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THE TALISMAN,

A California Sketch.

BY EDWARD S. ELLIS.

'Well, I reckon this New Year will be a mighty sight more pleasant than the last few have been. Things have gone hard since I left, and the old woman has had to work early and late to keep the little one at school; but brighter days are coming, as they'll find out before they're much older.'

Tom Whitney, a shaggy, iron-limbed and begrimed miner, was riding a cadaverous mule down the western slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains, on his way to San Francisco.

Tom had been among the California diggings for over three years. He was in good circumstances at home, when a sudden reverse left him penniless, and he started for the land of gold, leaving his wife and daughter Annie at home. The latter was a girl of thirteen—sweet, loving, intelligent and beautiful. It was the ambition of her parents to give her the best education possible, and every nerve was strained to that end. The mother was both industrious and ambitious, and the father cramped himself to the last degree that he might send home his pittance now and then by the steamer.

The mother and daughter did not suspect the privations and sufferings he underwent in the wild, lawless regions of the extreme West, because he carefully avoided all reference to it. He spoke hopefully, but at the same time was unmoved in his resolution to remain away until he had gathered enough of the golden treasure to restore him and his family to something like their former social position.

The success of Tom had been only moderate; in fact, scarcely that for a couple of years. He drifted about among the diggings, forced at times to consort with the most desperate characters, but able to hold his own with any of them.

One stormy night he saw a miner in Grizzly Gulch set upon by a couple of ruffians, and Tom went to his defence. The fight was a terrible one, but the assassins were beaten off, leaving their victim so terribly wounded that he lived only three days. By way of gratitude, he told Tom, just before he died, of a place up among the mountains where there was enough gold to make him rich.

After the poor fellow was decently buried, Tom mounted his rickety mule, with his few indispensible traps, and started on the hunt for the hidden wealth that the man had told him about. Good fortune favored him, and he struck a small stream, where the washings were of the richest possible character. In fact it may be said that Tom for a time actully scooped up solid wealth. Only a few weeks were needed for him to exaust the "bonanza," but when he had done so there was a consciousness that his wealth was triply as great as ever before.

And he was now making his way through the mountains toward the metropolis of the State, with the purpose of getting home in Philadelphia for Christmas. He calculated that he would reach the city so as to put himself through a "civilizing" process in the way of apparel and toilet, and then go home by the Pacific railroad before the new year should open.

'They don't expect me,' he muttered, as a pleased smile lit up his brozed visage, 'and, therefore, the surprise will be the greater. I'll come down on them all of a sudden like, and won't let them know anything about my wealth till New Year's morning, and then we'll have the jolliest time ever heard of. It's more than three years, and it seems like thirty, since I kissed the old woman and little Annie good-bye. 'God bless 'em!' he murmured, as he took a small locket from his pocket, and gazing through misty eyes at the figures, touched his lips to them again and again.

The picture was of a handsome lady in middle life, with a girl as beautiful as a rose seated upon her lap, reading the Holy Bible. It was a peculiar picture, as the eyes were entirely concealed by the act of reading, although the features and contour of the face were admirably displayed.

Hundreds and hundreds of times, among the wildest fastness of the mountains, in the gloomy depths of the wilderness and the solemn quiet of the forest, by the lonely camp-fire and when gliding in his canoe over the still water of the inland sea, had he gazed upon that picture, touching his bearded lips to it again and again, while his eyes filled and his heart went out to the wife and little one thousands of miles away.

Whitney had been toiling and digging into one of the most secluded spots in the mountains, so that he had a day or two to travel before he could expect to meet any human beings. Like all the inhabitants in that part of the world, he was fully armed, carrying his rifle, revolver and bowie knife—the last a weapon so terrible in looks that, as Colonel Crockett said when he first saw it, it was enough to make a person feel faint.

'I don't doubt,' he said, as he drew up for the night, 'that if it was known how much of the yellow stuff I've got about my clothes, I would have a whole regiment of desperadoes and robbers after me; but then nobody can know it, and I don't see the need of worrying over it.'

He had halted in a deep ravine, where the rocks threw dense shadows and walled him in from the rest of the world. During the afternoon, some miles back, he had detected the smoke of a camp fire on a distant elevation, but after surveying it through his spy glass, he concluded that it came from a party of Indians, so far off that he need not think further about them.

So he started his fire in the ravine at the base of an immense rock, cooked his antelope steak, smoked his pipe and stretching out upon his blanket, with his head resting on the saddle bags, he lay for two hours, with the locket in his hand, gazing at the faces as the firelight fell upon them.

It was his purpose to make different preparations before going to sleep, but as is often the case he became lost in reverie, with his eyes fixed upon the precious picture, only rousing up at a late hour to place the treasure with the precious gold in the saddle bags.

'I'll put it there to-night,' he muttered, 'but it's worth more than all the rest.'

Tom Whitney was tired, and fell into a heavy slumber which lasted beyond midnight, when he was suddenly aroused by the dropping of his head several inches. He had roughed it long enough to collect his senses on the instant, and he knew what this meant.

Some one had withdrawn the saddle bags which served as a pillow, and which also contained the rich yellow washings of that secret stream where he had spent a month. His entire wealth was hidden in them.

'Drop that, or you're a dead man!' called out Tom, catching up his rifle and leaping to his feet.

The moon was shining, but it was dark in the ravine. However, he heard the stealthy footsteps gliding up the gorge and the enraged miner dashed after them, as he would have done had there been a dozen desperadoes engaged in robbing him.

The quick ears of Tom told him that he and the thief were the only occupants of the ravine, and he pursued him with the fury of desperation. Both were fleet-footed, but the fugitive had the advantage of knowing the ground better, and the exasperated miner felt, after he had stumbled and gathered himself up several times, that he was losing ground; but he continued forwerd with undiminished resolution.

For a quarter of an hour this strange race continued, and then the thief ran up a sort of ridge, where for an instant he was seen on the crest, as he was brought in relief against tae moonlit sky beyond.

Whitney saw that he was a tall man wearing a Mexican sombrero. His dark figure was outlined so sharply against the sky, that Tom saw the saddle bags, which he held under his left arm, while a rifle was grasped in his right hand, and he sped forward with such long, tremendous strides, that it was easy to understand how he had made such swift progress.

The minute Tom saw the singular apparition, he brought his rifle to his shoulder and fired; but he was panting, and his nerves were so unstrung from his severe exertion that the shot went wild, and the tall thief and the saddle bags instantly vanished from view over the ridge.

A few seconds later, Whitney was on the crest, in which dangerous position he paused, that his ear might tell him which direction the thief had gone.

But all was still as the tomb, only the soft sighing of the night wind through the pines on his left reaching his ears. Wherever the thief was, he was either hiding or fleeing so quietly, that the ear could not detect him. Whitney waited a half-hour and then stole softly down the ridge, and stayed there listening and on the alert until morning.

But the sun brought no more knowledge. The thief had disappeared for good and left no trace behind. Whitney could not follow the trail for a hundred yards, and he turned back where his cadaverous and rickety mule nibbled the grass and awaited him.

'Every dollar was in those saddle bags,' he muttered, in bitterness of spirit, 'and it's gone. Wife and daughter won't see me this New Year. I ain't going home a poor man if I must die here—and back again I strike for the mountain. Oh, Heaven!'

Just then he recalled that before going to sleep he had placed the locket in the saddle-bags with the gold, so that had vanished also. His talisman as he had come to regard it, had departed.

Much as he needed the gold, he would have parted with it a thousand times over rather than lose the picture of his wife and only child. The cold perspiration broke out upon him, as he stood by the smouldering embers of his own camp-fire and thought of the overwhelming calamity that had come upon him. With a grim, iron resolve he mounted his mule and headed him back to the lonely brook from which he had taken his rich washings, only praying that for a few months he might forget everything else but his search for gold.

And for weeks and months the man toiled and delved, from rise of morn till set of sun, in his quest for metal. He was not working for himself, but his family.

He found that the stream which had once made him wealthy was now exhausted, and when the almost interminable year had rolled around, he had not more than two or three hundred dollars in his possession, barely enough to fit him up decently and send him home.

The wear of the year had told heavily upon him. He felt used-up, sick and weary, and he had finally come to the conclusion that he would go home and die.

'I can make it by New Year,' he muttered, as he drew up where he had encamped a year before. 'I go back to die a wreck a complete failure!'

His meditations were more gloomy as he was encamped upon the very spot where he had been robbed a year before. A more utterly wretched and despairing being could not have existed than Tom Whitney as he stretched out before the camp fire—although there was a certain tenderness thrilling him at intervals, as he recalled the visit he had made some weeks before to the nearest settlement, where he found a letter from the loving wife and daughter, begging him to come home, no matter whether he had secured any gold or not, and he had decided to do so.

As before, the hour was late when he closed his eyes, but his sleep was sound and he never awakened until broad day light and then, when he roused up and looked about him, he met with the greatest surprise in his life.

What did he see?

There, directly before his eyes, were his saddle bags, and on the top of them lay a letter directed to himself.

It was several minutes before Tom could assure himself that he was not dreaming—there was something so unreal so mysterious about it all. Finally he reached out his hand and took the unsealed letter:

'About a year ago, I robbed you of all your money, and a picture which I supposed was that of your wife and child. I once had such a wife and daughter, but they are both dead; and I promised that wife I would be a better man, but I forgot the promises untill I saw this picture. These faces have haunted me ever since. I haven't been able to sleep peaceably for months, not until I made up my mind to try with the help of heaven to be a better man. As a step toward doing so, I return you all that of which I robbed you, when you encamped here a year ago. There is no need of my signing my name.'

Tom Whitney examined the saddle-bags. Yes, there was all the gold, and there too was the blessed picture, none the less precious because since its loss he had received another from home.

He looked about him, hoping he might see the writer and grasp his hand; but no living being was in sight. Taking his battered hat from his head, the miner reverently raised his eyes to heaven and thanked God for all his mercies.

An hour later he was astride his leathery mule again making his way down the mountain side in the direction of San Francisco. He guarded the treasure with the care of one who knew its value, and who could not forget the lesson of before.

There were several times when Tom's over-anxiety really increased his peril, and there was more than one cut-throat who looked as if he suspected the cause of his agitation.

But they saw at the same time that Whitney was a powerful, active and courageous man, and it was not the most healthful thing in the world to attack him and so he was left alone and reached San Francisco in safety, with his gold intact.

In that city he turned it into bills of exchange to the amount of over twenty thousand dollars, and started homeward wondering all the way who the man was who had repented in such a genuine fashion of a great wrong committed. Remembering his stature and peculiar appearance as shown in that memorable night when he caught a glimpse of him by moonlight, as he went over the hill, Tom scrutinized every person resembling him with interest, but he never heard anything more of the mysterious individual.

And on New Year's morning wife and daughter were clasped in the arms of the husband and father, who had come back to them after so many years of wandering.

And in the great city of Philadelphia, and indeed in the whole broad land, there was no happier and more grateful family than was the little one which returned thanks to heaven for the manner in which they were brought together after many days.—*Golden Era.*

A Birmingham (Conn.) farmer recently lost his wife, and there being no undertaker in the place he was obliged to go to a neighboring town to procure one. His errand accomplished, conversation was pursued on various topics, during which he inquired if the undertaker had plenty of walnuts that year. The answer being in the negative, the farmer agreed to give him half a bushel when he drove over with the hearse, and said he could take them on the seat with him. On the day of the funeral, when the rooms were filled with friends who had come to sympathize, and when everything was hushed and still, the farmer went up stairs to fulfill his promise, and just as he was about to descend the stairs the bottom of the measure fell out, and with a terrible rattling noise the walnuts rolled down the uncarpeted stairs, alarming the people below. They rushed out to see the cause of the disturbance. The poor farmer stood holding the bottomless measure, not knowing which way to turn. The friends assisted in gathering up the walnuts with as good grace as they could muster, more than ever convinced, no doubt, that there is a time for everything.

A WAYSIDE COURTESY.

I was once walking a short distance behind a handsomely dressed young lady, and thinking, as I looked at her beautiful clothes, 'I wonder if she takes as much pains with her heart as she does with her body?' A poor man was coming up the walk with a loaded wheelbarrow, and just before he reached us he made two attempts to go into the yard of a small house, but the gate was heavy and would swing back before he could get through. 'Wait,' said the young girl springing forward, 'I'll hold the gate open.' And she held the gate open till he passed in, and received his thanks with a pleasant smile as she went on. She deserves good clothes, I thought, 'for a beautiful spirit dwells in her breast.'

Gleanings.

The most beautiful may be the most admired and caressed, but they are not always the most esteemed and loved.

The most benevolent intentions, and the most beneficient actions, often lose a great part of their merits if they are void of delicacy.

A wit asked a peasant what part he performed in the great drama of life. "I mind my own business," was the reply.

He is happy whose circumstances suit his temper; but he is more happy who can suit his temper to any circumstances.

The class in German grammar is of the subject of genders. "Miss Flora, why is 'moon' masculine in German?" "So that she can go out alone nights, I suppose."

Latest from the seashore: Break, break, break on her shivering limbs! Go see! She's surely going in with her striped stockings on. Goodness, gracious me!

A woman can no more help wanting to know what is inside of a trunk that's locked than she can refrain from trying on a new hat whenever she sees one.

A wag suggests that a suitable opening for many choirs should be, 'O Lord, have mercy on us miserable singers.'

He who wants goods sense is unhappy in having learning; for he has thereby only more ways of exposing himself.

Most men spend the early part of their lives in such a way as to render the latter part miserable.

It is easy to pick flaws in other people's work, but more profitable to do better work yourself.

There is something nice about the balance of trade. A worthy farmer who comes to town loaded with new wheat almost every day goes home loaded with old rye.

"I sigh for one glance of your rye," warbled an impecunious fellow as he wandered into a leading saloon, a few days ago. He got but a "glance," his range of vision being suddenly transferred to the outer air.

"Take away women," asks a writer, "and what would follow?" We would. Give us something harder next time.

An Infidel is generally one who wants to get God out of the way, so that he can have a good time all to himself and no questions asked.

The stock liar of the *Tribune* has exhausted himself on the cipher dispatches and that paper has re-engaged its old star performer—E. V. Smalley.—*Atlanta Constitution.*

An old Irish soldier who prided himself upon his bravery, said that he had fought at the battle of "Bull run." When asked if he had retreated and made good his escape as the others did on that famous occasion, he replied, "Bejabers, those that didn't run are there yit."

During the late war, some children were talking of their fathers and brothers who had been made prisoners of war. Many tales were told of the sufferings of their relatives, the youngsters evidently priding themselves upon it. One boy who was silently listening, at length said: "That's nothing; I've got an uncle in prison, and he ain't been to no war neither."

Sometimes God calls us from our dream of life to go out and battle for the victory before we are crowned; then again, amid the hurry and rush of other feet hastening to the conflict, He bids us wait with patience. Though it seems to us that others will carry away all the prizes, the twilight is radiant with the wings of His angels bearing to us the richest blessings.

To every man there are many, many dark hours when he feels inclined to abandon his best enterprise—hours when his heart's dearest hopes appear delusive—hours when he feels unequal to the burden, when all aspirations seem worthless. Let no one think that he alone has dark hours. They are the common lot of humanity. They are the touch-stone to try whether we are current coin or not.

An admirer of Caleb Cushing says that the loss to the world by his death is like that which would be felt upon the burning of a magnificent library of rare and unduplicated books.

A Cincinnati preacher declares that the earth is getting better. The gentleman has reference, doubtless, to the soil.

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