

Jimmy's Big Brother From California.

BY BRET HARTE.



AS night crept up from the valley that stormy afternoon Sawyer's Ledge was at first quite blotted out by wind and rain, but presently re-appeared in little nebulous star-like points along the mountain side as the straggling cabins of the settlement were, one by one, lit up by the miners returning from tunnel and claim. These stars were of varying brilliancy that evening, two notably so—one that eventually resolved itself into a many-candled illumination of a cabin of evident festivity; the other into a glimmering taper in the window of a silent one. They might have represented the extreme mutations of fortune in the settlement that night: the celebration of a strike by Robert Falloner, a lucky miner; and the sick bed of Dick Lasham, an unlucky one.

The latter was, however, not quite alone. He was ministered to by Daddy Folsom, a weak but emotional and aggressively hopeful neighbour, who was sitting beside the wooden bunk whereon the invalid lay. Yet there was something perfunctory in his attitude: his eyes were continually straying to the window, whence the illuminated Falloner festivities could be seen between the trees, and his ears were more intent on the songs and laughter that came faintly from the distance than on the feverish breathing and unintelligible moans of the sufferer.

Nevertheless, he looked troubled equally by the condition of his charge and by his own enforced absence from the revels. A more impatient moan from the sick man, however, brought a change to his abstracted face, and he turned to him with an exaggerated expression of sympathy.

"In course! Lordy! I know jest what those pains are: kinder ez ef you was havin' a tooth pulled that had roots branchin' all over ye! My! I've jest had 'em so bad I couldn't keep from yellin'! That's hot rheumatics! Yes, sir, I oughter know! And" (confidentially) "the sing'ler thing about 'em is that they get worst jest as th'y're going off—sorter wringin' yer hand and punchin' ye in the back to say 'Good-bye.' There!" he continued, as the man sank exhaustedly back on his rude pillow of flour-sacks. "There! didn't I tell ye? Ye'll be all right in a minit, and ez chipper ez a jay bird in the mornin'. Oh, don't tell me about rheu-

matics—I've bin thar! On'y mine was the cold kind—that hangs on longest—yours is the hot, that burns itself up in no time."

If the flushed face and bright eyes of Lasham were not enough to corroborate this symptom of high fever, the quick, wandering laugh he gave would have indicated the point of delirium. But the too optimistic Daddy Folsom referred this act to improvement, and went on, cheerfully: "Yes, sir, you're better now, and"—here he assumed an air of cautious deliberation, extravagant, as all his assumptions were—"I ain't sayin' that—ef—you—was—to—rise—up" (very slowly) "and heave a blanket or two over your shoulders—jest by way o' caution, you know—and leanin' on me, kinder meander over to Bob Falloner's cabin and the boys, it wouldn't do you a heap o' good. Changes o' this kind is often prescribed by the faculty." Another moan from the sufferer, however, here apparently corrected Daddy's too favourable prognosis. "Oh, all right! Well, perhaps ye know best; and I'll jest run over to Bob's and say how as ye ain't comin', and will be back in a jiffy!"

"The letter," said the sick man, hurriedly, "the letter, the letter!"

Daddy leaned suddenly over the bed. It was impossible for even his hopefulness to avoid the fact that Lasham was delirious. It was a strong factor in the case—one that would certainly justify his going over to Falloner's with the news. For the present moment, however, this aberration was to be accepted cheerfully and humoured after Daddy's own fashion. "Of course—the letter, the letter," he said, convincingly; "that's what the boys hev bin singin' jest now.

Good-bye, Charley; when you are away,
Write a letter, love; send me a letter, love!

That's what you heard, and a mighty purty song it is too, and kinder clings to you. It's wonderful how these things gets in your head."

"The letter!—write—send money—money—money, and the photograph—the photograph—photograph—money," continued the sick man, in the rapid reiteration of delirium.

"In course you will—to-morrow—when the mail goes," returned Daddy, soothingly; "plenty of them. Jess now yer try to get a snooze, will ye? Hol' on!—take some o' this,"

There was an anodyne mixture on the rude shelf which the doctor had left on his morning visit. Daddy had a comfortable belief that what would relieve pain would also check delirium, and he accordingly measured out a dose with a liberal margin to allow of waste by the patient in swallowing in his semi-conscious state. As he lay more quiet, muttering still, but now unintelligibly, Daddy, waiting for a more complete unconsciousness and the opportunity to slip away to Fallon's, cast his eyes around the cabin. He noticed now for the first time since his entrance that a crumpled envelope bearing a Western post-mark was lying at the foot of the bed. Daddy knew that the tri-weekly post had arrived an hour before he came, and that Lasham had evidently received a letter. Sure enough the letter itself was lying against the wall beside him. It was open. Daddy felt justified in reading it.

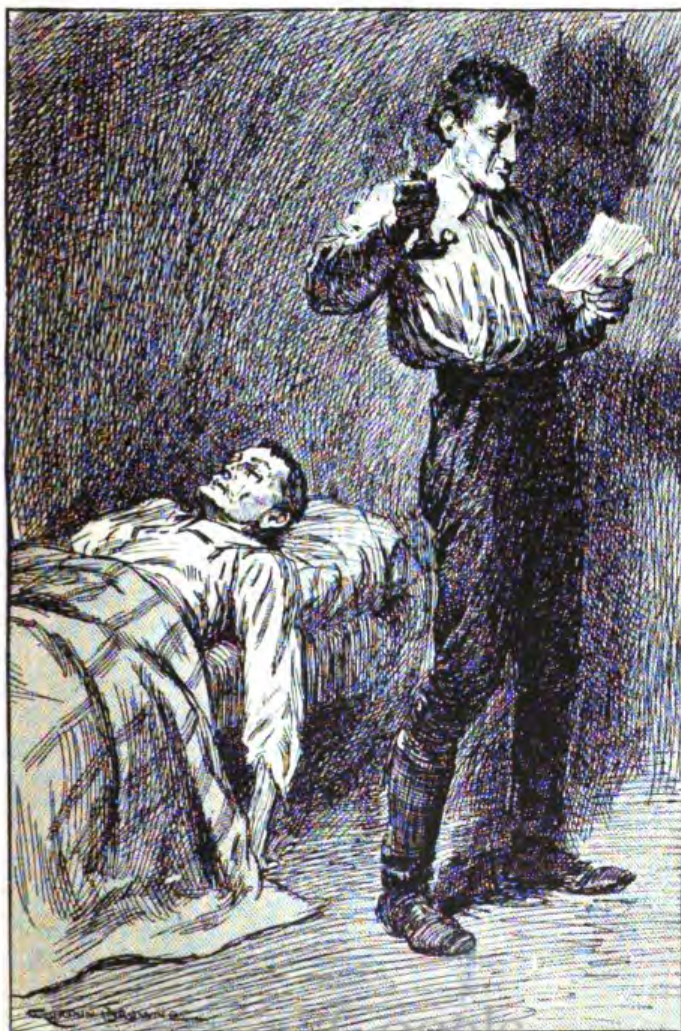
It was curt and business-like, stating that

unless Lasham at once sent a remittance for the support of his brother and sister—two children in charge of the writer—they must find a home elsewhere. That the arrears were long standing, and the repeated promises of Lasham to send money had been unfulfilled. That the writer could stand it no longer. This would be his last communication unless the money were sent forthwith.

It was by no means a novel or, under the circumstances, a shocking disclosure to Daddy. He had seen similar missives from daughters, and even wives, consequent on the varying fortunes of his neighbours; no one knew better than he the uncertainties of a miner's prospects, and yet the inevitable hopefulness that buoyed him up. He tossed it aside impatiently, when his eye caught a strip of paper he had overlooked lying upon the blanket near the envelope. It contained a few lines in an unformed, boyish hand addressed to "my bruther," and evidently slipped into the letter after it was written. By the uncertain candle-light Daddy read as follows:—

"Dear Bruther, Rite to me and Cissy rite off. Why aint you done it? It's so long since you rote any. Mister Recketts ses you dont care any more. Wen you rite send your fotograff. Folks here ses I aint got no big bruther any way, as I disrememer his looks, and cant say wots like him. Cissy's kryin' all along of it. I've got a hedake. William Walker made it ake by a blo. So no more at presen from your loving little bruther Jim."

The quick, hysteric laugh with which Daddy read this was quite consistent with his responsive, emotional nature; so too were the ready tears that sprang to his eyes. He put the candle down unsteadily, with a casual glance at the sick man. It was notable, however, that this look contained less sympathy for the ailing "big brother" than his emotion might have suggested. For Daddy was carried quite away by his own mental picture of the helpless children, and eager only to relate his impressions of the incident. He cast another glance at the invalid, thrust the papers into his pocket, and clapping on his hat



"DADDY FELT JUSTIFIED IN READING IT."

slipped from the cabin and ran to the house of festivity. Yet it was characteristic of the man, and so engrossed was he by his one idea, that to the usual inquiries regarding his patient, he answered: "*He's* all right," and plunged at once into the incident of the dunning letter, reserving—with the instinct of an emotional artist—the child's missive until the last. As he expected, the money demand was received with indignant criticisms of the writer.

"That's just like 'em in the States," said Captain Fletcher; "darned if they don't believe we've only got to bore a hole in the ground and snake out a hundred dollars! Why, there's my wife—with a heap of hoss sense in everything else—is allus wonderin' *why* I can't rake in a cool fifty betwixt one steamer day and another."

"That's nothin' to my old dad," interrupted Gus Houston, the "infant" of the camp, a bright-eyed young fellow of twenty; "why, he wrote to me yesterday that if I'd only pick up a single piece of gold every day and just put it aside, sayin' 'that's for popper and mommer,' and not fool it away—it would be all they'd ask of me."

"That's so," added another; "these ignorant relations is just the ruin o' the mining industry. Bob Falloner hez bin lucky in his strike to-day, but he's a darned sight luckier in being without kith or kin that he knows of."

Daddy waited until the momentary irritation had subsided, and then drew the other letter from his pocket. "That ain't all, boys," he began, in a faltering voice, but gradually working himself up to a pitch of pathos; "just as I was thinking all them very things, I kinder noticed this yer poor little bit o' paper lyin' thar lonesome like and forgotten, and I—read it—and well—gentlemen—it just choked me right up!" He stopped, and his voice faltered.

"Go slow, Daddy, go slow!" said an auditor, smilingly. It was evident that Daddy's sympathetic weakness was well known.

Daddy read the child's letter. But, unfortunately, what with his real emotion and the intoxication of an audience, he read it extravagantly, and interpolated a child's lisp (on no authority whatever) and a simulated infantile delivery, which, I fear, at first provoked the smiles rather than the tears of his audience. Nevertheless, at its conclusion the little note was handed round the party, and then there was a moment of thoughtful silence.

"Tell you what it is, boys," said Fletcher, looking around the table; "we ought to be doin' suthin' for them kids right off! Did you," turning to Daddy, "say anythin' about this to Dick?"

"Nary—why, he's clean off his head with fever—don't understand a word—and just babbles," returned Daddy, forgetful of his roseate diagnosis a moment ago, "and hasn't got a cent."

"We must make up what we can amongst us afore the mail goes to-night," said the "infant," feeling hurriedly in his pockets. "Come, ante up, gentlemen," he added, laying the contents of his buckskin purse upon the table.

"Hold on, boys," said a quiet voice. It was their host Falloner who had just risen, and was slipping on his oilskin coat. "You've got enough to do, I reckon, to look after your own folks. I've none! Let this be *my* affair. I've got to go to the Express Office anyhow—to see about my passage home, and I'll just get a draft for a hundred dollars for that old skeesicks—what's his blamed name? Oh, Ricketts," he made a memorandum from the letter, "and I'll send it by express. Meantime, you fellows sit down there and write something—you know what; saying that Dick's hurt his hand and can't write—you know; but asked you to send a draft, which you're doing. *Sabe?* That's all! I'll skip over to the express now and get the draft off, and you can mail the letter an hour later. So put your dust back in your pockets and help yourselves to the whisky while I'm gone." He clapped his hat on his head and disappeared.

"There goes a white man, you bet!" said Fletcher, admiringly, as the door closed behind their host. "Now, boys," he added, drawing a chair to the table, "let's get this yer letter off, and then go back to our game."

Pens and ink were produced, and an animated discussion ensued as to the matter to be conveyed. Daddy's plea for an extended explanatory and sympathetic communication was overruled, and the letter was written to Ricketts, on the simple lines suggested by Falloner.

"But what about poor little Jim's letter? *That* ought to be answered," said Daddy, pathetically.

"If Dick hurt his hand so he can't write to Ricketts, how in thunder is he goin' to write to Jim?" was the reply.

"But suthin' oughter be said to the poor kid," urged Daddy, piteously.

"Well, write it yourself—you and Gus Houston make up suthin' together. I'm going to win some money," retorted Fletcher, returning to the card table, where he was presently followed by all but Daddy and Houston.

"Ye can't write it in Dick's name, because

up a lead mighty close, and expects to strike it rich in a few days."

"Oh, come off, Daddy!" interrupted Houston, "that's too thin!"

"You ain't got no *sabe* about kids," said Daddy, imperturbably; "they've got to be humoured like sick folks. And they want



"THE LETTER WAS WRITTEN TO RICKETTS."

that little brother knows Dick's handwriting, even if he don't remember his face. See?" suggested Houston.

"That's so," said Daddy, dubiously; "but," he added, with elastic cheerfulness, "we can write that Dick 'says.' See?"

"Your head's level, old man! Just you wade in on that."

Daddy seized the pen and "waded in." Into somewhat deep and difficult water, I fancy, for some of it splashed into his eyes and he sniffed once or twice as he wrote. "Suthin' like this," he said, after a pause:—

"DEAR LITTLE JIMMIE,—Your big brother havin' hurt his hand, wants me to tell you that otherways he is all hunky and A1. He says he don't forget you and little Cissy, you bet! and he's sendin' money to old Ricketts straight off. He says don't you and Cissy mind whether school keeps or not as long as Big Brother Dick holds the lines. He says he'd have written before, but he's bin follerin'

everythin' *big*—they don't take no stock in things ez they are, even ef they hev 'em worse than they are. So," continued Daddy, reading, to prevent further interruption, "he says you're just to keep your eyes skinned lookin' out for him comin' home any time—day or night. All you've got to do is to sit up and wait. He might come and even snake you out of your beds! He might come with four white horses and a nigger driver, or he might come disguised as an ornary tramp. Only you've got to be keen on watchin'." ("Ye see," interrupted Daddy, explanatorily, "that'll jest keep them kids lively"); "he says Cissy's to stop cryin' right off, and if Willie Walker hits yer on the right cheek you just slug out with your left fist, 'cordin' to Scriptor." "Gosh," ejaculated Daddy, stopping suddenly and gazing anxiously at Houston, "there's that blamed photograph—I clean forgot that."

"And Dick hasn't got one in the shop,

and never had," returned Houston, emphatically. "Golly! that stumps us! Unless," he added, with diabolical thoughtfulness, "we take Bob's? The kids don't remember Dick's face, and Bob's about the same age. And it's a regular star picture—you bet! Bob had it taken in Sacramento—in all his war paint. See!" He indicated a photograph pinned against the wall—a really striking likeness which did full justice to Bob's long silken moustache and large, brown, determined eyes. "I'll snake it off while they ain't lookin', and you jam it in the letter. Bob won't miss it, and we can fix it up with Dick after he's well, and send another."

Daddy silently grasped the Infant's hand, who presently secured the photograph without attracting attention from the card-players. It was promptly inclosed in the letter, addressed to Master James Lasham, the Infant started with it to the post-office, and Daddy Folsom returned to Lasham's cabin to relieve the watcher that had been detached from Falloner's to take his place beside the sick man.

Meanwhile the rain fell steadily and the shadows crept higher and higher up the mountain. Towards midnight the star points faded out one by one over Sawyer's Ledge even as they had come, with the difference that the illumination of Falloner's cabin was extinguished first, while the dim light of Lasham's increased in number. Later, two stars seemed to shoot from the centre of the ledge, trailing along the descent, until they were lost in the obscurity of the slope—the

lights of the stage coach to Sacramento carrying the mail and Robert Falloner. They met and passed two fainter lights toiling up the road—the buggy lights of the doctor, hastily summoned from Carterville to the bedside of the dying Dick Lasham.

The slowing up of his train caused Bob Falloner to start from a half doze in a Western Pullman car. As he glanced from his window he could see that the blinding snowstorm which had followed him for the past six hours had at last hopelessly blocked the line. There was no prospect beyond the interminable snowy level, the whirling flakes, and the monotonous palisades of leafless trees seen through it to the distant banks of the Missouri. It was a prospect that the mountain-bred Falloner was beginning to loathe, and, although it was scarcely six weeks since he left California, he was already looking back regretfully to the deep slopes and the free song of the serried ranks of pines.

The intense cold had chilled his temperate blood, even as the rigours and conventions of Eastern life had checked his sincerity and spontaneous flow of animal spirits begotten in the frank intercourse and brotherhood of camps. He had just fled from the artificialities of the great Atlantic cities to seek out some Western farming lands in which he might put his capital and energies. The unlooked-for interruption of his progress by a long-forgotten climate only deepened his discontent. And now—that train was actually backing! It appeared they must return to



THEY PASSED THE BUGGY LIGHTS OF THE DOCTOR.

the last station to wait for a snow-plough to clear the line. It was, explained the conductor, barely a mile from Shepherdstown, where there was a good hotel and a chance of breaking the journey for the night.

Shepherdstown! The name touched some dim chord in Bob Falloner's memory and conscience—yet one that was vague. Then he suddenly remembered that before leaving New York he had received a letter from Houston informing him of Lasham's death, reminding him of his previous bounty, and begging him—if he went West—to break the news to the Lasham family. There was also some allusion to a joke about his (Bob's) photograph, which he had dismissed as unimportant, and even now could not remember clearly. For a few moments his conscience pricked him that he should have forgotten it all, but now he could make amends by this providential delay. It was not a task to his liking; in any other circumstances he would have written, but he would not shirk it now.

Shepherdstown was on the main line of the Kansas Pacific Road, and as he alighted at its station, the big through trains from San Francisco swept out of the stormy distance and stopped also. He remembered, as he mingled with the passengers, hearing a childish voice ask if this was the Californian train. He remembered hearing the amused and patient reply of the station-master: "Yes, sonny—here she is again, and here's her passengers," as he got into the omnibus and drove to the hotel. Here he resolved to perform his disagreeable duty as quickly as possible, and on his way to his room stopped for a moment at the office to ask for Ricketts's address. The clerk, after a quick glance of curiosity at his new guest, gave it to him readily, with a somewhat

Vol. xix.—34.

familiar smile. It struck Falloner also as being odd that he had not been asked to write his name on the hotel register, but this was a saving of time he was not disposed to question, as he had already determined to make his visit to Ricketts at once, before dinner. It was still early evening.

He was washing his hands in his bedroom when there came a light tap at his sitting-room door. Falloner quickly resumed his coat and entered the sitting-room as the porter ushered in a young lady holding a small boy by the hand. But, to Falloner's utter consternation, no sooner had the door closed on the servant than the boy, with a half apologetic glance at the young lady,



"DICK! DICK!"

uttered a childish cry, broke from her, and calling, "Dick! Dick!" ran forward and leaped into Falloner's arms.

The mere shock of the onset and his own amazement left Bob without breath for words. The boy, with arms convulsively clasping his body, was imprinting kisses on Bob's waist-

coat, in default of reaching his face. At last Falloner managed gently but firmly to free himself, and turned a half-appealing, half-embarrassed look upon the young lady, whose own face, however, suddenly flushed pink. To add to the confusion, the boy, in some reaction of instinct, suddenly ran back to her, frantically clutched at her skirts, and tried to bury his head in their folds.

"He don't love me," he sobbed. "He don't care for me any more."

The face of the young girl changed. It was a pretty face in its flushing; in the paleness and thoughtfulness that overcast it it was a striking face, and Bob's attention was for a moment distracted from the grotesqueness of the situation. Leaning over the boy she said, in a caressing, yet authoritative, voice: "Run away for a moment, dear, until I call you," opening the door for him in a maternal way so inconsistent with the youthfulness of her figure that it struck him even in his confusion. There was something also in her dress and carriage that equally affected him: her garments were somewhat old-fashioned in style, yet of good material, with an odd incongruity to the climate and season.

Under her rough outer cloak she wore a polka jacket and the thinnest of summer blouses; and her hat, though dark, was of rough straw, plainly trimmed. Nevertheless, these peculiarities were carried off with an air of breeding and self-possession that was unmistakable. It was possible that her cool self-possession might have been due to some instinctive antagonism, for as she came a step forward with coldly and clearly-opened grey eyes, he was vaguely conscious that she didn't like him. Nevertheless, her manner was formally polite, even, as he fancied, to the point of irony, as she began, in a voice that occasionally dropped into the lazy Southern intonation, and a speech that easily slipped at times into Southern dialect:—

"I sent the child out of the room as I could see that his advances were annoying to you, and a good deal, I reckon, because I knew your reception of them was still more painful to him. It is quite natural, I dare say, that you should feel as you do, and I reckon consistent with your attitude towards him. But you must make some allowance for the depth of his feelings, and how he has looked forward to this meeting. When I tell you that ever since he received your last letter, he and his sister—until her illness kept her home—had gone every day when the Pacific train was due to the station to

meet you; that they have taken literally as Gospel truth every word of your letter—"

"My letter?" interrupted Falloner.

The young girl's scarlet lip curled slightly. "I beg your pardon—I should have said the letter you *dictated*. Of course it wasn't in your handwriting—you had hurt your hand, you know," she added, ironically. "At all events, they believed it all—that you were coming at any moment; they lived in that belief, and the poor things went to the station with your photograph in their hands so that they might be the first to recognise and greet you."

"With my photograph?" interrupted Falloner, again.

The young girl's clear eyes darkened ominously. "I reckon," she said, deliberately, as she slowly drew from her pocket the photograph Daddy Folsom had sent, "that that is your photograph. It certainly seems an excellent likeness," she added, regarding him with a slight suggestion of contemptuous triumph.

In an instant the revelation of the whole mystery flashed upon him! The forgotten passage in Houston's letter about the stolen photograph stood clearly before him; the coincidence of his appearance in Shepherds-town and the natural mistake of the children and their fair protector were made perfectly plain. But with this relief and the certainty that he could confound her with an explanation came a certain mischievous desire to prolong the situation and increase his triumph. She certainly had not shown him any favour.

"Have you got the letter also?" he asked, quietly.

She whisked it impatiently from her pocket and handed it to him. As he read Daddy's characteristic extravagance and recognised the familiar idiosyncrasies of his old companions he was unable to restrain a smile. He raised his eyes, to meet with surprise the fair stranger's levelled eyebrows and brightly indignant eyes, in which, however, the rain was fast gathering with the lightning.

"It may be amusing to you, and I reckon likely it was all a California joke," she said, with slightly trembling lips; "I don't know No'thern gentlemen and their ways, and you seem to have forgotten our ways as you have your kindred. Perhaps all this may seem so funny to them: it may not seem funny to that boy who is now crying his heart out in the hall; it may not be very amusing to that poor Cissy in her sick bed longing to see her brother. It may be so far from amusing

to her that I should hesitate to bring you there in her excited condition and subject *her* to the pain that you have caused *him*. But I have promised her: she is already expecting us, and the disappointment may be dangerous, and I can only implore you—for a few moments at least—to show a little more affection than you feel." As he made an impulsive, deprecating gesture, yet without changing his look of restrained amusement, she stopped him hopelessly. "Oh, of course, yes, yes, I know it is years since you have seen them; they have no right to expect more; only—only—feeling as you do," she burst out impulsively, "why—oh, *why* did you come?"

this brother they were longing for—living for—perhaps even dying for—was *dead*! In his crass stupidity, his wounded vanity over the scorn of the young girl, his anticipation of triumph, he had forgotten—totally forgotten—what that triumph meant! Perhaps if he had felt more keenly the death of Lasham the thought of it would have been uppermost in his mind; but Lasham was not his partner or associate, only a brother miner, and his single act of generosity was in the ordinary routine of camp life. If she thought him cold and heartless before, what would she think of him now? The absurdity of her mistake had vanished in the grim tragedy he had seemed to have cruelly prepared for her. The thought struck him so keenly that he stammered, faltered, and sank helplessly into a chair.

The shock that he had received was so plain to her that her own indignation went out in the breath of it. Her lip quivered. "Don't you mind," she said, hurriedly, dropping into her Southern speech; "I didn't go to hurt you, but I was just that mad with the thought of those pickaninnies, and the easy way you took it, that I clean forgot I'd no call to catechize you! And you don't know me from the Queen of Sheba. Well," she went on, still more rapidly, and in odd distinction to her previous formal slow Southern delivery, "I'm the daughter of Colonel Boutelle, of Bayou Sara, Louisiana, and his paw, and his paw before him, had a plantation there since the time of Adam, but he lost it and six hundred niggers during the Wah! We were pooh as poohverty—paw and maw and we four girls—and no more idea of work than a baby. But I had an education at the convent at New Orleans, and could play, and speak French, and I got

a place as school-teacher here: I reckon the first Southern woman that has taught school in the No'th! Ricketts, who used to be our steward at Bayou Sara, told me about the pickaninnies, and how helpless they were with only a brother who occasionally sent them



"WHY—OH, WHY DID YOU COME?"

Here was Bob's chance. He turned to her politely; began gravely, "I simply came to——" when suddenly his face changed; he stopped as if struck by a blow. His cheek flushed, and then paled! Good God! *What* had he come for? To tell them that

money from California. I suppose I cottoned to the poor little things at first because I knew what it was to be alone amongst strangers, Mr. Lasham; I used to teach them at odd times and look after them, and go with them to the train to look for you. Perhaps Ricketts made me think you didn't care for them; perhaps I was wrong in thinking it was true, from the way you met Jimmy just now. But I've spoken my mind—and you know why." She ceased and walked to the window.

Falloner rose. The storm that had swept through him was over! The quick determination, resolute purpose, and infinite patience which had made him what he was were all there, and with it a conscientiousness which his selfish independence had hitherto kept dormant. He accepted the situation not passively—it was not in his nature—but threw himself into it with all his energy.

"You were quite right," he said, halting a moment beside her; "I don't blame *you*, and let me hope that later you may think me less to blame than you do now. Now, what's to be done? Clearly, I've first to make it right with Tommy—I mean Jimmy—and then we must make a straight dash over to the girl! Whoop!" Before she could understand from his face the strange change in his voice, he had dashed out of the room. In a moment he reappeared with the boy struggling in his arms. "Think of the little scamp not knowing his own brother!" he laughed, giving the boy a really affectionate, if slightly exaggerated, hug, "and expecting me to open my arms to the first little boy who jumps into them! I've a great mind not to give him the present I fetched all the way from California. Wait a moment." He dashed into the bedroom, opened his valise—where he providentially remembered he had kept, with a miner's superstition, the first little nugget of gold he had ever found—seized the tiny bit of quartz and gold, and dashed out again to display it before Jimmy's eager eyes.

If the heartiness, sympathy, and charming kindness of the man's whole manner and face convinced, even while it slightly startled, the young girl, it was still more effective with the boy. Children are quick to detect the false ring of affected emotion, and Bob's was so genuine—whatever its cause—that it might have easily passed for a fraternal expression with harder critics. The child trustfully nestled against him and would have grasped the gold, but the young man whisked it into his pocket. "Not until we've shown it to our little sister—where we're going now! I'm off to order a sleigh." He dashed out

again to the office as if he found some relief in action, or as it seemed to Miss Boutelle to avoid embarrassing conversation. When he came back again he was carrying an immense bearskin from his luggage. He cast a critical look at the girl's unseasonable attire.

"I shall wrap you and Jimmy in this—you know it's snowing frightfully!"

Miss Boutelle flushed a little. "I'm warm enough when walking," she said, coldly. Bob glanced at her smart little French shoes, and thought otherwise. He said nothing, but hastily bundled his two guests downstairs and into the street. The whirlwind dance of the snow made the sleigh an indistinct bulk in the gathering darkness, and as the young girl for an instant stood dazedly still, Bob incontinently lifted her from her feet, deposited her in the vehicle, dropped Jimmy in her lap, and wrapped them both tightly in the bearskin. Her weight, which was scarcely more than a child's, struck him in that moment as being tantalizingly incongruous to the matronly severity of her manner and its strange effect upon him. He then jumped in himself, taking the direction from his companion, and drove off through the storm.

The wind and darkness were not favourable to conversation, and only once did he break the silence. "Is there anyone who would be likely to remember—me—where we are going?" he asked, in a lull of the storm.

Miss Boutelle uncovered enough of her face to glance at him curiously. "Hardly! You know the children came here from the North after your mother's death, while you were in California."

"Of course," returned Bob, hurriedly; "I was only thinking—you know that some of my old friends might have called," and then collapsed into silence.

After a pause a voice came icily, although under the furs: "Perhaps you'd prefer that your arrival be kept secret from the public? But they seem to have already recognised you at the hotel from your inquiry about Ricketts, and the photograph Jimmy had already shown them two weeks ago." Bob remembered the clerk's familiar manner and the omission to ask him to register. "But it need go no further, if you like," she added, with a slight return of her previous scorn.

"I've no reason for keeping it secret," said Bob, stoutly.

No other words were exchanged until the sleigh drew up before a plain wooden house in the suburbs of the town. Bob could see

at a glance that it represented the income of some careful artisan or small shopkeeper, and that it promised little for an invalid's luxurious comfort. They were ushered into a chilly sitting-room, and Miss Boutelle ran upstairs with Jimmy to prepare the invalid for Bob's appearance. He noticed that a word dropped by the woman who opened the door made the young girl's face grave again, and paled the colour that the storm had buffeted to her cheek. He noticed also that these plain surroundings seemed only to enhance her own superiority, and that the woman treated her with a deference in odd contrast to the ill-concealed disfavour with which she regarded him. Strangely enough, this latter fact was a relief to his conscience. It would have been terrible to have received their

intermittently conscious, but had asked to see him. It was a short flight of stairs to the bedroom, but before he reached it Bob's heart beat faster than it had in any mountain climb. In one corner of the plainly furnished room stood a small truckle bed, and in it lay the invalid. It needed but a single glance at her flushed face in its aureole of yellow hair to recognise the likeness to Jimmy, although, added to that strange refinement produced by suffering, there was a spiritual exaltation in the child's look—possibly from delirium—that awed and frightened him. An awful feeling that he could not lie to this hopeless creature took possession of him, and his step faltered. But she lifted her small arms pathetically towards him as if she divined his trouble, and he sank on his



"SHE SPOKE NO WORD."

kindness under false pretences; to take their just blame of the man he personated seemed to mitigate the deceit.

The young girl rejoined him presently, with troubled eyes. Cissy was worse, and only

knees beside her. With a tiny finger curled around his long moustache, she lay there silent. Her face was full of trustfulness, happiness, and consciousness—but she spoke no word.

There was a pause, and Falloner, slightly lifting his head without disturbing that faintly clasping finger, beckoned Miss Boutelle to his side. "Can you drive?" he said, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"Take my sleigh and get the best doctor in town to come here at once. Bring him with you if you can; if he can't come at once, drive home yourself. I will stay here."

"But——" hesitated Miss Boutelle.

"I will stay here," he repeated.

The door closed on the young girl, and Falloner, still bending over the child, presently heard the sleigh-bells pass away in the storm. He still sat with his bent head held by the tiny clasp of those thin fingers. But the child's eyes were fixed so intently upon him that Mrs. Ricketts leaned over the strangely-assorted pair and said:—

"It's your brother Dick, dearie. Don't you know him?"

The child's lips moved faintly. "Dick's dead," she whispered.

"She's wandering," said Mrs. Ricketts. "Speak to her." But Bob, with his eyes on the child's, lifted a protesting hand. The little sufferer's lips moved again. "It isn't Dick—it's the angel God sent to tell me."

She spoke no more. And when Miss Boutelle returned with the doctor she was beyond the reach of finite voices. Falloner would have remained all night with them, but he could see that his presence in the contracted household was not desired. Even his offer to take Jimmy with him to the hotel was declined, and at midnight he returned alone.

What his thoughts were that night may be easily imagined. Cissy's death had removed the only cause he had for concealing his real identity. There was nothing more to prevent his revealing all to Miss Boutelle and to offer to adopt the boy. But he reflected this could not be done until after the funeral, for it was only due to Cissy's memory that he should still keep up the rôle of Dick Lasham as chief mourner. If it seems strange that Bob did not at this crucial moment take Miss Boutelle into his confidence, I fear it was because he dreaded the personal effect of the deceit he had practised upon her more than any ethical consideration; she had softened considerably in her attitude towards him that night; he was human, after all, and while he felt his conduct had been unselfish in the main, he dared not confess to himself how much her opinion had influenced him. He resolved that after the

funeral he would continue his journey, and write to her, *en route*, a full explanation of his conduct, inclosing Daddy's letter as corroborative evidence. But on searching his letter-case he found that he had lost even that evidence, and he must trust solely at present to her faith in his improbable story.

It seemed as if his greatest sacrifice was demanded at the funeral! For it could not be disguised that the neighbours were strongly prejudiced against him. Even the preacher improved the occasion to warn the congregation against the dangers of putting off duty until too late. And when Robert Falloner, pale, but self-restrained, left the church with Miss Boutelle, equally pale and reserved, on his arm, he could with difficulty restrain his fury at the passing of a significant smile across the faces of a few curious bystanders. "It was Amy Boutelle that was the 'penitence' that fetched him, you bet!" he overheard, a barely concealed whisper; and the reply, "And it's a good thing she's made out of it, too, for he's mighty rich!"

At the church door he took her cold hand into his. "I am leaving to-morrow morning with Jimmy," he said, with a white face. "Good-bye."

"You are quite right; good-bye," she replied as briefly, but with the faintest colour. He wondered if she had heard it too.

Whether she had heard or not, she went home with Mrs. Ricketts in some righteous indignation, which found—after the young lady's habit—free expression. Whatever were Mr. Lasham's faults of omission it was most un-Christian to allude to them there, and an insult to the poor little dear's memory who had forgiven them. Were she in his shoes she would shake the dust of the town off her feet; and she hoped he would. She was a little softened on arriving to find Jimmy in tears. He had lost brother Dick's photograph—or Dick had forgotten to give it back at the hotel, for this was all he had in his pocket. And he produced a letter—the missing letter of Daddy, which by mistake Falloner had handed back instead of the photograph! Miss Boutelle saw the superscription and Californian post-mark with a vague curiosity.

"Did you look inside, dear? Perhaps it slipped in."

Jimmy had not. Miss Boutelle did—and I grieve to say, ended by reading the whole letter.

Bob Falloner had finished packing his things the next morning, and was waiting for Mr. Ricketts and Jimmy. But when a tap

came at the door, he opened it to find Miss Boutelle standing there. "I have sent Jimmy into the bedroom," she said, with a faint smile, "to look for the photograph which you gave him this in mistake for. I think for the present he prefers his *brother's picture* to this letter, which I have not explained to him or anyone." She stopped, and raising her eyes to his said, gently: "I think it would have only been a part of your goodness to have trusted *me*, Mr. Falloner."

"Then you will forgive me?" he said, eagerly.

She looked at him frankly, yet with a faint trace of coquetry that the angels might have pardoned. "Do you want me to say to you what Mrs. Ricketts says were the last words of poor Cissy?"

A year later, when the darkness and rain

were creeping up Sawyer's Ledge, and Houston and Daddy Folsom were sitting before their brush-wood fire in the old Lasham cabin, the latter delivered himself oracularly:—

"It's a mighty queer thing, that news about Bob! It's not that he's married, for that might happen to anyone; but this yer account in the paper of his wedding being attended by his 'little brother.' That gets me! To think all the while he was here he was lettin' on to us that he hadn't kith or kin! Well, sir, that accounts to me for one thing—the sing'ler way he tumbled to that letter of poor Dick Lasham's little brother and sent him that draft! Don't ye see? It was a feller feelin'! Knew how it was himself! I reckon ye all thought I was kinder soft reading that letter o' Dick Lasham's little brother to him, but ye see what it did."

