, but hit can't be holp, I jest hev ter say it—I air jest erbleeged ter say it."

His voice was husky and he was assuming a tragic air. Miss Crabb felt a strange thrill creep throughout her frame as a sudden suspicion seemed to leap back and forth between her heart and her brain.

"No, I assure you that I could not be angry with you, Mr. Tolliver, under any circumstances," she murmured, "you have been so very kind to me."

"Hit air awful confusin' an' hit mek a feller feel smaller 'n a mouse ter speak it right out, but then hit air no foolishness, hit air pine blank business."

"Of course," said Miss Crabb pensively, "of course you feel some embarrassment."

He hitched himself up in his chair and crossed his legs.

"Ef ye don't like w'at I say, w'y I won't blame ye a bit. I feel jest as if I wer a doin' somethin' 'at I hadn't orter do, but my mammy she say I must, an' that do everlastin'ly settle it."

"Yes, your mother's advice is always safe."

"Safe, I shed say so! Hit's mighty onsafe fer me not ter foller it, I kin tell ye. She'd thump my old gourd fer me in ermazin' style ef I didn't."

"Thump my old gourd," repeated Miss Crabb, making a note. "Go on, Mr. Tolliver, please."

"S'pose I mought as well, seein' 'at it has ter be said." He paused, faltered, and then proceeded: "Well, beggin' yer parding, Miss Crabb, but ever sence ye wer' down ther' ter we all's cabin, hit's been a worryin' my mammy and me, an' we hev' talked it all over an' over."

"Yes," sighed Miss Crabb.

"Hit's not the cost of them beads, Miss Crabb, they air not wo'th much, but they was guv ter mammy by her aunt Mandy Ann Bobus, an' she feel like she jest can't give 'em up."

Miss Crabb looked puzzled.

"Ef ye'll jest erblige me an' hand them beads over ter me, I'll never say er wo'd ter nobody ner nothin'."

"Mr. Tolliver, what in the world do you

mean?" cried Miss Crabb, rising and standing before him with a face that flamed with sudden anger.

"Ye mought er tuck 'em kinder accidentally, ye know," he suggested in a conciliatory tone, rising also.

"Mr. Tolliver!" she almost screamed.

"Ther' now, be still, er ye'll let ever'body know all erbout it," he half whispered. "Hit'd be disgraceful."

"Mr. Tolliver!"

"Sh-h-h! They'll hear ye!"

"Get right out of this room, you—

Just then Dufour, who had been slowly aroused from his nap and who while yet half asleep had overheard much of what had been said, stepped forth from behind the curtains and stood looking from one to the other of the excited actors in the little drama.

"What's up?" he, demanded bluntly.

"He's accusing me of stealing beads!" cried Miss Crabb. "He's insulting me!"

"What!" exclaimed Dufour, glaring at Tolliver.

"I feel mighty onery a doin' it," said Tolliver, "but hit air pine blank mighty suspicious, Kyernel, hit air for a fac'."

Dufour looked as if he hardly knew which he should do, laugh boisterously, or fling Tolliver out of the window, but he quickly pulled himself together and said calmly:

"You are wrong, sir, and you must apologize."

"Certingly, certingly," said Tolliver, "thet air jest what I air a doin'. I beg parding er thousan' times fer sayin' what I hev, but, Kyernel, hit air a Lor' a mighty's truth, all the same, le' me tell ye. Them beads was ther' w'en she come, an' they was gone w'en she was gone, an'—"

"Stop that! Take back those words or I'll throw you—"

Dufour took a step towards Tolliver, but stopped suddenly when the latter drew a huge revolver with one hand and a long crooked bowie-knife with the other and said:

"No yer don't, Kyernel, not by er good deal. Jest ye open yer bread-trap ergain an' I'll jest clean up this ole shanty in erbout two minutes."

It may not be inferred how this bit of dramatic experience would have ended had not a lean, wizzen-faced mountain lad rushed in just then with a three-cornered piece of paper in his hand upon which was scrawled the following message:

"I hev fown them beeds. They wus in mi terbacker bag."

Tolliver read this and wilted.

The boy was panting and almost exhausted. He had run all the way up the mountain from the Tolliver cabin.

"Yer mammy say kum home," he gasped.

"Hit air jest as I 'spected," said Tolliver. "Mammy hev made a pine blank eejit of me again." He handed the message to Dufour as

he spoke. His pistol and knife had disappeared.

A full explanation followed, and at the end of a half-hour Tolliver went away crest-fallen but happy.

As for Miss Crabb she had made a number of valuable dialect notes.

Dufour promised not to let the rest of the guests know what had just happened in the parlor.

XIV.

"LITERATURE-MAKING has not yet taken the rank of a profession, but of late the world has modified its opinion as to the ability of literary people to drive a close bargain, or to manage financial affairs with success. Many women and some men have shown that it is possible for a vivid imagination and a brilliant style in writing to go close along with a practical judgment and a fair share of selfish shrewdness in matters of bargain and sale. Still, after all, it remains true that a strong majority of literary people are of the Micawber genus, with great faith in what is to turn up, always nicely balancing themselves on the extreme verge of expectancy and gazing over into the promise-land of fame and fortune with pathetically hopeful, yet awfully hollow eyes. Indeed there is no species of gambling more uncertain in its results or more irresistibly fascinating to its victims than literary gambling. Day after day, month after month, year after year, the

deluded, enthusiastic, ever defeated but never discouraged writer plies his pen, besieges the publishers and editors, receives their rebuffs, rough or smooth, takes back his declined manuscripts, tries it over and over, sweats, fumes, execrates, coaxes, bullies, raves, re-writes, takes a new *nom de plume* and new courage, goes on and on to the end. Here or there rumor goes that some fortunate literator has turned the right card and has drawn a great prize; this rumor, never quite authentic, is enough to re-invigorate all the fainting scribblers and to entice new victims into the gilded casino of the Cadmean vice. The man who manipulates the literary machine is the publisher, that invisible person who usually grows rich upon the profits of unsuccessful books. He it is who inveigles the infatuated young novelist, essayist, or poet, into the beautiful bunco-den of the book business and there fastens him and holds him as long as he will not squeal; but at the first note of remonstrance he kicks him out and fills his place with a fresh victim. The literary Micawber, however, does not despair. He may be a little silly from the effect of the summersault to which the publisher's boot has treated him, but after a distraught look about him he gets up, brushes the dust off his seedy clothes and goes directly back into the den again with another manuscript under his arm and with a feverish faith burning in his deep-set eyes. What serene and beautiful courage, by the way, have the literary women! Of course the monster who presides

at the publisher's desk cannot be as brutal to her as he is to men, but he manipulates her copyright statements all the same, so that her book never passes the line of fifteen hundred copies sold. How can we ever account for a woman who has written forty-three novels under such circumstances and has died, finally, a devout Christian and a staunch friend of her publisher? Poor thing! up to the hour of her demise, white-haired, wrinkled, over-worked, nervous and semi-paralytic, she nursed the rosy hope that to-morrow, or at the very latest, the day after to-morrow, the reward of all her self-devotion would come to her in the form of a liberal copyright statement from her long-suffering and charitable publisher.

"Out in the West they have a disease called milk-sickness, an awful malady, of which everybody stands in deadly terror, but which nobody has ever seen. If you set out to find a case of milk-sickness it is like following a *will-o'-the-wisp*, it is always just a little way farther on, over in the next settlement; you never find it. The really successful author in America is, like the milk-sickness, never visible, except on the remote horizon. You hear much of him, but you never have the pleasure of shaking his cunning right hand. The fact is, he is a myth. On the other hand, however, the American cities are full of successful publishers who have become millionaires upon the profits of books which have starved their authors. Of course this appears to be a paradox, but I suppose that

it can be explained by the rule of profit and loss. The author's loss is the publisher's profit."

The foregoing is, in substance, the opening part of an address delivered by Ferris before the assembled guests of Hotel Helicon.

Mrs. Nancy Jones Black presided at the meeting; indeed she always presided at meetings. On this occasion, which was informal and impromptu, Ferris was in excellent mood for speaking, as he just had been notified by a letter from Dunkirk & Co. that he was expected to pay in advance for the plates of his new romance, *A Mysterious Missive*, and that a personal check would not be accepted—a draft on New York must be sent forthwith. Although Ferris was a thoroughly good fellow, who cared nothing for money as money, this demand for a sum the half of which he could not command if his life were at stake, hit him like a bullet-stroke. A chance to talk off the soreness of the wound was accepted with avidity. He felt guilty of a meanness, it is true, in thus stirring up old troubles and opening afresh ancient hurts in the breasts of his listening friends; but the relief to him was so great that he could not forego it. "The American publisher," he went on, "proclaims himself a fraud by demanding of the author a contract which places the author's business wholly in the control of the publisher. I take it that publishers are just as honest and just as dishonest, as any other class of respectable men. You know and I know, that, as a rule, the man who trusts his business entirely to others will,

in the long run, be robbed. Administrators of estates rob the heirs, in two-thirds of the instances, as every probate lawyer well knows. Every merchant has to treat his clerks and salesmen as if they were thieves, or if he do not they will become thieves. The government has to appoint bank examiners to watch the bankers, and yet they steal. The Indian agents steal from the government. Senators steal, aldermen steal, Wall street men steal from one another and from everybody else. Canada is overflowing with men who have betrayed and robbed those who trusted their business with them. Even clergymen (that poorly paid and much-abused class) now and again fall before the temptation offered by the demon of manipulated returns of trust funds. The fact is, one may feel perfectly safe in saying that in regard to all the professions, trades, and occupations, there is absolutely no safety in trusting one's affairs wholly in the hands of another. (Great applause). Even your milkman waters the milk and the dairyman sells you butter that never was in a churn. If you neglect to keep a pass-book your grocer runs up the bill to— (a great rustle, and some excited whispering) up to something enormous. Of course it is not everybody that is dishonest, but experience shows that if a man has the temptation to defraud his customers constantly before him, with absolutely no need to fear detection, he will soon reason himself into believing it his

right to have the lion's share of all that goes into his hands.

"Now isn't it strange, in view of the premises, that nobody ever heard of such a thing as a publisher being convicted of making false returns? Is it possible that the business of book-publishing is so pure and good of itself that it attracts to it none but perfect men? (Great applause). Publishers do fail financially once in a while, but their books of accounts invariably show that just eleven hundred and forty copies of each copyrighted book on their lists have been sold to date, no more, no less. (Suppressed applause). Nobody ever saw cleaner or better balanced books of accounts than those kept by the publishers. They foot up correctly to a cent. Indeed it would be a very strange thing if a man couldn't make books balance under such circumstances! (Prolonged hand-clapping). I am rather poor at double entry, but I fancy I could make a credit of eleven hundred and forty copies sold, so as to have it show up all right. (Cheers). I must not lose my head in speaking on this subject, for I cannot permit you to misunderstand my motive. So long as authors submit to the per centum method of publication, so long they will be the prey of the publishers. The only method by which justice can be assured to both author and publisher is the cash-sale method. If every author in America would refuse to let his manuscript go out of hand before he had received the cash value for it, the trade would

soon adjust itself properly. In that case the author's reputation would be his own property. So soon as he had made an audience his manuscripts would command a certain price. If one publisher would not pay enough for it another would. As the method now is, it makes little difference whether the author have a reputation or not. Indeed most publishers prefer to publish the novels, for example, of clever tyros, because these fledglings are so proud of seeing themselves in print that they never think of questioning copyright statements. Eleven hundred and forty copies usually will delight them almost beyond endurance. (Laughter and applause). Go look at the book lists of the publishers and you will feel the truth of what I have said.

"Now let me ask you if you can give, or if any publisher can give one solitary honest reason why the publishing business should not be put upon a cash basis—a manuscript for so much money? The publisher controls his own business, he knows every nook and corner, every leaf and every line of it, and he should be able to say, just as the corn-merchant does, I will give you so much, to which the author would say: I will take it, or I will not take it. But what is the good of standing here and arguing? You believe every word I speak, but you don't expect to profit by it. You will go on gambling at the publisher's faro table just as long as he will smile and deal the cards. Some of these

days you will win, you think. Poor deluded wretches, go on and die in the faith!"

No sooner had Ferris ended than Lucas the historian arose and expressed grave doubts as to the propriety of the address. He was decidedly of the opinion that authors could not afford to express themselves so freely and, if he must say it, recklessly. How could Mr. Ferris substantiate by proof any of the damaging allegations he had made against publishers of high standing? What Mr. Ferris had said might be strictly true, but the facts were certainly, very hard to come at, he thought. He hoped that Mr. Ferris's address would not be reported to the press (here he glanced appealingly at Miss Crabb), at least not as the sense of the meeting. Such a thing would, in his opinion, be liable to work a great harm to all present. He felt sure that the publishers would resent the whole thing as malicious and libellous.

Throughout the audience there was a nervous stirring, a looking at one another askance. It was as if a cold wave had flowed over them. Nobody had anything further to say, and it was a great relief when Dufour moved an adjournment *sine die*, which was carried by a vote that suggested a reserve of power. Every face in the audience, with the exception of Dufour's, wore a half-guilty look, and everybody crept silently out of the room.

XV.

It caused quite a commotion on Mt. Boab when Bartley Hubbard and Miss Henrietta Stackpole, newspaper people from Boston, arrived at Hotel Helicon. Miss Stackpole had just returned from Europe, and Bartley Hubbard had run down from Boston for a week to get some points for his paper. She had met Mr. Henry James on the continent and Hubbard had dined with Mr. Howells just before leaving Boston.

No two persons in all the world would have been less welcome among the guests at the hotel, just then, than were these professional reporters. Of course everybody tried to give them a cordial greeting, but they were classed along with Miss Crabb as dangerous characters whom it would be folly to snub. Miss Moyne was in downright terror of them, associating the thought of them with those ineffable pictures of herself which were still appearing at second and third hand in the "patent insides" of the country journals, but she was very good to them, and Miss Stackpole at once attached herself to her unshakably. Hubbard did likewise with little Mrs. Philpot, who amused him mightily with her strictures upon analytical realism in fiction.

"I do think that Mr. Howells treated you most shamefully," she said to him. "He had no right to represent you as a disagreeable person who was cruel to his wife and who had no moral stamina."

Hubbard laughed as one who hears an absurd joke. "Oh, Howells and I have an understanding. We are really great friends," he said. "I sat to him for my portrait and I really think he flattered me. I managed to keep him from seeing some of my ugliest lines."

"Now you are not quite sincere," said Mrs. Philpot, glancing over him from head to foot. "You are not so bad as he made you out to be. It's one of Mr. Howells's hobbies to represent men as rather flabby nonentities and women as invalids or dolls."

"He's got the men down fine," replied Hubbard, "but I guess he is rather light on women. You will admit, however, that he dissects feminine meanness and inconsequence with a deft turn."

"He makes fun of women," said Mrs. Philpot, a little testily, "he caricatures them, wreaks his humor on them; but you know very well that he misrepresents them even in his most serious and *quasi* truthful moods."

Hubbard laughed, and there was something essentially vulgar in the notes of the laugh. Mrs. Philpot admitted this mentally, and she found herself shrinking from his steadfast but almost conscienceless eyes.

"I imagine I shouldn't be as bad a husband as he did me into, but—"

Mrs. Philpot interrupted him with a start and a little cry.

"Dear me! and aren't you married?" she

asked in exclamatory deprecation of what his words had implied.

He laughed again very coarsely and looked at her with eyes that almost lured. "Married!" he exclaimed, "do I look like a marrying man? A newspaper man can't afford to marry."

"How strange," reflected Mrs. Philpot, "how funny, and Mr. Howells calls himself a realist!"

"Realist!" laughed Hubbard, "why he does not know enough about the actual world to be competent to purchase a family horse. He's a capital fellow, good and true and kind-hearted, but what does he know about affairs? He doesn't even know how to flatter women!"

"How absurd!" exclaimed little Mrs. Philpot, but Hubbard could not be sure for the life of him just what she meant the expression to characterize.

"And you like Mr. Howells?" she inquired.

"Like him! everybody likes him," he cordially said.

"Well, you are quite different from Miss Crabb. *She* hates Maurice Thompson for putting *her* into a story."

"Oh, well," said Hubbard, indifferently, "women are not like men. They take life more seriously. If Thompson had had more experience he would not have tampered with a newspaper woman. He's got the whole crew down on him. Miss Stackpole hates him almost as fiercely as she hates Henry James."

"I don't blame her," exclaimed Mrs. Philpot, "it's mean and contemptible for men to caricature women."

"Oh, I don't know," yawned Hubbard, "it all goes in a lifetime."

At this opportune moment Miss Crabb and Miss Stackpole joined them, coming arm in arm, Miss Crabb looking all the more sallow and slender in comparison with the plump, well-fed appearance of her companion.

"May I introduce you to Miss Crabb of the *Ringville Star*, Mr. Hubbard," Miss Stackpole asked, in a high but by no means rich voice, as she fastened her steady, button-like eyes on Mrs. Philpot.

Hubbard arose lazily and went through the process of introduction perfunctorily, giving Miss Crabb a sweeping but indifferent glance.

"There's an impromptu pedestrian excursion on hand," said Miss Stackpole, "and I feel bound to go. One of the gentlemen has discovered a hermit's cabin down a ravine near here, and he offers to personally conduct a party to it. You will go, Mr. Hubbard?"

"Go! I should remark that I will. You don't get a scoop of that item, I assure you."

Miss Stackpole was a plump and rather pretty young woman, fairly well dressed in drab drapery. She stood firmly on her feet and had an air of self-reliance and self-control in strong contrast with the fussy, nervous manner of Miss Crabb.

Mrs. Philpot, surveyed the two young women

with that comprehensive, critical glance which takes in everything that is visible, and quickly enough she made up her comparison and estimate of them.

She decided that Miss Crabb had no style, no *savoir faire*, no repose ; but then Miss Stackpole was forward, almost impudent in appearance, and her greater ease of manner was really the ease that comes of a long training in intrusiveness, and of rubbing against an older civilization. She felt quite distinctly the decided dash of vulgarity in the three newspaper representatives before her, and she could not help suspecting that it would not be safe to judge the press reporters by these examples.

The question arose in her mind whether after all Howells and Henry James and Maurice Thompson had acted fairly in taking these as representative newspaper people.

She had met a great many newspaper people and had learned to like them as a class ; she had many good and helpful friends among them.

Unconsciously she was showing to all present that she was dissecting the three reporters. Her unfavorable opinion of them slowly took expression in her tell-tale face. Not that she wholly disliked or distrusted them ; she really pitied them. How could they be content to live such a life, dependent upon what they could make by meddling, so to speak ?

Then too, she felt a vague shame, a chagrin, a regret that real people must be put into works

of fiction with all the seamy side of their natures turned out to the world's eye.

"We're in for it," exclaimed Hubbard, "Mrs. Philpot is making a study of us as a group. See the dreaming look in her eyes!"

"Oh, no! she never studies anybody or anything," said Miss Crabb. "Poor little woman, real life is a constant puzzle to her, and she makes not the slightest effort to understand it."

Hubbard and Miss Stackpole glanced curiously at each other and then at Miss Crabb. Evidently their thought was a common one.

XVI.

THE pedestrian excursion spoken of by Miss Stackpole promised to be an enjoyable affair to those of the Helicon guests who could venture upon it. A writer of oddly entertaining and preposterously impossible short stories, John B. Cattleton, had been mousing among the ravines of Mt. Boab, and had stumbled upon what he described as a "very obscure little cabin, jammed under a cliff in an angle of the cañon and right over a bright stream of cold, pure spring-water. It's a miserably picturesque and forlornly prepossessing place," he went on in his droll way, "where all sorts of engaging ghosts and entertaining ogres might be supposed to congregate at midnight. I didn't go quite down to it, but I was near enough to it to make out its main features, and I saw the queerest being imaginable poking around the premises. A veritable hermit, I should call

him, as old as the rocks themselves. His dress was absurdly old-fashioned, a caricature of the uniform of our soldier sires of revolutionary renown. A long spike-tailed blue coat with notable brass buttons, a triangular hat somewhat bell-crowned and tow or cotton trousers. Shirt? Vest? Yes, if I remember well they were of copperas homespun. His hair and beard were white, fine and thin, hanging in tags and wisps as fluffy as lint. I sat upon a rock in the shadow of a cedar tree and watched his queer manoeuvres for a good while. All his movements were furtive and peculiar, like those of a shy, wild beast."

"It's the Prophet of the Smoky Mountain," said Miss Crabb in an earnest stage whisper. "He's Craddock's material, we can't touch him."

"Touch him! I'll interview him on dialect in politics," said Hubbard, "and get his views on sex in genius."

"I should like a sketch of his life. There must be a human interest to serve as straw for my brick," remarked Miss Stackpole. "The motive that induced him to become a hermit, and all that."

Miss Crabb dared not confess that she desired a sketch of the old man for the newspaper syndicate, so she merely drummed on her front teeth with her pencil.

Dufour joined the pedestrian party with great enthusiasm, having dressed himself for the occasion in a pair of tennis trousers, a blue flannel shirt, a loose jacket and a shooting cap.

His shoes were genuine alpine foot-gear with short spikes in their heels and soles.

"Lead on Cattleton," he cried jovially, "and let our motto be, 'On to the hut of Friar Tuck'!"

"Good," answered Cattleton in like spirit, "and you shall be my lieutenant, come, walk beside me."

"Thank you, from the bottom of my heart," replied Dufour, "but I cannot accept. I have contracted to be Miss Moyne's servant instead."

That was a gay procession filing away from Hotel Helicon through the thin forest that fringed one shoulder of stately Mt. Boab. Cattleton led the column, flinging back from time to time his odd sayings and preposterous conceits.

The day was delightfully cool with a steady wind running over the mountain and eddying in the sheltered coves where the ferns were thick and tall. In the sky were a few pale clouds slowly vanishing, whilst some broad-pinioned buzzards wheeled round and round above the blue-green abyss of the valley. There were sounds of a vague, dreamy sort abroad in the woods, like the whisperings and laughter of legions of invisible beings. Everybody felt exhilarated and buoyant, tramping gaily away to the hut of the hermit.

At a certain point Cattleton commanded a halt, and pointing out the entrance to the ravine, said:

"Now, good friends, we must have perfect

silence during the descent, or our visit will be all in vain. Furthermore, the attraction of gravitation demands that, in going down, we must preserve our uprightness, else our progress may be facilitated to an alarming degree, and our advent at the hut be far from becomingly dignified."

Like a snake, flecked with touches of gay color, the procession crawled down the ravine, the way becoming steeper and more tortuous at every step. Thicker and thicker and thicker grew the trees, saving where the rock broke forth from the soil, and closer drew the zig-zags of the barely possible route. Cattleton silenced every voice and rebuked every person who showed signs of weakening.

"It's just a few steps farther," he whispered back from his advanced position, "don't make the least sound."

But the ravine proved, upon this second descent much more difficult and dangerous than it had appeared to Cattleton at first, and it was with the most heroic exertions that he finally led the party down to the point whence he had viewed the cabin. By this time the column was pressing upon him and he could not stop. Down he went, faster and faster, barely able to keep his feet, now sliding, now clutching a tree or rock, with the breathless and excited line of followers gathering dangerous momentum behind him.

It was too late now to command silence or to control the company in any way. An ava-

lanche of little stones, loosened by scrambling feet, swept past him and went leaping on down below. He heard Miss Moyne utter a little scream of terror that mingled with many exclamations from both men and women, and then he lost his feet and began to slide. Down he sped and down sped the party after him, till in a cataract of mightily frightened, but unharmed men and women, they all went over a little precipice and landed in a scattered heap on a great bed of oak leaves that the winds had drifted against the rock.

A few moments of strange silence followed, then everybody sprang up, disheveled and red-faced, to look around and see what was the matter.

They found themselves close to the long, low cabin, from under which flowed a stream of water. A little column of smoke was wandering out of a curious clay chimney. Beside the low door-way stood a long, deep trough filled with water in which a metal pipe was coiled fantastically. Two earthen jugs with cob stoppers sat hard by. A sourish smell assaulted their sense and a faint spirituous flavor burdened the air.

Cattleton, who was first upon his feet, shook himself together and drolly remarked:

"We have arrived in good order, let's interview the——"

Just then rushed forth from the door the old man of the place, who halted outside and snatched from its rack on the wall a long tin

horn, which he proceeded to blow vigorously, the echoes prowling through the woods and over the foot-hills and scampering far away up and down the valley.

Not a soul present ever could forget that sketch, the old man with his shrunk legs bent and wide apart, his arms akimbo as he leaned far back and held up that wailing, howling, bellowing horn, and his long coat-tail almost touching the ground, whilst his fantastic hat quivered in unison with the strain he was blowing. How his shriveled cheeks puffed out, and how his eyes appeared to be starting from their bony sockets!

"That is what I call a fitting reception," said Cattleton, gazing at the trumpeter.

"See here," exclaimed Crane with evident excitement, "I smell whisky! This——"

"Hyer! what d'ye mean hyer, you all a comin' down hyer?" broke forth a wrathful voice, and Wesley Tolliver rushed with melodramatic fierceness upon the scene.

"Oh! I—I—wa—want to g—go home!" cried little Mrs. Philpot, clutching Bartley Hubbard's arm.

"So do I," said he with phlegmatic cleverness. "I should like to see my mother. I'm feeling a little lonely and——"

"What upon yearth do this yer mean, anyhow?" thundered Tolliver. "Who invited you all down yer, tell me thet, will ye?"

"Oh, Mr. Tolliver, Mr. Tolliver!" exclaimed

Miss Crabb, rushing upon him excitedly, "I'm so glad you are here!"

"Well, I'll ber dorged!" he ejaculated, "you down hyer again! Well, I never seed the like afore in all my born days."

He gazed at first one and then another of the party, and a sudden light flashed into his face.

"Well I'll ber dorged ef ther whole kepoodle of 'em hain't done jest gone and tumbled off'n the mounting an' jest rolled down hyer!"

"You're a very accurate reasoner, my friend," said Cattleton, trying to get his hat into shape. "I think we touched at two or three points as we came down, however."

About this time four or five more mountaineers appeared bearing guns and looking savage.

"Bandits," said Miss Stackpole with a shudder.

"Moonshiners," muttered Crane.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Mr. Hubbard, do t—t—take m—me home!" wailed Mrs. Philpot.

"I should be delighted," said Hubbard, his voice concealing the uneasiness he felt. "Indeed I should."

More men appeared and at the same time a roll of thunder tumbled across the darkening sky. A sudden mountain storm had arisen.

The pedestrians found themselves surrounded by a line of grim and silent men who appeared to be waiting for orders from Tolliver.

A few large drops of rain come slanting down

from the advancing fringe of the sable-cloud, and again the thunder bounded across the heavens.

"I guess you'd better invite us in," suggested Cattleton, turning to the old man, who stood leaning on his tin horn. "The ladies will get wet."

"I say, Cattleton," called out Bartley Hubbard, "if a fellow only had a little supply of Stockton's negative gravity he could ameliorate his condition, don't you think?"

"Yes, I'd like to fall up hill just now. The excitement would be refreshing."

There came a spiteful dash of rain and a flurry of wind.

"You'ns had better go inter the still-house," said Tolliver. "Hit air goin' ter rain yearlin' calves. Go right erlong in, ye sha'n't be hurt."

Another gush of rain enforced the invitation, and they all scrambled into the cabin pell-mell, glad of the relief from a strain that had become almost unbearable to some of them, but they stared at each other when they found the door closed and securely locked on the outside.

"Prisoners!" cried some one whose voice was drowned by a deafening crash of thunder and a mighty flood of rain that threatened to crush in the rickety roof of the house.

"The treacherous villain!" exclaimed Dufour, speaking of Tolliver and holding Miss Moyne's hand. The poor girl was so frightened that it was a comfort to her to have her hand held.

"How grand, how noble it is in Mr. Tolliver

and his friends," said Miss Crabb, "to stand out there in the rain and let us have the shelter! I never saw a more virile and thoroughly unselfish man than he is. He is one of Nature's unshorn heroes, a man of the ancient god-like race."

Mrs. Nancy Jones Black gave the young woman a look of profound contempt.

Then a crash of thunder, wind, and rain scattered everybody's thoughts.

XVII.

THE storm was wild enough, but of short duration, and it came to its end as suddenly as it had begun. As the black cloud departed from the sky, the darkness, which had been almost a solid inside the still-house, was pierced by certain lines of mild light coming through various chinks in the walls and roof. Our friends examined one another curiously, as if to be sure that it was not all a dream.

Cattleton found himself face to face with a demure-looking young man, whom he at once recognized as Harry Punner, a writer of delicious verses and editor of a rollicking humorous journal at New York.

"Hello, Hal! you here?" he cried. "Well how does it strike your funny bone? It insists upon appearing serious to me."

"I'm smothering for a whiff of fresh air," said Punner, in a very matter-of-fact tone. "Can't we raise a window or something?"

"The only window visible to the naked eye," said Cattleton, "is already raised higher than I

can reach," and he pointed to a square hole in the wall about seven and a-half feet above the ground and very near the roof.

Crane went about in the room remarking that the aroma floating in the air was the bouquet of the very purest and richest copper-distilled corn whisky and that if he could find it he was quite sure that a sip of it would prove very refreshing under the peculiar circumstances of the case, an observation which called forth from Mrs. Nancy Jones Black a withering temperance reprimand.

"As the presiding officer of the *Woman's Prohibition Promulgation Society* I cannot let such a remark pass without condemning it. If this really is a liquor establishment I desire to be let out of it forthwith."

"So do I!" exclaimed little Mrs. Philpot with great vehemence. "Open the door Mr. Hubbard, please."

Hubbard went to the door and finding that it was constructed to open outwardly, gave it a shove with all his might. There was a short tussle and he staggered back.

"Why don't you push it open?" fretfully exclaimed Mrs. Nancy Jones Black.

"The gentlemen outside object, for reasons not stated," was the rather stolidly spoken answer.

Cattleton had taken off his hat and was going about through the company soliciting handkerchiefs.

"Drop them in, drop them in," he urged, "I need all of them that I can get."

He offered his hat as a contribution box as he spoke, and nearly every-one gave a handkerchief, without in the least suspecting his purpose.

When he had collected a round dozen, Cattleton crammed them all down in the crown of his hat which he then put on his head.

"Now Hal," he said, addressing Punner, "give me a boost and I'll make an observation through that window."

The rain was now entirely ended and the wind had fallen still.

With Punner's help Cattleton got up to the window and poked out his head.

"Git back ther'!" growled a vicious voice, and at the same time the dull sound of a heavy blow was followed by the retreat of Cattleton from the window to the floor in a great hurry.

Upon top of his hat was a deep trench made by a club.

"The handkerchiefs did their duty nobly," he remarked. "Let everybody come forward and identify his property."

"What did you see?" asked Punner.

"A giant with an oak tree in his hand and murder in his eye," said Cattleton, busily selecting and returning the handkerchiefs. "This eleemosynary padding was all that saved me. The blow was aimed at my divine intellect."

"See here," cried Peck, in great earnest, "this is no joking matter. We're in the power

of a set of mountain moonshiners, and may be murdered in cold blood. We'd better do something."

Crane had prowled around until he had found a small jug of fragrant mountain dew whisky, which he was proceeding to taste in true Kentucky style, when a gaunt form rose in a corner of the room, and tottering forward seized the jug and took it out of his hand.

"No ye don't, sonny, no ye don't! This yer mounting jew air not ever'body's licker 'at wants it. Not by er half er mile at the littlest calc'lation!"

Miss Crabb made a note. Crane gazed pathetically at the fantastic old man before him, and brushed his handkerchief across his lips, as if from habit, as he managed to say:

"I meant no undue liberty, I assure you. That whisky is ——"

"Overpowerin'," interrupted the old man, taking a sip from the vessel. "Yes, I don't blame ye fur a wantin' of it, but this yer licker air mine."

"Up in Kentucky," said Crane, "we are proud to offer ——"

"Kaintucky! did ye say ole Kaintuck? Air ye from ther', boy?"

The octogenarian leaned forward as he spoke and gazed at Crane with steadfast, rheumy eyes.

Miss Henrietta Stackpole came forward to hear what was to follow, her instinct telling her

that a point of human interest was about to be reached.

"Yes," said Crane, "I was born and reared on Lulbegrud creek."

"Lulbegrud!"

"Yes."

"How fur f'om Wright's mill?"

"Close by, at Kiddville," said Crane.

"Ye 'member Easton's Springs close by an' Pilot Knob away off in the distance?"

"Very well, indeed, and Guoff's pond."

"Boy, what mought yer name be?"

"Crane."

"Crane!"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll ber dorg!"

The old man stood gazing and grinning at Crane for some moments, and then added:

"What's yer pap's name?"

"Eliphas Crane."

"'Liphas Crane yore pap!"

"Yes."

"Child, I air yer pap's uncle."

"What!"

"I air Peter Job Crane."

"You!"

"Sartin es anything."

"Are you my father's uncle Peter?"

"I air yer pap's uncle Pete."

"How strange!"

Miss Stackpole did not permit a word, a look, or a shade of this interview to escape her. She now turned to Bartley Hubbard and said:

"We Americans are the victims of heterogeneous consanguinity. Such an incident as this could not happen in England. It will be a long time before we can get rid of our ancestors."

"Yes," assented Hubbard, nonchalantly, "Yer pap's uncle certainly is a large factor in American life."

"How many men did you see when you looked out?" Peck inquired, addressing Cattleton.

"I saw only one, but he was a monster," was the ready reply. "It's no use brooding over trying to escape by force. We're utterly helpless, and that jolt on my head has rendered me unfit for diplomatic efforts."

"What do you suppose they will do with us?"

"They won't dare let us go."

"Why?"

"They'd be afraid that we would report their illicit distillery."

"Ah, I see."

The affair began to take on a very serious and gloomy aspect, and the room was growing oppressively hot, owing to the presence of a small but energetic furnace that glowed under a sighing boiler. Outside, with the clearing sky and refreshed air, there arose a clamor of bird-song in the dripping trees. Under the floor the spring-stream gurgled sweetly.

"Ye 'member Abbott's still house on ole Lulbegrud?" said the old man, pursuing his reminiscences, after he had permitted his grand-

nephew to taste the "mounting jew," "an' Dan Rankin's ole bob-tail hoss?"

"Very well, indeed," responded Crane, "and Billy Pace's blackberry fields where I picked berries in summer and chased rabbits in winter."

"Take er nother drop o' the jyful juice, boy, fur the mem'ry o' ole Kaintuck!"

"Oh dear! but isn't it incomparably awful?" exclaimed Mrs. Nancy Jones Black, gazing in horrified fascination upon the two Kentuckians, as they bowed to each other and drank alternately from the little jug.

"Characteristic Southern scene not used by Craddock," murmured Miss Crabb, making a whole page of a single note.

"Don't this yere liquor taste o' one thing an' smell o' another an' jes' kinder git ter the lowest p'int o' yer appetite?" continued Crane's great uncle Peter.

"Delicious beyond compare," responded the young man, drinking again, "it is nectar of the gods."

Mrs. Nancy Jones Black groaned, but could not withdraw her eyes from the scene.

"Good deal like ole times down to Abbott's still-house on Lulbegrud, boy," the old man suggested, "ye don't forgit erbout Dan Rankin's mule a-kickin' ole man Hornback's hat off?"

The poet laughed retrospectively and mopped his glowing face with his handkerchief. The heat from the furnace and the stimulus of the excellent beverage were causing him to feel the need of fresh air.

Indeed, everybody was beginning to pant. Miss Moyne was so overcome with excitement and with the heat of the place, that she was ready to faint, when the door was flung open and Tolliver appeared. A rush of sweet cool air, flooding the room, revived her, just as she was sinking into Dufour's arms.

XVIII.

AUTHORS who have added the vice of elocution to the weakness of dialect verse-making, are often at a loss for a sympathetic audience. Whilst it is true that literary people are apt to bear with a good deal of patience the mutually offered inflictions incident to meeting one another, they draw the line at dialect recitations; and, as a rule, stubbornly refuse to be bored with a fantastic rendition of "When Johnny got spanked by a mule," or "Livery-stable Bob," or "Samantha's Courtin'," or "Over the Ridge to the Pest-house," no matter how dear a friend may offer the scourge. Circumstances alter cases, however, and although neither Carleton, nor Riley, nor yet Burdette, nor Bill Nye (those really irresistible and wholly delightful humorists), had come to Hotel Helicon, there was a certain relief for those of the guests who had not joined the luckless pedestrians, in hearing Miss Amelia Lotus Nebeker recite a long poem written in New Jersey patois.

Miss Nebeker was very hard of hearing, almost stone deaf, indeed, which affliction lent

a pathetic effect even to her humor. She was rather stout, decidedly short, and had a way of making wry faces with a view to adding comicality to certain turns of her New Jersey phraseology, and yet she was somewhat of a bore at times. Possibly she wished to read too often and sometimes upon very unsuitable occasions. It was Mrs. Bridges who once said that, if the minister at a funeral should ask some one to say a few appropriate words, Miss Nebeker, if present, would immediately clear her throat and begin reciting "A Jerseyman's Jewsharp." "And if she once got started you'd never be able to stop her, for she's as deaf as an adder."

It was during the rainstorm, while those of the guests who had not gone to the hermit's hut with Cattleton, were in the cool and spacious parlor of the hotel, that something was said about Charles Dickens reading from his own works. Strangely enough, although the remark was uttered in a low key and at some distance from Miss Nebeker, she responded at once with an offer to give them a new rendering of *The Jerseyman's Jewsharp*. Lucas, the historian, objected vigorously, but she insisted upon interpreting his words and gestures as emphatic applause of her proposition. She arose while he was saying :

"Oh now, that's too much, we're tired of the jangling of that old harp ; give us a rest !"

This unexpected and surprising slang from so grave and dignified a man set everybody to laughing. Miss Nebeker bowed in smiling

acknowledgement of what appeared to her to be a flattering anticipation of her humor, and taking her manuscript from some hiding-place in her drapery, made a grimace and began to read. Mrs. Philpot's cat, in the absence of its mistress, had taken up with the elocutionist and now came to rub and purr around her feet while she recited. This was a small matter, but in school or church or lecture-hall, small matters attract attention. The fact that the cat now and again mewed plaintively set some of the audience to smiling and even to laughing.

Such apparent approval of her new rendition thrilled Miss Nebeker to her heart's core. Her voice deepened, her intonations caught the spirit of her mood, and she read wildly well.

Every one who has even a smattering of the *patois* current in New Jersey, will understand how effective it might be made in the larynx of a cunning elocutionist; and then whoever has had the delicious experience of hearing a genuine Jerseyman play on the jewsharp will naturally jump to a correct conclusion concerning the pathos of the subject which Miss Nebeker had in hand. She felt its influence and threw all her power into it. Heavy as she was, she arose on her tip-toes at the turning point of the story and gesticulated vehemently.

The cat, taken by surprise, leaped aside a pace or two and glared in a half-frightened way, with each separate hair on its tail set stiffly. Of course there was more laughter which the reader took as applause.

"A brace of cats!" exclaimed the historian.
"A brace of cats!"

Nobody knew what he meant, but the laughing increased, simply for the reason that there was nothing to laugh at.

Discovering pretty soon that Miss Nebeker really meant no harm by her manoeuvres, the cat went back to rub and purr at her feet. Then Miss Nebeker let down her heel on the cat's tail, at the same time beginning with the pathetic part of *The Jerseyman's Jewsharp*.

The unearthly squall that poor puss gave forth was wholly lost on the excited elocutionist, but it quite upset the audience, who, not wishing to appear rude, used their handkerchiefs freely.

Miss Nebeker paused to give full effect to a touching line.

The cat writhed and rolled and clawed the air and wailed like a lost spirit in its vain endeavor to free its tail; but Miss Nebeker, all unconscious of the situation, and seeing her hearers convulsed and wiping tears from their faces, redoubled her elocutionary artifices and poured incomparable feeling into her voice.

Suddenly the tortured and writhing animal uttered a scream of blood-curdling agony and lunged at Miss Nebeker's ankles with tooth and claw.

She was in the midst of the passage where the dying Jerseyman lifts himself on his elbow and calls for his trusty Jewsharp:

"Gi' me my juice-harp, Sarah Ann——" she was saying, when of a sudden she screamed

louder than the cat and bounded into the air, sending her manuscript in fluttering leaves all over the room.

The cat, with level tail and fiery eyes, sailed through the door-way into the hall, and went as if possessed of a devil, bounding up the stairway to Mrs. Philpot's room.

Congratulations were in order, and Lucas insisted upon bellowing in Miss Nebeker's ear his appreciation of the powerful effect produced by the last scene in the little drama.

"If our friends who are out in this rain are finding anything half as entertaining," he thundered, "they needn't mind the drenching."

"But I'm bitten, I'm scratched, I'm hurt!" she exclaimed.

Lucas suddenly realized the brutality of his attitude, and hastened to rectify it by collecting the leaves of her manuscript and handing them to her.

"I beg pardon," he said sincerely, "I hope you are not hurt much."

"Just like a cat," she cried, "always under somebody's feet! I do despise them!"

With a burning face and trembling hands she swiftly rearranged the manuscript and assuming the proper attitude asked the audience to be seated again.

"I am bitten and scratched quite severely," she said, "and am suffering great pain, but if you will resume your places I will begin over again."

"Call that cat back, then, quick!" exclaimed Lucas, "it's the star performer in the play."

She proceeded forthwith, setting out on a new journey through the tortuous ways of the poem, and held up very well to the end. What she called New Jersey patois was a trifle flat when put into verse and she lacked the polished buffoonery of a successful dialect reader, wherefore she failed to get along very successfully with her audience in the absence of the cat; still the reading served to kill a good deal of time, by a mangling process.

The storm was over long ago when she had finished, and the sun was flooding the valley with golden splendor. Along the far away mountain ridges some slanting wisps of whitish mist sailed slowly, like aerial yachts riding dark blue billows. The foliage of the trees, lately dusky and drooping, twinkled vividly with a green that was almost dazzling, and the air was deliciously fresh and fragrant.

Everybody went out on the veranda for a turn and a deep breath.

The mail had arrived and by a mistake a bundle of letters bearing the card of George Dunkirk & Co., and addressed to "George Dunkirk, Esq., Hotel Helicon, room 24," was handed to Lucas.

The historian gazed at the superscription, adjusted his glasses and gazed again, and slowly the truth crept into his mind. There were ten or fifteen of the letters. Evidently some of them, as Lucas's experience suggested, had alien

letters inclosed within their envelopes, and thus forwarded by the mailing clerk of the firm had at last come to the senior partner at room 24.

"Gaspard Dufour, indeed!" Lucas exclaimed inwardly. "George Dunkirk, rather. This is a pretty kettle of fish!"

He sent the letters up to room 24, to await the return of their proper recipient, and fell to reflecting upon the many, very many and very insulting things that he and nearly all the rest of the hotel guests as well had said in Dufour's hearing about publishers in general and about George Dunkirk & Co., in particular. His face burned with the heat of the retrospect, as he recalled such phrases as "sleek thief," "manipulator of copy-right statements," "Cadmean wolf" "ghoul of literary grave-yards," and a hundred others, applied with utter unrestraint and bandied around, while George Dunkirk was sitting by listening to it all!

He called Ferris to him and imparted his discovery in a stage whisper.

"The dickens!" was all that gentleman could say, as the full text of his address of the other evening rushed upon him.

"It is awkward, devilish awkward," remarked Lucas, wiping his glasses and nervously readjusting them.

A few minutes later two men rode up to the hotel. One of them was a very quiet-looking fellow who dryly stated that he was the high sheriff of Mt. Boab county.

XIX.

MEANTIME down the ravine in the obscure little still-house our pedestrians were held in durance vile by Tolliver and his obedient moon-shiners.

It was a puzzling situation to all concerned. Far from wishing or intending to harm his prisoners, Tolliver still could not see his way clear to setting them at liberty. On the other hand he was clever enough to perceive that to hold them very long would be sure to lead to disaster, for their friends would institute a search and at the same time telegraph an account of their disappearance all over the country.

"'Pears ter me like I've ketched bigger game 'an my trap 'll hold," he thought, as he stood in the door-way surveying his victims.

"What ye all a doin' a monkeyin' round these yer premerses, anyhow?" he demanded. "W'y c'udn't ye jest wait 'll I sent for ye ter kem yer?"

"It's a sort of surprise party, my dear sir," said Cattleton. "Don't you see?"

"S'prise set o' meddlin' Yankees a foolin' roun' wher' they air not got no business at," responded Tolliver, "that's w'at I calls it."

"Where's your pantry?" inquired Punner, "I'm as hungry as a wolf."

"Hongry, air ye? What'd ye 'spect ter git ter eat at er still-house, anyhow? Hain't ye

got no sense er tall? Air ye er plum blasted eejit?"

Tolliver made these inquiries in a voice and manner suggestive of suppressed but utter wrath.

"Oh he's *always* hungry, he would starve in a feed-store," exclaimed Cattleton. "Don't pay the least attention to him, Mr. Tolliver. He's incurably hungry."

"W'y ef the man's really hongry—" Tolliver began to say in a sympathetic tone.

"Here," interrupted Hubbard gruffly, "let us out of this immediately, can't you? The ladies can't bear this foul air much longer, it's beastly."

"Mebbe hit air you 'at air a running this yer chebang," said Tolliver with a scowl. "I'll jes' let ye out w'en I git ready an' not a minute sooner, nother. So ye've hearn my tin horn."

Miss Stackpole and Miss Crabb made notes in amazing haste.

Hubbard shrugged his heavy shoulders and bit his lip. He was baffled.

"Do you think they'll kill us?" murmured Miss Moyne in Dufour's ear.

Dufour could not answer.

Crane and his "pap's uncle Pete" were still hobnobbing over the jug.

"Yer's a lookin' at ye, boy, an' a hopin' agin hope 'at ye may turn out ter be es likely a man es yer pap," the old man was saying, preliminary to another draught.

Crane was bowing with extreme politeness in

acknowledgement of the sentiment, and was saying:

"I am told that I look like my father ——"

'Yes, ye do look a leetle like im," interrupted the old man with a leer over the jug, "but l'me say at it air dern leetle, boy, dern leetle!"

Punner overhearing this reply, laughed uproariously. Crane appeared oblivious to the whole force of the joke, however. He was simply waiting for his turn at the jug.

"As I wer' a sayin'," resumed the old man, "yer's er hopin' agin' hope, an' a lookin' at ye ——"

"How utterly brutal and disgusting!" cried Mrs. Nancy Jones Black. "I must leave here, I cannot bear it longer! This is nothing but a low, vile dram-shop! Let me pass!"

She attempted to go through the doorway, but Tolliver interfered.

"Stay wher' ye air," he said, in a respectful but very stern tone. "Ye can't git out o' yer jist yit."

"Dear me! Dear me!" wailed Mrs. Black, "what an outrage, what an insult! Are you men?" she cried, turning upon the gentlemen near her, "and will you brook this?"

"Give me your handkerchiefs again," said Cattleton, "and I will once more poke out my head; 'tis all that I can do!"

"Shoot the fust head 'at comes out'n thet ther winder, Dave!" ordered Tolliver, speaking to some one outside.

"I don't care for any handkerchiefs, thank you," said Cattleton, "I've changed my mind."

Miss Moyne was holding Dufour's arm with a nervous clutch, her eyes were full of tears, and she was trembling violently. He strove to quiet her by telling her that there was no danger, that he would shield her, die for her and all that; but Tolliver looked so grim and the situation was so strange and threatening that she could not control herself.

"Goodness! but isn't this rich material," Miss Crabb soliloquized, writing in her little red book with might and main. "Bret Harte never discovered anything better."

"Miss Henrietta Stackpole was too busy absorbing the human interest of the interview between the two Cranes, to be more than indirectly aware of anything else that was going on around her.

"Ye needn't be erfeard as ter bein' hurt, boy," said the old man, "not es long es yer pap's uncle Pete air eroun' yer. Hit ain't often 'at I meets up wi' kinfolks downyer, an' w'en I does meet up wi' 'em I treats 'em es er Southern gen'l'man orter treat his kinfolks."

"Precisely so," said Crane, taking another sip, "hospitality is a crowning Southern virtue. When I go up to Louisville Henry Watterson and I always have a good time."

"Spect ye do, boy, spect ye do. Louisville use ter be a roarin' good place ter be at."

Tolliver, whose wits had been hard at work,

now proposed what he called "terms o' pay-roll, like what they hed in the war."

"Ef ye'll all take a oath an' swa' at ye'll never tell nothin' erbout nothin'," said he, "w'y I'll jest let ye off this yer time."

"That is fair enough," said Dufour, "we are not in the detective service."

"Then," observed Tolliver, "ef I ken git the 'tention of this yer meetin', I move 'at it air yerby considered swore 'at nothin' air ter be said erbout nothin' at no time an' never. Do ye all swa'?"

"Yes!" rang out a chorus of voices.

"Hit air cyarried," said Tolliver, "an' the meetin' air dismissed, sigh er die. Ye kin all go on erbout yer business."

The pedestrians filed out into the open air feeling greatly relieved. Crane lingered to have a few more passages with his sociable and hospitable grand-uncle. Indeed he remained until the rest of the party had passed out of sight up the ravine and he did not reach the hotel until far in the night, when he sang some songs under Miss Moyne's window.

Taken altogether, the pedestrians felt that they had been quite successful in their excursion.

Dufour was happiness itself. On the way back he had chosen for himself and Miss Moyne a path which separated them from the others, giving him an opportunity to say a great deal to her.

Now it is a part of our common stock of

understanding that when a man has an excellent and uninterrupted opportunity to say a great deal to a beautiful young woman, he usually does not find himself able to say much; still he rarely fails to make himself understood.

They both looked so self-consciously happy (when they arrived a little later than the rest at Hotel Helicon) that suspicion would have been aroused but for two startling and all-absorbing disclosures which drove away every other thought.

One was the disclosure of the fact that Dufour was not Dufour, but George Dunkirk, and the other was the disclosure of the fact that the high sheriff of Mt. Boab County was in Hotel Helicon on important official business.

Little Mrs. Philpot was the first to discover that the great publisher really had not practiced any deception as to his name. Indeed her album showed that the signature therein was, after all, George Dunkirk and not Gaspard Dufour. The autograph was not very plain, it is true, but it was decipherable and the mistake was due to her own bad reading.

If the sheriff had been out of the question the humiliation felt by the authors, for whom Dunkirk was publisher and who had talked so outrageously about him, would have crushed them into the dust; but the sheriff was there in his most terrible form, and he forced himself upon their consideration with his quiet but effective methods of legal procedure.

XX.

"Gaslucky has been caught in a wheat corner at Chicago," Lucas explained, "and has been squeezed to death."

"Dead!" cried Punner, "it's a great loss. We'll have to hold a meeting and pass res——"

"We'll have to get out of this place in short order," said Lucas, "the sheriff has levied an attachment on the hotel and all it contains."

"What!"

"How's that?"

"Do you mean that the house is to be shut up and we turned out?"

"Just that," said Lucas. "The sheriff has invoiced every thing, even the provisions on hand. He says that we can't eat another bite here."

"And I'm starving even now!" exclaimed Punner. "I could eat most anything. Let's walk round to Delmonico's, Cattleton."

"But really, what can we do?" demanded Ferris, dolefully enough.

"Go home, of course," said Cattleton.

Ferris looked blank and stood with his hands thrust in his pockets.

"I can't go home," he presently remarked.

"Why?"

"I haven't money enough to pay my way."

"By George! neither have I!" exclaimed Cattleton with a start.

"That is precisely my fix," said Lucas gravely.

"You echo my predicament," said Peck.

"My salary is suspended during my absence," said Punner, with his eyes bent on the floor.

Little Mrs. Philpot was speechless for a time as the force of the situation broke upon her.

"Squeezed in a wheat corner?" inquired Miss Stackpole, "what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that Gaslucky got sheared in the big deal the other day at Chicago," Lucas explained.

"Got sheared?"

"Yes, the bulls sat down on him."

"Oh, you mean a speculation—a—"

"Yes, Gaslucky was in for all he was worth, and they run it down on him and flattened him. A gas-man's no business in wheat, especially in Chicago; they spread him out, just as the sheriff's proceedings have flattened all our hopes for the present."

"It's just outrageous!" cried little Mrs. Philpot, finding her voice. "He should have notified us, so that—"

"They didn't notify him, I guess," said Catleton.

"No, he found it out afterwards," remarked Lucas, glancing gloomily toward where Dunkirk and Miss Moyne stood, apparently in light and pleasant conversation.

Viewed in any light the predicament was a peculiar and distressing one to the guests of Hotel Helicon. The sheriff, a rather ignorant,

but very stubborn and determined man, held executions and writs of attachment sued out by Gaslucky creditors, which he had proceeded to levy on the hotel and on all the personalty visible in it belonging to the proprietor.

"'Course," said he, "hit'll be poorty hard on you'ns, but I can't help it, I've got ter do my juty, let it hurt whoever it will. Not er thing kin ye tech at's in this yer tavern, 'ceptin' what's your'n, that air's jest how it air. So now mind w'at yer a doin'."

The servants were idle, the dining-room closed, the kitchen and pantries locked up. Never was there a more doleful set of people. Mrs. Nancy Jones Black thought of playing a piece of sacred music, but she found the grand piano locked, with its key deep in the sheriff's pocket.

The situation was made doubly disagreeable when at last the officer informed the guests that they would have to vacate their rooms forthwith, as he should proceed at once to close up the building.

"Heavens, man, are you going to turn us out into the woods?" demanded Peck.

"Woods er no woods " he replied, "ye'll hev ter git out'n yer, right off."

"But the ladies, Mr. Sheriff," suggested Punner, "no Southern gentleman can turn a lady out of doors."

The officer actually colored with the force of the insinuation. He stood silent for some time with his eyes fixed on the floor. Presently he looked up and said:

"The weeming kin stay till mornin'."

"Well they must have something to eat," said Punner. "They can't starve."

"Thet's so," the sheriff admitted, "they kin hev a bite er so."

"And we ——"

"You men folks cayn't hev a dorg gone mouthful, so shet up!"

"Well," observed Cattleton, dryly, "it appears the odds is the difference between falling into the hands of moonshiners and coming under the influence of a lawful sheriff."

"I know a little law," interposed Bartley Hubbard with a sullen emphasis, "and I know that this sheriff has no right to tumble us out of doors, and for my part ——"

"Fur yer part," said the sheriff coolly, "fur yer part, Mister, ef ye fool erlong o' me I'll crack yer gourd fur ye."

"You'll do what?"

"I'll stave in yer piggin."

"I don't understand."

"W'y, blame yer ignorant hide, wha' wer' ye borned and fotch up? I'll jest knock the everlastin' head off'n ye, *thet's* 'zac'ly w'at I says. Mebbe ye don't understan' *thet*?"

"Yes," said Hubbard, visibly shrinking into himself, "I begin to suspect your meaning."

Miss Crabb was taking notes with enthusiastic rapidity.

Dunkirk called the sheriff to him and a long conference was held between them, the result of which was presently announced.

"I heve thort it over," said the quiet officer of the law, "an' es hit appear thet w'at grub air on han' an' done cooked might spile afore it c'u'd be sold, therefore I proclamate an' say at you'ns kin stay yer tell termorrer an' eat w'at's cooked, but tech nothin' else."

Cattleton and Punner applauded loudly. To everybody the announcement was a reprieve of no small moment, and a sigh of relief rustled through the groups of troubled guests. Those who had been down the ravine were very tired and hungry; the thought of a cold luncheon to them was the vision of a feast.

Dunkirk had a basket of wine brought down from his room and he made the sheriff sit beside him at the table.

"We may as well make the most of our last evening together," he said, glancing jovially around.

"We shall have to walk down the mountain in the morning, I suppose," remarked Bartley Hubbard.

"That's jest w'at's the matter," observed the sheriff.

"But the ladies, my dear sir, the ladies——" began Punner.

"The weeming, they'll hev kinveyances, young man, so ye kin jest shet up ef ye please," the officer interrupted, with a good-natured wink and a knowing wag of his head.

A disinterested observer would have noted readily enough that the feast was far from a banquet. There was Ferris, for instance,

munching a biscuit and sipping his wine and pretending to enjoy Punner's sallies and Cattle-ton's drolleries, while down in his heart lay the leaden thought, the hideous knowledge of an empty pocket. Indeed the reflection was a common one, weighting down almost every breast at the board.

One little incident did make even Ferris forget himself for a moment or two; it was when deaf Miss Nebeker misinterpreted some remark made by Hubbard and arose with a view to reciting *The Jerseyman's Jewsharp*, with a new variation, "Oh, Jerseyman Joe had a Jewsharp of gold," she began, in her most melodious drawl. She could not hear the protesting voices of her friends and she misinterpreted the stare of the sheriff.

"For the good heaven's sake, Hubbard," cried Lucas, "do use your influence; quick, please, or I shall collapse."

Bartley Hubbard took hold of her dress and gently pulled her down into her chair.

"The sheriff objects!" he yelled in her ear.

"After dinner?" she resignedly inquired, "well, then after dinner, in the parlor."

When the feast had come to the crumbs, Dunkirk arose and said:

"We all have had a good time at the Hotel Helicon, but our sojourn upon the heights of Mt. Boab has been cut short by a certain chain of mishaps over which we have had no control, and to-morrow we go away, doubtless forever.

I feel like saying that I harbor no unpleasant recollections of the days we have spent together."

Cattelton sprung to his feet to move a vote of thanks "to the public-spirited and benevolent man who built this magnificent hotel and threw open its doors to us."

It was carried.

"Now then," said Lucas, adjusting his glasses and speaking in his gravest chest-tones, "I move that it be taken as the sense of this assembly, that it is our duty to draw upon our publisher for money enough to take us home."

The response was overwhelming.

Dunkirk felt the true state of affairs. He arose, his broad face wreathed with genial smiles, and said:

"To the certain knowledge of your unhappy publisher your accounts are already overdrawn, but in view of the rich material you have been gathering of late, your publisher will honor you draughts to the limit of your expenses home."

Never did happier people go to bed. The last sleep in Hotel Helicon proved to be the sweetest.

Far in the night, it is true, some one sang loudly but plaintively under Miss Moyne's window until the sheriff awoke and sallied forth to end the serenade with some remarks about "cracking that eejit's gourd;" but there was no disturbance, the sounds blending sweetly with the dreams of the slumberers. They all knew that it was Crane, poor fellow, who had finally

torn himself away from his father's fascinating uncle.

XXI.

THE retreat from Hotel Helicon was picturesque in the extreme. There had been much difficulty in finding vehicles to take the retiring guests down the mountain to the railway station, but Tolliver had come to the rescue with a mule, a horse, a cart, and an ox. These, when added to the rather incongruous collection of wagons and carts from every other available source, barely sufficed. Tolliver led the mule with Ferris on its back, while Miss Crabb and Miss Stackpole occupied the ox-cart, the former acting as driver.

"Good-bye and good luck to ye!" the sheriff called after them. "Mighty sorry ter discomode ye, but juty air juty, an' a officer air no respecter of persons."

Mrs. Nancy Jones Black sat beside Crane in a rickety wagon, and between jolts gave him many a word of wisdom on the subject of strong drink, which the handsome Bourbon poet stowed away for future consideration.

Dunkirk and Miss Moyne rode upon the "hounds" of a naked wood-wain, as happy as two blue-birds in April, while Bartley Hubbard, with little Mrs. Philpot and her child and some other ladies, was in an old weather-beaten barouche, a sad relic of the *ante-bellum* times. For the rest there were vehicles of every sort save the comfortable sort, and all went slowly

winding and zig-zagging down Mt. Boab toward the valley and the river. Why pursue them? Once they all looked up from far down the slope and saw Hotel Helicon shining like a castle of gold in the flood of summer sunlight. Its verandas were empty, its windows closed, but the flag on its wooden tower still floated bravely in the breeze, its folds appearing to touch the soft gray-blue sky.

* * * * *

A year later Crane and Peck met at Saratoga and talked over old times. At length coming down to the present, Crane said:

"Of all of us who were guests on Mt. Boab, Miss Moyne is the only one who has found success. Her story, *On The Heights*, is in its seventieth edition."

"Oh, well," said Peck, "that goes without the saying. Anybody could succeed with her chance."

"*Her* chance, why do you say that?"

"Have n't you heard? Ah, I see that the news has not yet penetrated the wilds of Kentucky. The open secret of Miss Moyne's success lies in the fact that she has married her publisher."

A silence of some minutes followed, during which Crane burned his cigar very rapidly.

"What fools we were," Peck presently ventured, "to be fighting a duel about her!"

"No, sir," said Crane, with a far-away look

in his eyes, "no, sir, I would die for her right now."

So the subject was dropped between them forever.

Some of Gaslucky's creditors bought Hotel Helicon at the sheriff's sale, but it proved a barren investment.

The house stands there now, weather-beaten and lonely on the peak of Mt. Boab, all tenantless and forlorn.

As to Tolliver's still-house I cannot say, but at stated intervals Crane receives a small cask marked: "J'yful juice, hannel with keer," which comes from his "Pap's uncle Pete."

THE END.