ORPIMENT & GAMBOGE.

THE firm was in leather, down in the Swamp, and Mr. Orpiment used to ride down-town every morning from his house in Bank Street, regular as the almanac, in a Bleecker Street car. His house was one of those eminently respectable, high-stooped dwellings, between Fourth Street and the old Greenwich Road—quite the court end of what used to be Greenwich village three score years or so ago, and about as pleasant an abiding-place as you will find to-day in all the city of New York. This house was unnecessarily large for Mr. Orpiment's family —for the whole of his family was himself; but as he seemed to be entirely satisfied with it, no one ventured to suggest to him that he had better move. Indeed, there were few people in the world who, knowing Mr. Orpiment, would have willingly ventured to suggest to him anything whatever, for he was not a person who took suggestions kindly. In point of fact, he usually took them with a snap.

When young Orpiment, in a suggestive sort of way, observed modestly from under his blonde mustache that his uncle would be doing a good thing if he would rescind the edict under which he, young Orpiment, was going through the form of learning the leather business, and would permit him to betake himself to the study of Art—when young Orpiment made this suggestion, I say, Mr. Orpiment fell into such a rage that his counting-house—large though it was and small though he was—would not hold him; in his wrath he strode out into his warehouse, among the kips and hides, and used language in their presence strong enough to tan them. The upshot of the matter was, that young Orpiment was given twenty-four hours in which to make up his mind whether he would stick to leather and his bread and

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butter, or be an infernal idiot (such was Mr. Orpiment's unparliamentary language) and starve among his paint-pots. And young Orpiment, his crisp blonde hair fairly bristling with determination, every muscle in his large, well-built body tense with energy, in something less than twenty-four seconds elected for starvation and the pots of paint.

But for all his high temper and defiant way of dealing with things, there was one thing that Mr. Orpiment could not deal with defiantly. One morning—only a few weeks after this battle royal of the paint-pots had been fought—to the astonishment of all the people in Bank Street, his front door did not open at precisely twenty-seven minutes after eight o'clock; and the conductor of the Bleecker Street car concluded that in some mysterious way he must have got ahead of his schedule, because at 8.30 Mr. Orpiment was not standing, like a block-signal, with his neatly-folded umbrella thrust out straight before him, at the Bank Street crossing; and Mr. Gamboge got into a nervous fluster,

and said that he knew that something must be wrong, when the counting-house clock struck nine and Mr. Orpiment did not make his appearance, as was his invariable custom, between the sixth stroke and the seventh. And something *was* wrong: Mr. Orpiment was dead.

As all through his life Mr. Orpiment had been setting himself to go off, like an alarm clock, at definitely determined points in the future, so did he carry this habit into the testamentary disposition of his estate. His will, so to speak, was double-barrelled. The first barrel went off immediately upon his decease, and, as it were, set the alarm. After devising certain small legacies to a few friends and dependants, to be paid out of accruing income, and a round ten thousand dollars in Government bonds to the Protestant Home for Half-Orphans—an institution in which, for many years, Mr. Orpiment had taken the liveliest interest, probably because in his early life he had been a half-orphan himself, and knew how very disa-

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greeable it was; after these rational and commendable bequests, the will took a new departure, and the rest of it was as eccentric and as arbitrary as ever Mr. Orpiment himself had been: and that is saying a good deal.

It declared that all the rest, residue, and remainder of Mr. Orpiment's estate, real and personal, whatsoever and wheresoever, was given, devised, and bequeathed unto his executors—Mr. Gamboge and Mr. Mangan Brown were the executors—in trust: to collect and receive the income thereof, and to pay thereout all necessary charges and expenses, and to invest the surplus income each year, and to add the same to the principal of Mr. Orpiment's estate, and thus to reinvest and accumulate for the period of five years after Mr. Orpiment's decease; and at the expiration of the said period, to hold the said principal, with its additions and accumulations, upon the further trusts set out in a codicil to this Mr. Orpiment's will, which codicil would be found in the top drawer of the small fire-proof safe in Mr. Orpiment's

library; and (here was the queerest part of all) that until the expiration of the said five years this codicil was not to be opened under any circumstances whatsoever. The will further provided that until the five years should be ended Mr. Gamboge should carry on the business of the firm under the firm name; and, in an extremely peremptory clause, he was forbidden to give employment, in any shape or way, to young Orpiment. The leather business and the art business, the will stated dryly, were inharmonious; and inasmuch as young Orpiment had chosen the latter, the testator wished to leave him entirely free to carry it on undisturbed by the claims of the former upon his thought and time.

With this parting shot the will ended, as a sailor would say, short—without giving, save as such was to be found in the tidy legacy to the Protestant half-orphans, the least hint or suggestion as to what was to become of Mr. Orpiment's fortune at the end of the five years; without throwing the faintest

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ray of light upon the mystery that all this waiting and trust-creating involved. It was as queer a will as ever went to probate ; indeed, had there been anybody besides young Orpiment to contest it, the probabilities are that it would not have been admitted to probate at all. But young Orpiment was Mr. Orpiment's sole kinsman ; and, as matters stood just then, his pride was so thoroughly up that had he been called upon to choose between breaking the will and breaking his own neck, he would have chosen the latter alternative with all possible celerity.

And so, although he was dead and buried, Mr. Orpiment had arranged matters in such a fashion that for these five years at least it by no means could be said with any sort of truthfulness that he had perished from off the earth.

ABOUT this time there was not a happier family in all Greenwich, nor anywhere else, for that matter, than the Browns. Mr. Mangan Brown, in the large-hearted way that be-

came his big body and big voice, and acting, of course, with the warm approval of Miss Caledonia, had urged Vandyke and Rose so heartily to bring the baby and come and live with them, that a refusal really was quite out of the question. So it came to pass that Mr. Mangan Brown, without the perceptible quiver of so much as an eyelash, signed a check big enough to pay for one of those delightful houses, with gardens in front of them, and broad verandas all the way up to their third stories, in West Eleventh Street—which also is a part of Greenwich village, as may be mentioned for the information of the mass of New Yorkers who know nothing of New York.

And in this pretty home, one bright May day, when the trees and gardens were glad in their fresh loveliness of delicious green, they all harmoniously took up their abode. Mr. Mangan Brown had the second-story front, and Miss Caledonia and Verona had the two second-story backs, and the third floor was given over to the baby and Van-

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dyke and Rose. If anything could make brighter the bright spring-time, it was the sight of Rose and the baby on the veranda in the early morning sunlight—Rose, prettier than ever, laughing delightedly at the baby's earnest efforts to reach out over the row of flower-pots and clutch the swaying branches of the trees. Before going to his big studio on Fourteenth Street, to begin the work of the day, Van liked to smoke his after-breakfast pipe on the veranda and contemplate this pretty picture.

In the two years which had slipped away since his marriage a good deal more than he ever had dared even to hope for had come to pass. Thanks to his own pluck and hard work, which had won for him Uncle Mangan's substantial backing, he now was as successful an artist as there was to be found in all New York. At times, in contemplation of his good fortune, he was rather more than half inclined to think that he must be somebody else; an excess of mysticism that Rose resolutely refused to countenance—for in

such a case to whom was she married? she pertinently asked. As for Mr. Mangan Brown, from being rather a grumpy sort of an old fellow, he had come to be positively beaming—a sort of overgrown fairy godfather, as it were, to the whole household. Not even the most remote allusion did he now make to the commercial rather than natural genesis of Miss Caledonia's back hair: and by this sign Miss Caledonia knew that he had experienced a change of heart. Moreover, he was instant in good works to each of the several members of the family; indeed, the extraordinary gifts which he constantly brought home to little Madder (named for his grandfather, of course) kept Rose constantly in a condition between laughter and tears.

"What can Madder possibly do with a grindstone, Uncle Mangan?"

"Possibly nothing at present, my dear. But I remember when I was a boy and lived in the country, I wanted a grindstone more than anything else in the world—especially

after old Mitre Rabbit, the wheelwright, you know, said that I couldn't use his; and I am sure that Madder will be glad enough, when he is a little older, to have one of his own. It can go in the cellar until he wants it, and in the mean time it will be useful to sharpen the carving knife."

Rose shuddered as her imagination conjured up a ghastly picture of Madder more or less cut to pieces with the knives which the grindstone had made cruelly sharp; and she registered a mental vow that only over her dead body should her offspring ever come into possession of this shocking gift.

Now two of the most constant of the rather numerous visitors to this exceptionally happy household were young Orpiment and Mr. Gamboge. All the way along for the past twenty years or so, Mr. Gamboge had been in the habit of spending one or two evenings in each and every week in company with Mr. Mangan Brown—his friend and also his associate in trade. Mr. Gamboge and Mr. Mangan Brown had known each other ever

since they were boys; and M. Brown & Co., and Orpiment & Gamboge owned in partnership a tannery in Lycoming County, Pennsylvania, and in various other directions the interests of the two firms were identical. Ostensibly, the visits of Mr. Gamboge were for the purpose of quietly and comfortably talking over the affairs of the tannery; but it was an open secret—in part revealed by the exceptionally careful brushing bestowed upon his fuzzy, close-cropped, grayish hair, by the exceeding smoothness of his smooth-shaven, fresh-colored face, by the admirable precision of the cut and fit of his neat black clothes—that their real object was Miss Caledonia. And there was a pleasant twinkle in his kindly gray eyes when they happened to meet—as they very often did—Miss Caledonia's kindly brown ones, that made this open secret more open still.

In point of fact, for nearly the full term of the twenty years during which Mr. Gamboge had been making his weekly visits, he had held toward Miss Caledonia the somewhat

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trying position of an earnest but undeclared lover. His earnestness could not for a moment be doubted; but although Miss Caledonia—in a strictly proper and maidenly manner, be it understood—had contrived that he should have at least one opportunity in each week during the past twenty years for making to her a formal tender of the heart that she well knew without such tender was hers, it was a melancholy fact that each of these ten hundred and forty opportunities successively had been wasted.

"Did he say anything to-night, Caledonia?"

"No, brother, not to-night. I think—I think that next week——"

"Um. Possibly. Good-night, Caledonia."

"Good-night, brother."

This conversation between Mr. Mangan Brown and Miss Caledonia had come to be stereotyped. Before Mr. Mangan experienced his change of heart this was the occasion that he usually took for referring to the

commercial characteristics of her back hair in terms as pointed as they were unkind. And not seldom would he go even further, and advise that Miss Caledonia should investigate into the requirements precedent to admission into Saint Luke's Home for Aged Couples, on Hudson Street—assuring her that if ever she and Mr. Gamboge got so far along as to want a home for couples of any sort, this certainly would be the only home at all suited to their needs. Many and many a night, her night-cap being drawn well down over the thinly-thatched region that was covered luxuriantly by the hair of commerce by day, did Miss Caledonia fall asleep with tears in her gentle brown eyes and heaviness in her heart. But, being a round little woman of sanguine temperament, she managed on the whole to keep up her courage pretty well. Each week, when Mr. Gamboge meaningly pressed her plump little hand as he bade her good-night, yet left still unsaid what he had come expressly to say, she believed that the next week would see

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his moral strength established firmly at last; that then the words would be spoken which he so earnestly longed to utter, and which she so earnestly longed to hear. And so believing, Miss Caledonia lived on always in hope.

Now the trouble with Mr. Gamboge that made him keep silence in this provoking fashion was a constitutional indecision that he could in nowise overcome. Never did there live a man with less of positiveness in his nature than Mr. Gamboge had in his. This was the reason why he and Mr. Orpiment always had got along so well together. Mr. Orpiment, on the shortest notice, could be positive enough about anything for six ordinary people, and upon this superabundance of resolution Mr. Gamboge was accustomed to draw in order to make good his own lack. Indeed, he could not have adopted any other line of conduct without getting into difficulties, for Mr. Orpiment, as is the way with positive people the world over, could not tolerate even the most remote approach to positiveness on the part of anybody else. He might admit, perhaps, though certainly disdainfully, that in the abstract two or more opinions might be entertained upon a given subject; but the moment that the matter became concrete, his view narrowed into the unalterable conviction that there was just one single tenable opinion concerning it—and that was his. And, if peace was to be preserved, that opinion had to be adopted in a hurry. Mr. Gamboge, whose love of peace was so great that it was the only thing in the world that he would have fought for, always adopted his partner's opinions with a becoming alacrity. Nor did he, while Mr. Orpiment's convictions were in course of formation, venture to have any of his own. If appealed to under such conditions, his answer invariably was: "I am waiting to confer with Mr. Orpiment." And upon the rare occasions when, in some matter foreign to the affairs of the firm, he ventured so far as to express views distinctively his own, it had come to

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be his habit to preface his remarks with some such phrase as "Under these conditions, I think that Mr. Orpiment would say," or, "In a case of this sort, I think that Mr. Orpiment would do." The fact was observed, however, by people who knew both the members of the firm well, that what Mr. Gamboge thus said or did under the supposititious shelter of Mr. Orpiment's mantle, usually had a deal more of quiet good sense about it than probably would have been manifested had the matter really been settled by Mr. Orpiment himself.

For some time after that morning when Mr. Orpiment stayed at home and died in his bed instead of coming down-town in the Bleecker Street car, the habit of referring to his late partner's opinions increased upon Mr. Gamboge greatly. Not a hide, not even a kip, did he buy or sell without having something to say to the seller or buyer as to what Mr. Orpiment would have thought about the terms upon which the transaction was concluded. But again it was observed by cer-

tain long-headed leather-men down in the Swamp, that since the decease of the senior partner the firm of Orpiment & Gamboge was doing a much larger and also a much safer business than ever it had done while the very positive Mr. Orpiment was alive.

However, the habit of a life-time cannot be given over in a day. It is true that Mr. Gamboge, now that Mr. Orpiment was buried and done for, was beginning gradually to have a few opinions and a trifling amount of positiveness of his own; but as yet it was all too soon to expect him to possess, still less to act upon, a positive opinion touching this momentous matter of his own heart and Miss Caledonia's hand.

As to the other visitor at the Brown's, young Orpiment, matters were entirely different. With an energetic promptness that was strictly in keeping with the traditions of his family, he had declared his love for Verona under the most unfavorable circumstances and in the most unmistakable terms. With a disregard of prudence and reason

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that was positively heroic, he had made this avowal on the very day that his uncle had bidden him begone to his paint-pots and starve. Whether he thought that love, being had in sufficient quantities, would make starvation impossible, or that if he must starve it would be pleasanter to do it in loving company, I am not prepared to say; but it is a fact that in less than three hours after he had, as he put it, disinherited his uncle, he had asked Verona Brown to marry him—and Verona Brown, collapsing from the pinnacle of dignity upon which usually she was exalted, suffered her beautiful dark hair to be shockingly tumbled upon young Orpiment's shoulder, and, with infinite tenderness and infinite love in her sweet, low voice, told him very frankly that she would!

There was a suggestion, at least, of poetic justice in this reckless entanglement of Verona's affections by young Orpiment; for it was Vandyke Brown who had been very largely the cause of the entanglement of young Orpiment's affections by the goddess

Art, to the utter ruin of his exceptionally brilliant prospects in the leather business. Young Orpiment had artistic talent, possibly artistic genius, and Brown had the wit to perceive it. Without thinking of the harm that he might be doing, he urged young Orpiment to abandon the leather that he hated and to give himself to the art that he loved; and it was not until his advice was taken, and he was called upon to behold the pretty kettle of fish that had come of it, that he perceived what a serious responsibility the giving of advice involves. With his own dreary experience still fresh in mind, he realized far more clearly than young Orpiment did, or could, how nearly hopeless is the struggle for artistic success when the artist has to earn his daily bread as he goes along. But he kept these cheerful reflections to himself—that is to say, to himself and Rose. They were quite agreed that young Orpiment and Verona had a sufficiency of troubles in hand without being called upon to take any upon interest.

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To be sure, there was a ray of hope for a moment when Mr. Orpiment died, for young Orpiment was his legal and only heir. But this hope was promptly extinguished, or pretty nearly so, by Mr. Orpiment's extraordinary double-barrelled will—with that ominous legacy in the first barrel to the Protestant half-orphans.

"It will be just like the old wretch to have left those miserable half-orphans every cent of his money, Van," said Rose with energetic determination. "And a nice thing that will be, to be sure; turning all their heads by making so many millionaires of them!"

"The 'ome 'alf-orphan," observed Jaune d'Antimoine, who happened to be present when Rose thus freed her mind. "Ah, 'e is the estabelisment most curious in Tens Street. I 'ave much vondered at 'im. Tell me, my Van, what is this 'ome 'alf-orphan?"

"It's a place where they take care of children born with only one leg and one arm. Of course, children like that have to be taken

care of by somebody. It's a capital charity. We'll go down there some day and see 'em. They're a jolly queer lot; all go about hopping, you know."

"Nonsense, Van. Don't believe him, M. d'Antimoine. They are called half-orphans because they have only one father or one mother. I'm a half-orphan myself."

"Eh? But, truly, Madame Brown, it is not most common for the child to 'ave more than one father or one mother—not, that is, is it thought well that 'e should 'ave more. Ah, pardon! I forget that Madame says that she is 'erself 'alf-orphan. No doubt to be so is most well in this country. In America is not as in France."

M. d'Antimoine no more comprehended why Brown went off into such fits of laughter, nor why Rose blushed a little and laughed too, than he did the laborious explanation of the constituent elements of a half-orphan that Brown, under the circumstances, felt called upon to make to him.

But whether Mr. Orpiment's money was

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or was not destined for the use of this excellent charity, there was no ground for hoping that any part of it was destined for his nephew; the spiteful clause in the will forbidding Mr. Gamboge to give employment to young Orpiment cut hope in this direction short off. Obviously, this clause was put in to serve as a check upon any indiscretion that Mr. Gamboge might be led into by what Mr. Orpiment always had styled his absurdly soft heart; and it was a patent declaration of a tolerably positive sort that young Orpiment was disinherited. His sole fortune, under these circumstances, was a little property that had come down to him from his father, and that yielded him the magnificent income of four hundred and seventy-one dollars a year. However, this was enough to keep a roof over his head, and to feed him and to give him at very long intervals something in the way of new clothes. Mr. Gamboge, by artfully representing the solitariness of his own home, did his best to make young Orpiment come and

share it with him; but his uncommonly tall stories about his melancholy loneliness—stories, let us hope, which were promptly blotted out in the celestial account against him by the friendly tears of the recording angel—did not deceive his auditor. Gratefully, but decidedly, the tender thus made of exceedingly comfortable free quarters was declined. But the invitations to dinner that Mr. Gamboge and the Browns showered upon him could not be refused—at least not without giving pain; and so, while his raiment was anything but purple and fine linen, young Orpiment at least fared sumptuously pretty nearly every day. And he was cheered and comforted, as only the love of a good woman can cheer and comfort a man, by the love of Verona Brown.

Verona certainly manifested a most conspicuous lack of worldly wisdom in thus lavishing her affections upon a man whose fortunes were so near to being desperate. But then—excepting in the case of Mr. Mangan—worldly wisdom was not a promi-

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