

The Wisdom of Solomon.

BY G. B. DUNHAM.



UE westward, on a heavy grade, the Overland climbs toward the backbone of the continent. If you travel that way in the early spring you may notice the birds and the flowers of the lower altitudes growing fewer and smaller as your train ascends to the mountains. The green turf gives way to brown, patches of white appear among the prickly pear by the roadside, and that jack-rabbit crouching near the soiled and shrunken core of a winter's drift, and flattening his ears along his back as the train rolls by, still wears his coat a shade whiter than the earthy snow. The air grows keen, and unless you happen to be to the manner born you are sure to wish that the man in the opposite seat would draw in his head and shut the window.

When the man finally does so it is to remark, "I can see the gap."

Other windows will go up, and other men will look out; a general interest and satisfaction will pervade the car. You, also, will presently look out, and if your eyes are really good, will see far ahead, with the line of road running plump into it, a cleft in the mountain range.

The great hills present to the eye no other break than this one — apparently made on purpose to let the railroad through. But, as you learn later in the day, the road does not go through, for after panting, like an overheated hound, all the way up the slope to the very threshold of the pass, your engine, merely pausing for a deep drink beside a foamy brook, turns sharply to the right and speeds along refreshed over an easy grade parallel to the mountains.

During the brief stop made by the train your car has been half emptied. All those men whose conversation has been of ranches

and ranges, saddles and spurs, are left behind. This is Rocky Creek. The cowboys who went East in the fall came to the railroad through the pass with the last beef drive of the season, chilled and disgusted. They swore great oaths never to tighten a cinch again, and sold their outfits to Jud Bristol for a song — or, at the most, a song and dance. Now they are coming back in shoals.

Bill Field and half a dozen of his fellows left the train on such an afternoon, and lined up on the platform to watch it away. That duty discharged, they felt as tired and thirsty as though they had helped to pull the cars up the long hill, and with a common impulse turned toward the buildings across the track.

Rocky Creek is not much of a town to look at — Cook's tourists don't stop there — but it ships more stock than any other three stations on the road. It is a straggling row of irregular wooden buildings along a single street facing the railroad. At the end of the row are the stock yards, large pens for handling and loading cattle. They are extensive and well built, cover more ground than the town, and the general effect given is that the stores and saloons are a suburb of the yards.

The homing cowboys turned their steps toward the general store of Jud Bristol. This store had long been one of the institutions of the town. Built two stories high in front, successive low additions made as business increased had extended back two hundred feet. Some parts were of redwood, some of pine and sheet iron; all were unpainted and weather-beaten. A sign had at one time reached across the front reading, "Groceries, Dry Goods & C." When the committee attempted to hang a superfluous citizen there, it broke in the middle, one end came down and was never replaced. The present reading — Goods & C — has been generally interpreted to mean "goods and credit." Within this ridiculous old shell was a complete department store, with a saloon annex, and a blacksmith shop and stock corral adjunct.

"Hello! a new sign," said Bill, as they came opposite; "Jud is putting on airs."

"Changed his name, too," said another; "he spells it 'A. Solomon. — Buys and Sells Everything.'"

"I can speak three languages," remarked bewildered Bill,

"American, English, and profane, but I can't get hold of a word that fits the occasion."

"Well, come along into the synagogue," urged Jo; "we got to have the liquor anyhow."

In the saloon annex the boys took the usual and made their inquiries about the former proprietor.

"Jud has gone broke," said the artist who mixes; "collections were a little slow, and the sheenies came down on him and closed him out. That gent over there in long whiskers corralled the whole outfit."

"I owe Jud about seven dollars, myself," said Bill, adding amiably as he chewed his liquor: "If things were like they used to be in this country we could pour coal oil on them whiskers and set 'em afire. No *sense* in shutting Jud off. Why, he was the most accommodating dealer that ever was; used to buy my saddle and togs every fall when I quit, and pay me the cash. Sell 'em to me again on credit in the spring."

With this tribute to the character of the late proprietor, Field dismissed the subject and ordered the score charged up to himself.

"That don't go," said the artist; "new boss don't keep a slate."

"It's got to go," retorted Bill; "I ain't off the range, nor just back from Klondike. I been East all winter."

Bill was crossed again by the new management when he tried to buy back his last year's saddle and outfit on the usual terms. The proprietor politely and decidedly declined to sell him goods for any other consideration than spot cash, and was quite unmoved when Bill repeated to him the regret already expressed to the barkeeper, that the changing times no longer countenanced the use of kerosene and matches as a vermicide.

"Have you lost any trouble?" asked Bill. "Because if you have," he added, "I should think you would find it right here, and pretty quick, too."

William Field was not a desperado. He belonged to a class of young men who come from country homes in the East to work on the cattle ranges, and who consider themselves amenable to no law but force after they get west of the 103d meridian. They are good boys, but the light air turns their heads a trifle, and they

own the earth. The men who own merely the flocks and herds, the stores and railroads, are there by sufferance. All that ails Bill and his fellows is the free life of the range; they have too much their own way, and any woman can tell you that is not good for any man.

Bill quitted the store too mad to take a parting drink of coal-tar whisky, went to a lodging house, took a room and went to bed. The whole town went early to bed in the spring time. Frontier towns are virtuous when they are poor. When shipping time comes round, and the pens are full of cattle and the boys have got their wages burning holes in their pockets,—“that is another story.”

Bill went to bed, and the little bad whisky he had taken went to his head. He had a vivid and startling dream. When he awoke he was out on the street, dressed, with his shoes in his hand. As he gazed stupidly about, unable for the moment to collect his thoughts, bright lights flared up in the windows of Solomon's store, and there was a cry of “Fire!”

His dream! The shoes dropped from his hand, and joining the cry, Bill dashed down the street to where Mr. Solomon, half dressed and weeping, stood wringing his hands.

“My Gott,” he moaned, “I'm a ruined man!” The fire had already made much headway. Men gathered quickly. Some broke in doors and windows and brought out a few goods. A bucket brigade was formed and passed up water from the creek, but soon gave up a hopeless task. There seemed nothing to do but watch the big shed filled with half the county's supplies go up in the smoke. The fire was fiercest at the back, but very rapidly eating toward the front of the building, and the outside stairs leading to Solomon's living rooms were burning. Suddenly a child's face appeared at an upper window. She vainly tried to raise the sash.

“My Gott! Rachel!” screamed the old man. “I thought she was at the hotel.”

Bill Field was as vigorous in action as in speech. He made a break for the stairway and went up through the flames, broke in the doors, knocked out the sash, dropped the child from the window to those below, and fell out after it.

It was a foolish act, because the window was but fifteen feet from the ground, and some one might have found a ladder, set it up at the front of the house, and saved the child before she strangled in the smoke. But the people cheered Bill just as hard as though he had done a noble thing, and he owned the town that night.

It was at first thought that Bill had received no more serious injuries than the bruises resulting from his fall, but the smoke and flame inhaled on the stairway soon made their effects so felt that he was put to bed in great pain. His lifelong friend, Jo Thornton, stayed with him and put all the other fellows out. The doctor said he might live a couple of days.

On the last day he asked to see Solomon. The merchant came to the room and the bedside, expressing profuse gratitude for the saving of his daughter.

"The fire has taken half my money," he said, "but I'll use the other half to see you through."

"Mr. Solomon," said Bill faintly, and wasting no words, "I was awfully mad at you, and I think I must have gone crazy that night," pulling himself together with a great effort; "I—fired your store."

Jo was leaning over him as he spoke, and for one instant was dazed. Then he burst out, "Bill, you lie! He lies, I tell you," repeated Jo, turning fiercely on Solomon, and dragging him out of the room. "He lies. I did it myself."

After the funeral the efficient sheriff of the county took charge of Jo. He admitted having made the confession, and the same newspaper which carried to their boyhood home the story of Bill Field's heroism and death reported the sentence for arson of Jo Thornton. The few persons who knew about the scene in Bill's room said that "probably both men were in it."

All but A. Solomon. He did not talk for publication, but, over and over, to himself he whispered:—

"My Gott! My Gott! And I did it myself to get the insurance."

The Bijou Bride.

BY GEORGE B. DUNHAM.



HE was a Denver schoolma'am, and when Clarence Marsh married her and took her to the ranch on Bijou Creek, there was not another woman within twenty miles. This was in '77. Some years later I knew Marsh very well, and he told me about her.

"She only stayed with me a year," said he, "and I reckon not many would have stayed as long as that. Women want neighbors, and ranchmen don't. If you've got a bunch of cattle or a band of sheep you've got to have all the range you can get; and if it's ten miles to the next ranch, so much the better for both of you.

"Wool was cash in those days, and thirty cents a pound. Milly had everything she wanted only society (at least, I thought so then). Once in a while we went to Denver for a couple of days, and often the L. C. boys would come over to our place in the evening. Henry and I played cards a lot, and Freel would sing or talk with Milly. I don't sing a little bit, but I thought my wife's singing was the sweetest music on earth. I think so yet. Those boys never came to the ranch much before I was married, but afterward they came a lot. Henry was real smart and I had to stop playing with him, but Freel was no good — didn't know a Lincoln sheep from a Shropshire. But he could sing, and my wife liked him, and bimeby I told her she liked him too well, and I told him to clear out and not come around any more for a spell. And we was all mad, and Milly cried a lot, and I acted like a regular fool, which I surely am when I'm mad — and the next day was the big blizzard.

"Do you remember the big blizzard of '77? It was the day before Christmas. You would remember it if, like me, you had been caught out in it with a band of sheep. One of the herders

had to go to town for his holiday drunk, and on that morning I took a band out south about two miles, and when the storm came I couldn't get back. I thought my time had come, sure, for the morning had been so warm that I had no overcoat, and the weather changed from summer to winter in a holy minute.

"Well, it snowed and blowed great guns all day, getting colder and colder, and I stayed with the sheep. After we had drifted with the storm for several miles, and half a day, me a-fighting them back, and them acrowding me down the wind all the time, I got the band into a deep arroyo, where the dogs could hold them. Then I skinned a couple of sheep and wrapped up in the pelts. The storm quit about dark, and I stayed there all night. You never saw so much snow! There were drifts thirty feet high and hard enough to carry a horse, while the hills and mesas were blown bare.

"Come morning, I strung out the flock and started them home on the run. Got there by 10 o'clock and found the place deserted. I thought for a minute that my wife must be under a snowdrift, and I tell you I was just about locoed, rushing about from house to barn. But when I found that her horse and saddle was gone, and something from the house too, then it came to me all of a sudden about the row with Freel, and I knew she had gone off of her own free will, and would never come back any more. And it didn't take me long to make up my mind that she'd run away with Freel Harlow.

"You want to remember that I had been most froze to death, had nothing to eat for a day and a night, and my judgment wasn't just quite so good as it was quick. So I saddled up and rode over to the L. C., across the drifts; the horse got stuck in a snowbank, and I left him and went in on foot. And there was Henry all alone, writing a letter. And I asked him where was Freel? (I told him I was up to his game, and he needn't waste any time trying to fool me.) And he said Freel was gone to Denver and I could go to the devil, and before we got through talking I missed him twice, and he shot me through the leg.

"Henry took care of me until they got a doctor and a nurse from town, and I was moved home. I was pretty weak for a while, and had to stay in bed for a fortnight. I had time to do a

lot of thinking. By the time I was up again the weather was warm and the snow nearly gone. All along the south side of the long mesa, where there is a clear drop of fifty feet to the valley below, the drift had been immense. And there—they found Milly—and brought her home.

“Horse and rider had fallen over the bluff in that blinding storm. My coat and wraps were strapped to the saddle. She was coming to help me, and nothing but death could stop her. If you’ve got a wife be good to her,—mine’s in heaven.”

