

# THE STORY OF A MINE.

By BRET HARTE

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## CHAPTER I.

WHO SOUGHT IT.



It was a steep trail leading over the Monterey coast range. Concho was very tired, Concho was very dusty, Concho was very much disgusted. To Concho's mind there was but one relief for these insurmountable difficulties, and that lay in a leathern bottle slung over the machillas of his saddle. Concho raised the bottle to his lips, took a long draught, made a wry face, and ejaculated:

"Carnajo!"

It appeared that the bottle did not contain aguardiente, but had lately been filled in a tavern near Tres Pinos by an Irishman who sold bad American whisky under that pleasing Castilian title. Nevertheless, Concho had already nearly emptied the bottle, and it fell back against the saddle as yellow and flaccid as his own cheeks. Thus re-enforced, Concho turned to look at the valley behind him, from which he had climbed since noon. It was a sterile waste bordered here and there by arable fringes and valleys of meadow land, but in the main dusty, dry and forbidding. His eye rested for a moment on a low, white cloud line on the eastern horizon, but so meek and unsubstantial that it seemed to come and go as he gazed. Concho struck his forehead and winked his hot eyelids. Was it the Sierras or the cursed American whisky?

Again he recommenced the ascent. At times the half-worn, half-invisible trail became utterly lost in the bare black out-crop of the ridge, but his sagacious mule soon found it again, until, stepping upon a loose boulder, she slipped and fell. In vain Concho tried to lift her from out the ruin of camp kettles, prospecting pans and picks; she remained quietly recumbent, occasionally raising her head as if to contemptuously glance over the arid plain below. Then he had recourse to useless blows. Then he essayed profanity of a secular kind, such as "Assassin," "Thief," "Beast with a pig's head," "Food for the Bull's Horns," but with no effect.

Then he had recourse to the curse ecclesiastic: "Ah, Judas Iscariot! is it thus, renegade and traitor, thou leavest me, thy master, a league from camp and supper waiting? Stealer of the Sacrament, get up!" Still no effect. Concho began to feel uneasy; never before had a mule of pious lineage failed to respond to this kind of exhortation. He made one more desperate attempt: "Ah, defiler of the altar! lie not there! Look!" he threw his hand into the air, extending the fingers suddenly. "Behold, God! I exorcise thee! Ha! tremblest! Look but a little now—see! Apostate! I—I—excommunicate thee—Mula!"

"What are you kicking up such a devil of row down there for?" said a gruff voice from the rocks above.

Concho shuddered. Could it be that the devil was really going to fly away with his mule. He dared not look up.

"Come now," continued the voice, "you just let up on that mule, you d—d old Greaser. Don't you see she's slipped her shoulder?"

Alarmed as Concho was at the information, he could not help feeling to a certain extent relieved. She was lamed, but had not lost her standing as a good Catholic.

He ventured to lift his eyes. A stranger—an American from his dress and accent—was descending the rocks toward him. He was a slight-built man with a dark, smooth face, that would have been quite commonplace and inexpressive but for his left eye, in which all that was villainous in him apparently centered. Slant that eye, and you had the features and expression of an ordinary man; cover up those features, and the eye shown out like Eblis' own. Nature had apparently observed this too, and had, by a paralysis of the nerve, ironically dropped the corner of the upper lid over it like a curtain, laughed at her handiwork, and turned him loose to prey upon the credulous world.

"What are you doing here?" said the stranger after he had assisted Concho in bringing the mule to her feet, and a helpless halt.

"Prospecting, Senor."

The stranger turned his respectable right eye toward Concho, while his left looked unutterable scorn and wickedness over the landscape.

"Prospecting, what for?"

"Gold and silver, Senor—yet for silver most."

"Alone?"

"Of us there are four."



The stranger looked around. "In camp—a league beyond," explained the Mexican.

"Found anything?"

"Of this—much." Concho took from his saddle bags a lump of grayish iron ore, studded here and there with star points of pyrites. The stranger said nothing, but his eye looked a diabolical suggestion.

"You are lucky, friend Greaser."

"It is silver."

"How you know this?"

"It is my business. I'm a metallurgist."

"And you can say what shall be silver and what is not?"

"Yes—see here!" The stranger took from his saddle bags a little leather case containing some half dozen phials. One, encased in dark blue paper, he held up to Concho.

"This contains a preparation of silver."

Concho's eyes sparkled, but he looked doubtfully at the stranger.

"Get me some water in your pan."

Concho emptied his water bottle in his prospecting pan and handed it to the stranger. He dipped a dried blade of grass in the bottle and then let a drop fall from its tip in the water. The water remained unchanged.

"Now throw a little salt in the water," said the stranger.

Concho did so. Instantly a white film appeared on the surface, and presently the whole mass assumed a milky hue.

Concho crossed himself hastily, "Mother of God, it is magic!"

"It is chloride of silver, you darned fool."

Not content with this cheap experiment, the stranger then took Concho's breath away by reddening some litmus paper with the nitrate, and then completely knocked over the simple Mexican by restoring its color by dipping it in the salt water.

"You shall try me this," said Concho, offering his iron ore to the stranger: "you shall use the silver and the salt."

"Not so fast my friend," answered the stranger: "in the first place this ore must be melted, and then a chip taken and put in shape like this—and that is worth something, my Greaser cherrub. No, sir, a man don't spend all his youth at Freiberg and Heidelberg to throw away his science gratuitously on the first Greaser he meets."

"It will cost—how much?" said the Mexican eagerly.

"Well, I should say it would take about \$100 and expenses to—find silver in that ore. But once you've got it there—you're all right for tons of it."

"You shall have it," said the now excited Mexican. "You shall have it of us—the four! You shall come to our camp and shall melt it—and show the silver, and—enough! Come!" and in his feverishness he clutched the hand of his companion as if to lead him forth at once.

"That are you going to do with your mule?" said the stranger.

"True, holy mother—what, indeed?"

"Look yer," said the stranger, with a grim smile, "she won't stray far, I'll be bound. I've an extra pack mule above here; you can ride on her, and lead me into camp, and tomorrow come back for your beast."

Poor honest Concho's heart sickened at the prospect of leaving behind the tired servant he had objugated so strongly a moment before, but the love of gold was uppermost. "I will come back to thee, little one, to-morrow, a rich man. Meanwhile, wait thou here, patient one—Adios!—thou smallest of mules—Adios!"

And, seizing the stranger's hand, he clambered up the rocky ledge until they reached the summit. Then the stranger turned and gave one sweep of his malevolent eye over the valley.

Wherefore, in after years, when their story was related, with the devotion of true Catholic pioneers, they named the mountain "La Canada de la Visitation del Diablo," "The Guleh of the Visitation of the Devil," the same being now the boundary lines of one of the famous Mexican land grants.

## CHAPTER II.

WHO FOUND IT.



WILES.

CONCHO was so impatient to reach the camp and deliver his good news to his companions that more than once the stranger was obliged to command him to slacken his pace. "Is it not enough, you infernal Greaser, that you lame your own mule, but you must try your hand on mine? Or am I to put Jimmy down among the expenses?" he added with a grin and a slight lifting of his baleful eyelid.

When they had ridden a mile along the ridge they began to descend again toward the valley. Vegetation now sparingly bordered the trail, clumps of chemical, an occasional manzanita bush and one or two dwarfed "buckeyes" rooted their way between the interstices of the black-gray rock. Now and then, in crossing some dry gully, worn by the overflow of winter torrents from above, the grayish rock gloom was relieved by dull red and brown masses of color, and almost every overhanging rock bore the mark of a miner's pick. Presently, as they rounded the curving flank of the mountain, from a rocky bench below them, a thin ghost-like stream of smoke seemed to be steadily drawn by invisible hands into the invisible ether. "It is the camp," said Concho, gleefully: "I will myself forward to prepare them for the stranger," and before his companion could detain him he had disappeared at a sharp cauter around the curve of the trail.

Left to himself, the stranger took a more leisurely pace, which left him ample time for reflection. Scamp as he was, there was something in the simple credulity of poor Concho that made him uneasy. Not that his moral consciousness was touched, but he feared that

Concho's companions might, knowing Concho's simplicity, instantly suspect him of trading upon it. He rode on in a deep study. Was he reviewing his past life? A vagabond by birth and education, a swindler by profession, an outcast by reputation, without absolutely turning his back upon respectability, he had trembled on the perilous edge of criminality ever since his boyhood. He did not scruple to cheat these Mexicans—they were a degraded race—and for a moment he felt almost an accredited agent of progress and civilization. We never really understand the meaning of enlightenment until we begin to use it aggressively.

A few paces further on four figures appeared in the now gathering darkness of the trail. The stranger quickly recognized the beaming smile of Concho, foremost of the party. A quick glance at the faces of the others satisfied him that while they lacked Concho's good humor, they certainly did not surpass him in intellect. Pedro was a stout vaquero. Manuel was a slim half-breed and ex-convert of the Mission of San Carmel, and Miguel a recent butcher of Monterey. Under the benign influences of Concho that suspicious wick which the ignorant regard

strangers fled away, and the whole party escorted the stranger—who had given his name as Mr. Joseph Wiles—to their camp fire. So anxious were they to begin their experiments that even the fastidious of hospitality were forgotten, and it was not until Mr. Wiles—now known as "Don Jose"—sharply reminded them that he wanted some "grub," that they came to their senses. When the frugal meal of tortillas, frijoles, salt pork, and chocolate was over, an oven was built of the dark red rock brought from the ledge before them, and an earthenware jar, glazed by some peculiar local process, tightly fitted over it, and packed with clay and suds. A fire was speedily built of pine boughs continually brought from a wooded ravine below, and in a few moments the furnace was in full blast. Mr. Wiles did not participate in these active preparations, except to give occasional directions between his teeth, which were contemptively fixed over a clay pipe as he lay comfortably on his back on the ground. Whatever enjoyment the rasal may have had in their useless labors he did not show it, but it was observed that his left eye often followed the broad figure of the ex-vaquero, Pedro, and often dwelt on that worthy's beetling brows and half savage face. Meeting that baleful glance once, Pedro growled out an oath, but could not resist a hideous fascination that caused him again and again to seek it.

The scene was weird enough without Wiles' eye to add to its wild picturesqueness. The mountain towered above—a heavy Rembrandish mass of black shadow—sharply cut here and there against a sky so inconceivably remote that the world-sized soul must have despaired of ever reaching so far or of climbing its steel-blue walls. The stars were large, keen and brilliant, but cold and steadfast. They did not dance nor twinkle in their adamantine setting. The furnace fire painted the faces of the men an Indian red, glanced on brightly colored blanket and serape, but was eventually caught and absorbed in the waiting shadows of the black mountain, scarcely twenty feet from the furnace door. The low, half-sung, half-whispered foreign speech of the group, the roaring of the furnace and the quick, sharp yelp of the coyotes on the plain below were the only sounds that broke the awful silence of the hills.

It was almost dawn when it was announced that the ore had fused. And it was high time, for the pot was slowly sinking into the fast crumbling oven. Concho uttered a jubilant "God and Liberty," but Don Jose Wiles bade him be silent and bring stakes to support the pot. Then Don Jose bent over the seething mass. It was for a moment only. But in that moment this accomplished metallurgist, Mr. Joseph Wiles, had quietly dropped a silver half dollar into the pot!

Then he charged them to keep up the fires and went to sleep—all but one eye.

Dawn came with dull beacon fires on the near hill tops, and, far in the east, roses over the Sierran snow. Birds twittering in the alder fringes a mile below, and the creaking of wagon wheels—the wagon itself a mere cloud of dust in the distant road—were heard distinctly. Then the melting pot was solemnly broken by Don Jose, and the glowing incandescent mass turned into the road to cool.

And then the metallurgist clipped a small fragment from the mass and pounded it, and chipped another smaller piece and pounded that, and then subjected it to acid, and then treated it to a salt bath which became at once milky—and at last produced a white something—mirabile dictu!—two cents' worth of silver!

Concho shouted with joy; the rest gazed at each other doubtfully and distrustfully; companions in poverty, they began to diverge and suspect each other in prosperity. Wiles' left eye glanced ironically from the one to the other.

"Here is the \$100, Don Jose," said Pedro, handing the gold to Wiles with a decidedly brusque intimation that the services and presence of a stranger were no longer required.

Wiles took the money with a gracious smile and a wink that sent Pedro's heart into his boots, and was turning away when a cry from Manuel stopped him:

"The pot—the pot—it has leaked! look! behold! see!"

He had been cleaning away the crumbled fragments of the furnace to get ready for breakfast, and had disclosed a shining pool of quicksilver!

Wiles started, cast a rapid glance around the group, saw in a flash that the metal was unknown to them, and then said, quietly:

"It is not silver."

"Pardon, senor, it is, and still molten."

Wiles stooped and ran his fingers through the shining metal.

"Mother of God—what is it, then?—magic?"

"No, only base metal." But here, Concho, emboldened by Wiles' experiment, attempted

to seize a handful of the glistening mass that instantly broke through his fingers in a thousand tiny spherules, and even sent a few globules up his shirt sleeves, until he danced around in mingled fear and childish pleasure.

"And it is not worth the taking?" queried Pedro of Wiles.

Wiles' right eye and bland face were turned toward the speaker, but his malevolent left was glancing at the dull, red-brown rock on the hillside.

"No!" and turning abruptly away he proceeded to saddle his mule.

Manuel, Miguel and Pedro, left to themselves, began talking earnestly together, while Concho, now mindful of his crippled mule, made his way back to the trail where he had left her. But she was no longer there. Constant to her master through beatings and bullies, she could not stand inequity and inattention. There are certain qualities of the sex that belong to all animated nature.

Inconsolable, footsore and remorseful, Concho returned to the camp and furnace, three miles across the rocky ridge. But what was his astonishment on arriving to find the place deserted of man, mule and camp equipage. Concho called aloud. Only the echoing rocks grimly answered him. Was it a trick? Concho tried to laugh. Ah—yes—a good one—a joke—no—no—they had deserted him! And then poor Concho bowed his head to the ground, and falling on his face, cried as if his honest heart would break.

The tempest passed in a moment; it was not Concho's nature to suffer long nor to brood over an injury. As he raised his head again his eye caught the shimmer of the quicksilver—that pool of merry antic metal that had so delighted him an hour before. In a few moments Concho was again sporting with it; chasing it here and there, rolling it in his palms and laughing with boylike glee at its elusive freaks and fancies. "Ah, sprightly one—skipjack—there thou goest—come here. This way—now I have thee, little one—come, muchacha—come and kiss me," until he had quite forgotten the defection of his companions. And even when he shouldered his sorry pack, he was vain to carry his playmate away with him in his empty leathern flask.

And yet I fancy the sun looked kindly on him as he strode cheerily down the black mountain side, and his step was none the less free nor light that he carried with him neither the brilliant prospects nor the crime of his late comrades.

## Ilygeia in the Dog Days.

While ruminating over a pipe on the evening of one of the dog days, the thermometer being above eighty degrees in the shade, I have wondered what the goddess Ilygeia would have done, and what she would have recommended under the circumstances, for purposes of health and comfort. She wouldn't have eaten roast duck I know; but how would she have combated the fierce heat, by way of keeping herself cool? Would she have swallowed haggis and cocklepie in north Britain, ham and beef in Yorkshire, and tripe and onions in London? Not a bit of it. Ilygeia had too much respect for herself as a goddess to indulge in such plebeian and delusive dainties in hot weather. I can just see her in a scornful attitude, on the top of a marble column such as Alma Tadema loves to paint—she waves her hand over the smoking viands our good cooks are sending up for our delectation. She preaches abstinence in a way that makes one feel creepy, as her words seem to come down from the cold marble. She is commanding her followers to keep cool with milk and water, and grapes and strawberries, and to leave all the alcohol and wine and beer for other occasions. I beg Ilygeia's pardon, and shall renounce heat producers on hot days in future, although they are very good, and like everything else, unfortunately what dyspeptics like best.—Chambers' Journal.

## The Despot of the White House.

Hector, Mrs. Cleveland's handsome poodle, holds supreme sway at the White House during the absence of his master and mistress. The dog is master of the situation and is a confirmed despot. One of the colored attaches of the executive mansion was assigned to the duty of waiting on the dog before the president left the city, and the curly-haired canine sees that his servant carries out the instructions given him. Hector is a very intelligent dog, and makes up for his inability to speak by expressive actions. He is very fond of a stroll around the grounds, and takes his daily guard out for an airing two or three times a day. When he wishes to go out he picks up his collar with a tag on it and starts on an exploring trip all over the house for his attendant. On finding him he places the collar in the man's hand and holds his neck ready for the pleasant yoke. As soon as the collar is placed over his head the poodle knows that his command is to be obeyed, and his joy knows no bounds. The same attendant feeds the executive dog and finds him a hard master to please. Bread and butter and the choicest meats, with small cakes for dessert, are always demanded, and, as his high connections insure compliance with his demands, he lives like an epicure.—Cor. Baltimore Sun.

## How to Help the Poor.

It is sad to have to acknowledge that the majority of the schemes for bettering the condition of the working millions are worse than useless. They sometimes do actual harm. There is a way, however, that money can be spent advantageously for the benefit of the toilers. Cornelius Vanderbilt has appropriated a large sum of money to build a club house for the employees of the New York Central Railway company who work around New York. In this club the men are furnished refreshments and opportunities for innocent recreation at a trifling expense. The aim is to give the employees, off duty, a good time in a club of their own, in which there shall be no temptations to dissipation. The Prince of Wales recently laid the foundation of a people's palace in East London. When completed, it will provide a means of recreation for hundreds of thousands of workmen, and also a technical and trade school for the education of boys. It will contain a summer and winter garden, concert halls, swimming baths, gymnasium, reading rooms and a library.—Democrat's Monthly.

A florist says that "cat tails boiled for ten minutes won't drop off." A cat would probably prefer to go through life without a tail to her back than to have it boiled ten minutes.—Norristown Herald.

## THE LIME KILN CLUB.

Election for Local Officers—Brother Gardner Instructs the Committee.

After Brother Gardner instructed the Lime Kiln club in their position on international questions, on motion of Sir Isaac Walpole the meeting then opened on the thirty-third degree, and proceeded to the election of local officers. There has been a great deal of wire pulling during the summer in regard to these offices, and it was felt that the election would prove an exciting contest. An informal ballot for secretary brought out thirteen candidates, five of whom could neither read nor write. When this fact came to be whispered about, Brother Gardner arose and said:

"I want to say to you five gem'len dat dis an not a pollytical leekshun. If it was you'd be all right. A man kin leave de fool asyrum to-day an' run fur alderman in any city in de land to-morrow, but we do bizness on a different basis in dis club. De five of you proceed to absquatulate, or you'll liar sunthin' drap!"

A formal ballot was then taken, and Way-down Belee was re-elected by a majority of 28. He returned his thanks in a few well selected words, in which he rung in Nero, Plato, the great Sahara desert and the Mormon question. An informal ballot for treasurer brought out twenty-eight candidates, and the feeling promised to be so high that the president again arose and said:

"My frends, I don't want to keep interruptin' de proceedings, but I mus' remind you agin dat dis club don't hold its leekshuns on a pollytical basis. Dar's a heap of you who don't know how to add five to seven, or to subtract two from six, an' dar' are some others who couldn't put a bond of \$50 signed to save deir necks. Dar' mus' be more absquatulashun."

His brief speech produced a wonderful effect. A formal ballot brought out only three candidates, and of those Trustee Pull-back received a majority of the votes and was declared elected. He expressed his thanks in broken remarks, which were about equally divided between the glacial period and the latest improvements in corn-shellers, and sat down and the heartiest applause. The president then made the following appointments:

- Professor De Hoe,
- Wendell Howler,
- Mr Isaac Wal-
- Col. Calhoun,
- James Smith,
- and many members or im-
- members of the club.
- There is anything for a
- committee were also ap-

Lawful Davis, Assump-

Curry Jones, Specie Taylor

Professor Hawkins,

Peaceful Johnson

Brother Gardner said that other committees of less importance might be named later on. Such persons as had been named were expected to enter into committee work with energy and enthusiasm, and seek to make a success of whatever they might be asked to do. It was announced that the library would open at 7 and close at 10 o'clock through the fall and winter months, and frequenters of the place were cautioned about indulging in other political or religious debates in the room. The janitor was instructed to secure the services of a civil engineer to make a survey of the hall stove and estimate the amount of money which would put it in safe condition for the winter, and the keeper of the sacred relics was cautioned to keep his eyes peeled for a cheap bust of Gen. Jackson to stand in the southwest corner of the main hall. The meeting then went home.—Detroit Free Press.

## Opening of the Bowling Season.



A TEN STRIKE.—Life.

## Every-Day Rules for Barbers.

1. "First catch your hair."
2. Place him in the chair and manipulate the tiller wheel until he is screwed down into a position at once uncomfortable and barbarous.
3. Remark about the weather.
4. If the patient wants a shave, lather him.
5. Having lathered the subject, rush to the hydrant and wash your hands.
6. Lather the patient again.
7. Seize your razor and sharpen it.
8. Rub patient's jaw for five minutes. This sends the soap inside the pores and produces a tranquility of the flesh that even a fine tooth razor cannot disturb.
9. More lather.
10. If the patient's pores are not thoroughly stuccoed with soap by this time, read your morning paper until the required stuccoedness is attained.
11. Seize your razor once more and flourish it three times on the strop, and then inquire if the patient is particularly tender in any particular spot.
12. If he is scrape that spot until the subject shows signs of dissolution, then soothe him with lather.
13. Scrape both jaws with the razor, and if musically inclined whistle in the patient's ear during the ceremony.
14. After he is entirely flayed ask if the razor hurts.
15. If he says yes, continue the process until he swears that it does not hurt.
16. Inform patient that a little shampoo might not hurt him.
17. Soak his face with bay rum, putting an especially large quantity on all raw spots.
18. Comb patient's hair on wrong side, scrape magnesia over his black tie, let a drop of lather fall on his boots, hand him his hat, give him the address of a convenient undertaker, and
19. Yell "Next!"—Life.