

Near the middle of the descent—that is, close to the corner where you alighted last evening—is a tall liberty-pole a little storm-eaten and half dismantled, like the liberty-poles of old country-places in the East; a town-pump which yields the very sweetest of water; a gilded public-house sign swung in the old-fashioned way at the corner, so that it may be read from four approaches; and a number of fresh, green locust-trees whose thrifty leaves spread a grateful shade all over the narrow way. So neighborly is the place that, when the butcher has occasion to know the time, he hails the watch-maker across the street, who, putting his head over his glass screen, says, half-past eight and be hanged to him; at this pleasantry half the street bursts into a loud laughter, which is increased to a roar when the butcher is heard to reply that if he hung he didn't know what would become of the watch-maker, giving the town to understand thereby that the artificer was a steady debtor to him, and would die of starvation if he (the butcher) were extinct. A trial of strength between two dogs is sure to bring every shopkeeper out, and, if a half-drunken tippler sings a rollicking song or a hasty mother scolds her youth in the privacy of her back-yard, the chances are excellent that Dutch Flat hears every word.

The town has no fire-engine. For defense against conflagration a heavy head of water is laid on from the mountains, and is brought into the streets by means of small iron hydrants, similar to those used in the cities. At about noon on each hot day, "Ike," a lean, self-contained man, who always has a portion of a cigar in his mouth, brings a short length of hose into the main street, and adjusting it to all the hydrants he can find, one after the other, beginning at the bottom of the street, he sprinkles everything that he can reach with the stream, producing a grateful change in the heated air, and creating something of a breeze. If a saloon-keeper is desirous of a little more water than common, he simply guesses out loud that "that piazzar up there 'u'd stan' a duckin';" and if a good lady has a favorite tree that needs reviving, she presents her smiling face above the top of her gate, and charmingly wonders if Ike could "jest play a stream onto that pore sufferin' thing to git it out of misery." No one presumes to give him orders. He is on a level with the best, and shares the great politeness that is characteristic of the place.

As you ascend to the upper part of the town, you are likely to be pleased and a little surprised at the neatness and prettiness of the cottages you find there. Built mostly in the midst of little lawns, shaded with trees and running vines, they are models of what they assume to be—houses of people in moderate circumstances. It is not likely that any one of them cost more than three thousand dollars, yet a little good taste having been employed, and Nature having been invited, they fill their measure thoroughly. From their trellised porches roses of all hues hang in the utmost profusion; the windows are screened with lace; garden-chairs are placed in the grass beneath the locusts, and the

doors are open through and through, permitting the breezes to sweep everywhere. You are sure to hear the voices of children and the songs of hidden birds at any hour, and the air is always fragrant with the odor of flowers. Were one to descend upon this spot from the clouds, he would never guess that he was in Dutch Flat, in California.

It is natural to dwell upon the graceful feature of the town after one has caught a glimpse of its surroundings, for it may be fairly doubted if there is in the country another place with features in close juxtaposition so utterly dissimilar, so startlingly in contrast, and yet belonging so intimately to each other.

Keeping on up the hill, you soon emerge from among the houses and the grateful shade-trees, and suddenly find yourself in a hot and glaring desert. All about you are stones, heaps of whitish gravel, boulders of immense size, and high cliffs of bare earth full of seams and gullies. Here, for the first time, you find yourself upon mining-ground.

The method of hydraulic mining is briefly this: From some lofty point a head of water is let on through iron pipes of varying diameter, and is projected in a thin stream against the bottom of a hill of gravel known to contain gold. The earth falls in loosened masses, and is washed into channels which lead to sluice-boxes. A sluice-box is a narrow trough made of planks and provided with a false bottom. Over the upper surface the current of earth and water passes, the finer portions of the gravel, together with what gold there may be, falling through apertures upon the real bottom below. Here at intervals are cross-pieces a few inches high, in whose angles quicksilver is placed. The particles of gold, great and small, draw to this, while the worthless earth is washed on and out of the way. These sluice-boxes are watched night and day, and are "cleared up," that is, the amalgam is taken out, at intervals which vary from ten days to three months or more, just as the earth is more or less rich in metal.

The pipes which convey the water are made of thin iron hardly thicker than box cardboard, and vary from some forty inches to fifteen in diameter. They are smooth, round, and black as jet. They are led across depressions in the ground upon trestles, and, where the surface is favorable, they are laid upon sleepers like the tracks of a railway. They are often miles in length, and, though their general tendency is downward, yet they make many rises and turns. The pipe near by you disappears a short distance off, behind a low hillock; it comes into view again two or three rods farther on; then it is lost for a quarter of a mile, and you see it climbing a hill like a serpent, bending itself over the crest, and vanishing once more; then, perhaps, you may see it in the faint distance curving like a hair-line, still doing its tremendous duty, yet with so little suggestion of the great power contained within it.

You bend down and apply your ear to a little orifice you find upon the upper side of one of these

pipes, and you hear the furious rush of the water ; at the same time your hat is blown from your head by a back-handed current of air that bursts from its imprisonment within the tube. A mile farther on you may be startled to hear a loud continuous roaring and hissing. You look about and discover another of these pipes surcharged with water, which seeks to escape from every joint and pin-hole in the entire length. The ground is wet beneath it, little pools forming here and there, while jets of spray shoot in all directions, catching the rays of the sun most delicately.

The water issues from the pipes at the place where the mining is carried on, with astonishing force. Lofty hills, broad plains, and long cliffs are washed away, and their ruin completed by nothing else than a shaft of water a few inches in diameter, thrown violently and persistently against them. Nothing can withstand it: trees, gnarled stumps, rocks of prodigious size, are whirled hither and thither like bubbles in the wind, and the softer earth is melted like frost before a fire. A stream having a fall of two hundred feet, and being forced through a two-inch pipe at its head, is a weapon of appalling force. It will cut into banks of packed clay that a pick-axe cannot penetrate, and tear out of their fastnesses rocks half as large as a railway-car, and whirl them about as easily as a garden-jet does its silver globe. Were it to strike a man it would literally tear him in pieces; not stun him, or simply kill him with the shock and the suffocation, but it would rend him limb from limb, as an explosion would.

Having arrived upon the mining-ground, you look about you for a point of interest. Five miles off there is a scanty fringe of dead pines upon the edge of a cliff, that a few years ago was clearly the centre of a great hill. In another direction is naught but a great rolling desert, similar to the one you stand in the midst of. In still another is a range of lofty mountains. Perhaps at the moment you are there a faint rumbling will be heard far above; you look up at an angle of sixty degrees and see sweeping along the edge of a precipice, two-thirds up the rocky height, a train of red-and-yellow railway-cars, drawn by two wood-burning engines, the sound of whose bells and whistles seems like the small diversions of very little children, so diminished are they by the distance. Upon a closer inspection of what lies before you, there appears a square red flag erected upon a pole a mile away. Comprehending that it is the danger-signal of a quarrying-party, and that mining must be going on, you look for a path that may take you in that direction.

One begins at your very feet, and, with an invocation against sunstroke, you step into it and travel as it leads. After an hour of as fine exercise as you ever took, you reach the first sign of the presence of human beings in the region. It is a little shed, beneath which are a number of empty boxes marked "Hercules Powder," and a few coils of fuse, together with a lot of ropes and drills. A quarter of a mile farther, and the land sinks. You descend

with caution, following a huge black pipe all the way, and you suddenly come upon the verge of an enormous pit five hundred feet in width and two hundred in depth. Its torn and jagged sides converge and meet where a gloomy shaft sinks into the earth. The upper portions of the banks are of the same whitish earth that forms most of the land thereabout, but the lowest portions are of blue gravel—an earth famous among all miners for its richness in gold. It may be that just as you reach the edge of the pit you hear from below a cry of warning, and catch sight of a dozen men or so moving carelessly to a place of safety. You secrete yourself behind a boulder and await the blast which you fancy is impending. It comes in a moment—a dull, lazy roar, which climbs by echoes up from out the pit; and then the miners lounge back again to their tasks. Some sit down, and, holding huge drills in their hands, turn them slowly round and round, while others beat upon them with sledges, making a noise that is not altogether untuneful. There is no more spirit in the work than there is in the work of a granite-quarry. The same weary lifting of the feet, the same languid blows, the same non-communication, mark the gold-hunter as mark the simple hewer of stone. Moreover, you see no gold; not an atom of it meets your eyes anywhere. Were you other than a scientific man or a very practical miner, you could find more wealth in your vegetable garden at home than in the whole mining country hereabout from one edge of the horizon to the other. The main color of the earth is white, as I have hinted too many times already, but to the south and west there are many places where it is of a dark, heavy, Venetian red. Even many of the white banks are tinged with this at the top, and some contain pale veins of it inclining in all directions. These are the prevailing hues, but in many places the stroller finds patches containing sand of some fifteen or twenty more colors and shades of color. If you examine some of your footprints you will find in them little stripes and dots of color that are truly astonishing for their number and variety.

Yet, remembering that you are upon a gold-field that is exceedingly rich, and that fortunes upon fortunes have been extracted from it, also that millions of money are now invested in appliances to work it, you feel a sense of injury that, after having come so far, the gist of the whole thing is beyond your reach—that not a straw's worth is to be found even if you go upon your knees all day long. You pick up handful after handful of earth that appears to you to be "pay-dirt," only to sift it away again out of your palms without a shadow of satisfaction for your pains.

You abandon this dull, hot, unseemly place with willing feet, and, knowing that they are washing some banks away two miles farther to the south, you turn your face thither and begin a tremendous journey over rocks and sand, with the unblinking sun pouring down upon you with consuming fury. Your eyes half close themselves, your face burns, your shoes crack, and you breathe something very like a flame.

When you arrive, you hasten to one of the pipes and thrust your wrists into an escaping jet of bitter-cold water and look around. There are six or seven men present. Two or three shovel, one or two pick, and the others apparently await an event. Twenty yards off is a slender nose-piece, eight feet long, attached to the end of a fifteen-inch pipe. This nose-piece is governed by a set of pulleys, by which it may be raised or depressed or swung from side to side as occasion may demand. From its end there is now shooting, with a series of sharp, cracking explosions, a narrow shaft of water, which is hurled some forty feet straight upon the sides of a wall of earth thirty yards high. The base of the cliff is bored with holes ten or twelve feet in depth, and the earth all around is a bed of mud. The men look up at the sides of the bank and watch for fissures. At last one or two appear. A few large stones, loosened by the gradual shifting of the surrounding earth, fall suddenly and make a terrible stir in the mire. Finally, an artist in mining, impatient at the delay, goes to the pulleys and drags the nose-piece a little upward and a little to the right of the mass that is expected to fall. The water strikes like a cannon-ball; the gravel flies in every direction, and the whole face of the cliff is seized with a tremor. The fissures widen, the top is seen to totter

and the bottom to sink. The men cry out and run back a few paces. Then the great mass comes careering downward, roaring and grinding, leaving an awful gap behind and filling you with a sensation compounded of awe and terror.

After a brief period of silence, such as always follows occurrences of this kind, the men begin to talk and to shovel again, the stream of water is turned upon a new spot, and the demolition of the hill goes on. That portion that has fallen will find its way into the sluice-boxes before to-morrow night, and the quicksilver will take away all that is valuable in it. Then the remains will be thrown out and an acre more will be added to the already vast waste.

You wait until you are sure that nothing novel is to be done, and that what you have seen is repeated with little variation day in and day out for months and years; then you turn your face in the direction of the little hotel in the shady village street with immense satisfaction.

You arrive after an hour's tramp, with parched face and hands, burning eyes and aching limbs, and, after ordering a bath and a small jug of iced claret-cup, you take out your pocket-book and write down that you are glad you have no thirst for gold, and that you are content with the even and modest life your gracious stars have allotted you.

A MODERN LAMIA.

I.

“WHY, Ulric Brandon! what in the name of wonder brings you to Biarritz?”

“‘A truant disposition, good my lord,’ is, I suppose, the appropriate answer—a desire to study the flora of these regions, and to verify certain facts connected with their geological formation, is the real state of the case.”

“And what about your patients? How many poor nervous creatures have you left to worry themselves to death for want of the ‘great specialist in nervous diseases, Dr. Brandon,’ as the *American Register* styled you the other day?”

“I have given up practice for the present; I mean to devote the next five years of my life to study. My present journey has been undertaken for purely scientific reasons, and I mean to remain at this place merely long enough to take breath. My means, as you know, are quite ample enough to permit a confirmed old bachelor like myself to fashion my life at will. And you—where are you going, and what brought you hither?”

“To the first question I will make answer, I don't know; to the second I will reply, caprice and a love of change.”

The friendship between Ulric Brandon and Horace Temple had always been a matter of wonderment to their mutual acquaintances, so dissimilar were the two men in tastes, pursuits, habits, in all

save years, for Dr. Brandon was but a few years older than his gay and brilliant companion. At the age of twenty-five the young physician had already conquered, by his devotion to study, the clearness of his arguments, the force and solidity of his mind, the esteem and respect of the leading members of his profession; and a few years later some remarkable cures in the difficult and perplexing specialty to which he had chosen to devote his studies—namely, that of nervous diseases—had already gained for him a certain celebrity. Devoted no less to the scientific than to the practical part of his profession, he had resolved, on inheriting a fortune sufficiently large to enable him to carry out his own views, to devote several years to the study of Nature in all her varied forms, in the hope of winning from her inexhaustible storehouse certain remedial agents of which he felt in need, and which were still lacking to the pharmacopœia. He was a man of noble and untiring *physique*, tall and powerfully formed, with a striking though not regularly handsome countenance. His dark, deep eyes flashed from beneath the shadow of a massive, dome-like brow, from which the heavy masses of his dark hair, already streaked with gray, were pushed back in careless fashion. A thick, dark mustache veiled closely-set lips with strength of will and firmness of character in their every line; and the same characteristics were visible in the square, sturdy outline of the closely-shaven chin and jaw.