SECOND PART.

THE PITTSBURG DISPATCH.

PAGES 9 TO 16.

PITTSBURG, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 1, 1889.

A POPULAR CORNER.

Something About the Visitors to the Postoffice Corridors.

STARTING A LETTER ON ITS WAY.

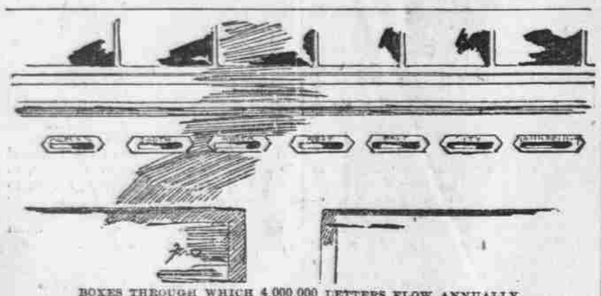
Troubles of the Stamp and Delivery Window Clerks.

DECLINE OF THE SPECIAL DELIVERY

[WRITTEN FOR THE DISPATCH.]

THROUGH the cramped corridors of that section of the queer old Government building devoted to the Post Office, flows an increasing stream of people, and the tread of many feet has worn great ridges in the stone steps, and even the pavement which serves as approaches. It is a simple truism to say that Post Office Corner is the most frequented and central location in Pittsburg.

The tide of humanity ebbs and flows through queer old Smithfield street and Fifth avenue archways of ancient color and graceful curves from early morn till dewy eve. Appointments of all kinds are made and kept; marketers catch widely diverging car lines by making use of the postoffice as a terminal; box owners rush in furtively and glance through the glass for the letters that seem so slow in coming that they never arrive, hundreds of young people meet in the corridors quite by accident; the public in general rushes in to start the machinery of the mails freighting Uncle Sam with hopes, fears, bids for fortune, news of families and individuals, in a word, their inner selves concealed only by a thickness of paper. But above all is the very apparent fact that the floating population of this big city rotates around this center.



BOXES THROUGH WHICH 4,000,000 LETTERS FLOW ANNUALLY.

An astonishingly large percentage of the out-of-door population of the city passes through the postoffice corridors. Some have some distinct business, others wander around the office countless times a day, just as if they could lay claim to business connections of the highest character through affecting dealings with so honorable an old gentleman as Uncle Sam; much upon the same principle that a man will dine in the Bowery on a 20-cent basis and adjourn to the steps of the Astor House with a toothpick adjunct and a well-fed expression.

A RUSHING TIDE.

But there is by no means a marked amount of idling in the corridors. Your average Pittsburg business man does not allow his heels to cool very much. The stream of these gentlemen actually pours out and in the archways all day long. Messengers and young clerks dive through the crowd with bundles of mail matter or packages. Greetings are exchanged, hands hastily pressed, hats raised to pretty women—for the fair sex is constantly represented. Acquaintances pass the compliments of the day and season, and unless limited to the simplest salutations, busy people elbow you, walk on your pedal pets or sweep you around with scantest ceremony. The postoffice corridors contain the most kaleidoscopic crowd to be found in the two cities.

Gomez: "Gimme a Two-Cent Stamp."

In this connection the figures on the amount of business done by the departments coming in direct contact with the public, are indicative of an amount of postal business which a few cities, like Cincinnati, St. Louis, or Kansas City, would do well to equal, and can never beat. Taking up the five slots, through which Pittsburg's letter mail is sent, some interesting computations can be made by anyone with a genius for statistics. There are five of these orifices which yawn unceasingly and cry, like the daughters of the Horseleech for more. The length of each orifice is eight inches, and a width of an inch or so. By way of facilitating the proper separation of the mail matter into sections of the country or the universe to be reached, the postal authorities have neat signs over four of the boxes indicating the points of the compass. The first box to the left is "South," then comes "North," then "East," then "West," the two last boxes getting, as a matter of course, the bulk of the mail. With its usual discriminating intelligence the public generally obeys the mute behest and drop letters accordingly. Those who drop a letter to Chicago in the East box would be surprised to know how much inconvenience it causes the clerks on the inside. So that quick transmission is really subserved by attention to the implied requests.

Through these cardinal point boxes an enormous amount of mail flows. Superintendent of Mails Stephen Collins hauled out a big book, and after some rapid marks with a pencil, said that in the month of September the daily average of letters was 90,000. On the customary basis of 50 letters to the pound, nearly a ton of letters found its way to the inside of the office in every 24 hours. Hardly less important are the two slots of much larger size, through which newspapers and small parcels are dropped into the maws of the postal.

There is also a small window adjacent through which larger parcels are received. This portion of the drop mail department averages 1,300 pounds of mail matter received per diem.

THE SPECIAL DELIVERY.

The special delivery box is a law unto itself. This branch of the quick transmission of mails idea started out several years since with a great flourish of trumpets and really enjoyed desultory popularity. But

A Sweet Applicant for Mail.

for some reason it has steadily retrogressed in its employment as a means of transportation of messages. Not over 175 letters per diem are dropped into the box at present, and it is understood that this state of affairs is noticed all over the country. Collections are made from the box every half hour, and the special messenger boys are under strict injunctions not to tarry by the wayside while en route with the accellerated missives. Despite every effort to push the service it is steadily declining in patronage. An expert in human nature says that one reason why the district messenger boy is the favorite emissary for sudden or important messages, is because the person who sends the letter can wait around until the boy returns and then ascertain accurately just how the addressed party received the missive. Especially is this said to be a correct hypothesis when the sender is a young man and the receiver a young woman, or vice versa. But this is conjecture. However, there is no doubt of the decadence of a system which a capricious public clamored for vigorously, hailed with satisfaction and wearied of eventually.

The chief place of interest in the corridors of the postoffice is the stamp window. The dark, good-natured man who passes out the stamps so expertly and makes change so affably is Mr. L. Cella. He is a long suffering employe of the Government, and has about as lively a time passing out an equivalent for the $1,200 he handles every day as could be imagined. Some of the stamp combinations thrown at him would baffle the most expert mathematician. Here is one taken at random from the calls which come every five seconds in the course of the day:

"Give me 31 2-cent, 1 10-cent, 6 postal cards, 1 stamped envelope, 2 lettersheets and the rest in 1-cent stamps," says a breathless individual balancing a dollar of our daddies on the abbreviated counter. The problem is 31 2-cent, 62; 1 10-cent, 72; 6 postal cards, 78; 1 stamped envelope, 81; 2 letter sheets, 87, 13 1-cent stamps rounding up the dollar. But the stamp seller has the goods piled in the customer's hand and the dollar in the drawer before the traditional "Jack Robinson" could be said. His mental arithmetic seems entirely infallible, and when change is involved in the transaction the money and the stamp appear with truly

MARVELOUS RAPIDITY.

The large majority of stamps sold are 2-cent. A great many 5-cent stamps are sold here for foreign mail, a stamp of that denomination taking a half ounce of letter material anywhere in Asia. If the letter exceeds half an ounce in weight the foreign countries light onto it for the extra postage. The letter must be of exact weight for transmission to Australia, a 12 good cents is what the service demands.

The 3-cent letter-sheet, which is a sheet of note paper and a stamped envelope combined, is a highly ingenious postal device for which the last national administration was responsible, but it has never had any share of popular favor for some unexplained reason. The sheets were not printed by the Government, but by a private firm which furnished the sheets to the Government and awaited the results on the sales. The latter have not been a remarkable financial achievement. The inventor of the device was smart enough to secure a fat sum from the firm which went into the scheme and has since doubtless had occasion to congratulate himself upon his sagacity.

One of the most interesting features of the arrangement of the corridor are the lock boxes, of which there are 1,022. There never were any call lock boxes in the Pittsburg Postoffice, that idea pertaining exclusively to the bucolic mail service. The revenue to the Government from the local lock boxes is a trifle over $8,000 per annum. Very few of the above number are empty, as there is a slowly increasing demand for private repositories of mail matter, which has been heretofore met by the extra boxes, a nice adjustment of demand and supply. The carrier service extensions are thought to be the means of keeping the lock box demand at a normal basis.

Uncle Sam Consigning Dead-Letters to the Grave.

It is a singular fact that the only cities in America having more lock boxes than Pittsburg are New York and Chicago. Cities of Pittsburg's size or even above it, have far less lock boxes. Officials attribute this to conservatism, arguing that Pittsburgers cling with great tenacity to old customs.

The possibility of confusion of Yale keys or the chance of duplication and robbery of boxes was mentioned to Mr. Collins, who stated that even if a key was lost it would be a pretty hard thing for if an evil-minded person was to secure a lost key he would have no chance of trying the fit without arousing suspicion. The Yale Company makes special numbers for postoffices and no one but the postmaster could order a duplicate of a box key intelligently by the record kept of each box and number of key. A box-owner could of course, order a duplicate by simply using the number stamped upon the key. But, as he would be the only one who would know which box the key fitted the seal of secrecy would remain intact, the scheme of parties renting boxes and corresponding without the use of postage by means of duplicate keys, is sometimes tried, but not often. The use of canceled stamps was not much of a success, either. No matter how clever the removal of the canceling stamp, it was a pretty hard thing to eradicate the ink, especially the kind new in use, which is printers' ink and "permeates," as Louis Harrison says in the "Pearl of Pekin." Uncle Sam is not asleep, and the penalty of three years in the penitentiary is too severe to warrant any infractions of the laws against defrauding the Government of postage.

There are 70 newspaper lock boxes, which front upon the corridor leading to the upstairs of the building. Many of them are filled four or five times a day, which betokens the importance of the Pittsburg papers upon the exchange lists of the journals of the nation.

THE GENERAL DELIVERY.

The general delivery windows are the centers of a large amount of attention, almost exclusive in fact, from the floating population of the city. Hundreds of people who are in Pittsburg only for a few days have their mail sent to the general delivery, not desiring to have it sent to boarding houses or hotels. In a general way, however, all undirected mail goes to the carriers, who try to locate the owner. Failing the letters go to the directory clerk whose duty it is to try and find the addresses of people not in the directory. If the carrier fails to locate a letter he stamps it as follows: "Have your mail addressed to street and number." Then the directory clerk puts on the folllowing inscription: "Not in Directory." Then the letter goes to the general delivery boxes, of which there are upward of 200, for all possible subdivisions of the alphabet and first syllables of names. There are about 4,000 letters carried in the general delivery. If a letter remains in the boxes a week without being called for it is advertised. Two weeks are given the owner to call for his property, and at the expiration of that time the letter is sent to the Dead Letter Office. Does Uncle Sam shed tears, one wonders, as he empties sack after sack of moribund letters into his little postal cemetery? How many hopes, aspirations, checks to tide over financial crisis, and other important or vital matters have been summarily buried?

As a result of advertising, an average of one-tenth of the letters are reclaimed. As for applicants for letters, there are at least 1,000 a day, many of whom come back time after time with blank despair written in every feature. Others, again, come up smiling every day and never get a letter in the course of the year. It's a capital place to study human nature. The most pronounced nuisance with which the clerk has to contend is the man who insists that the United States postal department is all wrong and that he's all right.

There is some epistolary flirtation incidental to every postoffice, and Pittsburg is no exception. Finely dressed young girls, perfectly well known to the clerk, come up to the window and ask for some name nothing like her own. There is, of course, no option but to deliver the letter, but sometimes the clerks exercise a wholesome discretion in scaring away the would-be fair offender against propriety in correspondence. Many women come to the window and call for letters in three or four names. Very recently orders were issued against this practice, and the supposition is that the ukase emanated from the good and great Mr. Wanamaker, who is, despite misleading reports, as smart as any of the balance of the politicians and rounders.

When the postoffice has four times as much room as at present, in the new building, it will be pleasanter for Uncle Sam's Pittsburg mail service employes.

WALES.

THE AMERICAN LION.

Peculiarities of a Savage Beast That Inhabits the Far West.

[Chambers' Journal.]

The mountain lion of North America is one of the most dangerous of the wild animals which are found in the mountains of the Far West. Although called a lion, yet this animal bears no resemblance to the African lion except so far as its fierceness is concerned. It really belongs to the same family as the wildcat or catamount, but is of much greater size, generally being about as large in body and limb as a full-grown sheep dog. It is rarely seen in the vicinity of settlements, except driven thither by hunger, when it will attack cattle, sheep, horses, or poultry, and at times human beings. But, as a general thing, if not molested, it will not attack human beings, though, if wounded, there is no animal which will make a more desperate fight, regardless of consequences.

It cannot be driven off from an attack as long as life lasts; it must be killed to be beaten. Its chief peculiarity is its cry, which the most experienced hunter has at times mistaken for the wail of a child in distress. This feature makes the beast more dangerous, especially if he should establish his lair in the vicinity of a settlement, because, unless a person is an old-timer, he will be deceived by that cry whenever he hears it. It is the most perfect imitation of a child's wail of lament I ever heard, more perfect than the cleverest mimic could utter.

HE NARROWLY ESCAPED POVERTY.

A California Millionaire's Experience in a New York Hotel.

It does not seem easy to realize how cheaply you live in California until you have tried some of the Eastern hotels, says the San Francisco *Chronicle*. E. J. Baldwin went to a hotel in New York for a rest. He was only going to stay a few hours in town. It was about 3 o'clock when he registered, and he wanted to take a little sleep before he was called at 10. The gentlemanly clerk recognized the name and the man, and looked pleased to have a whack at the long purse of the California millionaire. Baldwin had several hours' sleep and was called at 10 o'clock as ordered. He went to the office and asked for his bill. It was handed to him—$30. Mr. Baldwin looked at it.

"I am very much obliged to you for waking me at 10 o'clock."

"Why?"

"If I had slept a few hours more it would have busted me."

Pass the Pie.

[Detroit Free Press.]

The Rev. Joseph Cook says: "Beware of the nation which does not eat pies." Come to think of it, the nations which don't care for pies, are great on revolutions, loose in their morals, and are gradually degenerating in rank as war powers. It takes mince pie to keep a nation in the front rank.

A Congregation of One.

[Lewiston Journal.]

The Ellsworth *American* puts it mildly when it says that the resident minister at Isle au Haut is "very persevering." On a recent Sunday evening he held a service with only himself and sexton present.

A HUSKING ROMANCE.

Finding a Red Ear Compels a Pretty Vermont Girl to Decide

BETWEEN TWO EAGER SUITORS.

She Had Promised That Her Answer Should be a Kiss.

HIGH FUN AT A VERMONT HUSKING BEE

[CORRESPONDENCE OF THE DISPATCH.]

LAKE ST. CATHERINE, VT., November 30.—"Dancing in the barn" has been a favorite fashionable diversion in the society that spells its name with a capital S ever since Mrs. Vanderbilt gave the initiative barn ball at Newport, and Lenox hastened to seal the ceremony with the sign of popular approval, but no swell stable festival could equal in picturesque effects and genuing enthusiasm the series of old-fashioned harvest revels and husking-bee carnivals that have been given here during the past month. Mrs. Vanderbilt requested her guests to leave their diamonds at home, we are informed. The country maidens haven't any to bring; but they don't need them, for glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes, laughing red lips and shining tresses that all the Newport diamonds could not buy or lease, need no adorning; while shy, sweet grace of bearing, and the quaint dignity of unaffected simplicity in demeanor lend to gingham gown and calico frock a piquant charm and beauty.

Over the dun, barren fields, through the rustling golden glory of fallen leaves, and beneath the soft splendor of the late October moon the country lads and lasses hasten to the huskings with swift and willing steps. One, two, and even three miles they walk, though horses stand idly in the stables, for who would ride when the jolliest part of the whole proceeding is the walk home with your best girl after it is over, and the lingering good night at the gate? The yellow corn shocks are piled high against the old barn walls, where, in swaying festoons of aromatic cedar, lanterns flash out of the dark and make heavy shadows on the bright flushed faces of the merry workers; fringes and tassels of pine droop from the dark brown rafters, and through it all subtle sweet odors drift from the hay mow, whose summit is lost in the gables. High up in a corner of the peaked roof is fastened a wreath of cedars, where never a girl would dream one would be hung, and if any unsuspecting maiden ventures unconsciously beneath it, or is inveigled by some mischievous youth into its vicinity, she pays a mistletoe-bough penalty to whatever swain happens to be quickest at her side.

A KISS TO BE PRIZED.

How the sweet, glad voices ring through the rustling of the dry stalks as swift brown fingers strip the husks away and toss the ears over their shoulders into golden, glowing heaps, which the men carry away in baskets! What a shout and mad chase when the red ear is found, and the fleet-footed finder runs from her pursuers, brandishing it aloft, and how graciously and sweetly, when the race is over, she lifts her moist, warm lips to the swiftest runner in a kiss that is a kiss, with a smack to it that you can almost taste yourself the other side of the room!

And when the work is done how quickly room is made for the long table, improvised out of barrels and boards, where jugs of cider, heaped-up plates of brown doughnuts, great square tins of pumpkin pies, and piles of red and yellow apples are placed, while crazy seats of cornstalks accommodate the guests, who are served from the plenteous store! We reverse the conventional order of proceedings here, and, instead of a lot of stupid men tearing distractedly about the table and spilling most of the viands they try to secure for their ladies, the men are seated themselves, and the light-footed maidens, with their deft, skillful hands, serve them, and afterward sit down beside them to share the feast. Once it is dispatched, men and maidens alike help to clear the floor, the fiddler mounts a rickety platform, and all join in the old-fashioned country dances with the joyous abandon of children until the moonbeams get tangled in the distant treetops, and warn them that it is time to pair off, like birds in May, and start on the long walk toward home.

But of all the frolics Farmer Jenkins' husking bee the other night was the rollickingest, jolliest, merriest and gayest. In the first place, the farmer has the biggest barn and the best cider and the prettiest daughter in the whole township, and, in the second place, his wife makes the sweetest doughnuts and the thickest pumpkin pies and the richest molasses cake of anyone near here. And, in addition to all these attractions, a pretty little romance was brought to a charming finale in a most original and quaint manner just before the husking was done.

A RURAL BELLE.

Janie Jenkins is a most bewitching bundle of willful womanhood, with delicious, demure little ways that win your heart, but with a certain still proud dignity that commands your respect. If ever she lifts her long, dusky lashes and reveals the wistful depths of her wonderful eyes, you feel like taking her in your arms as you would a baby that is sobbing; but if you so much as touch the tips of her fingers she flashes a look of scornful defiance from those same depths that would right about face a whole regiment of men. Even in her childhood's merry games of forfeits no daring rustic laddie ever presumed to claim his rightful kiss from Janie, for she didn't believe in kissing and nonsense and would have none of it, but she was a blythe, brave, bonny little maiden, who knew how to steer her own sled down the sparkling snow crust in winter and sail her own crazy skiff over the waves in summer, and thought no more of going out in the pasture to catch and mount the vixenish, perverse little mare she would persist in riding (though not a man on the place could handle her) than other girls think of picking a bouquet of roses for their corsage.

Everyone felt a little bit of awe in Janie's presence, even the old biddies who knew she never would amount to anything because she would not learn to bake and brew; and the honest country boys who admired her afar off, and, flushed with strange, eager joy, they couldn't understand when she smiled on them. But there was one person who wasn't afraid of Miss Janie, and that was Harrison Wilkins, whose mother's farm joined her father's, and who took her out in her little cart on the first journey she ever made in this world, when she was six weeks and he was 6 years old. It was Harrison who carried her little shiny dinner pail to school when she went to learn her a b c's; who taught her how to steer the sled and sail the boat; who buried her kitten when it died; who helped her break the spirit of the fractious mare, and showed her how to sit the saddle firmly and hold the bridle well down in her firm little hand. It was Harrison who took her where the first May flowers came in the springtime; who showed her where the first strawberries ripened in June, and who shook the first chestnuts down for her in October; who helped her with her sums in arithmetic and fought her battles and who never feared or heeded her pretty imperious ways at all. Perhaps it was the care that his father's death brought to him as a child that developed his strength and firmness and fearlessness; perhaps it was only the dignity of his great love for Janie that made him her master. The day they buried the kitten he told her not to cry, for she would be his little wife some day; and when she indignantly flaped her vow never, never to be anybody's wife, he only laughed and said, "That's all right, Janie for now, but you'll change your mind some day."

THE CITY LOVER.

Every one in Wilton thought Janie and Harrison were to be married—that is every one but Janie—when there came upon the scene Adolphus Comstock from a distant city, who was the son of her father's oldest friend. He came for the fishing and the sketching, but he stayed for something else.

He knew women only through the conventional formal medium of society, and was such an exasperatingly and indifferent cynical creature that he piqued most women into displaying their frivolous and least attractive characteristics to him. He cared more for his pointers than for his sister's chattering friends; for a trout brook, his rod and flies, than any moonlight excursion or picnic, with a galaxy of pretty girls who must be waltzed with and talked with. But Janie knew the favorite haunts of the speckled beauties herself and could give him points on the fishing question beside. Harrison had taught her. She could pull her skiff steadily and still to where schools of bass hid in the cool waters of the lake, and land the gamiest of them without a scream, and when she cleared a five-rail fence on the wicked little pony which he had seen her saddle and mount, his respect grew into wondering, piquant interest. He liked the proud reserve with which this little rural beauty met his advances, the pretty scornful curl of the red lips at his finest compliments, and the haughty poise of the small head as her eyes flashed charming negatives to his proposals. He fancied what a wonder she would be once she learned her power; what a queenly beauty in the apparel which his wealth could give her; what a strong tender woman, once her spirit were broken, and her heart melted.

Harrison looked on grimly at all this wooing, ground his teeth sometimes as she rode by with the handsome stranger on the horse he taught her how to ride, but always smiled at last in confident content, and said to himself: "She will flirt with that city chap to the end of the chapter, but she will be my wife at last." He told her so the day of the husking, when he was helping her fasten the cedar festoons. Her face was temptingly near his as she raised it to lift to him some more of the greens, and they were just beneath the kissing wreath, too, but when he would have claimed his just and lawful dues she stopped him with a pretty protesting "please," and as she turned her flushed face away he could see the full white throat quiver a little as with a sudden contraction, and the lips trembled strangely. They were all alone in the big, fragrant place just for a minute, and he stooped suddenly and caught her with a noose of the green rope he was draping, and asked if she had forgotten that she was to be his wife some day, and when, instead of the usual protest, she only laughed and told him softly that when she was quite sure she was ready she would give him the kiss she owed him, he freed her and went on with his hammering and whittling.

AT THE HUSKING BEE.

That had been a trying day for Janie. She had helped her mother with the baking and her father with the barn decoration. She had ridden twice into the village for some forgotten ingredient needed for the mysterious processes going on in the big, sweet pantry, and, worse than all the rest, Adolphus Comstock had proposed to her in the little parlor, where she sat polishing the scarlet apples for the supper. It was all so sudden, and everything was in such a flutter that she didn't know what she had told him, but was dimly conscious of turning away her face when he would have kissed her, and faltering out something about her giving him the kiss some time when she was sure she could be all to him that he asked her to be.

Janie was horribly afraid that night as she thought it all over, while she braided her long, glossy hair into a coronet for her graceful little head, that she had half promised to marry two men, and the worst of it was she didn't quite know which one she did care most for. It was too bad of Harrison to say what he did when she had so much to do and no time to think it out at all, and after she had had one proposal.

But already the people were coming, and there was no time to think then, so she flew into a dark blue gingham dress, with a broad collar turned back from her soft, white throat, and knotted with scarlet ribbons, tied a red apron around her trim waist, and tripped lightly down the stairs and through the moonlight to the barn, where she met her guests with her merry, glad greeting, and there seated herself on a big corn shock, with her small, shapely head outlined against the yellow corn heap at her back, and hot blushes sweeping over her face. Something evidently was the matter with Janie, for the lithe, brown hands that usually were swiftest of all at the work trembled provokingly as she tore the yellow husks away, with the soft eyelashes resting against her warm, flushed cheeks.

Such a laugh as arose when Janie of all others found the first red ear, but the girl herself grew strangely pale for an instant; then with a bound she flew as fleetly as a deer round and round the room, in and out among the workers. One by one the pursuers all dropped out of the race, except Harrison and Adolphus. The people knew pretty well the state of affairs between the three, and watched with breathless interest the result of the race, which seemed to them significant and prophetic.

A KISS AND A BRIDE.

The girl's steps grew slower, and at length, finding herself in a corner, she caught at one of the festoons and half climbed, half drew herself up to the top of the great corn heap, where she poised, turned, and faced them like a frightened bird in a snare. Adolphus would have dashed up after her, but Harrison put his big brown hand commandingly on the other's shoulder and bade him wait. "Now, Janie," he said, in the old confident, sweet tone, "come down and take your pick."

Just for a second she waited, but in that fatal second came back to her all the years of sweet companionship, of helpfulness and trust. Why, of course she couldn't live without him; of course she was to be his wife some day, of course she belonged to him—hadn't he always said so, even by the kitten's grave, and just then the corn shock she stood on gave a great slide, and, without any effort of her own, she was in his arms, and everybody was cheering and shouting in the place. And right in the midst of it all didn't Harrison say with a triumphant gleam in his flashing eyes, "I told you so, Janie; and now for the kiss."

She lifted the shadowy lashes just for a second, with a look in her eyes that made the big, strong fellow feel as weak as a woman, and kissed him softly once, twice, thrice, before them all. Then she ran away, and he couldn't get near her again until after the tables were cleared and the dancing was to begin.

The stranger disappeared, and no one could find him at the supper, but when the long lines of Virginia reel had been formed he mounted the quickly improvised platform, took Harrison's violin, bade him go and find Janie to lead the dance, and then he played such music as our people never heard before, and watched Janie trip down the center with both small hands held fast and hidden in her lover's broad brown ones. The next morning he went away, and there's to be a wedding on Christmas, and he says he's coming back to play while Janie leads the dance again.

LAUREL.

A Truthful Fisherman.

[Troy Press.]

Isaac V. Baker, of Comstocks, father of Railroad Commissioner Isaac V. Baker, Jr., tells a new story to his friends. He said: "I'm over 70 years of age, and no man has ever shaved me. Never fired a pistol or gun during my life. I've only caught one fish. That was a cod, and the funny fellow was captured through an accident."

CHAPTER I.

It had grown dark on Burnt Ridge. Seen from below, the whole serrated crest that had glittered in the sunset as if its interstices were eaten by consuming fires, now closed up its ranks of blackened shafts and became again harsh and somber chevaux de frise against the sky. A faint glow still lingered over the red valley road as if it were its own reflection, rather than any light from beyond the darkened ridge. Evening was already creeping up out of remote canons and along the furrowed flanks of the mountain, or settling on the nearer woods with the slow home-coming of innumerable wings. At a point where the road began to encroach upon the mountain side in its slow winding ascent the darkness had become so real that a young girl entering along the rising terrace found difficulty in guiding her horse, with eyes still dazzled by the sunset fires.

In spite of her precautions, the animal suddenly shied at some object in the obscured roadway, and nearly unseated her. The accident disclosed not only the fact that she was riding in a man's saddle, but a foot and ankle that her ordinary walking dress was too short to hide. It was evident that her equestrian exercise was extempore, and that at that hour on the road she had not expected to meet company. But she was apparently a good horsewoman, for the mischance that might have thrown a less practical or more timid rider seemed of little moment to her. With a strong hand and determined gesture she wheeled her frightened horse back into the track and rode him directly at the object. But there she herself slightly recoiled—for it was the body of a man lying in the road.

As she leaned forward over her horse's shoulder she could see by the dim light that he was a miner, and that, though motionless, he was breathing stertorously. Drunk, no doubt—an accident of the locality alarming only to her horse. But although she cantered impatiently forward, she had not proceeded 100 yards before she stopped reflectively and trotted back again. He had not moved. She could now see that his head and shoulders were covered with clods of earth and gravel, and smaller fragments lay at his side. A dozen feet above him on the hillside there was a foot-trail which ran parallel with the bridle-road, and occasionally overhung it. It seemed possible that he might have fallen from the trail and been stunned.

Dismounting, she succeeded in dragging him to a safer position by the bank. The act discovered his face, which was young and unknown to her. Wiping it with the silk handkerchief which was loosely slung around his neck after the fashion of his class, she gave a quick feminine glance around her and then approached her own and rather handsome face near his lips. There was no odor of alcohol in the thick and heavy respiration. Mounting again, she rode forward at an increased pace, and in 20 minutes had reached a higher tableland of the mountain, a cleared opening in the forest that showed signs of careful cultivation, and a large, rambling, yet picturesque-looking dwelling, whose unpainted redwood walls were hidden in roses and creepers. Pushing open a swinging gate, she entered the inclosure as a brown-faced man, dressed as a vaquero, came toward her as if to assist her to alight. But she had already leaped to the ground and thrown him the reins.

"Miguel," she said with a mistress' quick authority in her boyish contralto voice, "put Glory in the covered wagon, and drive down the road as far as the valley turning. There's a man lying near the right bank, drunk, or sick, maybe, or perhaps crippled by a fall. Bring him up here, unless somebody has found him already, or you happen to know who he is and where to take him."

The vaquero raised his shoulders, half in deprecation, half in disappointed expectation of some other command. "And your brother, senora, he has not himself arrived."

A light shadow of impatience crossed her face. "No," she said bluntly. "Come, be quick."

She turned toward the house as the man moved away. Already a gaunt-looking old man had appeared in the porch, and was awaiting her with his hand shadowing his angry, suspicious eyes, and his lips moving querulously.

"Of course, you've got to stand out there and give orders and 'tend to your own business afore you think o' speaking to your own flesh and blood," he said aggrievedly.

"That's all you care!"

"There was a sick man lying in the road, and I've sent Miguel to look after him," returned the girl, with a certain contemptuous resignation.

"Oh, yes," struck in another voice, which seemed to belong to the female of the first speaker's species, and to be its equal in age and temper; "and I reckon you saw a jay bird on a tree or a squirrel on the fence, and either of 'em was more important to you than your own brother."

"Steve didn't come by the stage and didn't send any message," continued the young girl, with the same coldly resigned manner. "No one had any news of him, and, as I told you before, I didn't expect any."

"Why don't you say right out you didn't want any?" said the old man, sneeringly. "Much you inquired! No; I orter hev gone myself, and I would it I was master here, instead of me and your mother bein' the dust of the yearth beneath your feet."

The young girl entered the house, followed by the old man, passing an old woman seated by the window, who seemed to be nursing her resentment and a large Bible, which she held clasped against her shawled bosom, at the same moment. Going to the wall she hung up her large hat and slightly shook the red dust from her skirts as she continued her explanation in the same deep voice, with a certain monotony of logic and possibly of purpose and practice also.

"You and mother know as well as I do, father, that Stephen is no more to be depended upon than the wind that blows. It's three years since he set foot here—it's three years since he has been promising to come, and even getting money to come, and yet he has never showed his face, though he has been a dozen times within five miles of this house. He doesn't come, because he doesn't want to come. As to your going over to the stage office, I went there myself at the last moment to save you the mortification of asking questions of strangers that they know have been a dozen times answered already."

There was such a ring of absolute truthfulness, albeit worn by repetition, in the young girl's deep honest voice that for one instant her two more emotional relatives quailed before it; but only for a moment.

"That's right!" shrilled the old woman. "Go on and abuse your own brother. It's only the fear you have that he'll make his fortune yet and shame you before the father and mother you despise."

The young girl remained standing by the window, motionless and apparently passive, as if receiving an accepted and usual punishment. But here the elder woman gave way to sobs and some incoherent snuffling, at which the younger went away. Whether she recognized in her mother's tears the ordinary deliquescence of emotion, or whether, as a woman herself, she knew that this mere feminine conventionality could not possibly be directed at her, and that the actual conflict between them had ceased, she passed slowly on to an inner hall, leaving the male victim, her unfortunate father, to succumb, as he always did sooner or later, to their influence. Crossing the hall, which was decorated with a few elk horns, Indian trophies and mountain pelts, she entered another room and closed the door behind her with a gesture of relief.

SHE COULD SEE BY THE DIM LIGHT THAT HE WAS A MINER.

The room, which looked upon a porch, presented a singular combination of masculine business occupations and feminine taste and adornment. A desk covered with papers, a shelf displaying a ledger and account books, another containing works of reference, a table with a vase of flowers and a lady's riding whip upon it, a map of California flanked on either side by an embroidered silken workbag and an oval mirror decked with grasses, a calendar and interest-table hanging below two schoolgirl crayons of classic heads, with the legend, "Josephine Forsyth fecit"—were part of its incongruous accessories. The young girl went to her desk, but presently moved and turned toward the window thoughtfully. The last gleam had died from the steel-blue sky; a few lights like star points began to prick out the lower valley. The expression of monotonous restraint and endurance had not yet faded from her face.

Yet she had been accustomed to scenes like the one she had just passed through since her girlhood. Five years ago Alexander Forsyth, her uncle, had brought her to this spot—then a mere log cabin on the hillside—as a refuge from the impoverished and shiftless home of his elder brother Thomas and his ill-tempered wife. Here Alexander Forsyth, by reason of his more dominant character and business capacity, had prospered until he became a rich and influential ranche owner. Notwithstanding her father's jealousy of Alexander's fortune and the open rupture that followed between the brothers, Josephine retained her position in the heart and home of her uncle without espousing the cause of either; and her father was too prudent not to recognize the near and prospective advantages of such a mediator. Accustomed to her parent's extravagant denunciations, and her uncle's more repressed but practical contempt of them, the unfortunate girl early developed a cynical disbelief in the virtues of kinship in the abstract, and a philosophical resignation to its effect upon her personally. Believing that her father and uncle fairly represented the fraternal principle, she was quite prepared for the early defection and distrust of her vagabond and dissipated brother Stephen, and accepted it calmly. True to an odd standard of justice, which she had erected from the crumbling ruins of her own domestic life, she was tolerant of everything but human perfection. This quality, however, fatal to her higher growth, had given her a peculiar capacity for business which endeared her to her uncle. Familiar with the strong passions and prejudices of men, she had none of these feminine mannerisms, a wholesome distrust of which had kept her uncle a bachelor. It was not strange, therefore, that when he died, two years ago, it was found that he had left her his entire property, real and personal, limited only by a single condition. She was to undertake the vocation of a "sole trader," and carry on the business under the name of "J. Forsyth." If she married the estate and property was to be held distinct from her husband's, inalienable under the "Married Woman's Property Act," and subject during her life only to her own control and personal responsibilities as a trader.

The intense disgust and discomfiture of her parents, who had expected to more actively participate in their brother's fortune, may be imagined. But it was not equal to their fury when Josephine, instead of providing for them a separate maintenance out of her abundance, simply offered to transfer them and her brother to her own house on a domestic but not a business equality. There being no alternative but their former precarious shiftless life in their "played-out" claim in the valley, they wisely consented, reserving the sacred right of daily protest and objurgation. In the economy of Burnt Ridge Ranche they alone took it upon themselves to represent the shattered domestic altar and its outraged Lares and Penates. So conscientiously did they perform their task as to even occasionally impede the business visitor to the ranch and to cause some of the more practical neighbors to seriously doubt the young girl's commercial wisdom. But she was firm. Whether she thought her parents a necessity or whether she regarded their presence in the light of a penitential atonement for some previous disregard of them, no one knew. Public opinion inclined to the latter.

The black line of ridge faded out with her abstraction, and she turned from the window and lit the lamp on her desk. The yellow light illuminated her face and figure. In their womanly graces there was no trace of what some people believed to be a masculine character, except a singularly frank look of critical inquiry and patient attention in her dark eyes. Her long brown hair was somewhat rigidly twisted into a knot on the top of her head, as if more for security than ornament. Brown was also the prevailing tint of her eyebrows, thickly set eyelashes and eyes, and was even suggested in the slight sallowness of her complexion. But her lips were well cut and fresh colored, and her hands and feet small and finely formed. She would have passed for a pretty girl had she not suggested something more.

She sat down and began to examine a pile of papers before her with that concentration and attention to detail that was characteristic of her eyes, pausing at times with prettily knit brows, and her pencil between her lips, in the semblance of a smile. The rattle of hoofs and wheels struck her with a sense of something forgotten, and she put down her work quickly and stood up listening. The sound of rough voices and her father's querulous accents was broken upon by a cultivated and more familiar utterance. "All right; I'll speak to her at once. Wait there," and the door opened to the well known physician of Burnt Ridge, Dr. Duchesne.

"Look here," he said, with an abruptness that was only saved from being brusque by a soft intonation and a reassuring smile, "I met Miguel helping an accident into your buggy. Your orders, eh?"

"O, yes," said Josephine, quietly. "A man I saw on the road."

"Well, it's a bad case, and wants prompt attention. And as your house is the nearest, I came with him here."

"Certainly," she said gravely. "Take him to the second room beyond—Steve's room—it's ready," she explained to two dusky shadows in the hall behind the doctor.

"And look here," said the doctor, partly closing the door behind and regarding her with critical eyes—"you always said you'd like to see some of my queer cases. Well, this is one—a serious one, too; in fact, it's just touch and go with him. There's a piece of the bone pressing on the brain so bigger than that, but as much as it all Burnt Ridge was afoot of him! I'm going to lift it. I want somebody here to stand by, some one who can lend a hand with a sponge, eh?—some one who isn't going to faint or scream, or even shake a hair's breadth, eh?"

The color rose quickly to the girl's cheek, and her eyes kindled. "I'll come," she said thoughtfully. "Who is he?"

The doctor stared slightly at the unessential query. "Don't know; one of the river miners, I reckon. It's an urgent case. I'll go and get everything ready. You'd better," he added, with an ominous glance at her gray frock, "put something over your dress." The suggestion made her grave, but did not alter her color.

A moment later she entered the room. It was the one that had always been set apart for her brother; the very bed on which the unconscious man lay had been arranged that morning with her own hands. Something of this passed through her mind as she saw that the doctor had wheeled it beneath the strong light in the center of the room, stripped its outer coverings with professional thoughtfulness, and rearranged the mattresses. But it did not seem like the same room. There was a pungent odor in the air from some freshly opened phials, an almost feminine neatness and luxury in the open morocco case, like a jewel box, on the table, shining with spotless steel. At the head of the bed one of her own servants, the powerful mill foreman, was assisting with the mingled curiosity and blunt experience of one accustomed to smashed and lacerated digits. At first she did not look at the central, unconscious figure on the bed, whose sufferings seemed to her to have been vicariously transferred to the concerned, eager, and drawn faces that looked down upon its immunity. Then she imperceptibly rec