From the Overland Monthly.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ROBERT FAIRWAY.

I.

As Robert Fairway swung with careless yet graceful step down Maine street, in the sunny little town of San Diego, more than one of the dark-eyed senoritas turned a laughing look toward him, for he was a handsome man; and as he crossed the Plaza into the more modern and American portion of the town, there were cheerful salutations and gentle good mornings from the rosy damsels who were busy with their gardens at that time. Fairway bore the reputation of a lady's man; and there were not wanting quiet little bits of gossip, and slyly told stories of his success in the role of roue, to add that spice of danger to an acquaintanceship which young girls seem to love so well, and which, at the early day of which I write, was no bar to entrance into the best Californian society. Sauntering on, passing the hotel with its group of idlers, he turned up the stairs of the first and only brick building in the village, and opening a door having on it a little tin sign, which told of "Robert Fairway, Attorney and Counselor-at-law," walked in. The place was small, yet neatly fitted up and tidy. The carefully assorted papers on the table which served for a desk, the plain redwood shelves filled with well kept volumes, the spotless floor, the straight, white curtains, and the rose in the tumbler of water—all gave tokens of neatness, if not system. Throwing up the window—which opened upon a balcony—and lighting a fresh cigar, he sat in the clear morning sunlight, to all outward appearance a man thoroughly satisfied with himself and all around him.

Yet this man was throwing his life away. He was letting a land-practice worth a competence slip through his fingers—was neglecting every interest entrusted to his care until clients dropped away from him one by one—was worse than wasting the best years of his life. Still, he was in no want of money. He always dressed well and drove the best teams. When he reached into his pocket for the elegant little knief with which he trimmed his dainty nails, there always issued forth the music of jingling coins. His room-rent for the best parlor and bedroom at the widow's big house across the creek, and his beard bill at the hotel were paid to the hour. His purse was ever open to the call of friendship or the cry of distress. Educated in the law in Louisiana, he had passed his examination—which, in that State, is rigid—with honor and credit. But he had also acquired there the seeds of the fatal passion which was blighting his life; he was a gambler—and a successful one. Cool, clear-headed, and calculating, he had made the game of Poker his study, and had mastered it.

Having cast his lot among the simple minded and wealthy Spaniards of the old Mission of San Diego, with whom gaming was the passion of their lives, he found ample means to gratify his taste. His office was a law office but in name; the little back room the real workshop, and the blanket covered table and a few chairs the tools. Here, night after night was spent in the game. Almost every man of any consequence in the town had, at some time or other, taken a seat at the table. Judges, merchants, rancheros and doctors met there, with one common object. The games were fair and above board; an ignominious exit would have been the fate of any one who should have dared to try any of the blackleg's games there. All that was done or said at that board was on honor, and the play was a square contest of skill and nerve and pluck, while neither losses nor winnings made any change in the courteous demeanor of the men who changed their gold there. One would hardly realize, as he sat there in the bright light of the morning, lazily puffing his cigar, that this man could have turned the whole current of his life into this channel.

A step on the stair started him from his reverie, as a tall, dark skinned, black haired son of Spain entered the room. "Caramba, but I envy you your nerves; here you look as fresh as a new blown rose, and as clear as if you had slept the sleep of a baby instead of being up at that cursed game till day light," broke out the new comer whose energetic salutation was received with a courtly smile by Fairway, who pushed a chair toward him, with a careless, "Oh, it's nothing when you're used to it." The Spaniard, who was the heaviest land holder round about, took the proffered chair, and, producing his packet of cigarettes, proceeded to solace himself with the weed. Jose Alvido had become, upon the death of his father, sole heir to the vast grant of land, acquired under the old Spanish Government, known as the San Sliold Rancho, which subsequent litigation has made familiar to every one interested in the history of land matters in California. He had all the improvidence and disdain of labor peculiar to the Spaniard; and was the source of substance to the many human leeches who hung around the wealthy Spaniards at the time we speak of. Fairway was his legal adviser, as well as his boon companion, and although he would have spurned the imputation of dishonesty, was rapidly, and perhaps partly unconsciously, drawing him into the vortex which was destined to impoverish the one and enrich the other. Winning from him ready cash enough to keep his pockets lined with yellw twenties, he could well afford to take contingent fees of interests in his land in pay for such legal services as he rendered. Thus gaining a foothold on the estate, it requires no great amount of thought to enable the reader to comprehend the manner of his ultimate acquisition of a large part of it. Matters had reached very near this point on the morning of which I write. The night before had been passed in a game where stakes were high and title deeds formed the pool. But, as yet, these heavy losses and winnings were known only to the two parties interested. Fairway knew his man well enough to be content with the simple entry in his private memorandum book of the acknowledgment of debt, and Avido, in his simplicity, recognized such obligations as binding in honor, if not in law.

To be continued.

NOTICE!

STRAYED from C. P. Carlson, 10th Ward, Salt Lake City, a medium sized cow, (last Thursday night) color red, white on back, with a short white tail and some white underneath; also a brand on ribs on left side.

Any person giving information of her whereabouts will be rewarded for trouble.

C. P. CARLSON.

Sept. 18, 1871. d205-3

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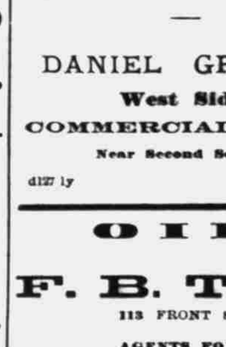

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