The North Branch Democrat.

HARVEY SICKLER, Proprietor. "TO SPEAK HIS THOUGHTS IS EVERY FREEMAN'S RIGHT."—Thomas Jefferson. TERMS, $2.00 PER ANNUM

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Select Story.

THE IRON VAULT.

I live in San Francisco, and am a locksmith by trade. My calling is a strange one, and possesses a certain fascination, rendering it one of the most agreeable of pursuits. Many who follow it see nothing in it but labor—think of nothing but its returns of gold and silver. To me it has other charms than the money it produces. I am called upon almost daily, to open doors and peer into neglected apartments; to spring the stubborn locks of safes, and gloat upon the treasures within; to quietly enter the apartments of ladies with more beauty than discretion, and pick the locks of drawers containing peace destroying missives, that the dangerous evidences of wandering affection may not reach the eye of a husband or father, in possession of the missing key; to force the fastening of cash boxes and depositories of records, telling of men made suddenly rich, of corporations plundered, of orphans robbed, of hopes crushed, of families ruined. Is there no charm in all this;—no food for speculation?—scope for the range of pleasant fancy? Then who would not be a locksmith, though his face is begrimmed with the soot of the forge, and his hands stained with rust.

Aut I have a story to tell—not exactly a story, either—for a story implies the completion, as well as the beginning of a narrative—and mine is scarcely more than the introduction to one. Let him who deals in things of fancy write the rest. In the spring of 1856—I think it was in April—I opened a little shop in Kearney Street, and soon worked myself into a fair business.—Late one evening, a lady, closely veiled, entered my shop, and pulling from beneath her cloak a small jappanned box, requested me to open it. The lock was curiously constructed, and I was all of an hour in fitting it with a key. The lady seemed nervous at the delay, and at length requested me to close the door. I was a little surprised at the suggestion, but of course complied. Shutting the door and returning to my work, the lady withdrew her veil, disclosing as sweet a face as can well be imagined. There was a restlessness in the eye and a pallor in the cheek, however, which plainly told of a heart ill at ease, and in a moment every emotion for her had given place to that of pity.

"Perhaps you are not well, madam, and the night air is too chilly?" said I, rather inquisitively.

I felt a rebuke at the reply: "In requesting you to close the door, I had no other object than to escape the attention of persons."

I did not reply, but thoughtfully continued my work. She resumed;

"That little box contains valuable papers—private papers—and I have either lost the key or it has been stolen. I do not wish to have you remember that I ever came here on such an errand," she continued with some hesitation, and giving me a look which it was no difficult matter to understand.

"Certainly, madam, if you desire it. If I cannot forget your face, I will at least attempt to lose the recollection of ever seeing it here."

The lady bowed rather coldly at what I considered a fine compliment, and I proceeded with my work, satisfied that a suddenly discovered partiality for me had nothing to do with the visit. Having succeeded after much filing and fitting, in turning the lock, I was seized with a curiosity to get a glimpse at the precious contents of the box and suddenly raising the lid, discovered a bundle of letters and a daugnerreotype, as I slowly passed the box to its owner. She seized it hurriedly, and placing the picture and letters in her pocket, locked the box and drawing the veil over her face, pointed to the door. I opened it, and as she passed into the street she merely whispered—"Remember!" We met again, and I have been thus particular in describing her visit to the shop to render probable a subsequent recognition.

About two o'clock in the morning, in the latter part of May following, I was awoke by a gentle tap upon the window of the little room back of the shop, in which I lodged. Thinking of burglars, I sprang out of bed, and in a moment was at the window, with a heavy hammer in my hand, which I usually kept at that time within convenient reach of my bedside.

"Who's there?" I inquired, raising the hammer, and peering out into the darkness—for it was as dark as Egypt when under the course of Israel's rod.

"Hist," exclaimed a figure, stepping in front of the window; "open the door; I have business for you."

"Rather past business hours, I should say; but who are you?"

"No one that would harm you," returned the voice, which I imagined was rather feminine for a burglar's,

"Nor no one that can," I replied rather emphatically, by the way of a warning, as I tightened my grip on the hammer, and proceeded to the door. I pushed back the bolt, and slowly opened the door, discovered the stranger upon the steps.

"What do you want?" I abruptly inquired.

"I will tell you," answered the same soft voice, "if you care to open the door wide enough for me to enter."

"Come in," said I, throwing the door ajar resolutely, and proceeding to light a candle. Having succeeded, I turned to examine the visitor. He was a small and neatly dressed gentleman, with a heavy Raglan around his shoulders, and a blue navy cap drawn over his eyes. As I advanced toward him he seemed to hesitate a moment, then raised the cap from his forehead, and looked me curiously in the face. I did not drop the candle, but I acknowledg to a little nervousness as I hurriedly placed the light upon the table, and silently proceeded to invest myself with two or three very necessary articles of clothing. As the Lord liveth, my visitor was a lady, and the same for whom I had opened the little box about a month before. Having completed my hasty toilet, I attempted to stammer an apology for my rudeness but utterly failed. The fact is I was too much confounded.

Smiling at my discomfiture, she said:

"Disguise is useless; I presume you recognize me?"

"I believe I told you, madam, I should not soon forget your face. In what way can I serve you?"

"By doing half an hour's work before daylight to-morrow, and receiving five hundred dollars for your labor," was the reply.

"It is not ordinary work," said I inquiringly, "that commands so magnificent a compensation."

"It is a labor common to your calling." returned the lady. "The price is not so much for the labor, as the condition under which it much be performed."

"And what is the condition," I asked

"That you will submit to being conveyed from and returned to your door blindfolded."

Ideas of murder, burglary, and almost every other crime to villainy, hurriedly presented themselves in succession, as I bowed and said:

"I must understand something more of the character of the employment as well as the condition, to accept your offer."

"Will not five hundred dollars answer in lieu of an explanation?" she asked.

"No—nor five thousand,"

She patted her foot nervously on the floor, I could see she had placed entirely too low an estimate on my honesty, and I felt some gratification in being able to convince her of the facts.

"Well, then, if it is absolutely necessary for me to explain," she replied, "I must tell you that you are required to pick the lock of a vault, and rescue from death a man who has been confined for three days."

"To whom does the vault belong?" I inquired.

"My husband," was the somewhat reluctant reply.

"Then why so much secresy, or rather how came a man confined in such a spot?"

"I secreted him there to escape the observation of my husband. He suspected such, and closed the door upon him. Presuming he had left the vault and quitted the house by the back door, I did not dream until to-day that he was confined there.—Certain suspicious acts of my husband this afternoon, convince me that the man is there, beyond human hearing, and will be starved to death by my barbarous husband, unless immediately rescued. For three days he has not left the house. I drugged him less than an hour ago, and he is now so completely stupefied that the lock may picked without his interfence. I have searched his pockets, hence my application to you. Now you know all; will you accompany me?"

"To the end of the world, madam, on such an errand."

"Then prepare yourself, there is a cab waiting at the door."

I was a little surprised, for I had not heard the sound of wheels. Hastily putting a coat, and providing myself with the required implements, I was soon at the door. There was the cab, with the driver in his seat, ready for the mysterious journey. I entered the vehicle, followed by the lady. As soon as I was seated, she produced a heavy handkerchief which, by the faint light of an adjoining street lamp, she bound round my eyes. The lady seated herself beside me and the cab started. In half an hour the cab stopped—in what part of the city I am entirely ignorant, as it was evidently driven in anything but a direct course from the point of starting.

Examining the bandage to see that my vision was completely obscured, the lady handed me the bundle of tools with which I was provided, then taking me by the arm led me through a gate into a house which I knew was of brick, and after taking me along a passage way which could not have been less than fifty feet in length and down a flight of stairs into which was evidently an underground basement stopped beside a vault, and removed the handkerchief from my eyes.

"Here is the vault—open it," said she, springing the door of a dark lantern, and throwing a beam of light upon the lock.

I seized a bunch of skeleton keys, and after a few trials, which the lady seemed to watch with the most painful anxiety, sprang the bolt. The door swung upon its hinges, and my companion telling me not to close it, as it was self-locking, sprang into the vault. I did not follow. I heard the murmur of low voices within, and the next moment the lady reappeared, and leaning upon her arm a man, with face so haggard that I started at the sight.—How he must have suffered during the three long days of his confinement.

"Remain here," she said, handing me the lantern; "I will be back in a moment."

The two slowly ascended the stairs, and I heard them enter a room immediately above where I was standing. In less than a minute the lady returned.

"Shall I close it, madam?" said I, placing my hand on the door of the vault.

"No, no!" she exclaimed, hastily seizing my arm; it waits, another occupant!"

"Madam, you certainly do not intend to—"

"Are you ready?" she interrupted, impatiently, holding the handkerchief to my eyes. The thought flashed across my mind that she intended to push me into the vault, and bury me and my secret together. She seemed to read my suspicion, and continued: "Do not be alarmed. You are not the man!"

I could not mistake the truth or the fearful meaning of the remark, and I shuddered as I bent my head to the handkerchief.—My eyes were as carefully bandaged as before, and I was led to the cab, and thence driven home by a more circuitous route, if possible, than the one by which we came. Arriving in front of the house, the handkerchief was removed, and I stepped from the vehicle. A purse of five hundred dollars was placed in my hand, and in a moment the cab and its mysterious occupants had turned the corner and were out of sight.

I entered the shop, and the purse of gold was the only evidence I could summon in my bewilderment, that all I had just done and witnessed was not a dream.

A month after that, I saw the lady, and the gentleman taken from the vault walking leisurely along Montgomery street, I do not know, but I believe the slooping husband awoke within the vault, and his bones are there to-day! The wife is still a resident of San Francisco.

VERY BAD.—We heard Fred Douglass speak but once. He is a pretty sharp darkey, well-formed, rather graceful, and entirely ready. On the occasion to which we allude he spoke in Independence Square, in Philadelphia. His harangue was violent, made up chiefly of descriptions of the outrages practiced upon the slave by his master, and wrought a very decided effect upon the crowd. Perceiving this, Fred took his advantage at the flood, went higher and higher into the region of eloquence. "Ah my friends," he said, "I do not speak from hearsay. I stand before you a living—I was going to say a bleeding—witness to the truth of all I relate. If you could behold the scars and stripes upon my back." Just here an Irishman vociferated, "Hould on, Freddy, darling—is it truth you is telling us?" The darkey orator lifted his finger tragically to Heaven in the affirmative. "Oh, murder! did they lacerate you!" Fred answered that they did. "Did they *thumb screw* you?" Fred answered that they did.—"Did they *buck* you like a shoal?" Fred answered that they did. "*Begorra!*" roared Pat, "*if that be true, you must have been a d—m bad nigger?*" It closed the meeting in a general row.—*Banner.*

☞ "I tell you that I shall commit suicide if you don't have me, Susan."

"Well Charley, as soon as you have given me that evidence of your affections, I will believe you love me."

He immediately hung himself upon her neck, and said:

"Thare now! Is not that an act of susyside?"

She wilted.

☞ A young man at Niagara Falls having been crossed in love, walked to the precipice, deliberately took off his clothes, gave one lingering look at the gulf below him and then—went home.

☞ An old lady inquired at ono of the railway stations what time the 7:45 train would start, and was told at a quarter to eight. "Bless me! she exclaimed, "von are always changing the time on this line."

When does a man become a sugar planter? When he buries his SWEET heart.

Let no one overload you with favors, you will find it an insufferable burden.

Why does water boil sooner in an old saucepan than in a new one? Punch takes it upon himself to answer this abstruse question by saying, it's because the old un's used to it.

A mule driver in the army was swearing at, and kicking a span of balky mules, when the general, who was annoyed at his profanity, ordered him to stop.

"Who are you?"

"Commander of the brigade!"

"I'm commander of these mules and I'll do as I please, or resign, and you can take my place."

"What is that dog barking at?" asked a fop, whose boots were more polished than his ideas. "Why," replied a bystander, "because he sees another puppy in your boots."

The path of glory leads but to the grave, and the road of the whisky-swiller endeth in a bed in the gutter.

People perform the greater part of the voyage of life before taking on their ballast; hence so many shipwrecks.

A lawyer engaged in a case, tormented a witness so much questions, that the poor fellow at last cried for water. "There, said the judge, "I thought you'd pump him dry."

A Political General's Soliloquy.

Whir r-r!

How like a rocket went up, terrifying the innocent.

Spat!

How like a stick falling in the mud did I come down.

When the late rebellion began, I did not amount to enough to add up and give one to carry. I was a sort of second-rate loafer, begging tobacco, standing around saloons and bar rooms, waiting to be treated by liberal strangers. I had no clean stockings—no neat home—no money saved—no credit—no fine food, and but little coarse. "But suddenly a star arose!"—Brave men were wanted. I had peddled whiskey at the polls, to elect men on the God-and-morality, retrenchment, lie and stick to it closer than any hungry politician in the country, and the late administration—noble administration—gave me rich reward. I was made a captain, and like a blue-tailed bottle-fly, I strutted about my native town.

Guess I wasn't old style, in white gloves and stripes up my legs. Guess I didn't support the government. Reckon I didn't get trusted to little things at stores, and when a man wouldn't trust me, guess I wouldn't incite mobs on such Copperheads. And I was put in command of a hundred men. Egad! that was a joke. Why Lord bless you, I didn't know as much about war as a dog knows of his grandfather—but I had poltical influence—could absorb vast quantities of whiskey and co'd steal like a nigger! Or like John Brown. Or like Ben. Butler. Or like any other house robber.

And I went to war. And I hired correspondents to mention my brave exploits in Republican papers. And I stole wines from hospitals and treated my friends. And I read the army letters which I hired written, and which poor fools printed to political friends. And I kept out of the way of bullets and such—and I stole piles of house hold goods, from rat traps to pianoes, from silk elastic to linen intended for infants yet unborn, and so in the eyes of the late administration proved my fitness for higher position.

And I was made a brigadier general.—Big thing. Nearly every fool in the army was a brigadier general. While brave men fought, I stole spoons and such. While other men were at war, I was punishing Democrats, issuing petty orders, "taking toil" from Union farmers, and sending chairs, tables, beds and bedding, pictures, books, spoons, knives and forks, nut crackers, glass and silver ware, mirrors, sideboards, parlor ornaments, laces, silks, and ladies' underclothes, stolen from private drawers, and bureaus, up North at government expense, to let people know that I was saving my salary to beautify my home.

Cunning cuss!

And I denounced Democrats, thereby winning promotion and good opinions from Republican papers. And I spent my salary for whiskey, except what went for——, nothing now, not much at first! And I went on raids, capturing imaginary bands of enemies, reported by the papers as real. And being an unscrupulous knave, intent only on money, I was hired by the administration of the late lamented to go up and down the land stumping for, and in behalf of niggers and Abolitionists.—*par nobile fratum.*

And I sent Democrats to the front, and they were shot down like dogs or dragged back wounded to die in hospitals, or swear allegiance to Abraham. And I stuffed election returns, and I stole cotton wherever it could be found, mules ditto, corn ditto government stores ditto, and other things ditto, till I became rich, And what a lot of men there were who believed we were fighting to subdue the rebellion. 'Twas merely a pleasant little murderous crusade for cotton and niggers—the cotton for the rich, the niggers for the poor tax payers to support.

The war was a Godsend to me. It took me from the gutter, or a stool in some saloon and made a great man of me. It lifted me by the waistbands right up alongside of great men. And didn't I strut? And didn't I fall back upon my dignity? And didn't I snub those whose servant I was—and win the contempt of every sensible man in the land. And didn't nigger wenches fall in love with me, and didn't I keep abandoned women at head quarters on money I stole from my bleeding country? To be sure I did. That was the acme of "loyalty." That was known as Lincoln prtriotism. That style was the style that paid. That style made me popular with the Abolitionists at home. And didn't I drive Southern roosters from watching the nest, and didn't I go into that business for them? And didn't I go into the patent bleaching business on joint account, half for myself and half for the government?

There were some good men in the army—some fine officers—some gentlemanly patriotic officers, but they were in hard luck, and took lower seats. And didn't I get promoted for being caught out nights, roaming over the country—poaching on some nigger or white man's domain, in behalf of my government?

And wasn't I sorry when we had stolen the South poor, and were obliged to close the War? The occupation of Othello was gone. I returned home. People did not make speeches and welcome me back as they did when I left. I strutted around with my blue-tailed plumage till it looked slumpy, and the people began to take in clothes from the lines in my neighborhood, when it became known that I was a political general, whose best holt was stealing and endorsing Abolitionism. No one cares for me now. A good hunting dog is more petted. A buck nigger is of more account in the eyes of Congress and the people. People whisper strange things about that Stonewall Jackson song of "Whose pin here?" etc. I am not half so popular as I was when in the army. In fact, I believe I am about played out. Why can't we have another war? Lots of fellows have come out of State prisons since the war ended, and there is plenty material for more of these political army officers, who could draw beer better than blood. Never mind—I'll put the money I stole in government bonds—there is no taxes to pay on them—I'll sit around and draw my interest on them—live in idleness and be supported by the poor fools who have no bonds, but who pay taxes while I do not, and who pay me for being a thief and living in idleness. You see I am one of the supporters of this government. I can put my money in bonds—*somebody* pays the taxes of the country, and pay me interest, *but it is too us bond holders.* Oh, dear! Suppose the people should REPUDIATE these bonds, as they *surely will* if they are not taxed—*what will become of me?* I'll have to work the same as other men or go to the poor house with liberated niggers, *for tax-paying white men to support.*—*Brick Pomeroy.*

Eleven Millions for Negro Paupers!

The bogus affair that calls itself a Congress has just voted eleven millions for the "Nigger Bureau," to establish schools and support nigger paupers in the South! Just think—the negroes of the South produced some three hundred millions of surplus or real wealth, nearly all of which was finally secured to the people of the North, who built their Fifth avenue palaces and voluptuous churches on this result of "slavery," and in 1860 there was not one single pauper among all these four millions of negroes. Now this labor and all this mighty production of wealth is abolished, for the time being, as absolutely so as if the negro himself was stricken out of existence, and the northern laboring classes are loaded down with a debt of three thousand millions to accomplish the stupendous crime. Counting in the negresses of the South, who produced as much cotton as the males perhaps, the producing forces of the two sections were about equal, therefore it comes to this, not only is the labor of the negro lost to the whole country, but every laboring man in the North, must hereafter give a very considerable portion of each day's toil to destroy the former. The emigrant, the Irishman, the farmer, the mechanic, every man who adds to the production of the country must first give up a portion of each day's toil to pay the interest on the debt contracted to "abolish" the labor of the negro in the South, and what is left he may spend on his wife and children. If his children have not quite enough to fill their bellies or to cover their nakedness, why he can only reply to them be patient, for though you suffer for food and clothing, and I am giving my sweat and very life blood, and will doubtless die in the almshouse, it is the glorious cause of emancipating negroes from labor! But since this unapproachable crime of Abolition, the negroes are not only lost to production, but northern laborers are to be taxed eleven millions more to support negro paupers! Well, why not? Since their hand is in, why not complete the job? Why not, indeed, bring the negroes North and save the expence of sending agents into the remote South to look after them? Why not, indeed, give every negro a white laborer to work for him hereafter? It would simplify the matter mightily, and be the same thing in fact.

TOO LATE!—Alas! how many hearts have ceased to beat with the wild pulsation of hope when those cruel, crushing words have fallen on the ear, leaving only the utter blankness of despair! How often have the struggles of long weary years realized a fortune *too late!* How often we have all found what we coveted most—friends, power, love—but TOO LATE!—How madly happy it would have made us once, before our trust had been deceived, and our spirit broken! It sickens us now, for we had given up the thought of it long ago, and turn from it even as the dying begger turns from food, the want of which has killed him.

PURITY OF FEELING.—A life of duty is the only cheerful life, for all joy springs from the affections; and it is the great law of nature that without good deeds, all good affection dies, and the heart becomes utterly desolate. The external world then looses all its beauty; poetry fades away from the earth; for what is poetry, but the reflection of all pure and sweet, all high and holy thoughts?

Hope for the shirtless. Boston is going to manufacture paper shirts at twenty-five cents each. No excuse for shirtless persons then.

A lady, writing upon the subject, says: "When men break their hearts, it is the same as when a lobster break one of his claws—another sprouting immediately and growing in its place."

☞ Boarding-House Dialogue.—"Your milk does not pay any income-tax, I suppose, Mrs. Skinpenny." "Why not, sir?" "I shouldn't think it was rich enough."