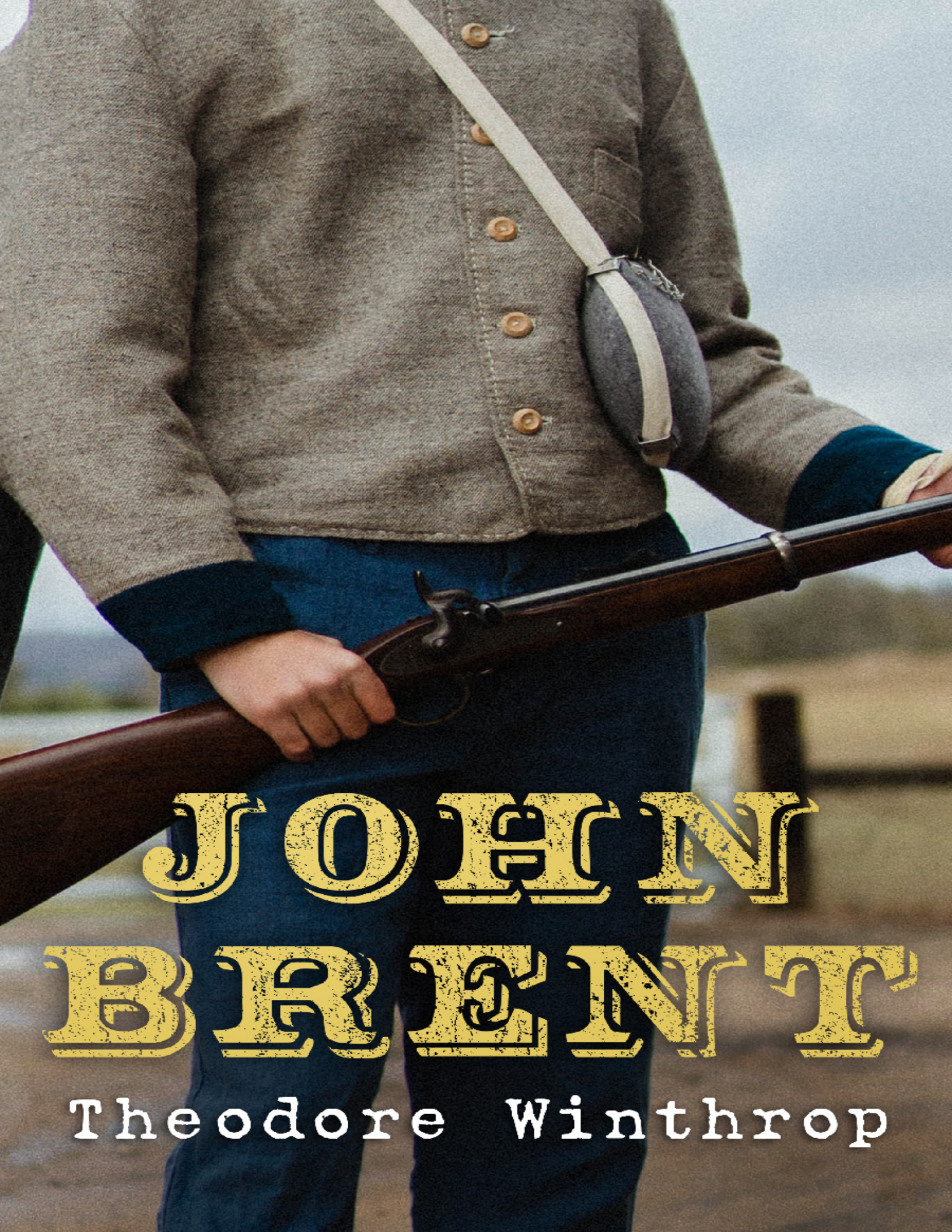

JOHN BRENT

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Western Novel

e-artnow, 2021
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EAN: 4064066498566

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Auri Sacre Fames

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I write in the first person; but I shall not maunder about myself. I am in no sense the hero of this drama. Call me Chorus, if you please, — not Chorus merely observant and impassive; rather Chorus a sympathizing monitor and helper. Perhaps I gave a certain crude momentum to the movement of the play, when finer forces were ready to flag; but others bore the keen pangs, others took the great prizes, while I stood by to lift the maimed and cheer the victor.

It is a healthy, simple, broad-daylight story.

No mystery in it. There is action enough, primeval action of the Homeric kind. Deeds of the heroic and chivalric times do not utterly disdain our day. There are men as ready to gallop for love and strike for love now, as in the age of Amadis.

Roughs and brutes, as well as gentlemen, take their places in this drama. None of the characters have scruples or qualms. They act according to their laws, and are scourged or crowned, as their laws suit Nature’s or not.

To me these adventures were episode; to my friend, the hero, the very substance of life.

But enough backing and filling. Enter Richard Wade — myself — as Chorus.

A few years ago I was working a gold-quartz mine in California.

It was a worthless mine, under the conditions of that time. I had been dragged into it by the shifts and needs of California life. Destiny probably meant to teach me patience and self-possession in difficulty. So Destiny thrust me into a bitter bad business of quartz mining.

If I had had countless dollars of capital to work my mine, or quicksilver for amalgamation as near and plenty as the snow on the Sierra Nevada, I might have done well enough.

As it was, I got but certain pennyworths of gold to a most intolerable quantity of quartz. The precious metal was to the brute mineral m the proportion of perhaps a hundred pin-heads to the ton. My partners, down in San Francisco, wrote to me: “Only find twice as many pin-heads, and our fortune is made.” So thought those ardent fellows, fancying that gold would go up and labor go down, — that presently I would strike a vein where the mineral would show yellow threads and yellow dots, perhaps even yellow knobs, in the crevices, instead of empty crannies which Nature had prepared for monetary deposits and forgotten to fill.

So thought the fellows in San Francisco. They had been speculating in beef, bread-stuffs, city lots, Rincon Point, wharf property, mission lands, Mexican titles, Sacramento boats, politics, Oregon lumber. They had been burnt out, they had been cleaned out, they had been drowned out. They depended upon me and the quartz mine to set them up again. So there was a small, steady stream of money flowing up from San Francisco from the depleted coffers of those sanguine partners, flowing into our mine, and sinking there, together with my labor and my life.

Our ore — the San Francisco partners liked to keep up the complimentary fiction of calling it ore — was pretty stuff for an amateur mineralogical cabinet. A professor would have exhibited specimens to a lecture-room with delight. There never was any quartz where the matrix was better defined, better shaped to hold the gold that was not in it. For Macadam, what royal material it would have been! Park roads made of it would have glittered gayer than marble. How brilliantly paths covered with its creamy-white fragments would have meandered through green grass!

If I had had no fond expectations of these shining white and yellow stones, I should have deemed their mass useful

and ornamental enough, — useful skeleton material to help hold the world together, ornamental when it lay in the sun and sparkled. But this laughing sparkle had something of a sneer in it. The stuff knew that it had humbugged me. Let a man or a woman be victor over man or woman, and the chances are that generosity will suppress the pæan. But matter is so often insulted and disdained, that when it triumphs over mind it is merciless.

Yes; my quartz had humbugged me. Or rather — let me not be unjust even to undefended stone, not rich enough to pay an advocate — I had humbugged myself with false hopes. I have since ascertained that my experience is not singular. Other men have had false hopes of other things than quartz mines. Perhaps it was to teach me this that the experience came. Having had my lesson, I am properly cool and patient now when I see other people suffering in the same way, — whether they dig for gold, fame, or bliss; digging for the bread of their life, and getting only a stone. The quartz was honest enough as quartz. It was my own fault that I looked for gold-bearing quartz, and so found it bogus and a delusion. What right have we to demand the noble from the ignoble!

I used sometimes fairly to shake my fist at my handsome pile of mineral, my bullionless pockets of ore. There was gold in the quartz; there are pearls in the Jersey muds; there are plums in boarding-house puddings; there are sixpences in the straw of Broadway omnibuses.

Steady disappointment, by and by, informs a man that he is in the wrong place. All work, no play, no pay, is a hint to work elsewhere. But men must dig in the wrong spots to learn where these are, and so narrow into the right spot at last. Every man, it seems, must waste so much life. Every man must have so much imprisonment to teach him limits and fit him for freedom.

Nearly enough, however of *Miei Prigioni*. A word or two of my companions in jail. A hard lot they were, my neighbors

within twenty miles! Jail-birds, some of them, of the worst kind. It was as well, perhaps, that my digging did not make money, and theirs did. They would not have scrupled to bag my gold and butcher me. But they were not all ruffians; some were only barbarians.

Pikes, most of these latter. America is manufacturing several new types of men. The Pike is one of the newest. He is a bastard pioneer. With one hand he clutches the pioneer vices; with the other he beckons forward the vices of civilization. It is hard to understand how a man can have so little virtue in so long a body, unless the shakes are foes to virtue in the soul, as they are to beauty in the face.

He is a terrible shock, this unlucky Pike, to the hope that the new race on the new continent is to be a handsome race. I lose that faith, which the people about me now have nourished, when I recall the Pike. He is hung together, not put together. He inserts his lank fathom of a man into a suit of molasses-colored homespun. Frowzy and husky is the hair Nature crowns him with; frowzy and stubby the beard. He shambles in his walk. He drawls in his talk. He drinks whiskey by the tank. His oaths are to his words as Falstaff's sack to his bread. I have seen Maltese beggars, Arab camel-drivers, Dominican friars, New York Aldermen, Digger Indians; the foulest, frowziest creatures I have ever seen are thorough-bred Pikes. The most vigorous of them leave their native landscape of cotton-wood and sand-bars along the yellow ditches of the West, and emigrate with a wagon-load of pork and pork-fed progeny across the plains to California. There the miasms are roasted out of them; the shakes warmed away; they will grow rich, and possibly mellow, in the third or fourth generation. They had not done so in my time. I lived among them *ad nauseam*, month after month, and I take this opportunity to pay them parting compliments.

I went on toiling, day after day, week after week, two good years of my life, over that miserable mine. Nothing

came of it. I was growing poorer with every ton we dug, poorer with every pound we crushed. In a few months more, I should have spent my last dollar and have gone to day labor, perhaps among the Pikes. The turnpike stuff refused to change into gold. I saw, of course, that something must be done. What, I did not know. I was in that state when one needs an influence without himself to take him by the hand gently, by the shoulder forcibly, by the hair roughly, or even by the nose insultingly, and drag him off into a new region.

The influence came. Bad news reached me. My only sister, a widow, my only near relative, died, leaving two young children to my care. It was strange how this sorrow made the annoyance and weariness of my life naught! How this responsibility cheered me! My life seemed no longer lonely and purposeless. Point was given to all my intentions at once. I must return home to New York. Further plans when I am there! But now for home! If any one wanted my quartz mine, he might have it. I could not pack it in my saddle-bags to present to a college cabinet of mineralogy.

I determined, as time did not absolutely press, to ride home across the plains. It is a grand journey. Two thousand miles, or so, on horse-back. Mountains, deserts, prairies, rivers, Mormons, Indians, buffalo, — adventures without number in prospect. A hearty campaign, and no carpet knighthood about it.

It was late August. I began my preparations at once.

Gerrian’s Ranch

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It happened that, on a journey, early in the same summer, some twenty miles from my mine, I had come upon a band of horses feeding on the prairie. They cantered off as I went riding down the yellow slope, and then, halting just out of lasso reach, stopped to reconnoitre me. Animals are always eager to observe man. Perhaps they want ideas against the time of their promotion to humanity, so that they need not be awkward, and introduce quadruped habits into biped circles.

The mass of the herd inspected me stupidly enough. Man to them was power, and nothing else, — a lasso-throwing machine, — something that put cruel bits into equine mouths, got on equine backs, and forced equine legs to gallop until they were stiff. Man was therefore something to admire, but to avoid, — so these horses seemed to think; and if they had known man as brother man alone knows him, perhaps their opinion would have been confirmed.

One horse, however, among them, had more courage, or more curiosity, or more faith. He withdrew from the gregarious commonalty, — the haughty aristocrat! — and approached me, circling about, as if he felt a certain centripetal influence, — as if he knew himself a higher being than his mustang comrades, — nearer to man, and willing to offer him his friendship. He and I divided the attention of the herd. He seemed to be, not their leader, but rather one who disdained leadership. *Facile princeps!* He was too far above the noblest of the herd to care for their unexciting society.

I slipped quietly down from my little Mexican caballo, and, tethering him to a bush with the lariat, stood watching the splendid motions of this free steed of the prairie.

He was an American horse, — so they distinguish in California one brought from the old States, — a superb young stallion, perfectly black, without mark. It was magnificent to see him, as he circled about me, fire in his eye, pride in his nostril, tail flying like a banner, power and grace from tip to tip. No one would ever mount him, or ride him, unless it was his royal pleasure. He was conscious of his representative position, and showed his paces handsomely. It is the business of all beautiful things to exhibit.

Imagine the scene. A little hollow in the prairie, forming a perfect amphitheatre; the yellow grass and wild oats grazed short; a herd of horses staring from the slope, myself standing in the middle, like the ring-master in a circus, and this wonderful horse performing at his own free will. He trotted powerfully, he galloped gracefully, he thundered at full speed, he lifted his fore-legs to welcome, he flung out his hind-legs to repel, he leaped as if he were springing over bayonets, he pranced and curvetted as if he were the pretty plaything of a girl; finally, when he had amused himself and delighted me sufficiently, he trotted up and snuffed about me, just out of reach.

A horse knows a friend by instinct. So does a man. But a man, vain creature! is willing to repel instinct and trust intellect, and so suffers from the attempt to revise his first impressions, which, if he is healthy, are infallible.

The black, instinctively knowing me for a friend, came forward and made the best speech he could of welcome, — a neigh and no more. Then, feeling a disappointment that his compliment could not be more melodiously or gracefully turned, he approached nearer, and, not without shying and starts, of which I took no notice, at last licked my hand, put his head upon my shoulder, suffered me to put my arm round his neck, and in fact lavished upon me every mark of confidence. “We were growing fast friends, when I heard a sound of coming hoofs. The black tore away with a snort,

and galloped off with the herd after him. A Mexican vaquero dashed down the slope in pursuit. I hailed him.

“A quien es ese caballo — el negrito?”

“Aquel diablo! es del Señor Gerrian.” And he sped on.

I knew Gerrian. He was a Pike of the better class. He had found his way early to California, bought a mission farm, and established himself as a ranchero. His herds, droves, and flocks darkened the hills. The name reminded me of the giant Geryon of old. Were I an unscrupulous Hercules, free to pillage and name it protection, I would certainly drive off Gerrian’s herds for the sake of that black horse. So I thought, as I watched them gallop away.

It chanced that, when I was making my arrangements to start for home, business took me within a mile of Gerrian’s ranch. I remembered my interview with the black. It occurred to me that I would ride down and ask the ranchero to sell me his horse for my journey.

I found Gerrian, a lank, wire-drawn man, burnt almost Mexican color, lounging in the shade of his adobe house. I told him my business in a word.

“No bueno, stranger!” said he.

“Why not? Do you want to keep the horse.”

“No, not partickler. Thar ain’t a better stallion nor him this side the South Pass; but I can’t do nothing with him no more ’n yer can with a steamboat when the cap’n says, ‘ Beat or bust!’ He’s a black devil, ef thar ever was a devil into a horse’s hide. Somebody’s tried to break him down when he was a colt, an now he wont stan’ nobody goan near him.”

“Sell him to me, and I’ll try him with kindness.”

“No, stranger. I’ve tuk a middlin’ shine to you from the way you got off that Chinaman them Pikes was goan to hang fur stealing the mule what he hadn’t stoled. I’ve tuk a middlin’ kind er shine to you, and I don’t want to see yer neck broke, long er me. That thar black’ll shut up the hinge in yer neck so tight that yer’ll never look up to ther top of a

red-wood again. Allowin’ you haint got an old ox-yoke into yer fur backbone, yer’ll keep off that thar black kettrypid, till the Injins tie yer on, and motion yer to let him slide or be shot.”

“My backbone is pretty stiff,” said I; “I will risk my neck.”

“The Greasers is some on hosses, you’ll give in, I reckon. Well, thar ain’t a Greaser on my ranch that’ll put leg over that thar streak er four-legged lightning; no, not if yer’d chain off for him a claim six squar leagues in the raal old Garden of Paradise, an stock it with ther best gang er bullocks this side er Santer Fee.”

“But I’m not a Mexican; I’m the stiffest kind of Yankee. I don’t give in to horse or man. Besides, if he throws me and breaks my neck I get my claim in Paradise at once.”

“Well, stranger, you’ve drawed yer bead on that thar black, as anybody can see. An ef a man’s drawed his bead, thar ain’t no use tellin’ him to pint off.”

“No. If you’ll sell, I’ll buy.”

“Well, if you wunt go fur to ask me to throw in a coffin to boot, praps we ken scare up a trade. How much do you own in the Foolonner Mine?”

I have forgotten to speak of my mine by its title. A certain Pike named Pegrum, Colonel Pegrum, a pompous Pike from Pike County, Missouri, had once owned the mine. The Spaniards, finding the syllables Pegrum a harsh morsel, spoke of the colonel, as they might of any stranger, as Don Fulano, — as we should say, “John Smith.” It grew to be a nickname, and finally Pegrum, taking his donship as a title of honor, had procured an act of the legislature dubbing him formally Don Fulano Pegrum. As such he is known, laughed at, become a public man and probable Democratic Governor of California. From him our quartz cavern had taken its name.

I told Gerrian that I owned one quarter of the Don Fulano Mine.

“Then you’re jess one quarter richer ’n ef you owned haff, and jess three quarters richer ’n ef you owned the hull kit and boodle of it.”

“You are right,” said I. I knew it by bitter heart.

“Well stranger, less see ef we can’t banter fur a trade. I’ve got a hoss that ken kill ayry man. That’s so; ain’t it?”

“You say so.”

“You’ve got a mine, that’ll break ayry man, short pocket or long pocket. That’s so; ain’t it?”

“No doubt of that.”

“Well now; my curwolyow’s got grit into him, and so’s that thar pile er quartz er yourn got gold into it. But you cant git the slugs out er your mineral; and I can get the kicks a blasted sight thicker ’n anything softer out er my animal. Here’s horse agin mine, — which’d yer rether hev, allowin’ ’t was toss up and win.”

“Horse!” said I. “I don’t know how bad he is, and I do know that the mine is worse than nothing to me.”

“Lookerhere, stranger! You’re goan home across lots. You want a horse. I’m goan to stop here. I’d jess as lives gamble off a hundred or two head o’ bullocks on that Foolonner Mine. You can’t find ayry man round here to buy out your interest in that thar heap er stun an the hole it cum out of. It’ll cost you more ’n the hul’s wuth ef you go down to San Frisco and wait tell some fool comes along what’s got gold he wants to buy quartz with. Take time now, I’m goan to make yer a fair banter.”

“Well, make it.”

“I stump you to a clean swap. My hoss agin your mine.”

“Done,” said I.

“I allowed you’d do it. This here is one er them swaps, when both sides gits stuck. I git the Foolonner Mine, what I can’t make go, and you’ll be a fool on a crittur what’ll go a heap more ’n you’ll want. Haw! haw!”

And Gerrian laughed a Pike’s laugh at his pun. It was a laugh that had been stunted in its childhood by the fever

and ague, and so had grown up husk without heart.

“Have the black caught,” said I, “and we’ll clinch the bargain at once.”

There was a Mexican vaquero slouching about. Gerrian called to him.

“O Hozay! kesty Sinyaw cumprader curwolyow nigereeto. Wamos addelanty! Corral curwolyose toethoso!”

Pike Spanish that! If the Mexicans choose to understand it, why should Pikes study Castilian? But we must keep a sharp look-out on the new words that come to us from California, else our new language will be full of foundlings with no traceable parentage. We should beware of heaping up problems for the lexicographers of the twentieth century: they ought to be free for harmonizing the universal language, half-Teutonic, half-Romanic, with little touches of Mandingo and Mandan.

The bukkarer, as Gerrian’s Spanish entitled Hozay, comprehended enough of the order to know that he was to drive up the horses. He gave me a Mexican’s sulky stare, muttered a caramba at my rashness, and lounged off, first taking a lasso from its peg in the court.

“Come in, stranger,” said Gerrian, “before we start, and take a drink of some of this here Mission Dolorous wine.”

“How does that go down?” said he, pouring out golden juices into a cracked tumbler.

It was the very essence of California sunshine, — sherry with a richness that no sherry ever had, — a somewhat fiery beverage, but without any harshness or crudity. Age would better it, as age betters the work of a young genius; but still there is something in the youth we would not willingly resign.

“Very fine,” said I; “it is romantic old Spain, with ardent young America interfused.”

“Some likes it,” says Gerrian; “but taint like good old Argee to me. I can’t git nothin’ as sweet as the taste of yaller corn into sperit. But I reckon thar ken be stuff made

out er grapes what’ll make all owdoors stan’ round. This yer wuz made by the priests. What ken you spect of priests? They ain’t more ’n haff men nohow. I’m goan to plant a wineyard er my own, and ’fore you cum out to buy another quartz mine, I’ll hev some of ther strychnine what’ll wax Burbon County’s much’s our inyans here ken wax them low-lived smellers what they grow to old Pike.”

Don Fulano

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Hector of Troy, Homer’s Hector, was my first hero in literature. Not because he loved his wife and she him, as I fancy that noble wives and husbands love in the times of trial now; but simply because he was Hippodamos, one that could master the horse.

As soon as I knew Hector, I began to emulate him. My boyish experiments were on donkeys, and failed. “I couldn’t wallop ’em. O no, no!” That was my difficulty. Had I but met an innocent and docile donkey in his downy years! Alas! only the perverted donkey, bristly and incorrigible, came under my tutorship. I was too humane to give him stick enough, and so he mastered me.

Horses I learned to govern by the law of love. The relation of friendship once established between man and horse, there is no trouble. A centaur is created. The man wills whither; the horse, at the will of his better half, does his best to go thither. I became, very early, Hippodamos, not by force, but by kindness. All lower beings, — fiendish beings apart, — unless spoilt by treachery, seek the society of the higher; as man, by nature, loves God. Horses will do all they know for men, if man will only let them. All they need is a slight hint to help their silly willing brains, and they dash with ardor at their business of galloping a mile a minute, or twenty miles an hour, or of leaping a gully, or pulling tonnage. They put so much reckless, break-neck frenzy in their attempt to please and obey the royal personage on their back, that he needs to be brave indeed to go thoroughly with them.

The finer the horse, the more delicate the magnetism between him and man. Knight and his steed have an affinity for each other. I fancied that Gerrian’s black, after our

mutual friendly recognition on the prairie, would like me better as our intimacy grew.

After hobnobbing with cracked tumblers of the Mission Dolores wine, Gerrian and I mounted our mustangs and rode toward the corral.

All about on the broad slopes, the ranchero's countless cattle were feeding. It was a patriarchal scene. The local patriarch, in a red flannel shirt purpled by sun and shower, in old buckskin breeches with the fringe worn away and decimated along its files whenever a thong was wanted, in red-topped boots with the maker's name, Abel Cushing, Lynn, Mass., stamped in gilt letters on the red, — in such costume the local patriarch hardly recalled those turbaned and white-robed sheiks of yore, Abraham and his Isaac. But he represented the same period of history modernized, and the same type of man Americanized; and I have no doubt his posterity will turn out better than Abraham's, and scorn peddling, be it Austrian loans or "ole clo'."

The cattle scampered away from us, as we rode, hardly less wild than the buffaloes on the Platte. Whenever we rose on the crest of a hillock, we could see several thousands of the little fierce bullocks, — some rolling away in flight, in a black breadth, like a shaken carpet; some standing in little groups, like field officers at a review, watching the movements as squadron after squadron came and went over the scene; some, as arbitrators and spectators, surrounding a pair of champion bulls butting and bellowing in some amphitheatre among the swells of land.

"I tell you what it is, stranger," said Gerrian, halting and looking proudly over the landscape, "I wouldn't swop my place with General Price at the White House."

"I should think not," said I; "bullocks are better company than office-seekers."

It was a grand, simple scene. All open country, north and south, as far as the eye could see. Eastward rose the noble blue barrier of the Sierra, with here and there a field, a

slope, a spot, or a pinnacle of the snow that names it Nevada. A landscape of larger feeling than any we can show in the old States, on the tame side of the continent. Those rigorous mountain outlines on the near horizon utterly dwarf all our wooded hills, Alleghanies, Greens, Whites. A race trained within sight of such loftiness of nature must needs be a loftier race than any this land has yet known. Put cheap types of mankind within the influence of the sublimities, and they are cowed; but the great-hearted expand with vaster visions. A great snow-peak, like one of the Tacomas of Oregon, is a terrible monitor over a land; but it is also a benignant sovereign, a presence, calm, solemn, yet not without a cheering and jubilant splendor. A range of sharp, peremptory mountains, like the Sierra Nevada, insists upon taking thought away from the grovelling flats where men do their grubbing for the bread of daily life, and up to the master heights, whither in all ages seers have gone to be nearer mystery and God.

It was late August. All the tall grass and wild oats and barley, over lift, level, and hollow, were ripe yellow or warm brown, — a golden mantle over the golden soil. There were but two colors in the simple, broad picture, — clear, deep, scintillating blue in the sky, melting blue in the mountains, and all the earth a golden surging sea.

“It’s a bigger country ’n old Pike or Missourer anywhar,” says Gerrian, giving his ‘curwolyow’ the spur. “I’d ruther hev this, even ef the shakes wuz here instidd of thar, and havin’ their grab reglar twicet a day all the year round.”

As we rode on, our ponies half hidden in the dry, rustling grass of a hollow, a tramp of hoofs came to us with the wind, — a thrilling sound! with something free and vigorous in it that the charge of trained squadrons never has.

“Thar they come!” cried Gerrian; “thar’s a rigiment wuth seeing. They can’t show you a sight like that to the old States.”

“No indeed. The best thing to be hoped there in the way of stampede is when a horse kicks through a dash-board, kills a coachman, shatters a carriage, dissipates a load of women and children, and goes tearing down a turnpike, with ‘sold to an omnibus’ awaiting him at the end of his run-away!”

We halted to pass the coming army of riderless steeds in review.

There they came! Gerrian’s whole band of horses in full career! First, their heads suddenly lifted above a crest of the prairie; then they burst over, like the foam and spray of a black, stormy wave when a blast strikes it, and wildly swept by us with manes and tails flaring in the wind. It was magnificent. My heart of a horseman leaped in my breast. “Hurrah!” I cried.

“Hurrah ’t is!” said Gerrian.

The herd dashed by in a huddle, making for the corral.

Just behind, aloof from the rush and scamper of his less noble brethren, came the black, my purchase, my old friend.

“Ef you ever ride or back that curwolyow,” says Gerrian, “I’ll eat a six-shooter, loaded and capped.”

“You’d better begin, then, at once,” rejoined I, “whetting your teeth on Derringers. I mean to ride him, and you shall be by when I do it.”

It was grand to see a horse that understood and respected himself so perfectly. One, too, that meant the world should know that he was the very chiefest chief of his race, proud with the blood of a thousand kings. How masterly he looked! How untamably he stepped! The herd was galloping furiously. He disdained to break into a gallop. He trotted after, a hundred feet behind the hindmost, with large and liberal action. And even at this half speed easily overtaking his slower comrades, he from time to time paused, bounded in the air, tossed his head, flung out his legs, and then strode on again, writhing all over with suppressed power.

There was not a white spot upon him, except where a flake of foam from his indignant nostril had caught upon his flank. A thorough-bred horse, with the perfect tail and silky mane of a noble race. His coat glistened, as if the best groom in England had just given him the final touches of his toilette for a canter in Rotten Row. But it seems a sin to compare such a free rover of the prairie with any less favored brother, who needs a groom, and has felt a currycomb.

Hard after the riderless horses came José, the vaquero, on a fast mustang. As he rode, he whirled his lasso with easy turn of the wrist.

The black, trotting still, and halting still to curvet and caracole, turned back his head contemptuously at his pursuer. “Mexicans may chase their own ponies and break their spirit by brutality; but an American horse is no more to be touched by a Mexican than an American man. Bah! make your cast! Don’t trifle with your lasso! I challenge you. Jerk away, Señor Greaser! I give you as fair a chance as you could wish.”

So the black seemed to say, with his provoking backward glance and his whinny of disdain.

José took the hint. He dug cruel spurs into his horse. The mustang leaped forward. The black gave a tearing bound and quickened his pace, but still waited the will of his pursuer.

They were just upon us, chased and chaser, thundering down the slope, when the vaquero, checking his wrist at the turn, flung his lasso straight as an arrow for the black’s head.

I could hear the hide rope sing through the summer air, for a moment breezeless.

Will he be taken! Will horse or man be victor!

The loop of the lasso opened like a hoop. It hung poised for one instant a few feet before the horse’s head, vibrating m the air, keeping its circle perfect, waiting for the

vaquero’s pull to tighten about that proud neck and those swelling shoulders.

Hurrah!

Through it went the black.

With one brave bound he dashed through the open loop. He touched only to spurn its vain assault with his hindmost hoof.

“Hurrah!” I cried.

“Hurrah! ’t is,” shouted Gerrian.

José dragged in his spurned lasso.

The black, with elated head, and tail waving like a banner, sprang forward, closed in with the caballada; they parted for his passage, he took his leadership, and presently was lost with his suite over the swells of the prairie.

“Mucho malicho!” cried Gerrian to José, not knowing that his Californian Spanish was interpreting Hamlet. “He ought to hev druv ’em straight to corral. But I don’t feel so sharp set on lettin’ you hev that black after that shine. Reg’lar circus, only thar never was no sich seen in no circus! You’ll never ride him, allowin’ he’s cotched, no more ’n you’ll ride a alligator.”

Meantime, loping on, we had come in sight of the corral. There, to our great surprise, the whole band of horses had voluntarily entered. They were putting their heads together as the manner of social horses is, and going through kissing manœuvres in little knots, which presently were broken up by the heels of some ill-mannered or jealous brother. They were very probably discussing the black’s act of horsemanship, as men after the ballet discuss the first *entrechat* of the danseuse.

We rode up and fastened our horses. The black was within the corral, pawing the ground, neighing, and whinnying. His companions kept at a respectful distance.

“Don’t send in José!” said I to Gerrian. “Only let him keep off the horses, so that I shall not be kicked, and I will try my hand at the black alone.”

“I’ll hev ’em all turned out except that black devil, and then you ken go in and take your own resk with him. Akkee José!” continued the ranchero, “fwarer toethose! Day her hel diablo!”

José drove the herd out of the staked enclosure. The black showed no special disposition to follow. He trotted about at his ease, snuffing at the stakes and bars.

I entered alone. Presently he began to repeat the scene of our first meeting on the prairie. It was not many minutes before we were good friends. He would bear my caresses and my arm about his neck, and that was all for an hour. At last, after a good hour’s work, I persuaded him to accept a halter. Then by gentle seductions I induced him to start and accompany me homeward.

Gerrian and the Mexican looked on in great wonderment.

“Praps that is the best way,” said the modern patriarch, “ef a man has got patience. Looker here, stranger, ain’t you a terrible fellow among women?”

I confessed my want of experience.

“Well, you will be when your time comes. I allowed from seeing you handle that thar hoss, that you had got your hand in on women, — they is the wust devils to tame I ever seed.”

I had made my arrangements to start about the first of September, with the Sacramento mail-riders, a brace of jolly dogs, brave fellows, who, with their scalps as well secured as might be, ran the gauntlet every alternate month to Salt Lake. That was long before the days of coaches. No pony express was dreamed of. A trip across the plains, without escort or caravan, had still some elements of heroism, if it have not to-day.

Meantime one of my ardent partners from San Francisco arrived to take my place at the mine.

“I don’t think that quartz looks quite so goldy as it did at a distance,” said he.

“Well,” said old Gerrian, who had come over to take possession of his share of our bargain; “it *is* whiter ’n it’s yaller. It *does* look about as bad off fur slugs as the cellar of an Indiana bank. But I b’leeve in luck, and luck is olluz comin’ at me with its head down and both eyes shet. I’m goan to shove bullocks down this here hole, or the price of bullocks, until I make it pay.”

And it is a fact, that by the aid of Gerrian’ s capital, and improved modern machinery, after a long struggle, the Fulano mine has begun to yield a sober, quiet profit.

My wooing of the black occupied all my leisure during my last few days. Every day, a circle of Pikes collected to see my management. I hope they took lessons in the law of kindness. The horse was well known throughout the country, and my bargain with Gerrian was noised abroad.

The black would tolerate no one but me. With me he established as close a brotherhood as can be between man and beast. He gave me to understand, by playful protest, that it was only by his good pleasure that I was permitted on his back, and that he endured saddle and bridle; as to spur or whip, they were not thought of by either. He did not obey, but consented. I exercised no control. We were of one mind. We became a Centaur. I loved that horse as I have loved nothing else yet, except the other personages with whom and for whom he acted in this history.

I named him Don Fulano.

I had put my mine into him. He represented to me the whole visible, tangible result of two long, workaday years, dragged out in that dreary spot among the Pikes, with nothing in view except barren hill-sides ravaged by mines, and the unbeautiful shanties of miners as rough as the landscape.

Don Fulano, a horse that would not sell, was my profit for the sternest and roughest work of my life! I looked at him, and looked at the mine, that pile of pretty pebbles, that pile of bogus ore, and I did not regret my bargain. I never have