

THE BANK OF CALIFORNIA

BY PRENTICE MULFORD.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOLLY.

It seemed so weak to say to her, as I did: "I thank you for what you have done for me to-night."

"I do not know," she said. "I am not, Pratt's wounds were both accidental and self-inflicted, one by a bullet from his own pistol, the other by a fall."

"It was a hard thing to say. As the words were spoken I realized more clearly than ever how improbable they must sound to others. She was silent."

"You do not believe me?" I said.

"Yes, I do," she said.

"Why now?"

"I don't know. Perhaps it is because for the last few months I have been so much among deceit and lies that my mind became trained to believe anything."

"You do not seem like the Blanche Sefton of ten months ago."

"You mean, perhaps, the Blanche you knew then, or rather as much as you knew of her," she replied.

"I don't understand you."

"I don't understand myself. I wish I did. You thought me perfection then, did you not?" she asked.

"I thought you very near it; yes, and do now," I answered.

"Well, I am not. I'm glad I've found it out. I find I can make great mistakes and do very foolish things. Perhaps I've done one lately."

"How?" I asked.

"In believing all I heard of you, in addition to what I saw."

"Saw? What did you see?"

"My first sight of you in California was in Chinese Camp yonder, waiting in a dance house, your arm around the waist of a Mexican girl."

"Heaven and earth! The fandango hall was open to the street—it might almost have been in it so far as privacy was concerned—and this was the manner in which I had been put on free exhibition to Blanche while on her way that evening from the hotel to the Chinese Camp 'opera house'."

"And for that reason you did not recognize me in the box at the theatre?"

"It is not my business on the stage to recognize any one in the audience. People do not pay their money to see an actress nod and smile at her friends."

"How did you hear of the charge against me?" I asked.

"It was the talk at the hotel table, in that camp where we played. There I first learned of my uncle's whereabouts and his condition."

"What did they say of me?"

"In substance, that your life and actions were suspicious; that you 'loafed' a good deal, as they expressed it, always had plenty of money, and that no one knew how you came by it. I think, however, I should not have judged you so quickly as I did had I not seen you in the dance house."

"Why did that set you against me?"

"That's a strange question for you to ask. Perhaps it was because of jealousy—perhaps contempt," she replied.

"I was silent. She continued: 'Never mind that now. My fault is the greater. I want to see it all, and you must help me. Did not my manner toward you at the store the other day excite more prejudice than ever against you among the miners?'"

"I think it did."

"I thought so," said she. "I began to see and feel it very soon. Well, it shows a woman's power for good or ill—in this case for ill—and men call us the weaker sex. What caused the quarrel between you and my uncle?"

"He intruded himself on ground belonging to me and Broener."

"I gather from my uncle's rambling, delirious talk that he imagines the ground in question not to be yours legally. Is that so?"

"It is."

"Then why did you oppose him?"

"Because I thought the circumstances justified it. It is ground for which no legal provision is yet made for holdings."

"Then how can you hold it?"

"Only by the unwritten law of this land at present—the law of might."

"The same law by which your recently dismissed friends from your hollow acted," was her answer.

"You would make a good lawyer," I said.

"I think I should. But have you not placed yourself in an awkward position?"

"Yes, either I have or fate has for me."

"What do you think my fault has been in this matter?" she asked.

"I don't know that there is any. I think, had you known the temper of Bull Bar, you would not unconsciously have brought the prejudice against me to the boiling point by cutting me as you did at the store, before so many people. That, on your part, was caused by ignorance. I think, though, that you might first have sought me out and heard my story before judging me."

"I should have done so. I was a great mistake. Any more?" she asked.

"Well, you may have made a similar misjudgment in another direction, as to seeing me as you did in—the dance house."

"Indeed! I think I understand. You were simply enjoying a man's privileges in this very free country."

"That's your way of putting it?"

"What is your way of putting it?"

"I was silent. She continued: 'Suppose we reverse the case, and you had seen me in that place, whirling in the arms of a brawny miner?'"

"It's not a supposable case," I answered.

"Thank you. In other words you would say that 'no lady' would visit such a place?"

"If I say so, then I suppose you will ask me why should a gentleman visit it?"

"Yes," said she. "That was my intention. On second thought I take the question back. I may want possibly to reserve for myself some time or other some of the privileges of you gentlemen."

"We were silent for some minutes."

"Why did you not inquire of Broener with regard to the affair?" I asked.

"I had reasons—perhaps right, perhaps wrong—for not doing so. I knew that as your partner, and an interested party, his sympathies would be in your behalf. I wanted to find out for myself and place myself under as little obligation as possible to any one in doing what I had to do. Perhaps, in that, I made a mistake."

"You mean, then, that had you been guided by Broener you might not have been

misted as you were regarding me?"

"Guided is rather too strong a word. Still, I think now his judgment in the matter would have been better than mine," she replied.

"This phase of the subject was not agreeable to me. I avoided present further mention of it; but that dreadful dance house picture of myself before Blanche now took full possession of me. I could not help talking of it. I said:

"As we are talking very plainly to each other to-night, may I ask of you exactly your judgment of me from seeing me at the fandango?"

"My judgment regarding it is one thing; my emotion may be quite another. As to judgment or judging you in the matter, I own I am not able to do it. You are a man living among men, influenced possibly by other men. You live in the man's kingdom and in that kingdom are laws, customs, usages, privileges, perhaps temperaments, which don't appertain to us women. You may have waltzed with the Mexican girl for the mere pleasure of the moment; you may, again, be her lover; you may like those low revels and persist in them; you may drop in for a moment's curiosity and amusement and satiated, perhaps disgusted, soon come out again. How do I know?"

"I think your last conjecture the right one," I said somewhat eagerly.

"I hope it is," she answered, adding, "for your own sake."

"For my sake alone?"

"For the sake of all or any one whose happiness depends on your welfare," she replied.

"Does yours now depend at all on that welfare?" I asked.

"Do you mean to ask if I love you still? Is my act to-night one of love or hate?" was her reply.

"Perhaps you might have so done for any man."

"She paused and then said slowly: 'Since you are so kind as to suggest the idea, well, perhaps I will.'"

"I was neither comforted nor satisfied. Talk of landing ahead took! The Land of Promise, so near at our moment, receded at the next."

"Fardon me, Blanche," I said. "I should not have made such a remark."

"I don't see why you should not. What you suggest may be among the possibilities. How do I know?" she replied.

"My ground this, I thought, and thinking in it all the time."

"Then I spoke 'just like a man' and said foolishly: 'Perhaps you'd have done the same for Mr. Broener?'"

"Perhaps so," she said calmly, adding as a clincher: "Very likely."

"I went down over ears in the quagmire of despair and jealousy."

"John Holder," she exclaimed in a few moments, "this is no time for us two to be talking in this fashion; and besides, John," she said, with a shade of playfulness, "if we do, you in your present attitude toward me, will get the worst of it. Mr. Broener is an old friend of mine. I esteem him highly and value his association, for he is a remarkable man, and one from whom I have learned much. What we have now to do is to get Uncle Pratt well and you out of this trouble."

"I replied: 'If you mean by 'we' any aid of Mr. Broener in my behalf, let me say right here, then I don't want it and won't accept it.' The word 'we' was a fresh brand in the flame."

"John, you are talking foolishly," she said. "Like all other men but one that I've known, you can't abide from a woman a word in favor of another of your own sex."

"But one, I thought, and that's Broener. We were now near Pratt's cabin. She stopped, laying her hand on my arm."

"John," she said, earnestly, and her voice trembled. "Your danger in connection with this affair isn't all over yet. Unless my uncle recovers, or confirms your story, you are in great danger. His delirious utterances are supposed to bear on you, and as heard by the eavesdroppers and meddlers they are continually going on and keeping suspicion alive against you. You must not throw aside any help that may come to you—for you may need it all."

"I will not accept any aid from Broener, if I can avoid it. I hate your men so brilliant that they are always towering over me."

"We had reached Pratt's cabin. 'Oh, John,' was all she said. 'Good-night,' she



"Good night"

extended her hand. I took it coldly. So we parted, I bearing home a new mountain of misery in the thought that I had repaid her heroism with—well, what name is there for the acts and words of a jealous man (or woman) but premeditated jealousy!

CHAPTER XIX

TARDY REPENTANCE.

Of course, so soon as alone I regretted bitterly my manner at parting toward Blanche and spent a large portion of the night in imaginary interviews with her, in which I acted more rationally and smoothed over all my roughness. I resolved to see her as early as possible next day and acknowledge to her my error. But the doors of our to-morrows are not always those of our to-days, and may open on far different scenes and events, on which or in which, despite all our effort or inclination, we must either gaze or participate.

Broener arrived early that morning. I knew that a surprise was in store for him and wondered how he would take it. I knew that he had been disappointed at not finding Blanche at Marysville, and least of all expected to find her at Bull Bar. He showed no signs of chagrin, however. This was characteristic of him. It was his philosophy that care, vexation, trouble of any sort or

from any cause, were all to be fought off and beaten off as speedily as possible. "The actual event," he said, "was quite enough. All dwelling in thought upon it afterward was in substance a re-creation and repetition of it. Switch the mind off on some other track and put the trouble out of sight. It can be done—by training."

Of Blanche's presence I said nothing. He would visit Pratt and find out for himself. Concerning my capture and the events of the night I told him in the briefest possible terms. "Of the manner of my release I said simply, 'I got away.' That left a large field for conjecture. He saw that I preferred to remain reticent and did not question me. Uncertain as were our social relations toward each other we had reached that fortunate condition where each knew to a hair's breadth where the other desired to stop at self-revelations, and acted accordingly."

Soon after breakfast he went over to Pratt's. Despite my misery I was half amused at a thought thus shaping itself: "Well, the drama progresses. I wonder what figure will be disclosed by the next turn of the kaleidoscope." I had unconsciously absorbed something of Broener's philosophy. "No matter what happened," he said, "a man who had brain enough could always find something of interest in noting that no two of life's pictures were exactly alike, and that, as regards incident, event, or situation, every day for such a man had some new shade of color."

He returned in about half an hour, sat down awhile, pored his nails carefully, and finally remarked: "This world is all a fleeting show; but, nevertheless, a very interesting one. I wonder which way the cat will jump next. At the same time, how monotonous it would be if the cat jumped the same way every time."

"I could not help laughing in spite of all. 'Yes,' he said, as if in reply to a remark of mine, 'I agree with you, Holder. Out of the little trouble we will find flowers of recreation, if not of resignation.'"

"I wondered for whom he meant the term 'resignation.' The man had sometimes two and even three meanings for some of his sentences, which it might take days, even weeks, to make out."

"How is Pratt?" I asked.

"To the ordinary business mind of Bull Bar," he replied, "the professional pill-popper, who practices the solemn scientific over-learned, he is no better. To one, like myself, a few degrees higher than they in the plane of intelligent animal development, he will eventually mend and recover the small fragments of mind vouchsafed him by—well, the infanter, 'oh, woman, in her hours of ease, etc.'"

A horseman rode up to the cabin door and called out: "Does John Holder live here?"

"I am John Holder," I replied, coming out.

"This is a deputy sheriff with a warrant for my arrest on a charge of assault with intent to kill Jedediah Pratt."

"I gave myself up and asked of the officer as a favor that he would make no parade of me as his prisoner on the Bar. I desired above all things not to make any semi-dramatic departure in this situation before Blanche, or give her any notice of it whatever. 'I have friends,' I said to him, 'living near by, and I don't wish they should see me.'"

"I will be responsible for Mr. Holder," said Broener.

"All right," said the deputy. "You want to get away quietly, I know. I'll wait for you up yonder, where the trail turns up the mountains."

"I will go with you and give bail for your appearance," said Broener.

"No," I said. "I'm going to jail."

"I wouldn't do that," he replied. "First, there isn't the least necessity for it. Second, it will hurt your case. Appearance goes a long way here, and to go to jail is to put yourself in the position before the community of a man without money and without friends."

"Well," I asked, "what matters that so long as I am innocent?"

"It matters a great deal," he answered. "from the point of view that law is dealt out here—or elsewhere. 'Plato sin with oro,' you know, and the lanes of justice harmless breaks. Clothe it in rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it." How William S. did write for posterity, with a big 'P'! Come, Holder, don't make what's hard any harder than it needs be."

"It was not so easy now to resist him as I had imagined. There was a shade of tenderness and feeling in his tones, and in his look also. Some change had come over him. What, to me, was indefinable. But I would go to jail."

"Sorry, Holder, that I've got to put the matter to you, then, in another light," he said. "This arrest of yours is aimed at me as well as you, and is backed up by some party behind Pratt, influenced by some motive other than that of mere friendship for Pratt. The parties are, I think, those who sent him up here to hunt for the 'Bank.' Suppose they manage to get you in prison, though but for a time. Then you, as one of the 'Bank' keepers are out of the way. Next, they'd probably turn their batteries on me, whoop up some prejudice against me on the Bar as an abettor in the assassination and cripple me by legal process in some way. This leaves the 'Bank' at their mercy. Their tool here now is possibly Sefton. The only flaw in their calculations is this: The 'Bank' is nearly worked out. Still it may be a feather to some even richer vein. Anyway, I want to fight this thing out. As a matter of simple justice, ought you not to help me in the best way you can?"

"Very well. One of those 'best ways' lies in not going to jail when you can get bail for your appearance, and so keep a respectable showing for our side."

"I'd as lieve go to jail as stay on this bar," I replied. "It's been a hell to me for weeks."

"You needn't stay on the bar," he answered. "Stay anywhere you like. Travel round and nurse yourself as you like till the trial comes on."

"And have you here with Blanche Sefton, I thought."

"We might ramble round together," he said, after a pause. "Hunt more quartz lead elsewhere. We're posted in all its signs and indications, and there's a world of that wealth lying as yet uncovered all over this state."

"Then in mind I objected because—because I could not be near Blanche, on the Bar, and because, turn which way I would, Broener seemed always getting the best of me in making me act like a rational creature. Now, I thought, confound him, he outdoes me in unselfishness in volunteering thus to leave the Bar and Blanche himself."

"I consented on one condition: that in all that concerned the trial I should have my own way."

Broener was well known to the deputy, and satisfied him that whatever bail was required for me would be forthcoming, and that he would be "up country" next day to attend to the proper legal formality.

"I left the bar without being observed and the official and myself rode off together. He was a pleasant, manly fellow. We soon became on good terms. No appearances of captor and captive were observed. "You seem to trust me," I remarked.

"Well, I generally know my men, and I know you're not one of the kind that would give me any trouble. I'm not over anxious to put handcuffs on my decent man, who may be himself sheriff of the county inside of six months. Ups and downs are pretty frequent here, you know."

It was an ascent, in some places steeply inclined, in others graded for fully two miles from Bull Bar before reaching the general up-country grade. The higher we went the lighter became my spirits, despite what I was leaving behind me. I seemed coming out of a dark cloud and shaking from me a load—the load of malice, suspicion, lies and ill intent which had borne down upon me at Bull Bar. Broener now stood out in a different and more favorable light. Blanche seemed more lovely than ever, and even the morbid, suspicious, jealous, unreasonable Holder of the night before seemed far removed from the one of to-day. The trust reposed in me by the deputy and the footing of companionship he established between us was a great relief. I to him, from his point of view, was only a piece of goods, which he was charged to deliver at a certain place. So long as the package was not unpleasant neither would he be so. If on the way there was any revolution to be got out of his merchandise he proposed to get it.

You may say it was not very consistent for me thus so steadily to climb a mount of joyfulness. Perhaps not, though consistency, as applied to human nature and conduct, is for men a word of vague meaning. The fact is, I was tolerably happy for the first time in a fortnight, though a woman was then in tears on my account behind me. That I did not think of.

We stopped at various camps on passing through, and brought up at saloon doors, "Magnolias," "Bell's Unions," "Long Tom." The deputy was known everywhere; his arrival was the signal for the formation of a mob of men at the various bars, and the usual solemn, silent performance with tumbler and bottle. A heathen might have supposed it one of our religious rites, and the common, and about the only expression, heard on such occasions, "Here's luck!" a preparatory invocation to the ruling deity of the place. The deputy treated at every camp. I soon divined that this was a matter even more of business than pleasure. He informed me that he intended running for sheriff next election, and drinks were largely relied on to influence votes. His trip for my arrest served for him also the purpose of an electioneering tour through the county, partly at the public expense. He had many private talks in retired corners with the presumed party leaders at sundry precincts, and in cases involving extreme secrecy the buttonholing went on at great length behind sundry bars or pigpens, while I remained in the saloons, an interested observer, being simply introduced to the crowd by my considerate friend as "Mr. Holder, a cousin of mine." We arrived at the last camp before reaching the county town about nine o'clock in the evening.

"This is a hard old place," said the deputy. "There's more fools to the square inch in this camp than any other of the county. There's a crowd here who loaf all day and raise the devil all night. When they sleep, or how they get their living, the Lord only knows. Yes, they're at it now!"

About half way through the single street we were suddenly confronted by a huge apparently mechanical contrivance mounted on a wheelbarrow, propelled furiously by a man, some five or six others running by its side. It was a dry goods box, through which was thrust a section of stovepipe, and vaguely suggested a photographer's camera. Said one of the party:

"We must take your pictures, gentlemen; done in two minutes. Oh, Aleck, is that you? Just in time. We're doing a rushing

business to-night; taking the whole camp. Now, James, get the plates ready."

"Let them have their fun. We'll never get through here if we don't," said the deputy to me in a low voice.

We halted our horses in the full glare of lights from two saloons, fronting each other. The sidewalk was full of ransled lookers-on. The mock photographers went through a great amount of ceremony in getting the presumed chemicals ready and adjusting the instrument. Then arose a discussion among them as to the pose of our horses. One insisted that a better effect could be obtained if the animals should be backed up to the instrument while we were reversed on our saddles so as to face it. The deputy's horse was placed in such position. The chief photographer hooded himself in an old blanket and took the regular position fronting the glass, watch in hand.

So our pictures were taken, and at the close

of the performance some charcoal sketches on pasteboard were presented to us with the remark that the "New Helió Daguerreotype company were 'arid' through the exhausting effect of the chemicals necessary to be used in taking equestrian pictures and that both Bell, of the 'Placer,' and Soper, of the 'Rocker' saloons, had fixed the price for that evening in consideration of the occasion at a dollar for the horse."

This meant the treating of the crowd by the deputy, a matter well known to him in advance.

As we rode away the photographers had brought their instrument to bear on the store of a Hebrew clothing dealer, "taking the

Half of these men," said the deputy, "have families somewhere in the states. D'ye think they'd dare cut up so there? No sir-ee! They're just like boys let out of school out hours."

[To be Continued.]

FARMERS

Who have any Correspondence whatever, can save time and money by calling at

THE

Courier Office!

—AND GETTING—

FARM LETTER HEADS,

—AND PRINTED—

ENVELOPES!

The cost is hardly more than that of the plain stationery.

FOR FINE

JOB PRINTING,

No office west of Minneapolis is better equipped than the

COURIER JOB ROOMS.

—FINE—

Commercial Work a Specialty



So our pictures were taken.

of the performance some charcoal sketches on pasteboard were presented to us with the remark that the "New Helió Daguerreotype company were 'arid' through the exhausting effect of the chemicals necessary to be used in taking equestrian pictures and that both Bell, of the 'Placer,' and Soper, of the 'Rocker' saloons, had fixed the price for that evening in consideration of the occasion at a dollar for the horse."

This meant the treating of the crowd by the deputy, a matter well known to him in advance.

As we rode away the photographers had brought their instrument to bear on the store of a Hebrew clothing dealer, "taking the