

THE MINER'S DREAM.

In the bonanza days of the Comstock Lode, Virginia City, Nevada, harbored two populations, in many ways distinct from one another. During the week, the steep streets of the little town, being on the mountain side, were thronged by crowds of eager speculators, mine owners, brokers and business men, who watched the bulletin board for the latest quotations of the San Francisco Stock Exchange, and in offices, saloons, and hotel lobbies, discussed the market, and exchanged reports and rumors concerning the condition of this or that mine. On Saturday evening the scene changed. Thousands of brawny miners then came up from the deep workings for their one breath of fresh air and day for leisure; and as the greater number of these were Cornishmen, they gave a new and foreign aspect to place.

Miners, whatever their nationality, are superstitious. They live close to nature in her mysterious moods, and they acquire a peculiar tendency to belief in the supernatural. Mines, are, at best, uncanny places, full of deep shadows and corners of impenetrable obscurity; full also of queer echoes, and the creaking and cracking of heavy timbers, and the rush or drip of water; while in the deep workings, from one to three thousand feet beneath the surface of the earth, there is an ever-present sense of danger—danger from the immense pressure of the superincumbent mass of rock, and from fire, which, once started in those labyrinthine of wood-lined passages, spreads with such appalling rapidity as to baffles and defeat even the utmost precaution and preparation. So it is that the Comstock miners were given to superstition. They had many legends and traditions of fearful things seen in the deep workings; of spectral appearances, of mysterious voices, and more than all else, of supernatural warnings and premonitions prefacing disasters in the mines. An interesting volume could have been compiled by any one frequenting the favorite saloons of these honest, old-fashioned miners, for on Saturday nights they were in the habit of "swapping yarns," and the story to be told here is one which was many a time told over pipes and glasses, on these festive occasions.

John Treloar and James Pennart were employed in the Yellow Jacket mine, and being close friends, they had arranged so as to be in the same shaft—a term nearly equivalent to the sailor's "watch"—at sea. Treloar was the elder of the two—a sturdy, powerful, handsome man of thirty, known and liked for his constant readiness to befriend his comrades. He was brave and gentle, modest yet resolute; a man of action, yet at the same time a man of sentiment. His chum, Jim Pennart, was five years his junior, and contrasted with Treloar in many ways. He was physically robust, but of lighter frame, good-looking, honest, frank, but possessing less decision and a timidity that was almost morbid. Pennart had on intellect above the merely bodily toil by which he gained a living. He had managed to educate himself partially, and knew enough to be dissatisfied with his position in life. He was not considered selfish, but his was one of the natures which are formed to absorb rather than so dispense trust and affection. John Treloar's loving friendship was poured out upon him, and he accepted it as a perfectly matter-of-fact manifestation. Had the opportunity occurred he might have proved capable of self-sacrifice; as it was, he seemed merely to let himself be loved.

Now these two friends did what has severed many friendships: they fell in love with the same woman. Alice Minton was not a Cornish girl, but of American parentage and born in California. Left an orphan without means in her sixteenth year, she had quite naturally taken to teaching, and had presently obtained a position in one of the public schools of Virginia City, through the interest of an old mining friend of her father. She had met the comrades, Treloar and Pennart, at a ball, where both had danced with her, and whence both had walked to their lodgings in an unaccustomed silence. The truth was that Jack and Jim were equally hard hit, though neither thought for a moment that the other had been impressed by the pretty and engaging young teacher. Before the mutual discovery occurred, moreover, both had become still more deeply entangled, and when at last the truth came to light, dismay fell upon each, as they looked at each other. Treloar was the first to recover from the shock. His face was white and his mouth drawn and set, as he slowly said:

"Jim, lad, do'st'ee care for her greatly?"

Jim, with pained eyes and trembling lips, made answer:

"Jack! She's just all there is to me!"

Then silence fell again, and the two brooded, shielding their faces with their hands, no longer looking at each other.

Treloar's voice, low and yet strained, at last almost whispered:

"Lad—Jim—count me out of the running!" Then a pause, and evidently with difficulty: "Stand thou up to the rack, boy! I'll do all I can for thee!"

There was no more talk on the subject. Pennart accepted the sacrifice, after his manner, perhaps cheapening it, for the quieting of his conscience, with the assumption that his friend did not really care much for the girl. Treloar did not appear to feel the renunciation deeply, though he knew in his heart of hearts that he had missed the best life could hold for him, and though even his modesty could hardly have failed to realize that Alice looked upon him with special kindness. When he kept his word loyally as ever, and he found that by continuing to visit Alice, though with a single-minded purpose to advance the wooing of his friend, he was only complicating matters by developing the girl's liking for himself, he determined to keep away, and Pennart's suit did not prosper. Alice Minton was no coquette, but a very candid and ingenious girl. She did not dislike Jim, and she did not realize that her feeling toward Treloar was more than one of strong friendliness. It was only as his absence became more marked that she caught herself pondering upon its possible cause, to an extent that surprised her when she reflected upon it. Still the full truth remained unsuspected by her, and as Pennart's visits became more frequent, a sense of habitude commended him to her, and she was in a fair way to be prepared for his offer of marriage, when something occurred which changed the situation, tragically and definitely.

All the workings on the Comstock Lode are lined and roofed with heavy framed timbers, from a foot to eighteen inches square. Even these massive beams often have proved unequal to the tremendous strain upon them; and when they do not give way it is found necessary to replace them at intervals, their fibre being destroyed by the pressure. The great heat of the lower workings also dries these timbers, so that they become dangerously inflammable; and when, as sometimes has happened, the rock itself is at a very high temperature, mere contact with it may set the wood on fire.

How the great fire in the Yellow Jacket mine started will never be known, for those who were alone likely to know the truth perished in that disaster. The foulest rumors were afterwards spread abroad to injure the superintendent of the mine, notwithstanding that he had risked his life in attempting to rescue the imprisoned men.

It was the night before this disaster that John Treloar dreamed a dream. He thought he was down in the mine on the twelve-hundred foot level, and that some serious accident—but he could not make out what—had happened. Whatever its nature, he found himself, with his mate, Jim, struggling to reach the shaft; and as they labored through the passage there was the sound of a heavy fall, and lo! the way was blocked before them by the collapse of the roof. And he dreamed that he and Jim set to work to dig themselves out, but that his own strength failed under the heat and foul air, and that Pennart had to drag him through the opening they had made. Toward the end, the dream became less distinct, and the last he remembered was a slowly broadening gleam of light, which, he thought, represented their approach to the shaft.

Then he awoke, and at breakfast he told his dream; and his comrades did not like it at all, but shook their heads, and one or two of them determined then and there that they would "lay off" that day and not venture to go down the Yellow Jacket.

Now, the strangest part of this strange story is that on this same night Alice Minton dreamed about the counterpart of John Treloar's dream—but with a difference which can hardly be regarded as fortuitous. She, too, found herself in the mine, and looking on in a great agitation. At first she saw only a crowd of excited miners running this way and that. Then she seemed to float away from the crowd, and into a comparatively silent working, where two men were frantically digging at a heap of rock and earth that filled the passage in front of them. She looked, and recognized the two friends, but she could not speak or make herself known to them. Presently a narrow opening was made between the roof and the top of the fallen mass, and then the men seemed to be talking, but she could not hear what was said. After a pause, one of the men sank upon the ground, and the other climbed the obstruction and made his way through the opening. At this moment, an intense longing to know which of them had escaped and which was left behind overcame her, but she was now unable to distinguish their faces; and as she seemed to strain forward in order to see, a cloud as of vapor or smoke rolled along the dimly lighted passage, obscuring the scene completely, and the girl awoke with a shudder, and the name of John Treloar upon her lips. Then she knew for the first time that the feeling in her heart towards this man was stronger than that of friendship. At the breakfast table next morning she, too, told her dream, and those who heard it recalled an marveled at the story afterward.

For within twelve hours the great fire in the Yellow Jacket mine broke out, and all Virginia City was thronging to the hoisting works, where the massive engine was being worked at dangerous speed, and the cage was being almost hurled up and down the deep shaft, and the clanging of the signal bells, the shouting of orders, the excitement of the miners, and the piteous moans and cries of the women who had husbands, fathers, brothers below, combined to make a memorable and tragic scene. And now the smoke grew thicker in the shaft, and those who looked down saw red points far down, showing that the fire was no longer confined to one level, but had made its way in the dry timbers far and wide. So prompt and well judged had been the action of the superintendent, that three-fourths of the shift on duty below had been brought up, for the most part uninjured, though in some cases near suffocation from the smoke and heat. But there were still twenty-seven men unaccounted for, and it was known that most of them had been in the workings farthest from the shaft. So long as these miners were below it was necessary to continue forcing air down the mine, even with the certainty of increasing the fire, and now volunteers were called for to go down, at deadly risk, and search for the missing ones. The superintendent announced his intention of heading the rescue party, and, though he was not loved, the men cheered him for his pluck, and pressed forward with characteristic gallantry and devotion to offer themselves for the perilous service. An attempt was made to clear the shafts of smoke sufficiently to prevent the suffocation of the men while descending, and the cage was lowered with such a rush that old miners held their breath as they watched the great cable spin over the drum.

Meanwhile the dream had been fulfilling itself in the depths of the mine. Treloar and Pennart were as usual working together when the alarm was given, and it had broken out in the level they were in. They quickly ascertained that the way to the shaft was still open, and they started for it, side by side, retaining their tools more from forgetfulness than foresight. They were within a hundred yards of the shaft when Treloar halted and pulled his mate back, and, as he did so, the ground and walls of the passage shook; there was a rending, grinding crash of timber, and a great mass of rock fell from the roof in front of them, filling the gallery. They stood still until it seemed that there would be no further fall, and with scarcely a word, simultaneously attacked the obstructing mass. Both powerful men and skillful miners, they knew how to apply their tools with most effect, and in less than half an hour so much had been cleared away from the top of the barrier that it was possible to creep through close to the roof. But while they had been working, the fire had been advancing in their rear, and sudden puffs of super-heated air, whiffs of black smoke and an ominous rise in the temperature, accompanied by a sharp, crackling

sound, growing constantly nearer, warned them that little time was left them for escape. At this moment Pennart leaned exhausted on his pick and turned to Treloar, meaning to ask him if it were not best to stop work and try to free the passage over the pile of rock. To his consternation, he saw John slowly sinking to the ground, his face white, as if fainting. Pennart sprang to his side, and would have saved him, but Treloar shook his head, and, after grasping for breath a moment, whispered rather than spoke:

"No, no, dear lad! It's no use! I'm done! Climb thou through the hole. See! The smoke is thickening, and another minute 'll block that way, too, for 'twill hang under 't' roof an' choke thee. Good-bye, dear Jim, an' don't worry over me!" And he sank against the timbers of the wall, panting heavily.

The crisis of James Pennart's life had come. In such circumstances men's minds work with lightning rapidity, and he took in the situation instantly and grasped the duty that lay before him clearly. That duty was to save his friend, no matter at what peril to himself. He knew perfectly well that John Treloar would have had no hesitation in such a case. He knew that there was just a chance of being able to thrust John through the hole or to go through first himself and then drag him after. He felt still physically capable of doing this, and yet something held him back. All his obligations to his friend rose up against his sluggish will. With them, unhappily, rose, also, a remembrance of Alice Minton's preference for the man who now lay unconscious before him. No definite purpose of evil crossed his mind; no definite feeling of jealousy; but the hesitation which paralyzed his moral nature deepened. All this reflection, tedious as it is to represent it in words, occupied so few seconds that there seemed to have been hardly a pause after Treloar's speech when his comrade answered:

"Nonsense, John! You're a long way from being done yet. Lean on me, and we'll make the rifle together."

But as he said this, James Pennart clearly knew that the moment for action had passed. John Treloar's eyes opened slowly, he moved his head so that he could look down the gallery, and seeing a dense curtain of smoke pressing toward them, he once more shook his head, and with a half-strangled utterance, murmured: "Get out, Jim, for the sake—of—Alice!" and his head sank upon his breast. Pennart hesitated no longer. Pressing his friend's hand, but unable to speak for emotion, he sprang up the pile of debris, forced his body through the narrow opening, rolled into the clear gallery, and reached the shaft in time to be taken up on the last trip of the cage. As he was struggling over the rock-heap after abandoning his comrade, he thought, but could be sure, that he heard a faint, a dying voice whisper: "Alice!" It might have been an echo or a fancy, and no one could prove or disprove it; for when, after many weeks, the Yellow Jacket mine was once more habitable, nothing but a few charred bones remained beside the fallen rock in the gallery, to show where John Treloar had died. Had died! I have said—but, after all, which of these two men was it whose life ended on that fateful day? John Treloar's name is never mentioned by the miners save with deepest respect and admiration. He, indeed, to our circumscribed vision to have missed happiness and success and love; but what do we know of ultimate consequences? As for James Pennart, surely his was a living death from the hour he proved recreant to his duty; for he was sensitive and clear-sighted, and he could not forgive himself. Neither could Alice Minton forgive him, or look upon him with kindness thenceforward. She never married, and he, miserable, went forth a wanderer, objectless, hopeless and indifferent to the future, feeling that nothing it held could by any possibility atone or mitigate the weight of that burden of self to which he was bound.—Exchange.

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2	From mouth of Upsalquitch River to Toad Brook.	H. B. Hollands.	S. 300 00
3	From Toad Brook up to Tom's Brook.	Samuel Thorne.	S. 1,500 00
4	From Tom's Brook up to Patapedia River.	James M. Waterbury.	S. 800 00
5	From Patapedia River up to Tracey's Brook.	Restigouche Salmon Club.	S. 1,600 00
6	From Tracey's Brook up to Quatawamkewick River.	Archibald Rogers.	S. 1,200 00
7	From Quatawamkewick up to Madawaska County line.		S. 100 00
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9	From its Forks to its head, including all Branches.	do.	S. 200 00
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11	From 11 mile tree up to Great Falls.	do.	S. 175 00
12	From Great Falls to head of River.	do.	T. 150 00
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14	Big and Little Sevogle Rivers and Branches, and the part of N. W. Miramichi River from the mouth of Big Sevogle to the mouth of Little S. W. Miramichi River.	Wm. F. Ladd.	S. 150 00
15	Little S. W. Miramichi River and Branches.	do.	S. 150 00
16	CAINS RIVER and Branches.	A. S. Murray.	S. & T. 100 00

Copies of the Regulations to govern the above Sale, or any further information, may be had on application to the Fishery Commissioner, J. Henry Phair, Esq., Fredericton, N. B.

L. J. TWEEDIE, Surveyor General.

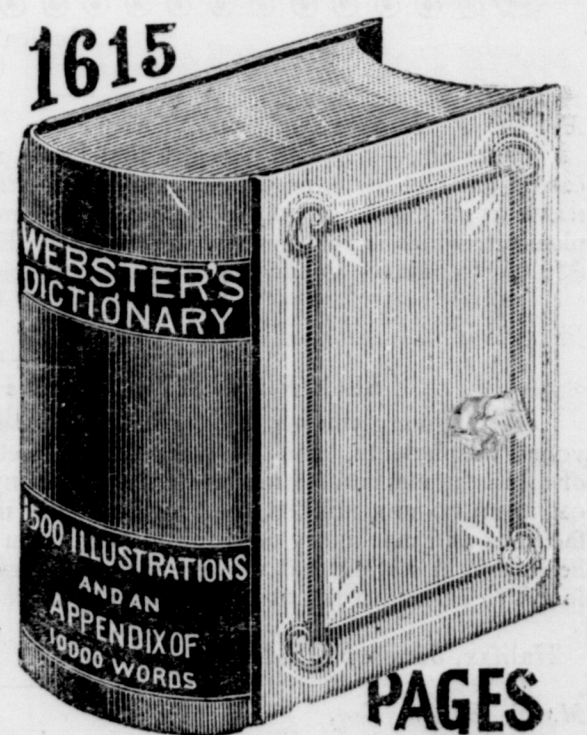
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