## SECRET OF MACARGER'S GULCH.

BY AMBROSE BIERCE.

Northwestwardly from Mammon Hill, about nine miles as the crow flies, is Macarger's Gulch. It is not much of a gulch-a mere depression between two wooded ridges of inconsiderable height. From its mouth up to its head-for gulches, like rivers, have an anatomy of their own-the distance does not exceed two miles, and the width at bottom is at only one place more than a dozen yards; for most of the distance on either side of the little brook which distance on either side of the little brook which drains it in winter, and goes dry in the early spring, there is no level ground at all; the steep slopes of the hills covered with an almost impenetrable growth of mauzanita and chemisal, are divided by nothing but the width of the watercourse. No one but an occasional enterprising hunter of the vicinity ever goes into Macarger's Gulch, and it is unknown even by name, five miles away. Within that distance in any direction are far more conspicuous topographical features with a constant of the control of the constant of

this one.

About midway between the head and the mouth of Macarger's Gulch, the hill on the right as you ascend is cloven by another gulch, a short, dry one, and at the junction of the two is a level space of two or three the junction of the two is a level space of two or three acres, and there, a few years ago, stood an old board house containing one small room. How the component parts of the house, few and simple as they were, had been assembled at that almost inaccessible point is a problem, in the solution of which there would be greater satisfaction than advantage; possibly, the creek bed is a reformed road. It is certain that the guich was at one time pretty throroughly prospected by miners, who must have had some means of getting in with at least pack animals carrying tools and supplies; their profits, apparently, were not such as would have justified any considerable outlay to conwould have justified any considerable outlay to con-nect Macager's Gulch with any centre of civilization enjoying the distinction of a sawnill. The house, however, was there, most of it. It lacked a door and a window-freme, and the chimney of mud and stones a window-indee, and the childrey in mid and stones had fallen into an unlovely heap, overgrown with rank weeds. Such humble furniture as there may once have been, and much of the lower weather-boarding, had served as fitel in the camp-fires of hunters; as had also, probably, the curbing of an old well, which at the time that I write of, existed in the form of a rather wide but not very deep depression

near by.
One afternoon in the summer of 1874, I passed up One afternoon in the summer of 1874, I passed up Macarger's Gulch from the narrow valley into which it opens, by following the dry bed of the brook. I was qualis-hooting and had made a bag of about a dozen birds by the time I had reached the house described, of whose existence I was until then, unaware. After rather carelessly inspecting the ruin, I resumed my sport, and having tolerably good success, prolonged it until nearly sunset, when it occurred to me the state and a long way from any human, behivist. ionged it until dearly sonset, which it occurred to me that I was a long way from any human habitation—too far to reach one before nightfall. But in my game-bag was food, and the old house would afford shelter, if shelter were needed on a warm and dewiess might in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, where night in the footbills of the Sierra Nevada, where one may sleep in comfort on the pine needles, without covering. I am fond of solitude and love the night, so my resolution to "camp out" was soon taken, and by the time that it was dark I had made taken, and by the time that it was dark I had made my bed of boughs and grasses in a corner of the room and was roasting a quasi at a fire which I had kindled on the health. The smoke escaped out of the ruined chimney, the light Illuminated the room with a kindly glow, and as I ate my simple meal of plain bird and drank the remains of a bottle of red wine the water which the region did not afford I ex-perienced a sense of comfort which better fare and accommodations do not allows give. Nevertheless. the water which the region did not afford, I experienced a sense of comfort which better fare and
perienced a sense of comfort which better fare and
accommodations do not always give. Nevertheless,
there was something lacking. I had the sense of
comfort, but not that of security. I detected myself
importance of all this. The recognition somehow deeply
comfort, but not that of security. I detected myself
importance of all this. And that faculty, where
lank window than I could find warrant for doing.
Outside these apertures all was bleak, and I was
unable to repress a certain feeling of apprehension as
my fancy pictured the outer world and filled it with
uncanny existences, natural and supernatural—chief
among which, in their respective classes, were the
grizzly bear, which I knew was occasionally still seen
in that region, and the ghoos, which I had reason to
know the sense of the sense o

open doorway. I felt this keenly as I lay on my leafy couch in a corner of the room next to the chimney and permitted my fire to die out. So strong caminey and permitted my net to the out. So strong became my sense of the presence of something malign and menacing in the place, that I found myself almost unable to withdraw my eyes from the opening, as in the deepening darkness it became more and more indistinct. And when the last little fiame flickered and went out I grasped the shotgun which I had laid at my side and actually turned the muzzle in the direction of the now invisible entrance, my thumb on one of the hammers, ready to cock th piece, my breath suspended, my muscles rigid and tense. A moment later I laid down the weapon with a sense of shame and mortification. What did I fear. a sense of shame and mortification. Wha and why?—I to whom the night had been

"A more familiar face Than that of man"

I in whom that element of hereditary superstition, I in whom that element of hereditary superstition, from which none of us is altogether free, had but given to solitude and darkness and silence a more alluring charm and interest. I was unable to compare the solitude and the solitude solitude in the solitude solitude in the solitude solitude darkness. I was in a great city in a foreign landaries of speech and costume; yet precisely what these were I could not say; my sense of them was indistinct. The city was dominated by a great castle upon an over-looking height, whose name I knew, but could not speak. I walked through many streets, but could not speak. I walked through many streets, some broad and straight with high modern buildings, some narrow, gloomy and tortuous, between the ga-bles of quaint old houses whose overhanging stories, elaborately ornamented with carvings in wood and stone, almost met above my head. I sought some stone, almost met above my nead. I sought some one whom I had never seen, yet knew that I should recognize when found. My quest was not aimless and fortuitous; it had a definite method. I turned from one street into another without hesitation and treaded a maze of intricate passages, devoid of the fear of

losing my way.

At last I stopped before a low door in a plain stone house which might have been the dwelling of an artihouse which might have been the dwelling of an artisan of the better sort, and without announcing myself,
entered. The room, rather sparely furnished, and
lighted by a single window with small diamondshaped panes, had but two occupants, a man and a
woman. They took in outice of my intrusion, a circumstance which, in the manner of dreams, appeared
entirely natural. They were not conversing: they
sat apart unoccupied and sullen. The common was a superior of the control of the c

The woman was young and rather stout, with fine large eyes and a certain grave beauty; my memory of her expression is exceedingly vivid, but in dreams one does not observe the details of faces. About her shoulders was a plaid shawl. The man was older, dark, with an evil face made more forbidding by a long scar extending from near the left temple diagonally downward into the black moustache; though in my dreams it seemed rather to haunt the face as a thing apart.—I can express it no otherwise.—than to belong to it. The moment that I had found the man and woman I knew them to be man and wife. What and woman I knew them to be mfu and wife. What followed, I remember indistinctly; it was confused and inconsistent—made 80, I think, by gleams of consciousness. It was as it two pictutes, the scene of my dream, and my actual surroundings, had been blended, one over-lying the other, until the former, gradually fading, disappeared, and I was broad awake in the deserted cabin, entirely and tranquilly conscious of my situation. My foolish fear was gone and, opening my eyes, I saw that my fire, not altogether burnt out, had revived by the falling of a stick and was again lighting the room. I had roubably sleet burnt out, had revived by the falling of a stick and was again lighting the room. I had probably slept but a few minutes, but my commonplace dream had somehow so strongely impressed me, that I was no longer drowsy, and after a little while rose, pushed the embers of my fire together, lit my pipe, and proceeded in a rather ludicrously methodical way to meditate upon my vision. It would have puzzled me then to say in what respect it was worth attention. In the first moment of services thought that I was the first moment of services thought that I was the say in the sa then to say in what respect it was worth attention. In the first moment of serious thought that I gave to the matter, I recognized the city of my dream as Edinburgh, where I had never been; so if the dream was a memory, it was a memory of pictures. The recognition somehow deeply impressed me; it was as if something in my mind insisted rebelliously against will and reason on the importance of all this. And that faculty, whatever it was, asserted also a court of of my speech. "Gurely: Surely: MacGregori must have come here from Edinburgh."

ing upward, lifted itself clear of its embers and expired in air. The darkness seemed absolute.

At that instant—almost it seemed before the gleam of the blaze had faded from my eyes—there was a dull, dead sound, as of some heavy body falling upon the floor, which shook beneath me as I lay. I sprang to dead sound, as of some heavy body falling upon the floor, which shook beneath me as I lay. I sprang to a sitting posture and groped at my side for my gun; my notion was that some wild beast had leaped in through the open window. While the flimsy structure was still shaking from the impact, I heard the sound of blows, the scuffling of feet upon the floor, and then it seemed to come from almost within reach and then it seemed to come from amost within reach of my hand—the sharp shrieking of a woman in mortal agony. So horrible a cry I had never heard nor conceived; it utterly unnerved me; I was conscious for a moment of nothing but my own terror! Fortunately my hand now found the weapon of which it was in search, and the familiar touch somewhat rewas in search, and the laminar outen somewhat re-stored me. I leaped to my feet, straining my eyes to pierce the darkness. The violent sounds had ceased, but more terrible than these, I heard, at what seemed long intervals, a faint inter-mittent gasping of some living thing at the point of death!

As my eyes grew accustomed to the dim light of the coals in the fire-place, I saw first the shapes of the door and window, looking blacker than the black of the walls. Next, the distinction between wall and floor be-came discernable, and at last I was sensible to the form and full expanse of the latter from end to end and side to side. Nothing was visible and the silence was inbroken!

side to side. Nothing was visible and the silence was unbroken! Inauch that shook a little, the other still With a my gun, I restored my fire and made a critical examination of the place. There was nowhere any sign that the cabin had been entered. My own tracts were visible in the dust covering the floor, but there were no others. I relit my pipe, provided fresh feel by ripping a thin board or two from the inside of the house—I did not care to go into the night smoking and thinking, and freeding my fire—not for a hundred added years of life would I have permitted that thtel flame to expire again. Some years afterward, I met in Sacramento a man named Morgan, to whom I had a note of introduction from a friend in Saar home, I observed various "trophies" upon the wall, indicating that he was fond of shooting. It turned out that he was, and in relating some of his feats he mentioned having been in the region of my own adventure.

"Mr. Morgan," I asked, abruptly, "do you know a place up there called Macarger's Guich?"

he replied; "it was I who 'I have good reason to,' gave to the newspapers, last year, the accounts of the huding of the skeleton there."

hinding of the skeleton there."

I had not heard of it; the accounts had been published, it appeared, while I was absent in the East.

"By the way," said Morgan, "the name of the gulch is a corruption; it should have been called "MacGregor's." My dear," he added, speaking to his wife, "Mr. Elderson has upset his wine."

That was hardly accurate-I had simply dropped it, glass and all, from my lips.

guss and an, from my sps.

"There was an old sharty ouce in the gulch,"
Morgan resumed when the ruin wrought by my
wkwardness had been repaired, "but just previously
to my visit it had been blown down, or rather blown
away, for its debris was scattered all about, the very
floor being parted, plank from plank. Between two
of the sleepers still in position, I and my companion
observed the remnant of an old plaid shaw, and exswining if found that it was wranged shout the amining it, found that it was wrapped about the shoulders of a female body, of which but little resnouncers of a remaie body, of which but little re-mained leside the bouse, partly covered with frag-ment of clothing, and brown dry skin—but we will spare Mrs. Morgan," he added, with a smile. The lady had indeed exhibited signs of disgust rather than

"It is necessary to say, however," he went on, "that the skull was fractured in several places as by blows of some blunt instrument; and that instrument itself— a pick-handle, still stained with blood—lay under the

a pick-mannle, and a sained with abbodiesy under the boards near by.

Mr. Morgan turned to his wife. "Pardon me, my dear," he said with affected solemnity, "for mentioning these disagreeable particulars, the natural though regrettable incidents of a conjugal quarrel resulting, doubtless, from the wife's insubordination."

countries, from the wire's insunordination."
"I ought to be able to overlook it," the lady replied, with composure; "you have so many times asked me to in those very words."
I thought he seemed rather glad to go on with his story, "From these and other circumstances," he said, "the coroner's jury found that the deceased, lacted of the seement of the death from blows in the countries of the seement of the see was added that the evidence pointed stongly to musband, Thomas MacGregor, as the guilty person. But Thomas MacGregor has never been found not heard of. It was learned that the couple came from Edinburgh, but no—my dear, do you not observe

that Mr. Elderson's bone-plate has water, is wet?'
I had deposited a chicken-bone in my finger-bowl.
''I a little cupboard was found a photograph of
MacGregor, but it did not lead to his capture.''
The picture showed a dark man with an evil face
made more forbidding by a long sear extending from
near the left temple diagonally downward into the
black moustache.
'' By the way, Mr. Elderson'' said my affable host,
''By the way, Mr. Elderson'' said my affable host,
Guich'', exnow why you saked about 'Macarger's
Guich'' "I lost a mule near there once," I replied, "and

Guich?""
"I lost a mule near there once," I replied, "and
the mischauce has—has quite—upset me."
"My dear," said Mr. Morgan, with the mechanical
intonation of an interpreter trauslating, "the loss of
Mr. Elderson's mule has peppered his coffee."