

## Long Brown of Esmerelda.

BY ARTHUR MCEWEN.



LONG BROWN lay in bed and smiled. He was in a lightsome mood, for the Chinaman had but a little while before brought him his morning coffee, and, with his hands clasped behind his head, and his shrewd blue eyes fixed on the ceiling, he was smoking the cigar which he always smoked at this hour — 11 A. M.

Long Brown's smile was occasioned by a conversation going on at the time in the adjoining room. Partitions were thin in Esmerelda, and privacy was one of the luxuries not enjoyed in that decaying Nevada mining camp.

Few men in Brown's position would have felt like smiling. A gambler, he had been playing in the worst luck for weeks. He had played in bad luck before, but never in anything like this. His watch, his rings, his diamond studs, his spare silver-mounted sixshooter, and — of this he was ashamed — some of his more costly garments, were in pawn. He had borrowed till he could borrow no more, and even the least respectable of his friends were growing cool.

It was not at this plight of his that Long Brown smiled, but at some reflections which were forced upon his sharp mind by the conversation he could not but overhear. He was something of a philosopher, and, to his amusement, cogitated upon the inconsistencies which inhere in those social laws that are written and enforced by custom.

In the next room Mrs. Vasquez and her daughter Pachita were talking, Pachita tearfully. Esmerelda custom permitted Mrs. Vasquez to take in lodgers, even sports, without loss of caste, but when Long Brown met Pachita Vasquez on Esmerelda's one street, she was expected not to see him; whereas she not only saw but stopped to talk with McKenzie, the young clerk at the Bullion office, and also a lodger.

Long Brown smiled harder than ever. He did not rebel at the discrimination, having lived too long in the sage-brush, and possessing too intimate an acquaintance with sports not to recognize the justice of the outlawry of his free-living and happy-go-lucky class, quite unfit for domesticity and its responsibilities. The previous afternoon Pachita and the clerk had passed him—the former carefully unconscious of his proximity, and the latter just nodding for shame's sake—and now Long Brown, listening whether he would or not, to the conversation on the other side of the partition (and he had no fanciful scruples on the head of being an eavesdropper), puffed his cigar and thought of several things. One of these was the girl's beauty. It was not a new decision of his that he had never seen a prettier, more graceful, alert little creature in his life. "She's Spanish, of course," he admitted to himself, "but she's lived all her life with white people, and ain't to be considered a dago. Not much sense, naturally, being young and female, but she's just the sort men lose their heads over, and put out other fellows' lights for. She's not for me, I know. Sports ain't in this kind of race, but even if they were, what in heaven would I do with her? She's gone on that McKenzie, that ain't fit to serve drinks at a game when it comes to sabe."

Long Brown laughed quietly. He compared the small figure, the narrow shoulders, the mild, freckled countenance of the clerk, who was on a footing of equality, of favor, with his own stalwart frame, his six feet two of height, his brown beard, and his *ensemble* of stunning elegance, for Long Brown knew himself to be one of the handsomest and best-dressed men in camp. If bitterness rose in his heart, he quenched it with a resolution that was habitual. Gamblers know their place perfectly well, and learn to accept its disadvantages along with its exemptions. At least Long Brown had no need to go to school in this branch of Western life's instruction.

"It's perfectly preposterous," came Mrs. Vasquez's voice through the partition. She was Massachusetts born, and had married the late Vasquez in California. He had left her with enough, but she had tried to make it more in the mining stock market, with the result that Long Brown, her lodger, lay smoking

hard by, and could hear her nearly as well as though she had spoken in his ear. The other lodgers, normal men, were off about their business; sports are late, and Brown was forgotten.

"It's perfectly preposterous," cried Mrs. Vasquez. "You've lost your school, and we've absolutely nothing to depend on except what this house brings in. You know I'd like well enough for you to go to the Emmet Guard ball, but a new dress — and that cherry silk at Goldstein's, too! — is utterly out of the question. If go you must, you'll have to make your lilac do. Perhaps you can turn it."

"I'm sure," pleaded the girl, her voice trembling, "that Goldstein would let us pay for it in instalments. I'll try to get some private scholars in embroidery and Spanish and — things. I must go. Alec has invited me, and I've accepted."

"Alec!" the lady's tone was the feminine equivalent of swearing. "What on earth can you see in that McKenzie? The camp's full of better men, and any of them would be glad to give you anything you wanted."

"Alec's poor now," flamed up the young lady, "but when the market turns he'll be all right. He offered to sell some of his Bullion to get me the cherry, but I wouldn't let him. It's bound to boom when they open the crosscut on the 1900 level."

Chivalry's manifestations often took substantial and serviceable form in Esmerelda, and no harm thought.

"Does McKenzie own Bullion?" inquired mamma, a touch of respect in her voice.

"Yes, a thousand shares."

"Well, anyway, you can't have the cherry. That assessment on Hidden Treasure has taken my last dollar."

Pachita wept, and the lodger, still smiling, noted the abandon of the despair in the youthful sobbing. Then he threw away his cigar and arose to dress and decorate his person as becomes a sport, whether in bad luck or good.

The morning following — over night Long Brown had surprised himself by borrowing a hundred dollars from the superintendent of the Last Chance, but was not surprised when it went in two bets, one open and the other coppered, for faro is seldom friendly to the previously unfortunate — the next morning, Senator Rolls,

proprietor of the Bullion mine, in making his rounds was interested in a sight that met his all-seeing eye. Not fifty yards from the hoisting works, and well within the marked and universally known limits of the famous Bullion claim, a man appeared at work with pick and shovel, digging a hole. The back of the industrious intruder was toward the astonished proprietor, who disturbed him in his toil by approaching and demanding what in an evil place's name he did there?

The miner stopped his labor, straightened himself in his pit, and after favoring the senator with an icy survey from head to foot, seated himself on the edge of the hole. As he dropped his pick, he reached for a shotgun lying convenient and laid the weapon across his knees.

The senator's manner altered. The dignity of authority and the red of indignation vanished from his intelligent countenance.

"What," he inquired with a grin, "has happened to make *you* go to work, my boy?"

"Well, I guess I *have* been a long time about it," answered Long Brown in seriousness, "but at last I've made up my mind to get in and drill and develop my claim. When grass is short there's nothing for it but work."

"Have you any partners?" asked the senator with friendly interest.

"About two thirds of the sports on the lode, and that means all of them that's broke. I'm broke myself, and there's nothing I won't do to make a raise—hire out to you or any other mine-owner as a fighter to hold a claim, or even go to work, as you see. The boys are back of me to a man."

This was not true. Long Brown was playing a lone and desperate hand.

The statesman looked fixedly at the hole, at Brown, and at the shotgun. He also gave rapid thought to the feebleness of the constituted authorities in Esmerelda, and the debonair disregard for life and property cultivated by gentlemen of the class represented by the one before him, whose scorn for legal and other conventions he knew well.

"It ought to be a pretty good claim this of yours," he said at last, sighing resignedly, and lighting a cigar, and handing one to

the invader. "Promising, I should say, anyway, considering its nearness to the Bullion, which happens to be mine."

"As sure as this is mine," declared Long Brown, crossing his legs and enjoying the senatorial cigar. "I haven't any doubt but it'll pan out all right."

"Suppose you were disturbed in working it?"

"It would not," said Long Brown, taking the cigar from his mouth and blowing a long, thin column of smoke straight up into the air, "it would not be healthy for the disturber."

"But it might mean jail for you, you know — I mention it as a possibility."

"In that case," explained the honest miner, "it would mean a dose of lead for the disturber as soon as I got out. You and I, Senator, don't need to be told that Esmerelda is neither Washington nor New York, Boston nor Frisco, nor yet Patee. This claim is mine, and mine it's going to be till it gets me out of the scrape I'm in, for, as I've told you, I'm flat broke, and in hock to the whole world."

Senator Rolls shifted his position uneasily. Though many times a millionaire, he was but a man, and knew Nevada. Still, the impudence of the thing was gross, and anger assailed him suddenly.

"Where's your title to this ground?" he exploded.

"Here," answered Long Brown, unruffled, tapping the barrels of the shotgun that rested on his knees.

"Brown," remarked the senator, his mood changing, "an industrious man like you ought to be encouraged. What do you ask for your claim?"

"Three thousand."

"Make it," urged the senator, who, being a man of business, was keen at a bargain, "make it fifteen hundred, and if you'll come up to the office with me I'll give you the money now — provided you insure me against any more shafts being sunk on this ground."

"Done," laughed Long Brown, "and I'll throw in the pick and shovel."

"But keep the shotgun?"

"To protect your property hereafter from jumpers," explained the prosperous miner politely.

Long Brown was awakened next morning by voices in the adjoining room, but though they were the same voices as before, their tune was not the same.

"Goldstein, mamma," almost caroled the girl, "threw off five per cent. for cash, and of course, as Alec insisted, I had to take the gloves — twelve buttons."

"Of course," assented mamma. "Did he sell his Bullion?"

"No," said the young lady, accustomed to the speculation as well as the speech of Esmerelda, "he told me he had made a little raise on the side."

Long Brown smiled again, though not cheerily, for he had sat long at faro the night past, and had not been abstemious. But luck had come his way once more, and in his trousers over the foot of the bed he had the wherewithal, and more, to take his things out of pawn, and to discharge the hundred to the Superintendent of the Last Chance, and all other debts.

Pachita had a dressmaker in the room with her. The cherry for the festival of the Emmet Guard was under construction. She intermitted her chatter only to sing.

"Mamma," she said, after a long ripping sound that told of parting silk, "d'you know it makes me feel kind of bad to be always meeting that Long Brown on Main Street, as I did again yesterday, in front of the National, and not noticing him. He's real nice looking and quite gentlemanly, but I wish you'd get rid of him. So long as he's in the house it's rather embarrassing not to speak to him outside; but of course I can't do that, his being a sport."

"Of course not," agreed mamma; and when Mr. Brown, that afternoon, informed her that it would be more convenient for him to live further down town, her protestations of regret were mere politeness, for a friend of McKenzie's, a new clerk at the Bullion, had made application for lodgings.

And Bullion went up. Within a week of the opening of the new crosscut on the 1900 the stock touched a hundred, in two weeks it passed the three hundred mark, and when it climbed to five hundred dollars a share, two events occurred simultaneously: Young McKenzie sold out, and permitted his coming marriage to Miss Vasquez to be announced.

"Brown, old man," the capitalist said as he presented the other with a check out of the new book whose newness was still an exhilarating pleasure, "Brown, old man, it was awfully good of you to stand in the way you did that time on the Emmet business, and I'll never forget it. Simply giving you the money back doesn't square our account, by Jove, and if at any time you go broke and want to be staked for the game just let me know, and anything in reason I'm good for."

"Thanks," said the gambler coldly, pocketing the check. "So she's going to marry you, eh? Well, that's all right; she's got to marry somebody, I suppose."

He turned away and went from the bar of the Silver Palace toward the faro room, but came back and grasped the other's hand energetically.

"See here," he began, with a frowning fierceness that astonished and startled the unoffending young man; "see here, I want you to be good to her, do you understand? Be good to her for — for style," he ended feebly, the other standing rather bewildered as the swinging doors of the faro room closed on Long Brown's broad back.

