

CHAPTER II.

HOW WILLIAM W. KOLDERUP, OF SAN FRANCISCO, WAS AT
LOGGERHEADS WITH J. R.

TASKINAR, OF STOCKTON.

A man extraordinarily rich, who counted dollars by the million as other men do by the thousand; such was William W. Kolderup.

People said he was richer than the Duke of Westminster, whose income is some \$4,000,000 a year, and who can spend his \$10,000 a day, or seven dollars every minute; richer than Senator Jones, of Nevada, who has \$35,000,000 in the funds; richer than Mr. Mackay himself, whose annual \$13,750,000 give him \$1560 per hour, or half-a-dollar to spend every second of his life.

I do not mention such minor millionaires as the Rothschilds, the Vanderbilts, the Dukes of Northumberland, or the Stewarts, nor the directors of the powerful bank of California, and other opulent personages of the old and new worlds whom William W. Kolderup would have been able to comfortably pension. He could, without inconvenience, have given away a million just as you and I might give away a shilling.

It was in developing the early placer-mining enterprises in California that our worthy speculator had laid the solid foundations of his

incalculable fortune. He was the principal associate of Captain Sutter, the Swiss, in the localities, where, in 1848, the first traces were discovered. Since then, luck and shrewdness combined had helped him on, and he had interested himself in all the great enterprises of both worlds. He threw himself boldly into commercial and industrial speculations. His inexhaustible funds were the life of hundreds of factories, his ships were on every sea. His wealth increased not in arithmetical but in geometrical progression. People spoke of him as one of those few "millionnaires" who never know how much they are worth. In reality he knew almost to a dollar, but he never boasted of it.

At this very moment when we introduce him to our readers with all the consideration such a many-sided man merits, William W. Kolderup had 2000

branch offices scattered over the globe, 80,000 employés in America, Europe, and Australia, 300,000 correspondents, a fleet of 500 ships which continually ploughed the ocean for his profit, and he was spending not less than a million a year in bill-stamps and postages. In short, he was the honour and glory of opulent Frisco--the nickname familiarly given by the Americans to the Californian capital.

A bid from William W. Kolderup could not but be a serious one. And when the crowd in the auction room had recognized who it was that by \$100,000 had capped the reserve price of Spencer Island, there was an irresistible sensation, the chaffing ceased instantly, jokes gave place to interjections of admiration, and cheers resounded through the saloon. Then a deep silence succeeded to the hubbub, eyes grew bigger, and ears

opened wider. For our part had we been there we would have had to hold our breath that we might lose nothing of the exciting scene which would follow should any one dare to bid against William W. Kolderup.

But was it probable? Was it even possible?

No! And at the outset it was only necessary to look at William W. Kolderup to feel convinced that he could never yield on a question where his financial gallantry was at stake.

He was a big, powerful man, with huge head, large shoulders, well-built limbs, firmly knit, and tough as iron. His quiet but resolute look was not willingly cast downwards, his grey hair, brushed up in front, was as abundant as if he were still young. The straight lines of his nose formed a geometrically-drawn right-angled triangle. No moustache; his beard cut in Yankee fashion bedecked his chin, and the two upper points met at the opening of the lips and ran up to the temples in pepper-and-salt whiskers; teeth of snowy whiteness were symmetrically placed on the borders of a clean-cut mouth. The head of one of those true kings of men who rise in the tempest and face the storm. No hurricane could bend that head, so solid was the neck which supported it. In these battles of the bidders each of its nods meant an additional hundred thousand dollars.

There was no one to dispute with him.

"Twelve hundred thousand dollars--twelve hundred thousand!" said the

auctioneer, with that peculiar accent which men of his vocation find most effective.

"Going at twelve hundred thousand dollars!" repeated Gingrass the crier.

"You could safely bid more than that," said Oakhurst, the bar-keeper;

"William Kolderup will never give in."

"He knows no one will chance it," answered the grocer from Merchant Street.

Repeated cries of "Hush!" told the two worthy tradesmen to be quiet. All wished to hear. All hearts palpitated. Dare any one raise his voice in answer to the voice of William W. Kolderup? He, magnificent to look upon, never moved. There he remained as calm as if the matter had no interest for him. But--and this those near to him noticed--his eyes were like revolvers loaded with dollars, ready to fire.

"Nobody speaks?" asked Dean Felporg.

Nobody spoke.

"Once! Twice!"

"Once! Twice!" repeated Gingrass, quite accustomed to this little dialogue with his chief.

"Going!"

"Going!"

"For twelve--hundred--thousand--dollars--Spencer--Island--com--plete!"

"For twelve--hundred--thousand--dollars!"

"That is so? No mistake?"

"No withdrawal?"

"For twelve hundred thousand dollars, Spencer Island!"

The waistcoats rose and fell convulsively. Could it be possible that at the last second a higher bid would come? Felporg with his right hand stretched on the table was shaking his ivory hammer--one rap, two raps, and the deed would be done.

The public could not have been more absorbed in the face of a summary application of the law of Justice Lynch!

The hammer slowly fell, almost touched the table, rose again, hovered an instant like a sword which pauses ere the drawer cleaves the victim in twain; then it flashed swiftly downwards.

But before the sharp rap could be given, a voice was heard giving

utterance to these four words,--

"Thirteen--hundred--thousand--dollars!"

There was a preliminary "Ah!" of general stupefaction, then a second "Ah!" of not less general satisfaction. Another bidder had presented himself! There was going to be a fight after all!

But who was the reckless individual who had dared to come to dollar strokes with William W. Kolderup of San Francisco?

It was J. R. Taskinar, of Stockton.

J. R. Taskinar was rich, but he was more than proportionately fat. He weighed 490 lbs. If he had only run second in the last fat-man show at Chicago, it was because he had not been allowed time to finish his dinner, and had lost about a dozen pounds.

This colossus, who had had to have special chairs made for his portly person to rest upon, lived at Stockton, on the San Joachim. Stockton is one of the most important cities in California, one of the depôt centres for the mines of the south, the rival of Sacramento the centre for the mines of the north. There the ships embark the largest quantity of Californian corn.

Not only had the development of the mines and speculations in wheat furnished J. R. Taskinar with the occasion of gaining an enormous

fortune, but petroleum, like another Pactolus, had run through his treasury. Besides, he was a great gambler, a lucky gambler, and he had found "poker" most prodigal of its favours to him.

But if he was a Croesus, he was also a rascal; and no one would have addressed him as "honourable," although the title in those parts is so much in vogue. After all, he was a good war-horse, and perhaps more was put on his back than was justly his due. One thing was certain, and that was that on many an occasion he had not hesitated to use his "Derringer"--the Californian revolver.

Now J. R. Taskinar particularly detested William W. Kolderup. He envied him for his wealth, his position, and his reputation. He despised him as a fat man despises a lean one. It was not the first time that the merchant of Stockton had endeavoured to do the merchant of San Francisco out of some business or other, good or bad, simply owing to a feeling of rivalry. William W. Kolderup thoroughly knew his man, and on all occasions treated him with scorn enough to drive him to distraction.

The last success which J. R. Taskinar could not forgive his opponent was that gained in the struggle over the state elections.

Notwithstanding his efforts, his threats, and his libels, not to mention the millions of dollars squandered by his electoral courtiers, it was William W. Kolderup who sat in his seat in the Legislative Council of Sacramento.

J. R. Taskinar had learnt--how, I cannot tell--that it was the intention

of William W. Kolderup to acquire possession of Spencer Island. This island seemed doubtless as useless to him as it did to his rival. No matter. Here was another chance for fighting, and perhaps for conquering. J. R. Taskinar would not allow it to escape him.

And that is why J. R. Taskinar had come to the auction room among the curious crowd who could not be aware of his designs, why at all points he had prepared his batteries, why before opening fire, he had waited till his opponent had covered the reserve, and why when William W. Kolderup had made his bid of--

"Twelve hundred thousand dollars!"

J. R. Taskinar at the moment when William W. Kolderup thought he had definitely secured the island, woke up with the words shouted in stentorian tones,--

"Thirteen hundred thousand dollars!"

Everybody as we have seen turned to look at him.

"Fat Taskinar!"

The name passed from mouth to mouth. Yes. Fat Taskinar! He was known well enough! His corpulence had been the theme of many an article in the journals of the Union.

I am not quite sure which mathematician it was who had demonstrated by transcendental calculations, that so great was his mass that it actually influenced that of our satellite and in an appreciable manner disturbed the elements of the lunar orbit.

But it was not J. R. Taskinar's physical composition which interested the spectators in the room. It was something far different which excited them; it was that he had entered into direct public rivalry with William W. Kolderup. It was a fight of heroes, dollar versus dollar, which had opened, and I do not know which of the two coffers would turn out to be best lined. Enormously rich were both these mortal enemies! After the first sensation, which was rapidly suppressed, renewed silence fell on the assembly. You could have heard a spider weaving his web.

It was the voice of Dean Felporg which broke the spell.

"For thirteen hundred thousand dollars, Spencer Island!" declaimed he, drawing himself up so as to better command the circle of bidders.

William W. Kolderup had turned towards J. R. Taskinar. The bystanders moved back, so as to allow the adversaries to behold each other. The man of Stockton and the man of San Francisco were face to face, mutually staring, at their ease. Truth compels me to state that they made the most of the opportunity. Never would one of them consent to lower his eyes before those of his rival.

"Fourteen hundred thousand dollars," said William W. Kolderup.

"Fifteen hundred thousand!" retorted J. R. Taskinar.

"Sixteen hundred thousand!"

"Seventeen hundred thousand!"

Have you ever heard the story of the two mechanics of Glasgow, who tried which should raise the other highest up the factory chimney at the risk of a catastrophe? The only difference was that here the chimney was of ingots of gold.

Each time after the capping bid of J. R. Taskinar, William W. Kolderup took a few moments to reflect before he bid again. On the contrary Taskinar burst out like a bomb, and did not seem to require a second to think.

"Seventeen hundred thousand dollars!" repeated the auctioneer. "Now, gentlemen, that is a mere nothing! It is giving it away!"

And one can well believe that, carried away by the jargon of his profession, he was about to add,--

"The frame alone is worth more than that!" When--

"Seventeen hundred thousand dollars!" howled Gingrass, the crier.

"Eighteen hundred thousand!" replied William W. Kolderup.

"Nineteen hundred thousand!" retorted J. R. Taskinar.

"Two millions!" quoth William W. Kolderup, and so quickly that this time he evidently had not taken the trouble to think. His face was a little pale when these last words escaped his lips, but his whole attitude was that of a man who did not intend to give in.

J. R. Taskinar was simply on fire. His enormous face was like one of those gigantic railway bull's-eyes which, screened by the red, signal the stoppage of the train. But it was highly probable that his rival would disregard the block, and decline to shut off steam.

This J. R. Taskinar felt. The blood mounted to his brows, and seemed apoplectically congested there. He wriggled his fat fingers, covered with diamonds of great price, along the huge gold chain attached to his chronometer. He glared at his adversary, and then shutting his eyes so as to open them with a more spiteful expression a moment afterwards.

"Two million, four hundred thousand dollars!" he remarked, hoping by this tremendous leap to completely rout his rival.

"Two million, seven hundred thousand!" replied William W. Kolderup in a peculiarly calm voice.

"Two million, nine hundred thousand!"

"Three millions!"

Yes! William W. Kolderup, of San Francisco, said three millions of dollars!

Applause rang through the room, hushed, however, at the voice of the auctioneer, who repeated the bid, and whose oscillating hammer threatened to fall in spite of himself by the involuntary movement of his muscles. It seemed as though Dean Felporg, surfeited with the surprises of public auction sales, would be unable to contain himself any longer.

All glances were turned on J. R. Taskinar. That voluminous personage was sensible of this, but still more was he sensible of the weight of these three millions of dollars, which seemed to crush him. He would have spoken, doubtless to bid higher--but he could not. He would have liked to nod his head--he could do so no more.

After a long pause, however, his voice was heard; feeble it is true, but sufficiently audible.

"Three millions, five hundred thousand!"

"Four millions," was the answer of William W. Kolderup.

It was the last blow of the bludgeon. J. R. Taskinar succumbed. The

hammer gave a hard rap on the marble table and--

Spencer Island fell for four millions of dollars to William W. Kolderup, of San Francisco.

"I will be avenged!" muttered J. R. Taskinar, and throwing a glance of hatred at his conqueror, he returned to the Occidental Hotel.

But "hip, hip, hurrah," three times thrice, smote the ears of William W. Kolderup, then cheers followed him to Montgomery Street, and such was the delirious enthusiasm of the Americans that they even forgot to favour him with the customary bars of "Yankee Doodle."