

KEEP THE UPPER HAND.

Bear your burdens manfully,
 Whatso'er they be;
 Never let them over you
 Gain ascendancy.
 Never let them master you,
 Never for them wait:
 Hands of labor strong to bear,
 King the Bell of Fate.
 —Texas Siftings.

ON SILVER MOUNTAIN.

BY F. L. STEALEY.

Heavy snows had fallen that season, adding to the never-melted accumulations in the gulches that gashed the northern slope of Silver Mountain. Huge, undulating drifts, too, projected along the lofty crest, threatening to break away, and start the annihilating avalanche.

From the dingy log-dens below, the miners read these snow-signs with experienced eyes. Stout hearts had those seekers for silver, but apprehension of the snow-slide could shake even them.

But from two log-shanties, placed one above the other in a clump of giant pines well up on the mountain side, smoke still arose at the morning and evening, and from the ragged mouths of two tunnels that were being driven in the slope above, there still came daily the silvery clink of hammer striking drill, intermitted by a muffled roar, as giant powder shattered the mountain's breast.

In the upper of these shanties lived "Uncle Jimmy" Trout, with his son, young Jimmy; in the lower, "old man" Trail, with his son Sam.

These were rival claimants to the same lead, to which old man Trail gave the significant name of "The Last Chance," and which Uncle Jimmy, in more cheerful spirit, called "The Blue Bird," as a harbinger of the spring of hope in the winter of his life.

Many were the complications involving intricate points of miners' law about this disputed claim, and which claimant had the right thereof no man could tell. The listener to Uncle Jimmy's wrongs would be firmly convinced that he must be right, until he heard old man Trail expatiate on the equity of "first discovery," marking each "pint" with a hard forefinger in a horny palm, to the utter confusion of all previous convictions.

Each indignantly rejected all attempts at arbitration; and as, fortunately for themselves, both were too poor for the expensive luxury of litigation, it only remained, as Uncle Jimmy declared, "to sit right thar until they'd sot it out, regardless of expenses." And though Uncle Jimmy, with his rotund body and red face set in a casing of close-cut gray whisker, was one of the easiest-going of men, the energetic and determined air with which he made this declaration was indicative of a protracted "set" on the part of the Blue Bird.

As for old man Trail, one look in his cavernous eyes, as he ran his hand slowly over the tangles of his unkempt beard, would suffice to show that there was as little yield about him as about one of the granite crags that guarded the entrance to the Last Chance Tunnel.

Jimmy, who was, to use his father's own expression, "light complected," stood a clear ten inches above the head of his house; strong, too, of arm and shoulder from swing of hammer, and every whit as stout of heart.

That stalwart son of the Sierras, Sam Trail, though of leaner build than Jimmy, was in size and strength his match, "dark complected," and in other respects like the sombre and self-contained christener of the Last Chance.

Often when at sundown the two boys, tin buckets in hand, met at the little spring that served for the use of both cabins, brows bent in wrath were reflected in that crystal basin. For the feud went loyally down from father to son.

Even the two "jacks"—one of these Mexican donkeys being owned by each claimant, and used for packing up supplies from the camp blow—became imbued with partisan animosity. Each grazed aloof on the bunch-grass growing on the breezy slopes; and, meeting by the cabin doors, they bit and kicked over the bacon rinds flung therefrom with a heartiness that partook of the spirit of their respective masters.

It had been "skiffing" snow on the mountain for a day or two. But the morning was clear, and the sun, hanging on the pines that crested the opposing slope, shot his rays through glittering particles of flying frost into the open

door of the upper cabin. Within, the two Trouts sat at their slab table before a Spartan breakfast of slap-jacks and salt pork.

"Jimmy, that outfit down thar," said the elder Trout, indicating the cabin below with his hand as he spoke—"they sent to camp yesterday. Suppose you take the jack and go down to-day, fur our grub pile is gettin' low, and git the drills sharpened. I'll rustle round and wash up some clothes while you're gone."

The air of the early morning was keen, and Jimmy waited until the sun was well up before he put the pack-saddle on the jack, and started down. Uncle Jimmy, meantime, set the camp-kettle on the coals in the rough fireplace, and prepared for washing.

Daily the two old men passed each other on the deep-worn paths leading from cabins to tunnels, but without a word or look of recognition. But, rigid as was the silence maintained between them, it could be broken by one thing—want of tobacco. After a few hours' unsatisfied craving for this universal solace of the miner, either would yield and apply to the other, never to be refused.

On this morning old man Trail, who had sent Sam to camp the previous day, had resisted this craving a whole day, but at last he succumbed, and slowly sauntered up to the Trout cabin.

"Kin you spar me a piece of tobacco till my boy gets back?" he asked in his deliberate speech, disdainful of the forms of salutation, as he paused on the doorstep.

Uncle Jimmy, in overalls and red shirt with rolled up sleeves, was vigorously soaping flannels. He pointed with one side-dripping hand to the rough mantel.

"It's on the shelf. Come in and help yourself," he said, endeavoring vainly to throw a hospitable heartiness into his tone.

The old man stepped in, drew his sheath-knife, and was about to part the coveted plug, when the attention of both was caught by a sound, loud and strange among the many noises of the mountain, coming from above.

"The slide!" cried the old man.

Almost as he spoke the topmost of the pines snapped before the avalanche, and then it struck the cabin. Stout as this was it shivered to the shock, the logs on the upper side were driven partly in, and the centre roof-logs, already burdened by the weight of the dirt-roof, were sprung down and splintered with an ominous cracking.

But the spruce timbers were green and tough, and the cabin hung together. The slide, being partially broken by the trees, tore over it, closed the stout slab-door, and passed on down with a roar. Then followed darkness and silence.

All their tools were in the tunnels; they had nothing wherewith to effect an escape, even were escape possible. Fortunately the fire had gone out, so there was no smoke to add to their torture. But hidden thus from all its hopes, hatreds and fears, those two were to await, together, the inevitable.

For a time the suddenness of the catastrophe stunned both in silence. It was broken at length by the old man Trail, whose gruff tones were hardly recognizable in this softened whisper:

"Uncle Jimmy, I'm mighty glad the boys is both safe."

"I'm with you thar, old man," Uncle Jimmy replied, in a voice equally subdued.

The minutes, as they passed, might have been years, so faint and far away seemed their dispute over the lead.

"I'm sorry, old man. We mought 'a settled this here business twixt me and you long 'go; but now, I reckon it's goin' fur to settle us," and Uncle Jimmy's voice gave faltering indications of breaking down.

"Brace up, Uncle Jimmy! The boy is both safe, and me and you was a-gittin' old, and couldn't in natur' 'a held on much longer. And arter all, Uncle Jimmy, this here aint a plum' playout; it's jest a slip in the paystreak, and we'll strike it agin' 'acrost the gage."

The old man's voice was wonderful clear, as he paused and seated himself composedly on the bunk. Uncle Jimmy groped his way to him, and kneeling, rested his head and shoulders on the blankets. Then the hands of those ancient enemies met, and clung in a firm-locked clasp, reassuring each to each as they waited for the end.

To Jimmy, a visit to the camp was a welcome break in the monotony of life on Silver Mountain, and his step was accordingly light as he prodded the

down the drifted trail with the pointed end of the scrub-oak stick that served him alike for staff and goad.

As he progressed downward, frosty clouds passed between him and the sun, giving the air a sudden chill as their shadows darkened the sparkling surface of the snow. The summit was lost to view, and, driven by the wind, snow began to fly, coming partly from the clouds and partly from the drifts above. Jimmy, however, was used to these mountain "squalls," and knew that, as long as the nimble-footed jack could keep the trail, he was safe to follow.

A mile or less from the cabin the trail made an abrupt bend around a granite crag. Firm-bedded in the mountain, this thrust its tapering pinnacle to the tops of the surrounding pines. Where the trail hugged its base there had been a "catch" of soft sand conglomerate which, worn away by action of frost and air, had gradually dropped out and been washed down the slope, leaving a shelving recess.

Just as Jimmy reached this recess he encountered Sam Trail, coming upward. The two inimical jacks, brought suddenly face to face, alike laid long ears back and breathed forth defiance in trumpet notes that woke the echoes of the mountain defiles. Behind each pugnacious little beast his equally pugnacious driver halted squarely in the middle of the narrow trail.

"Turn out!" cried Sam Trail, in such a tone that Jimmy would have shot both jacks head-first down the slope rather than have complied. "Turn out, and let my jack hug the rock."

"Turn out yo'self!" retorted Jimmy. "My jack's got as good a right to the inside as yours." Everybody turns to the right, and I'm a-goin' to."

"The pack 'll tip my jack over the slope of I take the outside," replied Sam, "and I aint a-goin' to do it."

Both boys and beasts were by this time half-blinded by the snow, which was being sucked around the crag and whirled in their faces by the rising wind. Their passions kept pace with its fury. Each jack stood ready to rush open-mouthed; each driver got a firmer grasp on his oak stick and made a forward stride.

Just then, half-broken by the wind, came the sound of muffled thunder from the direction of the shanties. Following it, from immediately above them, came a crunching noise that caused the uplifted sticks to be held in air.

The snow-caps above had given way, and gathering momentum with increasing bulk and velocity, the slide, to which the one at the cabin was but a plaything, came tearing down, carrying along the granite boulders scattered in its path. Before its rush, the giant pines, with sap hard-frozen, snapped like reeds, each making a sharp report above the rattle-rumble of the mass.

Counted by the beating of their hearts, it was long before it struck the crag. Huge as was this, it trembled; but nothing less than an earthquake could have tumbled that mighty cone from its imbedded base, and the slide broke over it and passed on.

Cowering in the recess, the boys were covered with snow as the great avalanche thundered past, swept the pines from the slope below, and shot up on the opposite side of the gulch, where at last it settled with a sound and a shock that seemed to shake the mountain.

"O Sam, my pa and yours!" cried Jimmy, in a voice quite different from his former one. "That first one sounded like it was at the shanties."

As he spoke, with one accord they drew nearer together. No longer they seemed to be the two who had so lately met on the trail. And the slide had wrought other changes. Even the wind, no more sighing through the broken pines, whistled in altered cadence about the naked pinnacle of their bulwark.

"We must git out and git to the shanties somehow. Let's take the shovel and cut steps in the snow-bank," said Sam, pointing to a new shovel with its handle slipped through the many turns of rope that held the pack on the saddle of his jack.

Both brightened at the prospect of action. Sam, cutting the steps, was out first, and Jimmy clambering after, they stood looking around.

The dark green trees were gone. Some, torn up by the roots, had been carried bodily down; while here and there the stump of some broken giant stuck up its yellow splinters from the snow.

Both looked above, but the view was limited by the snow, driven by the furious wind, which, as they stepped from the crag, struck them with full power and forced them back.

"We can't go up agin' it," said Sam. "It'll fall 'fore long, I reckon. It didn't look like more'n a squall as I came up the trail. And maybe, Jimmy, the slide didn't strike the shanties; and ef it did, our pa's might 'a been in the tunnels."

"My pa wasn't," said Jimmy, shaking his head. "He was just going to wash our clothes when I left."

"Them shanties was both put there to stay, and yowen was the stoutest built—even pa always 'lowed that." For Sam, though silent enough generally, could speak out on occasion.

"Now, Jimmy, I was bringing up a coffee pot. 'Taint no use standin' doin' nothin', and we'll melt some snow and have some coffee. I've got some already ground in the pot."

"I'll make the fire," said Jimmy, starting up as Sam unhooked the coffee pot from the crosses of the pack saddle. "There's a big mountain rat's nest under this rock. I've noticed it every time I passed, and the sticks are good and dry."

The fire was quickly made, and coffee was boiled. Then, cups being wanting, the pot was set away in the snow to cool sufficiently to permit of drinking from it. Sam, meantime, cut slices of salt pork from the piece in his pack, and these, having been singed in the fire, the two ate, and drank alternately from the same spout in loving fellowship.

In the background the jacks hung over the feast with pleading eyes. Each was rewarded now and then by a tid-bit of rind from his master's hand. And when the pork was finished Sam got out a small sack of oatmeal, and pouring a little into his hollowed hand, the two jacks licked it up by brotherly turns.

Soon after the meal the wind began to fall, and the clouds, breaking away, the sun, now declining, struck into the gulch. Then they widened the steps sufficiently to permit of the jacks clambering up, and set out for the shanties.

The trail was obliterated, but the snow was packed hard and they had little difficulty in gaining the site of the cabins. Then their fears were confirmed. Both had disappeared, and no human sound broke the solemn stillness. They had some difficulty, too, in locating the exact spots where the cabins had stood.

This they at length did, however, by the aid of the torn and twisted trees. These, they saw, had broken the force of the slide, and deflected it as well, so that the main shoot had turned and passed directly over the lower cabin. The upper one, inhabited by the Trouts, had been covered but a few feet from the great side-pressure of the mass.

After they had determined the location, Sam paused, and leaning on the shovel which he had brought up, said, with generous self-restraint, "Now, Jimmy, we aint got but one shovel. Which shanty shall we go at first?"

"Let's draw straws," replied Jimmy, after a moment's indecision.

"All right; you fix 'em." Jimmy stooped, and taking two needles from a broken pine bough at his feet, turned his back.

"Short is our shanty, long is yours. Draw, Sam," he said, as he faced about.

Each knew the minutes now were fraught with life or death to their imprisoned fathers. Jimmy's big hand trembled as he held the fateful needles pressed between thumb and finger. Sam's lean, brown one never quivered as he reached and drew—the short one.

"Your shanty," he said, with a long breath, and flung off his coat. "I'll take first shift. We'd better run in an incline, so as to strike the door, ef it's still thar."

Taking short runs, after a couple of hours' rapid work, they heard a muffled cry from within. Then the door was soon reached, forced open, and there, to their great joy, each saw his father.

To the anxious boys the faces of the fathers looked white and ghastly from their confinement in the stifling place, but the fresh air soon revived them. The old man Trail, struggling to his feet, was the first to speak.

"We might er knowed, Uncle Jimmy," he said, "that the boys was bound to git us out."

"Old man," Uncle Jimmy replied, too much impressed by recent events to think of aught else, "this slide has settled it fur me. S'pose we cut the claim in the middle and you take fust choice?"

"I was jest thinkin'," said the old man, with due deliberation, "this here thing of drivin' in two tunnels side and side is kinder foolishness. If we'd consolidate on one we'd strike pay rock all the quicker."

"That's a fact, pardner, and we can call it the Last Chance." Uncle Jimmy responded with self-denying alacrity, for the christening of his find is a matter of