

The Clarion

By

Samuel Hopkins Adams

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The Clarion.....	4
THE CLARION	4
BY	4
SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS	4
WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY W.D. STEVENS.....	4
TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER	4
MYRON ADAMS	4
WHO LIVED AND DIED A SOLDIER OF IDEALS THIS BOOK IS REVERENTLY INSCRIBED.....	4
1. The Itinerant.....	5
2. Our Leading Citizen	19
3. Esmé	26
4. The Shop	29
CERTINA	30
CURES.....	30
5. The Scion.....	39
CERTINA A FAKE	49
6. Launched	52
7. The Owner	57
8. A Partnership	69
9. Glimmerings	81
10. In The Way Of Trade	91
11. The Initiate	103
12. The Thin Edge.....	114
13. New Blood	124
14. The Rookeries.....	130
15. Juggernaut.....	142
16. The Strategist	151
17. Reprisals.....	166
E.M. PIERCE DEFENDS DAUGHTER	169
MAGNATE INCENSED AT UNJUST ATTACKS.....	169
WILL PUSH CASE AGAINST HER	169
TRADUCERS TO A FINISH	169
18. Milly	175
19. Donnybrook.....	180
20. The Lesser Tempting	190
21. The Power Of Print.....	198
22. Patriots.....	207
23. Creeping Flame	215
24. A Failure In Tactics	225
25. Stern Logic.....	233
26. The Parting.....	241
27. The Greater Tempting.....	246

28. "Whose Bread I Eat"	258
29. Certina Charley.....	263
30. Illumination	270
31. The Voice Of The Prophet	280
32. The Warning.....	288
33. The Good Fight	293
34. Vox Populi	299
35. Tempered Metal.....	312
36. The Victory	318
37. McGuire Ellis Wakes Up.....	325
38. The Convert.....	332

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SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY W.D. STEVENS

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER

MYRON ADAMS

**WHO LIVED AND DIED A SOLDIER OF IDEALS
THIS BOOK IS REVERENTLY INSCRIBED**

1. The Itinerant

Between two flames the man stood, overlooking the crowd. A soft breeze, playing about the torches, sent shadows billowing across the massed folk on the ground. Shrewdly set with an eye to theatrical effect, these phares of a night threw out from the darkness the square bulk of the man's figure, and, reflecting garishly upward from the naked hemlock of the platform, accentuated, as in bronze, the bosses of the face, and gleamed deeply in the dark, bold eyes. Half of Marysville buzzed and chattered in the park-space below, together with many representatives of the farming country near by, for the event had been advertised with skilled appeal: cf. the "Canoga County Palladium," April 15, 1897, page 4.

The occupant of the platform, having paused, after a self-introductory trumpeting of professional claims, was slowly and with an eye to oratorical effect moistening lips and throat from a goblet at his elbow. Now, ready to resume, he raised a slow hand in an indescribable gesture of mingled command and benevolence. The clamor subsided to a murmur, over which his voice flowed and spread like oil subduing vexed waters.

"Pain. Pain. Pain. The primal curse, the dominant tragedy of life. Who among you, dear friends, but has felt it? You men, slowly torn upon the rack of rheumatism; you women, with the hidden agony gnawing at your breast" (his roving regard was swift, like a hawk, to mark down the sudden, involuntary quiver of a faded slattern under one of the torches); "all you who have known burning nights and pallid mornings, I offer you r-r-r-release!"

On the final word his face lighted up as from an inner fire of inspiration, and he flung his arms wide in an embracing benediction. The crowd, heavy-eyed, sodden, wondering, bent to him as the torch-fires bent to the breath of summer. With the subtle sense of the man who wrings his livelihood from human emotions, he felt the moment of his mastery approaching. Was it fully come yet? Were his fish securely in the net? Betwixt hovering hands he studied his audience.

His eyes stopped with a sense of being checked by the steady regard of one who stood directly in front of him only a few feet away; a solid-built, crisply outlined man of forty, carrying himself with a practical erectness, upon whose face there was a rather disturbing half-smile. The stranger's hand was clasped in that of a little girl, wide-eyed, elfin, and lovely.

"Release," repeated the man of the torches. "Blessed release from your torments. Peace out of pain."

The voice was of wonderful quality, rich and unctuous, the labials dropping, honeyed, from the lips. It wooed the crowd, lured it, enmeshed it. But the magician had, a little, lost confidence in the power of his spell. His mind dwelt uneasily upon his well-garbed auditor. What was he doing there, with his keen face and worldly, confident carriage,

amidst those clodhoppers? Was there peril in his presence? Your predatory creature hunts ever with fear in his heart.

"Guardy," the voice of the elfin child rang silvery in the silence, as she pressed close to her companion. "Guardy, is he preaching?"

"Yes, my dear little child." The orator saw his opportunity and swooped upon it, with a flash of dazzling teeth from under his pliant lips. "This sweet little girl asks if I am preaching. I thank her for the word. Preaching, indeed! Preaching a blessed gospel, for this world of pain and suffering; a gospel of hope and happiness and joy. I offer you, here, now, this moment of blessed opportunity, the priceless boon of health. It is within reach of the humblest and poorest as well as the millionaire. The blessing falls on all like the gentle rain from heaven."

His hands, outstretched, quivering as if to shed the promised balm, slowly descended below the level of the platform railing. Behind the tricolored cheesecloth which screened him from the waist down something stirred. The hands ascended again into the light. In each was a bottle. The speaker's words came now sharp, decisive, compelling.

"Here it is! Look at it, my friends. The wonder of the scientific world, the never-failing panacea, the despair of the doctors. All diseases yield to it. It revivifies the blood, reconstructs the nerves, drives out the poisons which corrupt the human frame. It banishes pain, sickness, weakness, and cheats death of his prey. Oh, grave, where is thy victory? Oh, death, where is thy power? Overcome by my marvelous discovery! Harmless as water! Sweet on the tongue as honey! Potent as a miracle! By the grace of Heaven, which has bestowed this secret upon me, I have saved five thousand men, women, and children from sure doom, in the last three years, through my swift and infallible remedy, Professor Certain's Vitalizing Mixture; as witness my undenied affidavit, sworn to before Almighty God and a notary public and published in every newspaper in the State."

Wonder and hope exhaled in a sigh from the assemblage. People began to stir, to shift from one foot to another, to glance about them nervously. Professor Certain had them. It needed but the first thrust of hand into pocket to set the avalanche of coin rolling toward the platform. From near the speaker a voice piped thinly:—

"Will it ease my cough?"

The orator bent over, and his voice was like a benign hand upon the brow of suffering.

"Ease it? You'll never know you had a cough after one bottle."

"We-ell, gimme—"

"Just a moment, my friend." The Professor was not yet ready. "Put your dollar back. There's enough to go around. Oh, Uncle Cal! Step up here, please."

An old negro, very pompous and upright, made his way to the steps and mounted.

"You all know old Uncle Cal Parks, my friends. You've seen him hobbling and hunching around for years, all twisted up with rheumatics. He came to me yesterday, begging for relief, and we began treatment with the Vitalizing Mixture right off. Look at him now. Show them what you can do, uncle."

Wild-eyed, the old fellow gazed about at the people. "Glory! Hallelujah!" Emotional explosives left over from the previous year's revival burst from his lips. He broke into a stiff, but prankish double-shuffle.

"I'd like to try some o' that on my old mare," remarked a facetious-minded rustic, below, and a titter followed.

"Good for man or beast," retorted the Professor with smiling amiability. "You've seen what the Vitalizing Mixture has done for this poor old colored man. It will do as much or more for any of you. And the price is Only One Dollar!" The voice double-capitalized the words. "Don't, for the sake of one hundred little cents, put off the day of cure. Don't waste your chance. Don't let a miserable little dollar stand between you and death. Come, now. Who's first?"

The victim of the "cough" was first, closely followed by the mare-owning wit. Then the whole mass seemed to be pressing forward, at once. Like those of a conjurer, the deft hands of the Professor pushed in and out of the light, snatching from below the bottles handed up to him, and taking in the clinking silver and fluttering greenbacks. And still they came, that line of grotesques, hobbling, limping, sprawling their way to the golden promise. Never did Pied Piper flute to creatures more bemused. Only once was there pause, when the dispenser of balm held aloft between thumb and finger a cart-wheel dollar.

"Phony!" he said curtly, and flipped it far into the darkness. "Don't any more of you try it on," he warned, as the thwarted profferer of the counterfeit sidled away, and there was, in his tone, a dominant ferocity.

Presently the line of purchasers thinned out. The Vitalizing Mixture had exhausted its market. But only part of the crowd had contributed to the levy. Mainly it was the men, whom the "spiel" had lured. Now for the women. The voice, the organ of a genuine artist, took on a new cadence, limpid and tender.

"And now, we come to the sufferings of those who bear pain with the fortitude of the angels. Our women-folk! How many here are hiding that dreadful malady, cancer? Hiding it, when help and cure are at their beck and call. Lady," he bent swiftly to the slattern under the torch and his accents were a healing effluence, "with my soothing, balmy oils, you can cure yourself in three weeks, or your money back."

"I do' know haow you knew," faltered the woman. "I ain't told no one yet. Kinder hoped it wa'n't thet, after all."

He brooded over her compassionately. "You've suffered needlessly. Soon it would have been too late. The Vitalizing Mixture will keep up your strength, while the soothing, balmy oils drive out the poison, and heal up the sore. Three and a half for the two. Thank you. And is there some suffering friend who you can lead to the light?"

The woman hesitated. She moved out to the edge of the crowd, and spoke earnestly to a younger woman, whose comely face was scarred with the chiseling of sleeplessness.

"Joe, he wouldn't let me," protested the younger woman. "He'd say 't was a waste."

"But ye'll be cured," cried the other in exaltation. "Think of it. Ye'll sleep again o' nights."

The woman's hand went to her breast, with a piteous gesture. "Oh, my God! D'yeh think it could be true?" she cried.

"Accourse it's true! Didn't yeh hear whut he sayed? Would he dast swear to it if it wasn't true?"

Tremulously the younger woman moved forward, clutching her shawl about her.

"Could yeh sell me half a bottle to try it, sir?" she asked.

The vender shook his head. "Impossible, my dear madam. Contrary to my fixed professional rule. But, I'll tell you what I will do. If, in three days you're not better, you can have your money back."

She began painfully to count out her coins. Reaching impatiently for his price, the Professor found himself looking straight into the eyes of the well-dressed stranger.

"Are you going to take that woman's money?"

The question was low-toned but quite clear. An uneasy twitching beset the corners of the professional brow. For just the fraction of a second, the outstretched hand was stayed. Then:—

"That's what I am. And all the others I can get. Can I sell *you* a bottle?"

Behind the suavity there was the impudence of the man who is a little alarmed, and a little angry because of the alarm.

"Why, yes," said the other coolly. "Some day I might like to know what's in the stuff."

"Hand up your cash then. And here you are—Doctor. It *is* 'Doctor,' ain't it?"

"You've guessed it," returned the stranger.

At once the platform peddler became the opportunist orator again.

"A fellow practitioner, in my audience, ladies and gentlemen; and doing me the honor of purchasing my cure. Sir," the splendid voice rose and soared as he addressed his newest client, "you follow the noblest of callings. My friends, I would rather heal a people's ills than determine their destinies."

Giving them a moment to absorb that noble sentiment, he passed on to his next source of revenue: Dyspepsia. He enlarged and expatiated upon its symptoms until his subjects could fairly feel the grilling at the pit of their collective stomach. One by one they came forward, the yellow-eyed, the pasty-faced feeders on fried breakfasts, snatchers of hasty noon-meals, sleepers on gorged stomachs. About them he wove the glamour of his words, the arch-seducer, until the dollars fidgeted in their pockets.

"Just one dollar the bottle, and pain is banished. Eat? You can eat a cord of hickory for breakfast, knots and all, and digest it in an hour. The Vitalizing Mixture does it."

Assorted ills came next. In earlier spring it would have been pneumonia and coughs. Now it was the ailments that we have always with us: backache, headache, indigestion and always the magnificent promise. So he picked up the final harvest, gleaning his field.

"Now,"—the rotund voice sunk into the confidential, sympathetic register, yet with a tone of saddened rebuke,—“there are topics that the lips shrink from when ladies are present. But I have a word for you young men. Young blood! Ah, young blood, and the fire of life! For that we pay a penalty. Yet we must not overpay the debt. To such as wish my private advice—*private*, I say, and sacredly confidential—” He broke off and leaned out over the railing. “Thousands have lived to bless the name of Professor Certain, and his friendship, at such a crisis; thousands, my friends. To such, I shall be available for consultation from nine to twelve to-morrow, at the Moscow Hotel. Remember the time and place. Men only. Nine to twelve. And all under the inviolable seal of my profession.”

Some quality of unexpressed insistence in the stranger—or was it the speaker's own uneasiness of spirit?—brought back the roving, brilliant eyes to the square face below.

"A little blackmail on the side, eh?"

The words were spoken low, but with a peculiar, abrupt crispness. This, then, was direct challenge. Professor Certain tautened. Should he accept it, or was it safer to ignore this pestilent disturber? Craft and anger thrust opposing counsels upon him. But determination of the issue came from outside.

"Lemme through."

From the outskirts of the crowd a rawboned giant forced his way inward. He was gaunt and unkempt as a weed in winter.

"Here's trouble," remarked a man at the front. "Allus comes with a Hardscrabblar."

"What's a Hardscrabblar?" queried the well-dressed man.

"Feller from the Hardscrabble Settlement over on Corsica Lake. Tough lot, they are. Make their own laws, when they want any; run their place to suit themselves. Ain't much they ain't up to. Hoss-stealin', barn-burnin', boot-leggin', an' murder thrown in when—"

"Be you the doctor was to Corsica Village two years ago?" The newcomer's high, droning voice cut short the explanation.

"I was there, my friend. Testimonials and letters from some of your leading citizens attest the work—"

"You give my woman morpheeian." There was a hideous edged intonation in the word, like the whine of some plaintive and dangerous animal.

"My friend!" The Professor's hand went forth in repressive deprecation. "We physicians give what seems to us best, in these cases."

"A reg'lar doctor from Burnham seen her," pursued the Hardscrabblar, in the same thin wail, moving nearer, but not again raising his eyes to the other's face. Instead, his gaze seemed fixed upon the man's shining expanse of waistcoat. "He said you doped her with the morpheeian you give her."

"So your chickens come home to roost, Professor," said the stranger, in a half-voice.

"Impossible," declared the Professor, addressing the Hardscrabblar. "You misunderstood him."

"They took my woman away. They took her to the 'sylum."

Foreboding peril, the people nearest the uncouth visitor had drawn away. Only the stranger held his ground; more than held it, indeed, for he edged almost imperceptibly nearer. He had noticed a fleck of red on the matted beard, where the lip had been bitten into. Also he saw that the Professor, whose gaze had so timorously shifted from his, was intent, recognizing danger; intent, and unafraid before the threat.

"She used to cry fer it, my woman. Cry fer the morpheeian like a baby." He sagged a step forward. "She don't haff to cry no more. She's dead."

Whence had the knife leapt, to gleam so viciously in his hand? Almost as swiftly as it was drawn, the healer had snatched one of the heavy torch-poles from its socket. Almost,

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