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OF  
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VOL. 3085.

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# CLARENCE.

BY

BRET HARTE,

AUTHOR OF "THE LUCK OF ROARING CAMP," ETC.

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LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1895.

# CLARENCE.

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## PART I.

### CHAPTER I.

As Clarence Brant, President of the Robles Land Company, and husband of the rich widow of John Peyton, of the Robles Ranche, mingled with the outgoing audience of the Cosmopolitan Theatre, at San Francisco, he elicited the usual smiling nods and recognition due to his good looks and good fortune. But as he hurriedly slipped through the still lingering winter's rain into the smart *coupé* that was awaiting him, and gave the order "Home," the word struck him with a peculiarly ironical significance. His home was a handsome one, and lacked nothing in appointment and comfort, but he had gone to the theatre to evade its hollow loneliness. Nor was it because his wife was not there, for he had a miser-



able consciousness that her temporary absence had nothing to do with his homelessness. The distraction of the theatre over, that dull, vague, but aching sense of loneliness which was daily growing upon him returned with greater vigour.

He leaned back in the *coupé* and gloomily reflected.

He had been married scarcely a year, yet even in the illusions of the honeymoon, the woman, older than himself, and the widow of his old patron, had half unconsciously reasserted herself, and slipped back into the domination of her old position. It was at first pleasant enough—this half-maternal protectorate which is even apt to mingle with the affections of younger women—and Clarence, in his easy, half-feminine intuition of the sex, yielded, as the strong are apt to yield, through the very consciousness of their own superiority. But this is a quality the weaker are not apt to recognise, and the woman who has once tasted equal power with her husband not only does not easily relegate it, but even makes its continuance a test of the affections. The usual triumphant feminine conclusion, "Then you no longer love me," had in Clarence's brief experience gone even further and reached its inscrutable climax, "Then I no longer love you," although shown only

in a momentary hardening of the eye and voice. And added to this was his sudden, but confused remembrance that he had seen that eye and heard that voice in marital altercation during Judge Peyton's life, and that he himself, her boy partisan, had sympathised with her. Yet, strange to say, this had given him more pain than her occasional other reversions to the past—to her old suspicions of him when he was a youthful *protégé* of her husband's and a presumed suitor of her adopted daughter Susy. High natures are more apt to forgive wrong done to themselves than any abstract injustice. And her capricious tyranny over her dependants and servants, or an unreasoning enmity to a neighbour or friend outraged his finer sense more than her own misconception of himself. Nor did he dream that this was a thing most women seldom understand, or understanding, ever forgive.

The *coupé* rattled over the stones or swirled through the muddy pools of the main thoroughfares. Newspaper and telegraphic offices were still brilliantly lit, and crowds were gathered among the bulletin boards. He knew that news had arrived from Washington that evening of the first active outbreaks of Secession, and that the city was breathless with excitement. Had he not just come from the theatre,

where certain insignificant allusions in the play had been suddenly caught up and cheered or hissed by hitherto unknown partisans, to the dumb astonishment of a majority of the audience comfortably settled to money-getting and their own affairs alone! Had he not applauded, albeit half-scornfully, the pretty actress—his old playmate Susy—who had audaciously and all incongruously waved the American flag in their faces. Yes! he had known it; had lived for the last few weeks in an atmosphere electrically surcharged with it—and yet it had chiefly affected him in his personal homelessness. For his wife was a Southerner, a born slaveholder, and a Secessionist, whose noted prejudices to the North had even outrun her late husband's politics. At first the piquancy and recklessness of her opinionative speech amused him as part of her characteristic flavour or as a lingering youthfulness which the maturer intellect always pardons. He had never taken her politics seriously—why should he? With her head on his shoulder he had listened to her extravagant diatribes against the North. He had forgiven her outrageous indictment of his caste and his associates for the sake of the imperious but handsome lips that uttered it. But when he was compelled to listen to her words echoed and repeated by her friends and