Coniston, Book II

Winston Churchill

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BOOK II

CHAPTER I. IN THE TANNERY HOUSE

ONE day, in the November following William Wetherell's death, Jethro Bass astonished Coniston by moving to the little cottage in the village which stood beside the disused tannery, and which had been his father's. It was known as the tannery house. His reasons for this step, when at length discovered, were generally commended: they were, in fact, a disinclination to leave a girl of Cynthia's tender age alone on Thousand Acre Hill while he journeyed on his affairs about the country. The Rev. Mr. Satterlee, gaunt, red−faced, but the six feet of him a man and a Christian, from his square−toed boots to the bleaching yellow hair around his temples, offered to become her teacher. For by this time Cynthia had exhausted the resources of the little school among the birches.

The four years of her life in the tannery house which are now briefly to be chronicled were, for her, full of happiness and peace. Though the young may sorrow, they do not often mourn. Cynthia missed her father; at times, when the winds kept her wakeful at night, she wept for him. But she loved Jethro Bass and served him with a devotion that filled his heart with strange ecstasies yes, and forebodings. In all his existence he had never known a love like this. He may have imagined it once, back in the bright days of his youth; but the dreams of its

fulfilment had fallen far short of the exquisite touch of the reality in which he now spent his days at home. In summer, when she sat, in the face of all the conventions of the village, reading under the butternut tree before the house, she would feel his eyes upon her, and the mysterious yearnings in them would startle her. Often during her lessons with Mr. Satterlee in the parlor of the parsonage she would hear a noise outside and perceive Jethro leaning against the pillar. Both Cynthia and Mr. Satterlee knew that he was there, and both, by a kind of tacit agreement, ignored the circumstance.

Cynthia, in this period, undertook Jethro's education, too. She could have induced him to study the making of Latin verse by the mere asking. During those days which he spent at home, and which he had grown to value beyond price, he might have been seen seated on the ground with his back to the butternut tree while Cynthia read aloud from the well−worn books which had been her father's treasures, books that took on marvels of meaning from her lips. Cynthia's powers of selection were not remarkable at this period, and perhaps it was as well that she never knew the effect of the various works upon the hitherto untamed soul of her listener. Milton and Tennyson and Longfellow awoke in him by their very music troubled and half−formed regrets; Carlyle's "Frederick the Great" set up tumultuous imaginings; but the "Life of Jackson" (as did the story of Napoleon long ago) stirred all that was masterful in his blood. Unlettered as he was, Jethro had a power which often marks the American of action a singular grasp of the application of any sentence or paragraph to his own life; and often, about this time, he took away the breath of a judge or a senator by flinging at them a chunk of Carlyle or Parton.

It was perhaps as well that Cynthia was not a woman at this time, and that she had grown up with him, as it were. His love, indeed, was that of a father for a daughter; but it held within it as a core the revived love of his youth for Cynthia, her mother. Tender as were the manifestations of this love, Cynthia never guessed the fires within, for there was in truth something primeval in the fierceness of his passion. She was his now his alone, to cherish and sweeten the declining years of his life, and when by a chance Jethro looked upon her and thought of the suitor who was to come in the fulness of her years, he burned with a hatred which it is given few men to feel. It was well for Jethro that these thoughts came not often.

Sometimes, in the summer afternoons, they took long drives through the town behind Jethro's white horse on business. "Jethro's gal," as Cynthia came to be affectionately called, held the reins while Jethro went in to talk to the men folk. One August evening found Cynthia thus beside a poplar in front of Amos Cuthbert's farmhouse, a poplar that shimmered green−gold in the late afternoon, and from the buggy−seat Cynthia looked down upon a thousand purple hilltops and mountain peaks of another state. The view aroused in the girl visions of the many wonders which life was to hold, and she did not hear the sharp voice beside her until the woman had spoken twice. Jethro came out in the middle of the conversation, nodded to Mrs. Cuthbert, and drove off.

"Uncle Jethro," asked Cynthia, presently, "what is a mortgage?"

Jethro struck the horse with the whip, an uncommon action with him, and the buggy was jerked forward sharply over the boulders.

"Er who's b'en talkin' about mortgages, Cynthy?" he demanded.

"Mrs. Cuthbert said that when folks had mortgages held over them they had to take orders whether they liked them or not. She said that Amos had to do what you told him because there was a mortgage. That isn't so, is it?"

Jethro did not speak. Presently Cynthia laid her hand over his.

"Mrs. Cuthbert is a spiteful woman," she said. "I know the reason why people obey you it's because you're so great. And Daddy used to tell me so."

A tremor shook Jethro's frame and the hand on which hers rested, and all the way down the mountain valleys to Coniston village he did not speak again. But Cynthia was used to his silences, and respected them.

To Ephraim Prescott, who, as the days went on, found it more and more difficult to sew harness on account of his rheumatism, Jethro was not only a great man but a hero. For Cynthia was vaguely troubled at having found one discontent. She was wont to entertain Ephraim on the days when his hands failed him, when he sat sunning himself before the door; and she knew that he was honest.

"Who's b'en talkin' to you, Cynthia?" he cried. "Why, Jethro's the biggest man I know, and the best. I don't like to think where some of us would have b'en if he hadn't given us a lift."

"But he has enemies, Cousin Eph," said Cynthia, still troubled.

"What great man hain't?" exclaimed the soldier. "Jethro's enemies hain't worth thinkin' about."

The thought that Jethro had enemies was very painful to Cynthia, and she wanted to know who they were that she might show them a proper contempt if she met them. Lem Hallowell brushed aside the subject with his usual bluff humor, and pinched her cheek and told her not to trouble her head; Amanda Hatch dwelt upon the inherent weakness in the human race, and the Rev. Mr. Satterlee faced the question once, during a history lesson. The nation's heroes came into inevitable comparison with Jethro Bass. Was Washington so good a man? and would not Jethro have been as great as the Father of his Country if he had had the opportunities?

The answers sorely tried Mr. Satterlee's conscience, albeit he was not a man of the world. It set him thinking. He liked Jethro, this man of rugged power whose word had become law in the state. He knew best that side of him which Cynthia saw; and if the truth be told as a native of Coniston Mr. Satterlee felt in the bottom of his heart a certain pride in Jethro. The minister's opinions well represented the attitude of his time. He had not given thought to the subject for such matters had come to be taken for granted. A politician now was a politician, his ways and standards set apart from those of other citizens, and not to be judged by men without the pale of public life. Mr. Satterlee in his limited vision did not then trace the matter to its source, did not reflect that Jethro Bass himself was almost wholly responsible in that state for the condition of politics and politicians. Coniston was proud of Jethro, prouder of him than ever since his last great victory in the Legislature, which brought the Truro Railroad through to Harwich and settled their townsman more firmly than ever before in the seat of power. Every statesman who drove into their little mountain village and stopped at the tannery house made their blood beat faster. Senators came, and representatives, and judges, and governors, "to git their orders," as Rias Richardson briefly put it, and Jethro could make or unmake them at a word. Each was scanned from the store where Rias now reigned supreme, and from the harness shop across the road. Some drove away striving to bite from their lips the tell−tale smile which arose in spite of them; others tried to look happy, despite the sentence of doom to which they had listened.

Jethro Bass was indeed a great man to make such as these tremble or rejoice. When he went abroad with Cynthia awheel or afoot, some took off their hats an unheard−of thing in Coniston. If he stopped at the store, they scanned his face for the mood he was in before venturing their remarks; if he lingered for a moment in front of the house of Amanda Hatch, the whole village was advised of the circumstance before nightfall.

Two personages worthy of mention here visited the tannery house during the years that Cynthia lived with Jethro. The Honorable Heth Sutton drove over from Clovelly attended by his prime minister, Mr. Bijah Bixby. The Honorable Heth did not attempt to conceal the smile with which he went away, and he stopped at the store long enough to enable Rias to produce certain refreshments from depths unknown to the United States Internal Revenue authorities. Mr. Sutton shook hands with everybody, including Jake Wheeler. Well he might. He came to Coniston a private citizen, and drove away to all intents and purposes a congressman: the darling wish of his life realized after heaven knows how many caucuses and conventions of disappointment, when Jethro had judged it

expedient for one reason or another that a north countryman should go. By the time the pair reached Brampton, Chamberlain Bixby was introducing his chief as Congressman Sutton, and by this title he was known for many years to come.

Another day, when the snow lay in great billows on the ground and filled the mountain valleys, when the pines were rusty from the long winter, two other visitors drove to Coniston in a two−horse sleigh. The sun was shining brightly, the wind held its breath, and the noon−day warmth was almost like that of spring. Those who know the mountain country will remember the joy of many such days. Cynthia, standing in the sun on the porch, breathing deep of the pure air, recognized, as the sleigh drew near, the somewhat portly gentleman driving, and the young woman beside him regally clad in furs who looked patronizingly at the tannery house as she took the reins. The young woman was Miss Cassandra Hopkins, and the portly gentleman, the Honorable Alva himself, patron of the drama, who had entered upon his governorship and now wished to be senator.

"Jethro Bass home?" he called out.

"Mr. Bass is home," answered Cynthia. The girl in the sleigh murmured something, laughing a little, and Cynthia flushed. Mr. Hopkins gave a somewhat peremptory knock at the door and was admitted by Millicent Skinner, but Cynthia stood staring at Cassandra in the sleigh, some instinct warning her of a coming skirmish.

"Do you live here all the year round?"

"Of course," said Cynthia.

Miss Cassandra shrugged as though that were beyond her comprehension.

"I'd die in a place like this," she said. "No balls, or theatres. Doesn't your father take you around the state?" "My father's dead," said Cynthia.

"Oh! Your name's Cynthia Wetherell, isn't it? You know Bob Worthington, don't you? He's gone to Harvard now, but he was a great friend of mine at Andover."

Cynthia didn't answer. It would not be fair to say that she felt a pang, though it might add to the romance of this narrative. But her dislike for the girl in the sleigh decidedly increased. How was she, in her inexperience, to know that the radiant beauty in furs was what the boys at Phillips Andover called an "old stager."

"So you live with Jethro Bass," was Miss Cassandra's next remark. "He's rich enough to take you round the state and give you everything you want."

"I have everything I want," replied Cynthia.

"I shouldn't call living here having everything I wanted," declared Miss Hopkins, with a contemptuous glance at the tannery house.

"I suppose you wouldn't," said Cynthia.

Miss Hopkins was nettled. She was out of humor that day, besides she shared some of her father's political ambition. If he went to Washington, she went too.

"Didn't you know Jethro Bass was rich?" she demanded, imprudently. "Why, my father gave twenty thousand dollars to be governor, and Jethro Bass must have got half of it."

Cynthia's eyes were of that peculiar gray which, lighted by love or anger, once seen, are never forgotten. One hand was on the dashboard of the cutter, the other had seized the seat. Her voice was steady, and the three words she spoke struck Miss Hopkins with startling effect.

Miss Hopkins's breath was literally taken away, and for once she found no retort. Let it be said for her that this was a new experience with a new creature. A demure country girl turn into a wildcat before her very eyes! Perhaps it was as well for both that the door of the house opened and the Honorable Alva interrupted their talk, and without so much as a glance at Cynthia he got hurriedly into the sleigh and drove off. When Cynthia turned, the points of color still high in her cheeks and the light still ablaze in her eyes, she surprised Jethro gazing at her from the porch, and some sorrow she felt rather than beheld stopped the confession on her lips. It would be unworthy of her even to repeat such slander, and the color surged again into her face for very shame of her anger. Cassandra Hopkins had not been worthy of it.

Jethro did not speak, but slipped his hand into hers, and thus they stood for a long time gazing at the snow fields between the pines on the heights of Coniston.

The next summer was the first which the painter pioneer of summer visitors there spent at Coniston. He was an unsuccessful painter, who became, by a process which he himself does not today completely understand, a successful writer of novels. As a character, however, he himself confesses his inadequacy, and the chief interest in him for the readers of this narrative is that he fell deeply in love with Cynthia Wetherell at nineteen. It is fair to mention in passing that other young men were in love with Cynthia at this time, notably Eben Hatch history repeating itself. Once, in a moment of madness, Eben confessed his love, the painter never did: and he has to this day a delicious memory which has made Cynthia the heroine of many of his stories. He boarded with Chester Perkins, and he was humored by the village as a harmless but amiable lunatic.

The painter had never conceived that a New England conscience and a temper of no mean proportions could dwell together in the body of a wood nymph. When he had first seen Cynthia among the willows by Coniston Water, he had thought her a wood nymph. But she scolded him for his impropriety with so unerring a choice of words that he fell in love with her intellect, too. He spent much of his time to the neglect of his canvases under the butternut tree in front of Jethro's house trying to persuade Cynthia to sit for her portrait; and if Jethro himself had not overheard one of these arguments, the portrait never would have been painted. Jethro focussed a look upon the painter.

"Er painter−man, be you? Paint Cynthy's picture?" "But I don't want to be painted, Uncle Jethro. I won't be painted!"

"H−how much for a good picture? Er only want the best only want the best."

The painter said a few things, with pardonable heat, to the effect − well, never mind the effect. His remarks made no impression whatever upon Jethro.

"Er paint the picture paint the picture, and then we'll talk about the price. Er wait a minute."

He went into the house, and they heard him lumbering up the stairs. Cynthia sat with her back to the artist, pretending to read, but presently she turned to him.

"I'll never forgive you never, as long as I live," she cried, "and I won't be painted!"

"N−not to please me, Cynthy?" It was Jethro's voice.

Her look softened. She laid down the book and went up to him on the porch and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Do you really want it so much as all that, Uncle Jethro?" she said.

"Callate I do, Cynthy," he answered. He held a bundle covered with newspaper in his hand, he looked down at Cynthia.

He seated himself on the edge of the porch and for the moment seemed lost in revery. Then he began slowly to unwrap the newspaper from the bundle: there were five layers of it, but at length he disclosed a bolt of cardinal cloth.

"Call this to mind, Cynthy?"

"Yes," she answered with a smile.

"H−how's this for the dress, Mr. Painter−man?" said Jethro, with a pride that was ill−concealed.

The painter started up from his seat and took the material in his hands and looked at Cynthia. He belonged to a city club where he was popular for his knack of devising costumes, and a vision of Cynthia as the daughter of a Doge of Venice arose before his eyes. Wonder of wonders, the daughter of a Doge discovered in a New England hill village! The painter seized his pad and pencil and with a few strokes, guided by inspiration, sketched the costume then and there and held it up to Jethro, who blinked at it in astonishment. But Jethro was suspicious of his own sensations.

"Er well Godfrey g−guess that'll do." Then came the involuntary: "W−wouldn't a−thought you had it in you. How about it, Cynthy?" and he held it up for her inspection.

"If you are pleased, it's all I care about, Uncle Jethro," she answered, and then, her face suddenly flushing, "You must promise me on your honor that nobody in Coniston shall know about it, 'Mr. Painter−man.'"

After this she always called him "Mr. Painter−man," when she was pleased with him.

So the cardinal cloth was come to its usefulness at last. It was inevitable that Sukey Kittredge, the village seamstress, should be taken into confidence. It was no small thing to take Sukey into confidence, for she was the legitimate successor in more ways than one of Speedy Bates, and much of Cynthia and the artist's ingenuity was spent upon devising a form of oath which would hold Sukey silent. Sukey, however, got no small consolation from the sense of the greatness of the trust confided in her, and of the uproar she could make in Coniston if she chose. The painter, to do him justice, was the real dressmaker, and did everything except cut the cloth and sew it together. He sent to friends of his in the city for certain paste jewels and ornaments, and one day Cynthia stood in the old tannery shed − hastily transformed into a studio before a variously moved audience. Sukey, having adjusted the last pin, became hysterical over her handiwork, Millicent Skinner stared open−mouthed, words having failed her for once, and Jethro thrust his hands in his pockets in a quiet ecstasy of approbation.

"A−always had a notion that cloth'd set you off, Cynthy," said he, "er next time I go to the state capital you come along g−guess it'll surprise 'em some."

"I guess it would, Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia, laughing.

Jethro postponed two political trips of no small importance to be present at the painting of that picture, and he would sit silently by the hour in a corner of the shed watching every stroke of the brush. Never stood Doge's daughter in her jewels and seed pearls amidst stranger surroundings, the beam, and the centre post around which the old white horse had toiled in times gone by, and all the piled−up, disused machinery of forgotten days. And never was Venetian lady more unconscious of her environment than Cynthia.

The portrait was of the head and shoulders alone, and when he had given it the last touch, the painter knew that, for once in his life, he had done a good thing. Never before, perhaps, had the fire of such inspiration been given him. Jethro, who expressed himself in terms (for him) of great enthusiasm, was for going to Boston immediately to purchase a frame commensurate with the importance of such a work of art, but the artist had his own views on that subject and sent to New York for this also.

The day after the completion of the picture a rugged figure in rawhide boots and coonskin cap approached Chester Perkins's house, knocked at the door, and inquired for the "Painter−man." It was Jethro. The "Painter−man" forthwith went out into the rain behind the shed, where a somewhat curious colloquy took place.

"G−guess I'm willin' to pay you full as much as it's worth," said Jethro, producing a cowhide wallet. "Er what figure do you allow it comes to with the frame?"

The artist was past taking offence, since Jethro had long ago become for him an engrossing study.

"I will send you the bill for the frame, Mr. Bass," he said, "the picture belongs to Cynthia."

"Earn your livin' by paintin', don't you earn your livin'?"

The painter smiled a little bitterly.

"No," he said, "if I did, I shouldn't be alive. Mr. Bass, have you ever done anything the pleasure of doing which was pay enough, and to spare?"

Jethro looked at him, and something very like admiration came into the face that was normally expressionless. He put up his wallet a little awkwardly, and held out his hand more awkwardly.

"You be more of a feller than I thought for," he said, and strode off through the drizzle toward Coniston. The painter walked slowly to the kitchen, where Chester Perkins and his wife were sitting down to supper.

"Jethro got a mortgage on you, too?" asked Chester.

The artist had his reward, for when the picture was hung at length in the little parlor of the tannery house it became a source of pride to Coniston second only to Jethro himself.

CHAPTER II. CHIEFLY CONCERNING THE NATIONAL GAME

TIME passes, and the engines of the Truro Railroad are now puffing in and out of the yards of Worthington's mills in Brampton, and a fine layer of dust covers the old green stage which has worn the road for so many years over Truro Gap. If you are ever in Brampton, you can still see the stage, if you care to go into the back of what was once Jim Sanborn's livery stable, now owned by Mr. Sherman of the Brampton House.

Conventions and elections had come and gone, and the Honorable Heth Sutton had departed triumphantly to Washington, cheered by his neighbors in Clovelly. Chamberlain Bixby was left in charge there, supreme. Who could be more desirable as a member of Congress than Mr. Sutton, who had so ably served his party (and Jethro) by holding the House against the insurgents in the matter of the Truro Bill? Mr. Sutton was, moreover, a gentleman, an owner of cattle and land, a man of substance whom lesser men were proud to mention as a friend a very hill−Rajah with stock in railroads and other enterprises, who owed allegiance and paid tribute alone to the Great Man of Coniston.

Mr. Sutton was one who would make himself felt even in the capital of the United States felt and heard. And he had not been long in the Halls of Congress before he made a speech which rang under the very dome of the Capitol. So said the Brampton and Harwich papers, at least, though rivals and detractors of Mr. Sutton declared that they could find no matter in it which related to the subject of a bill, but that is neither here nor there. The oration began with a lengthy tribute to the resources and history of his state, and ended by a declaration that the speaker was in Congress at no man's bidding, but as the servant of the common people of his district.

Under the lamp of the little parlor in the tannery house, Cynthia (who has now arrived at the very serious age of nineteen) was reading the papers to Jethro and came upon Mr. Sutton's speech. There were four columns of it, but Jethro seemed to take delight in every word; and portions of the noblest parts of it, indeed, he had Cynthia read over again. Sometimes, in the privacy of his home, Jethro was known to chuckle, and to Cynthia's surprise he chuckled more than usual that evening.

"Uncle Jethro," she said at length, when she had laid the paper down, "I thought that you sent Mr. Sutton to Congress."

Jethro leaned forward.

"What put that into your head, Cynthy?" he asked.

"Oh," answered the girl, "everybody says so, Moses Hatch, Rias, and Cousin Eph. Didn't you?"

Jethro looked at her, as she thought, strangely.

"You're too young to know anything about such things, Cynthy," he said, "too young."

"But you make all the judges and senators and congressmen in the state, I know you do. Why," exclaimed Cynthia, indignantly, "why does Mr. Sutton say the people elected him when he owes everything to you?"

Jethro rose abruptly and flung a piece of wood into the stove, and then he stood with his back to her. Her instinct told her that he was suffering, though she could not fathom the cause, and she rose swiftly and drew him down into the chair beside her.

"What is it?" she said anxiously. "Have you got rheumatism, too, like Cousin Eph? All old men seem to have rheumatism."

"No, Cynthy, it ain't rheumatism," he managed to answer; "wimmen folks hadn't ought to mix up in politics. They they don't understand 'em, Cynthy."

"But I shall understand them some day, because I am your daughter now that now that I have only you, I am your daughter, am I not?"

"Yes, yes," he answered huskily, with his hand on her hair.

"And I know more than most women now," continued Cynthia, triumphantly. "I'm going to be such a help to you soon very soon. I've read a lot of history, and I know some of the Constitution by heart. I know why old Timothy Prescott fought in the Revolution it was to get rid of kings, wasn't it, and to let the people have a chance? The people can always be trusted to do what is right, can't they, Uncle Jethro?"

Jethro was silent, but Cynthia did not seem to notice that. After a space she spoke again:

"I've been thinking it all out about you, Uncle Jethro."

"A−about me?"

"Yes, I know why you are able to send men to Congress and make judges of them. It's because the people have chosen you to do all that for them you are so great and good."

Jethro did not answer.

Although the month was March, it was one of those wonderful still nights that sometimes come in the mountain−country when the wind is silent in the notches and the stars seem to burn nearer to the earth. Cynthia awoke and lay staring for an instant at the red planet which hung over the black and ragged ridge, and then she arose quickly and knocked at the door across the passage.

"Are you ill, Uncle Jethro?"

"No," he answered, "no, Cynthy. Go to bed. Er I was just thinkin' − thinkin', that's all, Cynthy."

Though all his life he had eaten sparingly, Cynthia noticed that he scarcely touched his breakfast the next morning, and two hours later he went unexpectedly to the state capital. That day, too, Coniston was clothed in clouds, and by afternoon a wild March snowstorm was sweeping down the face of the mountain, piling against doorways and blocking the roads. Through the storm Cynthia fought her way to the harness shop, for Ephraim Prescott had taken to his bed, bound hand and foot by rheumatism.

Much of that spring Ephraim was all but helpless, and Cynthia spent many days nursing him and reading to him. Meanwhile the harness industry languished. Cynthia and Ephraim knew, and Coniston guessed, that Jethro was taking care of Ephraim, and strong as was his affection for Jethro the old soldier found dependence hard to bear. He never spoke of it to Cynthia, but he used to lie and dream through the spring days of what he might have done if the war had not crippled him. For Ephraim Prescott, like his grandfather, was a man of action a keen, intelligent American whose energy, under other circumstances, might have gone toward the making of the West. Ephraim, furthermore, had certain principles which some in Coniston called cranks; for instance, he would never apply for a pension, though he could easily have obtained one. Through all his troubles, he held grimly to the ideal which meant more to him than ease and comfort, that he had served his country for the love of it.

With the warm weather he was able to be about again, and occasionally to mend a harness, but Doctor Rowell shook his head when Jethro stopped his buggy in the road one day to inquire about Ephraim. Whereupon Jethro went on to the harness shop. The inspiration, by the way, had come from Cynthia.

"Er Ephraim, how'd you like to be postmaster? H−haven't any objections to that kind of a job, hev you?"

"Why no," said Ephraim. "We hain't agoin' to hev a post−office at Coniston air we?"

"H−how'd you like to be postmaster at Brampton?" demanded Jethro, abruptly.

Ephraim dropped the trace he was shaving.

"Postmaster at Brampton!" he exclaimed.

"H−how'd you like it?" said Jethro again.

"Well," said Ephraim, "I hain't got any objections."

Jethro started out of the shop, but paused again at the door. "W−won't say nothin' about it, will you, Eph?" he inquired.

"Not till I git it," answered Ephraim. The sorrows of three years were suddenly lifted from his shoulders, and for an instant Ephraim wanted to dance until he remembered the rheumatism and the Wilderness leg. Suddenly a thought struck him, and he hobbled to the door and called out after Jethro's retreating figure. Jethro returned.

"Well?" he said, "well?"

"What's the pay?" said Ephraim, in a whisper.

Jethro named the sum instantly, also in a whisper.

"You don't tell me!" said Ephraim, and sank stupefied into the chair in front of the shop, where lately he had spent so much of his time.

Jethro chuckled twice on his way home: he chuckled twice again to Cynthia's delight at supper, and after supper he sent Millicent Skinner to find Jake Wheeler. Jake, as usual, was kicking his heels in front of the store, talking to Rias and others about the coming Fourth of July celebrations at Brampton. Brampton, as we know, was famous for its Fourth of July celebrations. Not neglecting to let it be known that Jethro had sent for him, Jake hurried off through the summer twilight to the tannery house, bowed ceremoniously to Cynthia under the butternut tree, and discovered Jethro behind the shed. It was usually Jethro's custom to allow the other man to being the conversation, no matter how trivial the subject a method which had commended itself to Mr. Bixby and other minor politicians who copied him. And usually the other man played directly into Jethro"s hands. Jake Wheeler always did, and now, to cover the awkwardness of the silence, he began on the Brampton celebration.

"They tell me Heth Sutton's a−goin' to make the address seems prouder than ever sence he went to Congress. I guess you'll tell him what to say when the time comes, Jethro."

"Er goin' to Clovelly after wool this week, Jake?"

"I kin go to−morrow," said Jake, scenting an affair.

"Er goin' to Clovelly after wool this week, Jake?" Jake reflected. He saw it was expedient that this errand should not smell of haste.

"I was goin' to see Cutter on Friday," he answered.

"Er if you should happen to meet Heth −"

"Yes," interrupted Jake.

"If by chance you should happen to meet Heth, or Bije" (Jethro knew that Jake never went to Clovelly without a conference with one or the other of these personages, if only to be able to talk about it afterward at the store), "er what would you say to 'em?"

"Why," said Jake, scratching his head for the answer," I'd tell him you was at Coniston."

"Think we'll have rain, Jake?" inquired Jethro, blandly.

Jake wended his way back to the store, filled with renewed admiration for the great man. Jethro had given him no instructions whatever, could deny before a jury if need be that he had sent him (Jake) to Clovelly to tell Heth Sutton to come to Coniston for instructions on the occasion of his Brampton speech. And Jake was filled with a mysterious importance when he took his seat once more in the conclave.

Jake Wheeler, although in many respects a fool, was one of the most efficient pack of political hounds that the state has ever known. By six o'clock on Friday morning he was descending a brook valley on the Clovelly side of the mountain, and by seven was driving between the forest and river meadows of the Rajah's domain, and had come in sight of the big white house with its somewhat pretentious bay−windows and Gothic doorway; it might be dubbed the palace of these parts. The wide river flowed below it, and the pastures so wondrously green in the morning sun were dotted with fat cattle and sheep. Jake was content to borrow a cut of tobacco from the superintendent and wander aimlessly around the farm until Mr. Sutton's family prayers and breakfast were accomplished. We shall not concern ourselves with the message or the somewhat lengthy manner in which it was delivered. Jake had merely dropped in by accident, but the Rajah listened coldly while he picked his teeth, said he didn't know whether he was going to Brampton or not − hadn't decided; didn't know whether he could get to Coniston or not his affairs were multitudinous now. In short, he set Jake to thinking deeply as his horse walked up the western heights of Coniston on the return journey. He had, let it be repeated, a sure instinct once his nose was fairly on the scent, and he was convinced that a war of great magnitude was in the air, and he, Jake Wheeler, was probably the first in all the state to discover it! His blood leaped at the thought.

The hill−Rajah's defiance, boiled down, could only mean one thing, − that somebody with sufficient power and money was about to lock horns with Jethro Bass. Not for a moment did Jake believe that, for all his pomp and circumstance, the Honorable Heth Sutton was a big enough man to do this. Jake paid to the Honorable Heth all the outward respect that his high position demanded, but he knew the man through and through. He thought of the Honorable Heth's reform speech in Congress, and laughed loudly in the echoing woods. No, Mr. Sutton was not the man to lead a fight. But to whom had he promised his allegiance? This question puzzled Mr. Wheeler all the way home, and it may be said finally for many days thereafter. He slid into Coniston in the dusk, big with impending events, which he could not fathom. As to giving Jethro the careless answer of the hill−Rajah, that was another matter.

The Fourth of July came at last, nor was any contradiction made in the Brampton papers that the speech of the Honorable Heth Sutton had been cancelled. Instead, advertisements appeared in the Brampton Clarion announcing the fact in large letters. When Cynthia read this advertisement to Jethro, he chuckled again. They were under the butternut tree, for the evenings were long now.

"Will you take me to Brampton, Uncle Jethro?" said she, letting fall the paper on her lap.

"W−who's to get in the hay?" said Jethro. "Hay on the Fourth of July!" exclaimed Cynthia, "why, that's sacrilege! You'd much better come and hear Mr. Sutton's speech it will do you good."

Cynthia could see that Jethro was intensely amused, for his eyes had a way of snapping on such occasions when he was alone with her. She was puzzled and slightly offended, because, to tell the truth, Jethro had spoiled her.

"Very well, then," she said, "I'll go with the Painter−man."

Jethro came and stood over her, his expression the least bit wistful.

"Er Cynthy," he said presently, "hain't fond of that Painter−man, be you?"

"Why, yes," said Cynthia, "aren't you?"

"He's fond of you," said Jethro, "sh−shouldn't be surprised if he was in love with you."

Cynthia looked up at him, the corners of her mouth twitching, and then she laughed. The Rev. Mr. Satterlee, writing his Sunday sermon in his study, heard her and laid down his pen to listen.

"Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia, "sometimes I forget that you're a great, wise man, and I think that you are just a silly old goose."

Jethro wiped his face with his blue cotton handkerchief.

"Then you hain't a−goin' to marry the Painter−man?" he said.

"I'm not going to marry anybody," cried Cynthia, contritely; "I'm going to live with you and take care of you all my life."

On the morning of the Fourth, Cynthia drove to Brampton with the Painter−man, and when he perceived that she was dreaming, he ceased to worry her with his talk. He liked her dreaming, and stole many glances at her face of which she knew nothing at all. Through the cool and fragrant woods, past the mill−pond stained blue and white by the sky, and scented clover fields and wayside flowers nodding in the morning air Cynthia saw these things in the memory of another journey to Brampton. On that Fourth her father had been with her, and Jethro and Ephraim and Moses and Amanda Hatch and the children. And how well she recalled, too, standing amidst the curious crowd before the great house which Mr. Worthington had just built.

There are weeks and months, perhaps, when we do not think of people, when our lives are full and vigorous, and then perchance a memory will bring them vividly before us so vividly that we yearn for them. There rose before Cynthia now the vision of a boy as he stood on the Gothic porch of the house, and how he had come down to the wondering country people with his smile and his merry greeting, and how he had cajoled her into lingering in front of the meeting−house. Had he forgotten her? With just a suspicion of a twinge, Cynthia remembered that Janet Duncan she had seen at the capital, whom she had been told was the heiress of the state. When he had graduated from Harvard, Bob would, of course, marry her. That was in the nature of things.

To some the great event of that day in Brampton was to be the speech of the Honorable Heth Sutton in the meeting−house at eleven; others (and this party was quite as numerous) had looked forward to the base−ball game between Brampton and Harwich in the afternoon. The painter would have preferred to walk up meeting−house hill with Cynthia, and from the cool heights look down upon the amphitheatre in which the town was built. But Cynthia was interested in history, and they went to the meeting−house accordingly, where she listened for an hour and a half to the patriotic eloquence of the representative. The painter was glad to see and hear so great a man in the hour of his glory, though so much as a fragment of the oration does not now remain in his memory. In size, in figure, in expression, in the sonorous tones of his voice, Mr. Sutton was everything that a congressman should be. "The people," said Isaac D. Worthington in presenting him, "should indeed be proud of such an able and high−minded representative." We shall have cause to recall that word high−minded. Many persons greeted Cynthia outside the meeting−house, for the girl seemed genuinely loved by all who knew her too much loved, her companion thought, by certain spick−and−span young men of Brampton. But they ate the lunch Cynthia had brought, far from the crowd, under the trees by Coniston Water. It was she who proposed going to the base−ball game, and the painter stifled a sigh and acquiesced. Their way brought them down Brampton Street, past a house with great, iron dogs on the lawn, so imposing and cityfied that he hung back and asked who lived there.

"Mr. Worthington," answered Cynthia, making to move on impatiently.

Her escort did not think much of the house, but it interested him as the type which Mr. Worthington had built. On that same Gothic porch, sublimely unconscious of the covert stares and subdued comments of the passers−by, the

first citizen himself and the Honorable Heth Sutton might be seen. Mr. Worthington, whose hawklike look had become more pronounced, sat upright, while the Honorable Heth, his legs crossed, filled every nook and cranny of an arm−chair, and an occasional fragrant whiff from his cigar floated out to those on the tar sidewalk. Although the pedestrians were but twenty feet away, what Mr. Worthington said never reached them; but the Honorable Heth on public days carried his voice of the Forum around with him.

"Come on," said Cynthia, in one of those startling little tempers she was subject to; "don't stand there like an idiot."

Then the voice of Mr. Sutton boomed toward them.

"As I understand, Worthington," they heard him say, "you want me to appoint young Wheelock for the Brampton post−office." He stuck his thumb into his vest pocket and recrossed his legs. "I guess it can he arranged."

When the painter at last overtook Cynthia the jewel points he had so often longed to catch upon a canvas were in her eyes. He fell back, wondering how he could so greatly have offended, when she put her hand on his sleeve. "Did you hear what he said about the Brampton post−office?" she cried.

"The Brampton post−office?" he repeated, dazed.

"Yes," said Cynthia; "Uncle Jethro has promised it to Cousin Ephraim, who will starve without it. Did you hear this man say he would give it to Mr. Wheelock?"

Here was a new Cynthia, aflame with emotions on a question of politics of which he knew nothing. He did understand, however, her concern for Ephraim Prescott, for he knew that she loved the soldier. She turned from the painter now with a gesture which he took to mean that his profession debarred him from such vital subjects, and she led the way to the fair−grounds. There he meekly bought tickets, and they found themselves hurried along in the eager crowd toward the stand.

The girl was still unaccountably angry over that mysterious affair of the post−office, and sat with flushed cheeks staring out on the green field, past the line of buggies and carryalls on the farther side to the southern shoulder of Coniston towering above them all. The painter, already beginning to love his New England folk, listened to the homely chatter about him, until suddenly a cheer starting in one corner ran like a flash of gunpowder around the field, and eighteen young men trotted across the turf. Although he was not a devotee of sport, he noticed that nine of these, as they took their places on the bench, wore blue, the Harwich Champions. Seven only of those scattering over the field wore white; two young gentlemen, one at second base and the other behind the batter, wore gray uniforms with crimson stockings, and crimson piping on the caps, and a crimson H embroidered on the breast a sight that made the painter's heart beat a little faster, the honored livery of his own college.

"What are those two Harvard men doing here?" he asked.

Cynthia, who was leaning forward, started, and turned to him a face which showed him that his question had been meaningless. He repeated it. "Oh," said she, "the tall one, burned brick−red like an Indian, is Bob Worthington."

"He's a good type," the artist remarked.

"You're right, Mister, there hain't a finer young feller anywhere," chimed in Mr. Dodd, a portly person with a tuft of yellow beard on his chin. Mr. Dodd kept the hardware store in Brampton.

"And who," asked the painter, "is the bullet−headed little fellow, with freckles and short red hair, behind the bat?"

"I don't know," said Cynthia, indifferently.

"Why," exclaimed Mr. Dodd, with just a trace of awe in his voice, "that's Somers Duncan, son of Millionaire Duncan down to the capital. I guess," he added, "I guess them two will be the richest men in the state some day. Duncan come up from Harvard with Bob."

In a few minutes the game was in full swing, Brampton against Harwich, the old rivalry in another form. Every advantage on either side awoke thundering cheers from the partisans; beribboned young women sprang to their feet and waved the Harwich blue at a home run, and were on the verge of tears when the Brampton pitcher struck out their best batsman. But beyond the facts that the tide was turning in Brampton's favor; that young Mr. Worthington stopped a ball flying at a phenomenal speed and batted another at a still more phenomenal speed which was not stopped; that his name and Duncan's were mingled generously in the cheering, the painter remembered little of the game. The exhibition of human passions which the sight of it drew from an undemonstrative race: the shouting, the comments wrung from hardy spirits off their guard, the joy and the sorrow, such things interested him more. High above the turmoil Coniston, as through the ages, looked down upon the scene impassive.

He was aroused from these reflections by an incident. Some one had leaped over the railing which separated the stand from the field and stood before Cynthia, a tanned and smiling young man in gray and crimson. His honest eyes were alight with an admiration that was unmistakable to the painter perhaps to Cynthia also, for a glow that might have been of annoyance or anger, and yet was like the color of the mountain sunrise, answered in her cheek. Mr. Worthington reached out a large brown hand and seized the girl's as it lay on her lap.

"Hello, Cynthia," he cried, "I"ve been looking for you all day. I thought you might be here. Where were you?"

"Where did you look?" answered Cynthia, composedly, withdrawing her hand.

"Everywhere," said Bob, "up and down the street, all through the hotel. I asked Lem Hallowell, and he didn"t know where you were. I only got here last night myself."

"I was in the meeting−house," said Cynthia.

"The meeting−house!" he echoed. "You don't mean to tell me that you listened to that silly speech of Sutton's?"

This remark, delivered in all earnestness, was the signal for uproarious laughter from Mr. Dodd and others sitting near by, attending earnestly to the conversation.

Cynthia bit her lip.

"Yes, I did," she said; "but I"m sorry now."

"I should think you would be," said Bob; "Sutton's a silly, pompous old fool. I had to sit through dinner with him. I believe I could represent the district better myself."

"By gosh!" exploded Mr. Dodd, "I believe you could!"

But Bob paid no attention to him. He was looking at Cynthia.

"Cynthia, you've grown up since I saw you," he said. "How's Uncle Jethro?"

"He's well thanks," said Cynthia, and now she was striving to put down a smile.

"Still running the state?" said Bob. "You tell him I think he ought to muzzle Sutton. What did he send him down to Washington for?"

"I don't know," said Cynthia.

"What are you going to do after the game?" Bob demanded. "I"m going home, of course," said Cynthia.

His face fell.

"Can't you come to the house for supper and stay for the fireworks?" he begged pleadingly. "We'd be mighty glad to have your friend, too."

Cynthia introduced her escort.

"It's very good of you, Bob," she said, with that New England demureness which at times became her so well, "but we couldn't possibly do it. And then I don't like Mr. Sutton."

"Oh, hang him!" exclaimed Bob. He took a step nearer to her. "Won't you stay this once? I have to go West in the morning."

"I think you are very lucky," said Cynthia.

Bob scanned her face searchingly, and his own fell.

"Lucky!" he cried, "I think it's the worst thing that ever happened to me. My father's so hard−headed when he gets his mind set he's making me do it. He wants me to see the railroads and the country, so I've got to go with the Duncans. I wanted to stay −" He checked himself, "I think it's a blamed nuisance."

"So do I," said a voice behind him.

It was not the first time that Mr. Somers Duncan had spoken, but Bob either had not heard him or pretended not to. Mr. Duncan's freckled face smiled at them from the top of the railing, his eyes were on Cynthia's face, and he had been listening eagerly. Mr. Duncan's chief characteristic, beyond his freckles, was his eagerness a quality probably amounting to keenness.

"Hello," said Bob, turning impatiently, "I might have known you couldn't keep away. You're the cause of all my troubles you and your father's private car."

Somers became apologetic.

"It isn"t my fault," he said; "I'm sure I hate going as much as you do. It's spoiled my summer, too."

Then he coughed and looked at Cynthia.

"Well," said Bob, "I suppose I'll have to introduce you. This," he added, dragging his friend over the railing, "is Mr. Somers Duncan." "I'm awfully glad to meet you, Miss Wetherell," said Somers, fervently; "to tell you the truth, I thought he was just making up yarns."

"Yarns?" repeated Cynthia, with a look that set Mr. Duncan floundering.

"Why, yes," he stammered. "Worthy said that you were up here, but I thought he was crazy the way he talked I didn't think −"

"Think what?" inquired Cynthia, but she flushed a little.

"Oh, rot, Somers!" said Bob, blushing furiously under his tan; "you ought never to go near a woman you're the darndest fool with 'em I ever saw."

This time even the painter laughed outright, and yet he was a little sorrowful, too, because he could not be even as these youths. But Cynthia sat serene, the eternal feminine of all the ages, and it is no wonder that Bob Worthington was baffled as he looked at her. He lapsed into an awkwardness quite as bad as that of his friend.

"I hope you enjoyed the game," he said at last, with a formality that was not at all characteristic.

Cynthia did not seem to think it worth while to answer this, so the painter tried to help him out.

"That was a fine stop you made, Mr. Worthington," he said; "wasn't it, Cynthia?"

"Everybody seemed to think so," answered Cynthia, cruelly; "but if I were a man and had hands like that" (Bob thrust them in his pockets), "I believe I could stop a ball, too."

Somers laughed uproariously.

"Good−by," said Bob, with uneasy abruptness, "I've got to go into the field now. When can I see you?"

"When you get back from the West perhaps," said Cynthia.

"Oh," cried Bob (they were calling him), "I must see you to−night!" He vaulted over the railing and turned. "I'll come back here right after the game," he said; "there's only one more inning."

"We'll come back right after the game," repeated Mr. Duncan. Bob shot one look at him, of which Mr. Duncan seemed blissfully unconscious, and stalked off abruptly to second base.

The artist sat pensive for a few moments, wondering at the ways of women, his sympathies unaccountably enlisted in behalf of Mr. Worthington.

"Weren't you a little hard on him?" he said.

For answer Cynthia got to her feet.

"I think we ought to be going home," she said.

"Going home!" he ejaculated in amazement.

"I promised Uncle Jethro I'd be there for supper," and she led the way out of the grand stand.

So they drove back to Coniston through the level evening light, and when they came to Ephraim Prescott's harness shop the old soldier waved at them cheerily from under the big flag which he had hung out in honor of the day. The flag was silk, and incidentally Ephraim's most valued possession. Then they drew up before the tannery house, and Cynthia leaped out of the buggy and held out her hand to the painter with a smile.

"It was very good of you to take me," she said.

Jethro Bass, rugged, uncouth, in rawhide boots and swallowtail and coonskin cap, came down from the porch to welcome her, and she ran toward him with an eagerness that started the painter to wondering afresh over the contrasts of life. What, he asked himself, had Fate in store for Cynthia Wetherell?

CHAPTER III. JOURNEYS TO GO

"H−HAVE a good time, Cynthy?" said Jethro, looking down into her face. Love had wrought changes in Jethro, mightier changes than he suspected, and the girl did not know how zealous were the sentries of that love, how watchful they were, and how they told him often and again whether her heart, too, was smiling.

"It was very gay," said Cynthia.

"P−painter−man gay?" inquired Jethro.

Cynthia's eyes were on the orange line of the sunset over Coniston, but she laughed a little, indulgently.

"Cynthy?"

"Yes."

"Er that Painter−man hain't such a bad fellow w−why didn't you ask him in to supper?"

"I'll give you three guesses," said Cynthia, but she did not wait for them. "It was because I wanted to be alone with you. Milly's gone out, hasn't she?"

"G−gone a−courtin'," said Jethro.

She smiled, and went into the house to see whether Milly had done her duty before she left. It was characteristic of Cynthia not to have mentioned the subject which was agitating her mind until they were seated on opposite sides of the basswood table.

"Uncle Jethro," she said, "I thought you told Mr. Sutton to give Cousin Eph the Brampton post−office? Do you trust Mr. Sutton?" she demanded abruptly.

"Er why?" said Jethro. "Why?"

"Because I don't," she answered with conviction; "I think he's a big fraud. He must have deceived you, Uncle Jethro. I can't see why you ever sent him to Congress."

Although Jethro was in no mood for mirth, he laughed in spite of himself, for he was an American. His lifelong habit would have made him defend Heth to any one but Cynthia.

"'D you see Heth, Cynthy?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the girl, disgustedly, "I should say I did, but not to speak to him. He was sitting on Mr. Worthington's porch, and I heard him tell Mr. Worthington he would give the Brampton post−office to Dave Wheelock. I don't want you to think that I was eavesdropping," she added quickly; "I couldn't help hearing it."

Jethro did not answer.

"You'll make him give the post−office to Cousin Eph, won't you, Uncle Jethro?"

"Yes," said Jethro, very simply, "I will." He meditated awhile, and then said suddenly, "W−won't speak about it will you, Cynthy?"

"You know I won't," she answered.

Let it not be thought by any chance that Coniston was given over to revelry and late hours, even on the Fourth of July. By ten o'clock the lights were out in the tannery house, but Cynthia was not asleep. She sat at her window watching the shy moon peeping over Coniston ridge, and she was thinking, to be exact, of how much could happen in one short day and how little in a long month. She was aroused by the sound of wheels and the soft beat of a horse's hoofs on the dirt road: then came stifled laughter, and suddenly she sprang up alert and tingling. Her own name came floating to her through the darkness.

The next thing that happened will be long remembered in Coniston. A tentative chord or two from a guitar, and then the startled village was listening with all its might to the voices of two young men singing "When I first went up to Harvard" probably meant to disclose the identity of the serenaders, as if that were necessary! Coniston, never having listened to grand opera, was entertained and thrilled, and thought the rendering of the song better on the whole than the church choir could have done it, or even the quartette that sung at the Brampton celebrations behind the flowers. Cynthia had her own views on the subject.

There were five other songs Cynthia remembers all of them, although she would not confess such a thing. "Naughty, naughty Clara," was another one; the other three were almost wholly about love, some treating it flippantly, others seriously this applied to the last one, which had many farewells in it. Then they went away, and the crickets and frogs on Coniston Water took up the refrain.

Although the occurrence was unusual, it might almost be said epoch−making, Jethro did not speak of it until they had reached the sparkling heights of Thousand Acre Hill the next morning. Even then he did not look at Cynthia.

"Know who that was last night, Cynthy?" he inquired, as though the matter were a casual one.

"I believe," said Cynthia, heroically, "I believe it was a boy named Somers Duncan and Bob Worthington."

"Er Bob Worthington," repeated Jethro, but said nothing more.

Of course Coniston, and presently Brampton, knew that Bob Worthington had serenaded Cynthia and Coniston and Brampton talked. It is noteworthy that (with the jocular exceptions of Ephraim and Lem Hallowell) they did not talk to the girl herself. The painter had long ago discovered that Cynthia was an individual. She had good blood in her: as a mere child she had shouldered the responsibility of her father; she had a natural aptitude for books a quality reverenced in the community; she visited, as a matter of habit, the sick and the unfortunate; and lastly (perhaps the crowning achievement) she had bound Jethro Bass, of all men, with the fetters of love. Of course I have ended up by making her a paragon, although I am merely stating what people thought of her. Coniston decided at once that she was to marry the heir to the Brampton Mills. But the heir had gone West, and as the summer wore on, the gossip died down. Other and more absorbing gossip took its place: never distinctly formulated, but whispered; always wishing for more definite news that never came. The statesmen drove out from Brampton to the door of the tannery house, as usual, only it was remarked by astute observers and Jake Wheeler that certain statesmen did not come who had been in the habit of coming formerly. In short, those who made it a custom to observe such matters felt vaguely a disturbance of some kind. The organs of the people felt it, and

became more guarded in their statements. What no one knew, except Jake and a few in high places, was that a war of no mean magnitude was impending.

There were three men in the State and perhaps only three who realized from the first that all former political combats would pale in comparison to this one to come. Similar wars had already started in other states, and when at length they were fought out another twist had been given to the tail of a long−suffering Constitution; political history in the United States had to be written from an entirely new and unforeseen standpoint, and the unsuspecting people had changed masters.

This was to be a war of extermination of one side or the other. No quarter would be given or asked, and every weapon hitherto known to politics would be used. Of the three men who realized this, and all that would happen if one side or the other were victorious, one was Alexander Duncan, another Isaac D. Worthington, and the third was Jethro Bass.

Jethro would never have been capable of being master of the state had he not foreseen the time when the railroads, tired of paying tribute, would turn and try to exterminate the boss. The really astonishing thing about Jethro's foresight (known to few only) was that he perceived clearly that the time would come when the railroads and other aggregations of capital would exterminate the boss, or at least subserviate him. This alone, the writer thinks, gives him some right to greatness. And Jethro Bass made up his mind that the victory of the railroads, in his state at least, should not come in his day. He would hold and keep what he had fought all his life to gain.

Jethro knew, when Jake Wheeler failed to bring him a message back from Clovelly, that the war had begun, and that Isaac D. Worthington, commander of the railroad forces in the field, had captured his pawn, the hill−Rajah. By getting through to Harwich, the Truro had made a sad muddle in railroad affairs. It was now a connecting link; and its president, the first citizen of Brampton, a man of no small importance in the state. This fact was not lost upon Jethro, who perceived clearly enough the fight for consolidation that was coming in the next Legislature.

Seated on an old haystack on Thousand Acre Hill, that sits in turn on the lap of Coniston, Jethro smiled as he reflected that the first trial of strength in this mighty struggle was to be over (what the unsuspecting world would deem a trivial matter) the postmastership of Brampton. And Worthington's first move in the game would be to attempt to capture for his faction the support of the Administration itself.

Jethro thought the view from Thousand Acre Hill, especially in September, to be one of the sublimest efforts of the Creator. It was September, the first of the purple months in Coniston, not the red−purple of the Maine coast, but the blue−purple of the mountains, the color of the bloom of the Concord grape. His eyes, sweeping the mountain from the notch to the granite ramp of the northern buttress, fell on the weather−beaten little farmhouse in which he had lived for many years, and rested lovingly on the orchard, where the golden early apples shone among the leaves. But Jethro was not looking at the apples.

"Cynthy," he called out abruptly, "h−how'd you like to go to Washington?"

"Washington!" exclaimed Cynthia. "When?"

"N−now to−morrow." Then he added uneasily, "C−can't you get ready?" Cynthia laughed.

"Why, I'll go to−night, Uncle Jethro," she answered.

"Well," he said admiringly, "you hain't one of them clutterin' females. We can get some finery for you in New York, Cynthy. D−don't want any of them town ladies to put you to shame. Er not that they would," he added hastily "not that they would."

Cynthia climbed up beside him on the haystack.

"Uncle Jethro," she said solemnly, "when you make a senator or a judge, I don't interfere, do I?"

He looked at her uneasily, for there were moments when he could not for the life of him make out her drift.

"N−no," he assented, "of course not, Cynthy."

"Why is it that I don't interfere?"

"I callate," answered Jethro, still more uneasily, "I callate it's because you're a woman."

"And don't you think," asked Cynthia, "that a woman ought to know what becomes her best?"

Jethro reflected, and then his glance fell on her approvingly.

"G−guess you're right, Cynthy," he said. "I always had some success in dressin' up Listy, and that kind of set me up."

On such occasions he spoke of his wife quite simply. He had been genuinely fond of her, although she was no more than an episode in his life. Cynthia smiled to herself as they walked though the orchard to the place where the horse was tied, but she was a little remorseful. This feeling, on the drive homeward, was swept away by sheer elation at the prospect of the trip before her. She had often dreamed of the great world beyond Coniston, and no one, not even Jethro, had guessed the longings to see it which had at times beset her. Often she had dropped her book to summon up a picture of what a great city was like, to reconstruct the Boston of her early childhood. She remembered the Mall, where she used to walk with her father, and the row of houses where the rich dwelt, which had seemed like palaces. Indeed, when she read of palaces, these houses always came to her mind. And now she was to behold a palace even greater than these, and the house where the President himself dwelt. But why was Jethro going to Washington?

As if in answer to the question, he drove directly to the harness shop instead of to the tannery house. Ephraim greeted them from within with a cheery hail, and hobbled out and stood between the wheels of the buggy.

"That bridle bust again?" he inquired.

"Er Ephraim," said Jethro, "how long since you b'en away from Coniston how long?"

Ephraim reflected.

"I went to Harwich with Moses before that bad spell I had in March," he answered.

Cynthia smiled from pure happiness, for she began to see the drift of things now.

"H−how long since you've b'en in foreign parts?" said Jethro.

"'Sixty−five," answered Ephraim, with astonishing promptness.

"Er like to go to Washington with us to−morrow like to go to Washington?"

Ephraim gasped, even as Cynthia had.

"Washin'ton!" he ejaculated.

"Cynthy and I was thinkin' of takin' a little trip," said Jethro, almost apologetically, "and we kind of thought we'd like to have you with us. Didn't we, Cynthy? Er we might see General Grant," he added meaningly.

Ephraim was a New Englander, and not an adept in expressing his emotions. Both Cynthia and Jethro felt that he would have liked to have said something appropriate if he had known how. What he actually said was:

"What time to−morrow?"

"C−callate to take the nine o'clock from Brampton," said Jethro.

"I'll report for duty at seven," said Ephraim, and it was then he squeezed the hand that he found in his. He watched them calmly enough until they had disappeared in the barn behind the tannery house, and then his thoughts became riotous. Rumors had been rife that summer, prophecies of changes to come, and the resignation of the old man who had so long been postmaster at Brampton was freely discussed or rather the matter of his successor. As the months passed, Ephraim had heard David Wheelock mentioned with more and more assurance for the place. He had had many nights when sleep failed him, but it was characteristic of the old soldier that he had never once broached the subject since Jethro had spoken to him two months before. Ephraim had even looked up the law to see if he was eligible, and found that he was, since Coniston had no post−office, and was within the limits of delivery of the Brampton office.

The next morning Coniston was treated to a genuine surprise. After loading up at the store, Lem Hallowell, instead of heading for Brampton, drove to the tannery house, left his horses standing as he ran in, and presently emerged with a little cowhide trunk that bore the letter W. Following the trunk came a radiant Cynthia, following Cynthia, Jethro Bass in a stove−pipe hat, with a carpet−bag, and hobbling after Jethro, Ephraim Prescott, with another carpet−bag. It was remarked in the buzz of query that followed the stage's departure that Ephraim wore the blue suit and the army hat with a cord around it which he kept for occasions. Coniston longed to follow them, in spirit at least, but even Milly Skinner did not know their destination.

Fortunately we can follow them. At Brampton station they got into the little train that had just come over Truro Pass, and steamed, with many stops, down the valley of Coniston Water until it stretched out into a wide range of shimmering green meadows guarded by blue hills veiled in the morning haze. Then, bustling Harwich, and a wait of half an hour until the express from the north country came thundering through the Gap; then a five−hours' journey down the broad river that runs southward between the hills, dinner in a huge station amidst a pleasant buzz of excitement and the ringing of many bells. Then into another train, through valleys and factory towns and cities until they came, at nightfall, to the metropolis itself. Cynthia will always remember the awe with which that first view of New York inspired her, and Ephraim confessed that he, too, had felt it, when he had first seen the myriad lights of the city after the long, dusty ride from the hills with his regiment. For all the flags and bunting it had held in '61, Ephraim thought that city crueller than war itself. And Cynthia thought so, too, as she clung to Jethro's arm between the carriages and the clanging street−cars, and looked upon the riches and poverty around her. There entered her soul that night a sense of that which is the worst cruelty of all the cruelty of selfishness. Every man going his own pace, seeking to gratify his own aims and desires, unconscious and heedless of the want with which he rubs elbows. Her natural imagination enhanced by her life among the hills, the girl peopled the place in the street lights with all kinds of strange evil−doers of whose sins she knew nothing, adventurers, charlatans, alert cormorants, who preyed upon the unwary. She shrank closer to Ephraim from a perfumed lady who sat next to her in the car, and was thankful when at last they found themselves in the corridor of the Astor House standing before the desk.

Hotel clerks, especially city ones, are supernatural persons. This one knew Jethro, greeted him deferentially as Judge Bass, and dipped the pen in the ink and handed it to him that he might register. By half−past nine Cynthia

was dreaming of Lem Hallowell and Coniston, and Lem was driving a yellow street−car full of queer people down the road to Brampton.

There were few guests in the great dining room when they breakfasted at seven the next morning. New York, in the sunlight, had taken on a more kindly expression, and those who were near by smiled at them and seemed full of good−will. Persons smiled at them that day as they walked the streets or stood spellbound before the shop windows, and some who saw them felt a lump rise in their throats at the memories they aroused of forgotten days: the three seemed to bring the very air of the hills with them into that teeming place, and many who had come to the city with high hopes, now in the shackles of drudgery, looked after them. They were a curious party, indeed: the straight, dark girl with the light in her eyes and the color in her cheeks; the quaint, rugged figure of the elderly man in his swallow−tail and brass buttons and square−toed, country boots; and the old soldier hobbling along with the aid of his green umbrella, clad in the blue he had loved and suffered for. Had they remained until Sunday, they might have read an amusing account of their visit, of Jethro's suppers of crackers and milk at the Astor House, of their progress along Broadway. The story was not lacking in pathos, either, and in real human feeling, for the young reporter who wrote it had come, not many years before, from the hills himself. But by that time they had accomplished another marvellous span in their journey, and were come to Washington itself.

CHAPTER IV. "JUDGE BASS AND PARTY"

CYNTHIA was deprived, too, of that thrilling first view of the capital from the train which she had pictured, for night had fallen when they reached Washington likewise. As the train slowed down, she leaned a little out of the window and looked at the shabby houses and shabby streets revealed by the flickering lights in the lamp−posts. Finally they came to a shabby station, were seized upon by a grinning darky hackman, who would not take no for an answer, and were rattled away to the hotel. Although he had been to Washington but once in his life before, as a Lincoln elector, Jethro was greeted as an old acquaintance by this clerk also.

"Glad to see you, Judge," said he, genially. "Train late? You've come purty nigh missin' supper."

A familiar of great men, the clerk was not offended when he got no response to his welcome. Cynthia and Ephraim, intent on getting rid of some of the dust of their journey, followed the colored hall−boy up the stairs. Jethro stood poring over the register, when a distinguished−looking elderly gentleman with a heavy gray beard and eyes full of shrewdness and humor paused at the desk to ask a question.

"Er Senator?"

The senator (for such he was, although he did not represent Jethro's state) turned and stared, and then held out his hand with unmistakable warmth.

"Jethro Bass," he exclaimed, "upon my word! What are you doing in Washington?"

Jethro took the hand, but he did not answer the question. "Er Senator when can I see the President?"

"Why," answered the senator, somewhat taken aback, "why, to−night, if you like. I'm going to the White House in a few minutes and I think I can arrange it."

"T−to−morrow afternoon t−to−morrow afternoon?"

The senator cast his eye over the swallow−tail coat and stove−pipe hat tilted back, and laughed.

"Thunder!" he exclaimed, "you haven't changed a bit. I'm beginning to look like an old man; but that

milk−and−crackers diet seems to keep you young, Jethro. I'll fix it for to−morrow afternoon."

"W−what time two?"

"Well, I'll fix it for two to−morrow afternoon. I never could understand you, Jethro; you don't do things like other men. Do I smell gunpowder? What's up now what do you want to see Grant about?"

Jethro cast his eye around the corridor, where a few men were taking their ease after supper, and looked at the senator mysteriously.

"Any place where we can talk?" he demanded.

"We can go into the writing room and shut the door," answered the senator, more amused than ever.

When Cynthia came downstairs, Jethro was standing with the gentleman in the corridor leading to the dining room, and she heard the gentleman say as he took his departure:

"I haven't forgotten what you did for us in '70, Jethro. I'll go right along and see to it now."

Cynthia liked the gentleman's looks, and rightly surmised that he was one of the big men of the nation. She was about to ask Jethro his name when Ephraim came limping along and put the matter out of her mind, and the three went into the almost empty dining room. There they were served with elaborate attention by a darky waiter who had, in some mysterious way, learned Jethro's name and title. Cynthia reflected with pride that Jethro, too, was one of the nation's great men, who could get anything he wanted simply by coming to the capital and asking for it. Ephraim was very much excited on finding himself in Washington, the sight of the place reviving in his mind a score of forgotten incidents of the war. After supper they found seats in a corner of the corridor, where a number of people were scattered about, smoking and talking. It did not occur to Jethro or Cynthia, or even to Ephraim, that these people were all of the male sex, and on the other hand the guests of the hotel were apparently used once in a while to see a lady from the country seated there. At any rate, Cynthia was but a young girl, and her two companions, however unusual their appearance, were clearly most respectable. Jethro, his hands in his pockets and his hat tilted, sat on the small of his back rapt in meditation; Cynthia, her head awhirl, looked around her with sparkling eyes; while Ephraim was smoking a cigar he had saved for just such a festal occasion. He did not see the stout man with the button and corded hat until he was almost on top of him.

"Eph Prescott, I believe!" exclaimed the stout one. "How be you, Comrade?"

Heedless of his rheumatism, Ephraim sprang to his feet and dropped the cigar, which the stout one picked up with much difficulty.

"Well," said Ephraim, in a voice that shook with unwonted emotion, "you kin skin me if it ain't Amasy Beard!" His eye travelled around Amasa's figure. "Wouldn't a−knowed you, I swan, I wouldn't. Why, when I seen you last, Amasy, your stomach was havin' all it could do to git hold of your backbone."

Cynthia laughed outright, and even Jethro sat up and smiled.

"When was it?" said Amasa, still clinging on to Ephraim's hand and incidentally to the cigar, which Ephraim had forgotten; "Beaver Creek, wahn't it?"

"July 10, 1863," said Ephraim, instantly.

Gradually they reached a sitting position, the cigar was restored to its rightful owner, and Mr. Beard was introduced, with some ceremony, to Cynthia and Jethro. From Beaver Creek they began to fight the war over again, backward and forward, much to Cynthia's edification, when her attention was distracted by the entrance of a street band of wind instruments. As the musicians made their way to another corner and began tuning up, she glanced mischievously at Jethro, for she knew his peculiarities by heart. One of these was a most violent detestation of any but the best music. He had often given her this excuse, laughingly, for not going to meeting in Coniston. How he had come by his love for good music, Cynthia never knew he certainly had not heard much of it.

Suddenly a great volume of sound filled the corridor, and the band burst forth into what many supposed to be "The Watch on the Rhine." Some people were plainly delighted; the veterans, once recovered from their surprise, shouted their reminiscences above the music, undismayed; Jethro held on to himself until the refrain, when he began to squirm, and as soon as the tune was done and the scattering applause had died down, he reached over and grabbed Mr. Amasa Beard by the knee. Mr. Beard did not immediately respond, being at that moment behind logworks facing a rebel charge; he felt vaguely that some one was trying to distract his attention, and in some lobe of his brain was registered the fact that that particular knee had gout in it. Jethro increased the pressure, and then Mr. Beard abandoned his logworks and swung around with a snort of pain.

"H−how much do they git for that noise h−how much do they git?"

Mr. Beard tenderly lifted the hand from his knee and stared at Jethro with his mouth open, like a man aroused from a bad dream.

"Who? What noise?" he demanded.

"The Dutchmen," said Jethro. "H−how much do they git for that noise?"

"Oh!" Mr. Beard glanced at the band and began to laugh. He thought Jethro a queer customer, no doubt, but he was a friend of Comrade Prescott's. "By gum!" said Mr. Beard, "I thought for a minute a rebel chain−shot had took my leg off. Well, sir, I guess that band gets about two dollars. They've come in here every evening since I've been at the hotel."

"T−two dollars? Is that the price? Er you say two dollars is their price?"

"Thereabouts," answered Mr. Beard, uneasily. Veteran as he was, Jethro's appearance and earnestness were a little alarming.

"You say two dollars is their price?"

"Thereabouts," shouted Mr. Beard, seating himself on the edge of his chair.

But Jethro paid no attention to him, He rose, unfolding by degrees his six feet two, and strode diagonally across the corridor toward the band leader. Conversation was hushed at the sight of his figure, a titter ran around the walls, but Jethro was oblivious to these things. He drew a great calfskin wallet from an inside pocket of his coat, and the band leader, a florid German, laid down his instrument and made an elaborate how. Jethro waited until the man had become upright and then held out a two−dollar bill.

"Is that about right for the performance?" he said "is that about right?"

"Ja, mein Herr," said the man, nodding vociferously.

"I want to pay what's right I want to pay what's right," said Jethro.

"I thank you very much, sir," said the leader, finding his English, "you haf pay for all."

"P−paid for everything everything to−night?" demanded Jethro.

The leader spread out his hands.

"You haf pay for one whole evening," said he, and bowed again.

"Then take it, take it," said Jethro, pushing the bill into the man's palm; "but don't you come back to−night don't you come back to−night."

The amazed leader stared at Jethro and words failed him. There was something about this man that compelled him to obey, and he gathered up his followers and led the way silently out of the hotel. Roars of laughter and applause arose on all sides; but Jethro was as one who heard them not as he made his way back to his seat again.

"You did a good job, my friend," said Mr. Beard, approvingly. "I'm going to take Eph Prescott down the street to see some of the boys. Won't you come, too?"

Mr. Beard doubtless accepted it as one of the man's eccentricities that Jethro did not respond to him, for without more ado he departed arm in arm with Ephraim. Jethro was looking at Cynthia, who was staring toward the desk at the other end of the corridor, her face flushed, and her fingers closed over the arms of her chair. It never occurred to Jethro that she might have been embarrassed.

"W−what's the matter, Cynthy?" he asked, sinking into the chair beside her.

Her breath caught sharply, but she tried to smile at him. He did not discover what was the matter until long afterward, when he recalled that evening to mind. Jethro was a man used to hotel corridors, used to sitting in an attitude that led the unsuspecting to believe he was half asleep; but no person of note could come or go whom he did not remember. He had seen the distinguished party arrive at the desk, preceded by a host of bell−boys with shawls and luggage. On the other hand, some of the distinguished party had watched the proceeding of paying off the band with no little amusement. Miss Janet Duncan had giggled audibly, her mother had smiled, while her father and Mr. Worthington had pretended to he deeply occupied with the hotel register. Somers was not there. Bob Worthington laughed heartily with the rest until his eye, travelling down the line of Jethro's progress, fell on Cynthia, and now he was striding across the floor toward them. And even in the horrible confusion of that moment Cynthia had a vagrant thought that his clothes had an enviable cut and became him remarkably.

"Well, of all things, to find you here!" he cried; "this is the best luck that ever happened. I am glad to see you. I was going to steal away to Brampton for a couple of days before the term opened, and I meant to look you up there. And Mr. Bass," said Bob, turning to Jethro, "I'm glad to see you too."

Jethro looked at the young man and smiled and held out his hand. It was evident that Bob was blissfully unaware that hostilities between powers of no mean magnitude were about to begin; that the generals themselves were on the ground, and that he was holding treasonable parley with the enemy. The situation appealed to Jethro, especially as he glanced at the backs of the two gentlemen facing the desk. These backs seemed to him full of expression.

"Th−thank you, Bob, th−thank you," he answered.

"I like the way you fixed that band," said Bob; "I haven't laughed as much for a year. You hate music, don't you? I hope you'll forgive that awful noise we made outside of your house last July, Mr. Bass."

"You you make that noise, Bob, you you make that?"

"Well," said Bob, "I'm afraid I did most of it. There was another fellow that helped some and played the guitar. It was pretty bad," he added, with a side glance at Cynthia, "but it was meant for a compliment."

"Oh," said she, "it was meant for a compliment, was it?"

"Of course," he answered, glad of the opportunity to turn his attention entirely to her. "I was for slipping away right after supper, but my father headed us off."

"Slipping away?" repeated Cynthia.

"You see, he had a kind of a reception and fireworks afterward. We didn't get away till after nine, and then I thought I'd have a lecture when I got home."

"Did you?" asked Cynthia.

"No," said Bob, "he didn't know where I'd been."

Cynthia felt the blood rush to her temples, but by habit and instinct she knew when to restrain herself.

"Would it have made any difference to him where you had been?" she asked calmly enough.

Bob had a presentiment that he was on dangerous ground. This new and self−possessed Cynthia was an enigma to him certainly a fascinating enigma. "My father would have thought I was a fool to go off serenading," he answered, flushing. Bob did not like a lie; he knew that his father would have been angry if he had heard he had gone to Coniston; he felt, in the small of his back, that his father was angry now, and guessed the reason.

She regarded him gravely as he spoke, and then her eyes left his face and became fixed upon an object at the far end of the corridor. Bob turned in time to see Janet Duncan swing on her heel and follow her mother up the stairs. He struggled to find words to tide over what he felt was an awkward moment.

"We've had a fine trip," he said, "though I should much rather have stayed at home. The West is a wonderful country, with its cañons and mountains and great stretches of plain. My father met us in Chicago, and we came here. I don't know why, because Washington's dead at this time of the year. I suppose it must be on account of politics." Looking at Jethro with a sudden inspiration, "I hadn't thought of that."

Jethro had betrayed no interest in the conversation. He was seated, as usual, on the small of his back. But he saw a young man of short stature, with a freckled face and close−cropped, curly red hair, come into the corridor by another entrance; he saw Isaac D. Worthington draw him aside and speak to him, and he saw the young man coming towards them.

"How do you do, Miss Wetherell?" cried the young man joyously, while still ten feet away, "I'm awfully glad to see you, upon my word, I am. How long are you going to be in Washington?"

"I don't know, Mr. Duncan," answered Cynthia.

"Did Worthy know you were here?" demanded Mr. Duncan, suspiciously.

"He did when he saw me," said Cynthia, smiling.

"Not till then?" asked Mr. Duncan. "Say, Worthy, your father wants to see you right away. I'm going to be in Washington a day or two will you go walking with me to−morrow morning, Miss Wetherell?" "She's going walking with me," said Bob, not in the best of tempers.

"Then I'll go along," said Mr. Duncan, promptly.

By this time Cynthia got up and was holding out her hand to Bob Worthington. "I'm not going walking with either of you," she said; "I have another engagement. And I think I'll have to say good night, because I'm very tired."

"When can I see you?" Both the young men asked the question at once.

"Oh, you'll have plenty of chances," she answered, and was gone.

The young men looked at each other somewhat blankly, and then down at Jethro, who did not seem to know that they were there, and then they made their way toward the desk. But Isaac D. Worthington and his friends had disappeared.

A few minutes later the distinguished−looking senator with whom Jethro had been in conversation before supper entered the hotel. He seemed preoccupied, and heedless of the salutations he received; but when he caught sight of Jethro he crossed the corridor rapidly and sat down beside him. Jethro did not move. The corridor was deserted now, save for the two.

"Bass," began the senator, "what's the row up in your state?"

"H−haven't heard of any row," said Jethro.

"What did you come to Washington for?" demanded the senator, somewhat sharply.

"Er vacation," said Jethro, "vacation to show my gal, Cynthy, the capital."

"Now see here, Bass," said the senator, "I don't forget what happened in '70. I don't object to wading through a swarm of bees to get a little honey for a friend, but I think I'm entitled to know why he wants it."

"G−got the honey?" asked Jethro.

The senator took off his hat and wiped his brow, and then he stole a look at Jethro, with apparently barren results. "Jethro," he said, "people say you run that state of yours right up to the handle. What's all this trouble about a two−for−a−cent postmastership?"

"H−haven't heard of any trouble," said Jethro.

"Well, there is trouble," said the senator, losing patience at last. "When I told Grant you were here and mentioned that little Brampton matter to him, it didn't seem much to me, the bees began to fly pretty thick, I can tell you. I saw right away that somebody had been stirring 'em up. It looks to me, Jethro," said the senator gravely, "it looks to me as if you had something of a rebellion on your hands."

"W−what'd Grant say?" Jethro inquired.

"Well, he didn't say a great deal he isn't much of a talker, you know, but what he did say was to the point. It seems that your man, Prescott, doesn't come from Brampton, in the first place, and Grant says that while he likes soldiers, he hasn't any use for the kind that want to lie down and make the government support 'em. I'll tell you what I found out. Worthington and Duncan wired the President this morning, and they've gone up to the White House now. They've got a lot of railroad interests back of them, and they've taken your friend Sutton into camp; but I managed to get the President to promise not to do anything until he saw you to−morrow afternoon at two."

Jethro sat silent so long that the senator began to think he wasn't going to answer him at all. In his opinion, he had told Jethro some very grave facts.

"W−when are you going to see the President again?" said Jethro, at last.

"To−morrow morning," the senator answered; "he wants me to walk over with him to see the postmaster−general, who is sick in bed."

"What time do you leave the White House?"

"At eleven," said the senator, very much puzzled.

"Er Grant ever pay any attention to an old soldier on the street?"

The senator glanced at Jethro, and a twinkle came into his eye. "Sometimes he has been known to," he answered.

"You you ever pay any attention to an old solder on the street?"

Then the senator's eyes began to snap.

"Sometimes I have been known to."

"Er suppose an old soldier was in front of the White House at eleven o'clock an old soldier with a gal suppose?"

The senator saw the point, and took no pains to restrain his admiration.

"Jethro," he said, slapping him on the shoulder, "I'm willing to bet a few thousand dollars that you'll run your state for a while yet."

CHAPTER V. COUSIN EPHRAIM'S COMRADE

"HEARD you say you was goin' for a walk this morning, Cynthy," Jethro remarked, as they sat at breakfast the next morning.

"Why, of course," answered Cynthia, "Cousin Eph and I are going out to see Washington, and he is to show me the places that he remembers." She looked at Jethro appealingly. "Aren't you coming with us?" she asked.

"M−meet you at eleven, Cynthy," he said.

"Eleven!" exclaimed Cynthia in dismay, "that's almost dinner−time."

"M−meet you in front of the White House at eleven," said Jethro, "plumb in front of it, under a tree."

By half−past seven, Cynthia and Ephraim with his green umbrella were in the street, but it would be useless to burden these pages with a description of all the sights they saw, and with the things that Ephraim said about them, and incidentally about the war. After New York, much of Washington would then have seemed small and ragged to any one who lacked ideals and a national sense, but Washington was to Cynthia as Athens to a Greek. To her the marble Capitol shining on its hill was a sacred temple, and the great shaft that struck upward through the sunlight, though yet unfinished, a fitting memorial to him who had led the barefoot soldiers of the colonies through ridicule to victory. They looked up many institutions and monuments, they even had time to go to the Navy Yard, and they saved the contemplation of the White House till the last. The White House, which Cynthia thought the finest and most graceful mansion in all the world, in its simplicity and dignity, a fitting dwelling for the chosen of the nation. Under the little tree which Jethro had mentioned, Ephraim stood bareheaded before the walls which had sheltered Lincoln, which were now the home of the greatest of his captains, Grant: and wonderous emotions played upon the girl's spirit, too, as she gazed. They forgot the present in the past and the future, and they did not see the two gentlemen who had left the portico some minutes before and were now coming toward them along the sidewalk.

The two gentlemen, however, slowed their steps involuntarily at a sight which was uncommon, even in Washington. The girl's arm was in the soldier's, and her face, which even in repose had a true nobility, now was alight with an inspiration that is seen but seldom in a lifetime. In marble, could it have been wrought by a great sculptor, men would have dreamed before it of high things.

The two, indeed, might have stood for a group, the girl as the spirit, the man as the body which had risked and suffered all for it, and still held it fast. For the honest face of the soldier reflected that spirit as truly as a mirror.

Ephraim was aroused from his thoughts by Cynthia nudging his arm. He started, put on his hat, and stared very hard at a man smoking a cigar who was standing before him. Then he stiffened and raised his hand in an involuntary salute. The man smiled. He was not very tall, he had a closely trimmed light beard that was growing a little gray, he wore a soft hat something like Ephraim's, a black tie on a white pleated shirt, and his eyeglasses were pinned to his vest. His eyes were all kindness.

"How do you do, Comrade?" he said, holding out his hand.

"General," said Ephraim, "Mr. President," he added, correcting himself, "how be you?" He shifted the green umbrella, and shook the hand timidly but warmly.

"General will do," said the President, with a smiling glance at the tall senator beside him, "I like to be called General."

"You've growed some older, General," said Ephraim, scanning his face with a simple reverence and affection, "but you hain't changed so much as I'd a thought since I saw you whittlin' under a tree beside the Lacy house in the Wilderness."

"My duty has changed some," answered the President, quite as simply. He added with a touch of sadness, "I liked those days best, Comrade."

"Well, I guess!" exclaimed Ephraim, "you're general over everything now, but you're not a mite bigger man to me than you was."

The President took the compliment as it was meant.

"I found it easier to run an army than I do to run a country," he said.

Ephraim's blue eyes flamed with indignation.

"I don't take no stock in the bull−dogs and the gold harness at Long Branch and and all them lies the dratted newspapers print about you," Ephraim hammered his umbrella on the pavement as an expression of his feelings, "and what's more, the people don't."

The President glanced at the senator again, and laughed a little, quietly.

"Thank you, Comrade," he said.

"You're a plain, common man," continued Ephraim, paying the highest compliment known to rural New England; "the people think a sight of you, or they wouldn't hev chose you twice, General."

"So you were in the Wilderness?" said the President, adroitly changing the subject.

"Yes, General. I was pressed into orderly duty the first day that's when I saw you whittlin' under the tree, and you didn't seem to have no more consarn than if it had been a company drill. Had a cigar then, too. But the second day, May the 6th, I was with the regiment. I'll never forget that day," said Ephraim, warming to the subject, "when we was fightin' Ewell up and down the Orange Turnpike Road, playin' hide−and−seek with the Johnnies in the woods. You remember them woods, General?"

The President nodded, his cigar between his teeth. He looked as though the scene were coming back to him.

"Never seen such woods," said Ephraim, "scrub oak and pine and cedars and young stuff springin' up until you couldn't see the length of a company, and the Rebs jumpin' and hollerin' around and shoutin' every which way. After a while a lot of them saplings was mowed off clean by the bullets, and then the woods caught afire, and that was hell."

"Were you wounded?" asked the President, quickly.

"I was hurt some, in the hip," answered Ephraim.

"Some!" exclaimed Cynthia, "why, you have walked lame ever since." She knew the story by heart, but the recital of it never failed to stir her blood. "They carried him out just as he was going to be burned up, in a blanket hung from rifles, and he was in the hospital nine months, and had to come home for a while."

"Cynthy," said Ephraim in gentle reproof, "I callate the General don't want to hear that."

Cynthia flushed, but the President looked at her with an added interest.

"My dear young lady," he said, "that seems to me the vital part of the story. If I remember rightly," he added, turning again to Ephraim, "the Fifth Corps was on the Orange turnpike. What brigade were you in?"

"The third brigade of the First Division," answered Ephraim.

"Griffin's," said the President. "There were several splendid New England regiments in that brigade. I sent them with Griffin to help Sheridan at Five Forks."

"I was thar, too," cried Ephraim.

"What!" said the President, "with the lame hip?"

"Well, General, I went back, I couldn't help it. I couldn't stay away from the boys just couldn't. I didn't limp as bad then as I do now. I wahn't much use anywhere else, and I had l'arned to fight. Five Forks!" exclaimed Ephraim. "I call that day to mind as if it was yesterday. I remember how the boys yelled when they told us we was goin' to Sheridan. We got started about daylight, and it took us till four o'clock in the afternoon to git into position. The woods was just comin' a little green, and the white dogwoods was bloomin' around. Sheridan, he galloped up to the line with that black horse of his'n and hollered out, 'Come on, boys, go in at a clean jump or you won't ketch one of 'em.' You know how men, even veterans like that Fifth Corps, sometimes hev to be pushed into a fight. There was a man from a Maine regiment got shot in the head fust thing. 'I'm killed,' said he. 'Oh, no, you're not,' says Sheridan, 'pick up your gun and go for 'em.' But he was killed. Well, we went for 'em through all the swamps and briers and everything, and Sheridan, thar in front, had got the battle−flag and was rushin' round with it swearin' and prayin' and shoutin', and the first thing we knowed he'd jumped his horse clean over their logworks and landed right on top of the Johnnies."

"Yes," said the President, "that was Sheridan, sure enough."

"Mr. President," said the senator, who stood by wonderingly while General Grant had lost himself in this conversation, "do you realize what time it is?"

"Yes, yes," said the President, "we must go on. What was your rank, Comrade?"

"Sergeant, General."

"I hope you have got a good pension for that hip," said the President, kindly. It may be well to add that he was not always so incautious, but this soldier bore the unmistakable stamp of simplicity and sincerity on his face.

Ephraim hesitated.

"He never would ask for a pension, General," said Cynthia.

"What!" exclaimed the President in real astonishment, "are you so rich as all that?" and he glanced at the green umbrella.

"Well, General," said Ephraim, uncomfortably, "I never liked the notion of gittin' paid for it. You see, I was what they call a war−Democrat."

"Good Lord!" said the President, but more to himself. "What do you do now?"

"I callate to make harness," answered Ephraim.

"Only he can't make it any more on account of his rheumatism, Mr. President," Cynthia put in.

"I think you might call me General, too," he said, with the grace that many simple people found inherent in him. "And may I ask your name, young lady?"

"Cynthia Wetherell General," she said smiling.

"That sounds more natural," said the President, and then to Ephraim, "Your daughter?"

"I couldn't think more of her if she was," answered Ephraim; "Cynthy's pulled me through some tight spells. Her mother was my cousin, General. My name's Prescott Ephraim Prescott."

"Ephraim Prescott!" ejaculated the President, sharply, taking his cigar from his mouth, "Ephraim Prescott!"

"Prescott that's right Prescott, General," repeated Ephraim, sorely puzzled by these manifestations of amazement.

"What did you come to Washington for?" asked the President.

"Well, General, I kind of hate to tell you I didn't intend to mention that. I guess I won't say nothin' about it," he added, "we've had such a sociable time. I've always b'en a little mite ashamed of it, General, ever since 'twas first mentioned."

"Good Lord!" said the President again, and then he looked at Cynthia. "What is it, Miss Cynthia?" he asked.

It was now Cynthia's turn to be a little confused.

"Uncle Jethro that is, Mr. Bass" (the President nodded), "went to Cousin Eph when he couldn't make harness any more and said he'd give him the Brampton post−office."

The President's eyes met the senator's, and both gentlemen laughed. Cynthia bit her lip, not seeing any cause for mirth in her remark, while Ephraim looked uncomfortable and mopped the perspiration from his brow.

"He said he'd give it to him, did he?" said the President. "Is Mr. Bass your uncle?"

"Oh, no, General," replied Cynthia, "he's really no relation. He's done everything for me, and I live with him since my father died. He was going to meet us here," she continued, looking around hurriedly, "I'm sure I can't think what's kept him."

"Mr. President, we are half an hour late already," said the senator, hurriedly.

"Well, well," said the President, "I suppose I must go. Good−by, Miss Cynthia," said he, taking the girl's hand warmly. "Good−by, Comrade. If ever you want to see General Grant, just send in your name. Good−by."

The President lifted his hat politely to Cynthia and passed. He said something to the senator which they did not hear, and the senator laughed heartily. Ephraim and Cynthia watched them until they were out of sight.

"Godfrey!" exclaimed Ephraim, "they told me he was hard to talk to. Why, Cynthy, he's as simple as a child."

"I've always thought that all great men must be simple," said Cynthia; "Uncle Jethro is."

"To think that the President of the United States stood talkin' to us on the sidewalk for half an hour," said Ephraim, clutching Cynthia's arm. "Cynthy, I'm glad we didn't press that post−office matter it was worth more to me than all the post−offices in the Union to have that talk with General Grant."

They waited some time longer under the tree, happy in the afterglow of this wonderful experience. Presently a clock struck twelve.

"Why, it's dinner−time, Cynthy," said Ephraim. "I guess Jethro hain't a−comin' must hev b'en delayed by some of them politicians."

"It's the first time I ever knew him to miss an appointment," said Cynthia, as they walked back to the hotel. Jethro was not in the corridor, so they passed on to the dining room and looked eagerly from group to group. Jethro was

not there, either, but Cynthia heard same one laughing above the chatter of the guests, and drew back into the corridor. She had spied the Duncans and the Worthingtons making merry by themselves at a corner table, and it was Somers's laugh that she heard. Bob, too, sitting next to Miss Duncan, was much amused about something. Suddenly Cynthia's exaltation over the incident of the morning seemed to leave her, and Bob Worthington's words which she had pondered over in the night came back to her with renewed force. He did not find it necessary to steal away to see Miss Duncan. Why should he have "stolen away" to see her? Was it because she was a country girl, and poor? That was true; but on the other hand, did she not live in the sunlight, as it were, of Uncle Jethro's greatness, and was it not an honor to come to his house and see any one? And why had Mr. Worthington turned his back on Jethro, and sent for Bob when he was talking to them? Cynthia could not understand these things, and her pride was sorely wounded by them.

"Perhaps Jethro's in his room," suggested Ephraim.

And indeed they found him there seated on the bed, poring over some newspapers, and both in a breath demanded where he had been. Ephraim did not wait for an answer.

"We seen General Grant, Jethro," he cried; "while we was waitin' for you under the tree he come up and stood talkin' to us half an hour. Full half an hour, wahn't it, Cynthy?"

"Oh, yes," answered Cynthia, forgetting her own grievance at the recollection; "only it didn't seem nearly that long."

"W−want to know!" exclaimed Jethro, in astonishment, putting down his paper. "H−how did it happen?"

"Come right up and spoke to us," said Ephraim, in a tone he might have used to describe a miracle, "jest as if he was common folk. Never had a more sociable talk with anybody. Why, there was times when I clean forgot he was President of the United States. The boys won't believe it when we git back at Coniston."

And Ephraim, full of his subject, began to recount from the beginning the marvellous affair, occasionally appealing to Cynthia for confirmation. How he had lived over again the Wilderness and Five Forks; how the General had changed since he had seen him whittling under a tree; how the General had asked about his pension.

"D−didn't mention the post−office, did you, Ephraim?"

"Why, no," replied Ephraim, "I didn't like to exactly. You see, we was havin' such a good time I didn't want to spoil it, but Cynthy −"

"I told the President about it, Uncle Jethro; I told him how sick Cousin Eph had been, and that you were going to give him the postmastership because he couldn't work any more with his hands."

The training of a lifetime had schooled Jethro not to betray surprise.

"K−kind of mixin' up in politics, hain't you, Cynthy? P−President say he'd give you the postmastership, Eph?" he asked.

"He did say nothin' about it, Jethro," answered Ephraim slowly; "I callate he had other views for the place, and he was too kind to come right out with 'em and spoil our mornin'. You see, Jethro, I wahn't only a sergeant, and Brampton's gittin' to be a big town."

"But surely," cried Cynthia, who could scarcely wait for him to finish, "surely you're going to give Cousin Eph the post−office, aren't you, Uncle Jethro? All you have to do is to tell the President that you want it for him. Why,

I had an idea that we came down for that."

"Now, Cynthy," Ephraim put in, deprecatingly.

"Who else would get the post−office?" asked Cynthia. "Surely you're not going to let Mr. Sutton have it for Dave Wheelock!"

"Er Cynthy," said Jethro, slyly, "w−what'd you say to me once about interferin' with women's fixin's?"

Cynthia saw the point. She perceived also that the mazes of politics were not to be understood by a young woman, or even by an old soldier. She laughed and seized Jethro's hands and pulled him from the bed.

"We won't get any dinner unless we hurry," she said.

When they reached the dining room she was relieved to discover that the party in the corner had gone.

In the afternoon there were many more sights to be viewed, but they were back in the hotel again by half−past four, because Ephraim's Wilderness leg had its limits of endurance. Jethro (though he had not mentioned the fact to them) had gone to the White House.

It was during the slack hours that our friend the senator, whose interest in the matter of the Brampton post−office outweighed for the present certain grave problems of the Administration in which he was involved, hurried into the Willard Hotel, looking for Jethro Bass. He found him without much trouble in his usual attitude, occupying one of the chairs in the corridor.

"Well," exclaimed the senator, with a touch of eagerness he did not often betray, "did you see Grant? How about your old soldier? He's one of the most delightful characters I ever met simple as a child," and he laughed at the recollection. "That was a masterstroke of yours, Bass, putting him under that tree with that pretty girl. I doubt if you ever did anything better in your life. Did they tell you about it?"

"Yes," said Jethro, "they told me about it."

"And how about Grant? What did he say to you?"

"W−well, I went up there and sent in my card. D−didn't have to wait a great while, as I was pretty early, and soon he came in, smokin' a black cigar, head bent forward a little. D−didn't ask me to sit down, and what talkin' we did we did standin'. D−didn't ask me what he could do for me, what I wanted, or anything else, but just stood there, and I stood there. F−fust time in my life I didn't know how to commence or what to say; looked looked at me didn't take his eye off me. After a while I got started, somehow; told him I was there to ask him to appoint Ephraim Prescott to the Brampton post−office t−told him all about Ephraim from the time he was rocked in the cradle never was so hard put that I could remember. T−told him how Ephraim shook butternuts off my father's tree for all I know. T−told him all about Ephraim's war record leastways all I could call to mind and, by Godfrey! before I got through, I wished I'd listened to more of it. T−told him about Ephraim's Wilderness bullets t−told him about Ephraim's rheumatism, how it bothered him when he went to bed and when he got up again."

If Jethro had glanced at his companion, he would have seen the senator was shaking with silent and convulsive laughter.

"All the time I talked to him I didn't see a muscle move in his face," Jethro continued, "so I started in again, and he looked looked − looked right at me. W−wouldn't wink don't think he winked once while I was in that room. I

watched him as close as I could, and I watched to see if a muscle moved or if I was makin' any impression. All he would do was to stand there and look look look. K−kept me there ten minutes and never opened his mouth at all. Hardest man to talk to I ever met never see a man before but what I could get him to say somethin', if it was only a cuss word. I got tired of it after a while, made up my mind that I had found one man I couldn't move. Then what bothered me was to get out of that room. If I'd a had a Bible I believe I'd a read it to him. I didn't know what to say, but I did say this after a while:

"'W−well, Mr. President, I guess I've kept you long enough g−guess you're a pretty busy man. H−hope you'll give Mr. Prescott that postmastership. Er er good−by.'

"'Wait, sir,' he said.

"'Yes,' I said, 'I'll wait.'

"'Thought you was goin' to give him that postmastership, Mr. Bass,' he said."

At this point the senator could not control his mirth, and the empty corridor echoed his laughter.

"By thunder! what did you say to that?" "Er I said, 'Mr. President, I thought I was until a while ago.'

"'And when did you change your mind?' says he.

"Then he laughed a little not much but he laughed a little.

"'I understand that your old soldier lives within the limits of the delivery of the Brampton office,' said he.

"'That's correct, Mr. President,' said I.

"'Well,' said he, 'I will app'int him postmaster at Brampton, Mr. Bass.'

"'When?' said I.

"Then he laughed a little more.

"'I'll have the app'intment sent to your hotel this afternoon,' said he.

"Then I said to him: 'This has come out full better than I expected, Mr. President. I'm much obliged to you.' He didn't say nothin' more, so I come out."

"Grant didn't say anything about Worthington or Duncan, did he?" asked the senator, curiously, as he rose to go.

"G−guess I've told you all he said," answered Jethro; "'twahn't a great deal."

The senator held out his hand.

"Bass," he said, laughing, "I believe you came pretty near meeting your match. But if Grant's the hardest man in the Union to get anything out of, I've a notion who's the second." And with this parting shot the senator took his departure, chuckling to himself as he went.

As has been said, there were but few visitors in Washington at this time, and the hotel corridor was all but empty. Presently a substantial−looking gentleman came briskly in from the street, nodding affably to the colored porters

and bell−boys, who greeted him by name. He wore a flowing Prince Albert coat, which served to dignify a growing portliness, and his coal−black whiskers glistened in the light. A voice, which appeared to come from nowhere in particular, brought the gentleman up standing.

"How be you, Heth?"

It may not be that Mr. Sutton's hand trembled, but the ashes of his cigar fell to the floor. He was not used to visitations, and for the instant, if the truth be told, he was not equal to looking around.

"Like Washington, Heth like Washington?"

Then Mr. Sutton turned. His presence of mind, and that other presence of which he was so proud, seemed for the moment to have deserted him.

"S−stick pretty close to business, Heth, comin' down here out of session time. S−stick pretty close to business, don't you, since the people sent you to Congress?"

Mr. Sutton might have offered another man a cigar or a drink, but (as is well known) Jethro was proof against tobacco or stimulants.

"Well," said the Honorable Heth, catching his breath and making a dive, "I am surprised to see you, Jethro," which was probably true.

"Th−thought you might be," said Jethro. "Er glad to see me, Heth − glad to see me?"

As has been recorded, it is peculiarly difficult to lie to people who are not to be deceived.

"Why, certainly I am," answered the Honorable Heth, swallowing hard, "certainly I am, Jethro. I meant to have got to Coniston this summer, but I was so busy −"

"Peoples' business, I understand. Er hear you've gone in for high−minded politics, Heth r−read a high−minded speech of yours two high−minded speeches. Always thought you was a high−minded man, Heth."

"How did you like those speeches, Jethro?" asked Mr. Sutton, striving as best he might to make some show of dignity.

"Th−thought they was high−minded," said Jethro.

Then there was a silence, for Mr. Sutton could think of nothing more to say. And he yearned to depart with a great yearning, but something held him there.

"Heth," said Jethro, after a while, "you was always very friendly and obliging. You've done a great many favors for me in your life."

"I've always tried to be neighborly, Jethro," said Mr. Sutton, but his voice sounded a little husky even to himself.
"And I may have done one or two little things for you, Heth," Jethro continued, "but I can't remember exactly. Er can you remember, Heth."

Mr. Sutton was trying with becoming nonchalance to light the stump of his cigar. He did not succeed this time. He pulled himself together with a supreme effort.

"I think we've both been mutually helpful, Jethro," he said, "mutually helpful."

"Well," said Jethro, reflectively, "I don't know as I could have put it as well as that there's somethin' in being an orator."

There was another silence, a much longer one. The Honorable Heth threw his butt away, and lighted another cigar. Suddenly, as if by magic, his aplomb returned, and in a flash of understanding he perceived the situation. He saw himself once more as the successful congressman, the trusted friend of the railroad interests, and he saw Jethro as a discredited boss. He did not stop to reflect that Jethro did not act like a discredited boss, as a keener man might have done. But if the Honorable Heth had been a keener man, he would not have been at that time a congressman. Mr. Sutton accused himself of having been stupid in not grasping at once that the tables were turned, and that now he was the one to dispense the gifts.

"K−kind of fortunate you stopped to talk to me, Heth. N−now I come to think of it, I hev a little favor to ask of you."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mr. Sutton, blowing out the smoke; "of course anything I can do, Jethro anything in reason."

"W−wouldn't ask a high−minded man to do anything he hadn't ought to," said Jethro; "the fact is, I'd like to git Eph Prescott appointed at the Brampton post−office. You can fix that, Heth can't you you can fix that?"

Mr. Sutton stuck his thumb into his vest pocket and cleared his throat.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am not to oblige you, Jethro, but I've arranged to give that post−office to Dave Wheelock." "Arranged it hev you arranged it?"

"Why, yes," said Mr. Sutton, scarcely believing his own ears. Could it be possible that he was using this patronizingly kind tone to Jethro Bass?

"Well, that's too bad," said Jethro; "g−got it all fixed, hev you?"

"Practically," answered Mr. Sutton, grandly; "indeed, I may go as far as to say that it is as certain as if I had the appointment here in my pocket. I'm sorry not to oblige you, Jethro; but these are matters which a member of Congress must look after pretty closely." He held out his hand, but Jethro did not appear to see it, he had his in his pockets. "I've an important engagement," said the Honorable Heth, consulting a large gold watch. "Are you going to be in Washington long?"

"G−guess I've about got through, Heth g−guess I've about got through," said Jethro.

"Well, if you have time, and there's any other little thing, I'm in room 29," said Mr. Sutton, as he put his foot on the stairway.

"T−told Worthington you got that app'intment for Wheelock t−told Worthington?" Jethro called out after him.

Mr. Sutton turned and waved his cigar and smiled in acknowledgment of this parting bit of satire. He felt that he could afford to smile. A few minutes later he was ensconced on the sofa of a private sitting room reviewing the incident, with much gusto, for the benefit of Mr. Isaac D. Worthington and Mr. Alexander Duncan. Both of these gentlemen laughed heartily, for the Honorable Heth Sutton knew the art of telling a story well, at least, and was often to be seen with a group around him in the lobbies of Congress.

CHAPTER VI. MR. SUTTON TALKS TO A CONSTITUENT

ABOUT five o'clock that afternoon Ephraim was sitting in his shirt−sleeves by the window of his room, and Cynthia was reading aloud to him an article (about the war, of course) from a Washington paper, which his friend, Mr. Beard, had sent him. There was a knock at the door, and Cynthia opened it to discover a colored hall−boy with a roll in his hand.

"Mistah Ephum Prescott?" he said.

"Yes," answered Ephraim, "that's me."

Cynthia shut the door and gave him the roll, but Ephraim took it as though he were afraid of its contents.

"Guess it's some of them war records from Amasy," he said.

"Oh, Cousin Eph," exclaimed Cynthia, excitedly, "why don't you open it? If you don't, I will."

"Guess you'd better, Cynthy," and he held it out to her with a trembling hand.

Cynthia did open it, and drew out a large document with seals and printing and signatures.

"Cousin Eph," she cried, holding it under his nose, "Cousin Eph, you're postmaster of Brampton!"

Ephraim looked at the paper, but his eyes swam, and he could only make out a dancing, bronze seal.

"I want to know!" he exclaimed. "Fetch Jethro."

But Cynthia had already flown on that errand. Curiously enough, she ran into Jethro in the hall immediately outside of Ephraim's door. Ephraim got to his feet; it was very difficult for him to realize that his troubles were ended, that he was to earn his living at last. He looked at Jethro, and his eyes filled with tears. "I guess I can't thank you as I'd ought to, Jethro," he said, "leastways, not now."

"I'll thank him for you, Cousin Eph," said Cynthia. And she did.

"D−don't thank me," said Jethro, "I didn't have much to do with it, Eph. Thank the President."

Ephraim did thank the President, in one of the most remarkable letters, from a literary point of view, ever received at the White House. For the art of literature largely consists in belief in what one is writing, and Ephraim's letter had this quality of sincerity, and no lack of vividness as well. He spent most of the evening in composing it.

Cynthia, too, had received a letter that day a letter which she had read several times, now with a smile, and again with a pucker of the forehead which was meant for a frown. "Dear Cynthia," it said. "Where do you keep yourself? I am sure you would not be so cruel if you knew that I was aching to see you." Aching! Cynthia repeated the word, and remembered the glimpse she had had of him in the dining room with Miss Janet Duncan. "Whenever I have been free" (Cynthia repeated this also, somewhat ironically, although she conceded it the merit of frankness), "Whenever I have been free, I have haunted the corridors for a sight of you. Think of me as haunting the hotel desk for an answer to this, telling me when I can see you and where. P.S. I shall be around all evening." And it was signed, "Your friend and playmate, R. Worthington."

It is a fact not generally known that Cynthia did answer the letter twice. But she sent neither answer. Even at

that age she was given to reflection, and much as she may have approved of the spirit of the letter, she liked the tone of it less. Cynthia did not know a great deal of the world, it is true, but she felt instinctively that something was wrong when Bob resorted to such means of communication. And she was positively relieved, or thought she was, when she went down to supper and discovered that the table in the corner was empty. After supper Ephraim had his letter to write, and Jethro wished to sit in the corridor. But Cynthia had learned that the corridor was not the place for a girl, so she explained to Jethro that he would find her in the parlor if he wanted her, and that she was going there to read. That parlor Cynthia thought a handsome room, with its high windows and lace curtains, its long mirrors and marble−topped tables. She established herself under a light, on a sofa in one corner, and sat, with the book on her lap, watching the people who came and went. She had that delicious sensation which comes to the young when they first travel the sensation of being a part of the great world; and she wished that she knew these people, and which were the great, and which the little ones. Some of them looked at her intently, she thought too intently, and at such times she pretended to read. She was aroused by hearing some one saying:

"Isn't this Miss Wetherell?"

Cynthia looked up and caught her breath, for the young lady who had spoken was none other than Miss Janet Duncan herself. Seen thus startlingly at close range, Miss Duncan was not at all like what Cynthia had expected but then most people are not. Janet Duncan was, in fact, one of those strange persons who do not realize the picture which their names summon up. She was undoubtedly good−looking; her hair, of a more golden red than her brother's, was really wonderful; her neck was slender; and she had a strange, dreamy face that fascinated Cynthia, who had never seen anything like it.

She put down her book on the sofa and got up, not without a little tremor at this unexpected encounter.

"Yes, I'm Cynthia Wetherell," she replied.

To add to her embarrassment, Miss Duncan seized both her hands impulsively and gazed into her face.

"You're really very beautiful," she said. "Do you know it?

Cynthia's only answer to this was a blush. She wondered if all city girls were like Miss Duncan.

"I was determined to come up and speak to you the first chance I had," Janet continued. "I've been making up stories about you."

"Stories!" exclaimed Cynthia, drawing away her hands.

"Romances," said Miss Duncan "real romances. Sometimes I think I'm going to be a novelist, because I'm always weaving stories about people that I see people who interest me, I mean. And you look as if you might be the heroine of a wonderful romance."

Cynthia's breath was now quite taken away.

"Oh," she said, "I had never thought that I looked like that."

"But you do," said Miss Duncan; "you've got all sorts of possibilities in your face you look as if you might have lived for ages."

"As old as that?" exclaimed Cynthia, really startled.

"Perhaps I don't express myself very well," said the other, hastily; "I wish you could see what I've written about you already. I can do it so much better with pen and ink. I've started quite a romance already.

"What is it?" asked Cynthia, not without interest.

"Sit down on the sofa and I'll tell you," said Miss Duncan; "I've done it all from your face, too. I've made you a very poor girl brought up by peasants, only you are really of a great family, although nobody knows it. A rich duke sees you one day when he is hunting and falls in love with you, and you have to stand a lot of suffering and persecution because of it, and say nothing. I believe you could do that," added Janet, looking critically at Cynthia's face.

"I suppose I could if I had to," said Cynthia, "but I shouldn't like it."

"Oh, it would do you good," said Janet; "it would ennoble your character. Not that it needs it," she added hastily. "And I could write another story about that quaint old man who paid the musicians to go away, and who made us all laugh so much."

Cynthia's eye kindled.

"Mr. Bass isn't a quaint old man," she said; "he's the greatest man in the state." Miss Duncan's patronage had been of an unconscious kind. She knew that she had offended, but did not quite realize how.

"I'm so sorry," she cried, "I didn't mean to hurt you. You live with him, don't you Coniston?"

"Yes," replied Cynthia, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

"I've heard about Coniston. It must be quite a romance in itself to live all the year round in such a beautiful place and to make your own clothes. Yours become you very well," said Miss Duncan, "although I don't now why. They're not at all in style, and yet they give you quite an air of distinction. I wish I could live in Coniston for a year, anyway, and write a book about you. My brother and Bob Worthington went out there one night and serenaded you, didn't they?"

"Yes," said Cynthia, that peculiar flash coming into her eyes again, "and I think it was very foolish of them."

"Do you?" exclaimed Miss Duncan, in surprise; "I wish somebody would serenade me. I think it was the most romantic thing Bob ever did. He's wild about you, and so is Somers they have both told me so in confidence."

Cynthia's face was naturally burning now.

"If it were true," she said, "they wouldn't have told you about it."

"I suppose that's so," said Miss Duncan, thoughtfully, "only you're very clever to have seen it. Now that I know you, I think you a more remarkable person than ever. You don't seem at all like a country girl, and you don't talk like one."

Cynthia laughed outright. She could not help liking Janet Duncan, mere flesh and blood not being proof against such compliments.

"I suppose it's because my father was an educated man," she said; "he taught me to read and speak when I was young."

"Why, you are just like a person out of a novel! Who was your father?"

"He kept the store at Coniston," answered Cynthia, smiling a little sadly. She would have liked to have added that William Wetherell would have been a great man if he had had health, but she found it difficult to give out confidences, especially when they were in the nature of surmises.

"Well," said Janet, stoutly, "I think that is more like a story than ever. Do you know," she continued, "I saw you once at the state capital outside of our grounds the day Bob ran after you. That was when I was in love with him. We had just come back from Europe then, and I thought he was the most wonderful person I had ever seen."

If Cynthia had felt any emotion from this disclosure, she did not betray it. Janet, moreover, was not looking for it.

"What made you change your mind?" asked Cynthia, biting her lip.

"Oh, Bob hasn't the temperament" said Janet, making use of a word that she had just discovered; "he's too practical he never does or says the things you want him to. He's just been out West with us on a trip, and he was always looking at locomotives and brakes and grades and bridges and all such tiresome things. I should like to marry a poet," said Miss Duncan, dreamily; "I know they want me to marry Bob, and Mr. Worthington wants it. I'm sure of that. But he wouldn't at all suit me."

If Cynthia had been able to exercise an equal freedom of speech, she might have been impelled to inquire what young Mr. Worthington's views were in the matter. As it was, she could think of nothing appropriate to say, and just then four people entered the room and came towards them. Two of these were Janet's mother and father, and the other two were Mr. Worthington, the elder, and the Honorable Heth Sutton. Mrs. Duncan, whom Janet did not at all resemble, was a person who naturally commanded attention. She had strong features, and a very decided, though not disagreeable, manner.

"I couldn't imagine what had become of you, Janet" she said, coming forward and throwing off her lace shawl. "Whom have you found a school friend?" "No, Mamma," said Janet, "this is Cynthia Wetherell."

"Oh," said Mrs. Duncan, looking very hard at Cynthia in a near−sighted way, and not knowing in the least who she was; "you haven't seen Senator and Mrs. Meade, have you, Janet? They were to be here at eight o'clock."

"No," said Janet, turning again to Cynthia and scarcely hearing the question.

"Janet hasn't seen them, Dudley," said Mrs. Duncan, going up to Mr. Worthington, who was pulling his chop whiskers by the door. "Janet has discovered such a beautiful creature," she went on, in a voice which she did not take the trouble to lower. "Do look at her, Alexander. And you, Mr. Sutton who are such a bureau of useful information, do tell me who she is. Perhaps she comes from your part of the country her name's Wetherell."

"Wetherell? Why, of course I know her," said Mr. Sutton, who was greatly pleased because Mrs. Duncan had likened him to an almanac: greatly pleased this evening in every respect, and even the diamond in his bosom seemed to glow with a brighter fire. He could afford to be generous to−night, and he turned to Mr. Worthington and laughed knowingly. "She's the ward of our friend Jethro," he explained.

"What is she?" demanded Mrs. Duncan, who knew and cared nothing about politics; "a country girl, I suppose."

"Yes," replied Mr. Sutton, "a country girl from a little village not far from Clovelly. A good girl, I believe, in spite of the atmosphere in which she has been raised."

"It's really wonderful, Mr. Sutton, how you seem to know every one in your district, including the women and children," said the lady; "but I suppose you wouldn't be where you are if you didn't."

The Honorable Heth cleared his throat.

"Wetherell," Mr. Duncan was saying, staring at Cynthia through his spectacles, "where have I heard that name?"

He must suddenly have remembered, and recalled also that he and his ally Worthington had been on opposite sides in the Woodchuck Session, for he sat down abruptly beside the door, and remained there for a while. For Mr. Duncan had never believed Mr. Merrill's explanation concerning poor William Wetherell's conduct.

"Pretty, ain't she?" said Mr. Sutton to Mr. Worthington. "Guess she's more dangerous than Jethro, now that we've clipped his wings a little." The congressman had heard of Bob's infatuation.

Isaac D. Worthington, however, was in a good humor this evening, and was moved by a certain curiosity to inspect the girl. Though what he had seen and heard of his son's conduct with her had annoyed him, he did not regard it seriously.

"Aren't you going to speak to your constituent, Mr. Sutton?" said Mrs. Duncan, who was bored because her friends had not arrived; "a congressman ought to keep on the right side of the pretty girls, you know."

It hadn't occurred to the Honorable Heth to speak to his constituent. The ways of Mrs. Duncan sometimes puzzled him, and he could not see why that lady and her daughter seemed to take more than a passing interest in the girl. But if they could afford to notice her, certainly he could, so he went forward graciously and held out his hand to Cynthia, interrupting Miss Duncan in the middle of a discourse upon her diary.

"How do you do, Cynthia?" said Mr. Sutton. Had he been in Coniston, he would have said, "How be you?"

Cynthia took the hand, but did not rise, somewhat to Mr. Sutton's annoyance. A certain respect was due to a member of Congress and the Rajah of Clovelly.

"How do you do, Mr. Sutton?" said Cynthia, very coolly.

"I like her," remarked Mrs. Duncan to Mr. Worthington.

"This is a splendid trip for you, eh, Cynthia?" Mr. Sutton persisted, with a praiseworthy determination to be pleasant.

"It has turned out to be so, Mr. Sutton," replied Cynthia. This was not precisely the answer Mr. Sutton expected, and to tell the truth, he didn't quite know what to make of it.

"A great treat to see Washington and New York, isn't it?" said Mr. Sutton, kindly, "a great treat for a Coniston girl. I suppose you came through New York and saw the sights?"

"Is there another way to get to Washington?" asked Cynthia.

Mrs. Duncan nudged Mr. Worthington and drew a little nearer, while Mr. Sutton began to wish he had not been lured into the conversation. Cynthia had been very polite, but there was something in the quiet manner in which the girl's eyes were fixed upon him that made him vaguely uneasy. He could not back out with dignity, and he felt himself on the verge of becoming voluble. Mr. Sutton prided himself on never being voluble.

"Why, no," he answered, "we have to go to New York to get anywhere in these days." There was a slight pause. "Uncle Jethro taking you and Mr. Prescott on a little pleasure trip?" He had not meant to mention Jethro's name, but he found himself, to his surprise, a little at a loss for a subject.

"Well, partly a pleasure trip. It's always a pleasure for Uncle Jethro to do things for others," said Cynthia, quietly, "although people do not always appreciate what he does for them."

The Honorable Heth coughed. He was now very uncomfortable, indeed. How much did this astounding young person know, whom he had thought so innocent?

"I didn't discover he was in town until I ran across him in the corridor this evening. Should have liked to have introduced him to some of the Washington folks some of the big men, although not many of 'em are here," Mr. Sutton ran on, not caring to notice the little points of light in Cynthia's eyes. (The idea of Mr. Sutton introducing Uncle Jethro to anybody!) "I haven't seen Ephraim Prescott. It must be a great treat for him, too, to get away on a little trip and see his army friends. How is he?" "He's very happy," said Cynthia.

"Happy!" exclaimed Mr. Sutton. "Oh, yes, of course, Ephraim's always happy, in spite of his troubles and his rheumatism. I always liked Ephraim Prescott."

Cynthia did not answer this remark at all, and Mr. Sutton suspected strongly that she did not believe it, therefore he repeated it.

"I always liked Ephraim. I want you to tell Jethro that I'm downright sorry I couldn't get him that Brampton postmastership."

"I'll tell him that you are sorry, Mr. Sutton," replied Cynthia, gravely, "but I don't think it'll do any good."

Not do any good! What did the girl mean? Mr. Sutton came to the conclusion that he had been condescending enough, that somehow he was gaining no merit in Mrs. Duncan's eyes by this kindness to a constituent. He buttoned up his coat rather grandly.

"I hope you won't misunderstand me, Cynthia," he said. "I regret extremely that my sense of justice demanded that I should make David Wheelock postmaster of Brampton, and I have made him so."

It was now Cynthia's turn to be amazed.

"But," she exclaimed, "but Cousin Ephraim is postmaster of Brampton."

Mr. Sutton started violently, and that part of his face not hidden by his whiskers seemed to pale, and Mr. Worthington, usually self−possessed, took a step forward and seized him by the arm.

"What does this mean, Sutton?" he said.

Mr. Sutton pulled himself together, and glared at Cynthia.

"I think you are mistaken," said he, "the congressman of the district usually arranges these matters, and the appointment will be sent to Mr. Wheelock to−morrow."

"But Cousin Ephraim already has the appointment," said Cynthia; "it was sent to him this afternoon, and he is up in his room now writing to thank the President for it."

"What in the world's the matter?" cried Mrs. Duncan, in astonishment. Cynthia's simple announcement had indeed caused something of a panic among the gentlemen present. Mr. Duncan had jumped up from his seat beside the door, and Mr. Worthington, his face anything but impassive, tightened his hold on the congressman's arm.

"Good God, Sutton!" he exclaimed, "can this be true?"

As for Cynthia, she was no less astonished than Mrs. Duncan by the fact that these rich and powerful gentlemen were so excited over a little thing like the postmastership of Brampton. But Mr. Sutton laughed; it was not hearty, but still it might have passed muster for a laugh.

"Nonsense," he exclaimed, making a fair attempt to regain his composure, "the girl's got it mixed up with something else she doesn't know what she's talking about."

Mrs. Duncan thought the girl did look uncommonly as if she knew what she was talking about, and Mr. Duncan and Mr. Worthington had some such impression, too, as they stared at her. Cynthia's eyes flashed, but her voice was no louder than before.

"I am used to being believed, Mr. Sutton," she said, "but here's Uncle Jethro himself. You might ask him."

They all turned in amazement, and one, at least, in trepidation, to perceive Jethro Bass standing behind them with his hands in his pockets, as unconcerned as though he were under the butternut tree in Coniston.

"How be you, Heth?" he said. "Er still got that appointment p−practically in your pocket?"

"Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia, "Mr. Sutton does not believe me when I tell him that Cousin Ephraim has been made postmaster of Brampton. He would like to have you tell him whether it is so or not."

But this, as it happened, was exactly what the Honorable Heth did not want to have Jethro tell him. How he got out of the parlor of the Willard House he has not to this day a very clear idea. As a matter of fact, he followed Mr. Worthington and Mr. Duncan, and they made their exit by the farther door. Jethro did not appear to take any notice of their departure. "Janet," said Mrs. Duncan, "I think Senator and Mrs. Meade must have gone to our sitting room." Then, to Cynthia's surprise, the lady took her by the hand. "I can't imagine what you've done, my dear," she said pleasantly, "but I believe that you are capable of taking care of yourself, and I like you."

Thus it will be seen that Mrs. Duncan was an independent person. Sometimes heiresses are apt to be.

"And I like you, too," said Janet, taking both of Cynthia's hands, "and I hope to see you very, very often."

Jethro looked after them.

"Er the women folks seem to have some sense," he said. Then he turned to Cynthia. "B−be'n havin' some fun with Heth, Cynthy?" he inquired.

"I haven't any respect for Mr. Sutton," said Cynthia, indignantly; "it serves him right for presuming to think that he could give a post−office to any one."

Jethro made no remark concerning this presumption on the part of the congressman of the district. Cynthia's indignation against Mr. Sutton was very real, and it was some time before she could compose herself sufficiently to tell Jethro what had happened. His enjoyment as he listened may be imagined; but presently he forgot this, and became aware that something really troubled her.

"Uncle Jethro," she asked suddenly, "why do they treat me as they do?"

He did not answer at once. This was because of a pain around his heart had she known it. He had felt that pain before.

"H−how do they treat you, Cynthy?"

She hesitated. She had not yet learned to use the word patronize in the social sense, and she was at a loss to describe the attitude of Mrs. Duncan and her daughter, though her instinct had registered it. She was at a loss to account for Mr. Worthington's attitude, too. Mr. Sutton's she bitterly resented.

"Are they your enemies?" she demanded.

Jethro was in real distress.

"If they are," she continued, "I won't speak to them again. If they can't treat me as as your daughter ought to be treated, I'll turn my back on them. I am I am just like your daughter am I not, Uncle Jethro?"

He put out his hand and seized hers roughly, and his voice was thick with suffering.

"Yes, Cynthy," he said, "you you're all I've got in the world."

She squeezed his hand in return.

"I know it, Uncle Jethro," she cried contritely, "I oughtn't to have troubled you by asking. You you have done everything for me, much more than I deserve. And I shan't be hurt after this when people are too small to appreciate how good you are, and how great.

The pain tightened about Jethro's heart tightened so sharply that he could not speak, and scarcely breathe because of it. Cynthia picked up her novel, and set the bookmark.

"Now that Cousin Eph is provided for, let's go back to Coniston, Uncle Jethro." A sudden longing was upon her for the peaceful life in the shelter of the great ridge, and she thought of the village maples all red and gold with the magic touch of the frosts. "Not that I haven't enjoyed the trip," she added; "but we are so happy there."

He did not look at her, because he was afraid to.

"C−Cynthy," he said, after a little pause, "th−thought we'd go to Boston?"

"Boston, Uncle Jethro!"

"Er to−morrow at one to−morrow like to go to Boston?"

"Yes," she said thoughtfully, "I remember parts of it. The Common, where I used to walk with Daddy, and the funny old streets that went uphill. It will be nice to go back to Coniston that way over the Truro Pass in the train."

That night a piece of news flashed over the wires to New England, and the next morning a small item appeared in the Newcastle Guardian to the effect that one Ephraim Prescott had been appointed postmaster at Brampton. Copied in the local papers of the state, it caused some surprise in Brampton, to be sure, and excitement in Coniston. Perhaps there were but a dozen men, however, who saw its real significance, who knew through this

item that Jethro Bass was still supreme that the railroads had failed to carry this first position in their war against him.

It was with a light heart the next morning that Cynthia packed the little leather trunk which had been her father's. Ephraim was in the corridor regaling his friend, Mr. Beard, with that wonderful encounter with General Grant which sounded so much like a Fifth Reader anecdote of a chance meeting with royalty. Jethro's room was full of visiting politicians. So Cynthia, when she had finished her packing, went out to walk about the streets alone, scanning the people who passed her, looking at the big houses, and wondering who lived in them. Presently she found herself, in the middle of the morning, seated on a bench in a little park, surrounded by colored mammies and children playing in the paths. It seemed a long time since she had left the hills, and this glimpse of cities had given her many things to think and dream about. Would she always live in Coniston? Or was her future to be cast among those who moved in the world and helped to sway it? Cynthia felt that she was to be of these, though she could not reason why, and she told herself that the feeling was foolish. Perhaps it was that she knew in the bottom of her heart that she had been given a spirit and intelligence to cope with a larger life than that of Coniston. With a sense that such imaginings were vain, she tried to think what she would do if she were to become a great lady like Mrs. Duncan.

She was aroused from these reflections by a distant glimpse, through the trees, of Mr. Robert Worthington. He was standing quite alone on the edge of the park, his hands in his pockets, staring at the White House. Cynthia half rose, and then sat down and looked at him again. He wore a light gray, loose−fitting suit and a straw hat, and she could not but acknowledge that there was something stalwart and clean and altogether appealing in him. She wondered, indeed, why he now failed to appeal to Miss Duncan, and she began to doubt the sincerity of that young lady's statements. Bob certainly was not romantic, but he was a man or would be very soon.

Cynthia sat still, although her impulse was to go away. She scarcely analyzed her feeling of wishing to avoid him. It may not be well, indeed, to analyze them on paper too closely. She had an instinct that only pain could come from frequent meetings, and she knew now what but a week ago was a surmise, that he belonged to the world of which she had been dreaming Mrs. Duncan's world. Again, there was that mysterious barrier between them of which she had seen so many evidences. And yet she sat still on her bench and looked at him.

Presently he turned, slowly, as if her eyes had compelled his. She sat still it was too late, then. In less than a minute he was standing beside her, looking down at her with a smile that had in it a touch of reproach.

"How do you do, Mr. Worthington?" said Cynthia, quietly.

"Mr. Worthington! "he cried, "you haven't called me that before."

"We are not children any more," she said.

"What difference does that make?"

"A great deal," said Cynthia, not caring to define it.

"Cynthia," said Mr. Worthington, sitting down on the bench and facing her, "do you think you've treated me just right?"

"Of course I do," she said, "or I should have treated you differently."

Bob ignored such quibbling.

"Why did you run away from that baseball game in Brampton? And why couldn't you have answered my letter yesterday, if it were only a line? And why have you avoided me here in Washington?"

It is very difficult to answer for another questions which one cannot answer for one's self.

"I haven't avoided you," said Cynthia. "I've been looking for you all over town this morning," said Bob, with pardonable exaggeration, "and I believe that idiot Somers has, too."

"Then why should you call him an idiot?" Cynthia flushed.

Bob laughed.

"How you do catch a fellow up!" said he, admiringly. "We both found out you'd gone out for a walk alone."

"How did you find it out?"

"Well," said Bob, hesitating, "we asked the colored doorkeeper."

"Mr. Worthington," said Cynthia, with an indignation that made him quail, "do you think it right to ask a doorkeeper to spy on my movements?"

"I'm sorry, Cynthia," he gasped, "I I didn't think of it that way − and he won't tell. Desperate cases require desperate remedies, you know."

But Cynthia was not appeased.

"If you wanted to see me," she said, "why didn't you send your card to my room, and I would have come to the parlor."

"But I did send a note, and waited around all day."

How was she to tell him that it was to the tone of the note she objected to the hint of a clandestine meeting? She turned the light of her eyes full upon him.

"Would you have been content to see me in the parlor?" she asked. "Did you mean to see me there?"

"Why, yes," said he; "I would have given my head to see you anywhere, only −"

"Only what?"

"Duncan might have come in and spoiled it."

"Spoiled what?"

Bob fidgeted.

"Look here, Cynthia," he said, "you're not stupid far from it. Of course you know a fellow would rather talk to you alone."

"I should have been very glad to have seen Mr. Duncan, too."

"You would, would you!" he exclaimed. "I shouldn't have thought that." "Isn't he your friend?" asked Cynthia.

"Oh, yes," said Bob, "and one of the best in the world. Only I shouldn't have thought you'd care to talk to him." And he looked around, for fear the vigilant Mr. Duncan was already in the park and had discovered them. Cynthia smiled, and immediately became grave again.

"So it was only on Mr. Duncan's account that you didn't ask me to come down to the parlor?" she said.

Bob was in a quandary. He was a truthful person, and he had learned something of the world through his three years at Cambridge. He had seen many young women, and many kinds of them. But the girl beside him was such a mixture of innocence and astuteness that he was wholly at a loss how to deal with her how to parry her searching questions.

"Naturally I wanted to have you all to myself," he said; "you ought to know that."

Cynthia did not commit herself on this point. She wished to go mercilessly to the root of the matter, but the notion of what this would imply prevented her. Bob took advantage of her silence.

"Everybody who sees you falls a victim, Cynthia," he went on; "Mrs. Duncan and Janet lost their hearts. You ought to have heard them praising you at breakfast." He paused abruptly, thinking of the rest of that conversation, and laughed. Bob seemed fated to commit himself that day. "I heard the way you handled Heth Sutton," he said, plunging in. "I'll bet he felt as if he'd been dropped out of the third−story window," and Bob laughed again. "I'd have given a thousand dollars to have been there. Somers and I went out to supper with a classmate who lives in Washington, in that house over there," and he pointed casually to one of the imposing mansions fronting on the park. "Mrs. Duncan said she'd never heard anybody lay it on the way you did. I don't believe you half know what happened, Cynthia. You made a ten−strike."

"A ten−strike?" she repeated.

"Well," he said, "you not only laid out Heth, but my father and Mr. Duncan, too. Mrs. Duncan laughed at 'em she isn't afraid of anything. But they didn't say a word all through breakfast. I've never seen my father so mad. He ought to have known better than to run up against Uncle Jethro."

"How did they run up against Uncle Jethro?" asked Cynthia, now keenly interested.

"Don't you know?" exclaimed Bob, in astonishment.

"No," said Cynthia, "or I shouldn't have asked."

"Didn't Uncle Jethro tell you about it?"

"He never tells me anything about his affairs," she answered.

Bob's astonishment did not wear off at once. Here was a new phase, and he was very hard put. He had heard, casually, a good deal of abuse of Jethro and his methods in the last two days.

"Well," he said, "I don't know anything about politics. I don't know myself why father and Mr. Duncan were so eager for this postmastership. But they were. And I heard them say something about the President going back on them when they had telegraphed from Chicago and come to see him here. And maybe they didn't let Heth in for it. It seems Uncle Jethro only had to walk up to the White House. They ought to have sense enough to know that he runs the state. But what's the use of wasting time over this business?" said Bob. "I told you I was going to

Brampton before the term begins just to see you, didn't I?"

"Yes, but I didn't believe you," said Cynthia.

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because it's my nature, I suppose," she replied.

This was too much for Bob, exasperated though he was, and he burst into laughter.

"You're the queerest girl I've ever known," he said. Not a very original remark.

"That must be saying a great deal," she answered.

"Why?"

"You must have known many."

"I have," he admitted, "and none of 'em, no matter how much they'd knocked about, were able to look out for themselves any better than you."

"Not even Cassandra Hopkins?" Cynthia could not resist saying. She saw that she had scored; his expressions registered his sensations so accurately.

"What do you know about her?" he said.

"Oh," said Cynthia, mysteriously, "I heard that you were very fond of her at Andover."

Bob could not help pluming himself a little. He thought the fact that she had mentioned the matter a flaw in Cynthia's armor, as indeed it was. And yet he was not proud of the Cassandra Hopkins episode in his career.

"Cassandra is one of the institutions at Andover," said he; "most fellows have to take a course in Cassandra to complete their education."

"Yours seems to be very complete," Cynthia retorted.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed, looking at her, "no wonder you made mince−meat of the Honorable Heth. Where did you learn it all, Cynthia?"

Cynthia did not know. She merely wondered where she would be if she hadn't learned it. Something told her that if it were not for this anchor she would be drifting out to sea: might, indeed, soon be drifting out to sea in spite of it. It was one thing for Mr. Robert Worthington, with his numerous resources, to amuse himself with a girl in her position; it would be quite another thing for the girl. She got to her feet and held out her hand to him.

"Good−by," she said.

"Good−by?"

"We are leaving Washington at one o'clock, and Uncle Jethro will be worried if I am not in time for dinner."

"Leaving at one! That's the worst luck I've had yet. But I'm going back to the hotel myself."

Cynthia didn't see how she was to prevent him walking with her. She would not have admitted to herself that she had enjoyed this encounter, since she was trying so hard not to enjoy it. So they started together out of the park. Bob, for a wonder, was silent awhile, glancing now and then at her profile. He knew that he had a great deal to say, but he couldn't decide exactly what it was to be. This is often the case with young men in his state of mind: in fact, to be paradoxical again, he might hardly be said at this time to have had a state of mind. He lacked both an attitude and a policy.

"If you see Duncan before I do, let me know," he remarked finally.

Cynthia bit her lip. "Why should I?" she asked.

"Because we've only got five minutes more alone together, at best. If we see him in time, we can go down a side street."

"I think it would be hard to get away from Mr. Duncan if we met him − even if we wanted to," she said, laughing outright.

"You don't know how true that is," he replied, with feeling.

"That sounds as though you'd tried it before."

He paid no attention to this thrust.

"I shan't see you again till I get to Brampton," he said; "that will be a whole week. And then," he ventured to look at her, "I shan't see you until the Christmas holidays. You might be a little kind, Cynthia. You know I've I've always thought the world of you. I don't know how I'm going to get through the three months without seeing you."

"You managed to get through a good many years," said Cynthia, looking at the pavement.

"I know," he said; "I was sent away to school and college, and our lives separated."

"Yes, our lives separated," she assented.

"And I didn't know you were going to be like like this," he went on, vaguely enough, but with feeling.

"Like what?"

"Like well, I'd rather be with you and talk to you than any girl I ever saw. I don't care who she is," Bob declared, "or how much she may have travelled." He was running into deep water. "Why are you so cold, Cynthia? Why can't you be as you used to be? You used to like me well enough."

"And I like you now," answered Cynthia. They were very near the hotel by this time.

"You talk as if you were ten years older than I," he said, smiling plaintively.

She stopped and turned to him, smiling. They had reached the steps.

"I believe I am, Bob," she replied. "I haven't seen much of the world, but I've seen something of its troubles. Don't be foolish. If you're coming to Brampton just to see me, don't come. Good−by," and she gave him her hand frankly.

"But I will come to Brampton," he cried, taking her hand and squeezing it. "I'd like to know why I shouldn't come."

As Cynthia drew her hand away a gentleman came out of the hotel, paused for a brief moment by the door and stared at them, and then passed on without a word or a nod of recognition. It was Mr. Worthington. Bob looked after his father, and then glanced at Cynthia. There was a trifle more color in her cheeks, and her head was raised a little, and her eyes were fixed upon him gravely.

"You should know why not," she said, and before he could answer her she was gone into the hotel. He did not attempt to follow her, but stood where she had left him in the sunlight.

He was aroused by the voice of the genial colored doorkeeper.

"Wal, suh, you found the lady, Mistah Wo'thington. Thought you would, suh. T'other young gentleman come in while ago looked as if he was feelin' powerful bad, Mistah Wo'thington."

CHAPTER VII. AN AMAZING ENCOUNTER

WHEN they reached Boston, Cynthia felt almost as if she were home again, and Ephraim declared that he had had the same feeling when he returned from the war. Though it be the prosperous capital of New England, it is a city of homes, and the dwellers of it have held stanchly to the belief of their forefathers that the home is the very foundation−rock of the nation. Held stanchly to other beliefs, too: that wealth carries with it some little measure of responsibility. The stranger within the gates of that city feels that if he falls, a heedless world will not go charging over his body: that a helping hand will be stretched out, a helping and a wise hand that will inquire into the circumstances of his fall but still a human hand.

They were sitting in the parlor of the Tremont House that morning with the sun streaming in the windows, waiting for Ephraim.

"Uncle Jethro," Cynthia asked, abruptly, "did you ever know my mother?"

Jethro started, and looked at her quickly.

"W−why, Cynthy?" he asked.

"Because she grew up in Coniston," answered Cynthia. "I never thought of it before, but of course you must have known her."

"Yes, I knew her," he said.

"Did you know her well?" she persisted.

Jethro got up and went over to the window, where he stood with his back toward her.

"Yes, Cynthy," he answered at length. "Why haven't you ever told me about her?" asked Cynthia. How was she to know that her innocent questions tortured him cruelly; that the spirit of the Cynthia who had come to him in the tannery house had haunted him all his life, and that she herself, a new Cynthia, was still that spirit? The bygone Cynthia had been much in his thoughts since they came to Boston.

"What was she like?"

"She she was like you, Cynthy," he said, but he did not turn round. "She was a clever woman, and a good woman, and a lady, Cynthy."

The girl said nothing for a while, but she tingled with pleasure because Jethro had compared her to her mother. She determined to try to be like that, if he thought her so.

"Uncle Jethro," she said presently, "I'd like to go to see the house where she lived."

"Er Ephraim knows it," said Jethro.

So when Ephraim came the three went over the hill, past the State House which Bulfinch set as a crown on the crest of it looking over the sweep of the Common, and on into the maze of quaint, old−world streets on the slope beyond: streets with white porticos, and violet panes in the windows. They came to an old square hidden away on a terrace of the hill, and after that the streets grew narrower and dingier. Ephraim, whose memory never betrayed him, hobbled up to a shabby house in the middle of one of these blocks and rang the bell.

"Here's where I found Will when I come back from the war," he said, and explained the matter in full to the slatternly landlady who came to the door. She was a good−natured woman, who thought her boarder would not mind, and led the way up the steep stairs to the chamber over the roofs where Wetherell and Cynthia had lived and hoped and worked together; where he had written those pages by which, with the aid of her loving criticism, he had thought to become famous. The room was as bare now as it had been then, and Ephraim, poking his stick through a hole in the carpet, ventured the assertion that even that had not been changed. Jethro, staring out over the chimney tops, passed his hand across his eyes. Cynthia Ware had come to this!

"I found him right here in that bed," Ephraim was saying, and he poked the bottom boards, too. "The same bed. Had a shock when I saw him. Callate he wouldn't have lived two months if the war hadn't bust up and I hadn't come along."

"Oh, Cousin Eph!" exclaimed Cynthia.

The old soldier turned and saw that there were tears in her eyes. But, stranger than that, Cynthia saw that there were tears in his own. He took her gently by the arm and led her down the stairs again, she supporting him, and Jethro following.

That same morning, Jethro, whose memory was quite as good as Ephraim's, found a little shop tucked away in Cornhill which had been miraculously spared in the advance of prosperity. Mr. Judson's name, however, was no longer in quaint lettering over the door. Standing before it, Jethro told the story in his droll way, of a city clerk and a country bumpkin, and Cynthia and Ephraim both laughed so heartily that the people who were passing turned round to look at them and laughed too. For the three were an unusual group, even in Boston. It was not until they were seated at dinner in the hotel, Ephraim with his napkin tucked under his chin, that Jethro gave them the key to the characters in this story.

"And who was the locket for, Uncle Jethro?" demanded Cynthia.

Jethro, however, shook his head, and would not be induced to tell.

They were still so seated when Cynthia perceived coming toward them through the crowded dining room a merry, middle−aged gentleman with a bald head. He seemed to know everybody in the room, for he was kept busy nodding right and left at the tables until he came to theirs. He was Mr. Merrill, who had come to see her father in Coniston, and who had spoken so kindly to her on that occasion. "Well, well, well," he said; "Jethro, you'll be the death of me yet. 'Don't write send,' eh? Well, as long as you sent word you were here, I don't complain. So you

licked 'em again, eh down in Washington? Never had a doubt but what you would. Is this the new postmaster? How are you, Mr. Prescott and Cynthia a young lady! Bless my soul," said Mr. Merrill, looking her over as he shook her hand. "What have you done to her, Jethro? What kind of beauty powder do they use in Coniston?"

Mr. Merrill took the seat next to her and continued to talk, scattering his pleasantries equally among the three, patting her arm when her own turn came. She liked Mr. Merrill very much; he seemed to her (as, indeed, he was) honest and kind−hearted. Cynthia was not lacking in a proper appreciation of herself that may have been discovered. But she was puzzled to know why this gentleman should make it a point to pay such particular attention to a young country girl. Other railroad presidents whom she could name had not done so. She was thinking of these things, rather than listening to Mr. Merrill's conversation, when the sound of Mr. Worthington's name startled her.

"Well, Jethro," Mr. Merrill was saying, "you certainly nipped this little game of Worthington's in the bud. Thought he'd take you in the rear by going to Washington, did he? Ha, ha! I'd like to know how you did it. I'll get you to tell me to−night see if I don't. You're all coming in to supper to−night, you know, at seven o'clock."

Ephraim laid down his knife and fork for the first time. Were the wonders of this journey never to cease? And Jethro, once in his life, looked nervous.

"Er er Cynthy'll go, Steve Cynthy'll go."

"Yes, Cynthy'll go," laughed Mr. Merrill, "and you'll go, and Ephraim'll go." Although he by no means liked everybody, as would appear at first glance, Mr. Merrill had a way of calling people by their first names when he did fancy them. "Er Steve," said Jethro, "what would your wife say if I was to drink coffee out of my saucer?"

"Let's see," said Mr. Merrill, grave for once. "What's the punishment for that in my house? I know what she'd do if you didn't drink it. What do you think she'd do, Cynthy?"

"Ask him what was the matter with it," said Cynthia, promptly.

"Well, Cynthy," said he, "I know why these old fellows take you round with 'em. To take care of 'em, eh? They're not fit to travel alone."

And so it was settled, after much further argument, that they were all to sup at Mr. Merrill's house, Cynthia stoutly maintaining that she would not desert them. And then Mr. Merrill, having several times repeated the street and number, went back to his office. There was much mysterious whispering between Ephraim and Jethro in the hotel parlor after dinner, while Cynthia was turning over the leaves of a magazine, and then Ephraim proposed going out to see the sights.

"Where's Uncle Jethro going?" she asked.

"He'll meet us," said Ephraim, promptly, but his voice was not quite steady.

"Oh, Uncle Jethro!" cried Cynthia, "you're trying to get out of it. You remember you promised to meet us in Washington."

"Guess he'll keep this app'intment," said Ephraim, who seemed to be full of a strange mirth that bubbled over, for he actually winked at Jethro.

Cynthia's mind flew to Bunker Hill and the old North Church, but they went first to Faneuil Hall. Presently they found themselves among the crowd in Washington Street, where Ephraim confessed the trepidation which he felt

over the coming supper party: a trepidation greater, so he declared many times, than he had ever experienced before any of his battles in the war. He stopped once or twice in the eddy of the crowd to glance up at the numbers, and finally came to a halt before the windows of a large dry−goods store. "I guess I ought to buy a new shirt for this occasion, Cynthy," he said, staring hard at the articles of apparel displayed there. "Let's go in."

Cynthia laughed outright, since Ephraim could not by any chance have worn any of the articles in question.

"Why, Cousin Ephraim," she exclaimed, "you can't buy gentlemen's things here."

"Oh, I guess you can," said Ephraim, and hobbled confidently in at the doorway. There we will leave him for a while conversing in an undertone with a floor−walker, and follow Jethro. He, curiously enough, had some fifteen minutes before gone in at the same doorway, questioned the same floor−walker, and he found himself in due time walking amongst a bewildering lot of models on the third floor, followed by a giggling saleswoman.

"What kind of a dress do you want, sir?" asked the saleslady, for we are impelled to call her so.

"S−silk cloth," said Jethro.

"What shades of silk would you like, sir?"

"Shades? shades? What do you mean by shades?"

"Why, colors," said the saleslady, giggling openly.

"Green," said Jethro, with considerable emphasis.

The saleslady clapped her hand over her mouth and led the way to another model.

"You don't call that green do you? That's not green enough."

They inspected another dress, and then another and another, not all of them were green, Jethro expressing very decided if not expert views on each of them. At last he paused before two models at the far end of the room, passing his hand repeatedly over each as he had done so often with the cattle of Coniston.

"These two pieces same kind of goods?" he demanded.

"Yes."

"Er this one is a little shinier than that one?"

"Perhaps the finish is a little higher," ventured the saleslady.

"Sh−shinier," said Jethro.

"Yes, shinier, if you please to call it so." "W−what would you call it?"

By this time the saleslady had become quite hysterical, and altogether incapable of performing her duties. Jethro looked at her for a moment in disgust, and in his predicament cast around for another to wait on him. There was no lack of these, at a safe distance, but they all seemed to be affected by the same mania. Jethro's eye alighted upon the back of another customer. She was, apparently, a respectable−looking lady of uncertain age, and her own attention was so firmly fixed in the contemplation of a model that she had not remarked the merriment about her,

nor its cause. She did not see Jethro, either, as he strode across to her. Indeed, her first intimation of his presence was a dig in her arm. The lady turned, gave a gasp of amazement at the figure confronting her, and proceeded to annihilate it with an eye that few women possess.

"H−how do, Ma'am," he said. Had he known anything about the appearance of women in general, he might have realized that he had struck a tartar. This lady was at least sixty−five, and probably unmarried. Her face, though not at all unpleasant, was a study in character−development: she wore ringlets, a peculiar bonnet of a bygone age, and her clothes had certain eccentricities which, for lack of knowledge, must be omitted. In short, the lady was no fool, and not being one she glanced at the giggling group of saleswomen and wonderful to relate they stopped giggling. Then she looked again at Jethro and gave him a smile. One of superiority, no doubt, but still a smile.

"How do you do, sir?"

"T−trying to buy a silk cloth gown for a woman. There's two over here I fancied a little. Er thought perhaps you'd help me."

"Where are the dresses?" she demanded abruptly.

Jethro led the way in silence until they came to the models. She planted herself in front of them and looked them over swiftly but critically.

"What is the age of the lady?" "W−what difference does that make?" said Jethro, whose instinct was against committing himself to strangers.

"Difference!" she exclaimed sharply, "it makes a considerable difference. Perhaps not to you, but to the lady. What coloring is she?"

"Coloring? She's white."

His companion turned her back on him.

"What size is she?"

"A−about that size," said Jethro, pointing to a model.

"About! about!" she ejaculated, and then she faced him. "Now look here, my friend," she said vigorously, "there's something very mysterious about all this. You look like a good man, but you may be a very wicked one for all I know. I've lived long enough to discover that appearances, especially where your sex is concerned, are deceitful. Unless you are willing to tell me who this lady is for whom you are buying silk dresses, and what your relationship is to her, I shall leave you. And mind, no evasions. I can detect the truth pretty well when I hear it."

Unexpected as it was, Jethro gave back a step or two before this onslaught of feminine virtue, and the movement did not tend to raise him in the lady's esteem. He felt that he would rather face General Grant a thousand times than this person. She was, indeed, preparing to sweep away when there came a familiar tap−tap behind them on the bare floor, and he turned to behold Ephraim hobbling toward them with the aid of his green umbrella, Cynthia by his side.

"Why, it's Uncle Jethro," cried Cynthia, looking at him and the lady in astonishment, and then with equal astonishment at the models. "What in the world are you doing here?" Then a light seemed to dawn on her. "You frauds! So this is what were whispering about! This is the way Cousin Ephraim buys his shirts!"

"C−Cynthy," said Jethro, apologetically, "d−don't you think you ought to have a nice city dress for that supper party?" "So you're ashamed of my country clothes, are you?" she asked gayly.

"W−want you to have the best, Cynthy," he replied. "M−meant to have it all chose and bought when you come, but I got into a kind of argument with this lady."

"Argument!" exclaimed the lady. But she did not seem displeased. She had been staring very fixedly at Cynthia. "My dear," she continued kindly, "you look like some one I used to know a long, long time ago, and I'll be glad to help you. Your uncle may be sensible enough in other matters, but I tell him frankly he is out of place here. Let him go away and sit down somewhere with the other gentleman, and we'll get the dress between us, if he'll tell us how much to pay."

"P−pay anything, so's you get it," said Jethro.

"Uncle Jethro, do you really want it so much?"

It must not be thought that Cynthia did not wish for a dress, too. But the sense of dependence on Jethro and the fear of straining his purse never quite wore off. So Jethro and Ephraim took to a bench at some distance, and at last a dress was chosen not one of the gorgeous models Jethro had picked out, but a pretty, simple, girlish gown which Cynthia herself had liked and of which the lady highly approved. Not content with helping to choose it, the lady must satisfy herself that it fit, which it did perfectly. And so Cynthia was transformed into a city person, though her skin glowed with a health with which few city people are blessed.

"My dear," said the lady, still staring at her, "you look very well. I should scarcely have supposed it." Cynthia took the remark in good part, for she thought the lady a character, which she was. "I hope you will remember that we women were created for a higher purpose than mere beauty. The Lord gave us brains, and meant that we should use them. If you have a good mind, as I believe you have, learn to employ it for the betterment of your sex, for the time of our emancipation is at hand." Having delivered this little lecture, the lady continued to stare at her with keen eyes. "You look very much like some one I used to love when I was younger. What is your name?"

"Cynthia Wetherell."

"Cynthia Wetherell? Was your mother Cynthia Ware, from Coniston?"

"Yes," said Cynthia, amazed.

In an instant the strange lady had risen and had taken Cynthia in her embrace, new dress and all.

"My dear," she said, "I thought your face had a familiar look. It was your mother I knew and loved. I'm Miss Lucretia Penniman."

Miss Lucretia Penniman! Could this be, indeed, the authoress of the "Hymn to Coniston," of whom Brampton was so proud? The Miss Lucretia Penniman who sounded the first clarion note for the independence of American women, the friend of Bryant and Hawthorne and Longfellow? Cynthia had indeed heard of her. Did not all Brampton point to the house which had held the Social Library as to a shrine?

"Cynthia," said Miss Lucretia, "I have a meeting now of a girls' charity to which I must go, but you will come to me at the offices of the Woman's Hour to−morrow morning at ten. I wish to talk to you about your mother and yourself."

Cynthia promised, provided they did not leave for Coniston earlier, and in that event agreed to write. Whereupon Miss Lucretia kissed her again and hurried off to her meeting. On the way back to the Tremont House Cynthia related excitedly the whole circumstance to Jethro and Ephraim. Ephraim had heard of Miss Lucretia, of course. Who had not? But he did not read the Woman's Hour. Jethro was silent. Perhaps he was thinking of that fresh summer morning, so long ago, when a girl in a gig had overtaken him in the cañon made by the Brampton road through the woods. The girl had worn a poke bonnet, and was returning a book to this same Miss Lucretia Penniman's Social Library. And the book was the "Life of Napoleon Bonaparte."

"Uncle Jethro, shall we still be in Boston to−morrow morning?" Cynthia asked. He roused himself.

"Yes," he said, "yes."

"When are you going home?"

He did not answer this simple question, but countered.

"Hain't you enjoyin' yourself, Cynthy?"

"Of course I am," she declared. But she thought it strange that he would not tell her when they would be in Coniston.

Ephraim did buy a new shirt, and also (in view of the postmastership in his pocket) a new necktie, his old one being slightly frayed.

The grandeur of the approaching supper party and the fear of Mrs. Merrill hung very heavy over him; nor was Jethro's mind completely at rest. Ephraim even went so far as to discuss the question as to whether Mr. Merrill had not surpassed his authority in inviting him, and fully expected to be met at the door by that gentleman uttering profuse apologies, which Ephraim was quite prepared and willing to take in good faith.

Nothing of the kind happened, however. Mr. Merrill's railroad being a modest one, his house was modest likewise. But Ephraim thought it grand enough, and yet acknowledged a homelike quality in its grandeur. He began by sitting on the edge of the sofa and staring at the cut−glass chandelier, but in five minutes he discovered with a shock of surprise that he was actually leaning back, describing in detail how his regiment had been cheered as they marched through Boston. And incredible as it may seem, the person whom he was entertaining in this manner was Mrs. Stephen Merrill herself. Mrs. Merrill was as tall as Mr. Merrill was short. She wore a black satin dress with a big cameo brooch pinned at her throat, her hair was gray, and her face almost masculine until it lighted up with a wonderfully sweet smile. That smile made Ephraim and Jethro feel at home; and Cynthia, too, who liked Mrs. Merrill the moment she laid eyes on her.

Then there were the daughters, Jane and Susan, who welcomed her with a hospitality truly amazing for city people. Jane was big−boned like her mother, but Susan was short and plump and merry like her father. Susan talked and laughed, and Jane sat and listened and smiled, and Cynthia could not decide which she liked the best. And presently they all went into the dining room to supper, where there was another chandelier over the table. There was also real silver, which shone brilliantly on the white cloth but there was nothing to eat.

"Do tell us another story, Mr. Prescott," said Susan, who had listened to his last one.

The sight of the table, however, had for the moment upset Ephraim.

"Get Jethro to tell you how he took dinner with Jedge Binney," he said.

This suggestion, under the circumstances, might not have been a happy one, but its lack of appropriateness did not strike Jethro either. He yielded to the demand.

"Well," he said, "I supposed I was goin' to set down same as I would at home, where we put the vittles on the table. W−wondered what I was goin' to eat wahn't nothin' but a piece of bread on the table. S−sat there and watched 'em nobody ate anything. Presently I found out that Binney's wife ran her house same as they run hotels. Pretty soon a couple of girls come in and put down some food and took it away again before you had a chance. A−after a while we had coffee, and when I set my cup on the table, I noticed Mis' Binney looked kind of cross and began whisperin' to the girls. One of 'em fetched a small plate and took my cup and set it on the plate. That was all right. I used the plate.

"Well, along about next summer Binney had to come to Coniston to see me on a little matter and fetched his wife. Listy, my wife, was alive then. I'd made up my mind that if I could ever get Mis' Binney to eat at my place I would, so I asked 'em to stay to dinner. When we set down, I said: 'Now, Mis' Binney, you and the Judge take right hold, and anything you can't reach, speak out and we'll wait on you. And Mis' Binney?'

"'Yes,' she said. She was a little mite scared, I guess. B−begun to suspect somethin'. "'Mis' Binney,' said I, 'y−you can set your cup and sarcer where you've a mind to.' O−ought to have heard the Judge laugh. Says he to his wife: 'Fanny, I told you Jethro'd get even with you some time for that sarcer business.'"

This story, strange as it may seem, had a great success at Mr. Merrill's table. Mr. Merrill and his daughter Susan shrieked with laughter when it was finished, while Mrs. Merrill and Jane enjoyed themselves quite as much in their quiet way. Even the two neat Irish maids, who were serving the supper very much as poor Mis' Binney's had been served, were fain to leave the dining room abruptly, and one of them disgraced herself at sight of Jethro when she came in again, and had to go out once more. Mrs. Merrill insisted that Jethro should pour out his coffee in what she was pleased to call the old−fashioned way. All of which goes to prove that table−silver and cut−glass chandeliers do not invariably make their owners heartless and inhospitable. And Ephraim, whose plan of campaign had been to eat nothing to speak of and have a meal when he got back to the hotel, found that he wasn't hungry when he arose from the table.

There was much bantering of Jethro by Mr. Merrill, which the ladies did not understand talk of a mighty coalition of the big railroads which was to swallow up the little railroads. Fortunately, said Mr. Merrill, humorously, fortunately they did not want his railroad. Or unfortunately, which was it? Jethro didn't know. He never laughed at anybody's jokes. But Cynthia, who was listening with one ear while Susan talked into the other, gathered that Jethro had been struggling with the railroads, and was sooner or later to engage in a mightier struggle with them. How, she asked herself in her innocence, was any one, even Uncle Jethro, to struggle with a railroad? Many other people in these latter days have asked themselves that very question.

All together the evening at Mr. Merrill's passed off so quickly and so happily that Ephraim was dismayed when he discovered that it was ten o'clock, and he began to make elaborate apologies to the ladies. But Jethro and Mr. Merrill were still closeted together in the dining room: once Mrs. Merrill had been called to that conference, and had returned after a while to take her place quietly again among the circle of Ephraim's listeners. Now Mr. Merrill came out of the dining room alone.

"Cynthia," he said, and his tone was a little more grave than usual, "your Uncle Jethro wants to speak to you."

Cynthia rose, with a sense of something in the air which concerned her, and went into the dining room. Was it the light falling from above that brought out the lines of his face so strongly? Cynthia did not know, but she crossed the room swiftly and sat down beside him.

"What is it, Uncle Jethro?"

"C−Cynthy," he said, putting his hand over hers on the table, "I want you to do something for me er for me," he repeated, emphasizing the last word.

"I'll do anything in the world for you, Uncle Jethro," she answered; "you know that. What what is it?"

"L−like Mr. Merrill, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed"

"L−like Mrs. Merrill like the gals don't you?"

"Very much," said Cynthia, perplexedly.

"Like 'em enough to to live with 'em a winter?"

"Live with them a winter!"

"C−Cynthy, I want you should stay in Boston this winter and go to a young ladies' school."

It was out. He had said it, though he never quite knew where he had found the courage.

"Uncle Jethro!" she cried. She could only look at him in dismay, but the tears came into her eyes and sparkled.

"You you'll be happy here, Cynthy. It'll be a change for you. And I shan't be so lonesome as you'd think. I'll I'll be busy this winter, Cynthy."

"You know that I wouldn't leave you, Uncle Jethro," she said reproachfully. "I should be lonesome, if you wouldn't. You would be lonesome you know you would be." "You'll do this for me, Cynthy. S−said you would, didn't you said you would?"

"Why do you want me to do this?"

"W−want you to go to school for a winter, Cynthy. Shouldn't think I'd done right by you if I didn't."

"But I have been to school. Daddy taught me a lot, and Mr. Satterlee has taught me a great deal more. I know as much as most girls of my age, and I will study so hard in Coniston this winter, if that is what you want. I've never neglected my lessons, Uncle Jethro."

"'Tain't book−larnin' 'tain't what you'd get in book−larnin' in Boston, Cynthy."

"What, then?" she asked.

"Well," said Jethro, "they'd teach you to be a lady, Cynthy."

"A lady!"

"Your father come of good people, and and your mother was a lady. I'm only a rough old man, Cynthy, and I don't know much about the ways of fine folks. But you've got it in ye, and I want you should be equal to the best of 'em. You can. And I shouldn't die content unless I'd felt that you'd had the chance. Er Cynthy will you do it for me?"

She was silent a long while before she turned to him, and then the tears were running very swiftly down her cheeks.

"Yes, I will do it for you," she answered. "Uncle Jethro, I believe you are the best man in the world."

"D−don't say that, Cynthy d−don't say that," he exclaimed, and a sharp agony was in his voice. He got to his feet and went to the folding doors and opened them. "Steve!" he called, "Steve!"

"S−says she'll stay, Steve."

Mr. Merrill had come in, followed by his wife. Cynthia saw them but dimly through her tears. And while she tried to wipe the tears away she felt Mrs. Merrill's arm about her, and heard that lady say:

"We'll try to make you very happy, my dear, and send you back safely in the spring."

CHAPTER VIII. CYNTHIA LEARNS HOW TO BE FASHIONABLE

AN attempt will be made in these pages to set down such incidents which alone may be vital to this chronicle, now so swiftly running on. The reasons why Mr. Merrill was willing to take Cynthia into his house must certainly be clear to the reader. In the first place, he was under heavy obligations to Jethro Bass for many favors; in the second place, Mr. Merrill had a real affection for Jethro, which, strange as it may seem to some, was quite possible; and in the third place, Mr. Merrill had taken a fancy to Cynthia, and he had never forgotten the unintentional wrong he had done William Wetherell. Mr. Merrill was a man of impulses, and generally of good impulses. Had he not himself urged upon Jethro the arrangement, it would never have come about. Lastly, he had invited Cynthia to his house that his wife might inspect her, and Mrs. Merrill's verdict had been instant and favorable a verdict not given in words. A single glance was sufficient, for these good people so understood each other that Mrs. Merrill had only to raise her eyes to her husband's, and this she did shortly after the supper party began; while she was pouring the coffee to be exact. Thus the compact that Cynthia was to spend the winter in their house was ratified.

There was, first of all, the parting with Jethro and the messages with which he and Ephraim were laden for the whole village and town of Coniston. It was very hard, that parting, and need not be dwelt upon. Ephraim waved his blue handkerchief as the train pulled out, but Jethro stood silent and motionless: more eloquent in his sorrow so Mr. Merrill thought than any human being he had ever known. Mr. Merrill wondered if Jethro's sorrow were caused by this parting alone; he believed it was not, and suddenly guessed at the true note of it. Having come by chance upon the answer to the riddle, Mr. Merrill stood still with his hand on the carriage door and marvelled that he had not seen it all sooner. He was a man to take to heart the troubles of his friends. A subtle change had indeed come over Jethro, and he was not the same man Mr. Merrill had known for many years. Would others, the men with whom Jethro contended and the men he commanded, mark this change? And what effect would it have on the conflict for the mastery of a state which was to be waged from now on?

"Father," said his daughter Susan, "if you don't get in and close the door, we'll drive off and leave you standing on the sidewalk."

Thus Cynthia went to her new friends in their own carriage. Mrs. Merrill was goodness itself, and loved the girl for what she was. How, indeed, was she to help loving her? Cynthia was scrupulous in her efforts to give no trouble, and yet she never had the air of a dependent or a beneficiary; but held her head high, and when called upon gave an opinion as though she had a right to it. The very first morning Susan, who was prone to be late to breakfast, came down in a great state of excitement and laughter.

"What do you think Cynthia's done, Mother?" she cried. "I went into her room a while ago, and it was all swept and aired, and she was making up the bed."

"That's an excellent plan," said Mrs. Merrill, "to−morrow morning you three girls will have a race to see who makes up her room first."

It is needless to say that the race at bed−making never came off, Susan and Jane having pushed Cynthia into a corner as soon as breakfast was over, and made certain forcible representations which she felt bound to respect, and a treaty was drawn up and faithfully carried out between the three, that she was to do her own room if necessary to her happiness. The chief gainer by the arrangement was the chambermaid.

Odd as it may seem, the Misses Merrill lived amicably enough with Cynthia. It is a difficult matter to force an account of the relationship of five people living in one house into a few pages, but the fact that the Merrills had large hearts makes this simpler. There are few families who can accept with ease the introduction of a stranger into their midst, even for a time, and there are fewer strangers who can with impunity be introduced. The sisters quarrelled among themselves as all sisters will, and sometimes quarrelled with Cynthia. But oftener they made her the arbiter of their disputes, and asked her advice on certain matters. Especially was this true of Susan, whom certain young gentlemen from Harvard College called upon more or less frequently, and Cynthia had all of Susan's love affairs including the current one by heart in a very short time.

As for Cynthia, there were many subjects on which she had to take the advice of the sisters. They did not criticise the joint creations of herself and Miss Sukey Kittredge as frankly as Janet Duncan had done; but Jethro had left in Mrs. Merrill's hands a certain sufficient sum for new dresses for Cynthia, and in due time the dresses were got and worn. To do them justice, the sisters were really sincere in their rejoicings over the very wonderful transformation which they had been chiefly instrumental in effecting.

It is not a difficult task to praise a heroine, and one that should be indulged in but charily. But let some little indulgence be accorded this particular heroine by reason of the life she had led, and the situation in which she now found herself: a poor Coniston girl, dependent on one who was not her father, though she loved him as a father; beholden to these good people who dwelt in a world into which she had no reasonable expectations of entering, and which, to tell the truth, she now feared.

It was inevitable that Cynthia should be brought into contact with many friends and relations of the family. Some of these noticed and admired her; others did neither; others gossiped about Mrs. Merrill behind her back at her own dinners and sewing circles and wondered what folly could have induced her to bring the girl into her house. But Mrs. Merrill, like many generous people who do not stop to calculate a kindness, was always severely criticized.

And then there were Jane's and Susan's friends, in and out of Miss Sadler's school. For Mrs. Merrill's influence had been sufficient to induce Miss Sadler to take Cynthia as a day scholar with her own daughters. This, be it known, was a great concession on the part of Miss Sadler, who regarded Cynthia's credentials as dubious enough; and her young ladies were inclined to regard them so, likewise. Some of these young ladies came from other cities, New York and Philadelphia and elsewhere, and their fathers and mothers were usually people to be mentioned as a matter of course were, indeed, frequently so mentioned by Miss Sadler, especially when a visitor called at the school.

"Isabel, I saw that your mother sailed for Europe yesterday," or, "Sally, your father tells me he is building a gallery for his collection." Then to a visitor, "You know the Broke house in Washington Square, of course."

Of course the visitor did. But Sally or Isabel would often imitate Miss Sadler behind her back, showing how well they understood her snobbishness.

Miss Sadler was by no means the type which we have come to recognize in the cartoons as the Boston schoolma'am. She was a little, round person with thin lips and a sharp nose all out of character with her roundness, and bright eyes like a bird's. To do her justice, so far as instruction went, her scholars were equally well cared for, whether they hailed from Washington Square or Washington Court House. There were, indeed, none from such rural sorts of places except Cynthia. But Miss Sadler did not take her hand on the opening day or afterward − and ask her about Uncle Jethro. Oh, no. Miss Sadler had no interest for great men who did not sail for Europe or add picture galleries on to their houses. Cynthia laughed, a little bitterly, perhaps, at the thought of a picture gallery being added to the tannery house. And she told herself stoutly that Uncle Jethro was a greater man than any of the others, even if Miss Sadler did not see fit to mention him. So she had her first taste of a kind of wormwood that is very common in the world, though it did not grow in Coniston.

For a while after Cynthia's introduction to the school she was calmly ignored by many of the young ladies there, and once openly snubbed, to use the word in its most disagreeable sense. Not that she gave any of them any real cause to snub her. She did not intrude her own affairs upon them, but she was used to conversing kindly with the people about her as equals, and for this offence, on the third day, Miss Sally Broke snubbed her. It is hard not to make a heroine of Cynthia, not to be able to relate that she instantly put Miss Sally's nose out of joint. Susan Merrill tried to do that, and failed signally, for Miss Sally's nose was not easily dislodged. Susan fought more than one of Cynthia's battles. As a matter of fact, Cynthia did not know that she had been affronted until that evening. She did not tell her friends how she spent the night yearning fiercely for Coniston and Uncle Jethro, at times weeping for them, if the truth be told; how she had risen before the dawn to write a letter, and to lay some things in the rawhide trunk. The letter was never sent, and the packing never finished. Uncle Jethro wished her to stay and to learn to be a lady, and stay she would, in spite of Miss Broke and the rest of them. She went to school the next day, and for many days and weeks thereafter, and held communion with the few alone who chose to treat her pleasantly. Unquestionably this is making a heroine of Cynthia.

If young men are cruel in their schools, what shall be written of young women? It would be better to say that both are thoughtless. Miss Sally Broke, strange as it may seem, had a heart, and many of the other young ladies whose fathers sailed for Europe and owned picture galleries; but these young ladies were absorbed, especially after vacation, in affairs of which a girl from Coniston had no part. Their friends were not her friends, their amusements not her amusements, and their talk not her talk. But Cynthia watched them, as was her duty, and gradually absorbed many things which are useful if not essential outward observances of which the world takes cognizance, and which she had been sent there by Uncle Jethro to learn. Young people of Cynthia's type and nationality are the most adaptable in the world.

Before the December snows set in Cynthia had made one firm friend, at least, in Boston, outside of the Merrill family. That friend was Miss Lucretia Penniman, editress of the Woman's Hour. Miss Lucretia lived in the queerest and quaintest of the little houses tucked away under the hill, with the back door a story higher than the front, an arrangement which in summer enabled the mistress to walk out of her sitting−room windows into a little walled garden. In winter that sitting room was the sunniest, cosiest room in the city, and Cynthia spent many hours there, reading or listening to the wisdom that fell from the lips of Miss Lucretia or her guests. The sitting room had uneven, yellow−white panelling that fairly shone with enamel, mahogany bookcases filled with authors who had chosen to comply with Miss Lucretia's somewhat rigorous censorship; there was a table laden with such magazines as had to do with the uplifting of a sex, a delightful wavy floor covered with a rose carpet; and, needless to add, not a pin or a pair of scissors out of place in the whole apartment.

There is no intention of enriching these pages with Miss Lucretia's homilies. Their subject−matter may be found in the files of the Woman's Hour. She did not always preach, although many people will not believe this statement. Miss Lucretia, too, had a heart, though she kept it hidden away, only to be brought out on occasions when she was sure of its appreciation, and she grew strangely interested in this self−contained girl from Coniston whose mother she had known. Miss Lucretia understood Cynthia, who also was the kind who kept her heart hidden, the kind who conceal their troubles and sufferings because they find it difficult to give them out. So Miss

Lucretia had Cynthia to take supper with her at least once in the week, and watched her quietly, and let her speak of as much of her life as she chose which was not much, at first. But Miss Lucretia was content to wait, and guessed at many things which Cynthia did not tell her, and made some personal effort, unknown to Cynthia, to find out other things. It will be said that she had designs on the girl. If so, they were generous designs; and perhaps it was inevitable that Miss Lucretia should recognize in every young woman of spirit and brains a possible recruit for the cause.

It has now been shown in some manner and as briefly as possible how Cynthia's life had changed, and what it had become. We have got her partly through the winter, and find her still dreaming of the sparkling snow on Coniston and of the wind whirling it on clear, cold days like smoke among the spruces; of Uncle Jethro sitting by his stove through the long evenings all alone; of Rias in his store and Moses Hatch and Lem Hallowell, and Cousin Ephraim in his new post−office. Uncle Jethro wrote for the first time in his life letters: short letters, but in his own handwriting, and deserving of being read for curiosity's sake if there were time. The wording was queer enough and guarded enough, but they were charged with a great affection which clung to them like lavender. And Cynthia kept them every one, and read them over on such occasions when she felt that she could not live another minute out of sight of her mountain.

Such was the state of affairs one gray afternoon in December when Cynthia, who was sitting in Mrs. Merrill's parlor, suddenly looked up from her book to discover that two young men were in the room. The young men were apparently quite as much surprised as she, and the parlor maid stood grinning behind them.

"Tell Miss Susan and Miss Jane, Ellen," said Cynthia, preparing to depart. One of the young men she recognized from a photograph on Susan's bureau. He was, for the time being, Susan's. His name, although it does not matter much, was Morton Browne, and he would have been considerably astonished if he had guessed how much of his history Cynthia knew. It was Mr. Browne's habit to take Susan for a walk as often as propriety permitted, and on such occasions he generally brought along a good−natured classmate to take care of Jane. This, apparently, was one of the occasions. Mr. Browne was tall and dark and generally good−looking, while his friends were usually distinguished for their good nature. Mr. Browne stood between her and the door and looked at her rather fixedly. Then he said:

"Excuse me."

A great many friendships, and even love affairs, have been inaugurated by just such an opening.

"Certainly," said Cynthia, and tried to pass out. But Mr. Browne had no intention of allowing her to do so if he could help it.

"I hope I am not intruding," he said politely.

"Oh, no," answered Cynthia, wondering how she could get by him.

"Were you waiting for Miss Merrill?"

"Oh, no," said Cynthia again.

The other young man turned his back and became absorbed in the picture of a lion getting ready to tear a lady to pieces. But Mr. Browne was of that mettle which is not easily baffled in such matters. He introduced himself, and desired to know whom he had the honor of addressing. Cynthia could not but enlighten him. Mr. Browne was greatly astonished, and showed it.

"So you are the mysterious young lady who has been staying here in the house this winter," he exclaimed, as though it were a marvellous thing. "I have heard Miss Merrill speak of you. She admires you very much. Is it true that you come from Coniston?"

"Yes," she said.

"Let me see where is Coniston?" inquired Mr. Browne. "Do you know where Brampton is?" asked Cynthia. "Coniston is near Brampton."

"Brampton!" exclaimed Mr. Browne, "I have a classmate who comes from Brampton Bob Worthington. You must know Bob, then."

Yes, Cynthia knew Mr. Worthington.

"His father's got a mint of money, they say. I've been told that old Worthington was the whole show up in those parts. Is that true?"

"Not quite," said Cynthia.

Not quite! Mr. Morton Browne eyed her in surprise, and from that moment she began to have decided possibilities. Just then Jane and Susan entered arrayed for the walk, but Mr. Browne showed himself in no hurry to depart: began to speak, indeed, in a deprecating way about the weather, appealed to his friend, Mr. King, if it didn't look remarkably like rain, or hail, or snow. Susan sat down, Jane sat down, Mr. Browne and his friend prepared to sit down when Cynthia moved toward the door.

"You're not going, Cynthia!" cried Susan, in a voice that may have had a little too much eagerness in it. "You must stay and help us entertain Mr. Browne." (Mr. King, apparently, was not to be entertained.) "We've tried so hard to make her come down when people called, Mr. Browne, but she never would."

Cynthia was not skilled in the art of making excuses. She hesitated for one, and was lost. So she sat down, as far from Mr. Browne as possible, next to Jane. In a few minutes Mr. Browne was seated beside her, and how he accomplished this manœuvre Cynthia could not have said, so skilfully and gradually was it done. For lack of a better subject he chose Mr. Robert Worthington. Related, for Cynthia's delectation, several of Bob's escapades in his freshman year: silly escapades enough, but very bold and daring and original they sounded to Cynthia, who listened (if Mr. Browne could have known it) with almost breathless interest, and forgot all about poor Susan talking to Mr. King. Did Mr. Worthington still while away his evenings stealing barber poles and being chased around Cambridge by irate policemen? Mr. Browne laughed at the notion. O dear, no! seniors never descended to that. Had not Miss Wetherell heard the song wherein seniors were designated as grave and reverend? Yes, Miss Wetherell had heard the song. She did not say where, or how. Mr. Worthington, said his classmate, had become very serious−minded this year. Was captain of the base−ball team and already looking toward the study of law.

"Study law!" exclaimed Cynthia, "I thought he would go into his father's mills."

"Do you know Bob very well?" asked Mr. Browne.

She admitted that she did not.

"He's been away from Brampton a good deal, of course," said Mr. Browne, who seemed pleased by her admission. To do him justice, he would not undermine a classmate, although he had other rules of conduct which might eventually require a little straightening out. "Worthy's a first−rate fellow, a little quick−tempered, perhaps, and inclined to go his own way. He's got a good mind, and he's taken to using it lately. He has come pretty near

being suspended once or twice."

Cynthia wanted to ask what "suspended" was. It sounded rather painful. But at this instant there was the rattle of a latch key at the door, and Mr. Merrill walked in.

"Well, well," he said, spying Cynthia, "so you have got Cynthia to come down and entertain the young men at last."

"Yes," said Susan, "we have got Cynthia to come down at last."

Susan did not go to Cynthia's room that night to chat, as usual, and Mr. Morton Browne's photograph was mysteriously removed from the prominent position it had occupied. If Susan had carried out a plan which she conceived in a moment of folly of placing that photograph on Cynthia's bureau, there would undoubtedly have been a quarrel. Cynthia's own feelings seeing that Mr. Browne had not dazzled her were not enviable. But she held her peace, which indeed was all she could do, and the next time Mr. Browne called, though he took care to mention her name particularly at the door, she would not go down to entertain him: though Susan implored and Jane appealed, she would not go down. Mr. Browne called several times again, with the same result. Cynthia was inexorable she would have none of him. Then Susan forgave her. There was no quarrel, indeed, but there was a reconciliation, which is the best part of a quarrel. There were tears, of Susan's shedding; there was a character−sketch of Mr. Browne, of Susan's drawing, and that gentleman flitted lightly out of Susan's life.

Some ten days subsequent to this reconciliation Ellen, the parlor maid, brought up a card to Cynthia's room. The card bore the name of Mr. Robert Worthington. Cynthia stared at it, and bent it in her fingers, while Ellen explained how the gentleman had begged that she might see him. To tell the truth, Cynthia had wondered more than once why he had not come before, and smiled when she thought of all the assurances of undying devotion she had heard in Washington. After all, she reflected, why should she not see him once? He might give her news of Brampton and Coniston. Thus willingly deceiving herself, she told Ellen that she would go down: much to the girl's delight, for Cynthia was a favorite in the house.

As she entered the parlor Mr. Worthington was standing in the window. When he turned and saw her he started to come forward in his old impetuous way, and stopped and looked at her in surprise. She herself did not grasp the reason for this.

"Can it be possible," he said, "can it be possible that this is my friend from the country?" And he took her hand with the greatest formality, pressed it the least little bit, and released it. "How do you do, Miss Wetherell? Do you remember me?"

"How do you do Bob," she answered, laughing in spite of herself at his banter. "You haven't changed, anyway."

"It was Mr. Worthington in Washington," said he. "Now it is 'Bob' and 'Miss Wetherell.' Rank patronage! How did you do it, Cynthia?"

"You are like all men," said Cynthia, "you look at the clothes, and not the woman. They are not very fine clothes; but if they were much finer, they wouldn't change me."

"Then it must be Miss Sadler."

"Miss Sadler would willingly change me if she could," said Cynthia, a little bitterly. "How did you find out I was at Miss Sadler's?"

"Morton Browne told me yesterday," said Bob. "I felt like punching his head."

"What did he tell you?" she asked with some concern.

"He said that you were here, visiting the Merrills, among other things, and said that you knew me."

The "other things" Mr Browne had said were interesting, but flippant. He had seen Bob at a college club and declared that he had met a witch of a country girl at the Merrills. He couldn't make her out, because she had refused to see him every time he called again. He had also repeated Cynthia's remark about Bob's father not being quite the biggest man in his part of the country, and ventured the surmise that she was the daughter of a rival mill owner.

"Why didn't you let me know you were in Boston?" said Bob, reproachfully.

"Why should I?" asked Cynthia, and she could not resist adding, "Didn't you find it out when you went to Brampton to see me?"

"Well," said he, getting fiery red, "the fact is I didn't go to Brampton."

"I'm glad you were sensible enough to take my advice, though I suppose that didn't make any difference. But from the way you spoke, I should have thought nothing could have kept you away."

"To tell you the truth," said Bob, "I'd promised to visit a fellow named Broke in my class, who lives in New York. And I couldn't get out of it. His sister, by the way, is in Miss Sadler's. I suppose you know her. But if I'd thought you'd see me, I should have gone to Brampton, anyway. You were so down on me in Washington."

"It was very good of you to take the trouble to come to see me here. There must be a great many girls in Boston you have to visit."

He caught the little note of coolness in her voice. Cynthia was asking herself whether, if Mr. Browne had not seen fit to give a good report of her, he would have come at all. He would have come, certainly. It is to be hoped that Bob Worthington's attitude up to this time toward Cynthia has been sufficiently defined by his conversation and actions. There had been nothing serious about it. But there can be no question that Mr. Browne's openly expressed admiration had enhanced her value in his eyes.

"There's no girl in Boston that I care a rap for," he said.

"I'm relieved to hear it," said Cynthia, with feeling.

"Are you really?"

"Didn't you expect me to be, when you said it?"

He laughed uncomfortably.

"You've learned more than one thing since you've been in the city," he remarked, "I suppose there are a good many fellows who come here all the time."

"Yes, there are," she said demurely.

"Well," he remarked, "you've changed a lot in three months. I always thought that, if you had a chance, there'd be no telling where you'd end up."

"That doesn't sound very complimentary," said Cynthia. She had, indeed, changed. "In what terrible place do you think I'll end up?"

"I suppose you'll marry one of these Boston men."

"Oh," she laughed, "that wouldn't be so terrible, would it?"

"I believe you're engaged to one of 'em now," he remarked, looking very hard at her.

"If you believed that, I don't think you would say it," she answered.

"I can't make you out. You used to be so frank with me, and now you're not at all so. Are you going to Coniston for the holidays?"

Her face fell at the question.

"Oh, Bob," she cried, surprising him utterly by a glimpse of the real Cynthia, "I wish I were I wish I were! But I don't dare to."

"Don't dare to?"

"If I went, I should never come back never. I should stay with Uncle Jethro. He's so lonesome up there, and I'm so lonesome down here, without him. And I promised him faithfully I'd stay a whole winter at school in Boston."

"Cynthia," said Bob, in a strange voice as he leaned toward her, "do you do you care for him as much as all that?"

"Care for him?" she repeated.

"Care for for Uncle Jethro?"

"Of course I care for him," she cried, her eyes flashing at the thought. "I love him better than anybody in the world. Certainly no one ever had better reason to care for a person. My father failed when he came to Coniston he was not meant for business, and Uncle Jethro took care of him all his life, and paid his debts. And he has taken care of me and given me everything that a girl could wish. Very few people know what a fine character Uncle Jethro has," continued Cynthia, carried away as she was by the pent−up flood of feeling within her. "I know what he has done for others, and I should love him for that even if he never had done anything for me."

Bob was silent. He was, in the first place, utterly amazed at this outburst, revealing as it did a depth of passionate feeling in the girl which he had never suspected, and which thrilled him. It was unlike her, for she was usually so self−repressed; and, being unlike her, accentuated both sides of her character the more.

But what was he to say of the defence of Jethro Bass? Bob was not a young man who had pondered much over the problems of life, because these problems had hitherto never touched him. But now he began to perceive, dimly, things that might become the elements of a tragedy, even as Mr. Merrill had perceived them some months before. Could a union endure between so delicate a creature as the girl before him and Jethro Bass? Could Cynthia ever go back to him again, and live with him happily, without seeing many things which before were hidden by reason of her youth and innocence?

Bob had not been nearly four years at college without learning something of the world; and it had not needed the lecture from his father, which he got upon leaving Washington, to inform him of Jethro's political practices. He

had argued soundly with his father on that occasion, having the courage to ask Mr. Worthington in effect whether he did not sanction his underlings to use the same tools as Jethro used. Mr. Worthington was righteously angry, and declared that Jethro had inaugurated those practices in the state, and had to be fought with his own weapons. But Mr. Worthington had had the sense at that time not to mention Cynthia's name. He hoped and believed that that affair was not serious, and merely a boyish fancy as indeed it was.

It remains to be said, however, that the lecture had not been without its effect upon Bob. Jethro Bass, after all, was Jethro Bass. All his life Bob had heard him familiarly and jokingly spoken of as the boss of the state, and had listened to the tales, current in all the country towns, of how Jethro had outwitted this man or that. Some of them were not refined tales. Jethro Bass as the boss of the state with the tolerance with which the public in general regard politics was one thing. Bob was willing to call him "Uncle Jethro," admire his great strength and shrewdness, and declare that the men he had outwitted had richly deserved it. But Jethro Bass as the ward of Cynthia Wetherell was quite another thing.

It was not only that Cynthia had suddenly and inevitably become a lady. That would not have mattered, for such as she would have borne Coniston and the life of Coniston cheerfully. But Bob reflected, as he walked back to his rooms in the dark through the snow−laden streets, that Cynthia, young though she might be, possessed principles from which no love would sway her a hair's breath. How, indeed, was she to live with Jethro once her eyes were opened?

The thought made him angry, but returned to him persistently during the days that followed, in the lecture room, in the gymnasium, in his own study, where he spent more time than formerly. By these tokens it will be perceived that Bob, too, had changed a little. And the sight of Cynthia in Mrs. Merrill's parlor had set him to thinking in a very different manner than the sight of her in Washington had affected him.

Bob had managed to shift the subject from Jethro, not without an effort, though he had done it in that merry, careless manner which was so characteristic of him. He had talked of many things, his college life, his friends, and laughed at her questions about his freshman escapades. But when at length, at twilight, he had risen to go, he had taken both her hands and looked down into her face with a very different expression than she had seen him wear before a much more serious expression, which puzzled her. It was not the look of a lover, nor yet that of a man who imagines himself in love. With either of these her instinct would have told her how to deal. It was more the look of a friend, with much of the masculine spirit of protection in it.

"May I come to see you again?" he asked.

Gently she released her hands, and she did not answer at once. She went to the window, and stared across the sloping street at the grilled railing before the big house opposite, thinking. Her reason told her that he should not come, but her spirit rebelled against that reason. It was a pleasure to see him, so she freely admitted to herself. Why should she not have that pleasure? If the truth be told, she had argued it all out before, when she had wondered whether he would come. Mrs. Merrill, she thought, would not object to his coming. But there was the question she had meant to ask him.

"Bob," she said, turning to him, "Bob, would your father want you to come?" It was growing dark, and she could scarcely see his face. He hesitated, but he did not attempt to evade the question.

"No, he would not," he answered. And added, with a good deal of force and dignity: "I am of age, and can choose my own friends. I am my own master. If he knew you as I knew you, he would look at the matter in a different light."

Cynthia felt that this was not quite true. She smiled a little sadly.

"I am afraid you don't know me very well, Bob." He was about to protest, but she went on, bravely, "Is it because he has quarrelled with Uncle Jethro?"

"Yes," said Bob. She was making it terribly hard for him, sparing indeed neither herself nor him.

"If you come here to see me, it will cause a quarrel between you and your father. I I cannot do that."

"There is nothing wrong in my seeing you," said Bob, stoutly; "if he cares to quarrel with me for that, I cannot help it. If the people I choose for my friends are good people, he has no right to an objection, even though he is my father."

Cynthia had never come so near real admiration for him as at that moment.

"No, Bob, you must not come," she said. "I will not have you quarrel with him on my account."

"Then I will quarrel with him on my own account," he had answered. "Good−by. You may expect me this day week."

He went into the hall to put on his overcoat. Cynthia stood still on the spot of the carpet where he had left her. He put his head in at the door.

"This day week," he said.

"Bob, you must not come," she answered. But the street door closed after him as she spoke.

CHAPTER IX. IN WHICH MR. MERRILL ABANDONS A HABIT

"YOU must not come." Had Cynthia made the prohibition strong enough? Ought she not to have said, "If you do come, I will not see you"? Her knowledge of the motives of the men and women in the greater world was largely confined to that which she had gathered from novels not trashy novels, but those by standard authors of English life. And many another girl of nineteen has taken a novel for a guide when she has been suddenly confronted with the first great problem outside of her experience. Somebody has declared that there are only seven plots in the world. There are many parallels in English literature to Cynthia's position, so far as she was able to define that position, the wealthy young peer, the parson's or physician's daughter, and the worldly, inexorable parents who had other plans.

Cynthia was, of course, foolish. She would not look ahead, yet there was the mirage in the sky when she allowed herself to dream. It can truthfully be said that she was not in love with Bob Worthington. She felt, rather than knew, that if love came to her the feeling she had for Jethro Bass strong though that was would be as nothing to it. The girl felt the intensity of her nature, and shrank from it when her thoughts ran that way, for it frightened her.

"Mrs. Merrill," she said, a few days later, when she found herself alone with that lady, "you once told me you would have no objection if a friend came to see me here."

"None whatever, my dear," answered Mrs. Merrill. "I have asked you to have your friends here." Mrs. Merrill knew that a young man had called on Cynthia. The girls had discussed the event excitedly, had teased Cynthia about it; they had discovered, moreover, that the young man had not been a tiller of the soil or a clerk in a country store. Ellen, with the enthusiasm of her race, had painted him in glowing colors but she had neglected to read the name on his card.

"Bob Worthington came to see me last week, and he wants to come again. He lives in Brampton," Cynthia explained, "and is at Harvard College."

Mrs. Merrill was decidedly surprised. She went on with her sewing, however, and did not betray the fact. She knew of Dudley Worthington as one of the richest and most important men in his state; she had heard her husband speak of him often; but she had never meddled with politics and railroad affairs.

"By all means let him come, Cynthia," she replied.

When Mr. Merrill got home that evening she spoke of the matter to him.

"Cynthia is a strange character," she said. "Sometimes I can't understand her she seems so much older than our girls, Stephen. Think of her keeping this to herself for four days!"

Mr. Merrill laughed, but he went off to a little writing room he had and sat for a long time looking into the glowing coals. Then he laughed again. Mr. Merrill was a philosopher. After all, he could not forbid Dudley Worthington's son coming to his house, nor did he wish to.

That same evening Cynthia wrote a letter and posted it. She found it a very difficult letter to write, and almost as difficult to drop into the mail−box. She reflected that the holidays were close at hand, and then he would go to Brampton and forget, even as he had forgotten before. And she determined when Wednesday afternoon came around that she would take a long walk in the direction of Brookline. Cynthia loved these walks, for she sadly missed the country air, and they had kept the color in her cheeks and the courage in her heart that winter. She had amazed the Merrill girls by the distances she covered, and on more than one occasion she had trudged many miles to a spot from which there was a view of Blue Hills. They reminded her faintly of Coniston.

Who can speak or write with any certainty of the feminine character, or declare what unexpected twists perversity and curiosity may give to it? Wednesday afternoon came, and Cynthia did not go to Brookline. She put on her coat, and took it off again. Would he dare to come in the face of the mandate he had received? If he did come, she wouldn't see him. Ellen had received her orders.

At four o'clock the doorbell rang, and shortly thereafter Ellen appeared, simpering and apologetic enough, with a card. She had taken the trouble to read it this time. Cynthia was angry, or thought she was, and her cheeks were very red.

"I told you to excuse me, Ellen. Why did you let him in?"

"Miss Cynthia, darlin'," said Ellen, "if it was made of flint I was, wouldn't he bring the tears out of me with his wheedlin' an' coaxin'? An' him such a fine young gintleman! And whin he took to commandin' like, sure I couldn't say no to him at all at all. 'Take the card to her, Ellen,' he says didn't he know me name! 'an' if she says she won't see me, thin I won't trouble her more.' Thim were his words, Miss."

There he was before the fire, his feet slightly apart and his hands in his pockets, waiting for her. She got a glimpse of him standing thus, as she came down the stairs. It was not the attitude of a culprit. Nor did he bear the faintest resemblance to a culprit as he came up to her in the doorway. The chief recollection she carried away of that moment was that his teeth were very white and even when he smiled. He had the impudence to smile. He had the impudence to seize one of her hands in his, and to hold aloft a sheet of paper in the other.

"What does this mean?" said he.

"What do you think it means?" retorted Cynthia, with dignity.

"A summons to stay away," said Bob, thereby more or less accurately describing it. "What would you have thought of me if I had not come?"

Cynthia was not prepared for any such question as this. She had meant to ask the questions herself. But she never lacked for words to protect herself.

"I'll tell you what I think of you for coming, Bob, for insisting upon seeing me as you did," she said, remembering with shame Ellen's account of that proceeding. "It was very unkind and very thoughtless of you."

"Unkind?" Thus she succeeded in putting him on the defensive.

"Yes, unkind, because I know it is best for you not to come to see me, and you know it, and yet you will not help me when I try to do what is right. I shall be blamed for these visits," she said. The young ladies in the novels always were. But it was a serious matter for poor Cynthia, and her voice trembled a little. Her troubles seemed very real.

"Who will blame you?" asked Bob, though be knew well enough. Then he added, seeing that she did not answer: "I don't at all agree with you that it is best for me not to see you. I know of nobody in the world it does me more good to see than yourself. Let's sit down and talk it all over," he said, for she still remained standing uncompromisingly by the door.

The suspicion of a smile came over Cynthia's face. She remembered how Ellen had been wheedled. Her instinct told her that now was the time to make a stand or never.

"It wouldn't do any good, Bob," she replied, shaking her head; "we talked it all over last week."

"Not at all," said he, "we only touched upon a few points last week. We ought to thrash it out. Various aspects of the matter have occurred to me which I ought to call to your attention."

He could not avoid this bantering tone, but she saw that he was very much in earnest, too. He realized the necessity of winning, likewise, and he had got in and meant to stay. "I don't want to argue," said Cynthia. "I've thought it all out."

"So have I," said Bob. "I haven't thought of anything else, to speak of. And by the way," he declared, shaking the envelope, "I never got a colder and more formal letter in my life. You must have taken it from one of Miss Sadler's copy books."

"I'm sorry I haven't been able to equal the warmth of your other correspondents," said Cynthia, smiling at the mention of Miss Sadler.

"You've got a good many degrees yet to go," he replied.

"I have no idea of doing so," said Cynthia.

If Cynthia had lured him there, and had carefully thought out a plan of fanning his admiration into a flame, she could not have done better than to stand obstinately by the door. Nothing appeals to a man like resistance: resistance for a principle appealed to Bob, although he did not care a fig about that particular principle. In his former dealings with young women and they had not been few the son of Dudley Worthington had encountered no resistance worth the mentioning. He looked at the girl before him, and his blood leaped at the thought of a conquest over her. She was often demure, but behind that demureness was firmness: she was mistress of herself, and yet possessed a marvellous vitality.

"And now," said Cynthia, "don't you think you had better go?"

Go! He laughed outright. Never! He would sit down under that fortress, and some day he meant to scale the walls. Like John Paul Jones, he had not yet begun to fight. But he did not sit down just yet, because Cynthia remained standing.

"I'm here now," he said, "what's the good of going away? I might as well stay the rest of the afternoon."

"You will find a photograph album on the table," said Cynthia, "with pictures of all the Merrill family and their friends and relations."

In spite of the threat this remark conveyed, he could not help laughing at it. Mrs. Merrill in her sitting room heard the laugh, and felt that she would like Bob Worthington.

"It's a heavy album, Cynthia," he said; "perhaps you would hold up one side of it."

It was Cynthia's turn to laugh. She could not decide whether he were a man or a boy. Sometimes, she had to admit, he was very much of a man.

"Where are you going?" he cried.

"Upstairs, of course," she answered.

This was really alarming. But fate thrust a final weapon into his hands.

"All right," said he, "I'll look at the album. What time does Mr. Merrill get home?"

"About six," answered Cynthia. "Why?"

"When he comes," said Bob, "I shall put on my most disconsolate expression. He'll ask me what I'm doing, and I'll tell him you went upstairs at half−past four and haven't come down. He'll sympathize, I'll bet anything."

Whether Bob were really capable of doing this, Cynthia could not tell. She believed he was. Perhaps she really did not intend to go upstairs just then. To his intense relief she seated herself on a straight−backed chair near the door, although she had the air of being about to get up again at any minute. It was not a surrender, not at all − but a parley, at least.

"I really want to talk to you seriously, Bob," she said, and her voice was serious. "I like you very much I always have and I want you to listen seriously. All of us have friends. Some people you, for instance have a great many. We have but one father." Her voice failed a little at the word. "No friend can ever be the same to you as your father, and no friendship can make up what his displeasure will cost you. I do not mean to say that I shan't always be your friend, for I shall be."

Young men seldom arrive at maturity by gradual steps something sets them thinking, a week passes, and suddenly the world has a different aspect. Bob had thought much of his father during that week, and had considered their relationship carefully. He had a few precious memories of his mother before she had been laid to rest under that hideous and pretentious monument in the Brampton hill cemetery. How unlike her was that monument! Even as a young boy, when on occasions he had wandered into the cemetery, he used to stand before it with a lump in his throat and bitter resentment in his heart, and once he had shaken his fist at it. He had grown up out of sympathy with his father, but he had never until now begun to analyze the reasons for it. His father had given him everything except that communion of which Cynthia spoke so feelingly. Mr. Worthington had acted

according to his lights: of all the people in the world he thought first of his son. But his thoughts and care had been alone of what the son would be to the world: how that son would carry on the wealth and greatness of Isaac D. Worthington.

Bob had known this before, but it had had no such significance for him then as now. He was by no means lacking in shrewdness, and as he had grown older he had perceived clearly enough Mr. Worthington's reasons for throwing him socially with the Duncans. Mr. Worthington had never been a plain−spoken man, but he had as much as told his son that it was decreed that he should marry the heiress of the state. There were other plans connected with this. Mr. Worthington meant that his son should eventually own the state itself, for he saw that the man who controlled the highways of a state could snap his fingers at governor and council and legislature and judiciary: could, indeed, do more could own them even more completely than Jethro Bass now owned them, and without effort. The dividends would do the work: would canvass the counties and persuade this man and that with sufficient eloquence. By such tokens it will be seen that Isaac D. Worthington is destined to become great, though the greatness will be akin to that possessed by those gentlemen who in past ages had built castles across the highway between Venice and the North Sea. All this was in store for Bob Worthington, if he could only be brought to see it. These things would be given him, if he would but confine his worship to the god of wealth.

We are running ahead, however, of Bob's reflections in Mr. Merrill's parlor in Mount Vernon Street, and the ceremony of showing him the cities of his world from Brampton hill was yet to be gone through. Bob knew his father's plans only in a general way, but in the past week he had come to know his father with a fair amount of thoroughness. If Isaac D. Worthington had but chosen a worldly wife, he might have had a more worldly son. As it was, Bob's thoughts were a little bitter when Cynthia spoke of his father, and he tried to think instead what his mother would have him do. He could not, indeed, speak of Mr. Worthington's shortcomings as he understood them, but he answered Cynthia vigorously enough even if his words were not as serious as she desired.

"I tell you I am old enough to judge for myself, Cynthia," said he, "and I intend to judge for myself. I don't pretend to be a paragon of virtue, but I have a kind of a conscience which tells me when I am doing wrong, if I listen to it. I have not always listened to it. It tells me I'm doing right now, and I mean to listen to it."

Cynthia could not but think there was very little self−denial attached to this. Men are not given largely to self−denial.

"It is easy enough to listen to your conscience when you think it impels you to do that which you want to do, Bob," she answered, laughing at his argument in spite of herself.

"Are you wicked?" he demanded abruptly.

"Why, no, I don't think I am," said Cynthia, taken aback. But she corrected herself swiftly, perceiving his bent. "I should be doing wrong to let you come here."

He ignored the qualification.

"Are you vain and frivolous?"

She remembered that she had looked in the glass before she had come down to him, and bit her lip. "Are you given over to idle pursuits, to leading young men from their occupations and duties?"

"If you've come here to recite the Blue Laws," said she, laughing again, "I have something better to do than to listen to them."

"Cynthia," he cried, "I'll tell you what you are. I'll draw your character for you, and then, if you can give me one good reason why I should not associate with you, I'll go away and never come back."

"That's all very well," said Cynthia, "but suppose I don't admit your qualifications for drawing my character. And I don't admit them, not for a minute."

"I will draw it," said he, standing up in front of her. "Oh, confound it!"

This exclamation, astonishing and out of place as it was, was caused by a ring at the doorbell. The ring was followed by a whispering and giggling in the hall, and then by the entrance of the Misses Merrill into the parlor. Curiosity had been too strong for them. Susan was human, and here was the opportunity for a little revenge. In justice to her, she meant the revenge to be very slight.

"Well, Cynthia, you should have come to the concert," she said; "it was fine, wasn't it, Jane? Is this Mr. Worthington? How do you do. I'm Miss Susan Merrill, and this is Miss Jane Merrill."

Susan only intended to stay a minute, but how was Bob to know that? She was tempted into staying longer. Bob lighted the gas, and she inspected him and approved. Her approval increased when he began to talk to her in his bantering way, as if he had known her always. Then, when she was fully intending to go, he rose to take his leave.

"I'm awfully glad to have met you at last," he said to Susan, "I've heard so much about you." His leave−taking of Jane was less effusive, and then he turned to Cynthia and took her hand. "I'm going to Brampton on Friday," he said, "for the holidays. I wish you were going."

"We couldn't think of letting her go, Mr. Worthington," cried Susan, for the thought of the hills had made Cynthia incapable of answering. "We're only to have her for one short winter, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Worthington, gravely. "I'll see old Ephraim, and tell him you're well, and what a marvel of learning you've become. And and I'll go to Coniston if that will please you."

"Oh, no, Bob, you mustn't do anything of the kind," answered Cynthia, trying to keep back the tears. "I I write to Uncle Jethro very often. Good−by. I hope you will enjoy your holidays."

"I'm coming to see you the minute I get back and tell you all about everybody," said he.

How was she to forbid him to come before Susan and Jane! She could only be silent.

"Do come, Mr. Worthington," said Susan, warmly, wondering at Cynthia's coldness and, indeed, misinterpreting it. "I am sure she will be glad to see you. And we shall always make you welcome, at any rate."

As soon as he was out of the door, Susan became very repentant, and slipped her hand about Cynthia's waist.

"We shouldn't have come in at all if we had known he would go so soon, indeed we shouldn't, Cynthia." And seeing that Cynthia was still silent, she added: "I wouldn't do such a mean thing, Cynthia, I really wouldn't. Won't you believe me and forgive me?"

Cynthia scarcely heard her at first. She was thinking of Coniston mountain, and how the sun had just set behind it. The mountain would be ultramarine against the white fields, and the snow on the hill pastures to the east stained red as with wine. What would she not have given to be going back to−morrow yes, with Bob. She confessed though startled by the very boldness of the thought that she would like to be going there with Bob. Susan's appeal brought her back to Boston and the gas−lit parlor.

"Forgive you, Susan! There's nothing to forgive. I wanted him to go."

"You wanted him to go?" repeated Susan, amazed. She may be pardoned if she did not believe this, but a glance at Cynthia's face scarcely left a room for doubt. "Cynthia Wetherell, you're the strangest girl I've ever known in all my life. If I had a a friend" (Susan had another word on her tongue) "if I had such a friend as Mr. Worthington, I shouldn't be in a hurry to let him leave me. Of course," she added, "I shouldn't let him know it."

Cynthia's heart was very heavy during the next few days, heavier by far than her friends in Mount Vernon Street imagined. They had grown to love her almost as one of themselves, and because of the sympathy which comes of such love they guessed that her thoughts would be turning homeward at Christmastide. At school she had listened, perforce, to the festival plans of thirty girls of her own age; to accounts of the probable presents they were to receive, the cost of some of which would support a family in Coniston for several months; to arrangements for visits, during which there were to be theatre−parties and dances and other gayeties. Cynthia could not help wondering, as she listened in silence to this talk, whether Uncle Jethro had done wisely in sending her to Miss Sadler's; whether she would not have been far happier if she had never known about such things.

Then came the last day of school, which began with leave−takings and embraces. There were not many who embraced Cynthia, though, had she known it, this was largely her own fault. Poor Cynthia! how was she to know it? Many more of them than she imagined would have liked to embrace her had they believed that the embrace would be returned. Secretly they had grown to admire this strange, dark girl, who was too proud to bend for the good opinion of any one even of Miss Sally Broke. Once during the term Cynthia had held some of them in the hollow of her hand, and had incurred the severe displeasure of Miss Sadler by refusing to tell what she knew of certain mischief−makers.

Now, Miss Sadler was going about among them in the school parlor saying good−by, sending particular remembrances to such of the fathers and mothers as she thought worthy of that honor; kissing some, shaking hands with all. It was then that a dramatic incident occurred dramatic for a girls' school, at least. Cynthia deliberately turned her back on Miss Sadler and looked out of the window. The chatter in the room was hushed, and for a moment a dangerous wrath flamed in Miss Sadler's eyes. Then she passed on with a smile, to send most particular messages to the mother of Miss Isabel Burrage.

Some few moments afterward Cynthia felt a touch on her arm, and turned to find herself confronted by Miss Sally Broke. Unfortunately there is not much room for Miss Broke in this story, although she may appear in another one yet to be written. She was extremely good−looking, with real golden hair and mischievous blue eyes. She was, in brief, the leader of Miss Sadler's school.

"Cynthia," she said, "I was rude to you when you first came here, and I'm sorry for it. I want to beg your pardon." And she held out her hand.

There was a moment's suspense for those watching to see if Cynthia would take it. She did take it.

"I'm sorry, too," said Cynthia, simply, "I couldn't see what I'd done to offend you. Perhaps you'll explain now."

Miss Broke blushed violently, and for an instant looked decidedly uncomfortable. Then she burst into laughter, merry, irresistible laughter that carried all before it.

"I was a snob, that's all," said she, "just a plain, low−down snob. You don't understand what that means, because you're not one." (Cynthia did understand, nevertheless.) "But I like you, and I want you to be my friend. Perhaps when I get to know you better, you will come home with me sometime for a visit."

Go home with her for a visit to that house in Washington Square with the picture gallery!

"I want to say that I'd give my head to have been able to turn my back on Miss Sadler as you did," continued Miss Broke; "if you ever want a friend, remember Sally Broke."

Some of Cynthia's trouble, at least, was mitigated by this episode; and Miss Broke having led the way, Miss Broke's followers came shyly, one by one, with proffers of friendship. To the good−hearted Merrill girls the walk home that day was a kind of a triumphal march, a victory over Miss Sadler and a vindication of their friend. Mrs. Merrill, when she heard of it, could not find it in her heart to reprove Cynthia. Miss Sadler had got her just deserts. But Miss Sadler was not a person who was likely to forget such an incident. Indeed, Mrs. Merrill half expected to receive a note before the holidays ended that Cynthia's presence was no longer desired at the school. No such note came, however.

If one had to be away from home on Christmas, there could surely be no better place to spend that day than in the Merrill household. Cynthia remembers still, when that blessed season comes around, how each member of the family vied with the others to make her happy; how they showered presents on her, and how they strove to include her in the laughter and jokes at the big family dinner. Mr. Merrill's brother was there with his wife, and Mrs. Merrill's aunt and her husband, and two broods of cousins. It may be well to mention that the Merrill relations, like Sally Broke, had overcome their dislike of Cynthia.

There were eatables from Coniston on that board. A turkey sent by Jethro for which, Mr. Merrill declared, the table would have to be strengthened; a saddle of venison Lem Hallowell having shot a deer on the mountain two Sundays before; and mince−meat made by Amanda Hatch herself. Other presents had come to Cynthia from the hills: a gorgeous copy of Mr. Longfellow's poems from Cousin Ephraim, and a gold locket from Uncle Jethro. This locket was the precise counterpart (had she but known it) of a silver one bought at Mr. Judson's shop many years before, though the inscription "Cynthy, from Uncle Jethro," was within. Into the other side exactly fitted that daguerreotype of her mother which her father had given her when he died. The locket had a gold chain with a clasp, and Cynthia wore it hidden beneath her gown too intimate a possession to be shown. There was still another and very mysterious present, this being a huge box of roses, addressed to Miss Cynthia Wetherell, which was delivered on Christmas morning. If there had been a card, Susan Merrill would certainly have found it. There was no card. There was much pretended speculation on the part of the Merrill girls as to the sender, sly reference to Cynthia's heightened color, and several attempts to pin on her dress a bunch of the flowers, and Susan declared that one of them would look stunning in her hair. They were put on the dining−room table in the centre of the wreath of holly, and under the mistletoe which hung from the chandelier. Whether Cynthia surreptitiously stole one has never been discovered.

So Christmas came and went: not altogether unhappily, deferring for a day at least the knotty problems of life. Although Cynthia accepted the present of the roses with such magnificent unconcern, and would not make so much as a guess as to who sent them, Mr. Robert Worthington was frequently in her thoughts. He had declared his intention of coming to Mount Vernon Street as soon as the holidays ended, and had been cordially invited by Susan to do so. Cynthia took the trouble to procure a Harvard catalogue from the library, and discovered that he had many holidays yet to spend. She determined to write another letter, which he would find in his rooms when he returned. Just what terrible prohibitory terms she was to employ in that letter Cynthia could not decide in a moment, nor yet in a day, or a week. She went so far as to make several drafts, some of which she destroyed for the fault of leniency, and others for that of severity. What was she to say to him? She had expended her arguments to no avail. She could wound him, indeed, and at length made up her mind that this was the only resource left her, although she would thereby wound herself more deeply. When she had arrived at this decision, there remained still more than a week in which to compose the letter.

On the morning after New Year's, when the family were assembled around the breakfast table, Mrs. Merrill remarked that her husband was neglecting a custom which had been his for many years.

"Didn't the newspaper come, Stephen?" she asked.

Mr. Merrill had read it.

"Read it!" repeated his wife, in surprise, "you haven't been down long enough to read a column."

"It was full of trash," said Mr. Merrill, lightly, and began on his usual jokes with the girls. But Mrs. Merrill was troubled. She thought his jokes not as hearty as they were wont to be, and disquieting surmises of business worries filled her mind. The fact that he beckoned her into his writing room as soon as breakfast was over did not tend to allay her suspicions. He closed and locked the door after her, and taking the paper from a drawer in his desk bade her read a certain article in it.

The article was an arraignment of Jethro Bass and a terrible arraignment indeed. Step by step it traced his career from the beginning, showing first of all how he had debauched his own town of Coniston; how, enlarging on the same methods, he had gradually extended his grip over the county and finally over the state; how he had bought and sold men for his own power and profit, deceived those who had trusted in him, corrupted governors and legislators, congressmen and senators, and even justices of the courts; how he had trafficked ruthlessly in the enterprises of the people. Instance upon instance was given, and men of high prominence from whom he had received bribes were named, not the least important of these being the Honorable Alva Hopkins of Gosport.

Mrs. Merrill looked up from the paper in dismay.

"It's copied from the Newcastle Guardian," she said, for lack of immediate power to comment. "Isn't the Guardian the chief paper in that state?"

"Yes, Worthington bought it, and he instigated the article, of course. I've been afraid of this for a long time, Carry," said Mr. Merrill, pacing up and down. "There's a bigger fight than they've ever had coming on up there, and this is the first gun. Worthington, with Duncan behind him, is trying to get possession of and consolidate all the railroads in the western part of that state. If he succeeds, it will mean the end of Jethro's power. But he won't succeed."

"Stephen," said his wife, "do you mean to say that Jethro Bass will try to defeat this consolidation simply to keep his power?"

"Well, my dear," answered Mr. Merrill, still pacing, "two wrongs don't make a right, I admit. I've known these things a long time, and I've thought about them a good deal. But I've had to run along with the tide, or give place to another man who would, and and starve."

Mrs. Merrill's eyes slowly filled with tears.

"Stephen," she began, "do you mean to say −?" There she stopped, utterly unable to speak. He ceased his pacing and sat down beside her and took her hand.

"Yes, my dear, I mean to say I've submitted to these things. God knows whether I've been right or wrong, but I have. I've often thought I'd be happier if I resigned my office as president of my road and became a clerk in a store. I don't attempt to excuse myself, Carry, but my sin has been in holding on to my post. As long as I remain president I have to cope with things as I find them."

Mr. Merrill spoke thickly, for the sight of his wife's tears wrung his heart.

"Stephen," she said, "when we were first married and you were a district superintendent, you used to tell me everything."

Stephen Merrill was a man, and a good man, as men go. How was he to tell her the degrees by which he had been led into his present situation? How was he to explain that these degrees had been so gradual that his conscience had had but a passing wrench here and there? Politics being what they were, progress and protection had to be obtained in accordance with them, and there was a duty to the holders of bonds and stocks.

His wife had a question on her lips, a question for which she had to summon all her courage. She chose that form for it which would hurt him least.

"Mr. Worthington is going to try to change these things?"

Mr. Merrill roused himself at the words, and his eyes flashed. He became a different man.

"Change them!" he cried bitterly, "change them for the worse, if he can. He will try to wrest the power from Jethro Bass. I don't defend him. I don't defend myself. But I like Jethro Bass. I won't deny it. He's human, and I like him, and whatever they say about him I know that he's been a true friend to me. And I tell you as I hope for happiness here and hereafter, that if Worthington succeeds in what he is trying to do, if the railroads win in this fight, there will be no mercy for the people of that state. I'm a railroad man myself, though I have no interest in this affair. My turn may come later. Will come later, I suppose. Isaac D. Worthington has very little heart or soul or mercy himself; but the corporation which he means to set up will have none at all. It will grind the people and debase them and clog their progress a hundred times more than Jethro Bass has done. Mark my words, Carry. I'm running ahead of the times a little, but I can see it all as clearly as if it existed now."

Mrs. Merrill went about her duties that morning with a heavy heart, and more than once she paused to wipe away a tear that would have fallen on the linen she was sorting. At eleven o'clock the doorbell rang, and Ellen appeared at the entrance to the linen closet with a card in her hand. Mrs. Merrill looked at it with a flurry of surprise. It read:

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MISS LUCRETIA PENNIMAN
The Woman's Hour
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CHAPTER X. OF AN UNEXPECTED RETURN

IT was certainly affinity that led Miss Lucretia to choose the rosewood sofa of a bygone age, which was covered with horsehair. Miss Lucretia's features seemed to be constructed on a larger and more generous principle than those of women are nowadays. Her face was longer. With her curls and her bonnet and her bombazine, which she wore in all seasons, she was in complete harmony with the sofa. She had thrown aside the storm cloak which had become so familiar to pedestrians in certain parts of Boston.

"My dear Miss Penniman," said Mrs. Merrill, "I am delighted and honored. I scarcely hoped for such a pleasure. I have so long admired you and your work, and I have heard Cynthia speak of you so kindly."

"It is very good of you to say so, Mrs. Merrill," answered Miss Lucretia, in her full, deep voice. It was by no means an unpleasant voice. She settled herself, though she sat quite upright, in the geometrical centre of the horsehair sofa, and cleared her throat. "To be quite honest with you, Mrs. Merrill," she continued, "I came upon a particular errand, though I believe it would not be a perversion of the truth if I were to add that I have had for a month past every intention of paying you a friendly call."

Good Mrs. Merrill's breath was a little taken away by this extremely scrupulous speech. She also began to feel a misgiving about the cause of the visit, but she managed to say something polite in reply.

"I have come about Cynthia," announced Miss Lucretia, without further preliminaries. "About Cynthia?" faltered Mrs. Merrill.

Miss Lucretia opened a reticule at her waist and drew forth a newspaper clipping, which she unfolded and handed to Mrs. Merrill.

"Have you seen this?" she demanded.

Mrs. Merrill took it, although she guessed very well what it was, glanced at it with a shudder, and handed it back.

"Yes, I have read it," she said.

"I have come to ask you, Mrs. Merrill," said Miss Lucretia, "if it is true."

Here was a question, indeed, for the poor lady to answer! But Mrs. Merrill was no coward.

"It is partly true, I believe."

"Partly?" said Miss Lucretia, sharply.

"Yes, partly," said Mrs. Merrill, rousing herself for the trial; "I have never yet seen a newspaper article which was wholly true."

"That is because newspapers are not edited by women," observed Miss Lucretia. "What I wish you to tell me, Mrs. Merrill, is this: how much of that article is true, and how much of it is false?"

"Really, Miss Penniman," replied Mrs. Merrill, with spirit, "I don't see why you should expect me to know."

"A woman should take an intelligent interest in her husband's affairs, Mrs. Merrill. I have long advocated it as an entering wedge."

"An entering wedge!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill, who had never read a page of the Woman's Hour.

"Yes. Your husband is the president of a railroad, I believe, which is largely in that state. I should like to ask him whether these statements are true in the main. Whether this Jethro Bass is the kind of man they declare him to be."

Mrs. Merrill was in a worse quandary than ever. Her own spirits were none too good, and Miss Lucretia's eye, in its search for truth, seemed to pierce into her very soul. There was no evading that eye. But Mrs. Merrill did what few people would have had the courage or good sense to do. "That is a political article, Miss Penniman," she said, "inspired by a bitter enemy of Jethro Bass, Mr. Worthington, who has bought the newspaper from which it was copied. For that reason, I was right in saying that it is partly true. You nor I, Miss Penniman, must be the judges of any man or woman, for we know nothing of their problems or temptations. God will judge them. We can only say that they have acted rightly or wrongly according to the light that is in us. You will find it difficult to get a judgment of Jethro Bass that is not a partisan judgment, and yet I believe that that article is in the main a history of the life of Jethro Bass. A partisan history, but still a history. He has unquestionably committed many of the acts of which he is accused."

Here was talk to make the author of the "Hymn to Coniston" sit up, if she hadn't been sitting up already.

"And don't you condemn him for those acts?" she gasped.

"Ah," said Mrs. Merrill, thinking of her own husband. Yesterday she would certainly have condemned Jethro Bass. But now! "I do not condemn anybody, Miss Penniman."

Miss Lucretia thought this extraordinary, to say the least.

"I will put the question in another way, Mrs. Merrill," said she. "Do you think this Jethro Bass a proper guardian for Cynthia Wetherell?"

To her amazement Mrs. Merrill did not give her an instantaneous answer to this question. Mrs. Merrill was thinking of Jethro's love for the girl, manifold evidences of which she had seen, and her heart was filled with a melting pity. It was such a love, Mrs. Merrill knew, as is not given to many here below. And there was Cynthia's love for him. Mrs. Merrill had suffered that morning thinking of this tragedy also.

"I do not think he is a proper guardian for her, Miss Penniman."

It was then that the tears came to Mrs. Merrill's eyes, for there is a limit to all human endurance. The sight of these caused a remarkable change in Miss Lucretia, and she leaned forward and seized Mrs. Merrill's arm.

"My dear," she cried, "my dear, what are we to do? Cynthia can't go back to that man. She loves him, I know, she loves him as few girls are capable of loving. But when she finds out what he is! When she finds out how he got the money to support her father!" Miss Lucretia fumbled in her reticule and drew forth a handkerchief and brushed her own eyes − eyes which a moment ago were so piercing. "I have seen many young women," she continued; "but I have known very few who were made of as fine a fibre and who have such principles as Cynthia Wetherell."

"That is very true," assented Mrs. Merrill, too much cast down to be amazed by this revelation of Miss Lucretia's weakness.

"But what are we to do?" insisted that lady; "who is to tell her what he is? How is it to be kept from her, indeed?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Merrill, "there will be more articles. Mr. Merrill says so. It seems there is to be a great political struggle in that state."

"Precisely," said Miss Lucretia, sadly. "And whoever tells the girl will forfeit her friendship. I I am very fond of her," and here she applied again to the reticule.

"Whom would she believe?" asked Mrs. Merrill, whose estimation of Miss Lucretia was increasing by leaps and bounds.

"Precisely," agreed Miss Lucretia. "But she must hear about it sometime."

"Wouldn't it be better to let her hear?" suggested Mrs. Merrill; "we cannot very well soften that shock. I talked the matter over a little with Mr. Merrill and he thinks that we must take time over it, Miss Penniman. Whatever we do, we must not act hastily."

"Well," said Miss Lucretia, "as I said, I am very fond of the girl, and I am willing to do my duty, whatever it may be. And I also wished to say, Mrs. Merrill, that I have thought about another matter very carefully. I am willing to provide for the girl. I am getting too old to live alone. I am getting too old, indeed, to do my work properly, as I used to do it. I should like to have her to live with me."

"She has become as one of my own daughters," said Mrs. Merrill. Yet she knew that this offer of Miss Lucretia's was not one to be lightly set aside, and that it might eventually be the best solution of the problem. After some further earnest discussion it was agreed between them that the matter was, if possible, to be kept from Cynthia for the present, and when Miss Lucretia departed Mrs. Merrill promised her an early return of her call.

Mrs. Merrill had another talk with her husband, which lasted far into the night. This talk was about Cynthia alone, and the sorrow which threatened her. These good people knew that it would be no light thing to break the faith of such as she, and they made her troubles their own.

Cynthia little guessed as she exchanged raillery with Mr. Merrill the next morning that he had risen fifteen minutes earlier than usual to search his newspaper through. He would read no more at breakfast, so he declared in answer to his daughters' comments; it was a bad habit which did not agree with his digestion. It was something new for Mr. Merrill to have trouble with his digestion.

There was another and scarcely less serious phase of the situation which Mr. and Mrs. Merrill had yet to discuss between them a phase of which Miss Lucretia Penniman knew nothing.

The day before Miss Sadler's school was to reopen nearly a week before the Harvard term was to commence a raging, wet snowstorm came charging in from the Atlantic. Snow had no terrors for a Coniston person, and Cynthia had been for her walk. Returning about five o'clock, she was surprised to have the door opened for her by Susan herself. "What a picture you are in those furs!" she cried, with an intention which for the moment was lost upon Cynthia. "I thought you would never come. You must have walked to Dedham this time. Who do you think is here? Mr. Worthington."

"Mr. Worthington!"

"I have been trying to entertain him, but I am afraid I have been a very poor substitute. However, I have persuaded him to stay for supper."

"It needed but little persuasion," said Bob, appearing in the doorway. All the snowstorms of the wide Atlantic could not have brought such color to her cheeks. Cynthia, for all her confusion at the meeting, had not lost her faculty of observation. He seemed to have changed again, even during the brief time he had been absent. His tone was grave.

"He needs to be cheered up, Cynthia," Susan went on, as though reading her thoughts. "I have done my best, without success. He won't confess to me that he has come back to make up some of his courses. I don't mind owning that I've got to finish a theme to be handed in to−morrow."

With these words Susan departed, and left them standing in the hall together. Bob took hold of Cynthia's jacket and helped her off with it. He could read neither pleasure nor displeasure in her face, though he searched it anxiously enough. It was she who led the way into the parlor and seated herself, as before, on one of the uncompromising, straight−backed chairs. Whatever inward tremors the surprise of this visit had given her, she looked at him clearly and steadily, completely mistress of herself, as ever.

"I thought your holidays did not end until next week," she said.

"They do not."

"Then why are you here?"

"Because I could not stay away, Cynthia," he answered. It was not the manner in which he would have said it a month ago. There was a note of intense earnestness in his voice now, and to it she could make no light reply. Confronted again with an unexpected situation, she could not decide at once upon a line of action.

"When did you leave Brampton?" she asked, to gain time. But with the words her thoughts flew to the hill country.

"This morning," he said, "on the early train. They have three feet of snow up there." He, too, seemed glad of a respite from something. "They're having a great fuss in Brampton about a new teacher for the village school. Miss Goddard has got married. Did you know Miss Goddard, the lanky one with the glasses?"

"Yes," said Cynthia, beginning to be amused at the turn the conversation was taking.

"Well, they can't find anybody smart enough to replace Miss Goddard. Old Ezra Graves, who's on the prudential committee, told Ephraim they ought to get you. I was in the post−office when they were talking about it. Just see what a reputation for learning you have in Brampton!"

Cynthia was plainly pleased by the compliment.

"How is Cousin Eph?" she asked.

"Happy as a lark," said Bob, "the greatest living authority in New England on the Civil War. He's made the post−office the most popular social club I ever saw. If anybody's missing in Brampton, you can nearly always find them in the post−office. But I smiled at the notion of your being a schoolma'am."

"I don't see anything so funny about it," replied Cynthia, smiling too. "Why shouldn't I be? I should like it."

"You were made for something different," he answered quietly.

It was a subject she did not choose to discuss with him, and dropped her lashes before the plainly spoken admiration in his eyes. So a silence fell between them, broken only by the ticking of the agate clock on the mantel and the music of sleigh−bells in a distant street. Presently the sleigh−bells died away, and it seemed to Cynthia that the sound of her own heart−beats must be louder than the ticking of the clock. Her tact had suddenly deserted her, without reason, and she did not dare to glance again at Bob as he sat under the lamp. That minute for it was a full minute was charged with a presage which she could not grasp. Cynthia's instincts were very keen. She understood, of course, that he had cut short his holiday to come to see her, and she might have dealt with him had that been all. But through that sixth sense with which some women are endowed she knew that something troubled him. He, too, had never yet been at a loss for words.

The silence forced him to speak first, and he tried to restore the light tone to the conversation.

"Cousin Ephraim gave me a piece of news," he said. "Ezra Graves got it, too. He told us you were down in Boston at a fashionable school. Cousin Ephraim knows a thing or two. He says he always callated you were cut out for a fine lady."

"Bob," said Cynthia, nerving herself for the ordeal, "did you tell Cousin Ephraim you had seen me?"

"I told him and Ezra that I had been a constant and welcome visitor at this house."

"Did you tell your father that you had seen me?"

This was too serious a question to avoid.

"No, I did not. There was no reason why I should have."

"There was every reason," said Cynthia, "and you know it. Did you tell him why you came to Boston to−day?"

"No."

"Why does he think you came?"

"He doesn't think anything about it," said Bob. "He went off to Chicago yesterday to attend a meeting of the board of directors of a western railroad."

"And so," she said reproachfully, "you slipped off as soon as his back was turned. I would not have believed that of you, Bob. Do you think that was fair to him or me?"

Bob Worthington sprang to his feet and stood over her. She had spoken to a boy, but she had aroused a man, and she felt an amazing thrill at the result. The muscles in his face tightened, and deepened the lines about his mouth, and a fire was lighted about his eyes.

"Cynthia," he said slowly, "even you shall not speak to me like that. If I had believed it were right, if I had believed that it would have done any good to you or me, I should have told my father the moment I got to Brampton. In affairs of this kind in a matter of so much importance in my life," he continued, choosing his words carefully, "I am likely to know whether I am doing right or wrong. If my mother were alive, I am sure that she would approve of this this friendship."

Having got so far, he paused. Cynthia felt that she was trembling, as though the force and feeling that was in him had charged her also.

"I did not intend to come so soon," he went on, "but I had a reason for coming. I knew that you did not want me."

"You know that that is not true, Bob," she faltered. His next words brought her to her feet.

"Cynthia," he said, in a voice shaken by the intensity of his passion, "I came because I love you better than all the world because I always will love you so. I came to protect you, and care for you whatever happens. I did not mean to tell you so, now. But it cannot matter, Cynthia!"

He seized her, roughly indeed, in his arms, but his very roughness was a proof of the intensity of his love. For an instant she lay palpitating against him, and as long as he lives he will remember the first exquisite touch of her firm but supple figure and the marvellous communion of her lips. A current from the great store that was in her, pent up and all unknown, ran through him, and then she had struggled out of his arms and fled, leaving him standing alone in the parlor.

It is true that such things happen, and no man or woman may foretell the day or the hour thereof. Cynthia fled up the stairs, miraculously arriving unnoticed at her own room, and locked the door and flung herself on the bed. Tears came tears of shame, of joy, of sorrow, of rejoicing, of regret; tears that burned, and yet relieved her, tears that pained while they comforted. Had she sinned beyond the pardon of heaven, or had she committed a supreme act of right? One moment she gloried in it, and the next upbraided herself bitterly. Her heart beat with tumult, and again seemed to stop. Such, though the words but faintly describe them, were her feelings, for thoughts were still to emerge out of chaos. Love comes like a flame to few women, but so it came to Cynthia Wetherell, and burned out for a while all reason.

Only for a while. Generations which had practised self−restraint were strong in her generations accustomed, too, to thinking out, so far as in them lay, the logical consequences of their acts; generations ashamed of these very instants when nature has chosen to take command. After a time had passed, during which the world might have shuffled from its course, Cynthia sat up in the darkness. How was she ever to face the light again? Reason had returned.

So she sat for another space, and thought of what she had done thought with a surprising calmness now which astonished her. Then she thought of what she would do, for there was an ordeal still to be gone through. Although she shrank from it, she no longer lacked the courage to endure it. Certain facts began to stand out clearly from the confusion. The least important and most immediate of these was that she would have to face him, and incidentally face the world in the shape of the Merrill family, at supper. She rose mechanically and lighted the gas and bathed her face and changed her gown. Then she heard Susan's voice at the door.

"Cynthia, what in the world are you doing?"

Cynthia opened the door and the sisters entered. Was it possible that they did not read her terrible secret in her face? Apparently not. Susan was busy commenting on the qualities and peculiarities of Mr. Robert Worthington, and showering upon Cynthia a hundred questions which she answered she knew not how; but neither Susan nor Jane, wonderful as it may seem, betrayed any suspicion. Did he send the flowers? Cynthia had not asked him. Did he want to know whether she read the newspapers? He had asked Susan that, before Cynthia came. Susan was ready to repeat the whole of her conversation with him. Why did he seem so particular about newspapers? Had he notions that girls ought not to read them?

The significance of Bob's remarks about newspapers was lost upon Cynthia then. Not till afterward did she think of them, or connect them with his unexpected visit. Then the supper bell rang, and they went downstairs.

The reader will be spared Mr. Worthington's feelings after Cynthia left him, although they were intense enough, and absorbing and far−reaching enough. He sat down on a chair and buried his head in his hands. His impulse had been to leave this house and return again on the morrow, but he remembered that he had been asked to stay for supper, and that such a proceeding would cause comment. At length he got up and stood before the fire, his thoughts still above the clouds, and it was thus that Mr. Merrill found him when he entered.

"Good evening," said that gentleman, genially, not knowing in the least who Bob was, but prepossessed in his favor by the way he came forward and shook his hand and looked him clearly in the eye.

"I'm Robert Worthington, Mr. Merrill," said he.

"Eh!" Mr. Merrill gasped, "eh! Oh, certainly, how do you do, Mr. Worthington?" Mr. Merrill would have been polite to a tax collector or a sheriff. He separated the office from the man, which ought not always to be done. "I'm glad to see you, Mr. Worthington. Well, well, bad storm, isn't it? I had an idea the college didn't open until next week."

"Mr. Worthington's going to stay for supper, Papa," said Susan, entering.

"Good!" cried Mr. Merrill. "Capital! You won't miss the old folks after supper, will you, girls? Your mother wants me to go to a whist party."

"It can't be helped, Carry," said Mr. Merrill to his wife, as they walked up the hill to a neighbor's that evening.

"He's in love with Cynthia," said Mrs. Merrill, somewhat sadly; "it's as plain as the nose on your face, Stephen."

"That isn't very plain. Suppose he is! You can dam a mountain stream, but you can't prevent it reaching the sea, as we used to say when I was a boy in Edmundton. I like Bob," said Mr. Merrill, with his usual weakness for Christian names, "and he isn't any more like Dudley Worthington than I am. If you were to ask me, I'd say he couldn't do a better thing than marry Cynthia."

"Stephen!" exclaimed Mrs. Merrill. But in her heart she thought so, too. "What will Mr. Worthington say when he hears the young man has been coming to our house to see her?"

Mr. Merrill had been thinking of that very thing, but with more amusement than concern.

To return to Mr. Merrill's house, the three girls and the one young man were seated around the fire, and their talk, merrily as it had begun, was becoming minute by minute more stilted. This was largely the fault of Susan, who would not be happy until she had taken Jane upstairs and left Mr. Worthington and Cynthia together. This matter had been arranged between the sisters before supper. Susan found her opening at last, and upbraided Jane for her unfinished theme; Jane, having learned her lesson well, accused Susan. But Cynthia, who saw through the ruse, declared that both themes were finished. Susan, naturally indignant at such ingratitude, denied this. The manœuvre, in short, was executed very clumsily and very obviously, but executed nevertheless the sisters marching out of the room under a fire of protests. The reader, too, will no doubt think it a very obvious manœuvre, some things are managed badly in life as well as in books.

Cynthia and Bob were left alone: left, moreover, in mortal terror of each other. It is comparatively easy to open the door of a room and rush into a lady's arms if the lady be willing and alone. But to be abandoned, as Susan had abandoned them, and with such obvious intent, creates quite a different atmosphere. Bob had dared to hope for such an opportunity: had made up his mind during supper, while striving to be agreeable, just what he would do if the opportunity came. Instead, all he could do was to sit foolishly in his chair and look at the coals, not so much as venturing to turn his head until the sound of footsteps had died away on the upper floors. It was Cynthia who broke the silence and took command a very different Cynthia from the girl who had thrown herself on the bed not three hours before. She did not look at him, but stared with determination into the fire.

"Bob, you must go," she said.

"Go!" he cried. Her voice loosed the fetters of his passion, and he dared to seize the hand that lay on the arm of her chair. She did not resist this.

"Yes, you must go. You should not have stayed for supper.

"Cynthia," he said, "how can I leave you? I will not leave you."

"But you can and must," she replied.

"Why?" he asked, looking at her in dismay.

"You know the reason," she answered.

"Know it?" he cried. "I know why I should stay. I know that I love you with my whole heart and soul. I know that I love you as few men have ever loved and that you are the one woman among millions who can inspire such a love."

"No, Bob, no," she said, striving hard to keep her head, withdrawing her hand that it might not betray the treason of her lips. Aware, strange as it may seem, of the absurdity of the source of what she was to say, for a trace of a smile was about her mouth as she gazed at the coals. "You will get over this. You are not yet out of college, and

many such fancies happen there."

For the moment he was incapable of speaking, incapable of finding an answer sufficiently emphatic. How was he to tell her of the rocks upon which his love was built? How was he to declare that the very perils which threatened her had made a man of him, with all of a man's yearning to share these perils and shield her from them? How was he to speak at all of those perils? He did not declaim, yet when he spoke, an enduring sincerity which she could not deny was in his voice.

"You know in your heart that what you say is not true, Cynthia. Whatever happens, I shall always love you."

Whatever happens! She shuddered at the words, reminding her as they did of all her vague misgivings and fears.

"Whatever happens!" she found herself repeating them involuntarily.

"Yes, whatever happens I will love you truly and faithfully. I will never desert you, never deny you, as long as I live. And you love me, Cynthia," he cried, "you love me, I know it."

"No, no," she answered, her breath coming fast. He was on his feet now, dangerously near her, and she rose swiftly to avoid him. She turned her head, that he might not read the denial in her eyes, and yet had to look at him again, for he was coming toward her quickly. "Don't touch me," she said, "don't touch me."

He stopped, and looked at her so pitifully that she could scarce keep back her tears.

"You do love me," he repeated.

So they stood for a moment, while Cynthia made a supreme effort to speak calmly.

"Listen, Bob," she said at last, "if you ever wish to see me again, you must do as I say. You must write to your father, and tell him what you have done and and what you wish to do. You may come to me and tell me his answer, but you must not come to me before." She would have said more, but her strength was almost gone. Yes, and more would have implied a promise or a concession. She would not bind herself even by a hint. But of this she was sure: that she would not be the means of wrecking his opportunities. "And now you must go."

He stayed where he was, though his blood leaped within him, his admiration and respect for the girl outran his passion. Robert Worthington was a gentleman.

"I will do as you say, Cynthia," he answered, "but I am doing it for you. Whatever my father's reply may be will not change my love or my intentions. For I am determined that you shall be my wife."

With these words, and one long, lingering look, he turned and left her. He had lacked the courage to speak of his father's bitterness and animosity. Who will blame him? Cynthia thought none the less of him for not telling her. There was, indeed, no need now to describe Dudley Worthington's feelings.

When the door had closed she stole to the window, and listened to his footfalls in the snow until she heard them no more.

CHAPTER XI. IN WHICH MISS SADLER WRITES A LETTER

THE next morning Cynthia's heart was heavy as she greeted her new friends at Miss Sadler's school. Life had made a woman of her long ago, while these girls had yet been in short dresses, and now an experience had come

to her which few, if any, of these could ever know. It was of no use for her to deny to herself that she loved Bob Worthington loved him with the full intensity of the strong nature that was hers. To how many of these girls would come such a love? and how many would be called upon to make such a renunciation as hers had been? No wonder she felt out of place among them, and once more the longing to fly away to Coniston almost overcame her. Jethro would forgive her, she knew, and stretch out his arms to receive her, and understand that some trouble had driven her to him.

She was aroused by some one calling her name some one whose voice sounded strangely familiar. Cynthia was perhaps the only person in the school that day who did not know that Miss Janet Duncan had entered it. Miss Sadler certainly knew it, and asked Miss Duncan very particularly about her father and mother and even her brother. Miss Sadler knew, even before Janet's unexpected arrival, that Mr. and Mrs. Duncan had come to Boston after Christmas, and had taken a large house in the Back Bay in order to be near their son at Harvard. Mrs. Duncan was, in fact, a Bostonian, and more at home there than at any other place.

Miss Sadler observed with a great deal of astonishment the warm embrace that Janet bestowed on Cynthia. The occurrence started in Miss Sadler a train of thought, as a result of which she left the drawing−room where these reunions were held, and went into her own private study to write a note. This she addressed to Mrs. Alexander Duncan, at a certain number on Beacon Street, and sent it out to be posted immediately. In the meantime, Janet Duncan had seated herself on the sofa beside Cynthia, not having for an instant ceased to talk to her. Of what use to write a romance, when they unfolded themselves so beautifully in real life! Here was the country girl she had seen in Washington already in a fine way to become the princess, and in four months! Janet would not have thought it possible for any one to change so much in such a time. Cynthia listened, and wondered what language Miss Duncan would use if she knew how great and how complete that change had been. Romances, Cynthia thought sadly, were one thing to theorize about and quite another thing to endure and smiled at the thought. But Miss Duncan had no use for a heroine without a heartache.

It is not improbable that Miss Janet Duncan may appear with Miss Sally Broke in another volume. The style of her conversation is known, and there is no room to reproduce it here. She, too, had a heart, but she was a young woman given to infatuations, as Cynthia rightly guessed. Cynthia must spend many afternoons at her house lunch with her, drive with her. For one omission Cynthia was thankful: she did not mention Bob Worthington's name. There was this romance under Miss Duncan's nose, and she did not see it. It is frequently so with romancers.

Cynthia's impassiveness, her complete poise, had fascinated Miss Duncan with the others. Had there been nothing beneath that exterior, Janet would never have guessed it, and she would have been quite as happy. Cynthia saw very clearly that Mr. Worthington or no other man or woman could force Bob to marry Janet.

The next morning, in such intervals as her studies permitted, Janet continued her attentions to Cynthia. That same morning she had brought a note from her father to Miss Sadler, of the contents of which Janet knew nothing. Miss Sadler retired into her study to read it, and two newspaper clippings fell out of it under the paper−cutter. This was the note:

"MY DEAR MISS SADLER: Mrs. Duncan has referred your note to me, and I enclose two clippings which speak for themselves. Miss Wetherell, I believe, stands in the relation of ward to the person to whom they refer, and her father was a sort of political assistant to this person. Although, as you say, we are from that part of the country," (Miss Sadler had spoken of the Duncans as the people of importance there) "it was by the merest accident that Miss Wetherell's connection with this Jethro Bass was brought to my notice.

"Sincerely yours,

"ALEXANDER DUNCAN."

It is pleasant to know that there were people in the world who could snub Miss Sadler; and there could be no doubt, from the manner in which she laid the letter down and took up the clippings, that Miss Sadler felt snubbed: equally, there could be no doubt that the revenge would fall on other shoulders than Mr. Duncan's. And when Miss Sadler proceeded to read the clippings, her hair would have stood on end with horror had it not been so efficiently plastered down. Miss Sadler seized her pen, and began a letter to Mrs. Merrill. Miss Sadler's knowledge of the proprieties together with other qualifications had made her school what it was. No Cynthia Wetherells had ever before entered its sacred portals, or should again.

The first of these clippings was the article containing the arraignment of Jethro Bass which Mr. Merrill had shown to his wife, and which had been the excuse for Miss Penniman's call. The second was one which Mr. Duncan had clipped from the Newcastle Guardian of the day before, and gave, from Mr. Worthington's side, a very graphic account of the conflict which was to tear the state asunder. The railroads were tired of paying toll to the chief of a band of thieves and cutthroats, to a man who had long throttled the state which had nourished him, to in short, to Jethro Bass. Miss Sadler was not much interested in the figures and metaphors of political compositions. Right had found a champion the article continued in Mr. Isaac D. Worthington of Brampton, president of the Truro Road and owner of large holdings elsewhere. Mr. Worthington, backed by other respectable property interests, would fight this monster of iniquity to the death, and release the state from his thraldom. Jethro Bass, the article alleged, was already about his abominable work had long been so as in mockery of that very vigilance which is said to be the price of liberty. His agents were busy in every town of the state, seeing to it that the slaves of Jethro Bass should be sent to the next legislature.

And what was this system which he had built up among these rural communities? It might aptly be called the System of Mortgages. The mortgage dread name for a dreadful thing was the chief weapon of the monster. Even as Jethro Bass held the mortgages of Coniston and Tarleton and round about, so his lieutenants held mortgages in every town and hamlet of the state. What was a poor farmer to do? His choice was not between right and wrong, but between a roof over the heads of his wife and children and no roof. He must vote for the candidate of Jethro Bass and corruption or become a homeless wanderer. How the gentleman and his other respectable backers were to fight the system the article did not say. Were they to buy up all the mortgages? As a matter of fact, they intended to buy up enough of these to count, but to mention this would be to betray the methods of Mr. Worthington's reform. The first bitter frontier fighting between the advance cohorts of the new giant and the old the struggle for the caucuses and the polls had begun. Miss Sadler cared but little and understood less of all this matter. She lingered over the sentences which described Jethro Bass as a monster of iniquity, as a pariah with whom decent men would have no intercourse, and in the heat of her passion that one who had touched him had gained admittance to the most exclusive school for young ladies in the country she wrote a letter.

Miss Sadler wrote the letter, and three hours later tore it up and wrote another and more diplomatic one. Mrs. Merrill, though not by any means of the same importance as Mrs. Duncan, was not a person to be wantonly offended, and might knowing nothing about the monster in the goodness of her heart have taken the girl into her house. Had it been otherwise, surely Mrs. Merrill would not have had the effrontery! She would give Mrs. Merrill a chance. The bell of release from studies was ringing as she finished this second letter, and Miss Sadler in her haste forgot to enclose the clippings. She ran out in time to intercept Susan Merrill at the door, and to press into her hands the clippings and the note, with a request to take both to her mother.

Although the Duncans dined in the evening, the Merrills had dinner at half−past one in the afternoon, when the girls returned from school. Mr. Merrill usually came home, but he had gone off somewhere for this particular day, and Mrs. Merrill had a sewing circle. The girls sat down to dinner alone. When they got up from the table, Susan suddenly remembered the note which she had left in her coat pocket. She drew out the clippings with it.

"I wonder what Miss Sadler is sending mamma clippings for," she said. "Why, Cynthia, they're about your uncle. Look!"

And she handed over the article headed "Jethro Bass." Jane, who had quicker intuitions than her sister, would have snatched it from Cynthia's hand, and it was a long time before Susan forgave herself for her folly. Thus Miss Sadler had her revenge.

It is often mercifully ordained that the mightiest blows of misfortune are tempered for us. During the winter evenings in Coniston, Cynthia had read little newspaper attacks on Jethro, and scorned them as the cowardly devices of enemies. They had been, indeed, but guarded and covert allusions grimaces from a safe distance. Cynthia's first sensation as she read was anger anger so intense as to send all the blood in her body rushing to her head. But what was this? "Right had found a champion at last" in in Isaac D. Worthington! That was the first blow, and none but Cynthia knew the weight of it. It sank but slowly into her consciousness, and slowly the blood left her face, slowly but surely: left it at length as white as the lace curtain of the window which she clutched in her distress. Words which somebody had spoken were ringing in her ears. Whatever happens! "Whatever happens I will never desert you, never deny you, as long as I live." This, then, was what he had meant by newspapers, and why he had come to her!

The sisters, watching her, cried out in dismay. There was no need to tell them that they were looking on at a tragedy, and all the love and sympathy in their hearts went out to her.

"Cynthia! Cynthia! What is it?" cried Susan, who, thinking she would faint, seized her in her arms. "What have I done?"

Cynthia did not faint, being made of sterner substance. Gently, but with that inexorable instinct of her kind which compels them to look for reliance within themselves even in the direst of extremities, Cynthia released herself from Susan's embrace and put a hand to her forehead.

"Will you leave me here a little while alone?" she said.

It was Jane now who drew Susan out and shut the door of the parlor after them. In utter misery they waited on the stairs while Cynthia fought out her battle for herself.

When they were gone she sank down into the big chair under the reading lamp the very chair in which he had sat only two nights before. She saw now with a terrible clearness the thing which for so long had been but a vague premonition of disaster, and for a while she forgot the clippings. And when after a space the touch of them in her hand brought them back to her remembrance, she lacked the courage to read them through. But not for long. Suddenly her fear of them gave place to a consuming hatred of the man who had inspired these articles: of Isaac D. Worthington, for she knew that he must have inspired them. And then she began to read them.

Truth, though it come perverted from the mouth of an enemy, has in itself a note to which the soul responds, let the mind deny as vehemently as it will. Cynthia read, and as she read her body was shaken with sobs, though the tears came not. Could it be true? Could the least particle of the least of these fearful insinuations be true? Oh, the treason of those whispers in a voice that was surely not her own, and yet which she could not hush! Was it possible that such things could be printed about one whom she had admired and respected above all men nay, whom she had so passionately adored from childhood? A monster of iniquity, a pariah! The cruel, bitter calumny of those names! Cynthia thought of his goodness and loving kindness and his charity to her and to many others. His charity! The dreaded voice repeated that word, and sent a thought that struck terror into her heart: Whence had come the substance of that charity? Then came another word mortgage. There it was on the paper, and at sight of it there leaped out of her memory a golden−green poplar shimmering against the sky and the distant blue billows of mountains in the west. She heard the high−pitched voice of a woman speaking the word, and even then it had had a hateful sound, and she heard herself asking, "Uncle Jethro, what is a mortgage?" He had struck his horse with the whip.

Loyal though the girl was, the whispers would not hush, nor the doubts cease to assail her. What if ever so small a portion of this were true? Could the whole of this hideous structure, tier resting upon tier, have been reared without something of a foundation? Fiercely though she told herself she would believe none of it, fiercely though she hated Mr. Worthington, fervently though she repeated aloud that her love for Jethro and her faith in him had not changed, the doubts remained. Yet they remained unacknowledged.

An hour passed. It was a thing beyond belief that one hour could have held such a store of agony. An hour passed, and Cynthia came dry−eyed from the parlor. Susan and Jane, waiting to give her comfort when she was recovered a little from this unknown but overwhelming affliction, were fain to stand mute when they saw her: to pay a silent deference to one whom sorrow had lifted far above and transfigured. That was the look on Cynthia's face. She went up the stairs, and they stood in the hall not knowing what to do, whispering in awe−struck voices. They were still there when Cynthia came down again, dressed for the street. Jane seized her by the hand.

"Where are you going, Cynthia?" she asked.

"I shall be back by five," said Cynthia.

She went up the hill, and across to old Louisburg Square, and up the hill again. The weather had cleared, the violet−paned windows caught the slanting sunlight and flung it back across the piles of snow. It was a day for wedding bells. At last Cynthia came to a queerly fashioned little green door that seemed all askew with the slanting street, and rang the bell, and in another moment was standing on the threshold of Miss Lucretia Penniman's little sitting room. To Miss Lucretia, at her writing table, one glance was sufficient. She rose quickly to meet the girl, kissed her unresponsive cheek, and led her to a chair. Miss Lucretia was never one to beat about the bush, even in the gravest crises.

"You have read the articles," she said.

Read them! During her walk hither Cynthia had been incapable of thought, but the epithets and arraignments and accusations, the sentences and paragraphs, were printed now upon her brain, never, she believed, to be effaced. Every step of the way she had been unconsciously repeating them. "Have you read them?" asked Cynthia.

"Yes, my dear."

"Has everybody read them?" Did the whole world, then, know of her shame?

"I am glad you came to me, my dear," said Miss Lucretia, taking her hand. "Have you talked of this to any one else?"

"No," said Cynthia, simply.

Miss Lucretia was puzzled. She had not looked for apathy, but she did not know all of Cynthia's troubles. She wondered whether she had misjudged the girl, and was misled by her attitude.

"Cynthia," she said, with a briskness meant to hide emotion (for Miss Lucretia had emotions), "I am a lonely old woman, getting too old, indeed, to finish the task of my life. I went to see Mrs. Merrill the other day to ask her if she would let you come and live with me. Will you?"

Cynthia shook her head.

"No, Miss Lucretia, I cannot," she answered.

"I won't press it on you now," said Miss Lucretia.

"I cannot, Miss Lucretia. I'm going to Coniston."

"Going to Coniston!" exclaimed Miss Lucretia.

The name of that place magic name once so replete with visions of happiness and content seemed to recall Cynthia's spirit from its flight. Yes, the spirit was there, for it flashed in her eyes as she turned and looked into Miss Lucretia's face.

"Are these the articles you read?" she asked, taking the clippings from her muff.

Miss Lucretia put on her spectacles.

"I have seen both of them," she said.

"And do you believe what they say about about Jethro Bass?"

Poor Miss Lucretia! For once in her life she was at a loss. She, too, paid a deference to that face, young as it was. She had robbed herself of sleep trying to make up her mind what she would say upon such an occasion if it came. A wonderful virgin faith had to be shattered, and was she to be the executioner? She loved the girl with that strange, intense affection which sometimes comes to the elderly and the lonely, and she had prayed that this cup might pass from her. Was it possible that it was her own voice using very much the same words for which she had rebuked Mrs. Merrill?

"Cynthia," she said, "those articles were written by politicians, in a political controversy. No such articles can ever be taken literally."

"Miss Lucretia, do you believe what it says about Jethro Bass?" repeated Cynthia.

How was she to avoid those eyes? They pierced into her soul, even as her own had pierced into Mrs. Merrill's. Oh, Miss Lucretia, who pride yourself on your plain speaking, that you should be caught quibbling! Miss Lucretia blushed for the first time in many years, and into her face came the light of battle.

"I am a coward, my dear. I deserve your rebuke. To the best of my knowledge and belief, and so far as I can judge from the inquiries I have undertaken, Jethro Bass has made his living and gained and held his power by the methods described in those articles."

Miss Lucretia took off her spectacles and wiped them. She had committed a fine act of courage.

Cynthia stood up.

"Thank you," she said, "that is what I wanted to know."

"But −" cried Miss Lucretia, in amazement and apprehension, "but what are you going to do?"

"I am going to Coniston," said Cynthia, "to ask him if those things are true."

"To ask him!"

"Yes. If he tells me they are true, then I shall believe them."

"If he tells you?" Miss Lucretia gasped. Here was a courage of which she had not reckoned. "Do you think he will tell you?"

"He will tell me, and I shall believe him, Miss Lucretia."

"You are a remarkable girl, Cynthia," said Miss Lucretia, involuntarily. Then she paused for a moment. "Suppose he tells you they are true? You surely can't live with him again, Cynthia."

"Do you suppose I am going to desert him, Miss Lucretia?" she asked. "He loves me, and and I love him." This was the first time her voice had faltered. "He kept my father from want and poverty, and he has brought me up as a daughter. If his life has been as you say, I shall make my own living!"

"How?" demanded Miss Lucretia, the practical part of her coming uppermost.

"I shall teach school. I believe I can get a position, in a place where I can see him often. I can break his heart, Miss Lucretia, I I can bring sadness to myself, but I will not desert him."

Miss Lucretia stared at her for a moment, not knowing what to say or do. She perceived that the girl had a spirit as strong as her own: that her plans were formed, her mind made up, and that no arguments could change her.

"Why did you come to me?" she asked irrelevantly.

"Because I thought that you would have read the articles, and I knew if you had, you would have taken the trouble to inform yourself of the world's opinion."

Again Miss Lucretia stared at her.

"I will go to Coniston with you," she said, "at least as far as Brampton."

Cynthia's face softened a little at the words.

"I would rather go alone, Miss Lucretia," she answered gently, but with the same firmness. "I I am very grateful to you for your kindness to me in Boston. I shall not forget it or you. Good−by, Miss Lucretia."

But Miss Lucretia, sobbing openly, gathered the girl in her arms and pressed her. Age was coming on her indeed, that she should show such weakness. For a long time she could not trust herself to speak, and then her words were broken. Cynthia must come to her at the first sign of doubt or trouble: this, Miss Lucretia's house, was to be a refuge in any storm that life might send and Miss Lucretia's heart. Cynthia promised, and when she went out at last through the little door her own tears were falling, for she loved Miss Lucretia.

Cynthia was going to Coniston. That journey was as fixed, as inevitable, as things mortal can be. She would go to Coniston unless she perished on the way. No loving entreaties, no fears of Mrs. Merrill or her daughters, were of any avail. Mrs. Merrill, too, was awed by the vastness of the girl's sorrow, and wondered if her own nature were small by comparison. She had wept, to be sure, at her husband's confession, and lain awake over it in the night watches, and thought of the early days of their marriage.

And then, Mrs. Merrill told herself, Cynthia would have to talk with Mr. Merrill. How was he to come unscathed out of that? There was pain and bitterness in that thought, and almost resentment against Cynthia, quivering though she was with sympathy for the girl. For Mrs. Merrill, though the canker remained, had already pardoned her husband and had asked the forgiveness of God for that pardon. On other occasions, in other crises, she had waited and watched for him in the parlor window, and to−night she was at the door before his key was in the lock,

while he was still stamping the snow from his boots. She drew him into the room and told him what had happened.

"Oh, Stephen," she cried, "what are you going to say to her?"

What, indeed? His wife had sorrowed, but she had known the obstacles and perils by which he had been beset. But what was he to say to Cynthia? Her very name had grown upon him, middle−aged man of affairs though he was, until the thought of it summoned up in his mind a figure of purity, and of the strength which was from purity. He would not have believed it possible that the country girl whom they had taken into their house three months before should have wrought such an influence over them all.

Even in the first hour of her sorrow which she had spent that afternoon in the parlor, Cynthia had thought of Mr. Merrill. He could tell her whether those accusations were true or false, for he was a friend of Jethro's. Her natural impulse the primeval one of a creature which is hurt had been to hide herself; to fly to her own room, and perhaps by nightfall the courage would come to her to ask him the terrible questions. He was a friend of Jethro's. An illuminating flash revealed to her the meaning of that friendship if the accusations were true. It was then she had thought of Miss Lucretia Penniman, and somehow she had found the courage to face the sunlight and go to her. She would spare Mr. Merrill.

But had she spared him? Sadly the family sat down to supper without her, and after supper Mr. Merrill sent a message to his club that he could not attend a committee meeting there that evening. He sat with his wife in the little writing room, he pretending to read and she pretending to sew, until the silence grew too oppressive, and they spoke of the matter that was in their hearts. It was one of the bitterest evenings in Mr. Merrill's life, and there is no need to linger on it. They talked earnestly of Cynthia, and of her future. But they both knew why she did not come down to them.

"So she is really going to Coniston," said Mr. Merrill.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Merrill, "and I think she is doing right, Stephen."

Mr. Merrill groaned. His wife rose and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Come, Stephen," she said gently, "you will see her in the morning."

"I will go to Coniston with her," he said.

"No," replied Mrs. Merrill, "she wants to go alone. And I believe it is best that she should."

CHAPTER XII. "IN THE TANNERY SHED!"

GREAT afflictions generally bring in their train a host of smaller sorrows, each with its own little pang. One of these sorrows had been the parting with the Merrill family. Under any circumstance it was not easy for Cynthia to express her feelings, and now she had found it very difficult to speak of the gratitude and affection which she felt. But they understood dear, good people that they were: no eloquence was needed with them. The ordeal of breakfast over, and the tearful "God bless you, Miss Cynthia," of Ellen the parlor−maid, the whole family had gone with her to the station. For Susan and Jane had spent their last day at Miss Sadler's school.

Mr. Merrill had sent for the conductor and bidden him take care of Miss Wetherell, and recommend her in his name to a conductor on the Truro Road. The man took off his cap to Mr. Merrill and called him by name and promised. It was a dark day, and long after the train had pulled out Cynthia remembered the tearful faces of the

family standing on the damp platform of the station. As they fled northward through the flat river−meadows, the conductor would have liked to talk to her of Mr. Merrill; there were few employees on any railroad who did not know the genial and kindly president of the Grand Gulf and sympathize with his troubles. But there was a look on the girl's face that forbade intrusion. Passengers stared at her covertly, as though fascinated by that look, and some tried to fathom it. But her eyes were firmly fixed upon a point far beyond their vision. The car stopped many times, and flew on again, but nothing seemed to break her absorption. At last she was aroused by the touch of the conductor on her sleeve. The people were beginning to file out of the car, and the train was under the shadow of the snow−covered sheds in the station of the state capital. Cynthia recognized the place, though it was cold and bare and very different in appearance from what it had been on the summer's evening when she had come into it with her father. That, in effect, had been her first glimpse of the world, and well she recalled the thrill it had given her. The joy of such things was gone now, the rapture of holidays and new sights. These were over, so she told herself. Sorrow had quenched the thrills forever.

The kind conductor led her to the eating room, and when she would not eat his concern grew greater than ever. He took a strange interest in this young lady who had such a face and such eyes. He pointed her out to his friend the Truro conductor, and gave him some sandwiches and fruit which he himself had bought, with instructions to press them on her during the afternoon.

Cynthia could not eat. She hated this place, with its memories. Hated it, too, as a mart where men were bought and sold, for the wording of those articles ran in her head as though some priest of evil were chanting them in her ears. She did not remember then the sweeter aspect of the old town, its pretty homes set among their shaded gardens − homes full of good and kindly people. State House affairs were far removed from most of these, and the sickness and corruption of the body politic. And this political corruption, had she known it, was no worse than that of the other states in the wide Union: not so bad, indeed, as many, though this was small comfort. No comfort at all to Cynthia, who did not think of it.

After a while she rose and followed the new conductor to the Truro train, glad to leave the capital behind her. She was going to the hills − to the mountains. They, in truth, could not change, though the seasons passed over them, hot and cold, wet and dry. They were immutable in their goodness. Presently she saw them, the lower ones: the waters of the little stream beside her broke the black bonds of ice and raced over the rapids; the engine was puffing and groaning on the grade. Then the sun crept out, slowly, from the indefinable margin of vapor that hung massed over the low country.

Yes, she had come to the hills. Up and up climbed the train, through the little white villages in the valley nooks, banked with whiter snow; through the narrow gorges, sometimes hanging over them, − under steep granite walls seared with ice−filled cracks, their brows hung with icicles.

Truro Pass is not so high as the Brenner, but it has a grand, wild look in winter, remote as it is from the haunts of men. A fitting refuge, it might be, for a great spirit heavy with the sins of the world below. Such a place might have been chosen, in the olden time, for a monastery a gray fastness built against the black forest over the crag looking down upon the green clumps of spruces against the snow. Some vague longing for such a refuge was in Cynthia's heart as she gazed upon that silent place, and then the waters had already begun to run westward the waters of Tumble Down brook, which flowed into Coniston Water above Brampton. The sun still had more than two hours to go on its journey to the hill crests when the train pulled into Brampton station. There were but a few people on the platform, but the first face she saw as she stepped from the car was Lem Hallowell's. It was a very red face, as we know, and its owner was standing in front of the Coniston stage, on runners now. He stared at her for an instant, and no wonder, and then he ran forward with outstretched hands.

"Cynthy Cynthy Wetherell!" he cried. "Great Godfrey!"

He got so far, he seized her hands, and then he stopped, not knowing why. There were many more ejaculations and welcomes and what not on the end of his tongue. It was not that she had become a lady a lady of a type he had never before seen. He meant to say that, too, in his own way, but he couldn't. And that transformation would have bothered Lem but little. What was the change, then? Why was he in awe of her he, Lem Hallowell, who had never been in awe of any one? He shook his head, as though openly confessing his inability to answer that question. He wanted to ask others, but they would not come.

"Lem," she said, "I am so glad you are here."

"Climb right in, Cynthy. I'll git the trunk." There it lay, the little rawhide one before him on the boards, and he picked it up in his bare hands as though it had been a paper parcel. It was a peculiarity of the stage driver that he never wore gloves, even in winter, so remarkable was the circulation of his blood. After the trunk he deposited, apparently with equal ease, various barrels and boxes, and then he jumped in beside Cynthia, and they drove down familiar Brampton Street, as wide as a wide river; past the meeting−house with the terraced steeple; past the post−office, Cousin Ephraim's post−office, − where Lem gave her a questioning look but she shook her head, and he did not wait for the distribution of the last mail that day; past the great mansion of Isaac D. Worthington, where the iron mastiffs on the lawn were up to their muzzles in snow. After that they took the turn to the right, which was the road to Coniston.

Well−remembered road, and in winter or summer, Cynthia knew every tree and farmhouse beside it. Now it consisted of two deep grooves in the deep snow; that was all, save for a curving turnout here and there for team to pass team. Well−remembered scene! How often had Cynthia looked upon it in happier days! Such a crust was on the snow as would bear a heavy man, and the pasture hillocks were like glazed cakes in the window of a baker's shop. Never had the western sky looked so yellow through the black columns of the pine trunks. A lonely, beautiful road it was that evening.

For a long time the silence of the great hills was broken only by the sweet jingle of the bells on the shaft. Many a day, winter and summer, Lem had gone that road alone, whistling, and never before heeding that silence. Now it seemed to symbolize a great sorrow: to be in subtle harmony with that of the girl at his side. What that sorrow was he could not guess. The good man yearned to comfort her, and yet he felt his comfort too humble to be noticed by such sorrow. He longed to speak, but for the first time in his life feared the sound of his own voice. Cynthia had not spoken since she left the station, had not looked at him, had not asked for the friends and neighbors whom she had loved so well had not asked for Jethro! Was there any sorrow on earth to be felt like that? And was there one to feel it?

At length, when they reached the great forest, Lem Hallowell knew that he must speak or cry aloud. But what would be the sound of his voice after such an age of disuse? Could he speak at all? Broken and hoarse and hideous though the sound might be, he must speak. And hoarse and broken it was. It was not his own, but still it was a voice.

"Folks folks'll be surprised to see you, Cynthy."

No, he had not spoken at all. Yes, he had, for she answered him.

"I suppose they will, Lem."

"Mighty glad to have you back, Cynthy. We think a might of you. We missed you."

"Thank you, Lem."

"Jethro hain't lookin' for you by any chance, be he?"

"No," she said. But the question startled her. Suppose he had not been at home! She had never once thought of that. Could she have borne to wait for him?

After that Lem gave it up. He had satisfied himself as to his vocal powers, but he had not the courage even to whistle. The journey to Coniston was faster in the winter, and at the next turn of the road the little village came into view. There it was, among the snows. The pain in Cynthia's heart, so long benumbed, quickened when she saw it. How write of the sharpness of that pain to those who have never known it? The sight of every gable brought its agony, the store with the checker−paned windows, the harness shop, the meeting−house, the white parsonage on its little hill. Rias Richardson ran out of the store in his carpet slippers, bareheaded in the cold, and gave one shout. Lem heeded him not; did not stop there as usual, but drove straight to the tannery house and pulled up under the butternut tree. Milly Skinner ran out on the porch, and gave one long look, and cried:

"Good Lord, it's Cynthy!"

"Where's Jethro?" demanded Lem.

Milly did not answer at once. She was staring at Cynthia.

"He's in the tannery shed," she said, "choppin' wood." But still she kept her eyes on Cynthia's face. "I'll fetch him."

"No," said Cynthia, "I'll go to him there."

She took the path, leaving Millicent with her mouth open, too amazed to speak again, and yet not knowing why.

In the tannery shed! Would Jethro remember what happened there almost six and thirty years before? Would he remember how that other Cynthia had come to him there, and what her appeal had been?

Cynthia came to the doors. One of these was open now both had been closed that other evening against the storm of sheet and she caught a glimpse of him standing on the floor of chips and bark tan−bark no more. Cynthia caught a glimpse of him, and love suddenly welled up into her heart as waters into a spring after a drought. He had not seen her, not heard the sound of the sleigh−bells. He was standing with his foot upon the sawbuck and the saw across his knee, he was staring at the woodpile, and there was stamped upon his face a look which no man or woman had ever seen there, a look of utter loneliness and desolation, a look as of a soul condemned to wander forever through the infinite, cold spaces between the worlds alone.

Cynthia stopped at sight of it. What had been her misery and affliction compared to this? Her limbs refused her, though she knew not whether she would have fled or rushed into his arms. How long she stood thus, and he stood, may not be said, but at length he put down his foot and took the saw from his knee, his eyes fell upon her, and his lips spoke her name.

"Cynthy!" Speechless, she ran to him and flung her arms about his neck, and he dropped the saw and held her tightly even as he had held that other Cynthia in that place in the year gone by. And yet not so. Now he clung to her with a desperation that was terrible, as though to let go of her would be to fall into nameless voids beyond human companionship and love. But at last he did release her, and stood looking down into her face, as if seeking to read a sentence there.

And how was she to pronounce that sentence! Though her faith might be taken away, her love remained, and grew all the greater because he needed it. Yet she knew that no subterfuge or pretence would avail her to hide why she had come. She could not hide it. It must be spoken out now, though death was preferable.

And he was waiting. Did he guess? She could not tell. He had spoken no word but her name. He had expressed no surprise at her appearance, asked no reasons for it. Superlatives of suffering or joy or courage are hard to convey words fall so far short of the feeling. And Cynthia's pain was so far beyond tears.

"Uncle Jethro," she said, "yesterday something something happened. I could not stay in Boston any longer."

He nodded.

"I had to come to you. I could not wait."

He nodded again.

"I I read something." To take a white−hot iron and sear herself would have been easier than this.

"Yes," he said.

She felt that the look was coming again the look which she had surprised in his face. His hands dropped lifelessly from her shoulders, and he turned and went to the door, where he stood with his back to her, silhouetted against the eastern sky all pink from the reflection of sunset. He would not help her. Perhaps he could not. The things were true. There had been a grain of hope within her, ready to sprout.

"I read two articles from the Newcastle Guardian about you about your life." "Yes," he said. But he did not turn.

"How you had how you had earned your living. How you had gained your power," she went on, her pain lending to her voice an exquisite note of many modulations.

"Yes Cynthy," he said, and still stared at the eastern sky.

She took two steps toward him, her arms outstretched, her fingers opening and closing. And then she stopped.

"I would believe no one," she said, "I will believe no one until − unless you tell me. Uncle Jethro," she cried in agony, "Uncle Jethro, tell me that those things are not true!"

She waited a space, but he did not stir. There was no sound, save the song of Coniston Water under the shattered ice.

"Won't you speak to me?" she whispered. "Won't you tell me that they are not true?"

His shoulders shook convulsively. O for the right to turn to her and tell her that they were lies! He would have bartered his soul for it. What was all the power in the world compared to this priceless treasure he had lost? Once before he had cast it away, though without meaning to. Then he did not know the eternal value of love of such love as those two women had given him. Now he knew that it was beyond value, the one precious gift of life, and the knowledge had come too late. Could he have saved his life if he had listened to that other Cynthia?

"Won't you tell me that they are not true?"

Even then he did not turn to her, but he answered. Curious to relate, though his heart was breaking, his voice was steady steady as it always had been.

"I I've seen it comin', Cynthy," he said. "I never knowed anything I was afraid of before but I was afraid of this. I knowed what your notions of right and wrong was your your mother had them. They're the principles of good people. I I knowed the day would come when you'd ask, but I wanted to be happy as long as I could. I hain't been happy, Cynthy. But you was right when you said I'd tell you the truth. S−so I will. I guess them things which you speak about are true − the way I got where I am, and the way I made my livin'. They they hain't put just as they'd ought to be, perhaps, but that's the way I done it in the main."

It was thus that Jethro Bass met the supreme crisis of his life. And who shall say he did not meet it squarely and honestly? Few men of finer fibre and more delicate morals would have acquitted themselves as well. That was a Judgment Day for Jethro; and though he knew it not, he spoke through Cynthia to his Maker, confessing his faults freely and humbly, and dwelling on the justness of his punishment; putting not forward any good he may have done, nor thinking of it, nor seeking excuse because of the light that was in him. Had he been at death's door in the face of nameless tortures, no man could have dragged such a confession from him. But a great love had been given him, and to that love he must speak the truth, even at the cost of losing it.

But he was not to lose it. Even as he was speaking a thrill of admiration ran through Cynthia, piercing her sorrow. The superb strength of the man was there in that simple confession, and it is in the nature of woman to admire strength. He had fought his fight, and gained, and paid the price without a murmur, seeking no palliation. Cynthia had not come to that trial so bitter for her as a judge. If the reader has seen youth and innocence sitting in the seat of justice, with age and experience at the bar, he has mistaken Cynthia. She came to Coniston inexorable, it is true, because hers was a nature impelled to do right though it perish. She did not presume to say what Jethro's lights and opportunities might have been. Her own she knew, and by them she must act accordingly.

When he had finished speaking, she stole silently to his side and slipped her hand in his. He trembled violently at her touch.

"Uncle Jethro," she said in a low tone, "I love you."

At the words he trembled more violently still.

"No, no, Cynthy," he answered thickly, "don't say that I I don't expect it, Cynthy, I know you can't 'twouldn't be right, Cynthy. I hain't fit for it."

"Uncle Jethro," she said, "I love you better than I have ever loved you in my life."

Oh, how welcome were the tears! and how human! He turned, pitifully incredulous, wondering that she should seek by deceit to soften the blow; he saw them running down her cheeks, and he believed. Yes, he believed, though it seemed a thing beyond belief. Unworthy, unfit though he were, she loved him. And his own love as he gazed at her, sevenfold increased as it had been by the knowledge of losing her, changed in texture from homage to worship nay, to adoration. His punishment would still be heavy; but whence had come such a wondrous gift to mitigate it?

"Oh, don't you believe me?" she cried, "can't you see that it is true?"

And yet he could only hold her there at arm's length with that new and strange reverence in his face. He was not worthy to touch her, but still she loved him.

The flush had faded from the eastern sky, and the faintest border of yellow light betrayed the ragged outlines of the mountain as they walked together to the tannery house.

Millicent, in the kitchen, was making great preparations for Millicent. Miss Skinner was a person who had hitherto laid it down as a principle of life to pay deference or do honor to no human made of mere dust, like herself. Millicent's exception, if Cynthia had thought about it, was a tribute of no mean order. Cynthia, alas, did not think about it: she did not know that, in her absence, the fire had not been lighted in the evening, Jethro supping on crackers and milk and Milly partaking of the evening meal at home. Moreover, Miss Skinner had an engagement with a young man. Cynthia saw the fire, and threw off her sealskin coat which Mr. and Mrs. Merrill had given her for Christmas, and took down the saucepan from the familiar nail on which it hung. It was a miraculous fact, for which she did not attempt to account, that she was almost happy: happy, indeed, in comparison to that which had been her state since the afternoon before. Millicent snatched the saucepan angrily from her hand.

"What be you doin', Cynthy?" she demanded.

Such was Miss Skinner's little way of showing deference. Though deference is not usually vehement, Miss Skinner's was very real, nevertheless.

"Why, Milly, what's the matter?" exclaimed Cynthia, in astonishment.

"You hain't a−goin' to do any cookin', that's all," said Milly, very red in the face.

"But I've always helped," said Cynthia. "Why not?"

Why not? A tribute was one thing, but to have to put the reasons for that tribute into words was quite another.

"Why not?" cried Milly, "because you hain't a−goin' to, that's all."

Strange deference! But Cynthia turned and looked at the girl with a little, sad smile of comprehension and affection. She took her by the shoulders and kissed her.

Whereupon a most amazing thing happened Millicent burst into tears wild, ungovernable tears they were.

"Because you hain't a−goin' to," she repeated, her words interspersed with violent sobs. "You go 'way, Cynthy," she cried, "git out!"

"Milly," said Cynthia, shaking her head, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself." But they were not words of reproof. She took a little lamp from the shelf, and went up the narrow stairs to her own room in the gable, where Lemuel had deposited the rawhide trunk.

Though she had had nothing all day, she felt no hunger, but for Milly's sake she tried hard to eat the supper when it came. Before it had fairly begun Moses Hatch had arrived, with Amandy and Eben; and Rias Richardson came in, and other neighbors, to say a word of welcome: to hear (if the truth be not too disparaging to their characters) the reasons for her sudden appearance, and such news of her Boston experiences as she might choose to give them. They had learned from Lem Hallowell that Cynthia had returned a lady: a real lady, not a sham one who relied on airs and graces, such as had come to Coniston the summer before to look for a summer place on the painter's recommendation. Lem was not a gossip, in the disagreeable sense of the term, and he had not said a word to his neighbors of his feelings on that terrible drive from Brampton. Knowing that some blow had fallen upon Cynthia, he would have spared her these visits if he could. But Lem was wise and kind, so he merely said that she had returned a lady.

And they had found a lady. As they stood or sat around the kitchen (Eben and Rias stood), Cynthia talked to them about Coniston: rather, be it said, that they talked about Coniston in answer to her questions. The sledding

had been good; Moses had hauled so many thousand feet of lumber to Brampton; Sam Price's woman (she of Harwich) had had a spell of sciatica; Chester Perkins's bull had tossed his brother−in−law, come from Iowy on a visit, and broke his leg; yes, Amandy guessed her dyspepsy was somewhat improved since she had tried Graham's Golden Remedy it made her feel real light−hearted; Eben (blushing furiously) was to have the Brook Farm in the spring; there was a case of spotted fever in Tarleton.

Yes, Lem Hallowell had been right, Cynthia was a lady, but not a mite stuck up. What was the difference in her? Not her clothes, which she wore as if she had been used to them all her life. Poor Cynthia, the clothes were simple enough. Not her manner, which was as kind and sweet as ever. What was it that compelled their talk about themselves, that made them refrain from asking those questions about Boston, and why she had come back? Some such query was running in their minds as they talked, while Jethro, having finished his milk and crackers, sat silent at the end of the table with his eyes upon her. He rose when Mr. Satterlee came in.

Mr. Satterlee looked at her, and then he went quietly across the room and kissed her. But then Mr. Satterlee was the minister. Cynthia thought his hair a little thinner and the lines in his face a little deeper. And Mr. Satterlee thought perhaps he was the only one of the visitors who guessed why she had come back. He laid his thin hand on her head, as though in benediction, and sat down beside her.

"And how is the learning, Cynthia?" he asked.

Now, indeed, they were going to hear something at last. An intuition impelled Cynthia to take advantage of that opportunity.

"The learning has become so great, Mr. Satterlee," she said, "that I have come back to try to make some use of it. It shall be wasted no more."

She did not dare to look at Jethro, but she was aware that he had sat down abruptly. What sacrifice will not a good woman make to ease the burden of those whom she loves! And Jethro's burden would be heavy enough. Such a woman will speak almost gayly, though her heart be heavy. But Cynthia's was lighter now than it had been.

"I was always sure you would not waste your learning, Cynthia," said Mr. Satterlee, gravely; "that you would make the most of the advantages God has given you."

"I am going to try, Mr. Satterlee. I cannot be content in idleness. I was wasting time in Boston, and I I was not happy so far away from you all from Uncle Jethro. Mr. Satterlee, I am going to teach school. I have always wanted to, and now I have made up my mind to do it."

This was Jethro's punishment. But had she not lightened it for him a little by choosing this way of telling him that she could not eat his bread or partake of his bounty? Though by reason of that bounty she was what she was, she could not live and thrive on it longer, coming as it did from such a source. Mr. Satterlee might perhaps surmise the truth, but the town and village would think her ambition a very natural one; certainly no better time could have been chosen to announce it.

"To teach school." She was sure now that Mr. Satterlee knew and approved, and perceived something, at least, of her little ruse. He was a man whose talents fitted him for a larger flock than he had at Coniston, but he possessed neither the graces demanded of city ministers nor the power of pushing himself. Never was a more retiring man. The years she had spent in his study had not gone for nothing, for he who has cherished the bud can predict what the flower will be, and Mr. Satterlee knew her spiritually better than any one else in Coniston. He had heard of her return, and had walked over to the tannery house full of fears, the remembrance of those expressions of simple faith in Jethro coming back to his mind. Had the revelation which he had so long expected come at last? and how had she taken it? would it embitter her? The good man believed that it would not, and now he saw that it had not,

and rejoiced accordingly.

"To teach school," he said. "I expected that you would wish to, Cynthia. It is a desire that most of us have, who like books and what is in them. I should have taught school if I had not become a minister. It is a high calling, and an absorbing one, to develop the minds of the young." Mr. Satterlee was often a little discursive, though there was reason for it on this occasion, and Moses Hatch half closed his eyes and bowed his head a little out of sheer habit at the sound of the minister's voice. But he raised it suddenly at the next words. "I was in Brampton yesterday, and saw Mr. Graves, who is on the prudential committee of that district. You may not have heard that Miss Goddard has left. They have not yet succeeded in filling her place, and I think it more than likely that you can get it."

Cynthia glanced at Jethro, but the habit of years was so strong in him that he gave no sign.

"Do you think so, Mr. Satterlee?" she said gratefully. "I had heard of the place, and hoped for it, because it is near enough for me to spend the Saturdays and Sundays with Uncle Jethro. And I meant to go to Brampton to−morrow to see about it."

"I will go with you," said the minister; "I have business in Brampton to−morrow." He did not mention that this was the business.

When at length they had all departed, Jethro rose and went about the house making fast the doors, as was his custom, while Cynthia sat staring through the bars at the dying embers in the stove. He knew now, and it was inevitable that he should know, what she had made up her mind to do. It had been decreed that she, who owed him everything, should be made to pass this most dreadful of censures upon his whole life. Oh, the cruelty of that decree!

How, she mused, would it affect him? Had the blow been so great that he would relinquish those practices which had become a lifelong habit with him? Would he (she caught her breath at this thought) would he abandon that struggle with Isaac D. Worthington in which he was striving to maintain the mastery of the state by those very practices? Cynthia hated Mr. Worthington. The term is not too strong, and it expresses her feeling. But she would have got down on her knees on the board floor of the kitchen that very night and implored Jethro to desist from that contest, if she could. She remembered how, in her innocence, she had believed that the people had given Jethro his power, − in those days when she was so proud of that very power, now she knew that he had wrested it from them. What more supreme sacrifice could he make than to relinquish it! Ah, there was a still greater sacrifice that Jethro was to make, had she known it.

He came and stood over her by the stove, and she looked up into his face with these yearnings in her eyes. Yes, she would have thrown herself on her knees, if she could. But she could not. Perhaps he would abandon that struggle. Perhaps perhaps his heart was broken. And could a man with a broken heart still fight on? She took his hand and pressed it against her face, and he felt that it was wet with her tears.

"B−better go to bed now, Cynthy," he said; "m−must be worn out m−must be worn out."

He stooped and kissed her on the forehead. It was thus that Jethro Bass accepted his sentence.

CHAPTER XIII. CYNTHIA BECOMES A TEACHER

AT sunrise, in that Coniston hill−country, it is the western hills which are red, and a distant hillock on the meadow farm which was soon to be Eben's looked like the daintiest conical cake with pink icing as Cynthia surveyed the familiar view the next morning. There was the mountain, the pastures on the lower slopes all red, too, and higher up the dark masses of bristling spruce and pine and hemlock mottled with white where the

snow−covered rocks showed through.

Sunrise in January is not very early, and sunrise at any season is not early for Coniston. Cynthia sat at her window, and wondered whether that beautiful landscape would any longer be hers. Her life had grown up on it; but now her life had changed. Would the beauty be taken from it, too? Almost hungrily she gazed at the scene. She might look upon it again many times, perhaps but a conviction was strong in her that its daily possession would now be only a memory.

Mr. Satterlee was as good as his word, for he was seated in the stage when it drew up at the tannery house, ready to go to Brampton. And as they drove away Cynthia took one last look at Jethro standing on the porch. It seemed to her that it had been given her to feel all things, and to know all things: to know, especially, this strange man, Jethro Bass, as none other knew him, and to love him as none other loved him. The last severe wrench was come, and she had left him standing there alone in the cold, divining what was in his heart as though it were in her own. How worthless was this mighty power which he had gained, how hateful, when he could not bestow the smallest fragment of it upon one whom he loved? Some one has described hell as disqualification in the face of opportunity. Such was Jethro's torment that morning as he saw her drive away, the minister in the place where he should have been, at her side, and he, Jethro Bass, as helpless as though he had indeed been in the pit among the flames. Had the prudential committee at Brampton promised the appointment ten times over, he might still have obtained it for her by a word. And he must not speak even that word. Who shall say that a large part of the punishment of Jethro Bass did not come to him in the life upon this earth?

Some such thoughts were running in Cynthia's head as they jingled away to Brampton that dazzling morning. Perhaps the stage driver, too, who knew something of men and things and who meddled not at all, had made a guess at the situation. He thought that Cynthia's spirits seemed lightened a little, and he meant to lighten them more; so he joked as much as his respect for his passengers would permit, and told the news of Brampton. Not the least of the news concerned the first citizen of that place. There was a certain railroad in the West which had got itself much into Congress, and much into the newspapers, and Isaac D. Worthington had got himself into that railroad: was gone West, it was said on that business, and might not be back for many weeks. And Lem Hallowell remembered when Mr. Worthington was a slim−chested young man wandering up and down Coniston Water in search of health. Good Mr. Satterlee, thinking this a safe subject, allowed himself to be led into a discussion of the first citizen's career, which indeed had something fascinating in it.

Thus they jingled into Brampton Street and stopped before the cottage of Judge Graves a courtesy title. The judge himself came to the door and bestowed a pronounced bow on the minister, for Mr. Satterlee was honored in Brampton. Just think of what Ezra Graves might have looked like, and you have him. He greeted Cynthia, too, with a warm welcome for Ezra Graves, and ushered them into a best parlor which was reserved for ministers and funerals and great occasions in general, and actually raised the blinds. Then Mr. Satterlee, with much hemming and hawing, stated the business which had brought them, while Cynthia looked out of the window.

Mr. Graves sat and twirled his lean thumbs. He went so far as to say that he admired a young woman who scorned to live in idleness, who wished to impart the learning with which she had been endowed. Fifteen applicants were under consideration for the position, and the prudential committee had so far been unable to declare that any of them were completely qualified. (It was well named, that prudential committee!) Mr. Graves, furthermore, volunteered that he had expressed a wish to Colonel Prescott (Oh, Ephraim, you too have got a title with your new honors!), to Colonel Prescott and others, that Miss Wetherell might take the place. The middle term opened on the morrow, and Miss Bruce, of the Worthington Free Library, had been induced to teach until a successor could be appointed, although it was most inconvenient for Miss Bruce.

Could Miss Wetherell start in at once, provided the committee agreed? Cynthia replied that she would like nothing better. There would be an examination before Mr. Errol, the Brampton Superintendent of Schools. In short, owing to the pressing nature of the occasion, the judge would take the liberty of calling the committee

together immediately. Would Mr. Satterlee and Miss Wetherell make themselves at home in the parlor?

It very frequently happens that one member of a committee is the brain, and the other members form the body of it. It was so in this case. Ezra Graves typified all of prudence there was about it, which, it must be admitted, was a great deal. He it was who had weighed in the balance the fifteen applicants and found them wanting. Another member of the committee was that comfortable Mr. Dodd, with the tuft of yellow beard, the hardware dealer whom we have seen at the base−ball game. Mr. Dodd was not a person who had opinions unless they were presented to him from certain sources, and then he had been known to cling to them tenaciously. It is sufficient to add that, when Cynthia Wetherell's name was mentioned to him, he remembered the girl to whom Bob Worthington had paid such marked attentions on the grand stand. He knew literally nothing else about Cynthia. Judge Graves, apparently, knew all about her; this was sufficient, at that time, for Mr. Dodd; he was sick and tired of the whole affair, and if, by the grace of heaven, an applicant had been sent who conformed with Judge Graves's multitude of requirements, he was devoutly thankful. The other member, Mr. Hill, was a feed and lumber dealer, and not a very good one, for he was always in difficulties; certain scholarly attainments were attributed to him, and therefore he had been put on the conimittee. They met in Mr. Dodd's little office back of the store, and in five minutes Cynthia was a schoolmistress, subject to examination by Mr. Errol.

Just a word about Mr. Errol. He was a retired lawyer, with some means, who took an interest in town affairs to occupy his time. He had a very delicate wife, whom he had been obliged to send South at the beginning of the winter. There she had for a while improved, but had been taken ill again, and two days before Cynthia's appointment he had been summoned to her bedside by a telegram. Cynthia could go into the school, and her examination would take place when Mr. Errol returned.

All this was explained by the judge when, half an hour after he had left them, he returned to the best parlor. Miss Wetherell would, then, be prepared to take the school the following morning. Whereupon the judge shook hands with her, and did not deny that he had been instrumental in the matter.

"And, Mr. Satterlee, I am so grateful to you," said Cynthia, when they were in the street once more.

"My dear Cynthia, I did nothing," answered the minister, quite bewildered by the quick turn affairs had taken; "it is your own good reputation that got you the place."

Nevertheless Mr. Satterlee had done his share in the matter. He had known Mr. Graves for a long time, and better than any other person in Brampton. Mr. Graves remembered Cynthia Ware, and indeed had spoken to Cynthia that day about her mother. Mr. Graves had also read poor William Wetherell's contributions to the Newcastle Guardian, and he had not read that paper since they had ceased. From time to time Mr. Satterlee had mentioned his pupil to the judge, whose mind had immediately flown to her when the vacancy occurred. So it all came about.

"And now," said Mr. Satterlee, "what will you do, Cynthia? We've got the good part of a day to arrange where you will live, before the stage returns."

"I won't go back to−night, I think," said Cynthia, turning her head away; "if you would be good enough to tell Uncle Jethro to send my trunk and some other things."

"Perhaps that is just as well," assented the minister, understanding perfectly. "I have thought that Miss Bruce might be glad to board you," he continued, after a pause. "Let us go to see her."

"Mr. Satterlee," said Cynthia, "would you mind if we went first to see Cousin Ephraim?"

"Why, of course, we must see Ephraim," said Mr. Satterlee, briskly. So they walked on past the mansion of the first citizen, and the new block of stores which the first citizen had built, to the old brick building which held the

Brampton post−office, and right through the door of the partition into the sanctum of the postmaster himself, which some one had nicknamed the Brampton Club. On this occasion the postmaster was seated in his shirt sleeves by the stove, alone, his listeners being conspicuously absent. Cynthia, who had caught a glimpse of him through the little mail−window, thought he looked very happy and comfortable.

"Great Tecumseh!" he cried, an exclamation he reserved for extraordinary occasions, "if it hain't Cynthy!"

He started to hobble toward her, but Cynthia ran to him.

"Why," said he, looking at her closely after the greeting was over, "you be changed, Cynthy. Mercy, I don't know as I'd have dared done that if I'd seed you first. What have you b'en doin' to yourself? You must have seed a whole lot down there in Boston. And you're a full−blown lady, too."

"Oh, no, I'm not, Cousin Eph," she answered, trying to smile.

"Yes, you be," he insisted, still scrutinizing her, vainly trying to account for the change. Tact, as we know, was not Ephraim's strong point. Now he shook his head. "You always was beyond me. Got a sort of air about you, and it grows on you, too. Wouldn't be surprised," he declared, speaking now to the minister, "wouldn't be a mite surprised to see her in the White House, some day."

"Now, Cousin Eph," said Cynthia, coloring a little, "you mustn't talk nonsense. What have you done with your coat? You have no business to go without it with your rheumatism."

"It hain't b'en so bad since Uncle Sam took me over again, Cynthy," he answered, "with nothin' to do but sort letters in a nice hot room." The room was hot, indeed. "But where did you come from?"

"I grew tired of being taught, Cousin Eph. I I've always wanted to teach. Mr. Satterlee has been with me to see Mr. Graves, and they've given me Miss Goddard's place. I'm coming to Brampton to live, to−day."

"Great Tecumseh!" exclaimed Ephraim again, overpowered by the news. "I want to know! What does Jethro say to that?"

"He he is willing," she replied in a low voice.

"Well," said Ephraim, "I always thought you'd come to it. It's in the blood, I guess teachin'. Your mother had it too. I'm kind of sorry for Jethro, though, so I be. But I'm glad for myself, Cynthy. So you're comin' to Brampton to live with me!" "I was going to ask Miss Bruce to take me in," said Cynthia.

"No you hain't, anything of the kind," said Ephraim, indignantly. "I've got a little house up the street, and a room all ready for you."

"Will you let me share expenses, Cousin Eph?"

"I'll let you do anything you want," said he, "so's you come. Don't you think she'd ought to come and take care of an old man, Mr. Satterlee?"

Mr. Satterlee turned. He had been contemplating, during this conversation, a life−size print of General Grant under two crossed flags, that was hung conspicuously on the wall.

"I do not think you could do better, Cynthia," he answered, smiling. The minister liked Ephraim, and he liked a little joke, occasionally. He felt that one would not be particularly out of place just now; so he repeated, "I do not

think you could do better than to accept the offer of Colonel Prescott."

Ephraim grew very red, as was his wont when twitted about his new title. He took things literally.

"I hain't a colonel, no more than you be, Mr. Satterlee. But the boys down here will have it so."

Three days later, by the early train which leaves the state capital at an unheard−of hour in the morning, a young man arrived in Brampton. His jaw seemed squarer than ever to the citizens who met the train out of curiosity, and to Mr. Dodd, who was expecting a pump; and there was a set look on his face like that of a man who is going into a race or a fight. Mr. Dodd, though astonished, hastened toward him.

"Well, this is unexpected, Bob," said he. "How be you? Harvard College failed up?"

For Mr. Dodd never let slip a chance to assure a member of the Worthington family of his continued friendship.

"How are you, Mr. Dodd?" answered Bob, nodding at him carelessly, and passing on. Mr. Dodd did not dare to follow. What was young Worthington doing in Brampton, and his father in the West on that railroad business? Filled with curiosity, Mr. Dodd forgot his pump, but Bob was already striding into Brampton Street, carrying his bag. If he had stopped for a few moments with the hardware dealer, or chatted with any of the dozen people who bowed and stared at him, he might have saved himself a good deal of trouble. He turned in at the Worthington mansion, and rang the bell, which was answered by Sarah, the housemaid.

"Mr. Bob!" she exclaimed.

"Where's Mrs. Holden?" he asked.

Mrs. Holden was the elderly housekeeper. She had gone, unfortunately, to visit a bereaved relative; unfortunately for Bob, because she, too, might have told him something.

"Get me some breakfast, Sarah. Anything," he commanded, "and tell Silas to hitch up the black trotters to my cutter."

Sarah, though in consternation, did as she was bid. The breakfast was forthcoming, and in half an hour Silas had the black trotters at the door. Bob got in without a word, seized the reins, the cutter flew down Brampton Street (observed by many of the residents thereof) and turned into the Coniston road. Silas said nothing. Silas, as a matter of fact, never did say anything. He had been the Worthington coachman for five and twenty years, and he was known in Brampton as Silas the Silent. Young Mr. Worthington had no desire to talk that morning.

The black trotters covered the ten miles in much quicker time than Lem Hallowell could do it in his stage, but the distance seemed endless to Bob. It was not much more than half an hour after he had left Brampton Street, however, that he shot past the store, and by the time Rias Richardson in his carpet slippers reached the platform the cutter was in front of the tannery house, and the trotters, with their sides smoking, were pawing up the snow under the butternut tree.

Bob leaped out, hurried up the path, and knocked at the door. It was opened by Jethro Bass himself. "How do you do, Mr. Bass," said the young man, gravely, and he held out his hand. Jethro gave him such a scrutinizing look as he had given many a man whose business he cared to guess, but Bob looked fearlessly into his eyes. Jethro took his hand.

"C−come in," he said.

Bob went into that little room where Jethro and Cynthia had spent so many nights together, and his glance flew straight to the picture on the wall, the portrait of Cynthia Wetherell in crimson and seed pearls, so strangely set amidst such surroundings. His glance went to the portrait, and his feet followed, as to a lodestone. He stood in front of it for many minutes, in silence, and Jethro watched him. At last he turned.

"Where is she?" he asked.

It was a queer question, and Jethro's answer was quite as lacking in convention.

"G−gone to Brampton gone to Brampton."

"Gone to Brampton! Do you mean to say −? What is she doing there?" Bob demanded.

"Teachin' school," said Jethro; "g−got Miss Goddard's place."

Bob did not reply for a moment. The little schoolhouse was the only building in Brampton he had glanced at as he came through. Mrs. Merrill had told him that she might take that place, but he had little imagined she was already there on her platform facing the rows of shining little faces at the desks. He had deemed it more than possible that he might see Jethro at Coniston, but he had not taken into account that which he might say to him. Bob had, indeed, thought of nothing but Cynthia, and of the blow that had fallen upon her. He had tried to realize the multiple phases of the situation which confronted him. Here was the man who, by the conduct of his life, had caused the blow; he, too, was her benefactor; and again, this same man was engaged in the bitterest of conflicts with his father, Isaac D. Worthington, and it was this conflict which had precipitated that blow. Bob could not have guessed, by looking at Jethro Bass, how great was the sorrow which had fallen upon him. But Bob knew that Jethro hated his father, must hate him now, because of Cynthia, with a hatred given to few men to feel. He thought that Jethro would crush Mr. Worthington and ruin him if he could; and Bob believed he could.

What was he to say? He did not fear Jethro, for Bob Worthington had courage enough; but these things were running in his mind, and he felt the power of the man before him, as all men did. Bob went to the window and came back again. He knew that he must speak.

"Mr. Bass," he said at last, "did Cynthia ever mention me to you?"

"No," said Jethro.

"Mr. Bass, I love her. I have told her so, and I have asked her to be my wife."

There was no need, indeed, to have told Jethro this. The shock of that revelation had come to him when he had seen the trotters, had been confirmed when the young man had stood before the portrait. Jethro's face might have twitched when Bob stood there with his back to him.

Jethro could not speak. Once more there had come to him a moment when he would not trust his voice to ask a question. He dreaded the answer, though none might have surmised this. He knew Cynthia. He knew that, when she had given her heart, it was for all time. He dreaded the answer, because it might mean that her sorrow was doubled.

"I believe," Bob continued painfully, seeing that Jethro would say nothing, "I believe that Cynthia loves me. I should not dare to say it or to hope it, without reason. She has not said so, but −" the words were very hard for him, yet he stuck manfully to the truth; "but she told me to write to my father and let him know what I had done, and not to come back to her until I had his answer. This," he added, wondering that a man could listen to such a thing without a sign, "this was before before she had any idea of coming home."

Yes, Cynthia did love him. There was no doubt about it in Jethro's mind. She would not have bade Bob write to his father if she had not loved him. Still Jethro did not speak, but by some intangible force compelled Bob to go on.

"I shall write to my father as soon as he comes back from the West, but I wish to say to you, Mr. Bass, that whatever his answer contains, I mean to marry Cynthia. Nothing can shake me from that resolution. I tell you this because my father is fighting you, and you know what he will say." (Jethro knew Dudley Worthington well enough to appreciate that this would make no particular difference in his opposition to the marriage except to make that opposition more vehement.) "And because you do not know me," continued Bob. "When I say a thing, I mean it. Even if my father cuts me off and casts me out, I will marry Cynthia. Good−by, Mr. Bass."

Jethro took the young man's hand again. Bob imagined that he even pressed it a little something he had never done before.

"Good−by, Bob."

Bob got as far as the door.

"Er go back to Harvard, Bob?"

"I intend to, Mr. Bass."

"Er Bob?"

"Yes?"

"D−don't quarrel with your father don't quarrel with your father."

"I shan't be the one to quarrel, Mr. Bass."

"Bob hain't you pretty young pretty young?"

"Yes," said Bob, rather unexpectedly, "I am." Then he added, "I know my own mind."

"P−pretty young. Don't want to get married yet awhile do you?"

"Yes, I do," said Bob, "but I suppose I shan't be able to."

"Er wait awhile, Bob. Go back to Harvard. W−wouldn't write that letter if I was you."

"But I will. I'll not have him think I'm ashamed of what I've done. I'm proud of it, Mr. Bass."

In the eyes of Coniston, which had been waiting for his reappearance, Bob Worthington jumped into the sleigh and drove off. He left behind him Jethro Bass, who sat in his chair the rest of the morning with his head bent in revery so deep that Millicent had to call him twice to his simple dinner. Bob left behind him, too, a score of rumors, sprung full grown into life with his visit. Men and women an incredible distance away heard them in an incredible time: those in the village found an immediate pretext for leaving their legitimate occupation and going to the store, and a gathering was in session there when young Mr. Worthington drove past it on his way back. Bob thought little about the rumors, and not thinking of them it did not occur to him that they might affect Cynthia. The only person then in Coniston whom he thought about was Jethro Bass. Bob decided that his liking for Jethro had not diminished, but rather increased; he admired Jethro for the advice he had given, although he did not mean

to take it. And for the first time he pitied him.

Bob did not know that rumor, too, was spreading in Brampton. He had his dinner in the big walnut dining room all alone, and after it he smoked his father's cigars and paced up and down the big hall, watching the clock. For he could not go to her in the school hours. At length he put on his hat and hurried out, crossing the parklike enclosure in the middle of the street; bowed at by Mr. Dodd, who always seemed to be on hand, and others, and nodding absently in return. Concealment was not in Bob Worthington's nature. He reached the post−office, where the partition door was open, and he walked right into a comparatively full meeting of the Brampton Club. Ephraim sat in their midst, and for once he was not telling war stories. He was silent. And the others fell suddenly silent, too, at Bob's entrance.

"How do you do, Mr. Prescott?" he said, as Ephraim struggled to his feet. "How is the rheumatism?"

"How be you, Mr. Worthington?" said Ephraim; "this is a kind of a surprise, hain't it?" Ephraim was getting used to surprises. "Well, it is good−natured of you to come in and shake hands with an old soldier." "Don't mention it, Mr. Prescott," answered honest Bob, a little abashed, "I should have done so anyway, but the fact is, I wanted to speak to you a moment in private."

"Certain," said Ephraim, glancing helplessly around him, "jest come out front." That space, where the public were supposed to be, was the only private place in the Brampton post−office. But the members of the Brampton Club could take a hint, and with one consent began to make excuses. Bob knew them all from boyhood and spoke to them all. Some of them ventured to ask him if Harvard had bust up.

"Where does Cynthia live?" he demanded, coming straight to the point.

Ephraim stared at him for a moment in a bewildered fashion, and then a light began to dawn on him.

"Lives with me," he answered. He was quite as ashamed, for Bob's sake, as if he himself had asked the question, and he went on talking to cover that embarrassment. "It's made some difference, too, sence she come. House looks like a different place. Afore she come I cooked with a kit, same as I used to in the harness shop. I l'arned it in the army. Cynthy's got a stove."

It was not the way Ephraim would have gone about a love affair, had he had one. Sam Price's were the approved methods in that section of the country, though Sam had overdone them somewhat. It was an unheard−of thing to ask a man right out like that where a girl lived.

"Much obliged," said Bob, and was gone. Ephraim raised his hands in despair, and hobbled to the little window to get a last look at him. Where were the proprieties in these days? The other aspect of the affair, what Mr. Worthington would think of it when he returned, did not occur to the innocent mind of the old soldier until people began to talk about it that afternoon. Then it worried him into another attack of rheumatism.

Half of Brampton must have seen Bob Worthington march up to the little yellow house which Ephraim had rented from John Billings. It had four rooms around the big chimney in the middle, and that was all. Simple as it was, an architect would have said that its proportions were nearly perfect. John Billings had it from his Grandfather Post, who built it, and though Brampton would have laughed at the statement, Isaac D. Worthington's mansion was not to be compared with it for beauty. The old cherry furniture was still in it, and the old wall papers and the panelling in the little room to the right which Cynthia had made into a sitting room.

Half of Brampton, too, must have seen Cynthia open the door and Bob walk into the entry. Then the door was shut. But it had been held open for an appreciable time, however, while you could count twenty, because Cynthia had not the power to close it. For a while she could only look into his eyes, and he into hers. She had not

seen him coming, she had but answered the knock. Then, slowly, the color came into her cheeks, and she knew that she was trembling from head to foot.

"Cynthia," he said, "mayn't I come in?"

She did not answer, for fear her voice would tremble, too. And she could not send him away in the face of all Brampton. She opened the door a little wider, a very little, and he went in. Then she closed it, and for a moment they stood facing each other in the entry, which was lighted only by the fan−light over the door, Cynthia with her back against the wall. He spoke her name again, his voice thick with the passion which had overtaken him like a flood at the sight of her a passion to seize her in his arms, and cherish and comfort and protect her forever and ever. All this he felt and more as he looked into her face and saw the traces of her great sorrow there. He had not thought that that face could be more beautiful in its strength and purity, but it was even so.

"Cynthia my love!" he cried, and raised his arms. But a look as of a great fear came into her eyes, which for one exquisite moment had yielded to his own; and her breath came quickly, as though she were spent as indeed she was. So far spent that the wall at her back was grateful.

"No!" she said; "no you must not you must not you must not!" Again and again she repeated the words, for she could summon no others. They were a mandate had he guessed it to herself as to him. For the time her brain refused its functions, and she could think of nothing but the fact that he was there, beside her, ready to take her in his arms. How she longed to fly into them, none but herself knew to fly into them as into a refuge secure against the evil powers of the world. It was not reason that restrained her then, but something higher in her, that restrained him likewise. Without moving from the wall she pushed open the door of the sitting room.

"Go in there," she said.

He went in as she bade him and stood before the flickering logs in the wide and shallow chimney−place logs that seemed to burn on the very hearth itself, and yet the smoke rose unerring into the flue. No stove had ever desecrated that room. Bob looked into the flames and waited, and Cynthia stood in the entry fighting this second great battle which had come upon her while her forces were still spent with that other one. Woman in her very nature is created to be sheltered and protected; and the yearning in her, when her love is given, is intense as nature itself to seek sanctuary in that love. So it was with Cynthia leaning against the entry wall, her arms full length in front of her, and her hands clasped as she prayed for strength to withstand the temptation. At last she grew calmer, though her breath still came deeply, and she went into the sitting room.

Perhaps he knew, vaguely, why she had not followed him at once. He had grown calmer himself, calmer with that desperation which comes to a man of his type when his soul and body are burning with desire for a woman. He knew that he would have to fight for her with herself. He knew now that she was too strong in her position to be carried by storm, and the interval had given him time to collect himself. He did not dare at first to look up from the logs, for fear he should forget himself and be defeated instantly. "I have been to Coniston, Cynthia," he said.

"Yes."

"I have been to Coniston this morning, and I have seen Mr. Bass, and I have told him that I love you, and that I will never give you up. I told you so in Boston, Cynthia," he said; "I knew that this this trouble would come to you. I would have given my life to have saved you from it from the least part of it. I would have given my life to have been able to say 'it shall not touch you.' I saw it flowing in like a great sea between you and me, and yet I could not tell you of it. I could not prepare you for it. I could only tell you that I would never give you up, and I can only repeat that now."

"You must, Bob," she answered, in a voice so low that it was almost a whisper; "you must give me up."

"I would not," he said, "I would not if the words were written on all the rocks of Coniston Mountain. I love you."

"Hush," she said gently. "I have to say some things to you. They will be very hard to say, but you must listen to them."

"I will listen," he said doggedly; "but they will not affect my determination."

"I am sure you do not wish to drive me away from Brampton," she continued, in the same low voice, "when I have found a place to earn my living near near Uncle Jethro."

These words told him all he had suspected almost as much as though he had been present at the scene in the tannery shed in Coniston. She knew now the life of Jethro Bass, but he was still "Uncle Jethro" to her. It was even as Bob had supposed, that her affection once given could not be taken away.

"Cynthia," he said, "I would not by an act or a word annoy or trouble you. If you bade me, I would go to the other side of the world to−morrow. You must know that. But I should come back again. You must know that, too. I should come back again for you."

"Bob," she said again, and her voice faltered a very little now, "you must know that I can never he your wife."

"I do not know it," he exclaimed, interrupting her vehemently, "I will not know it."

"Think," she said, "think! I must say what I have to say, however it hurts me. If it had not been for for your father, those things never would have been written. They were in his newspaper, and they express his feelings toward toward Uncle Jethro."

Once the words were out, she marvelled that she had found the courage to pronounce them.

"Yes," he said, "yes, I know that, but listen −"

"Wait," she went on, "wait until I have finished. I am not speaking of the pain I had when I read these things, I I am not speaking of the truth that may be in them I have learned from them what I should have known before, and felt, indeed, that your father will never consent to to a marriage between us."

"And if he does not," cried Bob, "if he does not, do you think that I will abide by what he says, when my life's happiness depends upon you, and my life's welfare? I know that you are a good woman, and a true woman, that you will be the best wife any man could have. Though he is my father, he shall not deprive me of my soul, and he shall not take my life away from me."

As Cynthia listened she thought that never had words sounded sweeter than these no, and never would again. So she told herself as she let them run into her heart to be stored among the treasures there. She believed in his love believed in it now with all her might. (Who, indeed, would not?) She could not demean herself now by striving to belittle it or doubt its continuance, as she had in Boston. He was young, yes; but he would never be any older than this, could never love again like this. So much was given her, ought she not to be content? Could she expect more?

She understood Isaac Worthington, now, as well as his son understood him. She knew that, if she were to yield to Bob Worthington, his father would disown and disinherit him. She looked ahead into the years as a woman will, and allowed herself for the briefest of moments to wonder whether any happiness could thrive in spite of the violence of that schism any happiness for him. She would be depriving him of his birthright, and it may be that those who are born without birthrights often value them the most. Cynthia saw these things, and more, for those

who sit at the feet of sorrow soon learn the world's ways. She saw herself pointed out as the woman whose designs had beggared and ruined him in his youth, and (agonizing and revolting thought!) the name of one would be spoken from whom she had learned such craft. Lest he see the scalding tears in her eyes, she turned away − and conquered them. What could she do? Where should she hide her love that it might not be seen of men? And how, in truth, could she tell him these things?

"Cynthia," he went on, seeing that she did not answer, and taking heart, "I will not say a word against my father. I know you would not respect me if I did. We are different, he and I, and find happiness in different ways." Bob wondered if his father had ever found it. "If I had never met you and loved you, I should have refused to lead the life my father wishes me to lead. It is not in me to do the things he will ask. I shall have to carve out my own life, and I feel that I am as well able to do it as he was. Percy Broke, a classmate of mine and my best friend, has a position for me in a locomotive works in which his father is largely interested. We are going in together, the day after we graduate; it is all arranged, and his father has agreed. I shall work very hard, and in a few years, Cynthia, we shall be together, never to part again. Oh, Cynthia," he cried, carried away by the ecstasy of this dream which he had summoned up, "why do you resist me? I love you as no man has ever loved," he exclaimed, with scornful egotism and contempt of those who had made the world echo with that cry through the centuries, "and you love me! Ah, do you think I do not see it cannot feel it? You love me tell me so."

He was coming toward her, and how was she to prevent his taking her by storm? That was his way, and well she knew it. In her dreams she had felt herself lifted and borne off, breathless in his arms, to Elysium. Her breath was going now, her strength was going, and yet she made him pause by the magic of a word. A concession was in that word, but one could not struggle so piteously and concede nothing.

"Bob," she said, "do you love me?"

Love her! If there was a love that acknowledged no bounds, that was confined by no superlatives, it was his. He began to speak, but she interrupted him with a wild passion that was new to her. As he sat in the train on his way back to Cambridge through the darkening afternoon, the note of it rang in his ears and gave him hope yes, and through many months afterward.

"If you love me I beg, I implore, I beseech you in the name of that love for your sake and my sake, to leave me. Oh, can you not see why you must go?"

He stopped, even as he had before in the parlor in Mount Vernon Street. He could but stop in the face of such an appeal and yet the blood beat in his head with a mad joy.

"Tell me that you love me, once," he cried, "once, Cynthia."

"Do do not ask me," she faltered. "Go."

Her words were a supplication, not a command. And in that they were a supplication he had gained a victory. Yes, though she had striven with all her might to deny, she had bade him hope. He left her without so much as a touch of the hand, because she had wished it. And yet she loved him! Incredible fact! Incredible conjury which made him doubt that his feet touched the snow of Brampton Street, which blotted, as with a golden glow, the faces and the houses of Brampton from his sight. He saw no one, though many might have accosted him. That part of him which was clay, which performed the menial tasks of his being, had kindly taken upon itself to fetch his bag from the house to the station, and to board the train.

Ah, but Brampton had seen him!

CHAPTER XIV. IN WHICH THE LORD OF BRAMPTON RETURNS

GREAT events, like young Mr. Worthington's visit to Brampton, are all very well for a while, but they do not always develop with sufficient rapidity to satisfy the audiences of the drama. Seven days were an interlude quite long enough in which to discuss every phase and bearing of this opening scene, and after that the play in all justice ought to move on. But there it halted for a while and the curtain obstinately refused to come up. If the inhabitants of Brampton had only known that the drama, when it came, would be well worth waiting for, they might have been less restless.

It is unnecessary to enrich the pages of this folio with all the footnotes and remarks of the sages of Brampton. These can be condensed into a paragraph or two and we can ring up the curtain when we like on the next scene, for which Brampton had to wait considerably over a month. There is to be no villain in this drama with the face of an Abbé Maury like the seven cardinal sins. Comfortable−looking Mr. Dodd of the prudential committee, with his chin−tuft of yellow beard, is cast for the part of the villain, but will play it badly; he would have been better suited to a comedy part.

Young Mr. Worthington left Brampton on the five o'clock train, and at six Mr. Dodd met his fellow−member of the committee, Judge Graves.

"Called a meetin'?" asked Mr. Dodd, pulling the yellow tuft.

"What for?" said the judge, sharply.

"What be you a−goin' to do about it?" said Mr. Dodd. "Do about what?" demanded the judge, looking at the hardware dealer from under his eyebrows.

Mr. Dodd knew well enough that this was not ignorance on the part of Mr. Graves, whose position in the matter had been very well defined in the two sentences he had spoken. Mr. Dodd perceived that the judge was trying to get him to commit himself, and would then proceed to annihilate him. He, Levi Dodd, had no intention of walking into such a trap.

"Well," said he, with a final tug at the tuft, "if that's the way you feel about it."

"Feel about what?" said the judge, fiercely.

"Callate you know best," said Mr. Dodd, and passed on up the street. But he felt the judge's gimlet eyes boring holes in his back. The judge's position was very fine, no doubt for the judge. All of which tends to show that Levi Dodd had swept his mind, and that it was ready now for the reception of an opinion.

Six weeks or more, as has been said, passed before the curtain rose again, but the snarling trumpets of the orchestra played a fitting prelude. Cynthia's feelings and Cynthia's life need not be gone into during this interval: knowing her character, they may well be imagined. They were trying enough, but Brampton had no means of guessing them. During the weeks she came and went between the little house and the little school, putting all the strength that was in her into her duties. The Prudential Committee, which sometimes sat on the platform, could find no fault with the performance of these duties, or with the capability of the teacher, and it is not going too far to state that the children grew to love her better than Miss Goddard had been loved. It may be declared that children are the fittest citizens of a republic, because they are apt to make up their own minds on any subject without regard to public opinion. It was so with the scholars of Brampton village lower school: they grew to love the new teacher, careless of what the attitude of their elders might be, and some of them could have been seen almost any day walking home with her down the street. As for the attitude of the elders there was none. Before

assuming one they had thought it best, with characteristic caution, to await the next act in the drama. There were ladies in Brampton whose hearts prompted them, when they called on the new teacher, to speak a kindly word of warning and advice; but somehow, when they were seated before her in the little sitting room of the John Billings house, their courage failed them. There was something about this daughter of the Coniston storekeeper and ward of Jethro Bass that made them pause. So much for the ladies of Brampton. What they said among themselves would fill a chapter, and more.

There was, at this time, a singular falling−off in the attendance of the Brampton Club. Ephraim sat alone most of the day in his Windsor chair by the stove, pretending to read newspapers. But he did not mention this fact to Cynthia. He was more lonesome than ever on the Saturdays and Sundays which she spent with Jethro Bass.

Jethro Bass! It is he who might be made the theme of the music of the snarling trumpets. What was he about during those six weeks? That is what the state at large was beginning to wonder, and the state at large was looking on at a drama, too. A rumor reached the capital and radiated thence to every city and town and hamlet, and was followed by other rumors like confirmations. Jethro Bass, for the first time in a long life of activity, was inactive: inactive, too, at this most critical period of his career, the climax of it, with a war to be waged which for bitterness and ferocity would have no precedent; with the town meetings at hand, where the frontier fighting was to be done, and no quarter given. Lieutenants had gone to Coniston for further orders and instructions, and had come back without either. Achilles was sulking in the tannery house some said a broken Achilles. Not a word could be got out of him, or the sign of an intention. Jake Wheeler moped through the days in Rias Richardson's store, too sore at heart to speak to any man, and could have wept if tears had been a relief to him. No more blithe errands over the mountain to Clovelly and elsewhere, though Jake knew the issue now and itched for the battle, and the vassals of the hill−Rajah under a jubilant Bijah Bixby were arming cap−a−pie. Lieutenant−General−and−Senator Peleg Hartington of Brampton, in his office over the livery stable, shook his head like a mournful stork when questioned by brother officers from afar. Operations were at a standstill, and the sinews of war relaxed. Rural givers of mortgages, who had not had the opportunity of selling them or had feared to do so, began (mirablile dictu) to express opinions. Most ominous sign of all the proprietor of the Pelican Hotel had confessed that the Throne Room had not been engaged for the coming session.

Was it possible that Jethro Bass lay crushed under the weight of the accusations which had been printed, and were still being printed, in the Newcastle Guardian? He did not answer them, or retaliate in other newspapers, but Jethro Bass had never made use of newspapers in this way. Still, nothing ever printed about him could be compared with those articles. Had remorse suddenly overtaken him in his old age? Such were the questions people were asking all over the state people, at least, who were interested in politics, or in those operations which went by the name of politics: yes, and many private citizens who had participated in politics only to the extent of voting for such candidates as Jethro in his wisdom had seen fit to give them, read the articles and began to say that boss domination was at an end. A new era was at hand, which they fondly (and very properly) believed was to be a golden era. It was, indeed, to be a golden era until things got working; and then the gold would cease. The Newcastle Guardian, with unconscious irony, proclaimed the golden era; and declared that its columns, even in other days and under other ownership, had upheld the wisdom of Jethro Bass. And he was still a wise man, said the Guardian, for he had had sense enough to give up the fight.

Had he given up the fight? Cynthia fervently hoped and prayed that he had, but she hoped and prayed in silence. Well she knew, if the event in the tannery shed had not made him abandon his affairs, no appeal could do so. Her happiest days in this period were the Saturdays and Sundays spent with him in Coniston, and as the weeks went by she began to believe that the change, miraculous as it seemed, had indeed taken place. He had given up his power. It was a pleasure that made the weeks bearable for her. What did it matter whether he had made the sacrifice for the sake of his love for her? He had made it.

On these Saturdays and Sundays they went on long drives together over the hills, while she talked to him of her life in Brampton or the books she was reading, and of those she had chosen for him to read. Sometimes they did

not turn homeward until the delicate tracery of the branches on the snow warned them of the rising moon. Jethro was often silent for hours at a time, but it seemed to Cynthia that it was the silence of peace of a peace he had never known before. There came no newspapers to the tannery house now: during the mid−week he read the books of which she had spoken William Wetherell's books; or sat in thought, counting, perhaps, the days until she should come again. And the joy of those days for him was more pathetic than much that is known to the world as sorrow.

And what did Coniston think? Coniston, indeed, knew not what to think, when, little by little, the great men ceased to drive up to the door of the tannery house, and presently came no more. Coniston sank then from its proud position as the real capital of the state to a lonely hamlet among the hills. Coniston, too, was watching the drama, and had had a better view of the stage than Brampton, and saw some reason presently for the change in Jethro Bass. Not that Mr. Satterlee told, but such evidence was bound, in the end, to speak for itself. The Newcastle Guardian had been read and debated at the store debated with some heat by Chester Perkins and other mortgagors; discussed, nevertheless, in a political rather than a moral light. Then Cynthia had returned home, her face had awed them by its sorrow, and she had begun to earn her own living. Then the politicians had ceased to come. The credit belongs to Rias Richardson for having been the first to piece these three facts together, causing him to burn his hand so severely on the stove that he had to carry it bandaged in soda for a week. Cynthia Wetherell had reformed Jethro.

Though the village loved and revered Cynthia, Coniston as a whole did not rejoice in that reform. The town had fallen from its mighty estate, and there were certain envious ones who whispered that it had remained for a young girl who had learned city ways to twist Jethro around her finger; that she had made him abandon his fight with Isaac D. Worthington because Mr. Worthington had a son but there is no use writing such scandal. Stripped of his power even though he stripped himself Jethro began to lose their respect, a trait tending to prove that the human race may have had wolves for ancestors as well as apes. People had small opportunity, however, of showing a lack of respect to his person, for in these days he noticed no one and spoke to none.

When the lion is crippled, the jackals begin to range. A jackal reconnoitred the lair to see how badly the lion was crippled, and conceived with astounding insolence the plan of capturing the lion's quarry. This jackal, who was an old one, well knew how to round up a quarry, and fled back over the hills to consult with a bigger jackal, his master. As a result, two days before March town−meeting day, Mr. Bijah Bixby paid a visit to the Harwich bank and went among certain Coniston farmers looking over the sheep, his clothes bulging out in places when he began, and seemingly normal enough when he had finished. History repeats itself, even among lions and jackals. Thirty−six years before there had been a town meeting in Coniston and a surprise. Established Church, decent and orderly selectmen and proceedings had been toppled over that day, every outlying farm sending its representative through the sleet to do it. And now retribution was at hand. This March−meeting day was mild, the grass showing a green color on the south slopes where the snow had melted, and the outlying farmers drove through mudholes up to the axles. Drove, albeit, in procession along the roads, grimly enough, and the sheds Jock Hallowell had built around the meeting−house could not hold the horses; they lined the fences and usurped the hitching posts of the village street, and still they came. Their owners trooped with muddy boots into the meeting−house, and when the moderator rapped for order the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, Jethro Bass, was not in his place; never, indeed, would be there again. Six and thirty years he had been supreme in that town long enough for any man. The beams and king posts would know him no more. Mr. Amos Cuthbert was elected Chairman, not without a gallant and desperate but unsupported fight of a minority led by Mr. Jake Wheeler, whose loyalty must be taken as a tribute to his species. Farmer Cuthbert was elected, and his mortgage was not foreclosed! Had it been, there was more money in the Harwich bank.

There was no telegraph to Coniston in these days, and so Mr. Sam Price, with his horse in a lather, might have been seen driving with unseemly haste toward Brampton, where in due time he arrived. Half an hour later there was excitement at Newcastle, sixty−five miles away, in the office of the Guardian, and the next morning the excitement had spread over the whole state.

Jethro Bass was dethroned in Coniston discredited in his own town!

And where was Jethro? Did his heart ache, did he bow his head as he thought of that supremacy, so hardly won, so superbly held, gone forever? Many were the curious eyes on the tannery house that day, and for days after, but its owner gave no signs of concern. He read and thought and chopped wood in the tannery shed as usual. Never, I believe, did man, shorn of power, accept his lot more quietly. His struggle was over, his battle was fought, a greater peace than he had ever thought to hope for was won. For the opinion and regard of the world he had never cared. A greater reward awaited him, greater than any knew the opinion and regard and the praise of one whom he loved beyond all the world. On Friday she came to him, on Friday at sunset, for the days were growing longer, and that was the happiest sunset of his life. She said nothing as she raised her face to his and kissed him and clung to him in the little parlor, but he knew, and he had his reward. So much for earthly power!

Cynthia brought the little rawhide trunk this time, and came to Coniston for the March vacation a happy two weeks that was soon gone. Happy by comparison, that is, with what they both had suffered, and a haven of rest after the struggle and despair of the wilderness. The bond between them had, in truth, never been stronger, for both the young girl and the old man had denied themselves the thing they held most dear. Jethro had taken refuge and found comfort in his love. But Cynthia! Her greatest love had now been bestowed elsewhere.

If there were letters for the tannery house, Milly Skinner, who made it a point to meet the stage, brought them. And there were letters during Cynthia's sojourn, many of them, bearing the Cambridge postmark. One evening it was Jethro who laid the letter on the table beside her as she sat under the lamp. He did not look at her or speak, but she felt that he knew her secret felt that he deserved to have from her own lips what he had been too proud yes and too humble to ask. Whose sympathy could she be sure of, if not of his? Still she had longed to keep this treasure to herself. She took the letter in her hand.

"I do not answer them, Uncle Jethro, but I cannot prevent his writing them," she faltered. She did not confess that she kept them, every one, and read them over and over again; that she had grown, indeed, to look forward to them as to a sustenance. "I I do love him, but I will not marry him."

Yes, she could be sure of Jethro's sympathy, though he could not express it in words. Yet she had not told him for this. She had told him, much as the telling had hurt her, because she feared to cut him more deeply by her silence.

It was a terrible moment for Jethro, and never had he desired the gift of speech as now. Had it not been for him, Cynthia might have been Robert Worthington's wife. He sat down beside her and put his hand over hers that lay on the letter in her lap. It was the only answer he could make, but perhaps it was the best, after all. Of what use were words at such a time!

Four days afterward, on a Monday morning, she went back to Brampton to begin the new term.

That same Monday a circumstance of no small importance took place in Brampton nothing less than the return, after a prolonged absence in the West and elsewhere, of its first citizen. Isaac D. Worthington was again in residence. No bells were rung, indeed, and no delegation of citizens as such, headed by the selectmen, met him at the station; and other feudal expressions of fealty were lacking. No staff flew Mr. Worthington's arms; nevertheless the lord of Brampton was in his castle again, and Brampton felt that he was there. He arrived alone, wearing the silk hat which had become habitual with him now, and stepping into his barouche at the station had been driven up Brampton Street behind his grays, looking neither to the right nor left. His reddish chop whiskers seemed to cling a little more closely to his face than formerly, and long years of compression made his mouth look sterner than ever. A hawk−like man, Isaac Worthington, to be reckoned with and feared, whether in a frock coat or in breastplate and mail.

His seneschal, Mr. Flint, was awaiting him in the library. Mr. Flint was large and very ugly, big−boned, smooth−shaven, with coarse features all askew, and a large nose with many excrescences, and thick lips. He was forty−two. From a foreman of the mills he had risen, step by step, to his present position, which no one seemed able to define. He was, indeed, a seneschal. He managed the mills in his lord's absence, and if the truth be told in his presence; knotty questions of the Truro Railroad were brought to Mr. Flint and submitted to Mr. Worthington, who decided them, with Mr. Flint's advice; and, within the last three months, Mr. Flint had invaded the realm of politics, quietly, as such a man would, under the cover of his patron's name and glory. Mr. Flint it was who had bought the Newcastle Guardian, who went occasionally to Newcastle and spoke a few effective words now and then to the editor; and, if the truth will out, Mr. Flint had largely conceived that scheme about the railroads which was to set Mr. Worthington on the throne of the state, although the scheme was not now being carried out according to Mr. Flint's wishes. Mr. Flint was, in a sense, a Bismarck, but he was not as yet all−powerful. Sometimes his august master or one of his fellow petty sovereigns would sweep Mr. Flint's plans into the waste basket, and then Mr. Flint would be content to wait. To complete the character sketch, Mr. Flint was not above hanging up his master's hat and coat, which he did upon the present occasion, and went up to Mr. Worthington's bedroom to fetch a pocket handkerchief out of the second drawer. He even knew where the handkerchiefs were kept. Lucky petty sovereigns sometimes possess Mr. Flints to make them emperors.

The august personage seated himself briskly at his desk.

"So that scoundrel Bass is actually discredited at last," he said, blowing his nose in the pocket handkerchief Mr. Flint had brought him. "I lose patience when I think how long we've stood the rascal in this state. I knew the people would rise in their indignation when they learned the truth about him."

Mr. Flint did not answer this. He might have had other views.

"I wonder we did not think of it before," Mr. Worthington continued. "A very simple remedy, and only requiring a little courage and and −" (Mr. Worthington was going to say money, but thought better of it) "and the chimera disappears. I congratulate you, Flint." "Congratulate yourself," said Mr. Flint; "that would not have been my way."

"Very well, I congratulate myself," said the august personage, who was in too good a humor to be put out by the rejection of a compliment. "You remember what I said: the time was ripe, just publish a few biographical articles telling people what he was, and Jethro Bass would snuff out like a candle. Mr. Duncan tells me the town−meeting results are very good all over the state. Even if we hadn't knocked out Jethro Bass, we'd have a fair majority for our bill in the next legislature."

"You know Bass's saying," answered Mr. Flint, "You can hitch that kind of a hoss, but they won't always 'stay hitched.'"

"I know, I know," said Mr. Worthington; "don't croak, Flint. We can buy more hitch ropes, if necessary. Well, what's the outlay up to the present? Large, I suppose. Well, whatever it is, it's small compared to what we'll get for it." He laughed a little and rubbed his hands, and then he remembered that capacity in which he stood before the world. Yes, and he stood before himself in the same capacity. Isaac Worthington may have deceived himself, but he may or may not have been a hero to his seneschal. "We have to fight fire with fire," he added, in a pained voice. "Let me see the account."

"I have tabulated the expense in the different cities and towns," answered Mr. Flint. "I'll show you the account in a little while. The expenses in Coniston were somewhat greater than the size of the town justifed, perhaps. But Sutton thought −"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mr. Worthington, "if it had cost as much to carry Coniston as Newcastle, it would have been worth it for the moral effect alone."

Moral effect! Mr. Flint thought of Mr. Bixby with his bulging pockets going about the hills, and smiled at the manner in which moral effects are sometimes obtained.

"Any news, Flint?"

No news yet, Mr. Flint might have answered. In a few minutes there might be news, and plenty of it, for it lay ready to be hatched under Mr. Worthington's eye. A letter in the bold and upright hand of his son was on the top of the pile, placed there by Mr. Flint himself, who had examined Mr. Worthington's face closely when he came in to see how much he might know of its contents. He had decided that Mr. Worthington was in too good a humor to know anything of them. Mr. Flint had not steamed the letter open, and read the news; but he could guess at them pretty shrewdly, and so could have the biggest fool in Brampton. That letter contained the opening scene of the next act in the drama.

Mr. Worthington cut the envelope and began to read, and while he did so Mr. Flint, who was not afraid of man or beast, looked at him. It was a manly and straight−forward letter, and Mr. Worthington, no matter what his opinions on the subject were, should have been proud of it. Bob announced, first of all, that he was going to marry Cynthia Wetherell; then he proceeded with praiseworthy self−control (for a lover) to describe Cynthia's character and attainments: after which he stated that Cynthia had refused him twice, because she believed that Mr. Worthington would oppose the marriage, and had declared that she would never be the cause of a breach between father and son. Bob asked for his father's consent, and hoped to have it, but he thought it only right to add that he had given his word and his love, and did not mean to retract either. He spoke of his visit to Brampton, and explained that Cynthia was teaching school there, and urged his father to see her before he made a decision. Mr. Worthington read it through to the end, his lips closing tighter and tighter until his mouth was but a line across his face. There was pain in the face, too, the kind of pain which anger sends, and which comes with the tottering of a pride that is false. Of what gratification now was the overthrow of Jethro Bass?

He stared at the letter for a moment after he had finished it, and his face grew a dark red. Then he seized the paper and tore it slowly, deliberately, into bits. Dudley Worthington was not thinking then not he! of the young man in the white beaver who had called at the Social Library many years before to see a young woman whose name, too, had been Cynthia. He was thinking, in fact, for he was a man to think in anger, whether it were not possible to remove this Cynthia from the face of the earth at least to a place beyond his horizon and that of his son. Had he worn the chain mail instead of the frock coat he would have had her hung outside the town walls.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. And the words sounded profane indeed as he fixed his eyes upon Mr. Flint. "You knew that Robert had been to Brampton?"

"Yes," said Flint, "the whole village knew it."

"Good God!" cried Mr. Worthington again, "why was I not informed of this? Why was I not warned of this! Have I no friends? Do you pretend to look after my interests and not take the trouble to write me on such a subject?"

"Do you think I could have prevented it?" asked Mr. Flint, very calmly.

"You allow this this woman to come here to Brampton and teach school in a place where she can further her designs? What were you about?"

"When the prudential committee appointed her, nothing of this was known, Mr. Worthington."

"Yes, but now now! What are you doing, what are they doing to allow her to remain? Who are on that committee?"

Mr. Flint named the men. They had been reëlected, as usual, at the recent town meeting. Mr. Errol, who had also been reëlected, had returned but had not yet issued the certificate or conducted the examination.

"Send for them, have them here at once," commanded Mr. Worthington, without listening to this.

"If you take my advice, you will do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Flint, who, as usual, had the whole situation at his fingers' ends. He had taken the trouble to inform himself about the girl, and he had discovered, shrewdly enough, that she was the kind which might be led, but not driven. If Mr. Flint's advice had been listened to, this story might have had quite a different ending. But Mr. Flint had not reached the stage where his advice was always listened to, and he had a maddened man to deal with now. At that moment, as if fate had determined to intervene, the housemaid came into the room.

"Mr. Dodd to see you, sir," she said.

"Show him in," shouted Mr. Worthington; "show him in!"

Mr. Dodd was not a man who could wait for a summons which he had felt in his bones was coming. He was ordinarily, as we have seen, officious. But now he was thoroughly frightened. He had seen the great man in the barouche as he drove past the hardware store, and he had made up his mind to go up at once, and have it over with. His opinions were formed now. He put a smile on his face when he was a foot outside of the library door.

"This is a great pleasure, Mr. Worthington, a great pleasure, to see you back," he said, coming forward. "I callated –"

But the great man sat in his chair, and made no attempt to return the greeting.

"Mr. Dodd, I thought you were my friend," he said.

Mr. Dodd went all to pieces at this reception.

"So I be, Mr. Worthington so I be," he cried. "That's why I'm here now. I've b'en a friend of yours ever since I can remember never fluctuated. I'd rather have chopped my hand off than had this happen so I would. If I could have foreseen what she was, she'd never have had the place, as sure as my name's Levi Dodd."

If Mr. Dodd had taken the trouble to look at the seneschal's face, he would have seen a well−defined sneer there.

"And now that you know what she is," cried Mr. Worthington, rising and smiting the pile of letters on his desk, "why do you keep her there an instant?"

Mr. Dodd stopped to pick up the letters, which had flown over the floor. But the great man was now in the full tide of his anger.

"Never mind the letters," he shouted; "tell me why you keep her there."

"We callated we'd wait and see what steps you'd like taken," said the trembling townsman.

"Steps! Steps! Good God! What kind of man are you to serve in such a place when you allow the professed ward of Jethro Bass of Jethro Bass, the most notoriously depraved man in this state, to teach the children of this town.

Steps! How soon can you call your committee together?"

"Right away," answered Mr. Dodd, breathlessly. He would have gone on to exculpate himself, but Mr. Worthington's inexorable finger was pointing at the door.

"If you are a friend of mine," said that gentleman, "and if you have any regard for the fair name of this town, you will do so at once."

Mr. Dodd departed precipitately, and Mr. Worthington began to pace the room, clasping his hands now in front of him, now behind him, in his agony: repeating now and again various appellations which need not be printed here, which he applied in turn to the prudential committee, to his son, and to Cynthia Wetherell.

"I'll run her out of Brampton," he said at last.

"If you do," said Mr. Flint, who had been watching him apparently unmoved, "you may have Jethro Bass on your back."

"Jethro Bass?" shouted Mr. Worthington, with a laugh that was not pleasant to hear, "Jethro Bass is as dead as Julius Cæsar."

It was one thing for Mr. Dodd to promise so readily a meeting of the committee, and quite another to decide how he was going to get through the affair without any more burns and scratches than were absolutely necessary. He had reversed the usual order, and had been in the fire now he was going to the frying−pan. He stood in the street for some time, pulling at his tuft, and then made his way to Mr. Jonathan Hill's feed store. Mr. Hill was reading "Sartor Resartus" in his little office, the temperature of which must have been 95°, and Mr. Dodd was perspiring when he got there.

"It's come," said Mr. Dodd, sententiously.

"What's come?" inquired Mr. Hill, mildly.

"Isaac D.'s come, that's what," said Mr. Dodd. "I hain't b'en sleepin' well of nights, lately. I can't think what we was about, Jonathan, puttin' that girl in the school. We'd ought to've knowed she wahn't fit."

"What's the matter with her?" inquired Mr. Hill.

"Matter with her!" exclaimed his fellow−committeeman, "she lives with Jethro Bass she's his ward."

"Well, what of it?" said Mr. Hill, who never bothered himself about gossip or newspapers, or indeed about anything not between the covers of a book, except when he couldn't help it.

"Good God!" exclaimed Mr. Dodd, "he's the most notorious, depraved man in the state. Hain't we got to look out for the fair name of Brampton?"

Mr. Hill sighed and closed his book.

"Well," he said, "I'd hoped we were through with that. Let's go up and see what Judge Graves says about it."

"Hold on," said Mr. Dodd, seizing the feed dealer by the coat, "we've got to get it fixed in our minds what we're goin' to do, first. We can't allow no notorious people in our schools. We've got to stand up to the jedge, and tell him so. We app'inted her on his recommendation, you know."

"I like the girl," replied Mr. Hill; "I don't think we ever had a better teacher. She's quiet, and nice appearin', and attends to her business."

Mr. Dodd pulled his tuft, and cocked his head.

"Mr. Worthington holds a note of yours, don't he, Jonathan?"

Mr. Hill reflected. He said he thought perhaps Mr. Worthington did.

"Well," said Mr. Dodd, "I guess we might as well go along up to the jedge now as any time."

But when they got there Mr. Dodd's knock was so timid that he had to repeat it before the judge came to the door and peered at them over his spectacles.

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" he asked, severely, though he knew well enough. He had not been taken by surprise many times during the last forty years. Mr. Dodd explained that they wished a little meeting of the committee. The judge ushered them into his bedroom, the parlor being too good for such an occasion.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "let us get down to business. Mr. Worthington arrived here to−day, he has seen Mr. Dodd, and Mr. Dodd has seen Mr. Hill. Mr. Worthington is a political opponent of Jethro Bass, and wishes Miss Wetherell dismissed. Mr. Dodd and Mr. Hill have agreed, for various reasons which I will spare you, that Miss Wetherell should be dismissed. Have I stated the case, gentlemen, or have I not?"

Mr. Graves took off his spectacles and wiped them, looking from one to the other of his very uncomfortable fellow−members. Mr. Hill did not attempt to speak; but Mr. Dodd, who was not sure now that this was not the fire and the other the frying−pan, pulled at his tuft until words came to him.

"Jedge," he said finally, "I must say I'm a mite surprised. I must say your language is unwarranted."

"The truth is never unwarranted," said the judge.

"For the sake of the fair name of Brampton," began Mr. Dodd, "we cannot allow −"

"Mr. Dodd," interrupted the judge, "I would rather have Mr. Worthington's arguments from Mr. Worthington himself, if I wanted them at all. There is no need of prolonging this meeting. If I were to waste my breath until six o clock, it would be no use. I was about to say that your opinions were formed, but I will alter that, and say that your minds are fixed. You are determined to dismiss Miss Wetherell. Is it not so?"

"I wish you'd hear me, Jedge," said Mr. Dodd, desperately.

"Will you kindly answer me yes or no to that question," said the judge; "my time is valuable." "Well, if you put it that way, I guess we are agreed that she hadn't ought to stay. Not that I've anything against her personally −"

"All right," said the judge, with a calmness that made them tremble. They had never bearded him before. "All right, you are two to one and no certificate has been issued. But I tell you this, gentlemen, that you will live to see the day when you will bitterly regret this injustice to an innocent and a noble woman, and Isaac D. Worthington will live to regret it. You may tell him I said so. Good day, gentlemen."

They rose.

"Jedge," began Mr. Dodd again, "I don't think you've been quite fair with us."

"Fair!" repeated the judge, with unutterable scorn. "Good day, gentlemen." And he slammed the door behind them.

They walked down the street some distance before either of them spoke.

"Goliath," said Mr. Dodd, at last, "did you ever hear such talk? He's got the drattedest temper of any man I ever knew, and he never callates to make a mistake. It's a little mite hard to do your duty when a man talks that way."

"I'm not sure we've done it," answered Mr. Hill.

"Not sure!" ejaculated the hardware dealer, for he was now far enough away from the judge's house to speak in his normal tone, "and she connected with that depraved −"

"Hold on," said Mr. Hill, with an astonishing amount of spirit for him, "I've heard that before."

Mr. Dodd looked at him, swallowed the wrong way and began to choke.

"You hain't wavered, Jonathan?" he said, when he got his breath.

"No, I haven't," said Mr. Hill, sadly; "but I wish to hell I had."

Mr. Dodd looked at him again, and began to choke again. It was the first time he had known Jonathan Hill to swear. "You're a−goin' to stick by what you agreed by your principles?"

"I'm going to stick by my bread and butter," said Mr. Hill, "not by my principles. I wish to hell I wasn't."

And so saying that gentleman departed, cutting diagonally across the street through the snow, leaving Mr. Dodd still choking and pulling at his tuft. This third and totally unexpected shaking−up had caused him to feel somewhat deranged internally, though it had not altered the opinions now so firmly planted in his head. After a few moments, however, he had collected himself sufficiently to move on once more, when he discovered that he was repeating to himself, quite unconsciously, Mr. Hill's profanity "I wish to hell I wasn't." The iron mastiffs glaring at him angrily out of the snow banks reminded him that he was in front of Mr. Worthington's door, and he thought he might as well go in at once and receive the great man's gratitude. He certainly deserved it. But as he put his hand on the bell Mr. Worthington himself came out of the house, and would actually have gone by without noticing Mr. Dodd if he had not spoken.

"I've got that little matter fixed, Mr. Worthington," he said, "called the committee, and we voted to discharge the young woman." No, he did not deliver Judge Graves's message.

"Very well, Mr. Dodd," answered the great man, passing on so that Mr. Dodd was obliged to follow him in order to hear, "I'm glad you've come to your senses at last. Kindly step into the library and tell Miss Bruce from me that she may fill the place to−morrow."

"Certain," said Mr. Dodd, with his hand to his chin. He watched the great man turn in at his bank in the new block, and then he did as he was bid.

By the time school was out that day the news had leaped across Brampton Street and spread up and down both sides of it that the new teacher had been dismissed. The story ran fairly straight there were enough clews, certainly. The great man's return, the visit of Mr. Dodd, the call on Judge Graves, all had been marked. The fiat of the first citizen had gone forth that the ward of Jethro Bass must be got rid of; the designing young woman who had sought to entrap his son must be punished for her amazing effrontery.

Cynthia came out of school happily unaware that her name was on the lips of Brampton: unaware, too, that the lord of the place had come into residence that day. She had looked forward to living in the same town with Bob's father as an evil which was necessary to be borne, as one of the things which are more or less inevitable in the lives of those who have to make their own ways in the world. The children trooped around her, and the little girls held her hand, and she talked and laughed with them as she came up the street in the eyes of Brampton, came up the street to the block of new buildings where the bank was. Stepping out of the bank, with that businesslike alertness which characterized him, was the first citizen none other. He found himself entangled among the romping children and horror of horrors he bumped against the schoolmistress herself! Worse than this, he had taken off his hat and begged her pardon before he looked at her and realized the enormity of his mistake. And the schoolmistress had actually paid no attention to him, but with merely heightened color had drawn the children out of his way and passed on without a word. The first citizen, raging inwardly, but trying to appear unconcerned, walked rapidly back to his house. On the street of his own town, before the eyes of men, he had been snubbed by a school−teacher. And such a school−teacher!

Mr. Worthington, as he paced his library burning with the shame of this occurrence, remembered that he had had to glance at her twice before it came over him who she was. His first sensation had been astonishment. And now, in spite of his bitter anger, he had to acknowledge that the face had made an impression on him a fact that only served to increase his rage. A conviction grew upon him that it was a face which his son, or any other man, would not be likely to forget. He himself could not forget it.

In the meantime Cynthia had reached her home, her cheeks still smarting, conscious that people had stared at her. This much, of course, she knew that Brampton believed Bob Worthington to be in love with her: and the knowledge at such times made her so miserable that the thought of Jethro's isolation alone deterred her from asking Miss Lucretia Penniman for a position in Boston. For she wrote to Miss Lucretia about her life and her reading, as that lady had made her promise to do. She sat down now at the cherry chest of drawers that was also a desk, to write: not to pour out her troubles, for she never had done that, but to calm her mind by drawing little character sketches of her pupils. But she had only written the words, "My dear Miss Lucretia," when she looked out of the window and saw Judge Graves coming up the path, and ran to open the door for him.

"How do you do, Judge?" she said, for she recognized Mr. Graves as one of her few friends in Brampton. "I have sent to Boston for the new reader, but it has not come."

The judge took her hand and pressed it and led her into the little sitting room. His face was very stern, but his eyes, which had flung fire at Mr. Dodd, looked at her with a vast compassion. Her heart misgave her.

"My dear," he said, it was long since the judge had called any woman "my dear," "I have bad news for you. The committee have decided that you cannot teach any longer in the Brampton school."

"Oh, Judge," she answered, trying to force back the tears which would come, "I have tried so hard. I had begun to believe that I could fill the place."

"Fill the place!" cried the judge, startling her with his sudden anger. "No woman in the state can fill it better than you."

"Then why am I dismissed?" she asked breathlessly.

The judge looked at her in silence, his blue lips quivering. Sometimes even he found it hard to tell the truth. And yet he had come to tell it, that she might suffer less. He remembered the time when Isaac D. Worthington had done him a great wrong. "You are dismissed," he said, "because Mr. Worthington has come home, and because the two other members of the committee are dogs and cowards." Mr. Graves never minced matters when he began, and his voice shook with passion. "If Mr. Errol had examined you, and you had your certificate, it might

have been different. Errol is not a sycophant. Worthington does not hold his mortgage."

"Mortgage!" exclaimed Cynthia. The word always struck terror to her soul.

"Mr. Worthington holds Mr. Hill's mortgage," said Mr. Graves, more than ever beside himself at the sight of her suffering. "That man's tyranny is not to be borne. We will not give up, Cynthia. I will fight him in this matter if it takes my last ounce of strength, so help me God!"

Mortgage! Cynthia sank down in the chair by the desk. In spite of the misery the news had brought, the thought that his father, too, who was fighting Jethro Bass as a righteous man, dealt in mortgages and coerced men to do his will, was overwhelming. So she sat for a while staring at the landscape on the old wall paper.

"I will go to Coniston to−night," she said at last.

"No," cried the judge, seizing her shoulder in his excitement, "no. Do you think that I have been your friend that I am your friend?"

"Oh, Judge Graves −"

"Then stay here, where you are. I ask it as a favor to me. You need not go to the school to−morrow indeed, you cannot. But stay here for a day or two at least, and if there is any justice left in a free country, we shall have it. Will you stay, as a favor to me?"

"I will stay, since you ask it," said Cynthia. "I will do what you think right."

Her voice was firmer than he expected much firmer. He glanced at her quickly, with something very like admiration in his eye.

"You are a good woman, and a brave woman," he said, and with this somewhat surprising tribute he took his departure instantly. Cynthia was left to her thoughts, and these were harassing and sorrowful enough. One idea, however, persisted through them all. Mr. Worthington, whose power she had lived long enough in Brampton to know, was an unjust man and a hypocrite. That thought was both sweet and bitter: sweet, as a retribution; and bitter, because he was Bob's father. She realized, now, that Bob knew these things, and she respected and loved him the more, if that were possible, because he had refrained from speaking of them to her. And now another thought came, and though she put it resolutely from her, persisted. Was she not justified now in marrying him? The reasoning was false, so she told herself. She had no right to separate Bob from his father, whatever his father might be. Did not she still love Jethro Bass? Yes, but he had renounced his ways. Her heart swelled gratefully as she spoke the words to herself, and she reflected that he, at least, had never been a hypocrite.

Of one thing she was sure, now. In the matter of the school she had right on her side, and she must allow Judge Graves to do whatever he thought proper to maintain that right. If Isaac D. Worthington's character had been different, this would not have been her decision. Now she would not leave Brampton in disgrace, when she had done nothing to merit it. Not that she believed that the judge would prevail against such mighty odds. So little did she think so that she fell, presently, into a despondency which in all her troubles had not overtaken her the despondency which comes even to the pure and the strong when they feel the unjust strength of the world against them. In this state her eyes fell on the letter she had started to Miss Lucretia Penniman, and in desperation she began to write.

It was a short letter, reserved enough, and quite in character. It was right that she should defend herself, which she did with dignity, saying that she believed the committee had no fault to find with her duties, but that Mr. Worthington had seen fit to bring influence to bear upon them because of her connection with Jethro Bass. It was

not the whole truth, but Cynthia could not bring herself to write of that other reason. At the end she asked, very simply, if Miss Lucretia could find her something to do in Boston in case her dismissal became certain. Then she put on her coat, and walked to the post−office to post the letter, for she resolved that there could be no shame without reason for it. There was a little more color in her cheeks, and she held her head high, preparing to be slighted. But she was not slighted, and got more salutations, if anything, than usual. She was, indeed, in the right not to hide her head, and policy alone would have forbade it, had Cynthia thought of policy.

CHAPTER XV. CONTAINING A DRAMATIC CLIMAX

PUBLIC opinion is like the wind it bloweth where it listeth. It whistled around Brampton the next day, whirling husbands and wives apart, and families into smithereens. Brampton had a storm all to itself save for a sympathetic storm raging in Coniston and all about a school−teacher.

Had Cynthia been a certain type of woman, she would have had all the men on her side and all of her own sex against her. It is a decided point to be recorded in her favor that she had among her sympathizers as many women as men. But the excitement of a day long remembered in Brampton began, for her, when a score or more of children assembled in front of the little house, tramping down the snow on the grass plots, shouting for her to come to school with them. Children give no mortgages, or keep no hardware stores.

Cynthia, trying to read in front of the fire, was all in a tremble at the sound of the high−pitched little voices she had grown to love, and she longed to go out and kiss them, every one. Her nature, however, shrank from any act which might appear dramatic or sensational. She could not resist going to the window and smiling at them, though they appeared but dimly little dancing figures in a mist. And when they shouted, the more she shook her head and put her finger to her lips in reproof and vanished from their sight. Then they trooped sadly on to school, resolved to make matters as disagreeable as possible for poor Miss Bruce, who had not offended in any way.

Two other episodes worthy of a place in this act of the drama occurred that morning, and one had to do with Ephraim. Poor Ephraim! His way had ever been to fight and ask no questions, and in his journey through the world he had gathered but little knowledge of it. He had limped home the night before in a state of anger of which Cynthia had not believed him capable, and had reappeared in the sitting room in his best suit of blue.

"Where are you going, Cousin Eph?" Cynthia had asked suspiciously.

"Never you mind, Cynthy."

"But I do mind," she said, catching hold of his sleeve. "I won't let you go until you confess."

"I'm a−goin' to tell Isaac Worthington what I think of him, that's whar I'm a−goin'," cried Ephraim "what I always hev thought of him sence he sent a substitute to the war an' acted treasonable here to home talkin' ag'in' Lincoln."

"Oh, Cousin Eph, you mustn't," said Cynthia, clinging to him with all her strength in her dismay. It had taken every whit of her influence to persuade him to relinquish his purpose. Cynthia knew very well that Ephraim meant to lay hands on Mr. Worthington, and it would indeed have been a disastrous hour for the first citizen if the old soldier had ever got into his library. Cynthia pointed out, as best she might, that it would be an evil hour for her, too, and that her cause would be greatly injured by such a proceeding; she knew very well that it would ruin Ephraim, but he would not have listened to such an argument.

The next thing he wished to do was to go to Coniston and rouse Jethro. Cynthia's heart stood still when he proposed this, for it touched upon her greatest fear, which had impelled her to go to Coniston. But she had hoped

and believed that Jethro, knowing her feelings, would do nothing since for her sake he had chosen to give up his power. Now an acute attack of rheumatism had come to her rescue, and she succeeded in getting Ephraim off to bed, swathed in bandages. The next morning he had insisted upon hobbling away to the post−office, where in due time he was discovered by certain members of the Brampton Club nailing to the wall a new engraving of Abraham Lincoln and draping it with a little silk flag he had bought in Boston. By which it will be seen that a portion of the Club were coming back to their old haunt. This portion, it may be surmised, was composed of such persons alone as were likely to be welcomed by the postmaster. Some of these had grievances against Mr. Worthington or Mr. Flint; others, in more prosperous circumstances, might have been moved by envy of these gentlemen; still others might have been actuated largely by righteous resentment at what they deemed oppression by wealth and power. These members who came that morning comprised about one−fourth of those who formerly had been in the habit of dropping in for a chat, and their numbers were a fair indication of the fact that those who from various motives took the part of the school−teacher in Brampton were as one to three.

It is not necessary to repeat their expressions of indignation and sympathy. There was a certain Mr. Gamaliel Ives in the town, belonging to an old Brampton family, who would have been the first citizen if that other first citizen had not, by his rise to wealth and power, so completely overshadowed him. Mr. Ives owned a small mill on Coniston Water below the town. He fairly bubbled over with civic pride, and he was an authority on all matters pertaining to Brampton's history. He knew the "Hymn to Coniston" by heart. But we are digressing a little. Mr. Ives, like that other Gamaliel of old, had exhorted his fellow−townsmen to wash their hands of the controversy. But he was an intimate of Judge Graves, and after talking with that gentleman he became a partisan overnight; and when he had stopped to get his mail he had been lured behind the window by the debate in progress. He was in the midst of some impromptu remarks when he recognized a certain brisk step behind him, and Isaac D. Worthington himself entered the sanctum!

It must be explained that Mr. Worthington sometimes had an important letter to be registered which he carried to the post−office with his own hands. On such occasions though not a member of the Brampton Club he walked, as an overlord will, into any private place he chose, and recognized no partitions or barriers. Now he handed the letter (addressed to a certain person in Cambridge, Massachusetts) to the postmaster.

"You will kindly register that and give me a receipt, Mr. Prescott," he said.

Ephraim turned from his contemplation of the features of the martyred President, and on his face was something of the look it might have worn when he confronted his enemies over the logworks at Five Forks. No, for there was a vast contempt in his gaze now, and he had had no contempt for the Southerners, and would have shaken hands with any of them the moment the battle was over. Mr. Worthington, in spite of himself, recoiled a little before that look, fearing, perhaps, physical violence.

"I hain't a−goin' to hurt you, Mr. Worthington," Ephraim said, "but I am a−goin' to ask you to git out in front, and mighty quick. If you hev any business with the postmaster, there's the window," and Ephraim pointed to it with his twisted finger. "I don't allow nobody but my friends here, Mr. Worthington, and people I respect."

Mr. Worthington looked well, eye−witnesses give various versions as to how he looked. All agree that his lip trembled; some say his eyes watered: at any rate, he quailed, stood a moment undecided, and then swung on his heel and walked to the partition door. At this safe distance he turned.

"Mr. Prescott," he said, his voice quivering with passion and perhaps with another emotion, "I will make it my duty to report to the postmaster−general the manner in which this office this run. Instead of attending to your business, you make the place a resort for loafers and idlers. Good morning, sir."

Ten minutes later Mr. Flint himself came to register the letter. But it was done at the window, and the loafers and idlers were still there. The curtain had risen again, indeed, and the action was soon fast enough for the most

impatient that day. No sooner had the town heard with bated breath of the expulsion of the first citizen from the inner sanctuary of the post−office, than the news of another event began to go the rounds. Mr. Worthington had other and more important things to think about than minor postmasters, and after his anger and yes, and momentary fear had subsided, he forgot the incident except to make a mental note to remember to deprive Mr. Prescott of his postmastership, which he believed could be done readily enough now that Jethro Bass was out of the way. Then he had stepped into the bank, which he had come to regard as his own bank, as he regarded most institutions in Brampton. He had, in the old days, been president of it, as we know. He stepped into the bank, and then he stepped out again.

Most people have experienced that sickly feeling of the diaphragm which sometimes comes from a sudden shock. Mr. Worthington had it now as he hurried up the street, and he presently discovered that he was walking in the direction opposite to that of his own home. He crossed the street, made a pretence of going into Mr. Goldthwaite's drug store, and hurried back again. When he reached his own library, he found Mr. Flint busy there at his desk. Mr. Flint rose. Mr. Worthington sat down and began to pull the papers about in a manner which betrayed to his seneschal (who knew every mood of his master) mental perturbation.

"Flint," he said at last, striving his best for an indifferent accent, "Jethro Bass is here I ran across him just now drawing money in the bank."

"I could have told you that this morning," answered Mr. Flint. "Wheeler, who runs errands for him in Coniston, drove him in this morning, and he's been with Peleg Hartington for two hours over Sherman's livery stable."

An interval of silence followed, during which Mr. Worthington shuffled with his letters and pretended to read them. "Graves has called a mass meeting to−night, I understand," he remarked in the same casual way. "The man's a demagogue, and mad as a loon. I believe he sent back one of our passes once, didn't he? I suppose Bass has come in to get Hartington to work up the meeting. They'll be laughed out of the town hall, or hissed out."

"I guess you'll find Bass has come down for something else," said Mr. Flint, looking up from a division report.

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Worthington, changing his attitude to one of fierceness. But he was well aware that whatever tone he took with his seneschal, he never fooled him.

"I mean what I told you yesterday," said Flint, "that you have stirred up the dragon."

Even Mr. Flint did not know how like a knell his words sounded in Isaac Worthington's ears.

"Nonsense!" he cried, "you're talking nonsense, Flint. We maimed him too thoroughly for that. He hasn't power enough left to carry his own town."

"All right," said the senesehal.

"What do you mean by that?" said his master, with extreme irritation.

"I mean what I said yesterday, that we haven't maimed him at all. He had his own reasons for going into his hole, and he never would have come out again if you hadn't goaded him. Now he's out, and we'll have to step around pretty lively, I can tell you, or he'll maim us."

All of which goes to show that Mr. Flint had some notion of men and affairs. He became, as may be predicted, the head of many material things in later days, and he may sometime reappear in company with other characters in this story.

The sickly feeling in Mr. Worthington's diaphragm had now returned.

"I think you will find you are mistaken, Flint," he said, attempting dignity now. "Very much mistaken."

"Very well," said Flint, "perhaps I am. But I believe you'll find he left for the capital on the eleven o'clock, and if you take the trouble to inquire from Redding you will probably learn that the Throne Room is bespoken for the session."

All of that which Mr. Flint had predicted turned out to be true. The dragon had indeed waked up. It all began with the news Milly Skinner had got from the stage driver, imparted to Jethro as he sat reading about Hiawatha. And terrible indeed had been that awakening. This dragon did not bellow and roar and lash his tail when he was roused, but he stood up, and there seemed to emanate from him a fire which frightened poor Milly Skinner, upset though she was by the news of Cynthia's dismissal. O, wondrous and paradoxical might of love, which can tame the most powerful of beasts, and stir them again into furies by a touch!

Coniston was the first to tremble, as though the forces stretching themselves in the tannery house were shaking the very ground, and the name of Jethro Bass took on once more, as by magic, a terrible meaning. When Vesuvius is silent, pygmies may make faces on the very lip of the crater, and they on the slopes forget the black terror of the fiery hail. Jake Wheeler himself, loyal as he was, did not care to look into the crater now that he was summoned; but a force pulled him all the way to the tannery house. He left behind him an awe−stricken gathering at the store, composed of inhabitants who had recently spoken slightingly of the volcano.

We are getting a little mixed in our metaphors between lions and dragons and volcanoes, and yet none of them are too strong to represent Jethro Bass when he heard that Isaac Worthington had had the teacher dismissed from Brampton lower school. He did not stop to reason then that action might distress her. The beast in him awoke again; the desire for vengeance on a man whom he had hated most of his life, and who now had dared to cause pain to the woman whom he loved with all his soul, and even idolized, was too great to resist. He had no thought of resisting it, for the waters of it swept over his soul like the Atlantic over a lost continent. He would crush Isaac Worthington if it took the last breath from his body. Jake went to the tannery house and received his orders orders of which he made a great mystery afterward at the store, although they consisted simply of directions to be prepared to drive Jethro to Brampton the next morning. But the look of the man had frightened Jake. He had never seen vengeance so indelibly written on that face, and he had never before realized the terrible power of vengeance. Mr. Wheeler returned from that meeting in such a state of trepidation that he found it necessary to accompany Rias to a certain keg in the cellar; after which he found his tongue. His description of Jethro's appearance awed his hearers, and Jake declared that he would not be in Isaac Worthington's shoes for all of Isaac Worthington's money. There were others right here in Coniston, Jake hinted, who might now find it convenient to emigrate to the far West.

Jethro's face had not changed when Jake drove him out of Coniston the next morning. Good Mr. Satterlee saw it, and felt that the visit he had wished to make would have been useless; Mr. Amos Cuthbert and Mr. Sam Price saw it, from a safe distance within the store, and it is a fact that Mr. Price seriously thought of taking Mr. Wheeler's advice about a residence in the West; Mr. Cuthbert, of a sterner nature, made up his mind to be hung and quartered. A few minutes before Jethro walked into his office over the livery stable, Senator Peleg Hartington would have denied, with that peculiar and mournful scorn of which he was master, that Jethro Bass could ever again have any influence over him. Peleg was, indeed, at that moment preparing, in his own way, to make overtures to the party of Isaac D. Worthington. Jethro walked into the office, leaving Jake below with Mr. Sherman; and Senator Hartington was very glad he had not made the overtures. And when he accompanied Jethro to the station when he left for the capital, the senator felt that the eyes of men were upon him.

And Cynthia? Happily, Cynthia passed the day in ignorance that Jethro had gone through Brampton. Ephraim, though he knew it, did not speak of it when he came home to his dinner; Mr. Graves had called, and informed her

of the meeting in the town hall that night.

"It is our only chance," he said obdurately, in answer to her protests. "We must lay the case before the people of Brampton. If they have not the courage to right the wrong, and force your reinstatement through public opinion, there is nothing more to be done."

To Cynthia, the idea of having a mass meeting concerning herself was particularly repellent.

"Oh, Judge Graves!" she cried, "if there isn't any other way, please drop the matter. There are plenty of teachers who will be acceptable to everybody."

"Cynthia," said the judge, "I can understand that this publicity is very painful to you. I beg you to remember that we are contending for a principle. In such cases the individual must be sacrificed to the common good."

"But I cannot go to the meeting I cannot."

"No," said the judge; "I don't think that will be necessary."

After he was gone, she could think of nothing but the horror of having her name yes, and her character discussed in that public place; and it seemed to her, if she listened, she could hear a clatter of tongues throughout the length of Brampton Street, and that she must fain stop her ears or go mad. The few ladies who called during the day out of kindness or curiosity, or both, only added to her torture. She was not one who could open her heart to acquaintances: the curious ones got but little satisfaction, and the kind ones thought her cold, and they did not perceive that she was really grateful for their little attentions. Gratitude, on such occasions, does not always consist in pouring out one's troubles in the laps of visitors.

So the visitors went home, wondering whether it were worth while after all to interest themselves in the cause of such a self−contained and self−reliant young woman. In spite of all her efforts, Cynthia had never wholly succeeded in making most of the Brampton ladies believe that she did not secretly deem herself above them. They belonged to a reserved race themselves; but Cynthia had a reserve which was even different from their own.

As night drew on the predictions of Mr. Worthington seemed likely to be fulfilled, and it looked as if Judge Graves would have a useless bill to pay for gas in the new town hall. The judge had never been a man who could compel a following, and he had no magnetism with which to lead a cause: the town tradesmen, especially those in the new brick block, would be chary as to risking the displeasure of their best customer. At half−part seven Mr. Graves came in, alone, and sat on the platform staring grimly at his gas. Is there a lecturer, or a playwright, or a politician, who has not, at one time or another, been in the judge's place? Who cannot sympathize with him as he watched the thin and hesitating stream of people out of the corner of his eye as they came in at the door? The judge despised them with all his soul, but it is human nature not to wish to sit in a hall or a theatre that is three−quarters empty.

At sixteen minutes to eight a mild excitement occurred, an incident of some significance which served to detain many waverers. Senator Peleg Hartington walked up the aisle, and the judge rose and shook him by the hand, and as Deacon Hartington he was invited to sit on the platform. The senator's personal influence was not to be ignored; and it had sufficed to carry his district in the last election against the Worthington forces, in spite of the abdication of Jethro Bass. Mr. Page, the editor of the Clarion, Senator Hartington's organ, was also on the platform. But where was Mr. Ives? Where was that Gamaliel who had been such a warm partisan in the post−office that morning?

"Saw him outside the hall wahn't but ten minutes ago," said Deacon Hartington, sadly; "thought he was a−comin' in."

Eight o'clock came, and no Mr. Ives; ten minutes past fifteen minutes past. If the truth must be told, Mr. Ives had been on the very threshold of the hall, and one glance at the poor sprinkling af people there had decided him. Mr. Ives had a natural aversion to being laughed at, and as he walked back on the darker side of the street he wished heartily that he had stuck to his original Gamaliel−advocacy of no interference, of allowing the Supreme Judge to decide. Such opinions were inevitably just, Mr. Ives was well aware, though not always handed down immediately. If he were to humble the first citizen, Mr. Ives reflected that a better opportunity might present itself. The whistle of the up−train served to strengthen his resolution, for he was reminded thereby that his mill often had occasion to ask favors of the Truro Railroad.

In the meantime it was twenty minutes past eight in the town hall, and Mr. Graves had not rapped for order. Deacon Hartington sat as motionless as a stork on the borders of a glassy lake at sunrise, the judge had begun seriously to estimate the gas bill, and Mr. Page had chewed up the end of a pencil. There was one, at least, in the audience of whom the judge could be sure. A certain old soldier in blue sat uncompromisingly on the front bench with his hands crossed over the head of his stick; but the ladies and gentlemen nearest the door were beginning to vanish, one by one, silently as ghosts, when suddenly the judge sat up. He would have rubbed his eyes, had he been that kind of a man. Four persons had entered the hall he was sure of it and with no uncertain steps as if frightened by its emptiness. No, they came boldly. And after them trooped others, and still others were heard in the street beyond, not whispering, but talking in the unmistakable tones of people who had more coming behind them. Yes, and more came. It was no illusion, or delusion: there they were filling the hall as if they meant to stay, and buzzing with excitement. The judge was quivering with excitement now, but he, too, was only a spectator of the drama. And what a drama, with a miracle−play for Brampton!

Mr. Page rose from his chair and leaned over the edge of the platform that something might be whispered in his ear. The news, whatever it was, was apparently electrifying, and after the first shock he turned to impart it to Mr. Graves; but turned too late, for the judge had already rapped for order and was clearing his throat. He could not account for this extraordinary and unlooked−for audience, among whom he spied many who had thought it wiser not to protest against the dictum of the first citizen, and many who had professed to believe that the teacher's connection with Jethro Bass was a good and sufficient reason for dismissal. The judge was prepared to take advantage of the tide, whatever its cause.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I take the liberty of calling this meeting to order. And before a chairman be elected, I mean to ask your indulgence to explain my purposes in requesting the use of this hall to−night. In our system of government, the inalienable and most precious gift −"

Whatever the gift was, the judge never explained. He paused at the words, and repeated them, and stopped altogether because no one was paying any attention to him. The hall was almost full, the people had risen, with a hum, and as one man had turned toward the door. Mr. Gamaliel Ives was triumphantly marching down the aisle, and with him was well, another person. Nay, personage would perhaps be the better word.

Let us go back for a moment. There descended from that train of which we have heard the whistle a lady with features of no ordinary moulding, with curls and a string bonnet and a cloak that seemed strangely to harmonize with the lady's character. She had the way of one in authority, and Mr. Sherman himself ran to open the door of his only closed carriage, and the driver galloped off with her all the way to the Brampton House. Once there, the lady seized the pen as a soldier seizes the sword, and wrote her name in most uncompromising characters on the register, Miss Lucretia Penniman, Boston. Then she marched up to her room.

Miss Lucretia Penniman, author of the "Hymn to Coniston," in the reflected glory of whose fame Brampton had shone for thirty years! Whose name was lauded and whose poem was recited at every Fourth of July celebration, that the very children might learn it and honor its composer! Stratford−on−Avon is not prouder of Shakespeare than Brampton of Miss Lucretia, and now she was come back, unheralded, to her birthplace. Mr. Raines, the clerk, looked at the handwriting on the book, and would not believe his own sight until it was vouched for by

sundry citizens who had followed the lady from the station on foot. And then there was a to−do.

Send for Mr. Gamaliel Ives; send for Miss Bruce, the librarian; send for Mr. Page, editor of the Clarion, and notify the first citizen. He, indeed, could not be sent for, but had he known of her coming he would undoubtedly have had her met at the portals and presented with the keys in gold. Up and down the street flew the news which overshadowed and blotted out all other, and the poor little school−teacher was forgotten.

One of these notables was at hand, though he did not deserve to be. Mr. Gamaliel Ives sent up his card to Miss Lucretia, and was shown deferentially into the parlor, where he sat mopping his brow and growing hot and cold by turns. How would the celebrity treat him? The celebrity herself answered the question by entering the room in such stately manner as he had expected, to the rustle of the bombazine. Whereupon Mr. Ives bounced out of his chair and bowed, though his body was not formed to bend that way.

"Miss Penniman," he exclaimed, "what an honor for Brampton! And what a pleasure, the greater because so unexpected! How cruel not to have given us warning, and we could have greeted you as your great fame deserves! You could never take time from your great duties to accept the invitations of our literary committee, alas! But now that you are here, you will find a warm welcome, Miss Penniman. How long it has been − thirty years, you see I know it to a day, thirty−years since you left us. Thirty years, I may say, we have kept burning the vestal fire in your worship, hoping for this hour." Miss Lucretia may have had her own ideas about the propriety of the reference to the vestal fire.

"Gamaliel," she said sharply, "straighten up and don't talk nonsense to me. I've had you on my knee, and I knew your mother and father."

Gamaliel did straighten up, as though Miss Lucretia had applied a lump of ice to the small of his back. So it is when the literary deities, vestal or otherwise, return to their Stratfords. There are generally surprises in store for the people they have had on their knees, and for others.

"Gamaliel," said Miss Lucretia, "I want to see the prudential committee for the village district."

"The prudential committee!" Mr. Ives fairly shrieked the words in his astonishment.

"I tried to speak plainly," said Miss Lucretia. "Who are on that committee?"

"Ezra Graves," said Mr. Ives, as though mechanically compelled, for his head was spinning round. "Ezra Graves always has run it, until now. But he's in the town hall."

"What's he doing there?"

Mr. Ives was no fool. Some inkling of the facts began to shoot through his brain, and he saw his chance.

"He called a mass meeting to protest against the dismissal of a teacher."

"Gamaliel," said Miss Lucretia, "you will conduct me to that meeting. I will get my cloak."

Mr. Ives wasted no time in the interval, and he fairly ran out into the office. Miss Lucretia Penniman was in town, and would attend the mass meeting. Now, indeed, it was to be a mass meeting. Away flew the tidings, broadcast, and people threw off their carpet slippers and dressing gowns, and some who had gone to bed got up again. Mr. Dodd heard it, and changed his shoes three times, and his intentions three times three. Should he go, or should he not? Already he heard in imagination the first distant note of the populace, and he was not of the metal to defend a Bastille or a Louvre for his royal master with the last drop of his blood.

In the meantime Gamaliel Ives was conducting Miss Lucretia toward the town hall, and speaking in no measured tones of indignation of the cringing, truckling qualities of that very Mr. Dodd. The injustice to Miss Wetherell, which Mr. Ives explained as well as he could, made his blood boil: so he declared.

And now we are back again at the meeting, when the judge, with his hand on his Adam's apple, is pronouncing the word "gift." Mr. Ives is triumphantly marching down the aisle, escorting the celebrity of Brampton to the platform, and quite aware of the heart burnings of his fellow−citizens on the benches. And Miss Lucretia, with that stern composure with which celebrities accept public situations, follows up the steps as of right and takes the chair he assigns her beside the chairman. The judge, still grasping his Adam's apple, stares at the newcomer in amazement, and recognizes her in spite of the years, and trembles. Miss Lucretia Penniman! Blücher was not more welcome to Wellington, or Lafayette to Washington, than was Miss Lucretia to Ezra Graves as he turned his back on the audience and bowed to her deferentially. Then he turned again, cleared his throat once more to collect his senses, and was about to utter the familiar words, "We have with us to−night," when they were taken out of his mouth taken out of his mouth by one who had in all conscience stolen enough thunder for one man, Mr. Gamaliel Ives.

"Mr. Chairman," said Mr. Ives, taking a slight dropping of the judge's lower jaw for recognition, "and ladies and gentlemen of Brampton. It is our great good fortune to have with us to−night, most unexpectedly, one of whom Brampton is, and for many years has been, justly proud." (Cheers.) "One whose career Brampton has followed with a mother's eyes and with a mother's heart. One who has chosen a broader field for the exercise of those great powers with which Nature endowed her than Brampton could give. One who has taken her place among the luminaries of literature of her time." (Cheers.) "One who has done more than any other woman of her generation toward the uplifting of the sex which she honors." (Cheers and clapping of hands.) "And one who, though her lot has fallen among the great, has not forgotten the home of her childhood. For has she not written those beautiful lines which we all know by heart?

'Ah, Coniston! Thy lordly form I see Before mine eyes in exile drear.'

"Mr Chairman and fellow−townsmen and women, I have the extreme honor of introducing to you one whom we all love and revere, the author of the 'Hymn to Coniston,' the editor of the Woman's Hour, Miss Lucretia Penniman." (Loud and long−continued applause.)

Well might Brampton be proud, too, of Gamaliel Ives, president of its literary club, who could make such a speech as this on such short notice. If the truth be told, the literary club had sent Miss Lucretia no less than seven invitations, and this was the speech Mr. Ives had intended to make on those seven occasions. It was unquestionably a neat speech, and Judge Graves or no other chairman should cheat him out of making it. Mr. Ives, with a wave of his hand toward the celebrity, sat down by no means dissatisfied with himself. What did he care how the judge glared. He did not see how stiffly Miss Lucretia sat in her chair. She could not take him on her knee then, but she would have liked to.

Miss Lucretia rose, and stood quite as stiffly as she had sat, and the judge rose, too. He was very angry, but this was not the time to get even with Mr. Ives. As it turned out, he did not need to bother about getting even.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "in the absence of any other chairman I take pleasure in introducing to you Miss Lucretia Penniman."

More applause was started, but Miss Lucretia put a stop to it by the lifting of a hand. Then there was a breathless silence. Then she cast her eyes around the hall, as though daring any one to break that silence, and finally they rested upon Mr. Ives.

"Mr. Chairman," she said, with an inclination toward the judge, "my friends for I hope you will be my friends when I have finished" (Miss Lucretia made it quite clear by her tone that it entirely depended upon them whether they would be or not), "I understood when I came here that this was to be a mass meeting to protest against an injustice, and not a feast of literature and oratory, as Gamaliel Ives seems to suppose."

She paused, and when the first shock of amazement was past an audible titter ran through the audience, and Mr. Ives squirmed visibly.

"Am I right, Mr. Chairman?" asked Miss Lucretia.

"You are unquestionably right, Miss Penniman," answered the chairman, rising, "unquestionably."

"Then I will proceed," said Miss Lucretia. "I wrote the 'Hymn to Coniston' many years ago, when I was younger, and yet it is true that I have always remembered Brampton with kindly feelings. The friends of our youth are dear to us. We look indulgently upon their failings, even as they do on ours. I have scanned the faces here in the hall to−night, and there are some that have not changed beyond recognition in thirty years. Ezra Graves I remember, and it is a pleasure to see him in that chair." (Mr. Graves inclined his head, reverently. None knew how the inner man exulted.) "But there was one who was often in Brampton in those days," Miss Lucretia continued, "whom we all loved and with whom we found no fault, and I confess that when I have thought of Brampton I have oftenest thought of her. Her name," said Miss Lucretia, her hand now in the reticule, "her name was Cynthia Ware."

There was a decided stir among the audience, and many leaned forward to catch every word.

"Even old people may have an ideal," said Miss Lucretia, "and you will forgive me for speaking of mine. Where should I speak of it, if not in this village, among those who knew her and among their children? Cynthia Ware, although she was younger than I, has been my ideal, and is still. She was the daughter of the Rev. Samuel Ware of Coniston, and a descendant of Captain Timothy Prescott, whom General Stark called 'Honest Tim.' She was, to me, all that a woman should be, in intellect, in her scorn of all that is ignoble and false, and in her loyalty to her friends." Here the handkerchief came out of the reticule. "She went to Boston to teach school, and some time afterward I was offered a position in New York, and I never saw her again. But she married in Boston a man of learning and literary attainments, though his health was feeble and he was poor, William Wetherell." (Another stir.) "Mr. Wetherell was a gentleman Cynthia Ware could have married no other and he came of good and honorable people in Portsmouth. Very recently I read a collection of letters which he wrote to the Newcastle Guardian, which some of you may know. I did not trust my own judgment as to those letters, but I took them to an author whose name is known wherever English is spoken, but which I will not mention. And the author expressed it as his opinion, in writing to me, that William Wetherell was undoubtedly a genius of a high order, and that he would have been so recognized if life had given him a chance. Mr. Wetherell, after his wife died, was taken in a dying condition to Coniston, where he was forced, in order to earn his living, to become the storekeeper there. But he took his books with him, and found time to write the letters of which I have spoken, and to give his daughter an early education such as few girls have.

"My friends, I am rejoiced to see that the spirit of justice and the sense of right are as strong in Brampton as they used to be strong enough to fill this town hall to overflowing because a teacher has been wrongly yes, and iniquitously dismissed from the lower school." (Here there was a considerable stir, and many wondered whether Miss Lucretia was aware of the irony in her words.) "I say wrongly and iniquitously, because I have had the opportunity in Boston this winter of learning to know and love that teacher. I am not given to exaggeration, my friends, and when I tell you that I know her, that her character is as high and pure as her mother's, I can say no more. I am here to tell you this to−night because I do not believe you know her as I do. During the seventy years I have lived I have grown to have but little faith in outward demonstration, to believe in deeds and attainments rather than expressions. And as for her fitness to teach, I believe that even the prudential committee could find no fault with that." (I wonder whether Mr. Dodd was in the back of the hall.) "I can find no fault with it. I am

constantly called upon to recommend teachers, and I tell you I should have no hesitation in sending Cynthia Wetherell to a high school, young as she is.

"And now, my friends, why was she dismissed? I have heard the facts, though not from her. Cynthia Wetherell does not know that I have come to Brampton, unless somebody has told her, and did not know that I was coming. I have heard the facts, and I find it difficult to believe that so great a wrong could be attempted against a woman, and if the name of Cynthia Wetherell had meant no more to me than the letters in it I should have travelled twice as far as Brampton, old as I am, to do my utmost to right that wrong. I give you my word of honor that I have never been so indignant in my life. I do not come here to stir up enmities among you, and I will mention no more names. I prefer to believe that the prudential committee of this district has made a mistake, the gravity of which they must now realize, and that they will reinstate Cynthia Wetherell to−morrow. And if they should not of their own free will, I have only to look around this meeting to be convinced that they will be compelled to. Compelled to, my friends, by the sense of justice and the righteous indignation of the citizens of Brampton."

Miss Lucretia sat down, her strong face alight with the spirit that was in her. Not the least of the compelling forces in this world is righteous anger, and when it is exercised by a man or a woman whose life has been a continual warfare against the pests of wrong, it is well−nigh irresistible. While you could count five seconds the audience sat silent, and then began such tumult and applause as had never been seen in Brampton all started, so it is said, by an old soldier in the front row with his stick. Isaac D. Worthington, sitting alone in the library of his mansion, heard it, and had no need to send for Mr. Flint to ask what it was, or who it was had fired the Third Estate. And Mr. Dodd heard it. He may have been in the hall, but now he sat at home, seeing visions of the lantern, and he would have fled to the palace had he thought to get any sympathy from his sovereign. No, Mr. Dodd did not hold the Bastille or even fight for it. Another and a better man gave up the keys, for heroes are sometimes hidden away in meek and retiring people who wear spectacles and have a stoop to their shoulders. Long before the excitement died away a dozen men were on their feet shouting at the chairman, and among them was the tall, stooping man with spectacles. He did not shout, but Judge Graves saw him and made up his mind that this was the man to speak. The chairman raised his hand and rapped with his gavel, and at length he had obtained silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I am going to recognize Mr. Hill of the prudential committee, and ask him to step up on the platform."

There fell another silence, as absolute as the first, when Mr. Hill walked down the aisle and climbed the steps. Indeed, people were stupefied, for the feed dealer was a man who had never opened his mouth in town meeting; who had never taken an initiative of any kind; who had allowed other men to take advantage of him, and had never resented it. And now he was going to speak. Would he defend the prudential committee, or would he declare for the teacher? Either course, in Mr. Hill's case, required courage, and he had never been credited with any. If Mr. Hill was going to speak at all, he was going to straddle.

He reached the platform, bowed irresolutely to the chairman, and then stood awkwardly with one knee bent, peering at his audience over his glasses. He began without any address whatever.

"I want to say," he began in a low voice, "that I had no intention of coming to this meeting. And I am going to confess I am going to confess that I was afraid to come." He raised his voice a little defiantly at the words, and paused. One could almost hear the people breathing. "I was afraid to come for fear that I should do the very thing I am going to do now. And yet I was impelled to come. I want to say that my conscience has not been clear since, as a member of the prudential committee, I gave my consent to the dismissal of Miss Wetherell. I know that I was influenced by personal and selfish considerations which should have had no weight. And after listening to Miss Penniman I take this opportunity to declare, of my own free will, that I will add my vote to that of Judge Graves to reinstate Miss Wetherell."

Mr. Hill bowed slightly, and was about to descend the steps when the chairman, throwing parliamentary dignity to the winds, arose and seized the feed dealer's hand. And the people in the hall almost as one man sprang to their feet and cheered, and some Ephraim Prescott among these even waved their hats and shouted Mr. Hill's name. A New England audience does not frequently forget itself, but there were few present who did not understand the heroism of the man's confession, who were not carried away by the simple and dramatic dignity of it. He had no need to mention Mr. Worthington's name, or specify the nature of his obligations to that gentleman. In that hour Jonathan Hill rose high in the respect of Brampton, and some pressed into the aisle to congratulate him on his way back to his seat. Not a few were grateful to him for another reason. He had relieved the meeting of the necessity of taking any further action: of putting their names, for instance, in their enthusiasm to a paper which the first citizen might see.

Judge Graves, whose sense of a climax was acute, rapped for order.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, in a voice not wholly free from emotion, "you will all wish to pay your respects to the famous lady who is with us. I see that the Rev. Mr. Sweet is present, and I suggest that we adjourn, after he has favored us with a prayer."

As the minister came forward, Deacon Hartington dropped his head and began to flutter his eyelids. The Rev. Mr. Sweet prayed, and so was brought to an end the most exciting meeting ever held in Brampton town hall.

But Miss Lucretia did not like being called "a famous lady."

CHAPTER XVI. MISS LUCRETIA QUOTES GENESIS

WHILE Miss Lucretia was standing, unwillingly enough, listening to the speeches that were poured into her ear by various members of the audience, receiving the incense and myrrh to which so great a celebrity was entitled, the old soldier hobbled away to his little house as fast as his three legs would carry him. Only one event in his life had eclipsed this in happiness the interview in front of the White House. He rapped on the window with his stick, thereby frightening Cynthia half out of her wits as she sat musing sorrowfully by the fire.

"Cousin Ephraim," she said, taking off his corded hat, "what in the world's the matter with you?"

"You're a schoolmarm again, Cynthy."

"Do you mean to say −?"

"Miss Lucretia Penniman done it."

"Miss Lucretia Penniman!" Cynthia began to think his rheumatism was driving him out of his mind.

"You bet. 'Long toward the openin' of the engagement there wahn't scarcely anybody thar but me, and they was a−goin'. But they come fast enough when they l'arned she was in town, and she blew 'em up higher'n the Petersburg crater. Great Tecumseh, there's a woman! Next to General Grant, I'd sooner shake her hand than anybody's livin'."

"Do you mean to say that Miss Lucretia is in Brampton and spoke at the mass meeting?"

"Spoke!" exclaimed Ephraim, "callate she did some. Tore 'em all up. They'd a hung Isaac D. Worthington or Levi Dodd if they'd a had 'em thar." Cynthia, striving to be calm herself, got him into a chair and took his stick and straightened out his leg, and then Ephraim told her the story, and it lost no dramatic effect in his telling. He would

have talked all night. But at length the sound of wheels was heard in the street, Cynthia flew to the door, and a familiar voice came out of the darkness.

"You need not wait, Gamaliel. No, thank you, I think I will stay at the hotel."

Gamaliel was still protesting when Miss Lucretia came in and seized Cynthia in her arms, and the door was closed behind her.

"Oh, Miss Lucretia, why did you come?" said Cynthia, "if I had known you would do such a thing, I should never have written that letter. I have been sorry to−day that I did write it, and now I'm sorrier than ever."

"Aren't you glad to see me?" demanded Miss Lucretia.

"Miss Lucretia!"

"What are friends for?" asked Miss Lucretia, patting her hand. "If you had known how I wished to see you, Cynthia, and I thought a little trip would be good for such a provincial Bostonian as I am. Dear, dear, I remember this house. It used to belong to Gabriel Post in my time, and right across from it was the Social Library, where I have spent so many pleasant hours with your mother. And this is Ephraim Prescott. I thought it was, when I saw him sitting in the front row, and I think he must have been very lonesome there at one time."

"Yes, ma'am," said Ephraim, giving her his gnarled fingers; "I was just sayin' to Cynthy that I'd ruther shake your hand than anybody's livin' exceptin' General Grant."

"And I'd rather shake yours than the General's," said Miss Lucretia, for the Woman's Hour had taken the opposition side in a certain recent public question concerning women.

"If you'd a fit with him, you wouldn't say that, Miss Lucrety."

"I haven't a word to say against his fighting qualities," she replied.

"Guess the General might say the same of you," said Ephraim. "If you'd a b'en a man, I callate you'd a come out of the war with two stars on your shoulder. Godfrey, Miss Lucrety, you'd ought to've b'en a man."

"A man!" cried Miss Lucretia, "and 'stars on my shoulder'! I think this kind of talk has gone far enough, Ephraim Prescott."

"Cousin Eph," said Cynthia, laughing, "you're no match for Miss Lucretia, and it's long past your bedtime."

"A man!" repeated Miss Lucretia, after he had retired, and after Cynthia had tried to express her gratitude and had been silenced. They sat side by side in front of the chimney. "I suppose he meant that as a compliment. I never yet saw the man I couldn't back down, and I haven't any patience with a woman who gives in to them." Miss Lucretia poked vigorously a log which had fallen down, as though that were a man, too, and she was putting him back in his proper place.

Cynthia, strange to say, did not reply to this remark.

"Cynthia," said Miss Lucretia, abruptly, "you don't mean to say that you are in love!"

Cynthia drew a long breath, and grew as red as the embers.

"Miss Lucretia!" she exclaimed, in astonishment and dismay.

"Well," Miss Lucretia said, "I should have thought you could have gotten along, for a while at least, without anything of that kind. My dear," she said leaning toward Cynthia, "who is he?"

Cynthia turned away. She found it very hard to speak of her troubles, even to Miss Lucretia, and she would have kept this secret even from Jethro, had it been possible.

"You must let him know his place," said Miss Lucretia, "and I hope he is in some degree worthy of you."

"I do not intend to marry him," said Cynthia, with her head still turned away.

It was now Miss Lucretia who was silent.

"I came near getting married once," she said presently, with characteristic abruptness.

"You!" cried Cynthia, looking around in amazement. "You see, I am franker than you, my dear though I never told any one else. I believe you can keep a secret."

"Of course I can. Who was it any one in Brampton, Miss Lucretia?" The question was out before Cynthia realized its import. She was turning the tables with a vengeance.

"It was Ezra Graves," said Miss Lucretia.

"Ezra Graves!" And then Cynthia pressed Miss Lucretia's hand in silence, thinking how strange it was that both of them should have been her champions that evening.

Miss Lucretia poked the fire again.

"It was shortly after that, when I went to Boston, that I wrote the 'Hymn to Coniston.' I suppose we must all be fools once or twice, or we should not be human."

"And weren't you ever sorry?" asked Cynthia.

Again there was a silence.

"I could not have done the work I have had to do in the world if I had married. But I have often wondered whether that work was worth the while. Such a feeling must come over all workers, occasionally. Yes," said Miss Lucretia, "there have been times when I have been sorry, my dear, though I have never confessed it to another soul. I am telling you this for your own good not mine. If you have the love of a good man, Cynthia, be careful what you do with it."

The tears had come into Cynthia's eyes.

"I should have told you, Miss Lucretia," she faltered. "If I could have married him, it would have been easier."

"Why can't you marry him?" demanded Miss Lucretia, sharply to hide her own emotion.

"His name," said Cynthia, "is Bob Worthington."

"Isaac Worthington's son?"

"Yes."

Another silence, Miss Lucretia being utterly unable to say anything for a space.

"Is he a good man?"

Cynthia was on the point of indignant protest, but she stopped herself in time. "I will tell you what he has done," she answered, "and then you shall judge for yourself."

And she told Miss Lucretia, simply, all that Bob had done, and all that she herself had done.

"He is like his mother, Sarah Hollingsworth; I knew her well," said Miss Lucretia. "If Isaac Worthington were a man, he would be down on his knees begging you to marry his son. He tried hard enough to marry your own mother."

"My mother!" exclaimed Cynthia, who had never believed that rumor.

"Yes," said Miss Lucretia, "and you may thank your stars he didn't succeed. I mistrusted him when he was a young man, and now I know that he hasn't changed. He is a coward and a hypocrite."

Cynthia could not deny this.

"And yet," she said, after a moment's silence, "I am sure you will say that I have been right. My own conscience tells me that it is wrong to deprive Bob of his inheritance, and to separate him from his father, whatever his father may be."

"We shall see what happens in five years," said Miss Lucretia.

"Five years!" said Cynthia, in spite of herself.

"Jacob served seven for Rachel," answered Miss Lucretia; "that period is scarcely too short to test a man, and you are both young."

"No," said Cynthia, "I cannot marry him, Miss Lucretia. The world would accuse me of design, and I feel that I should not be happy. I am sure that he would never reproach me, even if things went wrong, but the day might come when when he would wish that it had been otherwise."

Miss Lucretia kissed her.

"You are very young, my dear," she repeated, "and none of us may say what changes time may bring forth. And now I must go."

Cynthia insisted upon walking with her friend down the street to the hotel an undertaking that was without danger in Brampton. And it was only a step, after all. A late moon floated in the sky, throwing in relief the shadow of the Worthington mansion against the white patches of snow. A light was still burning in the library.

The next morning after breakfast Miss Lucretia appeared at the little house, and informed Cynthia that she would walk to school with her.

"But I have not yet been notified by the Committee," said Cynthia. There was a knock at the door, and in walked Judge Ezra Graves. Miss Lucretia may have blushed, but it is certain that Cynthia did. Never had she seen the

judge so spick and span, and he wore the broadcloth coat he usually reserved for Sundays. He paused at the threshold, with his hand on his Adam's apple.

"Good morning, ladies," he said, and looked shyly at Miss Lucretia and cleared his throat, and spoke with the elaborate decorum he used on occasions, "Miss Penniman, I wish to thank you again for your noble action of last evening."

"Don't 'Miss Penniman' me, Ezra Graves," retorted Miss Lucretia; "the only noble action I know of was poor Jonathan Hill's unless it was paying for the gas."

This was the way in which Miss Lucretia treated her lover after thirty years! Cynthia thought of what the lady had said to her a few hours since, by this very fire, and began to believe she must have dreamed it. Fires look very differently at night and sometimes burn brighter then. The judge parted his coat tails, and seated himself on the wooden edge of a cane−bottomed chair.

"Lucretia," he said, "you haven't changed."

"You have, Ezra," she replied, looking at the Adam's apple.

"I'm an an old man," said Ezra Graves.

Cynthia could not help thinking that he was a very different man, in Miss Lucretia's presence, than when at the head of the prudential committee.

"Ezra," said Miss Lucretia, "for a man you do very well."

The judge smiled. "Thank you, Lucretia," said he. He seemed to appreciate the full extent of the compliment.

"Judge Graves," said Cynthia, "I can tell you how good you are, at least, and thank you for your great kindness to me, which I shall never forget."

She took his withered hands from his knees and pressed them. He returned the pressure, and then searched his coat tails, found a handkerchief, and blew his nose violently.

"I merely did my duty, Miss Wetherell," he said. "I would not willfully submit to a wrong."

"You called me 'Cynthia' yesterday."

"So I did," he answered, "so I did." Then he looked at Miss Lucretia.

"Ezra," said that lady, smiling a little, "I don't believe you have changed, after all."

What she meant by that nobody knows.

"I had thought, Cynthia," said the judge, "that it might be more comfortable for you to have me go to the school with you. That is the reason for my early call."

"Judge Graves, I do appreciate your kindness," said Cynthia; "I hope you won't think I'm rude if I say I'd rather go alone."

"On the contrary, my dear," replied the judge, "I think I can understand and esteem your feeling in the matter, and it shall be as you wish."

"Then I think I had better be going," said Cynthia. The judge rose in alarm at the words, but she put her hand on his shoulder. "Won't you sit down and stay," she begged, "you haven't seen Miss Lucretia for how many years, thirty, isn't it?"

Again he glanced at Miss Lucretia, uncertainly. "Sit down, Ezra," she commanded, "and for goodness' sake don't be afraid of the cane bottom. You won't go through it. I should like to talk to you, and most of the gossips of our day are dead. I shall stay in Brampton to−day, Cynthia, and eat supper with you here this evening."

Cynthia, as she went out of the door, wondered what they would talk about. Then she turned toward the school. It was not the March wind that burned her cheeks; as she thought of the mass meeting the night before, which was all about her, she wished she might go to school that morning through the woods and pasture lots rather than down Brampton Street. What what would Bob say when he heard of the meeting? Would he come again to Brampton? If he did, she would run away to Boston with Miss Lucretia. Every day it had been a trial to pass the Worthington house, but she could not cross the wide street to avoid it. She hurried a little, unconsciously, when she came to it, for there was Mr. Worthington on the steps talking to Mr. Flint. How he must hate her now, Cynthia reflected! He did not so much as look up when she passed.

The other citizens whom she met made up for Mr. Worthington's coldness, and gave her a hearty greeting, and some stopped to offer their congratulations. Cynthia did not pause to philosophize: she was learning to accept the world as it was, and hurried swiftly on to the little schoolhouse. The children saw her coming, and ran to meet her and escorted her triumphantly in at the door. Of their welcome she could he sure. Thus she became again teacher of the lower school.

How the judge and Miss Lucretia got along that morning, Cynthia never knew. Miss Lucretia spent the day in her old home, submitting to hero−worship, and attended an evening party in her honor at Mr. Gamaliel Ives's house a mansion not so large as the first citizen's, though it had two bay−windows and was not altogether unimposing. The first citizen, needless to say, was not there, but the rest of the élite attended. Mr. Ives will tell you all about the entertainment if you go to Brampton, but the real reason Miss Lucretia consented to go was to please Lucy Baird, who was Gamaliel's wife, and to chat with certain old friends whom she had not seen. The next morning she called at the school to bid Cynthia good−by, and to whisper something in her ear which made her very red before all the scholars. She shook her head when Miss Lucretia said it, for it had to do with an incident in the 29th chapter of Genesis.

While Jonathan Hill was being made a hero of in the little two−by−four office of the feed store the morning after the mass meeting (though nobody offered to take over his mortgage), Mr. Dodd was complaining to his wife of shooting pains, and "callated" he would stay at home that day.

"Shootin' fiddlesticks!" said Mrs. Dodd. "Get along down to the store and face the music, Levi Dodd. You'd have had shootin' pains if you'd a went to the meetin'."

"I might stop by at Mr. Worthington's house and explain how powerless I was −"

"For goodness sake git out, Levi. I guess he knows how powerless you are with your shootin' pains. If you only could forget Isaac D. Worthington for three minutes, you wouldn't have 'em."

Mr. Dodd's two clerks saw him enter the store by the back door, and he was very much interested in the new ploughs which were piled up in crates outside of it. Then he disappeared into his office and shut the door, and supposedly became very much absorbed in book−keeping. If any one called, he was out any one. Plenty of

people did call, but he was not disturbed until ten o'clock. Mr. Dodd had a very sensitive ear, and he could often recognize a man by his step, and this man he recognized.

"Where's Mr. Dodd?" demanded the owner of the step, indignantly.

"He's out, Mr. Worthington. Anything I can do for you, Mr. Worthington?"

"You can tell him to come up to my house the moment he comes in."

Unfortunately Mr. Dodd in the office had got into a strained position. He found it necessary to move a little; the day−book fell heavily to the floor, and the perspiration popped out all over his forehead. Come out, Levi Dodd. The Bastille is taken, but there are other fortresses still in the royal hands where you may be confined.

"Who's in the office?"

"I don't know, sir," answered the clerk, winking at his companion, who was sorting nails. In three strides the great man had his hand on the office door and had flung it open, disclosing the culprit cowering over the day−book on the floor.

"Mr. Dodd," cried the first citizen, "what do you mean by −?"

Some natures, when terrified, are struck dumb. Mr. Dodd's was the kind which bursts into speech.

"I couldn't help it, Mr. Worthington," he cried, "they would have it. I don't know what got into 'em. They lost their senses, Mr. Worthington, plumb lost their senses. If you'd a b'en there, you might have brought 'em to. I tried to git the floor, but Ezry Graves −"

"Confound Ezra Graves, and wait till I have done, can't you," interrupted the first citizen, angrily. "What do you mean by putting a bath−tub into my house with the tin loose, so that I cut my leg on it?"

Mr. Dodd nearly fainted from sheer relief.

"I'll put a new one in to−day, right now," he gasped.

"See that you do," said the first citizen, "and if I lose my leg, I'll sue you for a hundred thousand dollars."

"I was a−goin' to explain about them losin' their heads at the mass meetin' −"

"Damn their heads!" said the first citizen. "And yours, too," he may have added under his breath as he stalked out. It was not worth a swing of the executioner's axe in these times of war. News had arrived from the state capital that morning of which Mr. Dodd knew nothing. Certain feudal chiefs from the North Country, of whose allegiance Mr. Worthington had felt sure, had obeyed the summons of their old sovereign, Jethro Bass, and had come South to hold a conclave under him at the Pelican. Those chiefs of the North Country, with their clans behind them as one man, what a power they were in the state! What magnificent qualities they had, in battle or strategy, and how cunning and shrewd was their generalship! Year after year they came down from their mountains and fought shoulder to shoulder, and year after year they carried back the lion's share of the spoils between them. The great South, as a whole, was powerless to resist them, for there could be no lasting alliance between Harwich and Brampton and Newcastle and Gosport. Now their king had come back, and the North Country men were rallying again to his standard. No wonder that Levi Dodd's head, poor thing that it was, was safe for a while.

"Organize what you have left, and be quick about it," said Mr. Flint, when the news had come, and they sat in the library planning a new campaign in the face of this evident defection. There was no time to cry over spilt milk or reinstated school−teachers. The messages flew far and wide to the manufacturing towns to range their guilds into line for the railroads. The seneschal wrote the messages, and sent the summons to the sleek men of the cities, and let it be known that the coffers were full and not too tightly sealed, that the faithful should not lack for the sinews of war. Mr. Flint found time, too, to write some carefully worded but nevertheless convincing articles for the Newcastle Guardian, very damaging to certain commanders who had proved unfaithful.

"Flint," said Mr. Worthington, when they had worked far into the night, "if Bass beats us, I'm a crippled man."

"And if you postpone the fight now that you have begun it? What then?"

The answer, Mr. Worthington knew, was the same either way. He did not repeat it. He went to his bed, but not to sleep for many hours, and when he came down to his breakfast in the morning, he was in no mood to read the letter from Cambridge which Mrs. Holden had put on his plate. But he did read it, with what anger and bitterness may be imagined. There was the ultimatum, respectful, even affectionate, but firm. "I know that you will, in all probability, disinherit me as you say, and I tell you honestly that I regret the necessity of quarrelling with you more than I do the money. I do not pretend to say that I despise money, and I like the things that it buys, but the woman I love is more to me than all that you have."

Mr. Worthington laid the letter down, and there came irresistibly to his mind something that his wife had said to him before she died, shortly after they had moved into the mansion. "Dudley, how happy we used to be together before we were rich!" Money had not been everything to Sarah Worthington, either. But now no tender wave of feeling swept over him as he recalled those words. He was thinking of what weapon he had to prevent the marriage beyond that which was now useless disinheritance. He would disinherit Bob, and that very day. He would punish his son to the utmost of his power for marrying the ward of Jethro Bass. He wondered bitterly, in case a certain event occurred, whether he would have much to alienate.

When Mr. Flint arrived, fresh as usual in spite of the work he had accomplished and the cigars he had smoked the night before, Mr. Worthington still had the letter in his hand, and was pacing his library floor, and broke into a tirade against his son.

"After all I have done for him, building up for him a position and a fortune that is only surpassed by young Duncan's, to treat me in this way, to drag down the name of Worthington in the mire. I'll never forgive him. I'll send for Dixon and leave the money for a hospital in Brampton. Can't you suggest any way out of this, Flint?"

"No," said Flint, "not now. The only chance you have is to ignore the thing from now on. He may get tired of her I've known such things to happen."

"When she hears that I've disinherited him, she will get tired of him," declared Mr. Worthington.

"Try it and see, if you like," said Flint.

"Look here, Flint, if the woman has a spark of decent feeling, as you seem to think, I'll send for her and tell her that she will ruin Robert if she marries him." Mr. Worthington always spoke of his son as "Robert."

"You ought to have thought of that before the mass meeting. Perhaps it would have done some good then."

"Because this Penniman woman has stirred people up is that what you mean? I don't care anything about that. Money counts in the long run." "If money counted with this school−teacher, it would be a simple matter. I think you'll find it doesn't."

"I've known you to make some serious mistakes," snapped Mr. Worthington.

"Then why do you ask for my advice?"

"I'll send for her, and appeal to her better nature," said Mr. Worthington, with an unconscious and sublime irony.

Flint gave no sign that he heard. Mr. Worthington seated himself at his desk, and after some thought wrote on a piece of note−paper the following lines: "My dear Miss Wetherell, I should be greatly obliged if you would find it convenient to call at my house at eight o'clock this evening," and signed them, "Sincerely Yours." He sealed them up in an envelope and addressed it to Miss Wetherell, at the schoolhouse, and handed it to Mr. Flint. That gentleman got as far as the door, and then he hesitated and turned.

"There is just one way out of this for you, that I can see, Mr. Worthington," he said. "It's a desperate measure, but it's worth thinking about."

"What's that?"

It took some courage, even for Mr. Flint, to make the suggestion.

"The girl's a good girl, well educated, and by no means bad looking. Bob might do a thousand times worse. Give your consent to the marriage, and Jethro Bass will go back to Coniston."

It was wisdom such as few lords get from their seneschals, but Isaac D. Worthington did not so recognize it. His anger rose and took away his breath as he listened to it.

"I will never give my consent to it, never do you hear? never. Send that note!" he cried.

Mr. Flint walked out, sent the note, and returned and took his place silently at his own table. He was a man of concentration, and he put his mind on the arguments he was composing to certain political leaders. Mr. Worthington merely pretended to work as he waited for the answer to come back. And presently, when it did come back, he tore it open and read it with an expression not often on his lips. He flung the paper at Mr. Flint.

"Read that," he said.

This is what Mr. Flint read: "Miss Wetherell begs to inform Mr. Isaac D. Worthington that she can have no communication or intercourse with him whatsoever."

Mr. Flint handed it back without a word. His opinion of the school−teacher had risen mightily, but he did not say so. Mr. Worthington took the note, too, without a word. Speech was beyond him, and he crushed the paper as fiercely as he would have liked to have crushed Cynthia, had she been in his hands.

One accomplishment which Cynthia had learned at Miss Sadler's school was to write a letter in the third person, Miss Sadler holding that there were occasions when it was beneath a lady's dignity to write a direct note. And Cynthia, sitting at her little desk in the schoolhouse during her recess, had deemed this one of the occasions. She could not bring herself to write, "My dear Mr. Worthington." Her anger, when the note had been handed to her, was for the moment so great that she could not go on with her classes; but she had controlled it, and compelled Silas to stand in the entry until recess, when she sat with her pen in her hand until that happy notion of the third person occurred to her. And after Silas had gone she sat still, though trembling a little at intervals, picturing with some satisfaction Mr. Worthington's appearance when be received her answer. Her instinct told her that he had received his son's letter, and that he had sent for her to insult her. By sending for her, indeed, he had insulted her irrevocably, and that is why she trembled.

Poor Cynthia! her troubles came thick and fast upon her in those days. When she reached home, there was the letter which Ephraim had left on the table addressed in the familiar, upright handwriting, and when Cynthia saw it, she caught her hand sharply at her breast, as if the pain there had stopped the beating of her heart. Well it was for Bob's peace of mind that he could not see her as she read it, and before she had come to the end there were drops on the sheets where the purple ink had run. How precious would have been those drops to him! He would never give her up. No mandate or decree could separate them nothing but death. And he was happier now so he told her than he had been for months: happy in the thought that he was going out into the world to win bread for her, as became a man. Even if he had not her to strive for, he saw now that such was the only course for him. He could not conform.

It was a manly letter, how manly Bob himself never knew. But Cynthia knew, and she wept over it and even pressed it to her lips for there was no one to see. Yes, she loved him as she would not have believed it possible to love, and she sat through the afternoon reading his words and repeating them until it seemed that he were there by her side, speaking them. They came, untrammelled and undefiled, from his heart into hers.

And now that he had quarrelled with his father for her sake, and was bent with all the determination of his character upon making his own way in the world, what was she to do? What was her duty? Not one letter of the twoscore she had received (so she kept their count from day to day) not one had she answered. His faith had indeed been great. But she must answer this: must write, too, on that subject of her dismissal, lest it should be wrongly told him. He was rash in his anger, and fearless; this she knew, and loved him for such qualities as he had.

She must stay in Brampton and do her work, so much was clearly her duty, although she longed to flee from it. And at last she sat down and wrote to him. Some things are too sacred to be set forth on a printed page, and this letter is one of those things. Try as she would, she could not find it in her heart at such a time to destroy his hope, − or her own. The hope which she would not acknowledge, and the love which she strove to conceal from him seeped up between the words of her letter like water through grains of sand. Words, indeed, are but as grains of sand to conceal strong feelings, and as Cynthia read the letter over she felt that every line betrayed her, and knew that she could compose no lines which would not.

She said nothing of the summons which she had received that morning, or of her answer; and her account of the matter of the dismissal and reinstatement was brief and dignified, and contained no mention of Mr. Worthington's name or agency. It was her duty, too, to rebuke Bob for the quarrel with his father, to point out the folly of it, and the wrong, and to urge him as strongly as she could to retract, though she felt that all this was useless. And then then came the betrayal of hope. She could not ask him never to see her again, but she did beseech him for her sake, and for the sake of that love which he had declared, not to attempt to see her: not for a year, she wrote, though the word looked to her like eternity. Her reasons, aside from her own scruples, were so obvious, while she taught in Brampton, that she felt that he would consent to banishment until the summer holidays in July, at least: and then she would be in Coniston, and would have had time to decide upon future steps. A reprieve was all she craved, a reprieve in which to reflect, for she was in no condition to reflect now. Of one thing she was sure, that it would not be right at this time to encourage him although she had a guilty feeling that the letter had given him encouragement in spite of all the prohibitions it contained. "If, in the future years," thought Cynthia, as she sealed the envelope, "he persists in his determination, what then?" You, Miss Lucretia, of all people in the world, have planted the seeds with your talk about Genesis!

The letter was signed "One who will always remain your friend, Cynthia Wetherell." And she posted it herself.

When Ephraim came home to supper that evening, he brought the Brampton Clarion, just out, and in it was an account of Miss Lucretia Penniman's speech at the mass meeting, and of her visit, and of her career. It was written in Mr. Page's best vein, and so laudatory was it that we shall have to spare Miss Lucretia in not repeating it here: yes, and omit the encomiums, too, on the teacher of the Brampton lower school. Mr. Worthington was not

mentioned, and for this, at least, Cynthia drew a long breath of relief, though Ephraim was of the opinion that the first citizen should have been scored as he deserved, and held up to the contempt of his fellow−townsmen. The dismissal of the teacher, indeed, was put down to a regrettable misconception on the part of "one of the prudential committee," who had confessed his mistake in "a manly and altogether praiseworthy speech." The article was as near the truth, perhaps, as the Clarions may come on such matters which is not very near. Cynthia would have been better pleased if Mr. Page had spared his readers the recital of her qualities, and she did not in the least recognize the paragon whom Miss Lucretia had befriended and defended. She was thankful that Mr. Page did not state that the celebrity had come up from Boston on her account. Miss Penniman had been "actuated by a sudden desire to see once more the beauties of her old home, to look into the faces of the old friends who had followed her career with such pardonable pride." The speech of the president of the literary club, you may be sure, was printed in full, for Mr. Ives himself had taken the trouble to write it out for the editor by request, of course.

Cynthia turned over the sheet, and read many interesting items: one concerning the beauty and fashion and intellect which attended the party at Mr. Gamaliel Ives's; in the Clovelly notes she saw that Miss Judy Hatch, of Coniston, was visiting relatives there; she learned the output of the Worthington Mills for the past week. Cynthia was about to fold up the paper and send it to Miss Lucretia, whom she thought it would amuse, when her eyes were arrested by the sight of a familiar name.

"Jethro Bass come to life again. From the State Tribune."

That was the heading. "One of the greatest political surprises in many years was the arrival in the capital on Wednesday of Judge Bass, whom it was thought had permanently retired from politics. This, at least, seems to have been the confident belief of a faction in the state who have at heart the consolidation of certain lines of railroads. Judge Bass was found by a Tribune reporter in the familiar 'Throne Room' at the Pelican, but, as usual, he could not be induced to talk for publication. He was in conference throughout the afternoon with several well−known leaders from the North Country. The return of Jethro Bass to activity seriously complicates the railroad situation, and many prominent politicians are freely predicting to−night that, in spite of the town−meeting returns, the proposed bill for consolidation will not go through. Judge Bass is a man of such remarkable personality that he has regained at a stroke much of the influence that he lost by the sudden and unaccountable retirement which electrified the state some months since. His reappearance, the news of which was the one topic in all political centres yesterday, is equally unaccountable. It is hinted that some action on the part of Isaac D. Worthington has brough Jethro Bass to life. They are known to be bitter enemies, and it is said that Jethro Bass has but one object in returning to the field to crush the president of the Truro Railroad. Another theory is that the railroads and interests opposed to the consolidation have induced Judge Bass to take charge of their fight for them. All indications point to the fiercest struggle the state has ever seen in June, when the Legislature meets. The Tribune, whose sentiments are well known to be opposed to the iniquity of consolidation, extends a hearty welcome to the judge. No state, we believe, can claim a party leader of a higher order of ability than Jethro Bass."

Cynthia dropped the paper in her lap, and sat very still. This, then, was what happened when Jethro had heard of her dismissal he had left Coniston without writing her a word and passed through Brampton without seeing her. He had gone back to that life which he had abandoned for her sake; the temptation had been too strong, the desire for vengeance too great. He had not dared to see her. And yet the love for her which had been strong enough to make him renounce the homage of men, and even incur their ridicule, had incited him to this very act of vengeance.

What should she do now, indeed? Had those peaceful and happy Saturdays and Sundays in Coniston passed away forever? Should she follow him to the capital and appeal to him? Ah no, she felt that were a useless pain to them both. She believed, now, that he had gone away from her for all time, that the veil of limitless space was set between them. Silently she arose, so silently that Ephraim, dozing by the fire, did not awake. She went into her own room and wept, and after many hours fell into a dreamless sleep of sheer exhaustion.

The days passed, and the weeks; the snow ran from the brown fields, and melted at length even in the moist crotches under the hemlocks of the northern slopes; the robin and bluebird came, the hillsides were mottled with exquisite shades of green, and the scent of fruit blossom and balm of Gilead was in the air. June came as a maiden and grew into womanhood. But Jethro Bass did not return to Coniston.

CHAPTER XVII. WHEN THE PIE WAS OPENED

THE legends which surround the famous war which we are about to touch upon are as dim as those of Troy or Tuscany. Decorous chronicles and biographies and monographs and eulogies exist, bound in leather and stamped in gold, each lauding its own hero: chronicles written in really beautiful language, and high−minded and noble, out of which the heroes come unstained. Horatius holds the bridge, and not a dent in his armor; and swims the Tiber without getting wet or muddy. Castor and Pollux fight in the front rank at Lake Regillus, in the midst of all that gore and slaughter, and emerge all white and pure at the end of the day but they are gods.

Out of the classic wars to which we have referred sprang the great Roman Republic and Empire, and legend runs into authentic and written history. Just so, parva componere magnis, out of the cloud−wrapped conflicts of the five railroads of which our own Gaul is composed, emerged one imperial railroad, authentically and legally written down on the statute books, for all men to see. We cannot go behind that statute except to collect the legends and write homilies about the heroes who held the bridges.

If we were not in mortal terror of the imperial power, and a little fearful, too, of tiring our readers, we would write out all the legends we have collected of this first fight for consolidation, and show the blood, too.

In the statute books of a certain state may be found a number of laws setting forth the various things that a railroad or railroads may do, and on the margin of these pages is invariably printed a date, that being the particular year in which these laws were passed. By a singular coincidence it is the very year at which we have now arrived in our story. We do not intend to give a map of the state, or discuss the merits or demerits of the consolidation of the Central and the Northwestern and the Truro railroads. Such discussions are not the province of a novelist, and may all be found in the files of the Tribune at the State Library. There were, likewise, decisions without number handed down by the various courts before and after that celebrated session, opinions on the validity of leases, on the extension of railroads, on the rights of individual stockholders all dry reading enough.

At the risk of being picked to pieces by the corporation lawyers who may read these pages, we shall attempt to state the situation and with all modesty and impartiality for we, at least, hold no brief. When Mr. Isaac D. Worthington obtained that extension of the Truro Railroad (which we have read about from the somewhat verdant point of view of William Wetherell), that railroad then formed a connection with another road which ran northward from Harwich through another state, and with which we have nothing to do. Having previously purchased a line to the southward from the capital, Mr. Worthington's railroad was in a position to compete with Mr. Duncan's (the "Central") for Canadian traffic, and also to cut into the profits of the "Northwestern," Mr. Lovejoy's road. In brief, the Truro Railroad found itself very advantageously placed, as Mr. Worthington and Mr. Flint had foreseen. There followed a period of bickering and recrimination, of attempts of the other two railroads to secure representation in the Truro directorate, of suits and injunctions and appeals to the Legislature and I know not what else in all of which affairs Mr. Bijah Bixby and other gentlemen we could name found both pleasure and remuneration.

Oh, that those halcyon days of the little wars would come again, when a captain could ride out almost any time at the head of his band of mercenaries and see honest fighting and divide honest spoils! There was much knocking about of men and horses, but very little bloodshed, so we are told. Mr. Bixby will sit on the sunny side of his barns in Clovelly and tell you stories of that golden period with tears in his eyes, when he went to conventions with a pocketful of proxies from the river towns, and controlled in the greatest legislative year of all a "block"

which included the President of the Senate, for which he got the fabulous sum of −−. He will tell you, but I won't. Mr. Bixby's occupation is gone now. We have changed all that, and we are ruled from imperial Rome. If you don't do right, they cut off your (political) head, and it is of no use to run away, because there is no one to run to.

It was Isaac D. Worthington or shall we say Mr. Flint? who was responsible for this pernicious change for the worse, who conceived the notion of leasing for the Truro the Central and the Northwestern, thus making one railroad out of the three. If such a gigantic undertaking could be got through, Mr. Worthington very rightly deemed that the other railroads of the state would eventually fall like ripe fruit into their caps owning the ground under the tree, as they would. A movement, which we need not go into, was first made upon the courts, and for a while adverse decisions came down like summer rain. A genius by the name of Jethro Bass had for many years presided (in the room of the governor and council at the State House) at the political birth of justices of the Supreme Court. None of them actually wore livery, but we have seen one of them a long time ago in a horse blanket. None of them were favorable to the plans of Mr. Worthington and Mr. Duncan.

We have listened to the firing on the skirmish lines for a long time, and now the real battle is at hand. It is June, and the Legislature is meeting, and Bijah Bixby has come down to the capital at the head of his regiment of mercenaries, of which Mr. Sutton is the honorary colonel; the clans are here from the north, well quartered and well fed; the Throne Room, within the sacred precincts of which we have been before, is occupied. But there is another headquarters now, too, in the Pelican House a Railroad Room; larger than the Throne Room, with a bath−room leading out of it. Another old friend of ours, Judge Abner Parkinson of Harwich, he who gave the sardonic laugh when Sam Price applied for the post of road agent, may often be seen in that Railroad Room from now on. The fact is that the judge is about to become famous far beyond the confines of Harwich; for he, and none other, is the author of the Consolidation Bill itself.

Mr. Flint is the generalissimo of the allied railroads, and sits in his headquarters early and late, going over the details of the campaign with his lieutenants; scanning the clauses of the bill with Judge Parkinson for the last time, and giving orders to the captains of mercenaries as to the disposition of their forces; writing out passes for the deserving and the true. For these latter, also, and for the wavering there is a claw−hammer on the marble−topped mantel wielded by Mr. Bijah Bixby, pro tem chief of staff or of the hammer, for he is self−appointed and very useful. He opens the mysterious packing cases which come up to the Railroad Room thrice a week, and there is water to be had in the bath−room and glasses. Mr. Bixby also finds time to do some of the scouting about the rotunda and lobbies, for which he is justly celebrated, and to drill his regiment every day. The Honorable Heth Sutton, M.C., who held the bridge in the Woodchuck Session, is there also, sitting in a corner, swelled with importance, smoking big Florizel cigars which come from somewhere. There are, indeed, many great and battle−scarred veterans who congregate in that room too numerous and great to mention; and saunterers in the Capitol Park opposite know when a council of war is being held by the volumes of smoke which pour out of the window, just as the Romans are made cognizant by the smoking of a chimney of when another notable event takes place.

Who, then, are left to frequent the Throne Room? Is that ancient seat of power deserted, and does Jethro Bass sit there alone behind the curtains, in his bitterness, thinking of other bright June days that are gone?

Of all those who had been amazed when Jethro Bass suddenly emerged from his retirement and appeared in the capital some months before, none were more thunder−struck than certain gentlemen who had been to Coniston repeatedly, but in vain, to urge him to make this very fight. The most important of there had been Mr. Balch, president of the "Down East" Road, and the representatives of two railroads of another state. They had at last offered Jethro fabulous sums to take charge of their armies in the field sums, at least, that would seem fabulous to many people, and had seemed so to them. When they heard that the lion had roused and shaken himself and had unaccountably come forth of his own accord, they hastened to the state capital to renew their offers. Another shock, but of a different kind, was in store for them. Mr. Balch had not actually driven the pack−mules, laden with treasure, to the door of the Pelican House, where Jethro might see them from his window; but he requested a

private audience, and it was probably accidental that the end of his personal check−book protruded a little from his pocket. He was a big, coarse−grained man, Mr. Balch, who had once been a brakeman, and had risen by what is known as horse sense to the presidency of his road. There was a wonderful sunset beyond the Capitol, but Mr. Balch did not talk about the sunset, although Jethro was watching it from behind the curtains.

"If you are willing to undertake this fight against consolidation," said Mr. Balch, "we are ready to talk business with you."

"D−don't know what you're going to do," answered Jethro; "I'm going to prevent consolidation, if I can."

"All right," said Balch, smiling. He regarded this reply as one of Jethro's delicate euphemisms. "We're prepared to give that same little retainer."

Jethro did not look up. Mr. Balch went to the table and seized a pen and filled out a check for an amount that shall be nameless.

"I have made it payable to bearer, as usual," he said, and he handed it to Jethro.

Jethro took it, and absently tore it into little pieces, and threw the pieces on the floor. Mr. Balch watched him in consternation. He began to think the report that Jethro had reached his second childhood was true.

"What in Halifax are you doing, Bass?" he cried.

"W−want to stop this consolidation, don't you want to stop it?"

"Certainly I do."

"G−goin' to do all you can to stop it hain't you?"

"Certainly I am."

"I−I'll help you," said Jethro.

"Help us!" exclaimed Balch. "Great Scott, we want you to take charge of it."

"I−I'll do all I can, but I won't guarantee it w−won't guarantee it," said Jethro.

"We don't ask you to guarantee it. If you'll do all you can, that's enough. You won't take a retainer?"

"W−won't take anything," said Jethro.

"You mean to say you don't want anything for your for your time and your services if the bill is defeated?"

"T−that's about it, Ed. Little p−private matter with both of us. You don't want consolidation, and I don't. I hain't offered to give you a retainer have I?"

"No," said the astounded Mr. Balch. He scratched his head and fingered the leaves of his check−book. The captains over the tens and the captains over the hundreds would want little retainers and who was to pay these? "How about the boys?" asked Mr. Balch.

"S−still got the same office in the depot hain't you, Ed, same office?"

"Yes."

"G−guess the boys hev b'en there before," said Jethro.

Mr. Balch went away, meditating upon those sayings, and took the train for Boston. If he had waked up of a fine morning to find himself at the head of some benevolent and charitable organization, instead of the "Down East" Railroad, he could not have been more astonished than he had been at the unaccountable change of heart of Jethro Bass. He did not know what to make of it, and told his colleagues so; and at first they feared one of two things, treachery or lunacy. But a little later a rumor reached Mr. Balch's ear that Jethro's hatred of Isaac D. Worthington was at the bottom of his reappearance in public life, although Jethro himself never mentioned Mr. Worthington's name. Jethro sat in the Throne Room, consulting, directing day after day, and when the Legislature assembled, "the boys" began to call at Mr. Balch's office. But Mr. Balch never again broached the subject of money to Jethro Bass.

We have to sing the song of sixpence for the last time in these pages; and as it is an old song now, there will be no encores. If you can buy one member of the lower house for ten dollars, how many members can you buy for fifty? It was no such problem in primary arithmetic that Mr. Balch and his associates had to solve theirs was in higher mathematics, in permutations and combinations, and in least squares. No wonder the old campaigners speak with tears in their eyes of the days of that ever memorable summer. There were spoils to be picked up in the very streets richer than the sack of the thirty cities; and as the session wore on it is affirmed by men still living that money rained down in the Capitol Park and elsewhere like manna from the skies, if you were one of a chosen band. If you were, all you had to do was to look in your vest pockets when you took your clothes off in the evening and extract enough legal tender to pay your bill at the Pelican for a week. Mr. Lovejoy having been overheard one day to make a remark concerning the diet of hogs, the next morning certain visitors to the capital were horrified to discover trails of corn leading from the Pelican House to their doorways. Men who had never seen a receiving teller opened bank accounts. No, it was not a problem in simple arithmetic, and Mr. Balch and Mr. Flint, and even Mr. Duncan and Mr. Worthington, covered whole sheets with figures during the stifling days in July. Some men are so valuable that they can be bought twice, or even three times, and they make figuring complicated.

Jethro Bass did no calculating. He sat behind the curtains, and he must have kept the figures in his head.

The battle had closed in earnest, and for twelve long, sultry weeks it raged with unabated fierceness. Consolidation had a terror for the rural mind, and the state Tribune skilfully played its stream upon the constituents of those gentlemen who stood tamely at the Worthington hitching−posts, and the constituents flocked to the capital; that able newspaper, too, found space to return, with interest, the attacks of Mr. Worthington's organ, the Newcastle Guardian. These amenities are much too personal to reproduce here, now that the smoke of battle has rolled away. An epic could be written upon the conflict, if there were space: Canto One, the first position carried triumphantly, though at some expense, by the Worthington forces, who elect the Speaker. That had been a crucial time before the town meetings, when Jethro abdicated. The Worthington Speaker goes ahead with his committees, and it is needless to say that Mr. Chauncey Weed is not made Chairman of the Committee on Corporations. As an offset to this, the Jethro forces gain on the extreme right, where the Honorable Peleg Hartington is made President of the Senate, etc.

For twelve hot weeks, with a public spirit which is worthy of the highest praise, the Committee sit in their shirt sleeves all day long and listen to arguments for and against consolidation; and ask learned questions that startle rural witnesses; and smoke big Florizel cigars (a majority of them). Judge Abner Parkinson defends his bill, quoting from the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and the Bible; a celebrated lawyer from the capital riddles it, using the same authorities, and citing the Federalist and the Golden Rule in addition. The Committee sit open−minded, listening with laudable impartiality; it does not become them to arrive at a hasty decision on a question of such magnitude. In the meantime the House passes an important bill dealing with the

bounty on hedgehogs, and there are several card games going on in the cellar, where it is cool.

The governor of the state is a free lance, and may be seen any afternoon walking through the park, consorting with no one. He may be recognized even at a distance by his portly figure, his silk hat, and his dignified mien. Yes, it is an old and valued friend, the Honorable Alva Hopkins, patron of the drama, and sometimes he has a beautiful young woman (still unattached) by his side. He lives in a suite of rooms at the Pelican. It is a well−known fact (among Mr. Worthington's supporters) that the Honorable Alva promised in January, when Mr. Bass retired, to sign the Consolidation Bill, and that he suddenly became open−minded in March, and has remained open−minded ever since, listening gravely to arguments, and giving much study to the subject. He is an executive now, although it is the last year of his term, and of course he is never seen either in the Throne Room or the Railroad Room. And besides, he may become a senator.

August has come, and the forces are spent and panting, and neither side dares to risk the final charge. The reputation of Jethro Bass is at stake. Should he risk and lose, he must go back to Coniston a beaten man, subject to the contempt of his neighbors and his state. People do not know that he has nothing now to go back to, and that he cares nothing for contempt. As he sits in his window day after day he has only one thought and one wish, to ruin Isaac D. Worthington. And he will do it if he can. Those who know and among them is Mr. Balch himself say that Jethro has never conducted a more masterly campaign than this, and that all the others have been mere childish trials of strength compared to it. So he sits there through those twelve weeks while the session slips by, while his opponents grumble, and while even his supporters, eager for the charge, complain. The truth is that in all the years of his activity he has never had such an antagonist as Mr. Flint. Victory hangs in the balance, and a false move will throw it to either side.

Victory hangs now, to be explicit, upon two factors. The first and most immediate of these is a certain canny captain of many wars whose regiment is still at the disposal of either army for a price, a regiment which has hitherto remained strictly neutral. And what a regiment it is! A block of river towns and a senator, and not a casualty since they marched boldly into camp twelve weeks ago. Mr. Balch is getting very much worried about this regiment, and beginning to doubt Jethro's judgment.

"I tell you, Bass," he said one evening, "if you allow him to run around loose much longer, we're lost, that's all there is to it!" (Mr. Balch referred to the captain in question.) "They'll buy up his block at his figure see if they don't. They're getting desperate. Don't you think I'd better bid him in?"

"B−bid him in if you've a mind to, Ed."

"Look here, Jethro," said Mr. Balch, savagely biting off the end of a cigar, "I'm beginning to think you don't care a continental about this business. Which side are you on, anyway?" The heat and the length and the uncertainty of the struggle were telling on the nerves of the railroad president. "You sit there from morning till night and won't say anything; and now, when there's only one block out, you won't give the word to buy it."

"N−never told you to buy anything, did I Ed?"

"No," answered Mr. Balch, "you haven't. I don't know what the devil's got into you."

"D−done all the payin' without consultin' me, hain't you, Ed?"

"Yes, I have. What are you driving at?"

"D−done it if I hadn't b'en here, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, and more too," said Mr. Balch.

"W−wouldn't make much difference to you if I wasn't here would it?"

"Great Scott, Jethro, what do you mean?" cried the railroad president, in genuine alarm; "you're not going to pull out, are you?" "W−wouldn't make much odds if I did would it, Ed?"

"The devil it wouldn't!" exclaimed Mr. Balch. "If you pulled out, we'd lose the North Country, and Peleg, and Gosport, and nobody can tell which way Alva Hopkins will swing. I guess you know what he'll do − you're so d−d secretive I can't tell whether you do or not. If you pulled out, they'd have their bill on Friday."

"H−hain't under any obligations to you, Ed am I?"

"No," said Mr. Balch, "but I don't see why you keep harping on that."

"J−just wanted to have it clear," said Jethro, and relapsed into silence.

There was a fireproof carpet on the Throne Room, and Mr. Balch flung down his cigar and stamped on it and went out. No wonder he could not understand Jethro's sudden scruples about money and obligations about railroad money, that is. Jethro was spending some of his own, but not in the capital, and in a manner which was most effective. In short, at the very moment when Mr. Balch stamped on his cigar, Jethro had the victory in his hands only he did not choose to say so. He had had a mysterious telegram that day from Harwich, signed by Chauncey Weed, and Mr. Weed himself appeared at the door of Number 7, fresh from his travels, shortly after Mr. Balch had gone out of it. Mr. Weed closed the door gently, and locked it, and sat down in a rocking chair close to Jethro and put his hand over his mouth. We cannot hear what Mr. Weed is saying. All is mystery here, and in order to preserve that mystery we shall delay for a little the few words which will explain Mr. Weed's successful mission.

Mr. Balch, angry and bewildered, descended into the rotunda, where he shortly heard two astounding pieces of news. The first was that the Honorable Heth Sutton had abandoned the Florizel cigars and had gone home to Clovelly. The second, that Mr. Bijah Bixby had resigned the claw−hammer and had ceased to open the packing cases in the Railroad Room. Consternation reigned in that room, so it was said (and this was true). Mr. Worthington and Mr. Duncan and Mr. Lovejoy were closeted there with Mr. Flint, and the door was locked and the transom shut, and smoke was coming out of the windows.

Yes, Mr. Bijah Bixby is the canny captain of whom Mr. Balch spoke: he it is who owns that block of river towns, intact, and the one senator. Impossible! We have seen him opening the packing cases, we have seen him working for the Worthington faction for the last two years. Mr. Bixby was very willing to open boxes, and to make himself useful and agreeable; but it must be remembered that a good captain of mercenaries owes a sacred duty to his followers. At first Mr. Flint had thought he could count on Mr. Bixby; after a while he made several unsuccessful attempts to talk business with him; a particularly difficult thing to do, even for Mr. Flint, when Mr. Bixby did not wish to talk business. Mr. Balch had found it quite as difficult to entice Mr. Bixby away from the boxes and the Railroad room. The weeks drifted on, until twelve went by, and then Mr. Bixby found himself, with his block of river towns and one senator, in the incomparable position of being the arbiter of the fate of the Consolidation Bill in the House and Senate. No wonder Mr. Balch wanted to buy the services of that famous regiment at any price!

But Mr. Bixby, for once in his life, had waited too long.

When Mr. Balch, rejoicing, but not a little indignant at not having been taken into confidence, ascended to the Throne Room after supper to question Jethro concerning the meaning of the things he had heard, he found Senator Peleg Hartington seated mournfully on the bed, talking at intervals, and Jethro listening.

"Come up and eat out of my hand," said the senator.

"Who?" demanded Mr. Balch.

"Bije," answered the senator.

"Great Scott, do you mean to say you've got Bixby?" exclaimed the railroad president. He felt as if he would like to shake the senator, who was so deliberate and mournful in his answers. "What did you pay him?" Mr. Hartington appeared shocked by the question.

"Guess Heth Sutton will settle with him," he said.

"Heth Sutton! Why the why should Heth pay him?"

"Guess Heth'd like to make him a little present, under the circumstances. I was goin' through the barber shop," Mr. Hartington continued, speaking to Jethro and ignoring the railroad president, "and I heard somebody whisperin' my name. Sound came out of that little shampoo closet; went in there and found Bije. 'Peleg,' says he, right into my ear, 'tell Jethro it's all right you understand. We want Heth to go back break his heart if he didn't you understand. If I'd knowed last winter Jethro meant business, I wouldn't hev' helped Gus Flint out. Tell Jethro he can have 'em you know what I mean.' Bije waited a little mite too long," said the senator, who had given a very fair imitation of Mr. Bixby's nasal voice and manner.

"Well, I'm d−d," ejaculated Mr. Balch, staring at Jethro. "How did you work it?"

"Sent Chauncey through the deestrict," said Mr. Hartington.

Mr. Chauncey Weed had, in truth, gone through a part of the congressional district of the Honorable Heth Sutton with a little leather bag. Mr. Weed had been able to do some of his work (with the little leather bag) in the capital itself. In this way Mr. Bixby's regiment, of which Mr. Sutton was the honorary colonel, had been attacked in the rear and routed. There was to be a congressional convention that autumn, and a large part of Mr. Sutton's district lay in the North Country, which, as we have seen, was loyal to Jethro to the back bone. The district, too, was largely rural, and therefore anti−consolidation, and the inability of the Worthington forces to get their bill through had made it apparent that Jethro Bass was as powerful as ever. Under these circumstances it had not been very difficult for a gentleman of Mr. Chauncey Weed's powers of persuasion to induce various lieutenants in the district to agree to send delegates to the coming convention who would be conscientiously opposed to Mr. Sutton's renomination: hence the departure from the capital of Mr. Sutton; hence the generous offer of Mr. Bixby to put his regiment at the disposal of Mr. Bass free of charge.

The second factor on which victory hung (we can use the past tense now) was none other than his Excellency Alva Hopkins, governor of the state. The bill would never get to his Excellency now so people said; would never get beyond that committee who had listened so patiently to the twelve weeks of argument. These were only rumors, after all, for the rotunda never knows positively what goes on in high circles; but the rotunda does figuring, too, when at length the problem is reduced to a simple equation, with Bijah Bixby as x. If it were true that Bijah had gone over to Jethro Bass, the Consolidation Bill was dead.

CHAPTER XVIII. A BIOGRAPHICAL EPISODE: HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED

WHEN Jethro Bass walked out of the hotel that evening men looked at him, and made way for him, but none spoke to him. There was something in his face that forbade speech. He was a great man once more a greater man than ever; and he had, if the persistent rumors were true, accomplished an almost incomprehensible feat, even for Jethro Bass. There was another reason, too, why they stared at him. In all those twelve weeks of that most trying of all sessions he had not once gone into the street, and he had been less than ever common in the eyes of men.

Twice a day he had descended to the dining room for a simple meal − that was all; and fewer had gained entrance to Room Number 7 this session than ever before.

There is a river that flows by the capital, a wide and gentle river bordered by green meadows and fringed with willows; higher up, if you go far enough, a forest comes down to the water on the western side. Jethro walked through the hooded bridge, and up the eastern bank until he could see the forest like a black band between the orange sky and the orange river, and there he sat down upon a fallen log on the edge of the bank. But Jethro was thinking of another scene, of a granite−ribbed pasture on Coniston Mountain that swings in limitless space, from either end of which a man may step off into eternity. William Wetherell, in one of his letters, had described that place as the Threshold of the Nameless Worlds, and so it had seemed to Jethro in the years of his desolation. He was thinking of it now, even as it had been in his mind that winter's evening when Cynthia had come to Coniston and surprised him with that look of terrible loneliness on his face.

Yes, and he was thinking of Cynthia. When, indeed, had he not been thinking of her? How many times had he rehearsed the events in the tannery house for they were the events of his life now. The triumphs over his opponents and enemies fell away, and the pride of power. Such had not been his achievements. She had loved him, and no man had reached a higher pinnacle than that.

Why he had forfeited that love for vengeance, he could not tell. The embers of a man's passions will suddenly burst into flame, and he will fiddle madly while the fire burns his soul. He had avenged her as well as himself; but had he avenged her, now that he held Isaac Worthington in his power? By crushing him, had he not added to her trouble and her sorrow? She had confessed that she loved Isaac Worthington's son, and was not he (Jethro) widening the breach between Cynthia and the son by crushing the father? Jethro had not thought of this. But he had thought of her, night and day, as he had sat in his room directing the battle. Not a day had passed that he had not looked for a letter, hoping against hope. If she had written to him once, if she had come to him once, would he have desisted? He could not say the fires of hatred had burned so fiercely, and still burned so fiercely, that he clenched his fists when it came over him that Isaac Worthington was at last in his power.

A white line above the forest was all that remained of the sunset when he rose up and took from his coat a silver locket and opened it and held it to the fading light. Presently he closed it again, and walked slowly along the river bank toward the little city twinkling on its hill. He crossed the hooded bridge and climbed the slope, stopping for a moment at a little stationery shop; he passed through the groups which were still loudly discussing this thing he had done, and gained his room and locked the door. Men came to it and knocked and got no answer. The room was in darkness, and the night breeze stirred among the trees in the park and blew in at the window. At last Jethro got up and lighted the gas and paused at the centre table. He was to violate more than one principle of his life that night, though not without a struggle; and he sat for a long while looking at the blank paper before him. Then he wrote, and sealed the letter which contained three lines − and pulled the bell cord. The call was answered by a messenger who had been for many years in the service of the Pelican House, and who knew many secrets of the gods. The man actually grew pale when he saw the address on the envelope which was put in his hand and read the denomination of the crisp note under it that was the price of silence.

"F−find the gentleman and give it to him yourself. Er John?"

"Yes, Mr. Bass?"

"If you don't find him, bring it back."

When the man had gone, Jethro turned down the gas and went again to his chair by the window. For a while voices came up to him from the street, but at length the groups dispersed, one by one, and a distant clock boomed out eleven solemn strokes. Twice the clock struck again, at the half−hour and midnight, and the noises in the house the banging of doors and the jangling of keys and the hurrying of feet in the corridors were hushed. Jethro

took no thought of these or of time, and sat gazing at the stars in the depths of the sky above the capital dome until a shadow emerged from the black mass of the trees opposite and crossed the street. In a few minutes there were footsteps in the corridor, stealthy footsteps and a knock on the door. Jethro got up and opened it, and closed it again and locked it. Then he turned up the gas.

"S−sit down," he said, and nodded his head toward the chair by the table.

Isaac Worthington laid his silk hat on the table, and sat down. He looked very haggard and worn in that light, very unlike the first citizen who had entered Brampton in triumph on his return from the West not many months before. The long strain of a long fight, in which he had risked much for which he had labored a life to gain, had told on him, and there were crow's−feet at the corners of his eyes, and dark circles under them. Isaac Worthington had never lost before, and to destroy the fruits of such a man's ambition is to destroy the man. He was not as young as he had once been. But now, in the very hour of defeat, hope had rekindled the fire in the eyes and brought back the peculiar, tight−lipped, mocking smile to the mouth. An hour ago, when he had been pacing Alexander Duncan's library, the eyes and the mouth had been different.

Long habit asserts itself at the strangest moments. Jethro Bass took his seat by the window, and remained silent. The clock tolled the half−hour after midnight.

"You wanted to see me," said Mr. Worthington, finally.

Jethro nodded, almost imperceptibly.

"I suppose," said Mr. Worthington, slowly, "I suppose you are ready to sell out." He found it a little difficult to control his voice.

"Yes," answered Jethro, "r−ready to sell out."

Mr. Worthington was somewhat taken aback by this simple admission. He glanced at Jethro sitting motionless by the window, and in his heart he feared him: he had come into that room when the gas was low, afraid. Although he would not confess it to himself, he had been in fear of Jethro Bass all his life, and his fear had been greater than ever since the March day when Jethro had left Coniston. And could he have known, now, the fires of hatred burning in Jethro's breast, Isaac Worthington would have been in terror indeed.

"What have you got to sell?" he demanded sharply.

"G−guess you know, or you wouldn't have come here."

"What proof have I that you have it to sell?"

Jethro looked at him for an instant.

"M−my word," he said.

Isaac Worthington was silent for a while: he was striving to calm himself, for an indefinable something had shaken him. The strange stillness of the hour and the stranger atmosphere which seemed to surround this transaction filled him with a nameless dread. The man in the window had been his lifelong enemy: more than this, Jethro Bass was not like ordinary men his ways were enshrouded in mystery, and when he struck, he struck hard. There grew upon Isaac Worthington a sense that this midnight hour was in some way to be the culmination of the long years of hatred between them.

He believed Jethro: he would have believed him even if Mr. Flint had not informed him that afternoon that he was beaten, and bitterly he wished he had taken Mr. Flint's advice many months before. Denunciation sprang to is lips which he dared not utter. He was beaten and he must pay the pound of flesh. Isaac Worthington almost thought it would be a pound of flesh.

"How much do you want?" he said.

Again Jethro looked at him.

"B−biggest price you can pay," he answered.

"You must have made up your mind what you want. You've had time enough."

"H−have made up my mind," said Jethro.

"Make your demand," said Mr. Worthington, "and I'll give you my answer."

"B−biggest price you can pay," said Jethro, again.

Mr. Worthington's nerves could stand it no longer.

"Look here," he cried, rising in his chair, "if you've brought me here to trifle with me, you've made a mistake. It's your business to get control of things that belong to other people, and sell them out. I am here to buy. Nothing but necessity will keep me here a moment longer than I have to stay to finish this abominable affair. I am ready to pay you twenty thousand dollars the day that bill becomes a law."

This time Jethro did not look at him.

"P−pay me now," he said.

"I will pay you the day the bill becomes a law. Then I shall know where I stand."

Jethro did not answer this ultimatum in any manner, but remained perfectly still looking out of the window. Mr. Worthington glanced at him, twice, and got his fingers on the brim of his hat, but he did not pick it up. He stood so for a while, knowing full well that if he went out of that room his chance was gone. Consolidation might come in other years, but he, Isaac Worthington, would not be a factor in it.

"You don't want a check, do you?" he said at last.

"No d−don't want a check."

"What in God's name do you want? I haven't got twenty thousand dollars in currency in my pocket."

"Sit down, Isaac Worthington," said Jethro.

Mr. Worthington sat down out of sheer astonishment, perhaps.

"W−want the consolidation don't you? Want it bad don't you?"

Mr. Worthington did not answer. Jethro stood over him now, looking down at him from the other side of the other side of the narrow table.

"Know Cynthy Wetherell?" he said.

Then Isaac Worthington understood that his premonitions had been real. The pound of flesh was to be demanded, but strangely enough, he did not yet comprehend the nature of it.

"I know that there is such a person," he answered, for his pride would not permit him to say more.

"W−what do you know about her?"

Isaac Worthington was bitterly angry the more so because he was helpless, and could not question Jethro's right to ask. What did he know about her? Nothing, except that she had intrigued to marry his son. Bob's letter had described her, to be sure, but he could not be expected to believe that: and he had not heard Miss Lucretia Penniman's speech. And yet he could not tell Jethro that he knew nothing about her, for he was shrewd enough to perceive the drift of the next question.

"Kn−know anything against her?" said Jethro.

Mr. Worthington leaned back in his chair.

"I can't see what Miss Wetherell has to do with the present occasion," he replied.

"H−had her dismissed by the prudential committee had her dismissed didn't you?" "They chose to act as they saw fit."

"T−told Levi Dodd to dismiss her didn't you?"

That was a matter of common knowledge in Brampton, having leaked out through Jonathan Hill.

"I must decline to discuss this," said Mr. Worthington.

"W−wouldn't if I was you."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. T−told Levi Dodd to dismiss her, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did." Isaac Worthington had lost in self−esteem by not saying so before.

"Why? Wahn't she honest? Wahn't she capable? Wahn't she a lady?"

"I can't say that I know anything against Miss Wetherell's character, if that's what you mean."

"F−fit to teach wahn't she fit to teach?"

"I believe she has since qualified before Mr. Errol."

"Fit to teach w−wahn't fit to marry your son was she?"

Isaac Worthington clutched the table and started from his chair. He grew white to his lips with anger, and yet he knew that he must control himself.

"Mr. Bass," he said, "you have something to sell, and I have something to buy if the price is not ruinous. Let us confine ourselves to that. My affairs and my son's affairs are neither here nor there. I ask you again, how much do you want for this Consolidation Bill?

"N−no money will buy it."

"What!"

"C−consent to this marriage, c−consent to this marriage."

There was yet room for Isaac Worthington to be amazed, and for a while he stared up at Jethro, speechless.

"Is that your price?" he asked at last.

"Th−that's my price," said Jethro.

Isaac Worthington got up and went to the window and stood looking out above the black mass of trees at the dome outlined against the star−flecked sky. At first his anger choked him, and he could not think; he had just enough reason left not to walk out of the door. But presently habit asserted itself in him, too, and he began to reflect and calculate in spite of his anger. It is strange that memory plays so small a part in such a man. Before he allowed his mind to dwell on the fearful price, he thought of his ambitions gratified; and yet he did not think then of the woman to whom he had once confided those ambitions the woman who was the girl's mother. Perhaps Jethro was thinking of her.

It may have been I know not that Issac Worthington wondered at this revelation of the character of Jethro Bass, for it was a revelation. For this girl's sake Jethro was willing to forego his revenge, was willing at the end of his days to allow the world to believe that he had sold out to his enemy, or that he had been defeated by him.

But when he thought of the marriage, Isaac Worthington ground his teeth. A certain sentiment which we may call pride was so strong in him that he felt ready to make almost any sacrifice to prevent it. To hinder it he had quarrelled with his son, and driven him away, and threatened disinheritance. The price was indeed heavy the heaviest he could pay. But the alternative was not that heavier? To relinquish his dream of power, to sink for a while into a crippled state; for he had spent large sums, and one of those periodical depressions had come in the business of the mills, and those Western investments were not looking so bright now.

So, with his hands opening and closing in front of him, Isaac Worthington fought out his battle. A terrible war, that, between ambition and pride a war to the knife. The issue may yet have been undecided when he turned round to Jethro with a sneer which he could not resist.

"Why doesn't she marry him without my consent?"

In a moment Mr. Worthington knew he had gone too far. A certain kind of an eye is an incomparable weapon, and armed men have been cowed by those who possess it, though otherwise defenceless. Jethro Bass had that kind of an eye.

"G−guess you wouldn't understand if I was to tell you," he said. Mr. Worthington walked to the window again, perhaps to compose himself, and then came back again.

"Your proposition is," he said at length, "that if I give my consent to this marriage, we are to have Bixby and the governor, and the Consolidation Bill will become a law. Is that it?"

"Th−that's it," said Jethro, taking his accustomed seat.

"And this consent is to be given when the bill becomes a law?"

"Given now. T−to−night."

Mr. Worthington took another turn as far as the door, and suddenly came and stood before Jethro.

"Well, I consent."

Jethro nodded toward the table.

"Er pen and paper there," he said.

"What do you want me to do?" demanded Mr. Worthington.

"W−write to Bob write to Cynthy. Nice letters."

"This is carrying matters with too high a hand, Mr. Bass. I will write the letters to−morrow morning." It was intolerable that he, the first citizen of Brampton, should have to submit to such humiliation.

"Write 'em now. W−want to see 'em."

"But if I give you my word they will be written and sent to you to−morrow afternoon?"

"T−too late," said Jethro; "sit down and write 'em now."

Mr. Worthington went irresolutely to the table, stood for a minute, and dropped suddenly into the chair there. He would have given anything (except the realization of his ambitions) to have marched out of the room and to have slammed the door behind him. The letter paper and envelopes which Jethro had bought stood in a little pile, and Mr. Worthington picked up the pen. The clock struck two as he wrote the date, as though to remind him that he had written it wrong. If Flint could see him now! Would Flint guess? Would anybody guess? He stared at the white paper, and his rage came on again like a gust of wind, and he felt that he would rather beg in the streets than write such a thing. And yet and yet he sat there. Surely Jethro Bass must have known that he could have taken no more exquisite vengeance than this, to compel a man and such a man to sit down in the white heat of passion and write two letters of forgiveness! Jethro sat by the window, to all appearances oblivious to the tortures of his victim.

He who has tried to write a note the simplest note when his mind was harassed, will understand something of Isaac Worthington's sensations. He would no sooner get an inkling of what his opening sentence was to be than the flames of his anger would rise and sweep it away. He could not even decide which letter he was to write first: to his son, who had defied him and who (the father knew in his heart) condemned him? or to the school−teacher, who was responsible for all his misery; who Mr. Worthington believed had taken advantage of his son's youth by feminine wiles of no mean order so as to gain possession of him. I can almost bring myself to pity the first citizen of Brampton as he sits there with his pen poised over the paper, and his enemy waiting to read those tender epistles of forgiveness which he has yet to write. The clock has almost got round to the half−hour again, and there is only the date and a wrong one at that.

"My dear Miss Wetherell, Circumstances (over which I have no control?)" ought he not to call her Cynthia? He has to make the letter credible in the eyes of the censor who sits by the window. "My dear Miss Wetherell, I have come to the conclusion" two sheets torn up, or thrust into Mr. Worthington's pocket. By this time words have

begun to have a colorless look. "My dear Miss Wetherell, Having become convinced of the sincere attachment which my son Robert has for you, I am writing him to−night to give my full consent to his marriage. He has given me to understand that you have hitherto persistently refused to accept him because I have withheld that consent, and I take this opportunity of expressing my admiration of this praiseworthy resolution on your part." (If this be irony, it is sublime! Perhaps Isaac Worthington has a little of the artist in him, and now that he is in the heat of creation has forgotten the circumstances under which he is composing.) "My son's happiness and career in life are of such moment to me that, until the present, I could not give my sanction to what I at first regarded as a youthful fancy. Now that my son, for your sake, has shown his determination and ability to make his own way in the world" (Isaac Worthington was not a little proud of this) "I have determined that it is wise to withdraw my opposition, and to recall Robert to his proper place, which is near me. I am sure that my feelings in this matter will be clear to you, and that you will look with indulgence upon any acts of mine which sprang from a natural solicitation for the welfare and happiness of my only child. I shall be in Brampton in a day or two, and I shall at once give myself the pleasure of calling on you. Sincerely yours, Isaac D. Worthington."

Perhaps a little formal and pompous for some people, but an admirable and conciliatory letter for the first citizen of Brampton. Written under such trying circumstances, with I know not how many erasures and false starts, it is little short of a marvel in art: neither too much said, nor too little, for a relenting parent of Mr. Worthington's character, and I doubt whether Talleyrand or Napoleon or even Machiavelli himself could have surpassed it. The second letter, now that Mr. Worthington had got into the swing, was more easily written. "My dear Robert" (it said), "I have made up my mind to give my consent to your marriage to Miss Wetherell, and I am ready to welcome you home, where I trust I shall see you shortly. I have not been unimpressed by the determined manner in which you have gone to work for yourself, but I believe that your place is in Brampton, where I trust you will show the same energy in learning to succeed me in the business which I have founded there as you have exhibited in Mr. Broke's works. Affectionately, your Father."

A very creditable and handsome letter for a forgiving father. When Mr. Worthington had finished it, and had addressed both the envelopes, his shame and vexation had, curious to relate, very considerably abated. Not to go too deeply into the somewhat contradictory mental and cardiac processes of Mr. Worthington, he had somehow tricked himself by that magic exercise of wielding his pen into thinking that he was doing a noble and generous action: into believing that in the course of a very few days or weeks, at the most he would have recalled his erring son and have given Cynthia his blessing. He would, he told himself, have been forced eventually to yield when that paragon of inflexibility, Bob, dictated terms to him at the head of the locomotive works. Better let the generosity be on his (Mr. Worthington's) side. At all events, victory had never been bought more cheaply. Humiliation, in Mr. Worthington's eyes, had an element of publicity in it, and this episode had had none of that element; and Jethro Bass, moreover, was a highwayman who had held a pistol to his head. In such logical manner he gradually bolstered up again his habitual poise and dignity. Next week, at the latest, men would point to him as the head of the largest railroad interests in the state.

He pushed back his chair, and rose, merely indicating the result of his labors by a wave of his hand. And he stood in the window as Jethro Bass got up and went to the table. I would that I had a pen able to describe Jethro's sensations when he read them. Unfortunately, he is a man with few facial expressions. But I believe that he was artist enough himself to appreciate the perfections of the first citizen's efforts. After a much longer interval than was necessary for their perusal, Mr. Worthington turned.

"G−guess they'll do," said Jethro, as he folded them up. He was too generous not to indulge, for once, in a little well−deserved praise. "Hain't underdone it, and hain't overdone it a mite hev you? M−man of resource. Callate you couldn't hev beat that if you was to take a week to it."

"I think it only fair to tell you," said Mr. Worthington, picking up his silk hat, "that in those letters I have merely anticipated a very little my intentions in the matter. My son having proved his earnestness, I was about to consent to the marriage of my own accord."

"G−goin' to do it anyway was you?"

"I had so determined."

"A−always thought you was high−minded," said Jethro.

Mr. Worthington was on the point of giving a tart reply to this, but restrained himself.

"Then I may look upon the matter as settled?" he said. "The Consolidation Bill is to become a law?"

"Yes," said Jethro, "you'll get your bill." Mr. Worthington had got his hand on the knob of the door when Jethro stopped him with a word. He had no facial expressions, but he had an eye, as we have seen an eye that for the second time appeared terrible to his visitor. "Isaac Worthington," he said, "a−act up to it. No trickery or look out look out."

Then, the incident being closed so far as he was concerned, Jethro went back to his chair by the window, but it is to be recorded that Isaac Worthington did not answer him immediately. Then he said:

"You seem to forget that you are talking to a gentleman."

"That's so," answered Jethro, "so you be."

He sat where he was long after the sky had whitened and the stars had changed from gold to silver and gone out, and the sunlight had begun to glance upon the green leaves of the park. Perhaps he was thinking of the life he had lived, which was spent now: of the men he had ruled, of the victories he had gained from that place which would know him no more. He had won the last and the greatest of his victories there, compared to which the others had indeed been as vanities. Perhaps he looked back over the highway of his life and thought of the woman whom he had loved, and wondered what it had been if she had trod it by his side. Who will judge him? He had been what he had been; and as the Era was, so was he. Verily, one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh. When Mr. Isaac Worthington arrived at Mr. Duncan's house, where he was staying, at three o'clock in the morning, he saw to his surprise light from the library windows lying in bars across the lawn under the trees. He found Mr. Duncan in that room with Somers, his son, who had just returned from a seaside place, and they were discussing a very grave event. Miss Janet Duncan had that day eloped with a gentleman who to judge from the photograph Somers held − was both handsome and romantic−looking. He had long hair and burning eyes, and a title not to be then verified, and he owned a castle near some place on the peninsula of Italy not on the map.

CHAPTER XIX. CONTAINING FREE TRANSPORTATION TO BRAMPTON

WE are back in Brampton, owning, as we do, an annual pass over the Truro Railroad. Cynthia has been there all the summer, and as it is now the first of September, her school has begun again. I do not by any means intend to imply that Brampton is not a pleasant place to spend the summer: the number of its annual visitors is a refutation of that; but to Cynthia the season had been one of great unhappiness. Several times Lem Hallowell had stopped the stage in front of Ephraim's house to beg her to go to Coniston, and Mr. Satterlee had come himself; but she could not have borne to be there without Jethro. Nor would she go to Boston, though urged by Miss Lucretia; and Mrs. Merrill and the girls had implored her to join them at a seaside place on the Cape.

Cynthia had made a little garden behind Ephraim's house, and she spent the summer there with her flowers and her books, many of which Lem had fetched from Coniston. Ephraim loved to sit there of an evening and smoke his pipe and chat with Ezra Graves and the neighbors who dropped in. Among these were Mr. Gamaliel Ives, who talked literature with Cynthia; and Lucy Baird, his wife, who had taken Cynthia under her wing. I wish I had time

to write about Lucy Baird. And Mr. Jonathan Hill came his mortgage not having been foreclosed, after all. When Cynthia was alone with Ephraim she often read to him, generally from books of a martial flavor, and listened with an admirable hypocrisy to certain narratives which he was in the habit of telling.

They never spoke of Jethro. Ephraim was not a casuist, and his sense of right and wrong came largely through his affections. It is safe to say that he never made an analysis of the sorrow which he knew was afflicting the girl, but he had had a general and most sympathetic understanding of it ever since the time when Jethro had gone back to the capital; and Ephraim never brought home his Guardian or his Clarion now, but read them at the office, that their contents might not disturb her.

No wonder that Cynthia was unhappy. The letters came, almost every day, with the postmark of the town in New Jersey where Mr. Broke's locomotive works were; and she answered them now (but oh, how scrupulously!), though not every day. If the waters of love rose up through the grains of sand, it was, at least, not Cynthia's fault. Hers were the letters of a friend. She was reading such and such a book had he read it? And he must not work too hard. How could her letters be otherwise when Jethro Bass, her benefactor, was at the capital working to defeat and perhaps to ruin Bob's father? when Bob's father had insulted and persecuted her? She ought not to have written at all; but the lapses of such a heroine are very rare, and very dear.

Yes, Cynthia's life was very bitter that summer, with but little hope on the horizon of it. Her thoughts were divided between Bob and Jethro. Many a night she lay awake resolving to write to Jethro, even to go to him, but when morning came she could not bring herself to do so. I do not think it was because she feared that he might believe her appeal would be made in behalf of Bob's father. Knowing Jethro as she did, she felt that it would be useless, and she could not bear to make it in vain; if the memory of that evening in the tannery shed would not serve, nothing would serve. And again he had gone to avenge her.

It was inevitable that she should hear tidings from the capital. Isaac Worthington's own town was ringing with it. And as week after week of that interminable session went by, the conviction slowly grew upon Brampton that its first citizen had been beaten by Jethro Bass. Something of Mr. Worthington's affairs was known: the mills, for instance, were not being run to their full capacity. And then had come the definite news that Mr. Worthington was beaten, a local representative having arrived straight from the rotunda. Cynthia overheard Lem Hallowell telling it to Ephraim, and she could not for the life of her help rejoicing, though she despised herself for it. Isaac Worthington was humbled now, and Jethro had humbled him to avenge her. Despite her grief over his return to that life, there was something to compel her awe and admiration in the way he had risen and done this thing after men had fallen from him. Her mother had had something of these same feelings, without knowing why.

People who had nothing but praise for him before were saying hard things about Isaac Worthington that night. When the baron is defeated, the serfs come out of their holes in the castle rock and fling their curses across the moat. Cynthia slept but little, and was glad when the day came to take her to her scholars, to ease her mind of the thoughts which tortured it.

And then, when she stopped at the post−office to speak to Ephraim on her way homeward in the afternoon, she heard men talking behind the partition, and she stood, as one stricken, listening beside the window. Other tidings had come in the shape of a telegram. The first rumor had been false. Brampton had not yet received the details, but the Consolidation Bill had gone into the House that morning, and would be a law before the week was out. A part of it was incomprehensible to Cynthia, but so much she had understood. She did not wait to speak to Ephraim, and she was going out again when a man rushed past her and through the partition door. Cynthia paused instinctively, for she recognized him as one of the frequenters of the station and a bearer of news.

"Jethro's come home, boys," he shouted; "come in on the four o'clock, and went right off to Coniston. Guess he's done for, this time, for certain. Looks it. By Godfrey, he looks eighty! Callate his day's over, from the way the boys talked on the train." Cynthia lingered to hear no more, and went out, dazed, into the September sunshine.

Jethro beaten, and broken, and gone to Coniston. Resolution came to her as she walked. Arriving home, she wrote a little note and left it on the table for Ephraim; and going out again, ran by the back lane to Mr. Sherman's livery stable behind the Brampton House, and in half an hour was driving along that familiar road to Coniston, alone; for she had often driven Jethro's horses, and knew every turn of the way. And as she gazed at the purple mountain through the haze and drank in the sweet scents of the year's fulness, she was strangely happy. There was the village green in the cool evening light, and the flagstaff with its tip silvered by the departing sun. She waved to Rias and Lem and Moses at the store, but she drove on to the tannery house, and hitched the horse at the rough granite post, and went in, and through the house, softly, to the kitchen.

Jethro was standing in the doorway, and did not turn. He may have thought she was Millicent Skinner. Cynthia could see his face. It was older, indeed, and lined and worn, but that fearful look of desolation which she had once surprised upon it, and which she in that instant feared to see, was not there. Jethro's soul was at peace, though Cynthia could not understand why it was so. She stole to him and flung her arms about his neck, and with a cry he seized her and held her against him for I know not how long. Had it been possible to have held her there always, he would never have let her go. At last he looked down into her tear−wet face, into her eyes that were shining with tears.

"D−done wrong, Cynthy."

Cynthia did not answer that, for she remembered how she, too, had exulted when she had believed him to have accomplished Isaac Worthington's downfall. Now that he had failed, and she was in his arms, it was not for her to judge only to rejoice.

"Didn't look for you to come back didn't expect it."

"Uncle Jethro!" she faltered. Love for her had made him go, and she would not say that, either. "D−don't hate me, Cynthy don't hate me?"

She shook her head.

"Love me a little?"

She reached up her hands and brushed back his hair, tenderly, from his forehead. Such a loving gesture was her answer.

"You are going to stay here always, now," she said, in a low voice, "you are never going away again."

"G−goin' to stay always," he answered. Perhaps he was thinking of the hillside clearing in the forest who knows! "You'll come sometime, Cynthy sometime?"

"I'll come every Saturday and Sunday, Uncle Jethro," she said, smiling up at him. "Saturday is only two days away, now. I can hardly wait."

"Y−you'll come sometime?"

"Uncle Jethro, do you think I'll be away from you, except except when I have to?"

"C−come and read to me won't you come and read?"

"Of course I will!"

"C−call to mind the first book you read to me, Cynthy?"

"It was 'Robinson Crusoe,'" she said.

"'R−Robinson Crusoe.' Often thought of that book. Know some of it by heart. R−read it again, sometime, Cynthy?"

She looked up at him a little anxiously. His eyes were on the great hill opposite, across Coniston Water.

"I will, indeed, Uncle Jethro, if we can find it," she answered.

"Guess I can find it," said Jethro. "R−remember when you saw him makin' a ship?"

"Yes," said Cynthia, "and I had my feet in the pool."

The book had made a profound impression upon Jethro, partly because Cynthia had first read it to him, and partly for another reason. The isolation of Crusoe, depicted by Defoe's genius, had been comparable to his own isolation, and he had pondered upon it much of late. Yes, and upon a certain part of another book which he had read earlier in life: Napoleon had ended his days on St. Helena.

They walked out under the trees to the brookside and stood listening to the tinkling of the cowbells in the wood−lot beyond. The light faded early on these September evenings, and the smoky mist had begun to rise from the water when they turned back again. The kitchen windows were already growing yellow, and through them the faithful Millicent could be seen bustling about in her preparations for supper. But Cynthia, having accomplished her errand, would not go in. She could not have borne to have any one drive back with her to Brampton then, and she must not be late upon the road.

"I will come Friday evening, Uncle Jethro," she said, as she kissed him and gave one last, lingering look at his face. Had it been possible, she would not have left him, and on her way to Brampton through the gathering darkness she mused anxiously upon that strange calmness he had shown after defeat.

She drove her horse on to the floor of Mr. Sherman's stable, that gentleman himself gallantly assisting her to alight, and walked homeward through the lane. Ephraim had not yet returned from the post−office, which did not close until eight, and Cynthia smiled when she saw the utensils of his cooking−kit strewn on the hearth. In her absence he invariably unpacked and used it, and of course Cynthia at once set herself to cleaning and packing it again. After that she got her own supper a very simple affair and was putting the sitting room to rights when Ephraim came thumping in.

"Well, I swan!" he exclaimed when he saw her. "I didn't look for you to come back so soon, Cynthy. Put up the kit hev you?" He stood in front of the fireplace staring with apparent interest at the place where the kit had been, and added in a voice which he strove to make quite casual, "How be Jethro?"

"He looks older, Cousin Eph," she answered, after a pause, "and I think he is very tired. But he seems he seems more tranquil and contented than I hoped to find him."

"I want to know," said Ephraim. "I am glad to hear it. Glad you went up, Cynthy you done right to go. I'd have gone with you, if you'd only told me. I'll git a chance to go up Sunday."

There was an air of repressed excitement about the veteran which did not escape Cynthia. He held two letters in his hand, and, being a postmaster, he knew the handwriting on both. One had come from that place in New Jersey, and drew no comment. But the other! That one had been postmarked at the capital, and as he had sat at his counter

at the post−office waiting for closing time he had turned it over and over with many ejaculations and futile guesses. Past master of dissimulation that he was, he had made up his mind if he should find Cynthia at home to lay the letters indifferently on the table and walk into his bedroom. This campaign he now proceeded to carry out.

Cynthia smiled again when he was gone, and shook her head and picked up the letters. Bob's was uppermost and she read that first, without a thought of the other one. And she smiled as she read for Bob had had a promotion. He was not yet at the head of the locomotive works, he hastened add, for fear that Cynthia might think that Mr. Broke had resigned the presidency in his favor; and Cynthia never failed to laugh at these little facetious asides. He was now earning the princely sum of ninety dollars a month not enough to marry on, alas! On Saturday nights he and Percy Broke scrubbed as much as possible of the grime from their hands and faces and went to spend Sunday at Elberon, the Broke place on the Hudson; from whence Miss Sally Broke, if she happened to be at home, always sent Cynthia her love. As Cynthia is still a heroine, I shall not describe how she felt about Sally Broke's love. There was plenty of Bob's own in the letter. Cynthia would not have blamed him if he had fallen in love with Miss Broke. It seemed to her little short of miraculous that, amidst such surroundings, he could be true to her.

After a period which was no briefer than that usually occupied by Bob's letters, Cynthia took the other one from her lap, and stared at it in much perplexity before she tore it open. We have seen its contents over Mr. Worthington's shoulder, and our hearts will not stop beating as Cynthia's did. She read it twice before the full meaning of it came to her, and after that she could not well mistake it, the language being so admirable in every way. She sat very still for a long while, and presently she heard Ephraim go out. But Cynthia did not move. Mr. Worthington relented and Bob recalled! The vista of happiness suddenly opened up, widened and widened until it was too bright for Cynthia's vision, and she would compel her mind to dwell on another prospect, that of the father and son reconciled. Although her temples throbbed, she tried to analyze the letter. It implied that Mr. Worthington had allowed Bob to remain away on a sort of probation; it implied that it had been dictated by a strong paternal love mingled with a strong paternal justice. And then there was the appeal to her: "You will look with indulgence upon any acts of mine which sprang from a natural solicitation for the welfare and happiness of my only child." A terrible insight is theirs to whom it is given to love as Cynthia loved.

Suddenly there came a knock which frightened her, for her mind was running on swiftly from point to point: had, indeed, flown as far as Coniston by now, and she was thinking of that strange look of peace on Jethro's face which had troubled her. One letter she thrust into her dress, but the other she laid aside, and her knees trembled under her as she rose and went into the entry and raised the latch and opened the door. There was a moon, and the figure in the frock coat and the silk hat was the one which she expected to see. The silk hat came off very promptly.

"I hope I am not disturbing you, Miss Wetherell," said the owner of it.

"No," answered Cynthia, faintly.

"May I come in?"

Cynthia held open the door a little wider, and Mr. Worthington walked in. He seemed very majestic and out of place in the little house which Gabriel Post had built, and he carried into it some of the atmosphere of the walnut and high ceilings of his own mansion. His manner of laying his hat, bottom up, on the table, and of unbuttoning his coat, subtly indicated the honor which he was conferring upon the place. And he eyed Cynthia, standing before him in the lamplight, with a modification of the hawklike look which was meant to be at once condescending and conciliatory. He did not imprint a kiss upon her brow, as some prospective fathers−in−law would have done. But his eyes, perhaps involuntarily, paid a tribute to her personal appearance which heightened her color. She might not, after all, be such a discredit to the Worthington family.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked.

"Thank you, Cynthia," he said; "I hope I may now be allowed to call you Cynthia?"

She did not answer him, but sat down herself, and he followed her example, with his eyes still upon her.

"You have doubtless received my letter," began Mr. Worthington. "I only arrived in Brampton an hour ago, but I thought it best to come to you at once, under the circumstances."

"Yes," replied Cynthia, "I received the letter."

"I am glad," said Mr. Worthington. He was beginning to be a little taken aback by her calmness and her apparent absence of joy. It was scarcely the way in which a school−teacher should receive the advances of the first citizen, come to give a gracious consent to her marriage with his son. Had he known it, Cynthia was anything but calm. "I am glad," he said, "because I took pains to explain the exact situation in that letter, and to set forth my own sentiments. I hope you understood them."

"Yes, I understood them," said Cynthia, in a low tone.

This was enigmatical, to say the least. But Mr. Worthington had come with such praiseworthy intentions that he was disposed to believe that the girl was overwhelmed by the good fortune which had suddenly overtaken her. He was therefore disposed to be a little conciliatory.

"My conduct may have appeared harsh to you," he continued. "I will not deny that I opposed the matter at first. Robert was still in college, and he has a generous, impressionable nature which he inherits from his poor mother the kind of nature likely to commit a rash act which would ruin his career. I have since become convinced that he has − ahem inherited likewise a determination of purpose and an ability to get on in the world which I confess I had underestimated. My friend, Mr. Broke, has written me a letter about him, and tells me that he has already promoted him."

"Yes," said Cynthia.

"You hear from him?" inquired Mr. Worthington, giving her a quick glance.

"Yes," said Cynthia, her color rising a little.

"And yet," said Mr. Worthington, slowly, "I have been under the impression that you have persistently refused to marry him."

"That is true," she answered.

"I cannot refrain from complimenting you, Cynthia, upon such rare conduct," said he. "You will be glad to know that it has contributed more than anything else toward my estimation of your character, and has strengthened me in my resolution that I am now doing right. It may be difficult for you to understand a father's feelings. The complete separation from my only son was telling on me severely, and I could not forget that you were the cause of that separation. I knew nothing about you, except −" He hesitated, for she had turned to him.

"Except what?" she asked.

Mr. Worthington coughed. Mr. Flint had told him, that very morning, of her separation from Jethro, and of the reasons which people believed had caused it. Unfortunately, we have not time to go into that conversation with Mr. Flint, who had given a very good account of Cynthia indeed. After all (Mr. Worthington reflected), he had consented to the marriage, and there was no use in bringing Jethro's name into the conversation. Jethro would be

forgotten soon.

"I will not deny to you that I had other plans for my son," he said. "I had hoped that he would marry a daughter of a friend of mine. You must be a little indulgent with parents, Cynthia," he added with a little smile, "we have our castles in the air, too. Sometimes, as in this case, by a wise provision of providence they go astray. I suppose you have heard of Miss Duncan's marriage."

"No," said Cynthia.

"She ran off with a worthless Italian nobleman. I believe, on the whole," he said, with what was an extreme complaisance for the first citizen, "that I have reason to congratulate myself upon Robert's choice. I have made inquiries about you, and I find that I have had the pleasure of knowing your mother, whom I respected very much. And your father, I understand, came of very good people, and was forced by circumstances to adopt the means of livelihood he did. My attention has been called to the letters he wrote to the Guardian, which I hear have been highly praised by competent critics, and I have ordered a set of them for the files of the library. You yourself, I find, are highly thought of in Brampton" (a not unimportant factor, by the way); "you have been splendidly educated, and are a lady. In short, Cynthia, I have come to give my formal consent to your engagement to my son Robert."

"But I am not engaged to him," said Cynthia.

"He will be here shortly, I imagine," said Mr. Worthington.

Cynthia was trembling more than ever by this time. She was very angry, and she had found it very difficult to repress the things which she had been impelled to speak. She did not hate Isaac Worthington now − she despised him. He had not dared to mention Jethro, who had been her benefactor, though he had done his best to have her removed from the school because of her connection with Jethro.

"Mr. Worthington," she said, "I have not yet made up my mind whether I shall marry your son."

To say that Mr. Worthington's breath was taken away when he heard these words would be to use a mild expression. He doubted his senses. "What?" he exclaimed, starting forward, "what do you mean?"

Cynthia hesitated a moment. She was not frightened, but she was trying to choose her words without passion.

"I refused to marry him," she said, "because you withheld your consent, and I did not wish to be the cause of a quarrel between you. It was not difficult to guess your feelings toward me, even before certain things occurred of which I will not speak. I did my best, from the very first, to make Bob give up the thought of marrying me, although I loved and honored him. Loving him as I do, I do not want to be the cause of separating him from his father, and of depriving him of that which is rightfully his. But something is due to myself. If I should ever make up my mind to marry him," continued Cynthia, looking at Mr. Worthington steadfastly, "it will not be because your consent is given or withheld."

"Do you tell me this to my face?" exclaimed Mr. Worthington, now in a rage himself at such unheard−of presumption.

"To your face," said Cynthia, who got more self−controlled as he grew angry. "I believe that that consent, which you say you have given freely, was wrung from you."

It was unfortunate that the first citizen might not always have Mr. Flint by him to restrain and caution him. But Mr. Flint could have no command over his master's sensations, and anger and apprehension goaded Mr.

Worthington to indiscretion.

"Jethro Bass told you this!" he cried out.

"No," Cynthia answered, not in the least surprised by the admission, "he did not tell me but he will if I ask him. I guessed it from your letter. I heard that he had come back to−day, and I went to Coniston to see him, and he told me he had been defeated."

Tears came into her eyes at the remembrance of the scene in the tannery house that afternoon, and she knew now why Jethro's face had worn that look of peace. He had made his supreme sacrifice for her. No, he had told her nothing, and she might never have known. She sat thinking of the magnitude of this thing Jethro had done, and she ceased to speak, and the tears coursed down her cheeks unheeded.

Isaac Worthington had a habit of clutching things when he was in a rage, and now he clutched the arms of the chair. He had grown white. He was furious with her, furious with himself for having spoken that which might be construed into a confession. He had not finished writing the letters before he had stood self−justified, and he had been self−justified ever since. Where now were these arguments so wonderfully plausible? Where were the refutations which he had made ready in case of a barely possible need? He had gone into the Pelican House intending to tell Jethro of his determination to agree to the marriage. That was one. He had done so that was another and he had written the letters that Jethro might be convinced of his good will. There were still more, involving Jethro's character for veracity and other things. Summoning these, he waited for Cynthia to have done speaking, but when she had finished he said nothing. He looked at her, and saw the tears on her face, and he saw that she had completely forgotten his presence.

For the life of him, Isaac Worthington could not utter a word. He was a man, as we know, who did not talk idly, and he knew that Cynthia would not hear what he said; and arguments and denunciations lose their effect when repeated. Again, he knew that she would not believe him. Never in his life had Isaac Worthington been so ignored, so put to shame, as by this school−teacher of Brampton. Before, self−esteem and sophistry had always carried him off between them; sometimes, in truth, with a wound the wound had always healed. But he had a feeling, to−night, that this woman had glanced into his soul, and had turned away from it. As he looked at her the texture of his anger changed; he forgot for the first time that which he had been pleased to think of as her position in life, and he feared her. He had matched his spirit against hers. Before long the situation became intolerable to him, for Cynthia still sat silent. She was thinking of how she had blamed Jethro for going back to that life, even though his love for her had made him do it. But Isaac Worthington did not know of what she was thinking he thought only of himself and his predicament. He could not remain, and yet he could not go with dignity. He who had come to bestow could not depart like a whipped dog.

Suddenly a fear transfixed him: suppose that this woman, from whom he could not hide the truth, should tell his son what he had done. Bob would believe her. Could he, Isaac Worthington, humble his pride and ask her to keep her suspicions to herself? He would then be acknowledging that they were more than suspicions. If he did so, he would have to appear to forgive her in spite of what she had said to him. And Bob was coming home. Could he tell Bob that he had changed his mind and withdrawn his consent to the marriage? There would be the reason, and again Bob would believe her. And again, if he withdrew his consent, there was Jethro to reckon with. Jethro must have a weapon still, Mr. Worthington thought, although he could not imagine what it might be. As Isaac Worthington sat there, thinking, it grew clear to him at last that there was but one exit out of a very desperate situation.

He glanced at Cynthia again, this time appraisingly. She had dried her eyes, but she made no effort to speak. After all, she would make such a wife for his son as few men possessed. He thought of Sarah Hollingsworth. She had been a good woman, but there had been many times when he had deplored especially in his travels the lack of other qualities in his wife. Cynthia, he thought, had these qualities, so necessary for the wife of one who would

succeed to power though whence she had got them Isaac Worthington could not imagine. She would become a personage; she was a woman of whom they had no need to be ashamed at home or abroad. Having completed these reflections, he broke the silence.

"I am sorry that you should have been misled into thinking such a thing as you have expressed, Cynthia," he said, "but I believe that I can understand something of the feelings which prompted you. It is natural that you should have a resentment against me after everything that has happened. It is perhaps natural, too, that I should lose my temper under the circumstances. Let us forget it. And I trust that in the future we shall grow into the mutual respect and affection which our nearer relationship will demand."

He rose, and took up his hat, and Cynthia rose too. There was something very fine, he thought, about her carriage and expression as she stood in front of him.

"There is my hand," he said, "will you take it?"

"I will take it," Cynthia answered, "because you are Bob's father."

And then Mr. Worthington went away.

CHAPTER XX. "TO CHANGE THE NAME, AND NOT THE LETTER"

I AM able to cite one notable instance, at least, to disprove the saying a part of which is written above, and I have yet to hear of a case in which a gentleman ever hesitated a single instant on account of the first letter of a lady's last name. I know, indeed, of an occasion when locomotives could not go fast enough, when thirty miles an hour seemed a snail's pace to a young man who sat by the open window of a train that crept northward on a certain hazy September morning up the beautiful valley of a broad river which we know.

It was after three o'clock before he caught sight of the familiar crest of Farewell Mountain, and the train ran into Harwich. How glad he was to see everybody there, whether he knew them or not! He came near hugging the conductor of the Truro accommodation; who, needless to say, did not ask him for a ticket, or even a pass. And then the young man went forward and almost shook the arms off of the engineer and the fireman, and climbed into the cab, and actually drove the engine himself as far as Brampton, where it arrived somewhat ahead of schedule, having taken some of the curves and bridges at a speed a little beyond the law. The engineer was richer by five dollars, and the son of a railroad president is a privileged character, anyway.

Yes, here was Brampton, and in spite of the haze the sun had never shone so brightly on the terraced steeple of the meeting−house. He leaped out of the cab almost before the engine had stopped, and beamed upon everybody on the platform, even upon Mr. Dodd, who chanced to be there. In a twinkling the young man is in Mr. Sherman's hack, and Mr. Sherman galloping his horse down Brampton Street, the young man with his head out of the window, smiling; grinning would be a better word. Here are the iron mastiffs, and they seem to be grinning, too. The young man flings open the carriage door and leaps out, and the door is almost broken from its hinges by the maple tree. He rushes up the steps and through the hall, and into the library, where the first citizen and his seneschal are sitting.

"Hello, Father, you see I didn't waste any time," he cried, grasping his father's hand in a grip that made Mr. Worthington wince. "Well, you are a trump, after all. We're both a little hot−headed, I guess, and do things we're sorry for, but that's all over now, isn't it? I'm sorry. I might have known you'd come round when you found out for yourself what kind of a girl Cynthia was. Did you ever see anybody like her?"

Mr. Flint turned his back, and started to walk out of the room.

"Don't go, Flint, old boy," Bob called out, seizing Mr. Flint's hand, too. "I can't stay but a minute, now. How are you?"

"All right, Bob," answered Mr. Flint, with a curious, kindly look in his eyes that was not often there. "I'm glad to see you home. I have to go to the bank."

"Well, Father," said Bob, "school must be out, and I imagine you know where I'm going. I just thought I'd stop in to to thank you, and get a benediction."

"I am very happy to have you back, Robert," replied Mr. Worthington, and it was true. It would have been strange indeed if some tremor of sentiment had not been in his voice and some gleam of pride in his eye as he looked upon his son.

"So you saw her, and couldn't resist her," said Bob. "Wasn't that how it happened?"

Mr. Worthington sat down again at the desk, and his hand began to stray among the papers. He was thinking of Mr. Flint's exit. "I do not arrive at my decisions quite in that way, Robert," he answered.

"But you have seen her?"

"Yes, I have seen her."

There was a hesitation, an uneasiness in his father's tone for which Bob could not account, and which he attributed to emotion. He did not guess that this hour of supreme joy could hold for Isaac Worthington another sensation.

"Isn't she the finest girl in the world?" he demanded. "How does she seem? How does she look?"

"She looks extremely well," said Mr. Worthington, who had now schooled his voice. "In fact, I am quite ready to admit that Cynthia Wetherell possesses the qualifications necessary for your wife. If she had not, I should never have written you."

Bob walked to the window.

"Father," he said, speaking with a little difficulty, "I can't tell you how much I appreciate your your coming round. I wanted to do the right thing, but I just couldn't give up such a girl as that."

"We shall let bygones be bygones, Robert," answered Mr. Worthington, clearing his throat.

"She never would have me without your consent. By the way," he cried, turning suddenly, "did she say she'd have me now?"

"I believe," said Mr. Worthington, clearing his throat again, "I believe she reserved her decision."

"I must be off," said Bob, "she goes to Coniston on Fridays. I'll drive her out. Good−by, Father."

He flew out of the room, ran against Mrs. Holden, whom he astonished by saluting on the cheek, and astonished even more by asking her to tell Silas to drive his black horses to Gabriel Post's house as the cottage was still known in Brampton. And having hastily removed some of the cinders, he flew out of the door and reached the parklike space in the middle of Brampton Street. Then he tried to walk decorously, but it was hard work. What if she should not be in? The door and windows of the little house were open that balmy afternoon, and the bees were buzzing among the flowers which Cynthia had planted on either side of the step. Bob went up the path, and

caught a glimpse of her through the entry standing in the sitting room. She was, indeed, waiting for the Coniston stage, and she did not see him. Shall I destroy the mental image of the reader who has known her so long by trying to tell what she looked like? Some heroines grow thin and worn by the troubles which they are forced to go through. Cynthia was not this kind of a heroine. She was neither tall nor short, and the dark blue gown which she wore set off (so Bob thought) the curves of her figure to perfection. Her face had become a little more grave, yes, and more noble; and the eyes and mouth had an indescribable, womanly sweetness.

He stood for a moment outside the doorway gazing at her; hesitating to desecrate that revery, which seemed to him to have a touch of sadness in it. And then she turned her head, slowly, and saw him, and her lips parted, and a startled look came into her eyes, but she did not move. He came quickly into the room and stopped again, quivering from head to foot with the passion which the sight of her never failed to unloose within him. Still she did not speak, but her lip trembled, and the love leaping in his eyes kindled a yearning in hers, a yearning she was powerless to resist. He may by that strange power have drawn her toward him he never knew. Neither of them could have given evidence on that marvellous instant when the current bridged the space between them. He could not say whether this woman whom he had seized by force before had shown a like vitality in her surrender. He only knew that her arms were woven about his neck, and that the kiss of which he had dreamed was again on his lips, and that he felt once more her wonderful, supple body pressed against his, and her heart beating, and her breast heaving. And he knew that the strength of the love in her which he had gained was beyond estimation. Thus for a time they swung together in ethereal space, breathless with the motion of their flight. The duration of such moments is in words limitless. Now he held her against him, and again he held her away that his eyes might feast upon hers until she dropped her lashes and the crimson tide flooded into her face and she hid it again in the refuge she had longed for, murmuring his name. But at last, startled by some sound without and so brought back to earth, she led him gently to the window at the side and looked up at him searchingly. He was tanned no longer.

"I was afraid you had been working too hard," she said.

"So you do love me?" was Bob's answer to this remark.

Cynthia smiled at him with her eyes: gravely, if such a thing may be said of a smile.

"Bob, how can you ask?"

"Oh, Cynthia," he cried, "if you knew what I have been through, you wouldn't have held out, I know it. I began to think I should never have you."

"But you have me now," she said, and was silent.

"Why do you look like that?" he asked.

She smiled up at him again.

"I, too, have suffered, Bob," she said. "And I have thought of you night and day."

"God bless you, sweetheart," he cried, and kissed her again, many times. "It's all right now, isn't it? I knew my father would give his consent when he found out what you were."

The expression of pain which had troubled him crossed her face again, and she put her hand on his shoulder.

"Listen, dearest," she said, "I love you. I am doing this for you. You must understand that."

"Why, yes, Cynthia, I understand it of course I do," he answered, perplexed. "I understand it, but I don't deserve it."

"I want you to know," she continued in a low voice, "that I should have married you anyway. I I could not have helped it."

"Cynthia!" "If you were to go back to the locomotive works to−morrow, I would marry you."

"On ninety dollars a month?" exclaimed Bob.

"If you wanted me," she said.

"Wanted you! I could live in a log cabin with you the rest of my life."

She drew down his face to hers, and kissed him.

"But I wished you to be reconciled with your father," she said; "I could not bear to come between you. You you are reconciled, aren't you?"

"Indeed, we are," he said.

"I am glad, Bob," she answered simply. "I should not have been happy if I had driven you away from the place where you should be, which is your home."

"Wherever you are will be my home, sweetheart," he said, and pressed her to him once more.

At length, looking past his shoulder into the street, she saw Lem Hallowell pulling up the Brampton stage before the door.

"Bob," she said, "I must go to Coniston and see Uncle Jethro. I promised him."

Bob's answer was to walk into the entry, where he stood waving the most joyous of greetings at the surprised stage driver.

"I guess you won't get anybody here, Lem," he called out.

"But, Bob," protested Cynthia, from within, afraid to show her face just then, "I have to go, I promised. And and I want to go," she added when he turned.

"I'm running a stage to Coniston to−day myself, Lem," said he, "and I'm going to steal your best passenger."

Lemuel immediately flung down his reins and jumped out of the stage and came up the path and into the entry, where he stood confronting Cynthia.

"Hev you took him, Cynthy?" he demanded.

"Yes, Lem," she answered, "won't you congratulate me?"

The warm−hearted stage driver did congratulate her in a most unmistakable manner. "I think a sight of her, Bob," he said after he had shaken both of Bob's hands and brushed his own eyes with his coat sleeve. "I've knowed her so long −" Whereupon utterance failed him, and he ran down the path and jumped into his stage again and drove

off.

And then Cynthia sent Bob on an errand not a very long one, and while he was gone, she sat down at the table and tried to realize her happiness, and failed. In less than ten minutes Bob had come back with Cousin Ephraim, as fast as he could hobble. He flung his arms around her, stick and all, and he was crying. It is a fact that old soldiers sometimes cry. But his tears did not choke his utterance.

"Great Tecumseh!" said Cousin Ephraim, "so you've went and done it, Cynthy. Siege got a little mite too hot. I callated she'd capitulate in the end, but she held out uncommon long."

"That she did," exclaimed Bob, feelingly.

"I was tellin' Bob I hain't got nothin' against him," continued Ephraim.

"Oh, Cousin Eph," said Cynthia, laughing in spite of herself, and glancing at Bob, "is that all you can say?"

"Cousin Eph's all right," said Bob, laughing too. "We understand each other."

"Callate we do," answered Ephraim. "I'll go so far as to say there hain't nobody I'd ruther see you marry. Guess I'll hev to go back to the kit, now. What's to become of the old pensioner, Cynthy?"

"The old pensioner needn't worry," said Cynthia.

Then drove up Silas the Silent, with Bob's buggy and his black trotters. All of Brampton might see them now, and all of Brampton did see them. Silas got out, his presence not being required, and Cynthia was helped in, and Bob got in beside her, and away they went, leaving Ephraim waving his stick after them from the doorstep.

It is recorded against the black trotters that they made very poor time to Coniston that day, though I cannot discover that either of them was lame. Lem Hallowell, who was there nearly an hour ahead of them, declares that the off horse had a bunch of branches in his mouth. Perhaps Bob held them in on account of the scenery that September afternoon. Incomparable scenery! I doubt if two lovers of the renaissance ever wandered through a more wondrous realm of pleasance to quote the words of the poet. Spots in it are like a park, laid out by that peerless landscape gardener, nature: dark, symmetrical pine trees on the sward, and maples in the fulness of their leaf, and great oaks on the hillsides, and coppices; and beyond, the mountain, the evergreens massed like cloud−shadows on its slopes; and all trees and coppice and mountain flattened by the haze until they seemed woven in the softest of blues and blue greens into one exquisite picture of an ancient tapestry. I, myself, have seen these pictures in that country, and marvelled.

So they drove on through that realm, which was to be their realm, and came all too soon to Coniston green. Lem Hallowell had spread the well−nigh incredible news, that Cynthia Wetherell was to marry the son of the mill−owner and railroad president of Brampton, and it seemed to Cynthia that every man and woman and child of the village was gathered at the store. Although she loved them, every one, she whispered something to Bob when she caught sight of that group on the platform, and he spoke to the trotters. Thus it happened that they flew by, and were at the tannery house before they knew it; and Cynthia, all unaided, sprang out of the buggy and ran in, alone. She found Jethro sitting outside of the kitchen door with a volume on his knee, and she saw that the print of it was large, and she knew that the book was "Robinson Crusoe."

Cynthia knelt down on the grass beside him and caught his hands in hers.

"Uncle Jethro," she said, "I am going to marry Bob Worthington."

"Yes, Cynthy," he answered. And taking the initiative for the first time in his life, he stooped down and kissed her. "I knew you would be happy in my happiness," she said, the tears brimming in her eyes.

"N−never have been so happy, Cynthy, never have."

"Uncle Jethro, I never will desert you. I shall always take care of you."

"R−read to me sometimes, Cynthy r−read to me?"

But she could not answer him. She was sobbing on the pages of that book he had given her long ago.

I like to dwell on happiness, and I am reluctant to leave these people whom I have grown to love. Jethro Bass lived to take Cynthia's children down by the brook and to show them the pictures, at least, in that wonderful edition of "Robinson Crusoe." He would never depart from the tannery house, but Cynthia went to him there, many times a week. There is a spot not far from the Coniston road, and five miles distant alike from Brampton and Coniston, where Bob Worthington built his house, and where he and Cynthia dwelt many years; and they go there to this day, in the summer−time. It stands in the midst of broad lands, and the ground in front of it slopes down to Coniston Water, artificially widened here by a stone dam into a little lake. From the balcony of the summer−house which overhangs the lake there is a wonderful view of Coniston Mountain, and Cynthia Worthington often sits there with her sewing or her book, listening to the laughter of her children, and thinking, sometimes, of bygone days.

AFTERWORD

THE reality of the foregoing pages has to the author, at least, become so vivid that he regrets the necessity of having to add an afterword. Every novel is, to some extent, a compound of truth and fiction, and he has done his best to picture conditions as they were, and to make the spirit of his book true. Certain people who were living in St. Louis during the Civil War have been mentioned as the originals of characters in "The Crisis,"and there are houses in that city which have been pointed out as fitting descriptions in that novel. An author has, frequently, people, houses, and localities in mind when he writes; but he changes them, sometimes very materially, in the process of literary construction.

It is inevitable, perhaps, that many people of a certain New England state will recognize Jethro Bass. There are different opinions extant concerning the remarkable original of this character; ardent defenders and detractors of his are still living, but all agree that he was a strange man of great power. The author disclaims any intention of writing a biography of him. Some of the things set down in this book he did, and others he did not do. Some of the anecdotes here related concerning him are, in the main, true, and for this material the author acknowledges his indebtedness particularly to Colonel Thomas B. Cheney of Ashland, New Hampshire, and to other friends who have helped him. Jethro Bass was typical of his Era, and it is of the Era that this book attempts to treat.

Concerning the locality where Jethro Bass was born and lived, it will and will not be recognized. It would have been the extreme of bad taste to have put into these pages any portraits which might have offended families or individuals, and in order that it may be known that the author has not done so he has written this Afterword. Nor has he particularly chosen for the field of this novel a state of which he is a citizen, and for which he has a sincere affection. The conditions here depicted, while retaining the characteristics of the locality, he believes to be typical of the Era over a large part of the United States.

Many of the Puritans who came to New England were impelled to emigrate from the old country, no doubt, by an aversion to pulling the forelock as well as by religious principles, and the spirit of these men prevailed for a certain time after the Revolution was fought. Such men lived and ruled in Coniston before the rise of Jethro Bass.

Self−examination is necessary for the moral health of nations as well as men, and it is the most hopeful of signs that in the United States we are to−day going through a period of self−examination.

We shall do well to ascertain the causes which have led us gradually to stray from the political principles laid down by our forefathers for all the world to see. Some of us do not even know what those principles were. I have met many intelligent men, in different states of the Union, who could not even repeat the names of the senators who sat for them in Congress. Macaulay said, in 1852, "We now know, by the clearest of all proof, that universal suffrage, even united with secret voting, is no security against the establishment of arbitrary power." To quote James Russell Lowell, writing a little later: "We have begun obscurely to recognize that . . . popular government is not in itself a panacea, is no better than any other form except as the virtue and wisdom of the people make it so."

As Americans, we cannot but believe that our political creed goes down in its foundations to the solid rock of truth. One of the best reasons for our belief lies in the fact that, since 1776, government after government has imitated our example. We have, by our very existence and rise to power, made any decided retrogression from these doctrines impossible. So many people have tried to rule themselves, and are still trying, that one begins to believe that the time is not far distant when the United States, once the most radical, will become the most conservative of nations.

Thus the duty rests to−day, more heavily than ever, upon each American citizen to make good to the world those principles upon which his government was built. To use a figure suggested by the calamity which has lately befallen one of the most beloved of our cities, there is a theory that earthquakes are caused by a necessary movement on the part of the globe to regain its axis. Whether or not the theory be true, it has its political application. In America to−day we are trying − whatever the cost to regain the true axis established for us by the founders of our Republic.

HARLAKENDEN HOUSE, May 7, 1906.