# THE BANK OF CALIFORNIA and the blood cozing from a wound in the right temple.

## BY PRENTICE MULFORD.

## COSTRICTED BY THE AUTHOR. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. !

He crawled up gradually toward the shelf on which lay the "Bank." It inclined some-what toward the river and then jumped off abruptly, making a perpendicular face four or five feet in height. Pratt could now see that the quartz had rolled from this shelf, and that the vein must be somewhere at or mear its top.

"It's up there!" I heard him mutter, "and mighty rich, too!"

I heard him scrambling up the wall of rock, assisting himself by roots and bushes growing in the crevices. I heard him pant. All beside was still-the stillness of the California summer noon day-nothing of life in sight save a black buzzard wheeling above, his chadow floating along the ground.

Pratt had gained the top of the shelf. He made his way directly toward the face of the precipice. He burst through the chapparal, and I was disclosed to him, seated on a rock, about ten feet from the vein.

"Holloa!" was his involuntary exclamation; "you here?" "Yes, I'm here," I replied.

"Well, well!" He was evidently at a los what next to say or do. "It's a hot day. isu't it?

"Pretty hot," I remarked. I thought it was or would be soon in every sense, and the shadow of a laugh came over me as I thought of "talking weather" at such a juncture. Mr. Pratt sat himself also down upon a

rock, drew a rusty red bandana, mopped with it his face and partly bald head, and mid "Whew!" Then he poked the ground

before him with the end of his hammer, and

I poked Mother Earth before me with a stick. It was clear to me that Mr. Pratt intended to stay here and wait for my going. It was clear to me that I should remain-though I did not like so to do. The situation was somewhat akin to that in which two gentlemen calling on the same lady sometimes find themselves-and of all work sitting your man out ranks among the hardest. Both of us recognized silence as the factor most efficacious for the removal of his adversaryonly while Mr. Pratt hoped that the dullness of his company might remove me, I had no hope that my taciturnity would remove Mr. Pratt from the vicinity of the golden

mistress he knew was near. So we sat one full hour, and the longest hour of my life. Pratt made the first move. He commenced examining the rock near the solid mountain formation. Nearer he advanced toward the place where Broener had screened the worked portion of the vein with a layer of cut brush. He was in the act of removing this when I called out: "Don't touch that brush, please!"

"Why not?" said Pratt, looking back. "Never mind why not, Don't touch it." I said, advancing toward him, feeling as if on

my way to the scaffold. "Well, young man, do you own this mountain?" he said.

"I own that brush, that's all," was my

reply. The brush was ranged against the white streak of rock for not more than ten or twelve feet. Pratt passed it. His eye fell on one end of the vein-untouched there by the pick. He commenced chipping it with his hammer.

"You must let that rock alone," I said, going toward him. Pratt was now up and doing. The war

had commenced. "Oh, come!" he exclaimed, "don't you

fool around me any more. You must be off your head. This mountain's as much mine as yours." "That's my claim," I said. "Let it alone."

Momentary wonder showed itself in Pratt's eves that any one else should know of gold in this form.

"Your claim," said he, "up here! What sort of diggings do you call these anyway?" "Perhaps you know as well as I. But that's my claim by right of discovery.

"Where's your noticesf"

## CHAPTER XI. LIFE.

now!" added a third.

not noticed it before.

ones of to-morrow.

tried, convicted, sentenced.

body had smeared them near the feet-I had

This remark called to me the attention of

I left soon afterward. Hillyear's route

home was mine. We were obliged to walk

near each other on the narrow, rocky trail,

wide enough for a single traveler. With all the dark suspicion which I feared existed in

his mind concerning me I felt sorry for him.

felt when about him that his was one of

those natures, born to follow-that Pratt had picked him up as he would a stray dog

looking for a master, and that with the in-

stinct of the animal he had become attached

I tried in vain that night to sleep. So soon

as my body was at rest, and my brain be-

came more active than ever, its picturings

from the scenes of that day to the possible

Something must be done with that body.

You know how in our minds come floating

That buzzard! That buzzard and his com-

panions would to-morrow show to the search-

ers surely where the body lay! No animal in

that country may die on highway or byway,

on plain, guich or mountain, and though it

be ever so thickly screened by bushes,

though not one of these scavengers be visible,

yet within a few hours trooping they come,

led by some wondrous faculty of scent or

That body. I must remove, and this very

night. i jumped up, dressed myself in the

darkne-s, and in a few minutes was stumbling

me its fading yellowish light. Much of the

trail, both up and down, lay in almost total

darkness. Where the pines grew thickly some-

times 1 lost my way entirely. 1 groped and stumbled over bush and rock. In two hours

It was my intent to drag the body down

the mountain side and throw it in the river.

Whether it was found far or near, it would

I thought, lessen and break the web of cir-

cumstantial evidence i saw weaving about

me. It would put Pratt off the ground 1

The fragment of moon remaining was just

above the dark outline of the hills on the

other side of the river. In ten minutes 1

I commenced removing the brush from

Pratt's boly. I took is first from the legs

and trunk. The face I didn't want to see if possible. I worked the slower as

approached the head. The moon sunk

entirely behind the dark ridge opposite.

I removed the brush from the head. I had

reached the last branch covering is. I at-

tempted to remove that. Something seemed

to hold it with feeble resistance. I stooped

lower, shivering. The branch was clutched in Fratt's right hand. Yet the body lay in

corpse-like rigidity. It did not seem, as l

then saw it, the act of a live man. It seemed

should be left in total darkness.

up the mountain side. An "old moon" gave

memories-recent or remote, important or

to Pratt and was grieving for him.

Where it was it must not remain.

loating on the ground by me.

vision to the carcass, their teast.

I was again on the spot.

must frequent.

all in the dingy store. Their eyes seemed to burn through me. I felt as if in the dock

I had now a dead man on my hands and didn't know what to do with him. Pratt bore on me mentally with as great a weight, dead, as he had while living. He would be soon missed and sought for by his partner. Hillyear would find his prospect holes. This would bring the search in the neighborhood of the claim. If I told my story of the manner in which he met his death, I should be hard-ly credited. Then it would lead indirectly to the discovery of the "Bank." In whatever way I looked i saw perplexity. But something must be done.

The day was waning. I covered the body with brush and returne 1 home.

Nearing it, I saw Hillyear standing at his cabin door, cooking supper. They built their fire outside for sake of comfort. A frying pan was propped up so as to receive the heat from a bed of glowing coals, and in it was their evening's baking of bread. He was looking from time to time up the river with that air of expectancy which accompanies the act of waiting for some one who has overstayed the usual time. As I drew near he hailed me.

'Seen anything of Pratt?'

What was I to say! I had seen the last of him. I felt already like a murderer, because, circumstantially, I was in the position of one. People talk as if a "clear conscience" was equal to any situation. I did not find it so, "I saw him about three hours ago going up the river," was my reply. "Where was he?" asked Hillyear.

Great heavens! I thought, how much of this game of evasion am I to play from this out. I said: "He passed the cabin about nine this morning, and went into the chapparal about yonder," and I pointed to the spot where I had seen Pratt disappear at the hour I named. Hillyear resumed his cooking. I went into my cabin and took a big draught of whisky. Broener always had on hand a demijohn of the bost. There are times when one's system is not equal to the making of strength from ordinary food. 1 hold alcohol as a food-an artificial one, and an unhealthy one for steady use.

After supper I trudged down to the store, for I wanted other than my own thoughts that evening for company. The Buil Bar nucleus for goods and gossip was full as usual of miners, raising a dense fog of tobacco smoke, whose flavor was more than dashed with emanations from codfish, onious

and whisky. Mr. Rankin had received that day a new supply of provisions from Stock-ton, and was scoiding his partner, who acted as buyer and teamster combined, for the poor quality of some eigars he had brought up.

"If you buy any more eigars like them," said he, "I want you to hire and bring up some men to smoke them. These poor creatures about here haven t lungs strong enough to draw on 'em. They want all their strength to draw rocks out of the bed of the river. and it's for my interest to see that it's saved for that purpose, at the rate I'm chalking up flour, boots and whisky against them."

"Got any better cigars than the last lot?" asked a miner, who, just coming in, hal not heard Rankin's last rem rk.

"Yes," replied Rankin "Splendid lot-Havanas—only it wants a bull term to draw one. Try one. You'd find it'll lat  $y_{i}at$  a month. Just the quality to suit your case. You smoke too much. These cigars are gos up express to cure people of smoking. One'll last an ordinary man a whole year. Ask Mike, my rartner. He had 'em made to order.

Rankin's gabble was a relief. Big Dick came in, and forgetting past admonitions, hoisted his huge proportions, on the limited area of counter uncovered by goods, and immediately got off again with a quickness that suggested some uncomfortable sensation.

"Glad it works," said Rankin. "Nothin' but a needle stark through the wood. Some folkses heads are too thick to take a hint. Then we try some other part. 'If at first you don't succeed, try, try again," chimed Rankin, and then added: "'Needles and pins, Needles and pins, When you got mar-

#### early for in the morning." "And the last man's blood is on his pants a shot, which was not to be wondered at.

"For heaven's sake, Hillycar, don't fire! It's me. I'vo found Pratt. He's hurt badly," I I had worn a pair of white duck working cried. trousers and a spot of the blood from Pratt's

"Who's me?" asked Hillyear, after one of his periods of silence. I heard him cocking his pistol. "It's I-

Holder. Come and help me get Pratt down off the mountain. He's lying there with a gash in his head."

Mr. Hillyear now relapsed into silence. knew not whether he was trying to frame a idea into a sentence or peering out to get an aim at me.

"Ain't you coming?" I cried at last. "Are you going to help me get Pratt down. He'll die before we get to him."

"How-did-you-come - to -find-him?" came at length from Mr. Hillyear's lips, with a sort of clownish judicial gravity. "Good heavens!" I said. "Will you stay

there all night and ask questions, while your partner is bleeding to death? Do you suppose I'd get out of my bed to stand and call here like a fool for nothing!"

"What's the muss?' cried a voice in the darkness. It was Bill Sefter, who lived viorating from Pratt's body to the store, and about an eighth of a mile distant. He had come, roused by the shot and the sound of voices,

"I've found Pratt badly hurt on Scrub mountain, and am trying to get Hillyear to help me down with him. Hillyear won't believe me, and that's what's the matter."

"Hillyear, get up! Don't be a fool," said Sefter.

Hillyear finally replied: "All-right! I'm -comin' !" with an expression as if he had had no doubts as to the genuineness of the

Our party reached Pratt, where I had left were a source of great uneasiness. They

We left Pratt in his cabin. Sefter, who me, just what I expected he would:

"How did you come to find Pratt away up therel

I told Sefter that I heard Pratt's voice the night up the mountain, which was true, but not in the sense I left Sefter to infer I held that evasion was justifiable under the circumstances. It's not so much what we tell that may damage us as the construction placed on it by those it may be told to. The only way I know of when certain questions are asked that many people will ask, to avoid evasion or untruthfulness, is to say "it's nonof your business." That, as society is now constituted and complicated, would be quite innossible.

'I wonder who shot him?" continued Sefter.

"Shot himself, maybe." I replied.

"Queer business, anyway," was final remark, as he trudged off home. was Sefter's I saw by his manner that he was full of curiosity, and being full of curiosity would be soon full of theories as to the cause of Pratt's hurt, and that as curiosity and theories are contagious, he would in a short time inoculate all Bull Bar with them.

Next day I visited Pratt. His head had been hurt both by the bail and the fall. The builtet had gashed the temple-not very deeply. The concussion from the fall seemed to have most affected him. That one or other of these wounds had affected his brain was very evident without the porspous declaration of the physician, who had been summoned, to that effect.

Setter was present when I entered. Pratt me seemed to excite his brain to action, and They ran dangerously near, but did not ac-

It's only a feeder to some bigger vein in the mountain. That can lay for awhile. I've got four or five caches of quartz up there that I haven't shown you. We'll get it all down this week and hush up things for the present. There's, I think, your fair share of divvy, so far as we've gone," and he put in my hands a mint certificate of deposit for \$14,000. "If the rock that's mined out gives down as I think it will, you'll have as much more coming to you. Are you satisfied ?'

Satisfied! Less than a year from home and the possessor of what in Eastport was deemed I wanted to "pour forth my thanks." I said: "I wish I could fitly express my

feeling and gratitude to you." "I'm glad you can't," said Broener, inter-

rupting me. "It's a good thing for you that you can't. I hate effusiveness. You may in part thank your reticence and undemonstrativeness for what you call your luck. I don't want any gushers about me. Besides, you've earned what you got-every cent of it. Fate put you and me together, and with that put it in your way. There's no thanks nor gratitude in the matter. hate people always overwhelmed with gratitude. They're the sort who, if ever they do you what's called a favor, never forget it, and, in effect, want to be paid for it forever afterward. Let's change the subject. There's a traveling theatre company at Chinese Camp to-night. Let's go and see the show. You need a change from the ghastly buzzard spying and body hunting business. Get Rankin's horse, I'll take mine, and we'll gallop over there

On applying, Mr. Rankin said he would gladly hire me his horse. The animal, he added, was vicious, shied at his own shadow, 'bucked' frequently and had been the death of two men. As we were leaving he called out to Broener: "The coroner lives at one end of the camp and is lightenin' on an inquest when sober. The undertaker lives at the other. You'd better take the cloth for the young man's shroud along with you. They know that horse up there and always put an extra ten cents a vard on white linen when they see him comin"." it seemed another world in that land when

riding by night. The sun's hot glars was The air after nightfall was always gone. ool and refreshing, for it came off the snowbanks on the Sierra summits. Our horses were full of life and apparently as glad to make the trip as ourselves. The life of the horse seems to add life to the rider, providcuriosity was evidently much aroused, said to | ing he is a "horseman." Distance at night scens unnoticed. It is more like a dream, One travels forward without so much of that mental straining to reach one point after another as do so often our unhappily constituted hurrying minds in the day time.

So galloped Broener and I, regarding those myriad shining wonders of all ages-the stars.

"Lot's of 'em, aren't there?" said he. "The stars? Yes."

"Small potatoes we are under them. Smaller than ants in comparison, and moving about on this planet for these shining atoms we call gold. I wonder, now, of what importance poor Pratt, if he had his senses, would consider that biggest star alongside of a pan full of dust. Pratt would trade Venus for a quartz claim."

"Stars, speculation, immortality, etc.," said Broener, as we rode on. "The three seem to go together; or, at all events, stars always start one on those topics. I wonder what we are, anyway-who we are, where we came from, and all the rest. I am a certain amount of life and intelligence in a body. Body's only a garment, a wrap, a machine. Hit a a part of the body hard enough, just one blow, and in one second life's all gone, and with it the 'gunption' I've been storing up for years. Hit it not quite as hard, like the crack poor Pratt gave himself, and the intelligence stays but goes to flinders-all hurlyburly. Problem: when you hore a hole with a bullet through a man's head, does all hi intellect go out through that hole, and, if so, where does it go to? and might there not be some way of putting a bucket or basin under was lying on his bed silent, but the sight of such a man's head when he's dying, and collecting his intelligence, his quien set in motion the thoughts, scenes and emo-ticus common to the occurrence at the claim. trees for maple sugar! Well, one thing's certain; we're here, anyway, and I it up that the best plan is to get all the "No tools! no notices!" he eried. "Pretty way to hold a claim." philosophers and metaphysicians can tack on



### a dead body holding on with a dead life. Almost desperate with horror, I tugged a the branch. Then I heard Pratt's voi ing faintly: "It's not your mountain!" Then I heard Pratt's voice say

CHAPTER XIL

SUSPICION.

Bending over Fratt I put to him the usual idiotic question under such circumstances: "Pratt! are you alivef"

trivial, and of no apparent relation to the main subject of thought. So in my mental vision that night came the black buzzard I had seen in the sky the day before the scene of the tragedy, and his bit of black shadow

news, and had but momentarily heard of it.

him. With great difficulty we managed to carry him down the mountain. His utterances on the way down all bore vaguely on quartz hunting and the last scene of which he had been conscious while in his right mind. To Sefter, they were a puzzle. Hillycar, I knew not how much or how little meaning they conveyel. To myself they bore first on the secret of our claim. Next, they might confirm a suspicion, which, if not already developed, I know was likely to be, through the singular circumstances attending my fluding Pratt so far up Scrub mountain in the dead of night. It needed but a word of his delirious utterance to make known that we had quarrelad.

The written notice on the ground was then ried your trouble begins. indispensable to hold a claim. We had none Broener had put none up, knowing it would attract attention.

"Where's your tools?" he continued. Tools left on a claim were regarded as most important proofs of possession. Broener had hidden away those he used-where I knew not.

"No notices, no tools and no work done, and you call this a claim?" said Pratt derisively

Clearly as to the mining rights of the period Pratt had the best of me. I felt the weakness of the situation. moral Pratt seemed also to know his own strength and my weakness in this respect. Meantime ha had taken out his six-shooter and cocked it. He stood facing me, and had the "drop" on "Now, young man," me. I was powerless. said he, "I give you while I count ten off this ground, and if you don't I'll put a ball through you. D'ye hear? Get! Vame ' One-two-three-" As he spoke he made : As he spoke he made :. step backward. It was all a jumble of rock-



As he spoke, he made a step backward.

and fallen bowlders about. He missed his footing, stumbled over behind a huge bowlder, his right arm, with finger on the trigger, involuntarily jerked upward, and the pistol was discharged.

I stood in the same spot, how many minutes Iknow not, expecting, half hoping, to see Pratt reappear. All was silent. Full of dread I approached the spot where he had fallen. stood on the rock and looked over it. There lay Pratt, the pistol dropped from his hand.

Presently Hillyear entered. A cloud seemed to come with him. To me it was as if the vindictive spirit of the dead man

kept him company. He looked about anxiously, as if with the hope that Pratt might be present. I knew the meaning of that look.

Hillyear was a slow-moving man, apparently a follower of Fratt and led by him. Without his partner he seemed lost.

"Has anybedy seen Pratt to-day? He hasn't come back," after a time he asked, in his heavy, drawling way to sentence with him seemed always a matter of previous deep and labored study, and when asked the simplest question the time that elapsed before ha replied was exasperating to an eager inquirer).

"Why, I saw him piking along Scrub monntain to day," said one of the crowd. "What's he gunnin' after up there, anyhow?"

"Holder, didn't I see you crawlin' among the bushes up there to-day?" said one Bill Sefter. "That red shirt you've got on looks like the one I saw."

Fool that i was! I had not thought of wearing a garb which would show so conspicnously against the dark nottle green of the chapparal. "Yes, I took a stroll that way," I said, I

felt forced into such reply. He continued: "What did yer find to shoot up there!

That was Pratt's pistol. Sights and ounds seemed drawing their meshes about Hillyear was looking at me in his stolid me. fashion as if some faint glimmer of an idea were creeping into his brain.

"I shot nothing," was my reply. The talk then drifted toward mysterious murders and robberies-then common in that country-and cases were mentioned which had finally been traced to inchbors of the shin-whose lives had previously shown no such inclination.

Rankin's humor inclined him ever to give an individual the very characteristic which he most lacked. Slow men he spoke of as marvels of disprich, faciturn men as disturbing all about by the clatter of their tongues. I, with my shy, quiet, reticent manner, evidently ranked with him as a most peaceable character. It seemed to me then as if some fiend prompted him to the remark:

"Shouldn't wonder if Holder had waylaid and murdered Pratt. Put another man 1 in his private graveyard."

added another second fiddle humorlat. "That's what he knocks off work so

ir. The Ballet STON A an-

The words came from him in a feeble, whining tone:

"No, no! not that way. The leaf's higher up--mighty rich. too!

I managed to get him off the shelf. Further I could not. The only accessible route home wound in places about projections of the mountain several hundred feet perpendicular above the foaming river, where a sound man needed all his strength and herve to keep a sure footing.

"Them mint fellows are sharp. Jack Hillyear, mind you bake your next batch of Rattlesnakes or jackess raboits: Theard a | bread clean through. Run a straw through -dough sticks if 'tain't don :; don't put pock in till brans be boiled so you can squash em-else, hard as rocks.

So he rambled on. His words concerning the mint people suggested to me Broomer's remark as to their curiodity regarding his quartz assays and their whereabouts. was evidently definious. I thought to utilize this wit wandering and said:

Did the mint people send you up here?" "Put mesh salt on a bird's tall, an' you'll catch a weasel asleep." was his reply. Then his mind seemed to leap into the old channel. "It's rich---inighty rich---and they can't hold it all.

The thing to be done was to get Pratt to his cabin. Evidently his brain was affected the wound. I left him and harried to Hillycar.

Their cabin was built as thousands were in those days-an envelope of cotton drilling about a light wooden frame. There was no wooden door to knock against, or any other method to rouse the inmates save by calling. Call I did, but Hillycar seemed sleeping the sleep of the just. At last, out of patience, I pitched a rock into the frail structure. It

tually reveal me as a participator.

"What claim, Pratt?" said Sefter.

The sick man's eye fell on Sefter with a gleam of canning. "No claim," he said. "We're after rattlesnake oil. Hunting snakes in the chapparal. There's one now--on the lead. If yer not off while I count ten, I'll put a bell through ye. One-two-three-oh!" and he shricked as if with pain. Hillyear sooke:

"He-mu t-bekept-quiet. It-is the-doc ter's-orders. The-doctor-says-his-sarv -bruffum-is-something-or-other."

"Queer business-queer business!" was Sef-ter's remark, as we left the house together. I think he's had a shootin' scrape with some bod v.

Broener returned. I felt that I could now shift a part of the business to other shoalders.

He board my story At its conclusion he settle I back and laughed.

"Regular dime novel, isn't it?" said he. "Write it, print it, sell it. Well, young man. you're improving rapidly. I congratulate you. I couldn't have wished you anything better than the experience you've gone theorem. You needed it. You're the kind through. that must be put in very hot water to draw anything out of you."

"But won't this put all Bull Bar on the scent of the 'Bank'?" I askel.

"First, let's compound some whisky with sugar, leanens and untimeg. Before we talk business let's fix things so as to make basiness a pleasure, not by pouring the stuff down raw as the fools do at the store yonder, but dress up the fluid decently and tastefully before we put it down. There would be far less druddards if every man was com-pelled by law to dress up and triin up his drinks in this way before he swallowed them." He continued as he stoped his nunch: "Make yourself easy, Holder, about the claim. You have fixed that all right, or the Fates have for you. Pratt won't go up knocked out of his head, which for our pur- mand for ostrich plumes so largely increased lieve that if his wits were out of his body of ladies' hats, instead of 'extirpating the they'd be in much better shape to whole race of them, may have a contrary efing order. Hillyear, from what you say, is, I judge, only an appendage of Pratt's, and the spring approaches the propriety of leaving not able to do anything without him. At all to the wanten lapproaches the propriety of leaving events, I'll find out soon. As for the Bank,' his celebrated crest may be borne in upon the not able to do anything without him. tore through the cloth. Hillyear's reply was I I think I've got the cream out of it already. feminine mind.-Lite.

We rode into the "camp." In the language of the time, it was "bilin"." The theatre company had brought in miners from far and near. It was a single straight street. From every door and window on either side poured a flood of light, for every bouse on the street.

of wood or ciotn, was either store. loon, gambling tent or some place of rublic Sidewalk, street and houses were resort. alike full of men. The "fandango" was already in full blast. Here, alone, were seen women--dark-skinned senoritas in white dresses, some having their waists encircled by broad bands of pure gold. Riters were momentarily coming in, some urging their horses at a breekneck pace through the street. The air was filled with a medley of soundsmusic, shouts, laughter, the hum of several hundred voices gathered in so small an area, the clink of glasses and an occasional yell from some miner giving vent in this way to the emotions within him develope i by whisky. "Come," said Broener. "Let's take a look at the fandango. Everybody goes there either to dance or look on. It's not the low

dance house of an old city. You will find there the leading merchants of the place. the banker, the lawyer, the judge, and all the other present pillars of society, in this new world of adventurers. Society here, you see, is in a state of effervescence, and everybody's at the top. Hence there's now no bottom. Nor are these Mexican and Chilcancan girls like the 'abandoned' of our American or English cities. They don't get drunk, won't pick your pocket, and though morality sits lightly on them, still they have a certain respect for themselves which knows there out of gutter.

#### Extirpating the Song Birds.

It is said that ostrich farming has ceased to be profitable in South Africa, because the there for a while, now that his wits are market has been overstocked. That the depose is better far than knocking them out of the supply of ostriches encouraged the hope his body. Pecause I'm fool enough to be- that the use of song birds for the decoration come back and reveal our secret fect. There is no news yet, however, that than as they now are chained to a cracked skull, and therefore in bad work-ing order. Hillyear, from what you say, is. It is to be hoped that as

