CHAPTER XI

"WHAT DID YOU SHOOT THIS MAN FOR?"

'Tis sweet to hear the watchdog's honest bark
Bay deep-mouthed welcome as we draw near home
'Tis sweet to know there is an eye will mark
Our coming, and look brighter when we come.
—Byron.

The city of San Diego is one of the prettiest places in the west. It stands on the coast, near the monument that divides the two Republics. I lodged at the Holt House and went about the city canvassing for the publications of P. F. Collier. On one occasion I inadvertently entered the house of a minister of the gospel named Jones. I was selling, among other things, the novels of Bulwer-Lytton, Cooper, Dickens and Scott. The Rev. Mr. Jones became very much incensed when I offered to sell him sets of these works, and accused me of demoralizing the city by putting such books in the homes of the people.

I saw him on the streets quite often after that and he never failed to hit a verbal blow at my business, or to sneer at me, or to remind me of my "wickedness" as he called it, for selling novels. He was a pompous man, and paraded the streets with the grandest air imaginable, and this, together with his bigoted per-
tinacity in pursuing me, were the occasion of my deciding upon a way to humble him a little. One night I wrote a sentence, something after the style of those in the Bible, and determined to give him a public opportunity to explain it to me. The sentence ran thus: “And Paul said, Get ye down, and whether ye revenge let it be mystified into eternal as well as increatable contrition.”

One day I was standing upon the sidewalk among a crowd of acquaintances when the Rev. Mr. Jones came stepping grandly by.

“Parson,” said I, detaining him in such a position that the crowd could hear, and speaking in a distinct voice, “I have a sentence here which I should be glad to have you explain, and tell me what book or epistle in the Bible it is from.”

“Why certainly,” he replied, loftily, “I shall be quite glad to do so.”

I thereupon handed him the slip whereon I had written the sentence. He took it, read the words over to himself in a low voice, and then repeated them for the benefit of those looking on.

“That,” said the preacher, in a pompous tone, “is from Paul. I have seen it quite often. It simply repeats a lesson the inspired Book often enjoins, to be humble and reverent in the sight of God, and is in perfect keeping with the rest of the Scriptures.”

He then launched out into a long, impromptu sermon upon these points, referring to the sentence frequently, and explaining its different points. When he had done this, he seemed to feel that he had
accomplished a very wonderful feat indeed, and became more pompous than ever. He handed the slip back to me and was about to pass on.

"Parson," said I, "do you remember the exact chapter in the Bible in which this sentence occurs?"

"Well, no," he admitted, knitting his brows, "I think, however, that it will be found in the first epistle of Paul."

"I cannot agree with you," said I. "Furthermore, I will give any man ten dollars who will find this sentence anywhere in the Bible."

"What do you mean?" says Mr. Preacher, growing very red.

"I simply mean that this sentence is not in the Bible, and never was."

"Do you intend, sir," cried he, "to utter blasphemies against God's Holy Word?"

"By no means," I responded. "I have no such intention. On the contrary, I simply mean to take part of the conceit out of a man who does not practice the religion he preaches. Sir, I wrote this sentence myself, last night."

A great laugh went up at this; and the preacher, darting at me a glance which expressed anything but love, or good will, turned about and hurried off down the street.

During my stay in San Diego I received the local newspapers from my old Texas home, and as they invariably reached me on a certain day, I always looked forward to that hour with anxious pleasure. One day as I came out of the postoffice with one of
these papers a young man was standing dejectedly on the sidewalk. I had seen him quite often, and we were something more than mere acquaintances. He bade me good morning, and looked so pale and wan and melancholy, that I asked him if he was ill.

He replied, "No," and smiled in a sickly manner.

I went on down the street towards the city park, which was only a block or so away, to have a quiet hour with the news from home so eagerly longed for. The young man followed me, and we sat down upon the same seat. But in my selfish joy at hearing from home I almost turned my back upon him, and began to read my paper. While I was intent upon this employment, and without the least warning, a pistol shot rang out so near to me that I did not know for a moment whether I was shot or not, and a cloud of smoke from the burning powder swept across my face. At the same time, I heard a groan. I sprang up in alarm.

Then I saw that my late companion was not upon the seat, but had fallen to the ground. A smoking pistol was clutched convulsively in his hand, and I saw at once that the unfortunate young man had taken his own life. A ghastly bullet-hole gaped in his head, and blood was trickling from it. As I bent over him, I heard excited cries and the tramp of many feet. He was quite dead, the bullet having penetrated his brain.

At this moment I was seized, and a voice cried into my ear: "What did you shoot this man for?"

I looked up, and saw myself surrounded by an ex-
cited crowd. A policeman had seized my arm, but did not prevent me from rising to my feet.

"I did not kill him," I said to the officer, "can't you see that he killed himself?"

"A thin tale," some one sneered. "Officer, I advise you to hold that man."

"And I advise you, my friend," said I, "not to meddle with things you know nothing of."

By this time a man, evidently one in authority, had come up. He glanced around him keenly.

"What are you holding this man for?" he said to the policeman. "Release him. Can't you see that it is a clear case of suicide? Friend," he said to me, "you may go. But hold. Give me your name. We may need you."

I gave him my name, and, being free to go, did not remain a single moment.

During my sojourn in San Diego I came very unexpectedly upon two old Texas friends, Mr. James N. Cook, and Sim T. Hartsfield, and received many kind favors from them. They yet reside in California.

As has been stated, I remained in San Diego for nearly a year, and my health steadily improved. Before this time had elapsed, however, I had begun to think of returning to my Texas home, feeling able to cope with the trying climate of that section. It was in March of the year 1890 that I returned to Texas and was reunited with my family.

The storms and tumult of an eventful life have passed away, and the calm that precedes the end of
all has come. In the evening of my days I can look back over the unquiet ocean, and the rugged steeps that lie behind, and lo! the hours of darkness and storm have gone forever. I have passed them, and the lengthening shadows that, stealing closer, announce the coming of perpetual night, are beginning to gather about me. Yet despite the deepening shadows, I can yet see, in the blue void above me, whence the long reaches of ominous clouds have rolled away, the wide sky shining calmly and serenely down upon me.

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