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CHAPTER I.

SILVER CREEK TOWNSHIP.

It is December, and the sun marks the record of a hundred and six in the shade. We are at the golden end of the world, in Australia, at Silver Creek, twelve months ago a wilderness, now a busy and thriving township. Within this brief space, an infant in the history of cities has grown into what promises to become a strong and healthy man. Unknown, unthought of but a year ago, the name of Silver Creek is already a household word in a new and flourishing colony, and holds an important place in the journals of commerce.

There are turnings and thoroughfares in Silver Creek sufficiently irregular to drive land surveyors into a state of distraction, and there is but one street which exhibits anything like regularity in its formation; but this is a result more of accident than design. It is the principal street in the township, and is lined with wooden tenements and calico tents, in which the business of the town is transacted. Stores of every description, in which all things necessary, and many things unnecessary, for the requirements of life, are to be found within the limits of this thoroughfare, which is known to the residents as High Street. If you are curious in such matters, you may calculate how many stores High Street contains by setting its length at a mile and a half, and giving each store an average frontage of sixteen feet. A few of the buildings are of wood, the majority of calico, and the

inhabitants of one Englishman's castle can hear the inhabitants of the next talking and bargaining during the day, and sighing and murmuring during the night. Not that the inhabitants of Silver Creek are all Englishmen. Other nations thirsting to have their fingers in the golden pie, have sent their representatives across the seas and through the bush, and Americans, Germans, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Italians, Mongols, and Africans, form a rare Tower-of-Babel community. As, however, they have all been drawn thither by one magnet--fashioned of bright gold--they do not emulate the Tower-of-Babel folk, but hob-a-nob amicably with one another, and make common cause of it with the ubiquitous Englishman. The pie is a rich one, but the fruit is unequally distributed, and there are many waste places in it (unfortunately not seen until the crust is dived into), the discovery of which brings disappointment and despair to the hungry seekers. The despair does not last long; they are soon tearing up the earth again, animated by new hopes of coming suddenly upon rich pockets of gold.

High Street had only one side, where the stores were built. Opposite, it was open ground for a distance of some four hundred yards; then commenced the upland, on the ridge of which a long thin range of wooden buildings was erected, which formed the Government Camp, where the official business of the township was transacted. There were the resident-magistrate's court, the treasury, and, in dangerous proximity, the gaol, and all the other necessary adjuncts of civil government. The goldfields' commissioner, or the warden, as he was usually called, and his staff, and the resident magistrate, and a few of the lesser luminaries,

dwelt there in snug habitations with their Chinese cooks, who were rare masters at crust and paste--which is but natural, as they are proverbially light-fingered. There these children of the sun and the moon chattered, and cooked, and smoked opium in their little wooden pipes, of which they were as tenderly solicitous as though they had been children of their blood; and went elsewhere, to the vilest and dirtiest nest of thoroughfares the imagination can conjure up, and which was known as the Chinese Camp, to gamble away their hard earnings. In this camp, of course, was the Joss-House, with its absurd and senseless mummeries; and there, also, were certain dens, which every night were filled with Chinamen, smoking themselves into helpless idiocy. The provision stores in the Chinese camp were stocked with curiosities in the eating way which made fastidious persons shudder: such as preserved slugs and snails (delicious delicacies to the Chinese palate), and bottles crammed with what seemed to be pieces of preserved monkey, while thousands of shreds of shrivelled meat hung from the calico roofs, which were black with smoke. These shreds weighed about an ounce each, and looked like the dried and twisted skins and tails of rats. To judge from the glistening pig-like eyes of the children of the celestial sphere when these morsels were on their platters, and they were preparing to discuss them with their chop-sticks, they must have contained some exquisite and delectable charm, which was hidden from the sight and sense of the English barbarian. If ever night was made hideous, the the Chinamen made it so in their dirty camp with the clanging of their gongs and tom-toms, and the

harsh treble of their voices. To unaccustomed ears it appeared as though Bedlam had been turned loose in this remote part of the globe.

Between the Government Camp and the High Street ran a valley through which a sparkling stream of water meandered; this was the Silver Creek, from which the township derived its name. At the back of the High Street stores, dotting the hills and gullies for miles around, and in the rear again of the Government Camp, were the white tents of the gold-diggers. There was a range of hills from which one could look down upon the scene, and it was well worth the labour to climb this height on a moonlight night, and gaze at the perspective of snow-white roofs, beneath which the tired miners were sleeping, and at the silver stream of water threading its way through the undulations. Then there were the Government buildings, prettily situated, and here and there clumps of silver-bark trees, and, in the distance, shadows of great ranges melting into the clouds. It was a picturesque scene, and the solemn silence and its romantic history afforded food for the mind as well as for the eye.

The Silver Creek diggings more than fulfilled the promise of its name, for gold was found in its soil instead of silver. It was first discovered by Chinamen, who had been hunted off another goldfield fifty miles away, where their presence had been considered an abomination by the European miners. They brought this judgment on themselves by stealing, in the dead of the night, golden dirt which did not by right belong to them, and severe skirmishes had taken place between the rival races, in which the Chinamen were

worsted. They had to fly for their lives, and they wandered wearily, and yet with spirit, further into the interior of the country, prospecting here and there for gold, but without satisfactory results until they reached the hitherto unexplored district of Silver Creek. Here, by their discovery of the precious metal, their wanderings came to an end, and they pitched their tents and lit their fires, and worked undisturbed for a few weeks, getting much gold, and laughing doubtless in their capacious sleeves at the lucky chance which had led them to the place. But if they had indulged in the dream of keeping Silver Creek and its precious deposit all to themselves, it was rudely disturbed one fine morning, and they screeched like magpies when they saw six lusty Tipperary men march on to their diggings, and stick their picks into the ground. The Mongolian saw his enemy before him, and waited in dread for what was to come.

The following was the order of the proceedings of the Tipperary men:

They first stuck their picks into the ground, at a distance of about twenty yards apart from each other; then they clustered together, and tightened their belts. When these were arranged to their satisfaction, they solemnly and simultaneously produced six cutty pipes, all very short and very black, and carefully lighted them. Being now, with their pipes held firmly between their teeth, prepared for action, they sauntered in an indolent kind of way towards the shafts at which the Chinamen were working, and pausing at one, watched the man at the windlass winding up the bucket. The Chinamen spoke not a word; the Tipperary men spoke

not a word. For full five minutes this was the state of things, and the Chinamen proceeded sullenly with their work; from screeching magpies, they were transformed into mute, fear-stricken slaves. Wrath and animosity were in their hearts, but outwardly they were the humblest of mortals. Their sallow faces grew sallower, and they cursed their ill-fortune; for it happened that when the Tipperary men appeared upon the scene, they were pulling up wash-dirt, in which specks of gold could be plainly seen. But they cursed in silence.

"How deep, John?" asked one of the Tipperary men, touching the Chinaman gently on his blue dungaree sleeve.

He referred to the depth of the shaft at which the Chinaman was working.

John did not reply.

But be it here understood that on Australasian and doubtless other goldfields, all Chinamen have but one name--John--not given to them by their godfathers and godmothers; and the countrymen of Confucius have meekly accepted it.

The Tipperary man repeated his question.

"How deep, John?"

John preserved silence. The Tipperary man and his mates followed suit for a few seconds. Then he broke cover again.

"M'lenty gold, John?"

M'lenty means plenty; this was everywhere recognised as Chinaman's English.

"M'lenty gold, John?"

Compelled to reply by the sense of danger which the slightly raised tone in which this second question was

repeated conveyed to the sensitive soul of the Mongolian, John looked blankly into the face of his interlocutor, and said, with all the innocence of a babe.

"Me no sabby!"

Perhaps no race in the world combines so much simplicity with so much cunning as the Chinese. They utter falsehoods, as children do, with an absolute conviction that it will be believed. In this instance, it need scarcely be said that John understood perfectly the nature of the inquiries addressed to him, and professed ignorance from a mingled feeling of cunning, impotent anger, and helplessness.

The Tipperary man quietly knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the barrel of the windlass, and sticking it in his belt, produced from his pocket a cake of Cavendish tobacco and a great spring knife. His mates followed his example. They knocked the ashes out of their pipes, and began cutting up sticks of Cavendish tobacco with great spring knives. There was a wicked click in their knives as they opened them. The Chinamen's eyes grew white, and they sighed for thunderbolts, or lightning to strike these desperadoes into ashes, or for some secret and as effectual means of getting rid of them. The Tipperary men leisurely filled their pipes, applied a match to them, and puffed away till they were well lighted. Then the one who had acted as spokesman took the Chinaman's ear between his fingers, and the foreigner betrayed himself by yelling out, "What for, you? What for, you?" Another Tipperary man laid hold of the handle of the windlass, and the Chinaman was whirled aside, screaming and yelling, and, after spinning like a teetotum for a dozen yards, found himself in a favourable

position for studying the celestial sphere. A third Tipperary man put his foot into the bucket which was about to be sent empty to the bottom of the shaft, and grasped the rope above him with one firm hand, while the second man, working at the windlass, slowly unwound the rope, and let his mate down the pit.

The yelling of the Chinaman who had been whirled from the windlass brought every one of his companions to the spot. They formed quite a small colony, numbering in all, twenty-two souls. The Tipperary men would have grinned had they been told that they were surrounded by twenty-two souls. They knew as much of theology as a laughing jackass does, but, had they been put to it, they certainly would have denied with powerful emphasis that Chinamen have souls. They saw around them twenty-two pasty faces, and twenty-two bodies dressed in blue dungaree; had the Chinamen turned their backs, the Tipperary men would have seen twenty-two pigtails dangling from the crowns of the Chinamen's heads, all trembling simultaneously and responsively from agitation. This feature in the scene was curious and unique; but, indeed, speaking in a dramatic sense, the entire situation was stirring and interesting. One Tipperary man was hanging between heaven and earth, with his foot in a bucket; a second was letting him down the shaft. So that there were four Tipperary men left to confront, and if necessary do battle with, twenty-two Chinamen. Long odds: but the Tipperary men did not seem to think so, did not seem even to consider that there was the slightest danger. Certainly they trifled with their knives, but they trifled with them unconcernedly, opening and shutting them

with cruel clicks, and as though they had not the slightest notion that they might be required for the cutting-up of Chinamen instead of the cutting-up of tobacco. These Tipperary men--or, as they should be more properly called, Tipperary boys--looked upon Chinamen as the scum of the earth, as so many cattle. And the Chinamen, in this instance, really did behave as though they were dirt beneath the feet of the Tipperary boys. They screamed, they stamped, they expostulated, they flashed their fingers in each other's faces, but not in the faces of the Tipperary boys; but they did nothing more. The Tipperary boys scarcely looking at the Chinamen, calmly sucked at their pipes and played with their knives.

Suddenly a great screeching was heard at the bottom of the shaft, which might have come from twenty hungry and venomous cats let loose upon one another; the Chinamen made a movement towards the shaft, but did not approach close enough to mingle with the Tipperary boys. The screeching continued, and an Irish oath or two, heartily uttered, gave it variety. A voice was heard from below, calling out one single word:

"Up!"

The moment this word was uttered, the man at the windlass worked at the handle, and began to wind up the rope. There was a heavy weight at the end of it but the muscles of the Tipperary boy were equal to greater emergencies, and he turned the handle slowly and easily, until there came in view the shaven head of another Chinaman, and then an antique weazened face, in which wrath and dismay were strongly expressed. The man at the

windlass, stooping, clutched with his left hand the collar of the antique Chinaman, and pulling him out of the bucket, flung him among his companions, who instantly recommenced screaming, and chattering, and gesticulating with so much vehemence that one might have imagined that their tongues had just been loosened for the first time for twenty years. The arrival from the lower regions was much older than his companions: their faces were large and expressionless, his was small and vivacious; theirs were smooth, and looked as though they were made out of dirty dough, his was lined and wrinkled, and looked like an old and elaborate carving: their eyes were mild and fishlike, his were full of dark fire. Evidently he was the leader of the Chinese crew, for the moment he recovered his breath he began to harangue them with almost frenzied eloquence. A man of spirit he, inciting his mates to open resistance. His fingers flashed the number of friends and foes as his tongue uttered them--five to twenty-three; he even drew partly out of its sheath a long, thin, glittering knife--but nothing came of it, for one of the Tipperary boys, observing the action, caught him instantly by the neck, dragged him from the midst of his companions, wrested the knife from his hand, and hurled him far away on the other side of the Chinamen. It was the work of an instant, and the twenty-three Mongolians--twenty-two on one side, one on the other--looked on, cowed and trembling.

What had occurred at the bottom of the shaft is soon told. The Tipperary boy, when he stepped out of the bucket and landed on *terra firma*, found the antique Chinaman busily at work in the gutter, where the gold was found. The

intruder made short work of it, trying pacific means first. He pointed to the rope and the bucket, and motioned to the Chinaman that he was wanted above. The Chinaman shook his head, and did not understand. The Tipperary boy, not being in the humour to waste time, seized him, placed him by main force in the bucket, and then called to his mate to haul up. Having a sensible regard for his limbs, the antique Chinaman was compelled to hold on to the rope. After this a tape-line was let down the shaft, and the depth measured: then the man below busied himself in tracing the bearing of the gold gutter, its dip and direction, and what was the nature of the earth above and below it. Having satisfied himself upon these points, he half filled the bucket with the auriferous soil, and, stepping into it, was pulled to heaven's light.

"All right, mates," was all he said.

Then he took a tin dish which belonged to the Chinamen, and, filling it with the earth he had dug out of the gold gutter, walked towards the creek, followed by his mates and the rightful owners. He washed the earth carefully and deftly, and with experienced hands: all of them looked on, animated by various feelings, as he swung the dish round and round. Soon the gold came into view, dotting the lessened earth brightly, like stars in a dirty sky: little by little all the earth was washed away, and the pure gold lay in a little heap in the corner of the tin dish. One of the Irishmen produced a pair of gold scales, and the gold was weighed.

"Four pennyweights to the dish," he said.

"How thick is the wash-dirt?" asked one, of him who had been below.

"About two foot and a half," was the reply.

Hurrah! It was a fortune if they could get claims on the gutter. The Chinamen waited anxiously. What were their enemies now about to do? The man who had washed the gold held it towards the rightful owner.

"M'lenty gold, John," he said, with a pleasant laugh.

Somewhat more satisfied as to the honesty of the intentions of the Tipperary boys, the Chinamen nodded their heads violently enough almost to shake them off, and found their tongues and their understanding.

"Yes, yes. M'lenty gold! Englishman welly good man! Englishman get m'lenty gold!" And pointed to some distance, with tempting fingers, to show where gold was sure to be found in larger quantities.

"All right, John," they said; "we don't want your claims. We only want to find out the lay of the gutter. There's room enough for all at present."

The Chinamen, understanding now the English language, of which they were before so ignorant, became gratefully effusive. The old man darted forward to take the four pennyweights of gold.

"Stop, though," said a Tipperary boy, the lawyer of the company. "Have you got Miners' Rights! Where's your Miners' Rights?"

Without their Miners' Rights--which, it may be necessary to explain, were parchment grants from her Majesty the Queen, to mine the soil for gold, at the rate of one pound per year per man--the claims which the Chinamen were working were not legally theirs, and could be taken from them at a moment's notice. In reply to the query, twenty-

three hands were thrust into twenty-three blue dungaree bosoms, and twenty-three pieces of parchment were waved like flags of freedom triumphantly in the air. The gold was returned to the rightful owners, and the Tipperary boys marked out claims for themselves on the line of the gutter, and were fortunate enough to hit the mark. Next day more men arrived on the ground, and the gold rush having set in, in less than three months the township of Silver Creek was formed. Diggers and traders flocked there from all quarters, and a strangely mixed crew was soon assembled together.

CHAPTER II.

HOW BABY OBTAINED HER SHARE IN THE STAR DRAMATIC COMPANY.

Silver Creek could soon boast of its newspaper, of course; and equally as a matter of course, it could almost as soon boast of its rival newspaper. It is strange that in communities where one newspaper would languish, two are almost sure to flourish; and the *Silver Creek Herald* and the *Silver Creek Mercury* were not an exception to the rule. They led a prosperous and noisy life, and were conducted upon the usual abusive principles, with great vigour and some ability. Their establishments were in the High Street, where there were also sale-rooms, banks, hotels and restaurants, billiard-rooms, clothes and provision stores, and a store with

"Pie-office" written over it. This was almost as good as the peripatetic vendor of baked potatoes, upon whose tin can was painted "The Universal Baked Potato Company (Limited)." The stores drove a roaring trade; flags waved gaily over them; a continual stream of people was flowing up and down. It was like a fair. Here were two Chinamen bearing a pole on their shoulders, in the centre of which dangled, head downwards, a pig at the end of a rope, with its four feet tied in one knot. (When the Chinaman gets to Paradise he hopes to eat roast pig for breakfast, dinner, teas and supper, through all eternity.) Here were half-a-dozen gold-diggers in great thigh-boots, dragging a jibbing-horse along for their puddling machine, cracking their whips and leaping here and there in sympathy with the antics of their wild purchase. Here were American wagons, with handsome teams of horses, and bullock-drays yoked by patient long-suffering cattle, the drivers of which were unloading their stores. Here was a negro, with his gleaming teeth, and his face alight with humour, badgering a perplexed Mongolian, and a crowd of noisy gold-diggers around them egging him on and laughing. The negro was proving by the most absolute and logical of arguments that he had a perfect right to enjoy the privileges of Silver Creek township, and that the Mongolian was an interloper--"A foreigner, sah!" and had no right there at all. The contest was an unequal one. All the sympathies of the Europeans were with the negro, whose amazing flow of natural spirits would have borne down far greater obstacles than were presented in the distressed actions and thin voice of the Mongolian. It was a peculiar feature of the goldfields that the African was

everywhere welcomed, and the Mongolian everywhere scowled at. Here was a great dray creaking along, loaded with portions of the first quartz-reefing machine which Silver Creek could boast of; and all along the road were men buying boots and clothes, and picks and long and short-handled shovels, and bars of steel, and powder and fuse, calling out to one another heartily the while. It was a scene filled with life and colour.

Among the new arrivals, of whom thousands flocked into the township every day, were some dozen men and women, who came in dusty and weary with the toils of the road. They had travelled more than a hundred and fifty miles, being attracted to Silver Creek township by the news of its wonderful prosperity. They were a common-enough troop in outward appearance, and did not look like traders or gold-miners. They had with them a dray drawn by one horse--a poor weak-kneed creature, to whom existence seemed to be a burden as he toiled painfully along with his load behind him. What this load was could not be seen, for the dray had a tarpaulin over it. Upon the tarpaulin were seated three women. The first who calls for notice by virtue of her position was a stately person, probably about thirty-five years of age; her complexion was dark, and in her face was an expression, which might be said to be stamped upon it, and which represented all the tragic passions in little; she bore herself loftily in more senses than one. Her mind was a storehouse, filled with tragedy queens, intermixed with heroines of tenderer sentiment--which latter, however, were somewhat out of place; but you would have roused her to great indignation had you said so in her hearing. The

second, about twenty-three years of age, was a nice-looking saucy widow, with a pretty baby in her arms. The third was a beautiful girl, of some eighteen or nineteen summers. The men, who were all much sunburnt, walked along by the side and in the rear of the dray, and when they entered High Street, peered curiously about them, and then at each other, with an air of "This will do." The eyes of one of the party, the eldest, a man of over sixty years of age, were expressive of something more than curiosity: anxiety was plainly there, but presently this vanished, and bright twinkles took their place. He rubbed his hands joyously, and smiled upon one and another.

"It looks well," he said.

He was the chief of the party, which was nothing less than a company of actors and actresses come to open the first theatre at Silver Creek. Before they started from Melbourne, they had formed themselves into a joint stock company, and agreed to divide profits in proportion to their abilities. There were twelve in the party, not reckoning the baby, and the number of shares were thirty-six. These, after much anxious discussion and deliberation, and some display of the peacock's chief attribute, were distributed as follows:--

	Shares.
1. Tragedian, light comedian, and stage-manager, playing the lead in everything	4½
2. Heavy man	3

3. First old man	2½
4. Second old man	1½
5. First low comedy	3
6. Second low comedy	2
7. Walking gentleman and treasurer	3
8. Supernumerary	1
9. Juvenile lead and general utility, scene painter, acting-manager, and general director	4½
10. Leading lady	4½
11. First old woman	3
(*There was no second*.)	
12. Chambermaid (who could sing and dance)	2½

These proportions being settled, they jogged along comfortably, dreaming of full purses; but on the second day the First Old Man drew attention to the circumstance that although there were thirty-six shares in the company, only thirty-five had been allotted. The Walking Gentleman, who, as treasurer, was looked upon as the arithmetician of the company, and was, therefore, the great authority in figures, instantly began to reckon up, for the fifty-seventh time, and made the number of shares thirty-seven: he tried again and made them thirty-four; tried again, and made them thirty-eight. Then, in desperation, he said that the First Old Man

had "discovered a mare's nest," and that the figures were right--thirty-six shares in the company, and thirty-six allotted. Hurt in a tender point, the First Old Man began again to pencil and reckon, and after achieving a dozen different results, came back to his original discovery, and stuck to his guns like a man. Thereupon high words ensued between the Walking Gentleman and the First Old Man, and the matter was referred to the arbitration of the other ten, who immediately set to work to settle the dispute. The results they produced were extraordinary, varying from seventeen to fifty-two, the highest and the lowest totals being accomplished by the First Old Woman (who, to prove the general fitness of things, should have been the First Old Man's wife, but in proof of the general *un*fitness of things, wasn't) and the singing and dancing Chambermaid.

"*I* make it fifty-two," said the First Old Woman, in a despondent tone, "and what's to become of us, I'm sure I don't know."

She said this in a tone which denoted that the salvation of the Company was imperilled by this arithmetical crisis.

"Fifty-two!" exclaimed the singing and acting Chambermaid, with a melodious laugh. "Why, my dear, its only seventeen!"

The matter was so serious, and everybody became so positive, that in a very short time they were all wrangling and disputing. Nothing was clear but one thing, that if these actors and actresses were a fair sample of the profession they represented, then very few actors and actresses are blessed with a genius for figures.

"This is a bad commencement," frowned the Heavy Man, as was becoming in him: frowns were his special privilege.

The Supernumerary was the only indifferent person; his being the lowest share and represented by the simple figure 1, he considered himself safe. Besides, he was a neophyte, who had fully made up his mind to rival the elder Kean one of these fine days; he was content, in the meantime, to wait and suffer. Suffering is the badge of all his tribe.

Those were most uneasy and perplexed who held fractions of shares, such as the Tragedian and Stage-manager, and the Leading Lady of the company.

A happy thought entered the mind of the eldest man of the party, whose shares, represented by 4½, were set against No. 9, General Utility, Scene-painter, Acting-manager, etc.

"I have it!" he cried, slapping his thigh with the vigour of a younger man.

The others looked doubtful, but listened with attention, for he was one whom they all respected and regarded with affection.

"It is easily arrived at," he continued; "let us take thirty-six shillings, which will represent the thirty-six shares, and give each his proportion. Then, if there is no money left, no mistake has been made."

This proposal was received with laughter and applause, the largest demonstrations coming from those whose pockets were bare of shillings. For, truth to tell, these heroes and heroines of the sock and buskin were impecunious. This circumstance is not uncommon; the condition is almost chronic in the Profession.

"Contributions!" cried the Acting-manager, pulling out of his own pocket no fewer than seventeen shillings: a very Crœsus he.

Others gave timidly, hesitatingly, grudgingly, doubtfully, for the risk was not small. The Heavy Man had nothing to give; the Second Old Man the same contribution; the Supernumerary the same. The Treasurer, as became a "Walking Gentleman," was light of heart as he was of pocket; he looked forward with hope, rich argosies were before him. The First Old Woman produced a plethoric purse, which proved, however, to be stuffed, not with bank notes, but with critical notes of her abilities as the first of First Old Women. She managed to get together a sixpence and two fourpenny-pieces, which she handed to the Acting-manager, asking for twopence change. He gave her the demanded twopence, and was haunted by visions of future complications. The Leading Lady assumed an air of scornful indifference. The Leading Tragedian contributed three shillings, the whole of his wealth. The First Old Man produced four shillings, saying, "I give thee all--I can no more," but he had money concealed. "Who steals my purse, steals trash," observed the Low-Comedy Man, tossing a bad shilling to the Acting-manager. In due time the full complement of thirty-six shillings, representing thirty-six shares, lay in the Acting-manager's palm. He apportioned them to the cry of "The Ghost walks!" Four and sixpence to the Acting-manager, three shillings to the Heavy Man, and so on and so on, until each had received his share. Then he found he had a shilling left, and by this primitive arithmetic the First Old Man was proved to be right.

The next thing to be accomplished was the difficult task of collecting and re-distributing the shillings which had been advanced. This occasioned some comically-distressing scenes. The responsibility fell upon the Acting-manager, who had advanced seventeen shillings. When everybody was satisfied, he had only fourteen shillings left (a bad one among them which they all repudiated) which he pocketed with a grimace, amid general laughter.

Then,

"What's to be done with the other share?" was asked.

It never occurred to these Bohemians that the matter might rest where it was, and that the company could be carried on as well with thirty-five shares as thirty-six.

"O! I'll take it," said First Low-Comedy, "rather than it should cause disturbances."

"Will you?" from other throats. "But I'll take it!"

"And I!"

"And I!"

It threatened to become a bone of desperate contention.

Another happy thought occurred to the Acting-manager. Again he slapped his thigh.

"I have it!" he cried. "Give it to the baby."

"Bravo!" cried the other ten; the mother remained silent. "Bravo! Give it to the baby!"

"Agreed!" sang the First Low-Comedy Man, in the character of one of "Macbeth's" witches.

"Agreed!" sang the Second Low-Comedy Man, in the character of another of "Macbeth's" witches.

And,

"Agreed!" they all broke out in full chorus.

Then they filled the woods with the music from "Macbeth," and danced round an imaginary cauldron.

Thus the baby became a shareholder.

It was not the worst of small comedies this that was played in the Australian woods on a blazing summer's day in January. Many passions and emotions were represented in it in a small way. The curtain falls down as the mother tosses her baby in the air, and as the child is passed from one to another to be kissed.

If in response to the general applause, which I hope will not be wanting, the curtain is drawn aside again, the weak-kneed horse will be seen shambling leisurely along, and the Heavy Man will be taking great strides in advance of the others, with the baby on his shoulders, crowing and laughing and flourishing her dimpled fists in the air.

CHAPTER III.

THE OPENING OF THE THEATRE, AND WHAT PART BABY TOOK IN THE PERFORMANCES.

The news of the arrival of Hart's Star Dramatic Company spread through the Silver Creek Goldfields like wildfire, and every able-bodied man and woman (about thirty of the former to one of the latter, so you may guess what a precious commodity woman was) within ten miles around, resolved to pay them a visit. It was really an event in the

history of the township; with the exception of casinos, sing-songs, and negro entertainments, there had been no amusements, and the inhabitants looked forward to the opening night with great interest and excitement.

Mr. Hart, who was the originator and guiding-star of the company, was the old man already referred to as the Acting-manager; he was the putty that kept the separate parts of the venture together, for without him the concern would have gone to pieces. A tradesman takes a small order, and is thankful for it; but give a small part to an actress who aspires (and lives there an actress who does not aspire?) and wait to hear the thanks that are showered on your head! Heaven and earth! These little Junos are sublime in their indignation, and as for the little Jupiters, it is well for some persons that they are not Vulcans. It devolved upon Mr. Hart to heal every difference that arose among the members of the company. No sinecure this, for Vanity's ruffled feathers had to be smoothed a dozen times a week. In every difficulty he was the one appealed to, and his decision was invariably received with respect, if not with equanimity, for he was known to be a just man. He had led a strange and wandering life, had been Jack-of-all-trades and master of none, as he himself said, and was in every respect a gentleman. He spoke French and German, and was in other ways well educated; he painted, he sang, and knew how to conduct himself--in other words he had no low vices, and here he was an old man, fourteen thousand miles away from the land of his birth, an adventurer, with a purse as lean as Falstaff's. He had been all over the world, and (rare gift) had made friends everywhere; no one had ever

been heard to speak an ill word of him. That so old a man, becoming attached to a Star Dramatic Company, should play the juvenile lead will not be wondered at by persons acquainted with the peculiarities of the profession; as little will it be wondered at that the First Old Man was barely out of his teens. These reversals of the proper order of things are common. Was Mr. Hart happy? His eye was bright, his step was light, and his heart was as fresh as a young man's. For the rest the question will be answered as this story proceeds.

Being in the Silver Creek township, with probably five pounds between them, the first thing to be seen to by these wandering Bohemians was the building of a theatre. An impossibility do you say? Not at all. Easily accomplished. Directly their arrival and purpose became known, the proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle Hotel and Restaurant addressed Mr. Hart.

"What have you come here for?" he asked.

"To act," replied Mr. Hart.

"You will want a theatre to act in."

"We shall."

"Is your company a good one?"

"I think I may say it is. Go and look at our women."

"I've seen them. You've a real beauty among them. I'm not a man to beat about the bush, and you look like a man to be trusted."

"Try me."

"I will. I'll build you a theatre at the back of my hotel on the following conditions." (The proprietor of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle Hotel dotted off the conditions on the

fingers of his left hand with the forefinger of his right hand.) "You will undertake to play in no other place for three months. You will undertake to play in my theatre for six nights a week for three months, and the entertainment shall not last less than four hours. You will undertake to hand over to me every night one-fifth of the gross money received, that being the rent I shall charge you. You will undertake that you and all of you shall board and lodge at the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle, and to pay me three pounds per week per head for such board and lodging--baby not to count." He looked at his thumb with a pucker in his forehead, and finding no condition to which it could be applied, concluded abruptly by saying, "That's all."

Mr. Hart, with the mind of a general, debated for one moment, and resolved the next.

"How many people will the theatre hold?"

"A thousand," replied the enterprising hotel-keeper promptly.

It was a rough guess; he had not the slightest idea as to the size of the place required for the accommodation of the number.

"How long will the theatre take to build?

"A week," was the brisk reply.

"Then we can open in ten days," said Mr. Hart. "There's my hand on it. What shall be the name of the theatre?"

"I'm a loyal subject," said the hotel-keeper. "We'll call it 'The Theatre Royal.' God save the Queen!"

"So be it."

And there and then the matter was settled.

Within an hour a contract was given for the building of the Theatre Royal; within two it was commenced; within a week it was finished; and on the tenth night it was opened. Men never know what they can do till they try; wonders can be accomplished only by saying they shall be accomplished, and setting to work on them. It is grappling with small things that dwarf men's minds; give them a wilderness to conquer, and they rise to the occasion. When I say "them," I mean especially Americans and English; next to them, but not equal to them, the Germans; least of all civilised nations, with capacity to make grand use of such opportunity, the French.

The excitement in Silver Creek was tremendous. Crowds thronged the High Street during the opening day of the Theatre Royal. The Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle did a roaring trade. Eight hundred pounds were taken over the bars for drinks before six o'clock in the evening; no drink less than a shilling. Some contemptible rival grog-shop in the vicinity had already reduced the price of a glass of ale to sixpence, but the miners turned their noses up at it. They were as generous as sailors, and they were not going to pay sixpence for a glass of ale when a shilling was the regulation price. There was something sneaking in it, and many a gold-digger lost caste by patronising the cheap grog-shop. Fabulous prices were offered for the privilege of going into the theatre before the doors were open, and securing front seats; but the landlord of the Rose, Shamrock, and Thistle turned a deaf ear to the tempters.

"Fair play, mates," he said. "First come, first served; and the devil take the hindmost."