Coniston, Book I

Winston Churchill

Table of Contents

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To
M.H.C.

"We have been compelled to see what was weak in democracy as well as what was strong. We have begun obscurely to recognize that things do not go of themselves, and 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, and that when men undertake to do their own kingship, they enter upon the dangers and responsibilities as well as the privileges of the function. Above all, it looks as if we were on the way to be persuaded that no government can be carried on by declamation."

– JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I. ON THE DANGERS OF CURIOSITY

FIRST I am to write a love−story of long ago, of a time some little while after General Jackson had got into the White House and had shown the world what a real democracy was. The Era of the first six presidents had closed, and a new Era had begun. I am speaking of political Eras. Certain gentlemen, with a pious belief in democracy,

but with a firmer determination to get on top, arose, and got on top. So many of these gentlemen arose in the different states, and they were so clever, and they found so many chinks in the Constitution to crawl through and steal the people's chestnuts, that the Era may be called the Boss−Era. After the Boss came along certain Things without souls, but of many minds, and found more chinks in the Constitution: bigger chinks, for the Things were bigger, and they stole more chestnuts. But I am getting far ahead of my love−story and of my book.

The reader is warned that this first love−story will, in a few chapters, come to an end: and not to a happy end otherwise there would be no book. Lest he should throw the book away when he arrives at this page, it is only fair to tell him that there is another and a much longer love−story later on, if he will only continue to read, in which, it is hoped, he may not be disappointed.

The hills seem to leap up against the sky as I describe that region were Cynthia Ware was born, and the very old country names help to summon up the picture. Coniston Mountain, called by some the Blue Mountain, clad in Hercynian forests, ten good miles in length, north and south, with its notch road that winds over the saddle behind the withers of it. Coniston Water, that oozes out from under the loam in a hundred places on the eastern slope, gathers into a rushing stream to cleave the very granite, flows southward around the south end of Coniston Mountain, and having turned the mills at Brampton, idles through meadows westward in its own green valley until it comes to Harwich, where it works again and tumbles into a river. Brampton and Harwich are rivals, but Coniston Water gives of its power impartially to each. From the little farm clearings on the western slope of Coniston Mountain you can sweep the broad valley of a certain broad river where grew (and grow still) the giant pines that gave many a mast to King George's navy as tribute for the land. And beyond that river rises beautiful Farewell Mountain of many colors, now sapphire, now amethyst, its crest rimmed about at evening with saffron flame; and, beyond Farewell, the emerald billows of the western peaks catching the level light. A dozen little brooks are born high among the western spruces on Coniston to score deep, cool valleys in their way through Clovelly township to the broad river valleys full of the music of the water and fresh with the odor of the ferns.

To this day the railroad has not reached Coniston Village nay, nor Coniston Flat, four miles nearer Brampton. The village lies on its own little shelf under the forest−clad slope of the mountain, and in the midst of its dozen houses is the green triangle where the militia used to drill on June days. At one end of the triangle is the great pine mast that graced no frigate of George's, but flew the stars and stripes on many a liberty day. Across the road is Jonah Winch's store, with a platform so high that a man may step off his horse directly on to it; with its checker−paned windows, with its dark interior smelling of coffee and apples and molasses, yes, and of Endea rum for this was before the days of the revivals.

How those checker−paned windows bring back the picture of that village green! The meeting−house has them, lantern−like, wide and high, in three sashes white meeting−house, seat alike of government and religion, with its terraced steeple, with its classic porches north and south. Behind it is the long shed, and in front, rising out of the milkweed and the flowering thistle, the horse block of the first meeting−house, where many a pillion has left its burden in times agone. Honest Jock Hallowell built that second meeting−house was, indeed, still building it at time of which we write. He had hewn every beam and king post in it, and set every plate and slip. And Jock Hallowell is the man who, unwittingly, starts this chronicle.

At noon, on one of those madcap April days of that Coniston country, Jock descended from his work on the steeple to perceive the ungainly figure of Jethro Bass coming toward him across the green. Jethro was about thirty years of age, and he wore a coonskin cap even in those days, and trousers tucked into his boots. He carried his big head bent forward, a little to one side, and was not, at first sight, a prepossessing−looking person. As our story largely concerns him, and we must get started somehow, it may be well to fix a little attention on him.

"Heigho!" said Jock, rubbing his hands on his leather apron.

"H−how be you, Jock?" said Jethro, stopping.

"Heigho!" cried Jock, "what's this game of fox and geese you're a−playin' among the farmers?"

"C−callate to git the steeple done before frost?" inquired Jethro, without so much as a smile. "B−build it tight, Jock b−build it tight."

"Guess he'll build his'n tight, whatever it is," said Jock, looking after him as Jethro made his way to the little tannery near by.

Let it be known that there was such a thing as social rank in Coniston; and something which, for the sake of an advantageous parallel, we may call an Established Church. Coniston was a Congregational town still, and the deacons and dignitaries of that church were likewise the pillars of the state. Not many years before the time of which we write actual disestablishment had occurred, when the town ceased as a town to pay the salary of Priest Ware, as the minister was called. The father of Jethro Bass, Nathan the currier, had once, in a youthful lapse, permitted a Baptist preacher to immerse him in Coniston Water. This had been the extent of Nathan's religion; Jethro had none at all, and was, for this and other reasons, somewhere near the bottom of the social scale.

"Fox and geese!" repeated Jock, with his eyes still on Jethro's retreating back. The builder of the meeting−house rubbed a great, brown arm, scratched his head, and turned and came face to face with Cynthia Ware, in a poke bonnet.

Contrast is a favorite trick of authors, and no greater contrast is to be had in Coniston than that between Cynthia Ware and Jethro Bass. In the first place, Cynthia was the minister's daughter, and twenty−one. I can summon her now under the great maples of the village street, a virginal figure, gray eyes that kindled the face shaded by the poke bonnet, and up you went above the clouds.

"What about fox and geese, Jock?" said Cynthia.

"Jethro Bass," said Jock, who, by reason of his capability, was a privileged character. "Mark my words, Cynthy, Jethro Bass is an all−fired sight smarter than folks in this town think he be. They don't take notice of him, because he don't say much, and stutters. He hain't be'n eddicated a great deal, but I wouldn't be afeard to warrant he'd make a racket in the world some of these days."

"Jock Hallowell!" cried Cynthia, the gray eyes beginning to dance, "I suppose you think Jethro's going to be President."

"All right," said Jock, "you can laugh. Ever talked with Jethro?"

"I've hardly spoken two words to him in my life," she replied. And it was true, although the little white parsonage was scarce two hundred yards from the tannery house.

"Jethro's never ailed much," Jock remarked, having reference to Cynthia's proclivities for visiting the sick. "I've seed a good many different men in my time, and I tell you, Cynthy Ware, that Jethro's got a kind of power you don't often come acrost. Folks don't suspicion it."

In spite of herself, Cynthia was impressed by the ring of sincerity in the builder's voice. Now that she thought of it, there was rugged power in Jethro's face, especially when he took off the coonskin cap. She always nodded a greeting when she saw him in the tannery yard or on the road, and sometimes he nodded back, but oftener he had not appeared to see her. She had thought this failure to nod stupidity, but it might after all be abstraction.

"What makes you think he has ability?" she asked, picking flowers from a bunch of arbutus she held.

"He's rich, for one thing," said Jock. He had not intended a dissertation on Jethro Bass, but he felt bound to defend his statements.

"Rich!"

"Wal, he hain't poor. He's got as many as thirty mortgages round among the farmers some on land, and some on cattle."

"How did he make the money?" demanded Cynthia, in surprise.

"Hides an' wool an' bark turned 'em over an' swep' in. Gits a load, and Lyman Hull drives him down to Boston with that six−hoss team. Lyman gits drunk, Jethro keeps sober and saves."

Jock began to fashion some wooden pegs with his adze, for nails were scarce in those days. Still Cynthia lingered, picking flowers from the bunch.

"What did you mean by 'fox and geese,' Jock?" she said presently.

Jock laughed. He did not belong to the Establishment, but was a Universalist; politically he admired General Jackson. "What'd you say if Jethro was Chairman of the next Board of Selectmen?" he demanded.

No wonder Cynthia gasped. Jethro Bass, Chairman of the Board, in the honored seat of Deacon Moses Hatch, the perquisite of the church in Coniston! The idea was heresy. As a matter of fact, Jock himself uttered it as a playful exaggeration. Certain nonconformist farmers, of whom there were not a few in the town, had come into Jonah Winch's store that morning; and Jabez Miller, who lived on the north slope, had taken away the breath of the orthodox by suggesting that Jethro Bass be nominated for town office. Jock Hallowell had paused once or twice on his work on the steeple to look across the tree−tops at Coniston shouldering the sky. He had been putting two and two together, and now he was merely making five out of it, instead of four. He remembered that Jethro Bass had for some years been journeying through the town, buying his hides and wool, and collecting the interest on his mortgages.

Cynthia would have liked to reprove Jock Hallowell, and tell him there were some subjects which should not be joked about. Jethro Bass, Chairman of the Board of Selectmen!

"Well, here comes young Moses, I do believe," said Jock, gathering his pegs into his apron and preparing to ascend once more. "Callated he'd spring up pretty soon."

"Jock, you do talk foolishly for a man who is able to build a church," said Cynthia, as she walked away. The young Moses referred to was Moses Hatch, Junior, son of the pillar of the Church and State, and it was an open secret that he was madly in love with Cynthia. Let it be said of him that he was a steady−going young man, and that he sighed for the moon.

"Moses," said the girl, when they came in sight of the elms that shaded the gable of the parsonage, "what do you think of Jethro Bass?"

"Jethro Bass!" exclaimed honest Moses, "whatever put him into your head, Cynthy?" Had she mentioned, perhaps, any other young man in Coniston, Moses would have been eaten with jealousy.

"Oh, Jock was joking about him. What do you think of him?"

"Never thought one way or t'other," he answered. "Jethro never had much to do with the boys. He's always in that tannery, or out buyin' of hides. He does make a sharp bargain when he buys a hide. We always goes shares on our'n."

Cynthia was not only the minister's daughter, distinction enough, − her reputation for learning was spread through the country roundabout, and at the age of twenty she had had an offer to teach school in Harwich. Once a week in summer she went to Brampton, to the Social Library there, and sat at the feet of that Lucretia Penniman of whom Brampton has ever been so proud Lucretia Penniman, one of the first to sound the clarion note for the intellectual independence of American women; who wrote the "Hymn to Coniston"; who, to the awe of her townspeople, went out into the great world and became editress of a famous woman's journal, and knew Longfellow and Hawthorne and Bryant. Miss Lucretia it was who started the Brampton Social Library, and filled it with such books as both sexes might read with profit. Never was there a stricter index than hers. Cynthia, Miss Lucretia loved, and the training of that mind was the pleasantest task of her life.

Curiosity as a factor has never, perhaps, been given its proper weight by philosophers. Besides being fatal to a certain domestic animal, as an instigating force it has brought joy and sorrow into the lives of men and women, and made and marred careers. And curiosity now laid hold of Cynthia Ware. Why in the world she should ever have been curious about Jethro Bass is a mystery to many, for the two of them were as far apart as the poles. Cynthia, of all people, took to watching the tanner's son, and listening to the brief colloquies he had with other men at Jonah Winch's store, when she went there to buy things for the parsonage; and it seemed to her that Jock had not been altogether wrong, and that there was in the man an indefinable but very compelling force. And when a woman begins to admit that a man has force, her curiosity usually increases. On one or two of these occasions Cynthia had been startled to find his eyes fixed upon her, and though the feeling she had was closely akin to fear, she found something distinctly pleasurable in it.

May came, and the pools dried up, the orchards were pink and white, the birches and the maples were all yellow−green on the mountain side against the dark pines, and Cynthia was driving the minister's gig to Brampton. Ahead of her, in the cañon made by the road between the great woods, strode an uncouth but powerful figure coonskin cap, homespun breeches tucked into boots, and all. The gig slowed down, and Cynthia began to tremble with that same delightful fear. She knew it must be wicked, because she liked it so much. Unaccountable thing! She felt all akin to the nature about her, and her blood was coursing as the sap rushes through a tree. She would not speak to him; of that she was sure, and equally sure that he would not speak to her. The horse was walking now, and suddenly Jethro Bass faced around, and her heart stood still.

"H−how be you, Cynthy?" he said.

"How do you do, Jethro?"

A thrush in the woods began to sing a hymn, and they listened. After that a silence, save for the notes of answering birds quickened by the song, the minister's horse nibbling at the bushes. Cynthia herself could not have explained why she lingered. Suddenly he shot a question at her.

"Where be you goin'?"

"To Brampton, to get Miss Lucretia to change this book," and she held it up from her lap. It was a very large book.

"Wh−what's it about?" he demanded.

"Napoleon Bonaparte."

"Who was he?"

"He was a very strong man. He began life poor and unknown, and fought his way upward until he conquered the world."

"C−conquered the world, did you say? Conquered the world?"

"Yes."

Jethro pondered.

"Guess there's somethin' wrong about that book somethin' wrong. Conquer the United States?"

Cynthia smiled. She herself did not realize that we were not a part of the world, then.

"He conquered Europe, where all the kings and queens are, and became a king himself an emperor."

"I want to know!" said Jethro. "You said he was a poor boy?"

"Why don't you read the book, Jethro?" Cynthia answered. "I am sure I can get Miss Lucretia to let you have it."

"Don't know as I'd understand it," he demurred.

"I'll try to explain what you don't understand," said Cynthia, and her heart gave a bound at the very idea.

"Will you?" he said, looking at her eagerly. "Will you? You mean it?"

"Certainly," she answered, and blushed, not knowing why. "I I must be going," and she gathered up the reins.

"When will you give it to me?"

"I'll stop at the tannery when I come back from Brampton," she said, and drove on. Once she gave a fleeting glance over her shoulder, and he was still standing where she had left him.

When she returned, in the yellow afternoon light that flowed over wood and pasture, he came out of the tannery door. Jake Wheeler or Speedy Bates, the journeyman tailoress, from whom little escaped, could not have said it was by design thought nothing, indeed, of that part of it.

"As I live!" cried Speedy from the window to Aunt Lucy Prescott in the bed, "if Cynthy ain't givin' him a book as big as the Bible!"

12

Aunt Lucy hoped, first, that it was the Bible, and second, that Jethro would read it. Aunt Lucy, and Established Church Coniston in general, believed in snatching brands from the burning, and who so deft as Cynthia at this kind of snatching! So Cynthia herself was a hypocrite for once, and did not know it. At that time Jethro's sins were mostly of omission. As far as rum was concerned, he was a creature after Aunt Lucy's own heart, for he never touched it: true, gaunt Deacon Ira Perkins, tithing−man, had once chided him for breaking the Sabbath shooting at a fox.

To return to the book. As long as he lived, Jethro looked back to the joy of the monumental task of mastering its contents. In his mind, Napoleon became a rough Yankee general; of the cities, villages, and fortress he formed as accurate a picture as a resident of Venice from Marco Polo's account of Tartary. Jethro had learned to read, after a fashion, to write, add, multiply, and divide. He knew that George Washington and certain barefooted companions had forced a proud Britain to her knees, and much of the warring in the book took color from Captain Timothy Prescott's stories of General Stark and his campaigns, heard at Jonah Winch's store. What Paris looked like, or Berlin, or the Hospice of St. Bernard though imagined by a winter Coniston troubled Jethro not at all; the thing that stuck in his mind was that Napoleon for a considerable time, at least compelled men to do his bidding. Constitutions crumble before the Strong. Not that Jethro philosophized about constitutions. Existing conditions present themselves, and it occurred to him that there were crevices in the town system, and ways into power through the crevices for men clever enough to find them.

A week later, and in these same great woods on the way to Brampton, Cynthia overtook him once more. It was characteristic of him that he plunged at once into the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Not a very big place, this Corsica not a very big place."

13

"A little island in the Mediterranean," said Cynthia.

"Hum. Country folks, the Bonapartes country folks?"

Cynthia laughed.

"I suppose you might call them so," she said. "They were poor, and lived out of the world."

"He was a smart man. But he found things goin' his way. Didn't have to move 'em."

"Not at first," she admitted; "but he had to move mountains later. How far have you read?"

"One thing that helped him," said Jethro, in indirect answer to this question, "he got a smart woman for his wife a smart woman."

Cynthia looked down at the reins in her lap, and she felt again that wicked stirring within her, incredible stirring of minister's daughter for tanner's son. Coniston believes, and always will believe, that the social bars are strong enough. So Cynthia looked down at the reins.

"Poor Josephine!" she said, "I always wish he had not cast her off."

"C−cast her off?" said Jethro. "Cast her off! Why did he do that?"

"After a while, when he got to be Emperor, he needed a wife who would be more useful to him. Josephine had become a drag. He cared more about getting on in the world than he did about his wife."

Jethro looked away contemplatively.

"Wa−wahn't the woman to blame any?" he said.

"Read the book, and you'll see," retorted Cynthia, flicking her horse, which started at all gaits down the road. Jethro stood in his tracks, staring, but this time he did not see her face above the hood of the gig. Presently he

trudged on, head downward, pondering upon another problem than Napoleon's. Cynthia, at length, arrived in Brampton Street, in a humor that puzzled the good Miss Lucretia sorely.

CHAPTER II. ON THE WISDOM OF CHARITY

THE sun had dropped behind the mountain, leaving Coniston in amethystine shadow, and the last bee had flown homeward from the apple blossoms in front of Aunt Lucy Prescott's window, before Cynthia returned. Aunt Lucy was Cynthia's grandmother, and eighty−nine years of age. Still she sat in her window beside the lilac bush, lost in memories of a stout, rosy lass who had followed a stalwart husband up a broad river into the wilderness some seventy years agone in Indian days − Weathersfield Massacre days. That lass was Aunt Lucy herself, and in just such a May had Timothy's axe rung through the Coniston forest and reared the log cabin, where six of her children were born. Likewise in review passed the lonely months when Timothy was fighting behind his rugged General Stark for that privilege more desirable to his kind than life self−government. Timothy Prescott would pull the forelock to no man, would have such God−fearing persons as he chose make his laws for him.

Honest Captain Timothy and his Stark heroes, Aunt Lucy and her memories, have long gone to rest. Little did they dream of the nation we have lived to see, straining at her constitution like a great ship at anchor in a gale, with funnels belching forth smoke, and a new race of men thronging her decks for the mastery. Coniston is there still behind its mountain, with its rusty firelocks and its hillside graves.

Cynthia, driving back from Brampton in the gig, smiled at Aunt Lucy in the window, but she did not so much as glance at the tannery house farther on. The tannery house, be it known, was the cottage where Jethro dwelt, and which had belonged to Nathan, his father; and the tannery sheds were at some distance behind it, nearer Coniston Water. Cynthia did not glance at the tannery house, for a wave of orthodox indignation had swept over her: at any rate, we may call it so. In other words, she was angry with herself: pitied and scorned herself, if the truth be told, for her actions an inevitable mood.

In front of the minister's barn under the elms on the hill Cynthia pulled the harness from the tired horse with an energy that betokened activity of mind. She was not one who shrank from self−knowledge, and the question put itself to her, "Whither was this matter tending?" The fire that is in strong men has ever been a lure to women; and many, meaning to play with it, have been burnt thereby since the world began. But to turn the fire to some use, to make the world better for it or stronger for it, that were an achievement indeed! The horse munching his hay, Cynthia lingered as the light fainted above the ridge, with the thought that this might be woman's province, and Miss Lucretia Penniman might go on leading her women regiments to no avail. Nevertheless she was angry with Jethro, not because of what he had said, but because of what he was.

The next day is Sunday, and there is mild excitement in Coniston. For Jethro Bass, still with the coonskin cap, but in a brass−buttoned coat secretly purchased in Brampton, appeared at meeting! It made no difference that he entered quietly, and sat in the rear slip, orthodox Coniston knew that he was behind them: good Mr. Ware knew it, and changed a little his prayers and sermon: Cynthia knew it, and grew hot and cold by turns under her poke bonnet. Was he not her brand, and would she not get the credit of snatching him? How willingly, then, would she have given up that credit to the many who coveted it if it were a credit. Was Jethro at meeting for any religious purpose?

Jethro's importance to Coniston lay in his soul, and that soul was numbered at present ninety and ninth. When the meeting was over, Aunt Lucy Prescott hobbled out at an amazing pace to advise him to read chapter seven of Matthew, but he had vanished: via the horse sheds, if she had known it, and along Coniston Water to the house by the tannery, where he drew breath in a state of mind not to be depicted. He had gazed at the back of Cynthia's poke bonnet for two hours, but he had an uneasy feeling that he would have to pay a price.

The price was paid, in part, during the next six days. To do Jethro's importance absolute justice, he did inspire fear among his contemporaries, and young men and women did not say much to his face; what they did say gave them little satisfaction. Grim Deacon Ira Perkins stopped him as he was going to buy hides, and would have prayed over him if Jethro had waited; dear Aunt Lucy did pray, but in private. In six days orthodox Coniston came to the conclusion that this ninety and ninth soul were better left to her who had snatched it, Cynthia Ware.

As for Cynthia, nothing was farther from her mind. Unchristian as was the thought, if this thing she had awakened could only have been put back to sleep again, she would have thought herself happy. But would she have been happy? When Moses Hatch congratulated her, with more humor than sincerity, he received the greatest scare of his life. Yet in those days she welcomed Moses's society as she never had before; and Coniston, including Moses himself, began thinking of a wedding.

Another Saturday came, and no Cynthia went to Brampton. Jethro may or may not have been on the road. Sunday, and there was Jethro on the back seat in the meeting−house: Sunday noon, over his frugal dinner, the minister mildly remonstrates with Cynthia for neglecting one who has shown signs of grace, citing certain failures of others of his congregation: Cynthia turns scarlet, leaving the minister puzzled and a little uneasy: Monday, Miss Lucretia Penniman, alarmed, comes to Coniston to inquire after Cynthia's health: Cynthia drives back with her as far as Four Corners, talking literature and the advancement of woman; returns on foot, thinking of something else, when she discerns a figure seated on a log by the roadside, bent as in meditation. There was no going back: the thing to do was to come on, as unconcernedly as possible, not noticing anything, which Cynthia did, not without a little inward palpitating and curiosity, for which she hated herself and looked the sterner. The figure unfolded itself, like a Jack from a box.

"You say the woman wahn't any to blame wahn't any to blame?"

The poke bonnet turned away. The shoulders under it began to shake, and presently the astonished Jethro heard what seemed to be faint peals of laughter. Suddenly she turned around to him, all trace of laughter gone.

"Why don't you read the book?"

"So I am," said Jethro, "so I am. Hain't come to this casting−off yet."

"And you didn't look ahead to find out?" This with scorn.

"Never heard of readin' a book in that fashion. I'll come to it in time g−guess it won't run away."

Cynthia stared at him, perhaps with a new interest at this plodding determination. She was not quite sure that she ought to stand talking to him a third time in these woods, especially if the subject of conversation were not, as Coniston thought, the salvation of his soul. But she stayed. Here was a man who could be dealt with by no known rules, who did not even deign to notice a week of marked coldness.

"Jethro," she said, with a terrifying sternness, "I am going to ask you a question, and you must answer me truthfully."

"G−guess I won't find any trouble about that," said Jethro, apparently not in the least terrified.

"I want you to tell me why you are going to meeting."

"To see you," said Jethro, promptly, "to see you."

"Don't you know that that is wrong?"

"H−hadn't thought much about it," answered Jethro.

"Well, you should think about it. People don't go to meeting to to look at other people."

19

"Thought they did," said Jethro. "W−why do they wear their best clothes why do they wear their best clothes?"

"To honor God," said Cynthia, with a shade lacking in the conviction, for she added hurriedly: "It isn't right for you to go to church to see anybody. You go there to hear the Scriptures expounded, and to have your sins forgiven. Because I lent you that book, and you come to meeting, people think I'm converting you."

"So you be," replied Jethro, and this time it was he who smiled, "so you be."

Cynthia turned away, her lips pressed together. How to deal with such a man! Wondrous notes broke on the stillness, the thrush was singing his hymn again, only now it seemed a pæan. High in the azure a hawk wheeled, and floated.

"Couldn't you see I was very angry with you?"

"S−saw you was goin' with Moses Hatch more than common."

Cynthia drew breath sharply. This was audacity and yet she liked it.

"I am very fond of Moses," she said quickly.

"You always was charitable, Cynthy," said he.

"Haven't I been charitable to you?" she retorted.

"G−guess it has be'n charity," said Jethro. He looked down at her solemnly, thoughtfully, no trace of anger in his face, turned, and without another word strode off in the direction of Coniston Flat.

He left a tumultuous Cynthia, amazement and repentance struggling with anger, which forbade her calling him back: pride in her answering to pride in him, and she rejoicing fiercely that he had pride. Had he but known it, every step he took away from her that evening was a step in advance, and she gloried in the fact that he did not once look back. As she walked toward Coniston, the thought came to her that she was rid of the thing she had stirred up, perhaps forever, and the thrush burst into his song once more.

20

That night, after Cynthia's candle had gone out, when the minister sat on his doorsteps looking at the glory of the moon on the mountain forest, he was startled by the sight of a figure slowly climbing toward him up the slope. A second glance told him that it was Jethro's. Vaguely troubled, he watched his approach: for good Priest Ware, while able to obey one half the spriptural injunction, had not the wisdom of the serpent, and women, as typified by Cynthia, were a continual puzzle to him. That very evening, Moses Hatch had called, had been received with more favor than usual, and suddenly packed off about his business. Seated in the moonlight, the minister wondered vaguely whether Jethro Bass were troubling the girl. And now Jethro stood before him, holding out a book. Rising, Mr. Ware bade him good evening, mildly and cordially.

"C−come to leave this book for Cynthy," said Jethro.

Mr. Ware took it mechanically.

"Have you finished it?" he asked kindly.

"All I want," replied Jethro, "all I want."

He turned, and went down the slope. Twice the words rose to the minister's lips to call him back, and were suppressed. Yet what to say to him if he came? Mr. Ware sat down again, sadly, wondering why Jethro Bass should be so difficult to talk to.

The parsonage was of only one story, with a steep, sloping roof. On the left of the doorway was Cynthia's room, and the minister imagined he heard a faint, rustling noise at her window. Presently he arose, barred the door; could be heard moving around in his room for a while, and after that all was silence save for the mournful crying of a whippoorwill in the woods. Then a door opened softly, a white vision stole into the little entry lighted by the fan−window above, seized the book and stole back. Had the minister been a prying man about his household, he would have noticed next day that Cynthia's candle was burned down to the socket. He saw nothing of the kind: he saw, in fact, that his daughter flitted about the house singing, and he went out into the sun to drop potatoes. No sooner had he reached the barn than this singing ceased. But how was Mr. Ware to know that?

Twice Cynthia, during the week that followed, got half−way down the slope of the parsonage hill, the book under her arm, on her way to the tannery; twice went back, tears of humiliation and self−pity in her eyes at the thought that she should make advances to a man, and that man the tanner's son. Her household work done, a longing for further motion seized her, and she walked out under the maples of the village street. Let it be understood that Coniston was a village, by courtesy, and its shaded road a street. Suddenly, there was the tannery, Jethro standing in front of it, contemplative. Did he see her? Would he come to her? Cynthia, seized by a panic of shame, flew into Aunt Lucy Prescott's, sat through half an hour of torture while Aunt Lucy talked of redemption of sinners, during ten minutes of which Jethro stood, still contemplative. What tumult was in his breast, or whether there was any tumult, Cynthia knew not. He went into the tannery again, and though she saw him twice later in the week, he gave no sign of seeing her.

On Saturday Cynthia bought a new bonnet in Brampton; Sunday morning put it on, suddenly remembered that one went to church to honor God, and wore her old one; walked to meeting in a flutter of expectancy not to be denied, and would have looked around had that not been a cardinal sin in Coniston. No Jethro! General opinion (had she waited to hear it among the horse sheds or on the green), that Jethro's soul had slid back into the murky regions, from which it were folly for even Cynthia to try to drag it.

CHAPTER III. THE CLERK AND THE LOCKET

TO prove that Jethro's soul had not slid back into the murky regions, and that it was still indulging in flights, it is necessary to follow him (for a very short space) to Boston. Jethro himself went in Lyman Hull's six−horse team with a load of his own merchandise hides that he had tanned, and other country produce. And they did not go by the way of Truro Pass to the Capital, but took the state turnpike over the ranges, where you can see for miles and miles and miles on a clear summer day across the trembling floors of the forest tops to lonely sentinel mountains fourscore miles away.

No one takes the state turnpike nowadays except crazy tourists who are willing to risk their necks and their horses' legs for the sake of scenery. The tough little Morgans of that time, which kept their feet like cats, have all but disappeared, but there were places on that road where Lyman Hull put the shoes under his wheels for four miles at a stretch. He was not a companion many people would have chosen with whom to enjoy the beauties of such a trip, and nearly everybody in Coniston was afraid of him. Jethro Bass would sit silent on the seat for hours and it

is a fact to be noted that when he told Lyman to do a thing, Lyman did it; not, perhaps, without cursing and grumbling. Lyman was a profane and wicked man drover, farmer, trader, anything. He had a cider mill on his farm on the south slopes of Coniston which Mr. Ware had mentioned in his sermons, and which was the resort of the ungodly. The cider was not so good as Squire Northcutt's, but cheaper. Jethro was not afraid of Lyman, and he had a mortgage on the six−horse team, and on the farm and the cider mill.

After six days, Jethro and Lyman drove over Charlestown bridge and into the crooked streets of Boston, and at length arrived at a drover's hotel, or lodging−house that did not, we may be sure, front on Mount Vernon Street or face the Mall. Lyman proceeded to get drunk, and Jethro to sell the hides and other merchandise which Lyman had hauled for him.

There was a young man in Boston, when Jethro arrived in Lyman Hull's team, named William Wetherell. By extraordinary circumstances he and another connected with him are to take no small part in this story, which is a sufficient excuse for his introduction. His father had been a prosperous Portsmouth merchant in the West India trade, a man of many attainments, who had failed and died of a broken heart; and William, at two and twenty, was a clerk in the little jewellery shop of Mr. Judson in Cornhill.

William Wetherell had literary aspirations, and sat from morning till night behind the counter, reading and dreaming: dreaming that he was to be an Irving or a Walter Scott, and yet the sum total of his works in after years consisted of some letters to the Newcastle Guardian, and a beginning of the Town History of Coniston!

William had a contempt for the awkward young countryman who suddenly loomed up before him that summer's morning across the counter. But a moment before the clerk had been in a place where he would fain have lingered a city where blue waters flow swiftly between white palaces toward the sunrise.

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"And I have fitted up some chambers there
Looking toward the golden Eastern air,
And level with the living winds, which flow
Like waves above the living waves below."
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Little did William Wetherell guess, when he glanced up at the intruder, that he was looking upon one of the forces of his own life! The countryman wore a blue swallow−tail coat (fashioned by the hand of Speedy Bates), a neck−cloth, a coonskin cap, and his trousers were tucked into rawhide boots. He did not seem a promising customer for expensive jewellery, and the literary clerk did not rise, but merely closed his book with his thumb in it.

"S−sell things here," asked the countryman, "s−sell things here?"

"Occasionally, when folks have money to buy them."

"My name's Jethro Bass," said the countryman, "Jethro Bass from Coniston. Ever hear of Coniston?"

Young Mr. Wetherell never had, but many years afterward he remembered his name, heaven knows why. Jethro Bass! Perhaps it had a strange ring to it.

"F−folks told me to be careful," was Jethro's next remark. He did not look at the clerk, but kept his eyes fixed on the things within the counter.

"Somebody ought to have come with you," said the clerk, with a smile of superiority.

"D−don't know much about city ways."

"Well," said the clerk, beginning to be amused, "a man has to keep his wits about him."

Even then Jethro spared him a look, but continued to study the contents of the case.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Bass? We have some really good things here. For example, this Swiss watch, which I will sell you cheap, for one hundred and fifty dollars."

"One hundred and fifty dollars er one hundred and fifty?"

Wetherell nodded. Still the countryman did not look up.

"F−folks told me to be careful," he repeated without a smile. He was looking at the lockets, and finally pointed a large finger at one of them the most expensive, by the way. "W−what d'ye get for that?" he asked.

"Twenty dollars," the clerk promptly replied. Thirty was nearer the price, but what did it matter.

"H−how much for that?" he said, pointing to another. The clerk told him. He inquired about them all, deliberately repeating the sums, considering with so well−feigned an air of a purchaser that Mr. Wetherell began to take a real joy in the situation. For trade was slack in August, and diversion scarce. Finally he commanded that the case be put on the top of the counter, and Wetherell humored him. Whereupon he picked up the locket he had first chosen. It looked very delicate in his huge, rough hand, and Wetherell was surprised that the eyes of Mr. Bass had been caught by the most expensive, for it was far from being the showiest.

"T−twenty dollars?" he asked.

"We may as well call it that," laughed Wetherell.

"It's not too good for Cynthy," he said.

"Nothing's too good for Cynthy," answered Mr. Wetherell, mockingly, little knowing how he might come to mean it.

Jethro Bass paid no attention to this speech. Pulling a great cowhide wallet from his pocket, still holding the locket in his hand, to the amazement of the clerk he counted out twenty dollars and laid them down.

"G−guess I'll take that one, g−guess I'll take that one," he said.

Then he looked at Mr. Wetherell for the first time.

"Hold!" cried the clerk, more alarmed than he cared to show, "that's not the price. Did you think I could sell it for that price?"

"W−wahn't that the price you fixed?"

"You simpleton!" retorted Wetherell, with a conviction now that he was calling him the wrong name. "Give me back the locket, and you shall have your money again."

"W−wahn't that the price you fixed?"

"Yes, but −"

"G−guess I'll keep the locket g−guess I'll keep the locket."

Wetherell looked at him aghast, and there was no doubt about his determination. With a sinking heart the clerk realized that he should have to make good to Mr. Judson the seven odd dollars of difference, and then he lost his head. Slipping round the counter to the door of the shop, he turned the key, thrust it in his pocket, and faced Mr. Bass again from behind the counter.

"You don't leave this shop," cried the clerk, "until you give me back that locket."

Jethro Bass turned. A bench ran along the farther wall, and there he planted himself without a word, while the clerk stared at him, with what feelings of uneasiness I shall not attempt to describe, for the customer was plainly determined to wait until hunger should drive one of them forth. The minutes passed, and Wetherell began to hate him. Then some one tried the door, peered in through the glass, perceived Jethro, shook the knob, knocked violently, all to no purpose. Jethro seemed lost in a revery.

"This has gone far enough," said the clerk, trying to keep his voice from shaking; "it is beyond a joke. Give me back the locket." And he tendered Jethro the money again.

"W−wahn't that the price you fixed?" asked Jethro, innocently.

Wetherell choked. The man outside shook the door again, and people on the sidewalk stopped, and presently against the window−panes a sea of curious faces gazed in upon them. Mr. Bass's thoughts apparently were fixed on Eternity he looked neither at the people nor at Wetherell. And then, the crowd parting as for one in authority, as in a bad dream the clerk saw his employer, Mr. Judson, courteously pushing away the customer at the door who would not be denied. Another moment, and Mr. Judson had gained admittance with his private key, and stood on the threshold staring at clerk and customer. Jethro gave no sign that the situation had changed.

"William," said Mr. Judson, in a dangerously quiet voice, "perhaps you can explain this extraordinary state of affairs."

"I can, sir," William cried. "This gentleman" (the word stuck in his throat), "this gentleman came in here to examine lockets which I had no reason to believe he would buy. I admit my fault, sir. He asked the price of the most expensive, and I told him twenty dollars, merely for a jest, sir." William hesitated.

"Well?" said Mr. Judson.

"After pricing every locket in the case, he seized the first one, handed me twenty dollars, and now refuses to give it up, although he knows the price is twenty−seven."

"Then?"

"Then I locked the door, sir. He sat down there, and hasn't moved since."

Mr. Judson looked again at Mr. Bass, this time with unmistakable interest. The other customer began to laugh, and the crowd was pressing in, and Mr. Judson turned and shut the door in their faces. All this time Mr. Bass had not moved, not so much as to lift his head or shift one of his great cowhide boots.

"Well, sir," demanded Mr. Judson, "what have you to say?"

"N−nothin'. G−guess I'll keep the locket. I've paid for it I've paid for it."

"And you are aware, my friend," said Mr. Judson, "that my clerk has given you the wrong price?"

"Guess that's his l−lookout." He sat there, doggedly unconcerned.

A bull would have seemed more at home in a china−shop than Jethro Bass in a jewellery store. But Mr. Judson himself was a man out the ordinary, and instead of getting angry he began to be more interested.

"Took you for a greenhorn, did he?" he remarked.

"F−folks told me to be careful to be careful," said Mr. Bass.

Then Mr. Judson laughed. It was all the more disconcerting to William Wetherell, because his employer laughed rarely. He laid his hand on Jethro's shoulder.

"He might have spared himself the trouble, my young friend," he said. "You didn't expect to find a greenhorn behind a jewellery counter, did you?"

"S−surprised me some," said Jethro.

Mr. Judson laughed again, all the while staring at him.

29

"I am going to let you keep the locket," he said, "because it will teach my greenhorn a lesson. William, do you hear that?"

"Yes, sir," William said, and his face was very red.

Mr. Bass rose solemnly, apparently unmoved by his triumph in a somewhat remarkable transaction, and William long remembered how he towered over all of them. He held the locket out to Mr. Judson, who stared at it, astonished.

"What's this?" said that gentleman; "you don't want it?"

"Guess I'll have it marked," said Jethro, "ef it don't cost extry."

"Marked!" gasped Mr. Judson, "marked!"

"Ef it don't cost extry," Jethro repeated.

"Well, I'll −" exclaimed Mr. Judson, and suddenly recalled that he was a church member. "What description do you wish put into it?" he asked, recovering himself with an effort.

Jethro thrust his hand into his pocket, and again the cowhide wallet came out. He tendered Mr. Judson a somewhat soiled piece of paper, and Mr. Judson read:

"Cynthy, from Jethro"

"Cynthy," Mr. Judson repeated, in a tremulous voice, "Cynthy, not Cynthia."

"H−how is it written," said Jethro, leaning over it, "h−how is it written?"

"Cynthy," answered Mr. Judson, involuntarily.

"Then make it Cynthy make it Cynthy."

"Cynthy it shall be," said Mr. Judson, with conviction.

"When'll you have it done?"

"To−night," replied Mr. Judson, with a twinkle in his eye, "to−night, as a special favor."

"What time w−what time?"

"Seven o'clock, sir. May I send it to your hotel? The Tremont House, I suppose?"

"I I'll call," said Jethro, so solemnly that Mr. Judson kept his laughter until he was gone.

30

From the door they watched him silently as he strode across the street and turned the corner. Then Mr. Judson turned. "That man will make his mark, William," he said; and added thoughtfully, "but whether for good or evil, I know not."

CHAPTER IV. ENTER A GREAT MAN, INCOGNITO

WHAT Cynthia may have thought or felt during Jethro's absence in Boston, and for some months thereafter, she kept to herself. Honest Moses Hatch pursued his courting untroubled, and never knew that he had a rival. Moses would as soon have questioned the seasons or the weather as Cynthia's changes of moods, which were indeed the weather for him, and when storms came he sat with his back to them, waiting for the sunshine. He had long ceased proposing marriage, in the firm belief that Cynthia would set the day in her own good time. Thereby he was saved much suffering.

The summer flew on apace, for Coniston. Fragrant hay was cut on hillsides won from rock and forest, and Coniston Water sang a gentler melody save when the clouds floated among the spruces on the mountain and the rain beat on the shingles. During the still days before the turn of the year, days of bending fruit boughs, crab−apples glistening red in the soft sunlight, rumor came from Brampton to wrinkle the forehead of Moses Hatch as he worked among his father's orchards.

The rumor was of a Mr. Isaac Dudley Worthington, a name destined to make much rumor before it was to be carved on the marble. Isaac D. Worthington, indeed, might by a stretch of the imagination be called the pioneer of all the genus to be known in the future as City Folks, who were, two generations later, to invade the country like a devouring army of locusts.

At that time a stranger in Brampton was enough to set the town agog. But a young man of three and twenty, with an independent income of four hundred dollars a year! or any income at all not derived from his own labor was unheard of. It is said that when the stage from over Truro Gap arrived in Brampton Street a hundred eyes gazed at him unseen, from various ambushes, and followed him up the walk to Silas Wheelock's, where he was to board. In half an hour Brampton knew the essentials of Isaac Worthington's story, and Sam Price was on his way with it to Coniston for distribution at Jonah Winch's store.

Young Mr. Worthington was from Boston no less; slim, pale, medium height, but with an alert look, and a

high−bridged nose. But his clothes! Sam Price's vocabulary was insufficient here, they were cut in such a way, and Mr. Worthington was downright distinguished−looking under his gray beaver. Why had he come to Brampton? demanded Deacon Ira Perkins. Sam had saved this for the last. Young Mr. Worthington was threatened with consumption, and had been sent to live with his distant relative, Silas Wheelock.

The presence of a gentleman of leisure although threatened with consumption became an all−absorbing topic in two villages and three hamlets, and more than one swain, hitherto successful, felt the wind blow colder. But in a fortnight it was known that a petticoat did not make Isaac Worthington even turn his head. Curiosity centered on Silas Wheelock's barn, where Mr. Worthington had fitted up a shop, and presently various strange models of contrivances began to take shape there. What these were, Silas himself knew not; and the gentleman of leisure was, alas! close−mouthed. When he was not sawing and hammering and planing, he took long walks up and down Coniston Water, and was surprised deep in thought at several places.

Nathan Bass's story−and−a−half house, devoid of paint, faced the road, and behind it was the shed, or barn, that served as the tannery, and between the tannery and Coniston Water were the vats. The rain flew in silvery spray, and the drops shone like jewels on the coat of a young man who stood looking in at the tannery door. Young Jake Wheeler, son of the village spendthrift, was driving a lean white horse round in a ring: to the horse was attached a beam, and on the beam a huge round stone rolled on a circular oak platform. Jethro Bass, who was engaged in pushing hemlock bark under the stone to be crushed, straightened. Of the three, the horse had seen the visitor first, and stopped in his tracks.

"Jethro!" whispered Jake, tingling with an excitement that was but natural. Jethro had begun to sweep the finer pieces of bark toward the centre. "It's the city man, walked up here from Brampton."

It was indeed Mr. Worthington, slightly more sun−burned and less citified−looking than on his arrival, and he wore a woollen cap of Brampton make. Even then, despite his wavy hair and delicate appearance, Isaac Worthington had the hawklike look which became famous in later years, and at length he approached Jethro and fixed his eye upon him.

"Kind of slow work, isn't it?" remarked Mr. Worthington.

The white horse was the only one to break the silence that followed, by sneezing with all his might.

"How is the tannery business in these parts?" essayed Mr. Worthington again.

"Thinkin' of it?" said Jethro. "T−thinkin' of it, be you?"

"No," answered Mr. Worthington, hastily. "If I were," he added, "I'd put in new machinery. That horse and stone is primitive."

"What kind of machinery would you put in?" asked Jethro.

"Ah," answered Mr. Worthington, "that will interest you. All New Englanders are naturally progressive, I take it."

"W−what was it you took?"

"I was merely remarking on the enterprise of New Englanders," said Worthington, flushing. "On my journey up here, beside the Merrimac, I had the opportunity to inspect the new steam−boiler, the fulling−mill, the splitting−machine, and other remarkable improvements. In fact, these suggested one or two little things to me, which might be of interest to you."

"Well," said Jethro, "they might, and then again they mightn't. Guess it depends."

"Depends!" exclaimed the man of leisure, "depends on what?"

"H−how much you know about it."

Young Mr. Worthington, instead of being justly indignant, laughed and settled himself comfortably on a pile of bark. He thought Jethro a character, and he was not mistaken. On the other hand, Mr. Worthington displayed a knowledge of the fulling−mill and splitting−machine and the process of tanneries in general that was surprising. Jethro, had Mr. Worthington but known it, was more interested in animate machines: more interested in Mr. Worthington than the fulling−mill or, indeed, the tannery business.

At length the visitor fell silent, his sense of superiority suddenly gone. Others had had this same feeling with Jethro, even the minister; but the man of leisure (who was nothing of the sort) merely felt a kind of bewilderment.

"Callatin' to live in Brampton be you?" asked Jethro.

"I am living there now."

"C−callatin' to set up a mill some day?"

Mr. Worthington fairly leaped off the bark pile.

"What makes you say that?" he demanded.

"G−guesswork," said Jethro, starting to shovel again, "g−guesswork."

To take a walk in the wild, to come upon a bumpkin in cowhide boots crushing bark, to have him read within twenty minutes a cherished and well−hidden ambition which Brampton had not discovered in a month (and did not discover for many years) was sufficiently startling. Well might Mr. Worthington tremble for his other ambitions, and they were many.

Jethro stepped out, passing Mr. Worthington as though he had already forgotten the gentleman's existence, and seized an armful of bark that lay under cover of a lean−to. Just then, heralded by a brightening of the western sky, a girl appeared down the road, her head bent a little as in thought, and if she saw the group by the tannery house she gave no sign. Two of them stared at her Jake Wheeler and Mr. Worthington. Suddenly Jake, implike, turned and stared at Worthington.

"Cynthy Ware, the minister's daughter," he said.

"Haven't I seen her in Brampton?" inquired Mr. Worthington, little thinking of the consequences of the question.

"Guess you have," answered Jake. "Cynthy goes to the Social Library, to git books. She knows more'n the minister himself, a sight more."

"Where does the minister live?" asked Mr. Worthington.

Jake pulled him by the sleeve toward the road, and pointed to the low gable of the little parsonage under the elms on the hill beyond the meeting−house. The visitor gave a short glance at it, swung around and gave a longer glance at the figure disappearing in the other direction. He did not suspect that Jake was what is now called a news agency. Then Mr. Worthington turned to Jethro, who was stooping over the bark.

"If you come to Brampton, call and see me," he said. "You'll find me at Silas Wheelock's."

He got no answer, but apparently expected none, and he started off down the Brampton road in the direction Cynthia had taken.

"That makes another," said Jake, significantly, "and Speedy Bates says he never looks at wimmen. Godfrey, I wish I could see Moses now."

Mr. Worthington had not been quite ingenuous with Jake. To tell the truth, he had made the acquaintance of the Social Library and Miss Lucretia, and that lady had sung the praises of her favorite. Once out of sight of Jethro, Mr. Worthington quickened his steps, passed the store, where he was remarked by two of Jonah's customers, and his blood leaped when he saw the girl in front of him, walking faster now. Yes it is a fact that Isaac Worthington's blood once leaped. He kept on, but when near her had a spasm of fright to make his teeth fairly chatter, and then another spasm followed, for Cynthia had turned around.

"How do you do, Mr. Worthington?" she said, dropping him a little courtesy. Mr. Worthington stopped in his tracks, and it was some time before he remembered to take off his woollen cap and sweep the mud with it.

"You know my name!" he exclaimed.

"It is known from Tarleton Four Corners to Harwich," said Cynthia, "all that distance. To tell the truth," she added, "those are the boundaries of my world." And Mr. Worthington being still silent, "How do you like being a big frog in a little pond?"

"If it were your pond, Miss Cynthia," he responded gallantly, "I should be content to be a little frog."

"Would you?" she said; "I don't believe you."

This was not subtle flattery, but the truth Mr. Worthington would never be content to be a little anything. So he had been judged twice in an afternoon, once by Jethro and again by Cynthia.

"Why don't you believe me?" he asked ecstatically.

"A woman's instinct, Mr. Worthington, has very little reason in it."

"I hear, Miss Cynthia," he said gallantly, "that your instinct is fortified by learning, since Miss Penniman tells me that you are quite capable of taking a school in Boston."

"Then I should be doubly sure of your character," she retorted with a twinkle.

"Will you tell my fortune?" he said gayly.

"Not on such a slight acquaintance," she replied. "Good−by Mr. Worthington."

"I shall see you in Brampton," he cried, "I I have seen you in Brampton."

She did not answer this confession, but left him, and presently disappeared beyond the triangle of the green, while Mr. Worthington pursued his way to Brampton by the road, his thoughts that evening not on waterfalls, or machinery. As for Cynthia's conduct, I do not defend or explain it, for I have found out that the best and wisest of women can at times be coquettish.

It was that meeting which shook the serenity of poor Moses, and he learned of it when he went to Jonah Winch's store an hour later. An hour later, indeed, Coniston was discussing the man of leisure in a new light. It was possible that Cynthia might take him, and Deacon Ira Perkins made a note the next time he went to Brampton to question Silas Wheelock on Mr. Worthington's origin, habits, and orthodoxy.

Cynthia troubled herself very little about any of these. Scarcely any purpose in the world is single, but she had a purpose in talking to Mr. Worthington, besides the pleasure it gave her. And the next Saturday, when she rode off to Brampton, some one looked through the cracks in the tannery shed and saw that she wore her new bonnet.

There is scarcely a pleasanter place in the world than Brampton Street on a summer's day. Down the length of it runs a wide green, shaded by spreading trees, and on either side, tree−shaded, too, and each in its own little plot, gabled houses of that simple, graceful architecture of our forefathers. Some of these had fluted pilasters and cornices, the envy of many a modern architect, and fan−shaped windows in dormer and doorway. And there was the church, then new, that still stands to the glory of its builders; with terraced steeple and pillared porch and the widest of checker−paned sashes to let in the light on high−backed pews and gallery.

The celebrated Social Library, halfway up the street, occupied part of Miss Lucretia's little house; or, it might better be said, Miss Lucretia boarded with the Social Library. There Cynthia hitched her horse, gave greeting to Mr. Ezra Graves and others who paused, and, before she was fairly in the door, was clasped in Miss Lucretia's arms. There were new books to be discussed, arrived by the stage the day before; but scarce half an hour had passed before Cynthia started guiltily at a timid knock, and Miss Lucretia rose briskly.

"It must be Ezra Graves come for the Gibbon," she said. "He's early." And she went to the door. Cynthia thought it was not Ezra. Then came Miss Lucretia's voice from the entry:

"Why, Mr. Worthington! Have you read the 'Last of the Mohicans' already?"

There he stood, indeed, the man of leisure, and to−day he wore his beaver hat. No, he had not yet read the 'Last of the Mohicans.' There were things in it that Mr. Worthington would like to discuss with Miss Penniman. Was it not a social library? At this juncture there came a giggle from within that made him turn scarlet, and he scarcely heard Miss Lucretia offering to discuss the whole range of letters. Enter Mr. Worthington, bows profoundly to Miss Lucretia's guest, his beaver in his hand, and the discussion begins, Cynthia taking no part in it. Strangely enough, Mr. Worthington's remarks on American Indians are not only intelligent, but interesting. The clock strikes four, Miss Lucretia starts up, suddenly remembering that she has promised to read to an invalid, and with many regrets from Mr. Worthington, she departs. Then he sits down again, twirling his beaver, while Cynthia looks at him in quiet amusement.

"I shall walk to Coniston again, next week," he announced.

"What an energetic man!" said Cynthia.

"I want to have my fortune told."

"I hear that you walk a great deal," she remarked, "up and down Coniston Water. I shall begin to think you romantic, Mr. Worthington perhaps a poet."

"I don't walk up and down Coniston Water for that reason," he answered earnestly.

"Might I be so bold as to ask the reason?" she ventured.

Great men have their weaknesses. And many, close−mouthed with their own sex, will tell their cherished hopes to a woman, if their interests are engaged. With a bas−relief of Isaac Worthington in the town library to−day (his own library), and a full−length portrait of him in the capitol of the state, who shall deny this title to greatness?

He leaned a little toward her, his face illuminated by his subject, which was himself.

"I will confide in you," he said, "that some day I shall build here in Brampton a woollen mill which will be the best of its kind. If I gain money, it will not be to hoard it or to waste it. I shall try to make the town better for it, and the state, and I shall try to elevate my neighbors."

Cynthia could not deny that these were laudable ambitions.

"Something tells me," he continued, "that I shall succeed. And that is why I walk on Coniston Water to choose the best site for a dam."

"I am honored by your secret, but I feel that the responsibility you repose in me is too great," she said.

"I can think of none in whom I would rather confide," said he.

"And am I the only one in all Brampton, Harwich, and Coniston who knows this?" she asked.

Mr. Worthington laughed.

"The only one of importance," he answered. "This week, when I went to Coniston, I had a strange experience. I left the brook at a tannery, and a most singular fellow was in the shed shovelling bark. I tried to get him to talk, and told him about some new tanning machinery I had seen. Suddenly he turned on me and asked me if I was 'callatin' to set up a mill.' He gave me a queer feeling. Do you have many such odd characters in Coniston, Miss Cynthia? You're not going?"

Cynthia had risen, and all of the laughter was gone from her eyes. What had happened to make her grow suddenly grave, Isaac Worthington never knew.

"I have to get my father's supper," she said.

He, too, rose, puzzled and disconcerted at this change in her.

"And may I not come to Coniston?" he asked.

"My father and I should be glad to see you, Mr. Worthington," she answered.

He untied her horse and essayed one more topic.

"You are taking a very big book," he said. "May I look at the title?"

She showed it to him in silence. It was the "Life of Napoleon Bonaparte."

CHAPTER V. THE KING IS DEAD! LONG LIVE THE KING!

ISAAC Worthington came to Coniston not once, but many times, before the snow fell; and afterward, too, in Silas Wheelock's yellow sleigh through the great drifts under the pines, the chestnut Morgan trotting to one side in the tracks. On one of these excursions he fell in with that singular character of a bumpkin who had interested him on his first visit, in coonskin cap and overcoat and mittens. Jethro Bass was plodding in the same direction, and Isaac Worthington, out of the goodness of his heart, invited him into the sleigh. He was scarcely prepared for the bumpkin's curt refusal, but put it down to native boorishness, and thought no more about it then.

What troubled Mr. Worthington infinitely more was the progress of his suit; for it had become a suit, though progress is a wrong word to use in connection with it. So far had he got, not a great distance, and then came to what he at length discovered was a wall, and apparently impenetrable. He was not even allowed to look over it. Cynthia was kind, engaging, even mirthful, at times, save when he approached it; and he became convinced that a certain sorrow lay in the forbidden ground. The nearest he had come to it was when he mentioned again, by accident, that life of Napoleon.

That Cynthia would accept him, nobody doubted for an instant. It would be madness not to. He was orthodox, so Deacon Ira had discovered, of good habits, and there was the princely four hundred a year almost a minister's salary! Little people guessed that there was no love−making only endless discussions of books beside the great centre chimney, and discussions of Isaac Worthington's career.

It is a fact for future consideration that Isaac Worthington proposed to Cynthia Ware, although neither Speedy Bates nor Deacon Ira Perkins heard him do so. It had been very carefully prepared, that speech, and was a model of proposals for the rising young men of all time. Mr. Worthington preferred to offer himself for what he was going to be not for what he was. He tendered to Cynthia a note for a large amount, payable in some twenty years, with interest. The astonishing thing to record is that in twenty years he could have more than paid the note, although he could not have foreseen at the time the Worthington Free Library and the Truro Railroad, and the stained−glass window in the church and the great marble monument on the hill to another woman. All of these things, and more, Cynthia might have had if she had only accepted that promise to pay! But she did not accept it. He was a trifle more robust than when he came to Brampton in the summer, but perhaps she doubted his promise to pay.

It may have been guessed, although the language we have used has been purposely delicate, that Cynthia was already in love with somebody else. Shame of shames and horror of horrors with Jethro Bass! With Strength, in the crudest form in which it is created, perhaps, but yet with Strength. The strength might gradually and eventually be refined. Such was her hope, when she had any. It is hard, looking back upon that virginal and cultured Cynthia, to be convinced that she could have loved passionately, and such a man! But love she did, and passionately, too, and hated herself for it, and prayed and struggled to cast out what she believed, at times, to be a devil.

The ancient allegory of Cupid and the arrows has never been improved upon: of Cupid, who should never in the world have been trusted with a weapon, who defies all game laws, who shoots people in the bushes and innocent bystanders generally, the weak and the helpless and the strong and self−confident! There is no more reason in it than that. He shot Cynthia Ware, and what she suffered in secret Coniston never guessed. What parallels in history shall I quote to bring home the enormity of such a mésalliance? Orthodox Coniston would have gone into sackcloth and ashes, and was soon to go into these, anyway.

I am not trying to keep the lovers apart for any mere purposes of fiction, this is a true chronicle, and they stayed apart most of that winter. Jethro went about his daily tasks, which were now become manifold, and he wore the locket on its little chain himself. He did not think that Cynthia loved him yet, but he had the effrontery to believe

that she might, some day; and he was content to wait. He saw that she avoided him, and he was too proud to go to the parsonage and so incur ridicule and contempt.

Jethro was content to wait. That is a clew to his character throughout his life. He would wait for his love, he would wait for his hate: he had waited ten years before putting into practice the first step of a little scheme which he had been gradually developing during that time, for which he had been amassing money, and the life of Napoleon Bonaparte, by the way, had given him some valuable ideas. Jethro, as well as Isaac D. Worthington, had ambitions, although no one in Coniston had hitherto guessed them except Jock Hallowell and Cynthia Ware, after her curiosity had been aroused.

Even as Isaac D. Worthington did not dream of the Truro Railroad and of an era in the haze of futurity, it did not occur to Jethro Bass that his ambitions tended to the making of another era that was at hand. Makers of eras are too busy thinking about themselves and like immediate matters to worry about history. Jethro never heard the expression about "cracks in the Constitution," and would not have known what it meant, he merely had the desire to get on top. But with Established Church Coniston tight in the saddle (in the person of Moses Hatch, Senior), how was he to do it?

As the winter wore on, and March town meeting approached, strange rumors of a Democratic ticket began to drift into Jonah Winch's store, − a Democratic ticket headed by Fletcher Bartlett, of all men, as chairman of the board. Moses laughed when he first heard of it, for Fletcher was an easy−going farmer of the Methodist persuasion who was always in debt, and the other members of the ticket, so far as Moses could learn of it were remarkable neither for orthodoxy or solidity. The rumors persisted, and still Moses laughed, for the senior selectman was a big man with flesh on him, who could laugh with dignity.

"Moses," said Deacon Lysander Richardson as they stood on the platform of the store one sunny Saturday in February, "somebody's put Fletcher up to this. He hain't got sense enough to act that independent all by himself."

"You be always croakin', Lysander," answered Moses.

Cynthia Ware, who had come to the store for buttons for Speedy Bates, who was making a new coat for the minister, heard these remarks, and stood thoughtfully staring at the blue coat tails of the elders. A brass button was gone from Deacon Lysander's, and she wanted to sew it on. Suddenly she looked up, and saw Jock Hallowell standing beside her. Jock winked and Cynthia blushed and hurried homeward without a word. She remembered, vividly enough, what Jock had told her the spring before, and several times during the week that followed she thought of waylaying him and asking what he knew. But she could not summon the courage. As a matter of fact, Jock knew nothing, but he had a theory. He was a strange man, Jock, who whistled all day on roof and steeple and meddled with nobody's business, as a rule. What had impelled him to talk to Cynthia in the way he had must remain a mystery.

Meanwhile the disquieting rumors continued to come in. Jabez Miller, on the north slope, had told Samuel Todd, who told Ephraim Williams, that he was going to vote for Fletcher. Moses Hatch hitched up his team and went out to see Jabez, spent an hour in general conversation, and then plumped the question, taking, as he said, that means of finding out. Jabez hemmed and hawed, said his farm was mortgaged; spoke at some length about the American citizen, however humble, having a right to vote as he chose. A most unusual line for Jabez, and the whole matter very mysterious and not a little ominous. Moses drove homeward that sparkling day, shutting his eyes to the glare of the ice crystals on the pines, and thinking profoundly. He made other excursions, enough to satisfy himself that this disease, so new and unheard of (the right of the unfit to hold office), actually existed. Where the germ began that caused it, Moses knew no better than the deacon, since those who were suspected of leanings toward Fletcher Bartlett were strangely secretive. The practical result of Moses' profound thought was a meeting, in his own house, without respect to party; Democrats and Whigs alike, opened by a prayer from the minister himself. The meeting, after a futile session, broke up dismally. Sedition and conspiracy existed; a chief

offender and master mind there was, somewhere. But who was he?

Good Mr. Ware went home, troubled in spirit, shaking his head. He had a cold, and was not so strong as he used to be, and should not have gone to the meeting at all. At supper, Cynthia listened with her eyes on her plate while he told her of the affair.

"Somebody's behind this, Cynthia," he said. "It's the most astonishing thing in my experience that we cannot discover who has incited them. All the unattached people in the town seem to have been organized." Mr. Ware was wont to speak with moderation even at his own table. He said unattached not ungodly.

Cynthia kept her eyes on her plate, but she felt as though her body were afire. Little did the minister imagine, as he went off to write his sermon, that his daughter might have given him the clew to the mystery. Yes, Cynthia guessed; and she could not read that evening because of the tumult of her thoughts. What was her duty in the matter? To tell her father her suspicions? They were only suspicions, after all, and she could make no accusations. And Jethro! Although she condemned him, there was something in the situation that appealed to a most reprehensible sense of humor. Cynthia caught herself smiling once or twice, and knew that it was wicked. She excused Jethro, and told herself that, with his lack of training, he could know no better. Then an idea came to her, and the very boldness of it made her grow hot again. She would appeal to him: tell him that that power he had over other men could be put to better and finer uses. She would appeal to him, and he would abandon the matter. That the man loved her with the whole of his rude strength she was sure, and that knowledge had been the only salve to her shame.

So far we have only suspicions ourselves; and, strange to relate, if we go around Coniston with Jethro behind his little red Morgan, we shall come back with nothing but suspicions. They will amount to convictions, yet we cannot prove them. The reader very naturally demands some specific information how did Jethro do it? I confess that I can only indicate in a very general way: I can prove nothing. Nobody ever could prove anything against Jethro Bass. Bring the following evidence before any grand jury in the country, and see if they don't throw it out of court.

Jethro, in the course of his weekly round of strictly business visits throughout the town, drives into Samuel Todd's farmyard, and hitches on the sunny side of the red barns. The town of Coniston, it must be explained for the benefit of those who do not understand the word "town" in the New England sense, was a tract of country about ten miles by ten, the most thickly settled portion of which was the village of Coniston, consisting of twelve houses. Jethro drives into the barnyard, and Samuel Todd comes out. He is a little man, and has a habit of rubbing the sharp ridge of his nose.

"Haow be you, Jethro?" says Samuel. "Killed the brindle Thursday. Finest hide you ever seed."

"G−goin' to town meetin' Tuesday g−goin' to town meetin' Tuesday − Sam'l?" says Jethro.

50

"I was callatin' to, Jethro."

"Democrat hain't ye Democrat?"

"Callate to be."

"How much store do ye set by that hide?"

Samuel rubs his nose. Then he names a price that the hide might fetch, under favorable circumstances, in Boston. Jethro does not wince.

"Who d'ye callate to vote for, Sam'l?"

Samuel rubs his nose.

"Heerd they was a−goin' to put up Fletcher and Amos Cuthbert, an' Sam Price for Moderator." (What a convenient word is they when used politically!) "Hain't made up my mind, clear," says Samuel.

"C−comin' by the tannery after town meetin'?" inquired Jethro, casually.

"Don't know but what I kin."

"F−fetch the hide f−fetch the hide."

And Jethro drives off, with Samuel looking after him, rubbing his nose. "No bill," says the jury if you can get Samuel into court. But you can't. Even Moses Hatch can get nothing out of Samuel, who then talks Jacksonian principles and the rights of an American citizen.

Let us pursue this matter a little farther, and form a committee of investigation. Where did Mr. Todd learn anything about Jacksonian principles? From Mr. Samuel Price, whom they have spoken of for Moderator. And where did Mr. Price learn of these principles? Any one in Coniston will tell you that Mr. Price makes a specialty of orators and oratory, and will hold forth at the drop of a hat in Jonah Winch's store or anywhere else. Who is Mr. Price? He is a tall, sallow young man of eight and twenty, with a wedge−shaped face, a bachelor and a Methodist, who farms in a small way on the southern slope, and saves his money. He has become almost insupportable since they have named him for Moderator.

Get Mr. Price into court. Here is a man who assuredly knows who they are: if we are not much mistaken, he is their mouthpiece. Get an eel into court. There is only one man in town who can hold an eel, and he isn't on the jury. Mr. Price will talk plentifully, in his nasal way; but he won't tell you anything.

Mr. Price has been nominated to fill Deacon Lysander Richardson's shoes in the following manner: One day in the late autumn a man in a coonskin cap stops beside Mr. Price's woodpile, where Mr. Price has been chopping wood, pausing occasionally to stare off through the purple haze at the south shoulder of Coniston Mountain.

"Haow be you, Jethro?" says Mr. Price, nasally.

"D−Democrats are talkin' some of namin' you Moderator next meetin'," says the man in the coonskin cap.

"Want to know!" ejaculates Mr. Price, dropping the axe and straightening up in amazement. For Mr. Price's ambition soared no higher, and he had made no secret of it. "Wal! Whar'd you hear that, Jethro?"

"H−heerd it round some. D−Democrat hain't you Democrat?"

"Always callate to be."

"J−Jacksonian Democrat?"

"Guess I be."

Silence for a while, that Mr. Price may feel the gavel in his hand, which he does.

"Know somewhat about Jacksonian principles, don't ye know somewhat?"

"Callate to," says Mr. Price, proudly.

"T−talk 'em up, Sam t−talk 'em up. C−canvass, Sam."

With these words of neighborly advice, Mr. Bass went off down the road, and Mr. Price chopped no more wood that night; but repeated to himself many times in his nasal voice, "I want to know!" In the course of the next few weeks various gentlemen mentioned to Mr. Price that he had been spoken of for Moderator, and he became acquainted with the names of the other candidates on the same mysterious ticket who were mentioned. Whereupon he girded up his loins and went forth and preached the word of Jacksonian Democracy in all the farmhouses roundabout, with such effect that Samuel Todd and others were able to talk with some fluency about the rights of American citizens.

Question before the Committee, undisposed of: Who nominated Samuel Price for Moderator? Samuel Price gives the evidence, tells the court he does not know, and is duly cautioned and excused.

Let us call, next, Mr. Eben Williams, if we can. Moses Hatch, Senior, has already interrogated him with all the authority of the law and the church, for Mr. Williams is orthodox, though the deacons have to remind him of his duty once in a while. Eben is timid, and replies to us, as to Moses, that he has heard of the Democratic ticket, and callates that Fletcher Bartlett, who has always been the leader of the Democratic party, has named the ticket. He did not mention Jethro Bass to Deacon Hatch. Why should he? What has Jethro Bass got to do with politics?

Eben lives on a southern spur, next to Amos Cuthbert, where you can look off for forty miles across the billowy mountains of the west. From no spot in Coniston town is the sunset so fine on distant Farewell Mountain, and Eben's sheep feed on pastures where only mountain−bred sheep can cling and thrive. Coniston, be it known, at this time is one of the famous wool towns of New England: before the industry went West, with other industries. But Eben William's sheep do not wholly belong to him they are mortgaged and Eben's farm is mortgaged.

Jethro Bass Eben testifies to us is in the habit of visiting him once a month, perhaps, when he goes to Amos Cuthbert's. Just friendly calls. Is it not a fact that Jethro Bass holds his mortgage? Yes, for eight hundred dollars. How long has he held that mortgage? About a year and a half. Has the interest been paid promptly? Well, the fact is that Eben hasn't paid any interest yet.

Now let us take the concrete incident. Before that hypocritical thaw early in February, Jethro called upon Amos Cuthbert not so surly then as he has since become and talked about buying his wool when it should be duly cut, and permitted Amos to talk about the position of second selectman, for which some person or persons unknown to the jury had nominated him. On his way down to the Four Corners, Jethro had merely pulled up his sleigh before Eben William's house, which stood behind a huge snow bank and practically on the road. Eben appeared at the door, a little disheveled in hair and beard, for he had been sleeping.

"Haow be you, Jethro?" he said nervously. Jethro nodded.

"Weather looks a mite soft."

No answer.

"About that interest," said Eben, plunging into the dread subject, "don't know as I'm ready this month after all."

"G−goin' to town meetin', Eben?"

"Wahn't callatin' to," answered Eben.

"G−goin' to town meetin', Eben?"

Eben, puzzled and dismayed, ran his hand through his hair.

"Wahn't callatin' to but I kin I kin."

"D−Democrat hain't ye D−Democrat?"

"I kin be," said Eben. Then he looked at Jethro and added in a startled voice, "Don't know but what I be Yes, I guess I be."

"H−heerd the ticket?"

Yes, Eben had heard the ticket. What man had not. Some one has been most industrious, and most disinterested, in distributing that ticket.

"Hain't a mite of hurry about the interest right now right now," said Jethro. "M−may be along the third week in March may be c−can't tell."

And Jethro clucked to his horse, and drove away. Eben Williams went back into his house and sat down with his head in his hands. In about two hours, when his wife called him to fetch water, he set down the pail on the snow and stared across the next ridge at the eastern horizon, whitening after the sunset.

54

The third week in March was the week after town meeting!

"M−may be c−can't tell," repeated Eben to himself, unconsciously imitating Jethro's stutter. "Godfrey, I'll hev to git that ticket straight from Amos."

Yes, we may have our suspicions. But how can we get a bill on this evidence? There are some thirty other individuals in Coniston whose mortgages Jethro holds, from a horse to a house and farm. It is not likely that they will tell Deacon Hatch, or us, that they are going to town meeting and vote for that fatherless ticket because Jethro Bass wishes them to do so. And Jethro has never said that he wishes them to. If so, where are your witnesses? Have we not come back to our starting−point, even as Moses Hatch drove around in a circle. And we have the advantage over Moses, for we suspect somebody, and he did not know whom to suspect. Certainly not Jethro Bass, the man that lived under his nose and never said anything and had no right to. Jethro Bass had never taken any active part in politics, though some folks had heard, in his rounds on business, that he had discussed them, and had spread the news of the infamous ticket without a parent. So much was spoken of at the meeting over which Priest Ware prayed. It was even declared that, being a Democrat, Jethro might have influenced some of those under obligations to him. Sam Price was at last fixed upon as the malefactor, though people agreed that they had not given him credit for so much sense, and Jacksonian principles became as much abhorred by the orthodox as the spotted fever.

We can call a host of other witnesses if we like, among them cranky, happy−go−lucky Fletcher Bartlett, who has led forlorn hopes in former years. Court proceedings make tiresome reading, and if those who have been over ours have not arrived at some notion of the simple and innocent method of the new Era of politics now

dawning they never will. Nothing proved. But here is part of the ticket which nobody started:

55

For

SENIOR SELECTMAN, FLETCHER BARTLETT. (Farm and buildings on Thousand Acre Hill mortgaged to Jethro Bass.) SECOND SELECTMAN, AMOS CUTHBERT. (Farm and buildings on Town's End Ridge mortgaged to Jethro Bass.) THIRD SELECTMAN, CHESTER PERKINS. (Sop of some kind to the Established Church party. Horse and cow mortgaged to Jethro Bass, though his father, the tithing man, doesn't know it.) MODERATOR, SAMUEL PRICE. (Natural ambition love of oratory and Jacksonian principles.) etc. etc.

The notes are mine, not Moses's. Strange that they didn't occur to Moses. What a wealthy man has our hero become at thirty−one! Jethro Bass was rich beyond the dreams of avarice for Coniston. Truth compels me to admit that the sum total of all his mortgages did not amount to nine thousand dollars; but that was a large sum of money for Coniston in those days, and even now. Nathan Bass had been a saving man, and had left to his son one−half of this fortune. If thrift and the ability to gain wealth be qualities for a hero, Jethro had them in those days.

The Sunday before March meeting, it blew bitter cold, and Priest Ware, preaching in mittens, denounced sedition in general. Underneath him, on the first landing of the high pulpit, the deacons sat with knitted brows, and the key−note from Isaiah Prescott's pitch pipe sounded like a mournful echo of the mournful wind without.

Monday was ushered in with that sleet storm to which the almanacs still refer, and another scarcely less important event occurred that day which we shall have to pass by for the present; on Tuesday, the sleet still raging, came the historic town meeting. Deacon Moses Hatch, his chores done and his breakfast and prayers completed, fought his way with his head down through a white waste to the meeting−house door, and unlocked it, and shivered as he made the fire. It was certainly not good election weather, thought Moses, and others of the orthodox persuasion, high in office, were of the same opinion as they stood with parted coat tails before the stove. Whoever had stirred up and organized the hordes, whoever was the author of that ticket of the discontented, had not counted upon the sleet. Heaven−sent sleet, said Deacon Ira Perkins, and would not speak to his son Chester, who sat down just then in one of the rear slips. Chester had become an agitator, a Jacksonian Democrat, and an outcast, to be prayed for but not spoken to.

We shall leave them their peace of mind for half an hour more, those stanch old deacons and selectmen, who did their duty by their fellow citizens as they saw it and took no man's bidding. They could not see the trackless roads over the hills, now becoming tracked, and the bent figures driving doggedly against the storm, each impelled by a motive: each motive strengthened by a master mind until it had become imperative. Some, like Eben Williams behind his rickety horse, came through fear; others through ambition; others were actuated by both; and still others were stung by the pain of the sleet to a still greater jealousy and envy, and the remembrance of those who had been in power. I must not omit the conscientious Jacksonians who were misguided enough to believe in such a ticket.

The sheds were not large enough to hold the teams that day. Jethro's barn and tannery were full, and many other barns in the village. And now the peace of mind of the orthodox is a thing of the past. Deacon Lysander Richardson, the moderator, sits aghast in his high place as they come trooping in, men who have not been to town meeting for ten years. Deacon Lysander, with his white band of whiskers that goes around his neck like a sixteenth−century ruff under his chin, will soon be a memory. Now enters one, if Deacon Lysander had known it − symbolic of the new Era. One who, though his large head is bent, towers over most of the men who make way for him in the aisle, nodding but not speaking, and takes his place in the chair under the platform on the right of the meeting−house under one of the high, three−part windows. That chair was always his in future years, and

there he sat afterward silent, apparently taking no part. But not a man dropped a ballot into the box whom Jethro Bass did not see and mark.

And now, when the meeting−house is crowded as it has never been before, when Jonah Winch has arranged his dinner booth in the corner, Deacon Lysander raps for order and the minister prays. They proceed, first, to elect a representative to the General Court. The Jacksonians do not contest that seat, this year, and Isaiah Prescott, fourteenth child of Timothy, the Stark hero, father of a young Ephraim whom we shall hear from later, is elected. And now! Now for a sensation, now for disorder and misrule!

"Gentlemen," says Deacon Lysander, "you will prepare your ballots for the choice of the first Selectman."

The Whigs have theirs written out, Deacon Moses Hatch. But who has written out these others that are being so assiduously passed around? Sam Price, perhaps, for he is passing them most assiduously. And what name is written on them? Fletcher Bartlett, of course; that was on the ticket. Somebody is tricked again. That is not the name on the ticket. Look over Sam Price's shoulder and you will see the name Jethro Bass.

It burst from the lips of Fletcher Bartlett himself of Fletcher, inflammable as gunpowder.

"Gentlemen, I withdraw as your candidate, and nominate a better and an abler man, Jethro Bass."

59

"Jethro Bass for Chairman of the Selectmen!"

The cry is taken up all over the meeting−house, and rises high above the hiss of the sleet on the great windows. Somebody's got on the stove, to add to the confusion and horror. The only man in the whole place who is not excited is Jethro Bass himself, who sits in his chair regardless of those pressing around him. Many years afterward he confessed to some one that he was surprised and this is true. Fletcher Bartlett had surprised and tricked him, but was forgiven. Forty men are howling at the moderator, who is pounding on the table with a blacksmith's blows. Squire Asa Northcutt, with his arms fanning like a windmill from the edge of the platform, at length shouts down everybody else down to a hum. Some listen to him: hear the words "infamous outrage" "if Jethro Bass is elected Selectman, Coniston will never be able to hold up her head among her sister towns for very shame." (Momentary blank, for somebody has got on the stove again, a scuffle going on there.) "I see it all now," says the Squire (marvel of perspicacity!) "Jethro Bass has debased and debauched this town −" (blank again, and the squire points a finger of rage and scorn at the unmoved offender in the chair) "he has bought and intimidated men to do his bidding. He has sinned against heaven, and against the spirit of that most immortal of documents −" (Blank again. Most unfortunate blank, for this is becoming oratory, but somebody from below has seized the squire by the leg.) Squire Northcutt is too dignified and elderly a person to descend to rough and tumble, but he did get his leg liberated and kicked Fletcher Bartlett in the face. Oh, Coniston, that such scenes should take place in your town meeting! By this time another is orating, Mr. Sam Price, Jackson Democrat. There was no shorthand reporter in Coniston in those days, and it is just as well, perhaps, that the accusations and recriminations should sink into oblivion.

At last, by mighty efforts of the peace loving in both parties, something like order is restored, the ballots are in the box, and Deacon Lysander is counting them: not like another moderator I have heard of, who spilled the votes on the floor until his own man was elected. No. Had they registered his own death sentence, the deacon would have counted them straight, and needed no town clerk to verify his figures. But when he came to pronounce the vote, shame and sorrow and mortification overcame him. Coniston, his native town, which he had served and revered, was dishonored, and it was for him, Lysander Richardson, to proclaim her disgrace. The deacon choked, and tears of bitterness stood in his eyes, and there came a silence only broken by the surging of the sleet as he rapped on the table.

"Seventy−five votes have been cast for Jethro Bass sixty−three for Moses Hatch. Necessary for a choice, seventy and Jethro Bass is elected senior Selectman."

The deacon sat down, and men say that a great sob shook him, while Jacksonian Democracy went wild not looking into future years to see what they were going wild about. Jethro Bass, Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, in the honored place of Deacon Moses Hatch! Bourbon royalists never looked with greater abhorrence on the Corsican adventurer and usurper of the throne than did the orthodox in Coniston on this tanner, who had earned no right to aspire to any distinction, and who by his wiles had acquired the highest office in the town government. Fletcher Bartlett in, as a leader of the irresponsible opposition, would have been calamity enough. But Jethro Bass!

This man whom they had despised was the master mind who had organized and marshalled the loose vote, was the author of that ticket, who sat in his corner unmoved alike by the congratulations of his friends and the maledictions of his enemies; who rose to take his oath of office as unconcerned as though the house were empty, albeit Deacon Lysander could scarcely get the words out. And then Jethro sat down again in his chair not to leave it for six and thirty years. From this time forth that chair became a seat of power, and of dominion over a state.

61

Thus it was that Jock Hallowell's prophecy, so lightly uttered, came to pass.

How the remainder of that Jacksonian ticket was elected, down to the very hog−reeves, and amid what turmoil of the Democracy and bitterness of spirit of the orthodox, I need not recount. There is no moral to the story, alas it was one of those things which inscrutable heaven permitted to be done. After that dark town−meeting day some of those stern old fathers became broken men, and it is said in Coniston that this calamity to righteous government, and not the storm, gave to Priest Ware his death−stroke.

CHAPTER VI. "DEEP AS FIRST LOVE, AND WILD WITH ALL REGRET"

AND now we must go back for a chapter a very short chapter to the day before that town meeting which had so momentous an influence upon the history of Coniston and of the state. That Monday, too, it will be remembered, dawned in storm, the sleet hissing in the wide throats of the centre−chimneys, and bearing down great boughs of trees until they broke in agony. Dusk came early, and howling darkness that hid a muffled figure on the ice−bound road staring at the yellow cracks in the tannery door. Presently the figure crossed the yard; the door, flying open, released a shaft of light that shot across the white ground, revealed a face beneath a hood to him who stood within.

"Jethro!"

She darted swiftly past him, seizing the door and drawing it closed after her. A lantern hung on the central post and flung its rays upon his face. Her own, mercifully, was in the shadow, and burning now with a shame that was insupportable. Now that she was there, beside him, her strength failed her, and her courage courage that she had been storing for this dread undertaking throughout the whole of that dreadful day. Now that she was there, she would have given her life to have been able to retrace her steps, to lose herself in the wild, dark places of the mountain.

"Cynthy!" His voice betrayed the passion which her presence had quickened.

The words she would have spoken would not come. She could think of nothing but that she was alone with him, and in bodily terror of him. She turned to the door again, to grasp the wooden latch; but he barred the way, and

she fell back.

"Let me go," she cried. "I did not mean to come. Do you hear? let me go!"

To her amazement he stepped aside a most unaccountable action for him. More unaccountable still, she did not move, now that she was free, but stood poised for flight, held by she knew not what.

"G−go if you've a mind to, Cynthy if you've a mind to."

"I−I've come to say something to you," she faltered. It was not at all the way she had pictured herself as saying it.

"H−haven't took Moses have you?"

"Oh," she cried, "do you think I came here to speak of such a thing as that?"

"H−haven't took Moses, have you?"

She was trembling, and yet she could almost have smiled at this well remembered trick of pertinacity.

"No," she said, and immediately hated herself for answering him.

"H−haven't took that Worthington cuss?"

He was jealous!

"I didn't come to discuss Mr. Worthington," she replied.

"Folks say it's only a matter of time," said he. "Made up your mind to take him, Cynthy? M−made up your mind?"

"You've no right to talk to me in this way," she said, and added, the words seeming to slip of themselves from her lips, "Why do you do it?"

"Because I'm interested," he said.

"You haven't shown it," she flashed back, forgetting the place, and the storm, and her errand even, forgetting that Jake Wheeler, or anyone in Coniston, might come and surprise her there.

He took a step toward her, and she retreated. The light struck her face, and he bent over her as though searching it for a sign. The cape on her shoulders rose and fell as she breathed.

"'Twahn't charity, Cynthy was it? 'Twahn't charity?"

"It was you who called it such," she answered, in a low voice.

A sleet−charged gust hurled itself against the door, and the lantern flickered.

"Wahn't it charity?"

"It was friendship, Jethro. You ought to have known that, and you should not have brought back the book."

"Friendship," he repeated, "y−you said friendship?"

"Yes."

"M−meant friendship?"

"Yes," said Cynthia, but more faintly, and yet with a certain delicious fright as she glanced at him shyly. Surely there had never been a stranger man! Now he was apparently in a revery.

"G−guess it's because I'm not good enough to be anything more," he remarked suddenly. "Is that it?"

"You have not tried even to be a friend," she said.

"H−how about Worthington?" he persisted. "Just friends with him?"

"I won't talk about Mr. Worthington," cried Cynthia, desperately, and retreated toward the lantern again.

"J−just friends with Worthington?"

"Why?" she asked, her words barely heard above the gust, "why do you want to know?"

He came after her. It was as if she had summoned some unseen, uncontrollable power, only to be appalled by it, and the mountain−storm without seemed the symbol of it. His very voice seemed to partake of its strength.

"Cynthy," he said, "if you took him, I'd have killed him. Cynthy, I love you I want you to be my woman −"

"Your woman!"

He caught her, struggling wildly, terror−stricken, in his arms, beat down her hands, flung back her hood, and kissed her forehead her hair, blown by the wind her lips. In that moment she felt the mystery of heaven and hell, of all kinds of power. In that moment she was like a seed flying in the storm above the mountain spruces whither, she knew not, cared not. There was one thought that drifted across the chaos like a blue light of the spirit: Could she control the storm? Could she say whither the winds might blow, where the seed might be planted? Then she found herself listening, struggling no longer, for he held her powerless. Strangest of all, most hopeful of all, his own mind was working, though his soul rocked with passion.

"Cynthy ever sence we stopped that day on the road in Northcutt's woods, I've thought of nothin' but to marry you m−marry you. Then you gave me that book I hain't had much education, but it come across me if you was to help me that way And when I seed you with Worthington, I could have killed him easy as breakin' bark."

"Hush, Jethro."

She struggled free and leaped away from him, panting, while he tore open his coat and drew forth something which gleamed in the lantern's rays a silver locket. Cynthia scarcely saw it. Her blood was throbbing in her temples, she could not reason, but she knew that the appeal for the sake of which she had stooped must be delivered now.

"Jethro," she said, "do you know why I came here why I came to you?"

"No," he said. "No. W−wanted me, didn't you? Wanted me I wanted you, Cynthy."

"I would never have come to you for that," she cried, "never."

"L−love me, Cynthy love me, don't you?"

How could he ask, seeing that she had been in his arms, and had not fled? And yet she must go through with what she had come to do, at any cost.

"Jethro, I have come to speak to you about the town meeting to−morrow."

He halted as though he had been struck, his hand tightening over the locket.

66

"T−town meetin'?"

"Yes. All this new organization is your doing," she cried. "Do you think that I am foolish enough to believe that Fletcher Bartlett or Sam Price planned this thing? No, Jethro. I know who has done it, and I could have told them if they had asked me."

He looked at her, and the light of a new admiration was in his eye.

"Knowed it did you?"

"Yes," she answered, a little defiantly, "I did."

"H−how'd you know it how'd you know it, Cynthy?" How did she know it, indeed?

"I guessed it," said Cynthia, desperately, "knowing you, I guessed it."

"A−always thought you was smart, Cynthy."

"Tell me, did you do this thing?"

"Th−thought you knowed it th−thought you knowed it."

"I believe that these men are doing your bidding."

"Haint you guessin' a little mite too much, Cynthy?"

"Jethro," she said, "you told me just now that that you loved me. Don't touch me!" she cried, when he would have taken her in his arms again. "If you love me, you will tell me why you have done such a thing."

What instinct there was in the man which forbade him speaking out to her, I know not. I do not believe that he would have confessed, if he could. Isaac Worthington had been impelled to reveal his plans and aspirations, but Jethro Bass was as powerless in this supreme moment of his life as was Coniston Mountain to move the granite on which it stood. Cynthia's heart sank, and a note of passionate appeal came into her voice.

"Oh, Jethro!" she cried, "this is not the way to use your power, to compel men like Eben Williams and Samuel Todd and Lyman Hull, who is a drunkard and a vagabond, to come in and vote for those who are not fit to hold office." She was using the minister's own arguments. "We have always had clean men, and honorable and good men."

67

He did not speak, but dropped his hands to his sides. His thoughts were not to be fathomed, yet Cynthia took the movement for silent confession, which it was not, and stood appalled at the very magnitude of his accomplishment, astonished at the secrecy he had maintained. She had heard that his name had been mentioned in the meeting at the house of Moses Hatch as having taken part in the matter, and she guessed something of certain of his methods. But she had felt his force, and knew that this was not the only secret of his power.

What might he not aspire to, if properly guided? No, she did not believe him to be unscrupulous but merely ignorant: a man who was capable of such love as she felt was in him, a man whom she could love, could not mean to be unscrupulous. Defence of him leaped to her own lips.

"You did not know what you were doing," she said. "I was sure of it, or I would not have come to you. Oh, Jethro! you must stop it you must prevent this election."

Her eyes met his, her own pleading, and the very wind without seemed to pause for his answer. But what she asked was impossible. That wind which he himself had loosed, which was to topple over institutions, was rising, and he could no more have stopped it then than he could have hushed the storm.

"You will not do what I ask now?" she said, very slowly. Then her voice failed her, she drew her hands together, and it was as if her heart had ceased to beat. Sorrow and anger and fierce shame overwhelmed her, and she turned from him in silence and went to the door.

"Cynthy," he cried hoarsely, "Cynthy!"

"You must never speak to me again," she said, and was gone into the storm.

Yes, she had failed. But she did not know that she had left something behind which he treasured as long as he lived.

In the spring, when the new leaves were green on the slopes of Coniston, Priest Ware ended a life of faithful service. The high pulpit, taken from the old meeting house, and the cricket on which he used to stand and the Bible from which he used to preach have remained objects of veneration in Coniston to this day. A fortnight later many tearful faces gazed after the Truro coach as it galloped out of Brampton in a cloud of dust, and one there was, watching unseen from the spruces on the hill, who saw within it a girl dressed in black, dry−eyed, staring from the window.

CHAPTER VII. "AND STILL THE AGES ROLL, UNMOVED"

OUT of the stump of a blasted tree in the Coniston woods a flower will sometimes grow, and even so the story which I have now to tell springs from the love of Cynthia Ware and Jethro Bass. The flower, when it came to bloom, was fair in life, and I hope that in these pages it will not lose too much of its beauty and sweetness.

For a little while we are going to gallop through the years as before we have ambled through the days, although the reader's breath may be taken away in the process. How Cynthia Ware went over the Truro Pass to Boston, and how she became a teacher in a high school there, largely through the kindness of that Miss Lucretia Penniman of whom we have spoken, who wrote in Cynthia's behalf to certain friends she had in that city; how she met one William Wetherell, no longer a clerk in Mr. Judson's jewellery shop, but a newspaper man with I know not what ambitions and limitations in strength of body and will; how, many, many years afterward, she nursed him tenderly through a sickness and married him, is all told in a paragraph. Marry him she did, to take care of him, and told him so. She made no secret of the maternal in this love.

One evening, the summer after their marriage, they were walking in the Mall under the great elms that border the Common on the Tremont Street side. They often used to wander there, talking of the books he was to write when strength should come and a little leisure, and sometimes their glances would linger longingly on Colonnade Row that Bulfinch built across the way, where dwelt the rich and powerful of the city and yet he would not have exchanged their lot for his. Could he have earned with his own hands such a house, and set Cynthia there in glory, what happiness! But, I stray.

They were walking in the twilight, for the sun had sunk all red in the marshes of the Charles, when there chanced along a certain Mr. Judson, a jeweller, taking the air likewise. So there came into Wetherell's mind that amusing adventure with the country lad and the locket. His name, by reason of some strange quality in it, he had never forgotten, and suddenly he recalled that the place the countryman had come from was Coniston.

"Cynthia," said her husband, when Mr. Judson was gone, "did you know any one in Coniston named Jethro Bass?"

She did not answer him. And, thinking she had not heard, he spoke again.

"Why do you ask?" she said, in a low tone, without looking at him.

He told her the story. Not until the end of it did the significance of the name engraved come to him Cynthy. "Cynthy, from Jethro."

"Why, it might have been you!" he said jestingly. "Was he an admirer of yours, Cynthia, that strange, uncouth countryman? Did he give you the locket?"

"No," she answered, "he never did."

Wetherell glanced at her in surprise, and saw that her lip was quivering, that tears were on her lashes. She laid her hand on his arm.

"William," she said, drawing him to a bench, "come, let us sit down, and I will tell you the story of Jethro Bass. We have been happy together, you and I, for I have found peace with you. I have tried to be honest with you, William, and I will always be so. I told you before we were married that I loved another man. I have tried to forget him, but as God is my judge, I cannot. I believe I shall love him until I die."

They sat in the summer twilight, until darkness fell, and the lights gleamed through the leaves, and a deep, cool breath coming up from the sea stirred the leaves above their heads. That she should have loved Jethro seemed as strange to her as to him, and yet Wetherell was to feel the irresistible force of him. Hers was not a love that she chose, or would have chosen, but something elemental that cried out from the man to her, and drew her. Something that had in it now, as of yore, much of pain and even terror, but drew her. Strangest of all was that William Wetherell understood and was not jealous of this thing: which leads us to believe that some essence of virility was lacking in him, some substance that makes the fighters and conquerors in this world. In such a mood he listened to the story of Jethro Bass.

"My dear husband," said Cynthia, when she had finished, her hand tightening over his, "I have never told you this for fear that it might trouble you as it has troubled me. I have found in your love sanctuary, and all that remains of myself I have given to you."

"You have found a weakling to protect, and an invalid to nurse," he answered. "To have your compassion, Cynthia, is all I crave."

So they lived through the happiest and swiftest years of his life, working side by side, sharing this strange secret between them. And after that night Cynthia talked to him often of Coniston, until he came to know the mountain that lay along the western sky, and the sweet hillsides by Coniston Water under the blue haze of autumn, aye, and clothed in the colors of spring, the bright blossoms of thorn and apple against the tender green of the woods and fields. So he grew to love the simple people there, but little did he foresee that he was to end his life among them!

But so it came to pass. She was taken from him, who had been the one joy and inspiration of his weary days, and he was driven, wandering, into unfrequented streets that he might not recall the places where she had once trod, and through the wakeful nights her voice haunted him, its laughter, its sweet notes of seriousness; little ways and manners of her look came to twist his heart, and he prayed God to take him, too, until it seemed that Cynthia frowned upon him for his weakness. One mild Sunday, he took little Cynthia by the hand and led her, toddling, out into the sunny Common, where he used to walk with her mother, and the infant prattle seemed to bring at last a strange peace to his storm−tossed soul.

For many years these Sunday walks in the Common were Wetherell's greatest pleasure and solace, and it seemed as though little Cynthia had come into the world with an instinct, as it were, of her mission that lent to her infant words a sweet gravity and weight. Many people used to stop and speak to the child, among them a great physician, whom they grew to know. He was there every Sunday, and at length it came to be a habit with him to sit down on the bench and take Cynthia on his knee, and his stern face would soften as he talked to her.

One Sunday when Cynthia was eight years old he missed them, and the next, and at dusk he strode into their little lodging behind the hill and up to the bedside. He glanced at Wetherell, patting Cynthia on the head the while, and bade her cheerily to go out of the room. But she held tight hold of her father's hand and looked up at the doctor bravely.

"I am taking care of my father," she said.

"So you shall, little woman," he answered. "I would that we had such nurses as you at the hospital. Why didn't you send for me at once?"

"I wanted to," said Cynthia.

"Bless her good sense," said the doctor; "she has more than you, Wetherell. Why didn't you take her advice? If your father does not do as I tell him, he will be a very sick man indeed. He must go into the country and stay there."

"But I must live, Doctor," said William Wetherell.

The doctor looked at Cynthia.

"You will not live long if you stay here," he replied.

"Then he will go," said Cynthia, so quietly that he gave her another look, strange and tender and comprehending. He sat and talked of many things: of the great war that was agonizing the nation; of the strong man who, harassed and suffering himself, was striving to guide it, likening Lincoln unto a physician. So the doctor was wont to take the minds of patients from themselves. And before he left he gave poor Wetherell a fortnight to decide.

As he lay on his back in that room among the chimney tops trying vainly to solve the problem of how he was to earn his salt in the country, a visitor was climbing the last steep flight of stairs. That visitor was none other than Sergeant Ephraim Prescott, son of Isaiah of the pitch−pipe, and own cousin of Cynthia Ware's. Sergeant Ephraim was just home from the war and still clad in blue, and he walked with a slight limp by reason of a bullet he had

got in the Wilderness, and he had such an honest, genial face that little Cynthia was on his knee in a moment.

"How be you, Will? Kind of poorly, I callate. So Cynthy's b'en took," he said sadly. "Always thought a sight of Cynthy. Little Cynthy favors her some. Yes, thought I'd drop in and see how you be on my way home."

Sergeant Ephraim had much to say about the great war, and about Coniston. True to the instincts of the blood of the Stark hero, he had left the plough and the furrow at the first call, forty years of age though he was. But it had been otherwise with many in Coniston and Brampton and Harwich. Some of these, when the drafting came, had fled in bands to the mountain and defied capture. Mr. Dudley Worthington, now a mill owner, had found a substitute; Heth Sutton of Clovelly had been drafted and had driven over the mountain to implore Jethro Bass abjectly to get him out of it. In short, many funny things had happened − funny things to Sergeant Ephraim, but not at all to William Wetherell, who sympathized with Heth in his panic.

"So Jethro Bass has become a great man?" said Wetherell.

"Great!" Ephraim ejaculated. "Guess he's the biggest man in the state to−day. Queer how he got his power began twenty−four years ago when I wahn't but twenty. I call that town meetin' to mind as if 'twas yesterday never was such an upset. Jethro's be'n first Selectman ever sence, though he turned Republican in '60. Old folks don't fancy Jethro's kind of politics much, but times change. Jethro saved my life, I guess."

"Saved your life!" exclaimed Wetherell.

"Got me a furlough," said Ephraim. "Guess I would have died in the hospital if he hadn't got it so all−fired quick, and he druv down to Brampton to fetch me back. You'd have thought I was General Grant the way folks treated me."

"You went back to the war after your leg healed?" Wetherell asked, in wondering admiration of the man's courage.

"Well," said Ephraim, simply, "the other boys was gettin' full of bullets and dysentery, and it didn't seem just right. The leg troubles me some on wet days, but not to amount to much. You hain't thinkin' of dyin' yourself, be ye, William?"

William was thinking very seriously of it, but it was Cynthia who spoke, and startled them both.

"The doctor says he will die if he doesn't go to the country."

"Somethin' like consumption, William?" asked Ephraim.

"So the doctor said."

"So I callated," said Ephraim. "Come back to Coniston with me; there hain't a healthier place in New England."

"How could I support myself in Coniston?" Wetherell asked.

Ephraim ruminated. Suddenly he stuck his hand into the bosom of his blue coat, and his face lighted and even flushed as he drew out a crumpled letter.

"It don't take much gumption to run a store, does it, William? Guess you could run a store, couldn't you?"

"I would try anything," said Wetherell.

77

"Well," said Ephraim, "there's the store at Coniston. With folks goin' West, and all that, nobody seems to want it much." He looked at the letter. "Lem Hallowell says there hain't nobody to take it."

"Jonah Winch's!" exclaimed Wetherell.

"Jonah made it go, but that was before all this hullabaloo about Temperance Cadets and what not. Jonah sold good rum, but now you can't get nothin' in Coniston but hard cider and potato whiskey. Still, it's the place for somebody without much get−up," and he eyed his cousin by marriage. "Better come and try it, William."

So much for dreams! Instead of a successor to Irving and Emerson, William Wetherell became a successor to Jonah Winch.

That journey to Coniston was full of wonder to Cynthia, and of wonder and sadness to Wetherell, for it was the way his other Cynthia had come to Boston. From the state capital the railroad followed the same deep valley as the old coach road, but ended at Truro, and then they took stage over Truro Pass for Brampton, where honest Ephraim awaited them and their slender luggage with a team. Brampton, with its wide−shadowed green and terrace−steepled church; home once of the Social Library and Lucretia Penniman, now famous; home now of Isaac Dudley Worthington, whose great mills the stage driver had pointed out to them on Coniston Water as they entered the town.

Then came a drive through the cool evening to Coniston, Ephraim showing them landmarks. There was Deacon Lysander's house, where little Rias Richardson lived now; and on that slope and hidden in its forest nook, among the birches and briers, the little schoolhouse where Cynthia had learned to spell; here, where the road made an aisle in the woods, she had met Jethro. The choir of the birds was singing an evening anthem now as then, to the lower notes of Coniston Water, and the moist, hothouse fragrance of the ferns rose from the deep places.

At last they came suddenly upon the little hamlet of Coniston itself. There was the flagpole and the triangular green, scene of many a muster; Jonah Winch's store, with its horse block and checker−paned windows, just as Jonah had left it; Nathan Bass's tannery shed, now weather−stained and neglected, for Jethro lived on Thousand Acre Hill now; the Prescott house, home of the Stark hero, where Ephraim lived, "innocent of paint" (as one of Coniston's sons has put it), "innocent of paint as a Coniston maiden's face"; the white meeting−house, where Priest Ware had preached and the parsonage. Cynthia and Wetherell loitered in front of it, while the blue shadow of the mountain deepened into night, and until Mr. Satterlee, the minister, found them there, and they went in and stood reverently in the little chamber on the right of the door, which had been Cynthia's.

Long Wetherell lay awake that night, in his room at the gable−end over the store, listening to the rustling of the great oak beside the windows, to the whippoorwills calling across Coniston Water. But at last a peace descended upon him, and he slept: yes, and awoke with the same sense of peace at little Cynthia's touch, to go out into the cool morning, when the mountain side was in myriad sheens of green under the rising sun. Behind the store was an old−fashioned garden, set about by a neat stone wall, hidden here and there by the masses of lilac and currant bushes, and at the south of it was a great rose−covered boulder of granite. And beyond, through the foliage of the willows and the low apple trees which Jonah Winch had set out, Coniston Water gleamed and tumbled. Under an arching elm near the house was the well, stone−rimmed, with its long pole and crotch, and bucket all green with the damp moss which clung to it.

Ephraim Prescott had been right when he had declared that it did not take much gumption to keep store in Coniston. William Wetherell merely assumed certain obligations at the Brampton bank, and Lem Hallowell,

Jock's son, who now drove the Brampton stage, brought the goods to the door. Little Rias Richardson was willing to come in and help move the barrels, and on such occasions wore carpet slippers to save his shoes. William still had time for his books; in that Coniston air he began to feel stronger, and to wonder whether he might not be a Washington Irving yet. And yet he had one worry and one fear, and both of these concerned one man, Jethro Bass. Him, by her own confession, Cynthia Ware had loved to her dying day, hating herself for it: and he, William Wetherell, had married this woman whom Jethro had loved so violently, and must always love so Wetherell thought: that was the worry. How would Jethro treat him? that was the fear. William Wetherell was not the most courageous man in the world.

Jethro Bass had not been in Coniston since William's arrival. No need to ask where he was. Jake Wheeler, Jethro's lieutenant in Coniston, gave William a glowing account of that Throne Room in the Pelican Hotel at the capital, from whence Jethro ruled the state during the sessions of the General Court. This legislature sat to him as a sort of advisory committee of three hundred and fifty: an expensive advisory committee to the people, relic of an obsolete form of government. Many stories of the now all−powerful Jethro William heard from the little coterie which made their headquarters in his store stories of how those methods of which we have read were gradually spread over other towns and other counties. Not that Jethro held mortgages in these towns and counties, but the local lieutenants did, and bowed to him as an overlord. There were funny stories, and grim stories of vengeance which William Wetherell heard and trembled at. Might not Jethro wish to take vengeance upon him?

One story he did not hear, because no one in Coniston knew it. No one knew that Cynthia Ware and Jethro Bass had ever loved each other.

At last, toward the end of June, it was noised about that the great man was coming home for a few days. One beautiful afternoon William Wetherell stood on the platform of the store, looking off at Coniston, talking to Moses Hatch young Moses, who is father of six children now and has forgotten Cynthia Ware. Old Moses sleeps on the hillside, let us hope in the peace of the orthodox and the righteous. A cloud of dust arose above the road to the southward, and out of it came a country wagon drawn by a fat horse, and in the wagon the strangest couple Wetherell had ever seen. The little woman who sat retiringly at one end of the seat was all in brilliant colors from bonnet to flounce, like a paroquet, red and green predominating. The man, big in build, large−headed, wore an old−fashioned blue swallow−tailed coat with brass buttons, a stock, and coonskin hat, though it was summer, and the thumping of William Wetherell's heart told him that this was Jethro Bass. He nodded briefly at Moses Hatch, who greeted him with genial obsequiousness.

"Legislatur' through?" shouted Moses.

The great man shook his head, and drove on.

"Has Jethro Bass ever been a member of the Legislature?" asked the storekeeper, for the sake of something to say.

"Never would take any office but Chairman of the Selectmen," answered Moses, who apparently bore no ill will for his father's sake. "Jethro kind of fathers the Legislatur', I guess, though I don't take much stock in politics. Goes down sessions to see that they don't get too gumptious and kick off the swaddlin' clothes."

"And was that his wife?" Wetherell asked, hesitatingly.

"Aunt Listy, they call her. Nobody ever knew how he come to marry her. Jethro went up to Wisdom once, in the centre of the state, and come back with her. Funny place to bring a wife from Wisdom! Funnier place to bring Listy from. He loads her down with them ribbons and gewgaws all the shades of the rainbow! Says he wants her to be the best−dressed woman in the state. Callate she is," added Moses, with conviction. "Listy's a fine woman, but all she knows is enough to say, 'Yes, Jethro,' and 'No, Jethro.' Guess that's all Jethro wants in a wife; but he certainly is good to her."

"And why has he come back before the Legislature's over?" said Wetherell.

"Cuttin' of his farms. Always comes back hayin' time. That's the way Jethro spends the money he makes in politics, and he hain't no more of a farmer than −" Moses looked at Wetherell.

"Than I'm a storekeeper," said the latter, smiling.

"Than I'm a lawyer," said Moses, politely.

They were interrupted at this moment by the appearance of Jake Wheeler and Sam Price, who came gaping out of the darkness of the store.

"Was that Jethro, Mose?" demanded Jake. "Guess we'll go along up and see if there's any orders."

"I suppose the humblest of God's critturs has their uses," Moses remarked contemplatively, as he watched the retreating figure of Sam and Jake. "Leastwise that's Jethro's philosophy. When you come to know him, you'll notice how much those fellers walk like him. Never seed a man who had so many imitators. Some of 'em's took to talkin' like him, even to stutterin'. Bijah Bixby, over to Clovelly, comes pretty nigh it, too."

Moses loaded his sugar and beans into his wagon, and drove off.

An air of suppressed excitement seemed to pervade those who came that afternoon to the store to trade and talk mostly to talk. After such purchases as they could remember were made, they lingered on the barrels and on the stoop, in the hope of seeing Jethro, whose habit it was, apparently, to come down and dispense such news as he thought fit for circulation. That Wetherell also shared this excitement, too, he could not deny, but for a different cause. At last, when the shadows of the big trees had crept across the green, he came, the customers flocking to the porch to greet him, Wetherell standing curiously behind them in the door. Heedless of the dust, he strode down the road with the awkward gait that was all his own, kicking up his heels behind. And behind him, heels kicking up likewise, followed Jake and Sam, Jethro apparently oblivious of their presence. A modest silence was maintained from the stoop, broken at length by Lem Hallowell, who (men said) was an exact reproduction of Jock, the meeting−house builder. Lem alone was not abashed in the presence of greatness.

"How be you, Jethro?" he said heartily. "Air the Legislatur' behavin' themselves?"

"B−bout as common," said Jethro.

Surely nothing very profound in this remark, but received as though it were Solomon's.

Be prepared for a change in Jethro, after the galloping years. He is now fifty−seven, but he might be any age. He is still smooth−shaven, his skin is clear, and his eye is bright, for he lives largely on bread and milk, and eschews stimulants. But the lines in his face have deepened and his big features seem to have grown bigger.

"Who be you thinkin' of for next governor, Jethro?" queries Rias Richardson, timidly.

"They say Alvy Hopkins of Gosport is willin' to pay for it," said Chester Perkins, sarcastically. Chester, we fear, is a born agitator, fated to remain always in opposition. He is still a Democrat, and Jethro, as is well known, has extended the mortgage so as to include Chester's farm.

"Wouldn't give a Red Brook Seedling for Alvy," ejaculated the nasal Mr. Price.

"D−don't like Red Brook Seedlings, Sam? D−don't like 'em?" said Jethro. He had parted his blue coat tails and seated himself on the stoop, his long legs hanging over it.

"Never seed a man who had a good word to say for 'em," said Mr. Price, with less conviction.

"Done well on mine," said Jethro, "d−done well. I was satisfied with my Red Brook Seedlings."

Mr. Price's sallow face looked as if he would have contradicted another man.

"Haow was that, Jethro?" piped up Jake Wheeler, voicing the general desire.

Jethro looked off into the blue space beyond the mountain line.

83

"G−got mine when they first come round seed cost me considerable. Raised more than a hundred bushels L−Listy put some of 'em on the table t−then gave some to my old hoss Tom. Tom said: 'Hain't I always been a good beast, Jethro? Hain't I carried you faithful, summer and winter, for a good many years? And now you give me Red Brook Seedlings?'"

Here everybody laughed, and stopped abruptly, for Jethro still looked contemplative.

"Give some of 'em to the hogs. W−wouldn't touch 'em. H−had over a hundred bushels on hand n−new variety. W−what's that feller's name down to Ayer, Massachusetts, deals in all kinds of seeds? Ellett that's it. Wrote to Ellett, said I had a hundred bushels of Red Brooks to sell, as fine a lookin' potato as I had in my cellar. Made up my mind to take what he offered, if it was only five cents. He wrote back a dollar a bushel. I−I was always satisfied with my Red Brook Seedlings, Sam. But I never raised any more n−never raised any more."

Uproarious laughter greeted the end of the story, and continued in fits as some humorous point recurred to one or the other of the listeners. William Wetherell perceived that the conversation, for the moment at least, was safely away from politics, and in that dubious state where it was difficult to reopen. This was perhaps what Jethro wanted. Even Jake Wheeler was tongue−tied, and Jethro appeared to be lost in reflection.

At this instant a diversion occurred a trifling diversion, so it seemed at the time. Around the corner of the store, her cheeks flushed and her dark hair flying, ran little Cynthia, her hands, browned already by the Coniston sun, filled with wild strawberries.

"See what I've found, Daddy!" she cried, "see what I've found!"

Jethro Bass started, and flung back his head like a man who has heard a voice from another world, and then he looked at the child with a kind of stupefaction. The cry died on Cynthia's lips, and she stopped, gazing at him with wonder in her eyes.

"F−found strawberries?" said Jethro, at last.

"Yes," she answered. She was very grave and serious now, as was her manner in dealing with people.

"S−show 'em to me," said Jethro.

Cynthia went to him, without embarrassment, and put her hand on his knee. Not once had he taken his eyes from her face. He put out his own hand with an awkward, shy movement, picked a strawberry from her fingers, and

thrust it in his mouth.

"Mm," said Jethro, gravely. "Er what's your name, little gal what's your name?"

"Cynthia."

There was a long pause.

"Er−er Cynthia?" he said at length, "Cynthia?"

"Cynthia."

"Er−er, Cynthia not Cynthy?"

"Cynthia," she said again.

He bent over her and lowered his voice.

"M−may I call you Cynthy Cynthy?" he asked.

"Y−yes," answered Cynthia, looking up to her father and then glancing shyly at Jethro.

His eyes were on the mountain, and he seemed to have forgotten her until she reached out to him, timidly, another strawberry. He seized her little hand instead and held it between his own much to the astonishment of his friends.

"Whose little gal be you?" he asked.

"Dad's."

"She's Will Wetherell's daughter," said Lem Hallowell. "He's took on the store. Will," he added, turning to Wetherell, "let me make you acquainted with Jethro Bass."

Jethro rose slowly, and towered above Wetherell on the stoop. There was an inscrutable look in his black eyes, as of one who sees without being seen. Did he know who William Wetherell was? If so, he gave no sign, and took Wetherell's hand limply.

"Will's kinder hipped on book−l'arnin'," Lemuel continued kindly. "Come here to keep store for his health. Guess you may have heerd, Jethro, that Will married Cynthy Ware. You call Cynthy to mind, don't ye?"

Jethro Bass dropped Wetherell's hand, but answered nothing.

CHAPTER VIII. IT IS SOMETHING TO HAVE DREAMED

A WEEK passed, and Jethro did not appear in the village, report having it that he was cutting his farms on Thousand Acre Hill. When Jethro was farming, so it was said, he would not stop to talk politics even with the President of the United States were that dignitary to lean over the pasture fence and beckon to him. On a sultry Friday morning, when William Wetherell was seated at Jonah Winch's desk in the cool recesses of the store slowly and painfully going over certain troublesome accounts which seemed hopeless, he was thrown into a panic by the sight of one staring at him from the far side of a counter. History sometimes reverses itself.

"What can I do for you Mr. Bass," asked the storekeeper, rather weakly.

"Just stepped in stepped in," he answered. "W−where's Cynthy?"

"She was in the garden shall I get her?"

"No," he said, parting his coat tails and seating himself on the counter. "Go on figurin', don't mind me."

The thing was manifestly impossible. Perhaps Wetherell indicated as much by his answer.

"Like storekeepin'?" Jethro asked presently, perceiving that Wetherell did not continue his work.

"A man must live, Mr. Bass," said Wetherell; "I had to leave the city for my health. I began life keeping store," he added, "but I little thought I should end it so."

"Given to book−l'arnin' then, wahn't you?" Jethro remarked. He did not smile, but stared at the square of light that was the doorway, "Judson's jewelry store, wahn't it? Judson's?"

"Yes, Judson's," Wetherell answered, as soon as he recovered from his amazement. There was no telling from Jethro's manner whether he were enemy or friend; whether he bore the storekeeper a grudge for having attained to a happiness that had not been his.

"Hain't made a great deal out of life, hev you? N−not a great deal?" Jethro observed at last.

Wetherell flushed, although Jethro had merely stated a truth which had often occurred to the storekeeper himself.

"It isn't given to all of us to find Rome in brick and leave it in marble," he replied a little sadly.

Jethro Bass looked at him quickly.

"Er what's that?" he demanded. "F−found Rome in brick, left it in marble. Fine thought." He ruminated a little. "Never writ anything did you never writ anything?"

"Nothing worth publishing," said poor William Wetherell.

"J−just dreamed dreamed and kept store. S−something to have dreamed eh something to have dreamed?"

Wetherell forgot his uneasiness in the unexpected turn the conversation had taken. It seemed very strange to him that he was at last face to face again with the man whom Cynthia Ware had never been able to drive from her heart. Would he mention her? Had he continued to love her, in spite of the woman he had married and adorned? Wetherell asked himself these questions before he spoke.

"It is more to have accomplished," he said.

"S−something to have dreamed," repeated Jethro, rising slowly from the counter. He went toward the doorway that led to the garden, and there he halted and stood listening.

"C−Cynthy!" he said, "C−Cynthy!"

Wetherell dropped his pen at the sound of the name on Jethro's lips. But it was little Cynthia he was calling little Cynthia in the garden. The child came at his voice, and stood looking up at him silently.

"H−how old be you, Cynthy?"

"Nine," answered Cynthia, promptly.

"L−like the country, Cynthy like the country better than the city?"

"Oh, yes," said Cynthia.

"And country folks? L−like country folks better than city folks?"

"I didn't know many city folks," said Cynthia. "I liked the old doctor who sent Daddy up here ever so much, and I liked Mrs. Darwin."

"Mis' Darwin?"

"She kept the house we lived in. She used to give me cookies," said Cynthia, "and bread to feed the pigeons."

"Pigeons? F−folks keep pigeons in the city?"

"Oh, no," said Cynthia, laughing at such an idea; "the pigeons came on the roof under our window, and they used to fly right up on the window−sill and feed out of my hand. They kept me company while Daddy was away, working. And on Sundays we used to go into the Common and feed them, before Daddy got sick. The Common was something like the country, only not half as nice."

"C−couldn't pick flowers in the Common and go barefoot c−couldn't go barefoot, Cynthy?"

"Oh, no," said Cynthia, laughing again at his sober face.

"C−couldn't dig up the Common and plant flowers could you?"

"Of course you couldn't."

"P−plant 'em out there?" asked Jethro.

"Oh, yes," cried Cynthia; "I'll show you." She hesitated a moment, and then thrust her hand into his. "Do you want to see?"

"Guess I do," said he, energetically, and she led him into the garden, pointing out with pride the rows of sweet peas and pansies, which she had made herself. Impelled by a strange curiosity, William Wetherell went to the door and watched them. There was a look on the face of Jethro Bass that was new to it as he listened to the child talk of the wondrous things around them that summer's day, the flowers and the bees and the brook (they must go down and stand on the brink of it), and the songs of the vireo and the hermit thrush.

"H−hain't lonely here, Cynthy hain't lonely here?" he said.

"Not in the country," said Cynthia. Suddenly she lifted her eyes to his with a questioning look. "Are you lonely, sometimes?"

He did not answer at once.

"Not with you, Cynthy not with you."

By all of which it will be seen that the acquaintance was progressing. They sat down for a while on the old millstone that formed the step, and there discussed Cynthia's tastes. She was too old for dolls, Jethro supposed. Yes, Cynthia was too old for dolls. She did not say so, but the only doll she had ever owned had become insipid when the delight of such a reality as taking care of a helpless father had been thrust upon her. Books, suggested Jethro. Books she had known from her earliest infancy: they had been piled around that bedroom over the roof. Books and book lore and the command of the English tongue were William Wetherell's only legacies to his daughter, and many an evening that spring she had read him to sleep from classic volumes of prose and poetry I hesitate to name, for fear you will think her precocious. They went across the green to Cousin Ephraim Prescott's harness shop, where Jethro had tied his horse, and it was settled that Cynthia liked books.

On the morning following this extraordinary conversation, Jethro Bass and his wife departed for the state capital. Listy was bedecked in amazing greens and yellows, and Jethro drove, looking neither to the right nor left, his coat tails hanging down behind the seat, the reins lying slack across the plump quarters of his horse the same fat Tom who, by the way, had so indignantly spurned the Red Brook Seedlings. And Jake Wheeler went along to bring back the team from Brampton. To such base uses are political lieutenants sometimes put, although Jake would have told you it was an honor, and he came back to the store that evening fairly bristling with political secrets which he could not be induced to impart.

One evening a fortnight later, while the lieutenant was holding forth in commendably general terms on the politics of the state to a speechless if not wholly admiring audience, a bomb burst in their midst. William Wetherell did not know that it was a periodical bomb, like those flung at regular intervals from the Union mortars into Vicksburg. These bombs, at any rate, never failed to cause consternation and fright in Coniston, although they never did any harm. One thing noticeable, they were always fired in Jethro's absence. And the bombardier was always Chester Perkins, son of the most unbending and rigorous of tithing−men, but Chester resembled his father in no particular save that he, too, was a deacon and a pillar of the church. Deacon Ira had been tall and gaunt and sunken and uncommunicative. Chester was stout, and said to perspire even in winter, apoplectic, irascible, talkative, and still, as has been said, a Democrat. He drove up to the store this evening to the not inappropriate rumble of distant thunder, and he stood up in his wagon in front of the gathering and shook his fist in Jake Wheeler's face.

"This town's tired of puttin' up with a King," he cried. "Yes, King − I said it, and I don't care who hears me. It's time to stop this one−man rule. You kin go and tell him I said it, Jake Wheeler, if you've a mind to. I guess there's plenty who'll do that."

An uneasy silence followed the silence which cries treason louder than any voice. Some shifted uneasily, and spat, and Jake Wheeler thrust his hands in his pockets and walked away, as much as to say that it was treason even to listen to such talk. Lem Hallowell seemed unperturbed.

"On the rampage again, Chet?" he remarked.

"You'd ought to know better, Lem," cried the enraged Chester; "hain't the hull road by the Four Corners ready to drop into the brook? What be you a−goin' to do about it?"

"I'll show you when I git to it," answered Lem, quietly. And show them he did.

"Git to it!" shouted Chester, scornfully, "I'll git to it. I'll tell you right now I'm a candidate for the Chairman of the Selectmen, even if town meetin' is eight months away. An', Sam Price, I'll expect the Democrats to git into line."

With this ultimatum Chester drove away as rapidly as he had come.

"I want to know!" said Sam Price, an exclamation peculiarly suited to his voice. But nevertheless Sam might be counted on in each of these little rebellions. He, too, had remained steadfast to Jacksonian principles, and he had never forgiven Jethro about a little matter of a state office which he (Sam) had failed to obtain.

Before he went to bed Jake Wheeler had written a letter which he sent off to the state capital by the stage the next morning. In it he indicted no less than twenty of his fellow−townsmen for treason; and he also thought it wise to send over to Clovelly for Bijah Bixby, a lieutenant in that section, to come and look over the ground and ascertain by his well−known methods how far the treason had eaten into the body politic. Such was Jake's ordinary procedure when the bombs were fired, for Mr. Wheeler was nothing if not cautious.

Three mornings later, a little after seven o'clock, when the storekeeper and his small daughter were preparing to go to Brampton upon a very troublesome errand, Chester Perkins appeared again. It is always easy to stir up dissatisfaction among the ne'er−do−wells (Jethro had once done it himself), and during the three days which had elapsed since Chester had flung down the gauntlet there had been more or less of downright treason heard in the store. William Wetherell, who had perplexities of his own, had done his best to keep out of the discussions that had raged on his cracker boxes and barrels, for his head was a jumble of figures which would not come right. And now as he stood in the freshness of the early summer morning, waiting for Lem Hallowell's stage, poor Wetherell's heart was very heavy.

"Will Wetherell," said Chester, "you be a gentleman and a student, hain't you? Read history, hain't you?"

"I have read some," said William Wetherell.

"I callate that a man of parts," said Chester, "such as you be, will help us agin corruption and a dic'tator. I'm a−countin' on you, Will Wetherell. You've got the store, and you kin tell the boys the difference between right and wrong. They'll listen to you, because you're eddicated."

"I don't know anything about politics," answered Wetherell, with an appealing glance at the silent group, group that was always there. Rias Richardson, who had donned the carpet slippers preparatory to tending store for the day, shuffled inside. Deacon Lysander, his father, would not have done so.

"You know somethin' about history and the Constitootion, don't ye?" demanded Chester, truculently. "Jethro Bass don't hold your mortgage, does he? Bank in Brampton holds it hain't that so? You hain't afeard of Jethro like the rest on 'em, be you?"

"I don't know what right you have to talk to me that way, Mr. Perkins," said Wetherell.

"What right? Jethro holds my mortgage the hull town knows it and he kin close me out tomorrow if he's a mind to −"

"See here, Chester Perkins," Lem Hallowell interposed, as he drove up with the stage, "what kind of free principles be you preachin'? You'd ought to know better'n coerce."

"What be you a−goin' to do about that Four Corners road?" Chester cried to the stage driver.

"I give 'em till to−morrow night to fix it," said Lem. "Git in, Will. Cynthy's over to the harness shop with Eph. We'll stop as we go 'long."

"Give 'em till to−morrow night!" Chester shouted after them. "What you goin' to do then?"

But Lem did not answer this inquiry. He stopped at the harness shop, where Ephraim came limping out and lifted Cynthia to the seat beside her father, and they joggled off to Brampton. The dew still lay in myriad drops on the red herd's−grass, turning it to lavender in the morning sun, and the heavy scent of the wet ferns hung in the forest. Lem whistled, and joked with little Cynthia, and gave her the reins to drive, and at last they came in sight of Brampton Street, with its terrace−steepled church and line of wagons hitched to the common rail, for it was market day. Father and daughter walked up and down, hand in hand, under the great trees, and then they went to the bank.

It was a brick building on a corner opposite the common, imposing for Brampton, and very imposing to Wetherell. It seemed like a tomb as he entered its door, Cynthia clutching his fingers, and never but once in his life had he been so near to leaving all hope behind. He waited patiently by the barred windows until the clerk, who was counting bills, chose to look up at him.

"Want to draw money?" he demanded.

The words seemed charged with irony. William Wetherell told him, falteringly, his name and business, and he thought the man looked at him compassionately.

"You'll have to see Mr. Worthington," he said; "he hasn't gone to the mills yet."

"Dudley Worthington?" exclaimed Wetherell.

The teller smiled.

"Yes. He's the president of this bank."

He opened a door in the partition, and leaving Cynthia dangling her feet from a chair, Wetherell was ushered, not without trepidation, into the great man's office, and found himself at last in the presence of Mr. Isaac D. Worthington, who used to wander up and down Coniston Water searching for a mill site.

He sat behind a table covered with green leather, on which papers were laid with elaborate neatness, and he wore a double−breasted skirted coat of black, with braided lapels, a dark purple blanket−cravat with a large red cameo pin. And Mr. Worthington's features harmonized perfectly with this costume those of a successful, ambitious man who followed custom and convention blindly; clean−shaven, save for reddish chops, blue eyes of extreme keenness, and thin−lipped mouth which had been tightening year by year as the output of the Worthington Mills increased.

"Well, sir," he said sharply, "what can I do for you?"

"I am William Wetherell, the storekeeper at Coniston."

"Not the Wetherell who married Cynthia Ware!"

No, Mr. Worthington did not say that. He did not know that Cynthia Ware was married, or alive or dead, and let it be confessed at once he did not care.

This is what he did say:

"Wetherell Wetherell. Oh, yes, you've come about that note the mortgage on the store at Coniston." He stared at William Wetherell, drummed with his fingers on the table, and smiled slightly. "I am happy to say that the Brampton Bank does not own this note any longer. If we did, merely as a matter of business, you understand" (he

coughed), "we should have had to foreclose."

"Don't own the note!" exclaimed Wetherell. "Who does own it?"

"We sold it a little while ago since you asked for the extension − to Jethro Bass."

"Jethro Bass!" Wetherell's feet seemed to give way under him, and he sat down.

"Mr. Bass is a little quixotic that is a charitable way to put it − quixotic. He does strange things like this once in a while."

The storekeeper found no words to answer, but sat mutely staring at him. Mr. Worthington coughed again.

"You appear to be an educated man. Haven't I heard some story of your giving up other pursuits in Boston to come up here for your health? Certainly I place you now. I confess to a little interest in literature myself in libraries."

In spite of his stupefaction at the news he had just received, Wetherell thought of Mr. Worthington's beaver hat, and of that gentleman's first interest in libraries, for Cynthia had told the story to her husband.

"It is perhaps an open secret," continued Mr. Worthington, "that in the near future I intend to establish a free library in Brampton. I feel it my duty to do all I can for the town where I have made my success, and there is nothing which induces more to the popular welfare than a good library." Whereupon he shot at Wetherell another of his keen looks. "I do not talk this way ordinarily to my customers, Mr. Wetherell," he began; "but you interest me, and I am going to tell you something in confidence. I am sure it will not be betrayed."

"Oh, no," said the bewildered storekeeper, who was in no condition to listen to confidences.

He went quietly to the door, opened it, looked out, and closed it softly. Then he looked out of the window.

"Have a care of this man Bass," he said, in a lower voice. "He began many years ago by debauching the liberties of that little town of Coniston, and since then he has gradually debauched the whole state, judges and all. If I have a case to try" (he spoke now with more intensity and bitterness), "concerning my mills, or my bank, before I get through I find that rascal mixed up in it somewhere, and unless I arrange matters with him, I −"

He paused abruptly, his eyes going out the window, pointing with a long finger at a grizzled man crossing the street with a yellow and red horse blanket thrown over his shoulders.

"That man, Judge Baker, holding court in this town now, Bass owns him body and soul."

"And the horse blanket?" Wetherell queried, irresistibly.

Dudley Worthington did not smile.

"Take my advice, Mr. Wetherell, and pay off that note somehow." An odor of the stable pervaded the room, and a great unkempt grizzled head and shoulders, horse blanket and all, were stuck into it.

98

"Mornin', Dudley," said the head, "busy?"

"Come right in, Judge," answered Mr. Worthington. "Never too busy to see you." The head disappeared.

"Take my advice, Mr. Wetherell."

And then the storekeeper went into the bank.

For some moments he stood dazed by what he had heard, the query ringing in his head: Why had Jethro Bass bought that note? Did he think that the storekeeper at Coniston would be of use to him, politically? The words Chester Perkins had spoken that morning came back to Wetherell as he stood in the door. And how was he to meet Jethro Bass again with no money to pay even the interest on the note? Then suddenly he missed Cynthia, hurried out, and spied her under the trees on the common so deep in conversation with a boy that she did not perceive him until he spoke to her. The boy looked up, smiling frankly at something Cynthia had said to him. He had honest, humorous eyes, and a browned, freckled face, and was, perhaps, two years older than Cynthia.

"What's the matter?" said Wetherell.

Cynthia's face was flushed, and she was plainly vexed about something.

"I gave her a whistle," said the boy, with a little laugh of vexation, "and now she says she won't take it because I owned up I made it for another girl."

Cynthia held it out to him, not deigning to appeal her case.

"You must take it back," she said.

"But I want you to have it," said the boy.

"It wouldn't be right for me to take it when you made it for somebody else."

After all, people with consciences are born, not made. But this was a finer distinction than the boy had ever met with in his experience.

"I didn't know you when I made the whistle," he objected, puzzled and downcast.

"That doesn't make any difference."

"I like you better than the other girl."

"You have no right to," retorted the casuist; "you've known her longer."

"That doesn't make any difference," said the boy; "there are lots of people I don't like I have always known. This girl doesn't live in Brampton, anyway."

"Where does she live?" demanded Cynthia, which was a step backward.

"At the state capital. Her name's Janet Duncan. There, do you believe me now?"

William Wetherell had heard of Janet Duncan's father, Alexander Duncan, who had the reputation of being the richest man in the state. And he began to wonder who the boy could be.

"I believe you," said Cynthia; "but as long as you made it for her, it's hers. Will you take it?"

"No," said he, determinedly.

"Very well," answered Cynthia. She laid down the whistle behind him on the rail, and went off a little distance and seated herself on a bench. The boy laughed.

"I like that girl," he remarked; "the rest of 'em take everything I give 'em, and ask for more. She's prettier'n any of 'em, too."

"What's your name?" Wetherell asked him, curiously, forgetting his own troubles.

"Bob Worthington."

"Are you the son of Dudley Worthington?"

"Everybody asks me that," he said; "I'm tired of it. When I grow up, they'll have to stop it."

"But you should be proud of your father."

"I am proud of him, everybody's proud of him, Brampton's proud of him he's proud of himself. That's enough, ain't it?" He eyed Wetherell somewhat defiantly, then his glance wandered to Cynthia, and he walked over to her. He threw himself down on the grass in front of her, and lay looking up at her solemnly. For a while she continued to stare inflexibly at the line of market wagons, and then she burst into a laugh.

"Thought you wouldn't hold out forever," he remarked.

"It's because you're so foolish," said Cynthia, "that's why I laughed." Then she grew sober again and held out her hand to him. "Good−by."

"Where are you going?"

"I must go back to my father. I I think he doesn't feel very well."

"Next time I'll make a whistle for you," he called after her.

"And give it to somebody else," said Cynthia.

She had hold of her father's hand by that, but he caught up with her, very red in the face.

"You know that isn't true," he cried, angrily, and taking his way across Brampton Street, turned, and stood staring after them until they were out of sight.

"Do you like him, Daddy?" asked Cynthia.

William Wetherell did not answer. He had other things to think about.

"Daddy?"

"Yes."

"Does your trouble feel any better?"

"Some, Cynthia. But you mustn't think about it."

"Daddy, why don't you ask Uncle Jethro to help you?"

At the name Wetherell started as if he had had a shock.

"What put him into your head, Cynthia?" he asked sharply. "Why do you call him 'Uncle Jethro'?"

"Because he asked me to. Because he likes me, and I like him."

The whole thing was a riddle he could not solve one that was best left alone. They agreed to walk back the ten miles to Coniston, to save the money that dinner at the hotel would cost. And so they started, Cynthia flitting hither and thither along the roadside, picking the stately purple iris flowers in the marshy places, while Wetherell pondered.

CHAPTER IX. SHAKE HANDS WITH MR. BIJAH BIXBY

WHEN William Wetherell and Cynthia had reached the last turn in the road in Northcutt's woods, quarter of a mile from Coniston, they met the nasal Mr. Samuel Price driving silently in the other direction. The word "silently" is used deliberately, because to Mr. Price appertained a certain ghostlike quality of flitting, and to Mr. Price's horse and wagon likewise. He drew up for a brief moment when he saw Wetherell.

"Wouldn't hurry back if I was you, Will."

"Why not?"

Mr. Price leaned out of the wagon.

"Bije has come over from Clovelly to spy araound a little mite."

It was evident from Mr. Price's manner that he regarded the storekeeper as a member of the reform party.

"What did he say, Daddy?" asked Cynthia, as Wetherell stood staring after the flitting buggy in bewilderment.

"I haven't the faintest idea, Cynthia," answered her father, and they walked on.

"Don't you know who 'Bije' is?"

"No," said her father, "and I don't care."

It was almost criminal ignorance for a man who lived in that part of the country not to know Bijah Bixby of Clovelly, who was paying a little social visit to Coniston that day on his way home from the state capital, tending, as it were, Jethro's flock. Still, Wetherell must be excused because he was an impractical literary man with troubles of his own. But how shall we chronicle Bijah's rank and precedence in the Jethro army, in which there are neither shoulder−straps nor annual registers? To designate him as the Chamberlain of that hill Rajah, the Honorable Heth Sutton, would not be far out of the way. The Honorable Heth, whom we all know and whom we shall see presently, is the man of substance and of broad acres in Clovelly: Bijah merely owns certain mortgages in that town, but he has created the Honorable Heth (politically) as surely as certain prime ministers we could name have created their sovereigns. The Honorable Heth was Bijah's creation, and a grand creation he was, as no one will doubt when they see him.

Bijah as he will not hesitate to tell you took Heth down in his pocket to the Legislature, and has more than once delivered him, in certain blocks of five and ten, and four and twenty, for certain considerations. The ancient Song of Sixpence applies to Bijah, but his pocket was generally full of proxies instead of rye, and the Honorable Heth was frequently one of the four and twenty blackbirds. In short, Bijah was the working bee, and the Honorable Heth the ornamental drone.

I do not know why I have dwelt so long on such a minor character as Bijah, except that the man fascinates me. Of all the lieutenants in the state, his manners bore the closest resemblance to those of Jethro Bass. When he walked behind Jethro in the corridors of the Pelican, kicking up his heels behind, he might have been taken for Jethro's shadow. He was of a good height and size, smooth−shaven, with little eyes that kindled, and his mouth moved not at all when he spoke: unlike Jethro, he "used" tobacco.

When Bijah had driven into Coniston village and hitched his wagon to the rail, he went direct to the store. Chester Perkins and others were watching him with various emotions from the stoop, and Bijah took a seat in the midst of them, characteristically engaging in conversation without the usual conventional forms of greeting, as if he had been there all day.

"H−how much did you git for your wool, Chester h−how much?" "Guess you hain't here to talk about wool, Bije," said Chester, red with anger.

"Kind of neglectin' the farm lately, I hear," observed Bijah.

"Jethro Bass sent you up to find out how much I was neglectin' it," retorted Chester, throwing all caution to the winds.

"Thinkin' of upsettin' Jethro, be you? Thinkin' of upsettin' Jethro?" remarked Bije, in a genial tone.

"Folks in Clovelly hain't got nothin' to do with it, if I am," said Chester.

"Leetle early for campaignin', Chester, leetle early."

"We do our campaignin' when we've a mind to."

Bijah looked around.

"Well, that's funny. I could have took oath I seed Rias Richardson here."

There was a deep silence.

"And Sam Price," continued Bijah, in pretended astonishment, "wahn't he settin' on the edge of the stoop when I drove up?"

Another silence, broken only by the enraged breathing of Chester, who was unable to retort. Moses Hatch laughed. The discreet departure of these gentlemen certainly had its comical side.

"Rias as indoostrious as ever, Mose?" inquired Bijah.

"He has his busy times," said Mose, grinning broadly.

"See you've got the boys with their backs up, Chester," said Bijah.

"Some of us are sick of tyranny," cried Chester; "you kin tell that to Jethro Bass when you go back, if he's got time to listen to you buyin' and sellin' out of railroads."

"Hear Jethro's got the Grand Gulf Road in his pocket to do as he's a mind to with," said Moses, with a view to drawing Bijah out. But the remark had exactly the opposite effect, Bijah screwing up his face into an expression of extraordinary secrecy and cunning.

"How much did you git out of it, Bije?" demanded Chester. "Hain't looked through my clothes yet," said Bijah, his face screwed up tighter than ever. "N−never look through my clothes till I git home, Chester, it hain't safe."

It has become painfully evident that Mr. Bixby is that rare type of man who can sit down under the enemy's ramparts and smoke him out. It was a rule of Jethro's code either to make an effective departure or else to remain and compel the other man to make an ineffective departure. Lem Hallowell might have coped with him; but the stage was late, and after some scratching of heads and delving for effectual banter (through which Mr. Bixby sat genial and unconcerned), Chester's followers took their leave, each choosing his own pretext.

In the meantime William Wetherell had entered the store by the back door unperceived, as he hoped. He had a vehement desire to be left in peace, and to avoid politics and political discussions forever vain desire for the storekeeper of Coniston. Mr. Wetherell entered the store, and to take his mind from his troubles, he picked up a copy of Byron: gradually the conversation on the stoop died away, and just as he was beginning to congratulate himself and enjoy the book, he had an unpleasant sensation of some one approaching him measuredly. Wetherell did not move; indeed, he felt that he could not he was as though charmed to the spot. He could have cried aloud, but the store was empty, and there was no one to hear him. Mr. Bixby did not speak until he was within a foot of his victim's ear. His voice was very nasal, too.

"Wetherell, hain't it?"

The victim nodded helplessly.

"Want to see you a minute."

"What is it?"

"Where can we talk private?" asked Mr. Bixby, looking around.

"There's no one here," Wetherell answered. "What do you wish to say?"

"If the boys was to see me speakin' to you, they might git suspicious you understand," he confided, his manner conveying a hint that they shared some common policy. "I don't meddle with politics," said Wetherell, desperately.

"Ex'actly!" answered Bijah, coming even closer. "I knowed you was a level−headed man, moment I set eyes on you. Made up my mind I'd have a little talk in private with you you understand. The boys hain't got no reason to suspicion you care anything about politics, have they?"

"None whatever."

"You don't pay no attention to what they say?"

"None."

"You hear it?"

"Sometimes I can't help it."

"Ex'actly! You hear it."

"I told you I couldn't help it."

"Want you should vote right when the time comes," said Bijah. "D−don't want to see such an intelligent man go wrong an' be sorry for it you understand. Chester Perkins is hare−brained. Jethro Bass runs things in this state."

"Mr. Bixby −"

"You understand," said Bijah, screwing up his face. "Guess your pocket watch is a−comin' out." He tucked it back caressingly, and started for the door the back door. Involuntarily Wetherell put his hand to his pocket, felt something crackle under it, and drew the something out. To his amazement it was a ten−dollar bill.

"Here!" he cried so sharply in his fright that Mr. Bixby turned around. Wetherell ran after him. "Take this back!"

"Guess you got me," said Bijah. "W−what is it?"

"This money is yours," cried Wetherell, so loudly that Bijah started and glanced at the front of the store.

"Guess you made some mistake," he said, staring at the storekeeper with such amazing innocence that he began to doubt his senses, and clutched the bill to see if it was real.

"But I had no money in my pocket," said Wetherell, perplexedly. And then, gaining indignation, "Take this to the man who sent you, and give it back to him."

But Bijah merely whispered caressingly in his ear, "Nobody sent me, − you understand, nobody sent me," and was gone. Wetherell stood for a moment, dazed by the man's audacity, and then, hurrying to the front stoop, the money still in his hand, he perceived Mr. Bixby in the sunlit road walking, Jethro−fashion, toward Ephraim Prescott's harness shop.

"Why, Daddy," said Cynthia, coming in from the garden, "where did you get all that money? Your troubles must feel better."

"It is not mine," said Wetherell, starting. And then, quivering with anger and mortification, he sank down on the stoop to debate what he should do.

"Is it somebody else's?" asked the child, presently.

"Yes."

"Then why don't you give it back to them, Daddy?"

How was Wetherell to know, in his fright, that Mr. Bixby had for once indulged in an overabundance of zeal in Jethro's behalf? He went to the door, laughter came to him across the green from the harness shop, and his eye following the sound, fastened on Bijah seated comfortably in the midst of the group there. Bitterly the storekeeper comprehended that, had he possessed courage, he would have marched straight after Mr. Bixby and confronted him before them all with the charge of bribery. The blood throbbed in his temples, and yet he sat there, trembling,

despising himself, repeating that he might have had the courage if Jethro Bass had not bought the mortgage. The fear of the man had entered the storekeeper's soul.

"Does it belong to that man over there?" asked Cynthia.

"Yes."

"I'll take it to him, Daddy," and she held out her hand.

"Not now," Wetherell answered nervously, glancing at the group. He went into the store, addressed an envelope to "Mr. Bijah Bixby of Clovelly," and gave it to Cynthia. "When he comes back for his wagon, hand it to him," he said, feeling that he would rather, at that moment, face the devil himself than Mr. Bixby.

Half an hour later, Cynthia gave Mr. Bixby the envelope as he unhitched his horse; and so deftly did Bijah slip it into his pocket, that he must certainly have misjudged its contents. None of the loungers at Ephraim's remarked the transaction.

If Jethro had indeed instructed Bijah to look after his flock at Coniston, it was an ill−conditioned move, and some of the flock resented it when they were quite sure that Bijah was climbing the notch road toward Clovelly. The discussion (from which the storekeeper was providentially omitted) was in full swing when the stage arrived, and Lem Hallowell's voice silenced the uproar. It was Lem's boast that he never had been and never would be a politician.

"Why don't you folks quit railin' against Jethro and do somethin'?" he said. "Bije turns up here, and you all scatter like a flock of crows. I'm tired of makin' complaints about that Brampton road, and to−day the hull side of it give way, and put me in the ditch. Sure as the sun rises to−morrow, I'm goin' to make trouble for Jethro."

"What be you a−goin' to do, Lem?"

"Indict the town," replied Lem, vigorously. "Who is the town? Jethro, hain't he? Who has charge of the highways? Jethro Bass, Chairman of the Selectmen. I've spoke to him, time and agin, about that piece, and he hain't done nothin'. To−night I go to Harwich and git the court to app'int an agent to repair that road, and the town'll hev to pay the bill."

The boldness of Lem's intention for the moment took away their breaths, and then the awe−stricken hush which followed his declaration was broken by the sound of Chester's fist hammering on the counter.

"That's the sperrit," he cried; "I'll go along with you, Lem."

"No, you won't," said Lem, "you'll stay right whar you be." "Chester wants to git credit for the move," suggested Sam Price, slyly.

"It's a lie, Sam Price," shouted Chester. "What made you sneak off when Bije Bixby come?"

"Didn't sneak off," retorted Sam, indignantly, through his nose; "forgot them eggs I left to home."

"Sam," said Lem, with a wink at Moses Hatch, "you hitch up your hoss and fetch me over to Harwich to git that indictment. Might git a chance to see that lady."

"Wal, now, I wish I could, Lem, but my hoss is stun lame."

There was a roar of laughter, during which Sam tried to look unconcerned.

"Mebbe Rias'll take me over," said Lem, soberly. "You hitch up, Rias?"

"He's gone," said Joe Northcutt, "slid out the door when you was speakin' to Sam."

"Hain't none of you folks got spunk enough to carry me over to see the jedge?" demanded Lem; "my hosses ain't fit to travel to−night." Another silence followed, and Lem laughed contemptuously but good−naturedly, and turned on his heel. "Guess I'll walk, then," he said.

"You kin have my white hoss, Lem," said Moses Hatch.

"All right," said Lem; "I'll come round and hitch up soon's I git my supper."

An hour later, when Cynthia and her father and Millicent Skinner who condescended to assist in the work and cooking of Mr. Wetherell's household were seated at supper in the little kitchen behind the store, the head and shoulders of the stage−driver were thrust in at the window, his face shining from its evening application of soap and water. He was making eyes at Cynthia.

"Want to go to Harwich, Will?" he asked.

William set his cup down quickly.

"You hain't afeard, be you?" he continued. "Most folks that hasn't went West or died is afeard of Jethro Bass."

"Daddy isn't afraid of him, and I'm not," said Cynthia.

"That's right, Cynthy," said Lem, leaning over and giving a tug to the pigtail that hung down her back; "there hain't nothin' to be afeard of."

"I like him," said Cynthia; "he's very good to me."

"You stick to him, Cynthy," said the stage driver. "Ready, Will?"

It may readily be surmised that Mr. Wetherell did not particularly wish to make this excursion, the avowed object of which was to get Mr. Bass into trouble. But he went, and presently found himself jogging along on the mountain road to Harwich. From the crest of Town's End ridge they looked upon the western peaks tossing beneath a golden sky. The spell of the evening's beauty seemed to have fallen on them both, and for a long time Lem spoke not a word, and nodded smilingly but absently to the greetings that came from the farm doorways.

"Will," he said at last, "you acted sensible. There's no mite of use of your gettin' mixed up in politics. You're too good for 'em."

"Too good!" exclaimed the storekeeper.

"You're eddicated, Lem replied, with a tactful attempt to cover up a deficiency; "you're a gentleman, ef you do keep store."

Lemuel apparently thought that gentlemen and politics were contradictions. He began to whistle, while Wetherell sat and wondered that any one could be so care−free on such a mission. The day faded, and went out, and the lights of Harwich twinkled in the valley. Wetherell was almost tempted to mention his trouble to this man, as he

had been to Ephraim: the fear that each might think he wished to borrow money held him back.

"Jethro's all right," Lem remarked, "but if he neglects the road, he's got to stand for it, same's any other. I writ him twice to the capital, and give him fair warning afore he went. He knows I hain't doin' of it for politics. I've often thought," Lem continued, "that ef some smart, good woman could have got hold of him when he was young, it would have made a big difference. What's the matter?"

"Have you room enough?"

"I guess I've got the hull seat," said Lem. "As I was sayin', if some able woman had married Jethro and made him look at things a little mite different, he would have b'en a big man. He has all the earmarks. Why, when he comes back to Coniston, them fellers'll hunt their holes like rabbits, mark my words."

"You don't think −"

"Don't think what?"

"I understand he holds the mortgages of some of them," said Wetherell.

"Shouldn't blame him a great deal ef he did git tired and sell Chester out soon. This thing happens regular as leap year."

"Jethro Bass doesn't seem to frighten you," said the storekeeper.

"Well," said Lem, "I hain't afeard of him, that's so. For the life of me, I can't help likin' him, though he does things that I wouldn't do for all the power in Christendom. Here's Jedge Parkinson's house."

Wetherell remained in the wagon while Lemuel went in to transact his business. The Judge's house, outlined in the starlight, was a modest dwelling with a little porch and clambering vines, set back in its own garden behind a picket fence. Presently, from the direction of the lines of light in the shutters, came the sound of voices, Lem's deep and insistent, and another, pitched in a high nasal key, deprecatory and protesting. There was still another, a harsh one that growled something unintelligible, and Wetherell guessed, from the fragments which he heard, that the judge before sitting down to his duty was trying to dissuade the stage driver from a step that was foolhardy. He guessed likewise that Lem was not to be dissuaded. At length a silence followed, then the door swung open, and three figures came down the illuminated path.

"Like to make you acquainted with Jedge Abner Parkinson, Mr. Wetherell, and Jim Irving. Jim's the sheriff of Truro County, and I guess the jedge don't need any recommendation as a lawyer from me. You won't mind stayin' awhile with the jedge while Jim and I go down town with the team? You're both literary folks." Wetherell followed the judge into the house. He was sallow, tall and spare and stooping, clean−shaven, with a hooked nose and bright eyes the face of an able and adroit man, and he wore the long black coat of the politician−lawyer. The room was filled with books, and from these Judge Parkinson immediately took his cue, probably through a fear that Wetherell might begin on the subject of Lemuel's errand. However, it instantly became plain that the judge was a true book lover, and despite the fact that Lem's visit had disturbed him not a little, he soon grew animated in a discussion on the merits of Sir Walter Scott, paced the room, pitched his nasal voice higher and higher, covered his table with volumes of that author to illustrate his meaning. Neither of them heard a knock, and they both stared dumfounded at the man who filled the doorway.

It was Jethro Bass!

He entered the room with characteristic unconcern, as if he had just left it on a trivial errand, and without a "How do you do?" or a "Good evening," parted his coat tails, and sat down in the judge's armchair. The judge dropped the volume of Scott on the desk, and as for Wetherell, he realized for once the full meaning of the biblical expression of a man's tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth; the gleam of one of Jethro's brass buttons caught his eye and held it fascinated.

"Literary talk, Judge?" said Jethro. "D−don't mind me go on."

"Thought you were at the capital," said the judge, reclaiming some of his self−possession.

"Good many folks thought so," answered Jethro, "g−good many folks."

There was no conceivable answer to this, so the judge sat down with an affectation of ease. He was a man on whom dignity lay heavily, and was not a little ruffled because Wetherell had been a witness of his discomfiture. He leaned back in his chair, then leaned forward, stretching his neck and clearing his throat, a position in which he bore a ludicrous resemblance to a turkey gobbler. "Most through the Legislature?" inquired the judge.

"'Bout as common," said Jethro.

There was a long silence, and, forgetful for the moment of his own predicament, Wetherell found a fearful fascination in watching the contortions of the victim whose punishment was to precede his. It had been one of the delights of Louis XI to contemplate the movements of a certain churchman whom he had put in a cage, and some inkling of the pleasure to be derived from this pastime of tyrants dawned on Wetherell. Perhaps the judge, too, thought of this as he looked at "Quentin Durward" on the table.

"I was just sayin' to Lem Hallowell," began the judge, at last, "that I thought he was a little mite hasty −"

"Er indicted us, Judge?" said Jethro.

The judge and Wetherell heard the question with different emotions. Mr. Parkinson did not seem astonished at this miracle which had put Jethro in possession of this information, but heaved a long sigh of relief, as a man will when the worst has at length arrived.

"I had to, Jethro couldn't help it. I tried to get Hallowell to wait till you come back and talk it over friendly, but he wouldn't listen; said the road was dangerous, and that he'd spoken about it too often. He said he hadn't anything against you."

"Didn't come in to complain," said Jethro, "didn't come in to complain. Road is out of repair. W−what's the next move?"

"I'm sorry, Jethro I swan I'm sorry." He cleared his throat. "Well," he continued in his judicial manner, "the court has got to appoint an agent to repair that road, the agent will present the bill, and the town will have to pay the bill whatever it is. It's too bad, Jethro, that you have allowed this to be done."

"You say you've got to app'int an agent?"

"Yes I'm sorry −"

"Have you app'inted one?"

"No."

"G−got any candidates?" The judge scratched his head.

"Well, I don't know as I have."

"Well, have you?"

"No," said the judge.

"A−any legal objection to my bein' app'inted?" asked Jethro.

The judge looked at him and gasped. But the look was an involuntary tribute of admiration.

"Well," he said hesitatingly, "I don't know as there is, Jethro. No, there's no legal objection to it."

"A−any other kind of objection?" said Jethro.

The judge appeared to reflect.

"Well, no," he said at last, "I don't know as there is."

"Well, is there?" said Jethro, again.

"No," said the judge, with the finality of a decision. A smile seemed to be pulling at the corners of his mouth.

"Well, I'm a candidate," said Jethro.

"Do you tell me, Jethro, that you want me to appoint you agent to fix that road?"

"I I'm a candidate."

"Well," said the judge, rising, "I'll do it."

"When?" said Jethro, sitting still.

"I'll send the papers over to you within two or three days."

"O−ought to be done right away, Judge. Road's in bad shape."

"Well, I'll send the papers over to you to−morrow."

"How long would it take to make out that app'intment how long?"

"It wouldn't take but a little while."

"I'll wait," said Jethro.

"Do you want to take the appointment along with you to−night?" asked the judge, in surprise.

"G−guess that's about it."

Without a word the judge went over to his table, and for a while the silence was broken only by the scratching of his pen.

"Er interested in roads, Will, interested in roads?" The judge stopped writing to listen, since it was now the turn of the other victim.

"Not particularly," answered Mr. Wetherell, whose throat was dry.

"C−come over for the drive c−come over for the drive?"

"Yes," replied the storekeeper, rather faintly.

"H−how's Cynthy?" said Jethro.

The storekeeper was too astonished to answer. At that moment there was a heavy step in the doorway, and Lem Hallowell entered the room. He took one long look at Jethro and bent over and slapped his hand on his knee, and burst out laughing.

"So here you be!" he cried. "By Godfrey! ef you don't beat all outdoors, Jethro. Wal, I got ahead of ye for once, but you can't say I didn't warn ye. Come purty nigh bustin' the stage on that road to−day, and now I'm a−goin' to hev an agent app'inted."

"W−who's the agent?" said Jethro.

"We'll git one. Might app'int Will, there, only he don't seem to want to get mixed up in it."

"There's the agent," cried the judge, holding out the appointment to Jethro.

"Wh−what!" ejaculated Lem.

Jethro took the appointment, and put it in his cowhide wallet.

"Be you the agent?" demanded the amazed stage driver.

"C−callate to be," said Jethro, and without a smile or another word to any one he walked out into the night, and after various exclamations of astonishment and admiration, the stage driver followed.

No one, indeed, could have enjoyed this unexpected coup of Jethro's more than Lem himself, and many times on their drive homeward he burst into loud and unexpected fits of laughter at the sublime conception of the Chairman of the Selectmen being himself appointed road agent.

"Will," said he, "don't you tell this to a soul. We'll have some fun out of the boys to−morrow." The storekeeper promised, but he had an unpleasant presentment that he himself might be one of the boys in question.

"How do you suppose Jethro Bass knew you were going to indict the town?" he asked of the stage driver.

Lem burst into fresh peals of laughter, but this was something which he did not attempt to answer.

CHAPTER X. HOW THE REBELLION WAS QUENCHED

IT so happened that there was a certain spinster whom Sam Price had been trying to make up his mind to marry for ten years or more, and it was that gentleman's habit to spend at least one day in the month in Harwich for the purpose of paying his respects. In spite of the fact that his horse had been "stun lame" the night before, Mr. Price was able to start for Harwich, via Brampton, very early the next morning. He was driving along through Northcutt's woods with one leg hanging over the wheel, humming through his nose what we may suppose to have been a love−ditty, and letting his imagination run riot about the lady in question, when he nearly fell out of his wagon. The cause of this was the sight of fat Tom coming around a corner, with Jethro Bass behind him. Lem Hallowell and the storekeeper had kept their secret so well that Sam, if he was thinking about Jethro at all, believed him at that moment to be seated in the Throne Room at the Pelican House, in the capital.

Mr. Price, however, was one of an adaptable nature, and by the time he had pulled up beside Jethro he had recovered sufficiently to make a few remarks on farming subjects, and finally to express a polite surprise at Jethro's return.

"But you come a little mite late, hain't you, Jethro?" he said finally, with all of the indifference he could assume.

"H−how's that, Sam how's that?"

"It's too bad, I swan it is, but Lem Hallowell rode over to Harwich last night and indicted the town for that piece of road by the Four Corners. Took Will Wetherell along with him."

"D−don't say so!" said Jethro.

"I callate he done it," responded Sam, pulling a long face. "The court'll hev to send an agent to do the job, and I guess you'll hev to foot the bill, Jethro."

"C−court'll hev to app'int an agent?"

"I callate."

"Er you a candidate Sam you a candidate?"

"Don't know but what I be," answered the usually wary Mr. Price.

"G−goin' to Harwich hain't you?"

"Mebbe I be, and mebbe I hain't," said Sam, not able to repress a self−conscious smile.

"M−might as well be you as anybody, Sam," said Jethro, as he drove on.

It was not strange that the idea, thus planted, should grow in Mr. Price's favor as he proceeded. He had been surprised at Jethro's complaisance, and he wondered whether, after all, he had done well to help Chester stir people up at this time. When he reached Harwich, instead of presenting himself promptly at the spinster's house, he went first to the office of Judge Parkinson, as became a prudent man of affairs.

Perhaps there is no need to go into the details of Mr. Price's discomfiture on the occasion of this interview. The judge was by nature of a sour disposition, but he haw−hawed so loudly as he explained to Mr. Price the identity of the road agent that the judge of probate in the next office thought his colleague had gone mad. Afterward Mr.

Price stood for some time in the entry, where no one could see him, scratching his head and repeating his favorite exclamation, "I want to know!" It has been ascertained that he omitted to pay his respects to the spinster on that day.

Cyamon Johnson carried the story back to Coniston, where it had the effect of eliminating Mr. Price from local politics for some time to come.

That same morning Chester Perkins was seen by many driving wildly about from farm to farm, supposedly haranguing his supporters to make a final stand against the tyrant, but by noon it was observed by those naturalists who were watching him that his activity had ceased. Chester arrived at dinner time at Joe Northcutt's, whose land bordered on the piece of road which had caused so much trouble, and Joe and half a dozen others had been at work there all morning under the road agent whom Judge Parkinson had appointed. Now Mrs. Northcutt was Chester's sister, a woman who in addition to other qualities possessed the only sense of humor in the family. She ushered the unsuspecting Chester into the kitchen, and there, seated beside Joe and sipping a saucer of very hot coffee, was Jethro Bass himself. Chester halted in the doorway, his face brick−red, words utterly failing him, while Joe sat horror−stricken, holding aloft on his fork a smoking potato. Jethro continued to sip his coffee.

"B−busy times, Chester," he said, "b−busy times."

Chester choked. Where were the burning words of denunciation which came so easily to his tongue on other occasions? It is difficult to denounce a man who insists upon drinking coffee.

"Set right down, Chester," said Mrs. Northcutt, behind him.

Chester sat down, and to this day he cannot account for that action. Once seated, habit asserted itself, and he attacked the boiled dinner with a ferocity which should have been exercised against Jethro.

"I suppose the stores down to the capital is finer than ever, Mr. Bass," remarked Mrs. Northcutt.

"So−so, Mis' Northcutt, so−so."

"I was there ten years ago," remarked Mrs. Northcutt, with a sigh of reminiscence, "and I never see such fine silks and bonnets in my life. Now I've often wanted to ask you, did you buy that bonnet with the trembly jet things for Mis' Bass?"

"That bonnet come out full better'n I expected," answered Jethro, modestly.

"You have got taste in wimmen's fixin's, Mr. Bass. Strange! Now I wouldn't let Joe choose my things for worlds."

So the dinner progressed, Joe with his eyes on his plate, Chester silent, but burning with anger and resentment, until at last Jethro pushed back his chair, and said good day to Mrs. Northcutt and walked out. Chester got up instantly and went after him, and Joe, full of forebodings, followed his brother−in−law! Jethro was standing calmly on the grass plot, whittling a toothpick. Chester stared at him a moment, and then strode off toward the barn, unhitched his horse and jumped in his wagon. Something prompted him to take another look at Jethro, who was still whittling.

"C−carry me down to the road, Chester c−carry me down to the road?" said Jethro.

Joe Northcutt's knees gave way under him, and he sat down on a sugar kettle. Chester tightened up his reins so suddenly that his horse reared, while Jethro calmly climbed into the seat beside him and they drove off. It was some time before Joe had recovered sufficiently to arise and repair to the scene of operations on the road.

It was Joe who brought the astounding news to the store that evening. Chester was Jethro's own candidate for senior Selectman! Jethro himself had said so, that he would be happy to abdicate in Chester's favor, and make it unanimous Chester having been a candidate so many times, and disappointed.

"Whar's Chester?" said Lem Hallowell.

Joe pulled a long face.

"Just come from his house, and he hain't done a lick of work sence noon time. Jest sets in a corner won't talk, won't eat jest sets thar."

Lem sat down on the counter and laughed until he was forced to brush the tears from his cheeks at the idea of Chester Perkins being Jethro's candidate. Where was reform now? If Chester were elected, it would be in the eyes of the world as Jethro's man. No wonder he sat in a corner and refused to eat. "Guess you'll ketch it next, Will, for goin' over to Harwich with Lem," Joe remarked playfully to the storekeeper, as he departed.

These various occurrences certainly did not tend to allay the uneasiness of Mr. Wetherell. The next afternoon, at a time when a slack trade was slackest, he had taken his chair out under the apple tree and was sitting with that same volume of Byron in his lap but he was not reading. The humorous aspects of the doings of Mr. Bass did not particularly appeal to him now; and he was, in truth, beginning to hate this man whom the fates had so persistently intruded into his life. William Wetherell was not, it may have been gathered, what may be called vindictive. He was a sensitive, conscientious person whose life should have been in the vale; and yet at that moment he had a fierce desire to confront Jethro Bass and and destroy him. Yes, he felt equal to that.

Shocks are not very beneficial to sensitive natures. William Wetherell looked up, and there was Jethro Bass on the doorstep.

"G−great resource readin' great resource," he remarked.

In this manner Jethro snuffed out utterly that passion to destroy, and another sensation took its place a sensation which made it very difficult for William Wetherell to speak, but he managed to reply that reading had been a great resource to him. Jethro had a parcel in his hand, and he laid it down on the step beside him; and he seemed, for once in his life, to be in a mood for conversation.

"It's hard for me to read a book," he observed. "I own to it it's a little mite hard. H−hev to kind of spell it out in places. Hain't had much time for readin'. But it's kind of pleasant to l'arn what other folks has done in the world by pickin' up a book. T−takes your mind off things don't it?"

Wetherell felt like saying that his reading had not been able to do that lately. Then he made the plunge, and shuddered as he made it. "Mr. Bass I I have been waiting to speak to you about that mortgage."

"Er yes," he answered, without moving his head, "er about the mortgage."

"Mr. Worthington told me that you had bought it."

"Yes, I did yes, I did."

"I'm afraid you will have to foreclose," said Wetherell; "I cannot reasonably ask you to defer the payments any longer."

"If I foreclose it, what will you do?" he demanded abruptly.

There was but one answer Wetherell would have to go back to the city and face the consequences. He had not the strength to earn his bread on a farm.

"If I'd a b'en in any hurry for the money g−guess I'd a notified you," said Jethro.

"I think you had better foreclose, Mr. Bass," Wetherell answered; "I can't hold out any hopes to you that it will ever be possible for me to pay it off. It's only fair to tell you that."

"Well," he said, with what seemed a suspicion of a smile, "I don't know but what that's about as honest an answer as I ever got."

"Why did you do it?" Wetherell cried, suddenly goaded by another fear; "why did you buy that mortgage?"

But this did not shake his composure.

"H−have a little habit of collectin' 'em," he answered, "same as you do books. G−guess some of 'em hain't as valuable."

William Wetherell was beginning to think that Jethro Bass knew something also of such refinements of cruelty as were practised by Caligula. He drew forth his cowhide wallet and produced from it a folded piece of newspaper which must, Wetherell felt sure, contain the mortgage in question.

"There's one power I always wished I had," he observed, "the power to make folks see some things as I see 'em. I was acrost the Water to−night, on my hill farm, when the sun set, and the sky up thar above the mountain was all golden bars, and the river all a−flamin' purple, just as if it had been dyed by some of them Greek gods you're readin' about. Now if I could put them things on paper, I wouldn't care a haycock to be President. No, sir."

The storekeeper's amazement as he listened to this speech may be imagined. Was this Jethro Bass? If so, here was a side of him the existence of which no one suspected. Wetherell forgot the matter in hand.

"Why don't you put that on paper?" he exclaimed.

Jethro smiled, and made a deprecating motion with his thumb.

"Sometimes when I hain't busy, I drop into the state library at the capital and enjoy myself. It's like goin' to another world without any folks to bother you. Er er there's books I'd like to talk to you about sometime."

"But I thought you told me you didn't read much, Mr. Bass?"

He made no direct reply, but unfolded the newspaper in his hand, and then Wetherell saw that it was only a clipping.

"H−happened to run across this in a newspaper if this hain't this county, I wahn't born and raised here. If it hain't Coniston Mountain about seven o'clock of a June evening, I never saw Coniston Mountain. Er listen to this."

Whereupon he read, with a feeling which Wetherell had not supposed he possessed, an extract: and as the storekeeper listened his blood began to run wildly. At length Jethro put down the paper without glancing at his companion.

"There's somethin' about that that fetches you spinnin' through the air," he said slowly. "Sh−showed it to Jim Willard, editor of the Newcastle Guardian. Er what do you think he said?"

"I don't know," said Wetherell, in a low voice.

"Willard said, 'Bass, w−wish you'd find me that man. I'll give him five dollars every week for a letter like that er five dollars a week.'" He paused, folded up the paper again and put it in his pocket, took out a card and handed it to Wetherell.

James G. Willard, Editor. Newcastle Guardian.

"That's his address," said Jethro. "Er guess you'll know what to do with it. Er five dollars a week five dollars a week."

"How did you know I wrote this article?" said Wetherell, as the card trembled between his fingers.

"K−knowed the place was Coniston seen from the east, knowed there wahn't any one in Brampton or Harwich could have done it g−guessed the rest guessed the rest."

Wetherell could only stare at him like a man who, with the halter about his neck, had been suddenly reprieved. But Jethro Bass did not appear to be waiting for thanks. He cleared his throat, and had Wetherell not been in such a condition himself, he would actually have suspected him of embarrassment.

"Er Wetherell?"

"Yes?"

"W−won't say nothin' about the mortgage p−pay it when you can."

This roused the storekeeper to a burst of protest, but Jethro stemmed it.

"Hain't got the money, have you?"

"No but −"

"If I needed money, d'ye suppose I'd bought the mortgage?"

"No," answered the still bewildered Wetherell, "of course not." There he stuck, that other suspicion of political coercion suddenly rising uppermost. Could this be what the man meant? Wetherell put his hand to his head, but he did not dare to ask the question. Then Jethro Bass fixed his eyes upon him.

"Hain't never mixed any in politics hev you n−never mixed any?" Wetherell's heart sank.

"No," he answered.

"D−don't take my advice d−don't."

"What!" cried the storekeeper, so loudly that he frightened himself.

"D−don't," repeated Jethro, imperturbably.

There was a short silence, the storekeeper being unable to speak. Coniston Water, at the foot of the garden, sang the same song, but it seemed to Wetherell to have changed its note from sorrow to joy.

"H−hear things, don't you hear things in the store?"

"Yes."

"Don't hear 'em. Keep out of politics, Will, s−stick to storekeepin' and and literature."

Jethro got to his feet and turned his back on the storekeeper and picked up the parcel he had brought.

"C−Cynthy well?" he inquired.

"I I'll call her," said Wetherell, huskily. "She she was down by the brook when you came."

But Jethro Bass did not wait. He took his parcel and strode down to Coniston Water, and there he found Cynthia seated on a rock with her toes in a pool.

"How be you, Cynthy?" said he, looking down at her.

"I'm well, Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia.

"R−remembered what I told you to call me, hev you," said Jethro, plainly pleased. "Th−that's right. Cynthy?"

Cynthia looked up at him inquiringly.

"S−said you liked books didn't you? S−said you liked books?"

"Yes, I do," she replied simply, "very much."

He undid the wrapping of the parcel, and there lay disclosed a book with a very gorgeous cover. He thrust it into the child's lap.

"It's 'Robinson Crusoe'!" she exclaimed, and gave a little shiver of delight that made ripples in the pool. Then she opened it not without awe, for William Wetherell's books were not clothed in this magnificent manner. "It's full of pictures," cried Cynthia. "See, there he is making a ship!"

"Y−you ever read it, Cynthy?" asked Jethro, a little anxiously.

No, Cynthia hadn't.

"L−like it, Cynthy l−like it?" said he, not quite so anxiously.

Cynthia looked up at him with a puzzled expression.

"F−fetched it up from the capital for you, Cynthy for you."

"For me!"

A strange thrill ran through Jethro Bass as he gazed upon the wonder and delight in the face of the child.

"F−fetched it for you, Cynthy."

For a moment Cynthia sat very still, and then she slowly closed the book and stared at the cover again, Jethro looking down at her the while. To tell the truth, she found it difficult to express the emotions which the event had summoned up.

"Thank you Uncle Jethro," she said.

Jethro, however, understood. He had, indeed, never failed to understand her from the beginning. He parted his coat tails and sat down on the rock beside her, and very gently opened the book again, to the first chapter.

"G−goin' to read it, Cynthy?"

"Oh, yes," she said, and trembled again.

"Er read it to me?"

So Cynthia read "Robinson Crusoe" to him while the summer afternoon wore away, and the shadows across the pool grew longer and longer.

CHAPTER XI. MR. WORTHINGTON BECOMES A REFORMER

THUS William Wetherell became established in Coniston, and was started at last poor man upon a life that was fairly tranquil. Lem Hallowell had once covered him with blushes by unfolding a newspaper in the store and reading an editorial beginning: "We publish today a new and attractive feature of the Guardian, a weekly contribution from a correspondent whose modesty is to be compared only with his genius as a writer. We are confident that the readers of our paper will appreciate the letter in another column signed 'W.W.'" And from that day William was accorded much of the deference due to a litterateur which the fates had hitherto denied him. Indeed, during the six years which we are about to skip over so lightly, he became a marked man in Coniston, and it was voted in town meeting that he be intrusted with that most important of literary labors, the Town History of Coniston.

During this period, too, there sprang up the strangest of intimacies between him and Jethro Bass. Surely no more dissimilar men than these have ever been friends, and that the friendship was sometimes misjudged was one of the clouds on William Wetherell's horizon. As the years went on he was still unable to pay off the mortgage; and sometimes, indeed, he could not even meet the interest, in spite of the princely sum he received from Mr. Willard of the Guardian. This was one of the clouds on Jethro's horizon, too, if men had but known it, and he took such moneys as Wetherell insisted upon giving him grudgingly enough. It is needless to say that he refrained from making use of Mr. Wetherell politically, although no poorer vessel for political purposes was ever constructed. It is quite as needless to say, perhaps, that Chester Perkins never got to be Chairman of the Board of Selectmen.

After Aunt Listy died, Jethro was more than ever to be found, when in Coniston, in the garden or the kitchen behind the store. Yes, Aunt Listy is dead. She has flitted through these pages as she flitted through life itself, arrayed by Jethro like the rainbow, and quite as shadowy and unreal. There is no politician of a certain age in the state who does not remember her walking, clad in dragon−fly colors, through the streets of the capital on Jethro's arm, or descending the stairs of the Pelican House to supper. None of Jethro's detractors may say that he ever failed in kindness to her, and he loved her as much as was in his heart to love any woman after Cynthia Ware. As for Aunt Listy, she never seemed to feel any resentment against the child Jethro brought so frequently to Thousand Acre Hill. Poor Aunt Listy! some people used to wonder whether she ever felt any emotion at all. But I believe that she did, in her own way.

It is a well−known fact that Mr. Bijah Bixby came over from Clovelly, to request the place of superintendent of

the funeral, a position which had already been filled. A special office, too, was created on this occasion for an old supporter of Jethro's, Senator Peleg Hartington of Brampton. He was made chairman of the bearers, of whom Ephraim Prescott was one.

After this, as we have said, Jethro was more than ever at the store − or rather in that domestic domain behind it which Wetherell and Cynthia shared with Miss Millicent Skinner. Moses Hatch was wont to ask Cynthia how her daddies were. It was he who used to clear out the road to the little schoolhouse among the birches when the snow almost buried the little village, and on sparkling mornings after the storms his oxen would stop to breathe in front of the store, a cluster of laughing children clinging to the snow−plough and tumbling over good−natured Moses in their frolics. Cynthia became a country girl, and grew long and lithe of limb, and weather−burnt, and acquired an endurance that spoke wonders for the life−giving air of Coniston. But she was a serious child, and Wetherell and Jethro sometimes wondered whether she was ever a child at all. When Eben Hatch fell from the lumber pile on the ice, it was she who bound the cut in his head; and when Tom Richardson unexpectedly embraced the schoolhouse stove, Cynthia, not Miss Rebecca Northcutt, took charge of the situation.

It was perhaps inevitable, with such a helpless father, that the girl should grow up with a sense of responsibility, being what she was. Did William Wetherell go to Brampton, Cynthia examined his apparel, and he was marched shamefacedly back to his room to change; did he read too late at night, some unseen messenger summoned her out of her sleep, and he was packed off to bed. Miss Millicent Skinner, too, was in a like mysterious way compelled to abdicate her high place in favor of Cynthia, and Wetherell was utterly unable to explain how this miracle was accomplished. Not only did Millicent learn to cook, but Cynthia, at the age of fourteen, had taught her. Some wit once suggested that the national arms of the United States should contain the emblem of crossed frying−pans, and Millicent was in this respect a true American. When Wetherell began to suffer from her pies and doughnuts, the revolution took place without stampeding, or recriminations, or trouble of any kind. One evening he discovered Cynthia, decked in an apron, bending over the stove, and Millicent looking on with an expression that was (for Millicent) benign.

This was to some extent explained, a few days later, when Wetherell found himself gazing across the counter at the motherly figure of Mrs. Moses Hatch, who held the well−deserved honor of being the best cook in Coniston.

"Hain't had so much stomach trouble lately, Will?" she remarked.

"No," he answered, surprised; "Cynthia is learning to cook."

"Guess she is," said Mrs. Moses. "That gal is worth any seven grown−up women in town. And she was four nights settin' in my kitchen before I knowed what she was up to."

"So you taught her, Amanda?"

"I taught her some. She callated that Milly was killin' you, and I guess she was."

During her school days, Jethro used frequently to find himself in front of the schoolhouse when the children came trooping out quite by accident, of course. Winter or summer, when he went away on his periodical trips, he never came back without a little remembrance in his carpet bag, usually a book, on the subject of which he had spent hours in conference with the librarian at the state library at the capital. But in June of the year when Cynthia was fifteen, Jethro yielded to that passion which was one of the man's strangest characteristics, and appeared one evening in the garden behind the store with a bundle which certainly did not contain a book. With all the gravity of a ceremony he took off the paper, and held up in relief against the astonished Cynthia a length of cardinal cloth. William Wetherell, who was looking out of the window, drew his breath, and even Jethro drew back with an exclamation at the change wrought in her. But Cynthia snatched the roll from his hand and wound it up with a feminine deftness.

"Wh−what's the matter, Cynthy?"

"Oh, I can't wear that, Uncle Jethro," she said.

"C−can't wear it! Why not?"

Cynthia sat down on the grassy mound under the apple tree and clasped her hands across her knees. She looked up at him and shook her head.

"Don't you see that I couldn't wear it, Uncle Jethro?"

"Why not?" he demanded. "Ch−change it if you've a mind to hev green."

She shook her head, and smiled at him a little sadly.

"T−took me a full hour to choose that, Cynthy," said he. "H−had to go to Boston, so I got it there."

He was, indeed, grievously disappointed at this reception of his gift, and he stood eyeing the cardinal cloth very mournfully as it lay on the paper. Cynthia, remorseful, reached up and seized his hand.

"Sit down here, Uncle Jethro." He sat down on the mound beside here, very much perplexed. She still held his hand in hers. "Uncle Jethro," she said slowly, "you mustn't think I'm not grateful."

"N−no," he answered; "I don't think that, Cynthy. I know you be."

"I am grateful I'm very grateful for everything you give me, although I should love you just as much if you didn't give me anything."

She was striving very hard not to offend him, for in some ways he was as sensitive as Wetherell himself. Even Coniston folk had laughed at the idiosyncrasy which Jethro had of dressing his wife in brilliant colors, and the girl knew this.

"G−got it for you to wear to Brampton on the Fourth of July, Cynthy," he said.

"Uncle Jethro, I couldn't wear that to Brampton!"

"You'd look like a queen," said he.

"But I'm not a queen," objected Cynthia.

"Rather hev somethin' else?"

"Yes," she said, looking at him suddenly with the gleam of laughter in her eyes, although she was on the verge of tears.

"Wh−what?" Jethro demanded.

"Well," said Cynthia, demurely gazing down at her ankles, "shoes and stockings." The barefooted days had long gone by.

Jethro laughed. Perhaps some inkling of her reasons came to him, for he had a strange and intuitive understanding of her. At any rate, he accepted her decision with a meekness which would have astonished many people who knew only that side of him which he showed to the world. Gently she released her hand, and folded up the bundle again and gave it to him.

"B−better keep it hadn't you?"

"No, you keep it. And I will wear it for you when I am rich, Uncle Jethro."

Jethro did keep it, and in due time the cardinal cloth had its uses. But Cynthia did not wear it on the Fourth of July.

That was a great day for Brampton, being not only the nation's birthday, but the hundredth year since the adventurous little band of settlers from Connecticut had first gazed upon Coniston Water at that place. Early in the morning wagon loads began to pour into Brampton Street from Harwich, from Coniston, from Tarleton Four Corners, and even from distant Clovelly, and Brampton was banner−hung for the occasion flags across the stores, across the dwellings, and draped along the whole breadth of the meeting−house; but for sheer splendor the newly built mansion of Isaac D. Worthington outshone them all. Although its owner was a professed believer in republican simplicity, no such edifice ornamented any town to the west of the state capital. Small wonder that the way in front of it was blocked by a crowd lost in admiration of its Gothic proportions! It stands to−day one of many monuments to its builder, with its windows of one pane (unheard−of magnificence), its tower of stone, its porch with pointed arches and scrollwork. No fence divides its grounds from the public walk, and on the smooth−shaven lawn between the ornamental flower beds and the walk stand two stern mastiffs of iron, emblematic of the solidity and power of their owner. It was as much to see this house as to hear the orators that the countryside flocked to Brampton that day.

All the day before Cynthia and Milly, and many another housewife, had been making wonderful things for the dinners they were to bring, and stowing them in the great basket ready for the early morning start. At six o'clock Jethro's three−seated farm wagon was in front of the store. Cousin Ephraim Prescott, in a blue suit and an army felt hat with a cord, got up behind, a little stiffly by reason of that Wilderness bullet; and there were also William Wetherell and Lem Hallowell, his honest face shining, and Sue, his wife, and young Sue and Jock and Lilian, all a−quiver with excitement in their Sunday best. And as they drove away there trotted up behind them Moses and Amandy Hatch, with their farm team, and all the little Hatches, Eben and George and Judy and Liza. As they jogged along they drank in the fragrance of the dew−washed meadows and the pines, and a great blue heron stood knee−deep on the far side of Deacon Lysander's old mill−pond, watching them philosophically as they passed.

It was eight o'clock when they got into the press of Brampton Street, and there was a hush as they made their way slowly through the throng, and many a stare at the curious figure in the old−fashioned blue swallowtail and brass buttons and tall hat, driving the farm wagon. Husbands pointed him out to their wives, young men to sisters and sweethearts, some openly, some discreetly. "There goes Jethro Bass," and some were bold enough to say, "Howdy, Jethro?" Jake Wheeler was to be observed in the crowd ahead of them, hurried for once out of his Jethro step, actually running toward the tavern, lest such a one arrive unheralded. Commotion is perceived on the tavern porch, Mr. Sherman, the proprietor, bustling out, Jake Wheeler beside him; a chorus of "How be you, Jethros?" from the more courageous there, but the farm team jogs on, leaving a discomfited gathering, into the side street, up an alley, and into the cool, ammonia−reeking sheds of lank Jim Sanborn's livery stable. No obsequiousness from lank Jim, who has the traces slipped and the reins festooned from the bits almost before Jethro has lifted Cynthia to the floor. Jethro, walking between Cynthia and her father, led the way, with Ephraim, Lem, and Sue Hallowell following, the children, in unwonted shoes and stockings, bringing up the rear. The people parted, and presently they found themselves opposite the new−scrolled band stand among the trees, where the Harwich band in glittering gold and red had just been installed. The leader, catching sight of Jethro's party, and of Ephraim's corded army hat, made a bow, waved his baton, and they struck up "Marching through Georgia." It was, of

course, not dignified to cheer, but I think that the blood of every man and woman and child ran faster with the music, and so many of them looked at Cousin Ephraim that he slipped away behind the line of wagons. So the day began.

"Jest to think of bein' that rich, Will!" exclaimed Amanda Hatch to the storekeeper, as they stood in the little group which had gathered in front of the first citizen's new mansion. "I own it scares me. Think how much that house must hev cost, and even them dogs," said Amanda, staring at the mastiffs with awe. "They tell me he has a grand piano from New York, and guests from Boston railroad presidents. I call Isaac Worthington to mind when he wahn't but a slip of a boy with a cough, runnin' after Cynthy Ware." She glanced down at Cynthia with something of compassion. "Just to think, child, he might have be'n your father!"

"I'm glad he isn't," said Cynthia, hotly.

"Of course, of course," replied the good−natured and well−intentioned Amanda, "I'd sooner have your father than Isaac Worthington. But I was only thinkin' how nice it would be to be rich!"

Just then one of the glass−panelled doors of this house opened, and a good−looking lad of seventeen came out.

"That's Bob Worthington," said Amanda, determined that they should miss nothing. "My! it wahn't but the other day when he put on long pants. It won't be a great while before he'll go into the mills and git all that money. Guess he'll marry some city person. He'd ought to take you, Cynthy."

"I don't want him," said Cynthia, the color flaming into her cheeks. And she went off across the green in search of Jethro.

There was a laugh from the honest country folk who had listened. Bob Worthington came to the edge of the porch and stood there, frankly scanning the crowd, with an entire lack of self−consciousness. Some of them shifted nervously, with the New Englander's dislike of being caught in the act of sight−seeing.

"What in the world is he starin' at me for," said Amanda, backing behind the bulkier form of her husband. "As I live, I believe he's comin' here."

Young Mr. Worthington was, indeed, descending the steps and walking across the lawn toward them, nodding and smiling to acquaintances as he passed. To Wetherell's astonishment he made directly for the place where he was standing and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Wetherell," he said. "Perhaps you don't remember me, Bob Worthington."

"I can't say that I should have known you," answered the storekeeper. They were all absurdly silent, thinking of nothing to say and admiring the boy because he was at ease.

"I hope you have a good seat at the exercises," he said, pressing Wetherell's hand again, and before he could thank him, Bob was off in the direction of the band stand.

"One thing," remarked Amanda, "he ain't much like his dad. You'd never catch Isaac Worthington bein' that common."

Just then there came another interruption for William Wetherell, who was startled by the sound of a voice in his ear a nasal voice that awoke unpleasant recollections. He turned to confront, within the distance of eight inches, the face of Mr. Bijah Bixby of Clovelly screwed up into a greeting. The storekeeper had met Mr. Bixby several times since that first memorable meeting, and on each occasion, as now, his hand had made an involuntary

movement to his watch pocket.

"Hain't seed you for some time, Will," remarked Mr. Bixby; "goin' over to the exercises? We'll move along that way," and he thrust his hand under Mr. Wetherell's elbow. "Whar's Jethro?"

"He's here somewhere," answered the storekeeper, helplessly, moving along in spite of himself.

"Keepin' out of sight, you understand," said Bijah, with a knowing wink, as much as to say that Mr. Wetherell was by this time a past master in Jethro tactics. Mr. Bixby could never disabuse his mind of a certain interpretation which he put on the storekeeper's intimacy with Jethro. "You done well to git in with him, Will. Didn't think you had it in you when I first looked you over."

Mr. Wetherell wished to make an indignant denial, but he didn't know exactly how to begin.

"Smartest man in the United States of America guess you know that," Mr. Bixby continued amiably. "They can't git at him unless he wants 'em to. There's a railroad president at Isaac Worthington's who'd like to git at him to−day, guess you know that, Steve Merrill."

Mr. Wetherell didn't know, but he was given no time to say so.

"Steve Merrill, of the Grand Gulf and Northern. He hain't here to see Worthington; he's here to see Jethro, when Jethro's a mind to. Guess you understand."

"I know nothing about it," answered Wetherell, shortly. Mr. Bixby gave him a look of infinite admiration, as though he could not have pursued any more admirable line.

"I know Steve Merrill better'n I know you," said Mr. Bixby, "and he knows me. Whenever he sees me at the state capital he says, 'How be you, Bije?' just as natural as if I was a railroad president, and slaps me on the back. When be you goin' to the capital, Will? You'd ought to come down and be thar with the boys on this Truro Bill. You could reach some on 'em the rest of us couldn't git at."

William Wetherell avoided a reply to this very pointed inquiry by escaping into the meeting−house, where he found Jethro and Cynthia and Ephraim already seated halfway up the aisle.

On the platform, behind a bank of flowers, are the velvet−covered chairs which contain the dignitaries of the occasion. The chief of these is, of course, Mr. Isaac Worthington, the one with the hawklike look, sitting next to the Rev. Mr. Sweet, who is rather pudgy by contrast. On the other side of Mr. Sweet, next to the parlor organ and the quartette, is the genial little railroad president, Mr. Merrill, batting the flies which assail the unprotected crown of his head, and smiling benignly on the audience. Suddenly his eye becomes fixed, and he waves a fat hand vigorously at Jethro, who answers the salute with a nod of unwonted cordiality for him. Then comes a hush, and the exercises begin.

There is a prayer, of course, by the Rev. Mr. Sweet, and a rendering of "My Country" and "I would not Change my Lot," and other choice selections by the quartette; and an original poem recited with much feeling by a lady admirer of Miss Lucretia Penniman, and the "Hymn to Coniston" declaimed by Mr. Gamaliel Ives, president of the Brampton Literary Club. But the crowning event is, of course, the oration by Mr. Isaac D. Worthington, the first citizen, who is introduced under that title by the chairman of the day; and as the benefactor of Brampton, who has bestowed upon the town the magnificent gift which was dedicated such a short time ago, the Worthington Free Library.

Mr. Isaac D. Worthington stood erect beside the table, his hand thrust into the opening of his coat, and spoke at the rate of one hundred and eight words a minute, for exactly one hour. He sketched with much skill the creed of the men who had fought their way through the forests to build their homes by Coniston Water, who had left their clearings to risk their lives behind Stark and Ethan Allen for that creed; he paid a graceful tribute to the veterans of the Civil War, scattered among his hearers a tribute, by the way, which for some reason made Ephraim very indignant. Mr. Worthington went on to outline the duty of citizens of the present day, as he conceived it, and in this connection referred, with becoming modesty, to the Worthington Free Library. He had made his money in Brampton, and it was but right that he should spend it for the benefit of the people of Brampton. The library, continued Mr. Worthington when the applause was over, had been the dream of a certain delicate youth who had come, many years ago, to Brampton for his health. (It is a curious fact, by the way, that Mr. Worthington seldom recalled the delicate youth now, except upon public occasions.)

Yes, the dream of that youth had been to benefit in some way that community in which circumstances had decreed that he should live, and in this connection it might not be out of place to mention a bill then before the Legislature of the state, now in session. If the bill became a law, the greatest modern factor of prosperity, the railroad, would come to Brampton. The speaker was interrupted here by more applause. Mr. Worthington did not deem it dignified or necessary to state that the railroad to which he referred was the Truro Railroad; and that he, as the largest stockholder, might indirectly share that prosperity with Brampton. That would be wandering too far from his subject, which, it will be recalled, was civic duties. He took a glass of water, and went on to declare that he feared sadly feared that the ballot was not held as sacred as it had once been. He asked the people of Brampton, and of the state, to stop and consider who in these days made the laws and granted the franchises. Whereupon he shook his head very slowly and sadly, as much as to imply that, if the Truro Bill did not pass, the corruption of the ballot was to blame. No, Mr. Worthington could think of no better subject on this Birthday of Independence than a recapitulation of the creed of our forefathers, from which we had so far wandered.

In short, the first citizen, as became him, had delivered the first reform speech ever heard in Brampton, and the sensation which it created was quite commensurate to the occasion. The presence in the audience of Jethro Bass, at whom many believed the remarks to have been aimed, added no little poignancy to that sensation, although Jethro gave no outward signs of the terror and remorse by which he must have been struck while listening to Mr. Worthington's ruminations of the corruption of the ballot. Apparently unconscious of the eyes upon him, he walked out of the meeting−house with Cynthia by his side, and they stood waiting for Wetherell and Ephraim under the maple tree there.

The beribboned members of the Independence Day committee were now on the steps, and behind them came Isaac Worthington and Mr. Merrill. The people, scenting a dramatic situation, lingered. Would the mill owner speak to the boss? The mill owner, with a glance at the boss, did nothing of the kind, but immediately began to talk rapidly to Mr. Merrill. That gentleman, however, would not be talked to, but came running over to Jethro and seized his hand, leaving Mr. Worthington to walk on by himself.

"Jethro," cried the little railroad president, "upon my word. Well, well. And Miss Jethro," he took off his hat to Cynthia, "well, well. Didn't know you had a girl, Jethro."

"W−wish she was mine, Steve," said Jethro. "She's a good deal to me as it is. Hain't you, Cynthy?"

"Yes," said Cynthia.

"Well, well," said Mr. Merrill, staring at her, "you'll have to look out for her some day keep the boys away from her eh? Upon my word! Well, Jethro," said he, with a twinkle in his eye, "are you goin' to reform? I'll bet you've got an annual over my road in your pocket right now."

"Enjoy the speech−makin', Steve?" inquired Mr. Bass, solemnly.

Mr. Merrill winked at Jethro, and laughed heartily.

"Keep the boys away from her, Jethro," he repeated, laying his hand on the shoulder of the lad who stood beside him. "It's a good thing Bob's going off to Harvard this fall. Seems to me I heard about some cutting up at Andover eh, Bob?"

Bob grinned, showing a line of very white teeth.

Mr. Merrill took Jethro by the arm and led him off a little distance, having a message of some importance to give him, the purport of which will appear later. And Cynthia and Bob were left face to face. Of course Bob could have gone on, if he had wished it.

"Don't remember me, do you?" he said.

"I do now," said Cynthia, looking at him rather timidly through her lashes. Her face was hot, and she had been very uncomfortable during Mr. Merrill's remarks. Furthermore, Bob had not taken his eyes off her. "I remembered you right away," he said reproachfully; "I saw you in front of the house this morning, and you ran away."

"I didn't run away," replied Cynthia, indignantly.

"It looked like it to me," said Bob. "I suppose you were afraid I was going to give you another whistle."

Cynthia bit her lip, and then she laughed. Then she looked around to see where Jethro was, and discovered that they were alone in front of the meeting−house. Ephraim and her father had passed on while Mr. Merrill was talking.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob.

"I'm afraid they've gone," said Cynthia. "I ought to be going after them. They'll miss me."

"Oh, no, they won't," said Bob, easily, "let's sit down under the tree. They'll come back."

Whereupon he sat down under the maple. But Cynthia remained standing, ready to fly. She had an idea that it was wrong to stay which made it all the more delightful.

"Sit down Cynthia," said he.

She glanced down at him, startled. He was sitting, with his legs crossed, looking up at her intently.

"I like that name," he observed. "I like it better than any girl's name I know. Do be good−natured and sit down." And he patted the ground close beside him.

She laughed again. The laugh had in it an exquisite note of shyness, which he liked.

"Why do you want me to sit down?" she asked suddenly.

"Because I want to talk to you."

"Can't you talk to me standing up?"

"I suppose I could," said Bob, "but I shouldn't be able to say such nice things to you."

The corners of her mouth trembled a little.

"And whose loss would that be?" she asked.

Bob Worthington was surprised at the retort, and correspondingly delighted. He had not expected it in a country storekeeper's daughter, and he stared at Cynthia so frankly that she blushed again, and turned away. He was a young man who, it may be surmised, had had some experience with the other sex at Andover and elsewhere. He had not spent all of his life in Brampton.

"I've often thought of you since that day when you wouldn't take the whistle," he declared. "What are you laughing at?"

"I'm laughing at you," said Cynthia, leaning against the tree, with her hands behind her.

"You've been laughing at me ever since you've stood there," he said, aggrieved that his declarations should not be taken more seriously.

"What have you thought about me?" she demanded. She was really beginning to enjoy this episode.

"Well −" he began, and hesitated and broke down and laughed and Cynthia laughed with him.

"I can tell you what I didn't think," said Bob.

"What?" asked Cynthia, falling into the trap.

"I didn't think you'd be so so good−looking," said he, quite boldly.

"And I didn't think you'd be so rude," responded Cynthia. But though Cynthia blushed again, she was not exactly displeased.

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" he asked. "Let's go for a walk."

"I'm going back to Coniston."

"Let's go for a walk now," said he, springing to his feet. "Come on."

Cynthia looked at him and shook her head smilingly.

"Here's Uncle Jethro −"

"Uncle Jethro!" exclaimed Bob, "is he your uncle?"

"Oh, no, not really. But he's just the same. He's very good to me."

"I wonder whether he'd mind if I called him Uncle Jethro, too," said Bob, and Cynthia laughed at the notion. This young man was certainly very comical, and very frank. "Good−by," he said; "I'll come to see you some day in Coniston."

CHAPTER XII. "A TIME TO WEEP, AND A TIME TO LAUGH"

THAT evening, after Cynthia had gone to bed, William Wetherell sat down at Jonah Winch's desk in the rear of the store to gaze at a blank sheet of paper until the Muses chose to send him subject−matter for his weekly letter to the Guardian. The window was open, and the cool airs from the mountain spruces mingled with the odors of corn meal and kerosene and calico paint. Jethro Bass, who had supped with the storekeeper, sat in the wooden armchair silent, with his head bent. Sometimes he would sit there by the hour while Wetherell wrote or read, and take his departure when he was so moved without saying good night. Presently Jethro lifted his chin, and dropped it again; there was a sound of wheels without, and after an interval, a knock at the door.

William Wetherell dropped his pen with a start of surprise, as it was late for a visitor in Coniston. He glanced at Jethro, who did not move, and then he went to the door and shot back the great forged bolt of it, and stared out. On the edge of the porch stood a tallish man in a double−breasted frock coat.

"Mr. Worthington!" exclaimed the storekeeper.

Mr. Worthington coughed and pulled at one of his mutton−chop whiskers, and seemed about to step off the porch again. It was, indeed, the first citizen and reformer of Brampton. No wonder William Wetherell was mystified.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked. "Have you missed your way?"

Wetherell thought he heard him muttering, "No, no," and then he was startled by another voice in his ear. It was Jethro who was standing beside him.

"G−guess he hain't missed his way a great deal. Er come in come in."

Mr. Worthington took a couple of steps forward.

"I understood that you were to be alone," he remarked, addressing Jethro with an attempted severity of manner.

"Didn't say so d−didn't say so, did I?" answered Jethro.

"Very well," said Worthington, "any other time will do for this little matter."

"Er good night," said Jethro, shortly, and there was the suspicion of a gleam in his eye as Mr. Worthington turned away. The mill owner, in fact, did not get any farther than the edge of the porch before he wheeled again.

"The affair which I have to discuss with you is of a private nature, Mr. Bass," he said.

"So I callated," said Jethro.

"You may have the place to yourselves, gentlemen," Wetherell put in uneasily, and then Mr. Worthington came as far as the door, where he stood looking at the storekeeper with scant friendliness. Jethro turned to Wetherell.

"You a politician, Will?" he demanded.

"No," said Wetherell.

"You a business man?"

"No," he said again.

"You ever tell folks what you hear other people say?"

"Certainly not," the storekeeper answered; "I'm not interested in other people's business."

"Ex'actly," said Jethro. "Guess you'd better stay."

"But I don't care to stay," Wetherell objected.

"S−stay to oblige me stay to oblige me?" he asked.

"Well, yes, if you put it that way," Wetherell said, beginning to get some amusement out of the situation.

He did not know what Jethro's object was in this matter; perhaps others may guess.

Mr. Worthington, who had stood by with ill−disguised impatience during this colloquy, now broke in. "It is most unusual, Mr. Bass, to have a third person present at a conference in which he has no manner of concern. I think on the whole, since you have insisted upon my coming to you −"

"H−hain't insisted that I know of," said Jethro.

"Well," said Mr. Worthington, "never mind that. Perhaps it would be better for me to come to you some other time, when you are alone."

In the meantime Wetherell had shut the door, and they had gradually walked to the rear of the store. Jethro parted his coat tails, and sat down again in the armchair. Wetherell, not wishing to be intrusive, went to his desk, leaving the first citizen standing among the barrels.

"W−what other time?" Jethro asked.

"Any other time," said Mr. Worthington.

"What other time?"

"To−morrow night?" suggested said Mr. Worthington, striving to hide his annoyance.

"B−busy to−morrow night," said Jethro.

"You know that what I have to talk to you about is of the utmost importance," said Worthington. "Let us say Saturday night."

"B−busy Saturday night," said Jethro. Meet you to−morrow."

"What time?"

"Noon," said Jethro, "noon."

"Where?" asked Mr. Worthington, dubiously.

"Band stand in Brampton Street" said Jethro, and the storekeeper was fain to bend over his desk to conceal his laughter, busying himself with his books. Mr. Worthington sat down with as much dignity as he could muster on one of Jonah's old chairs, and Jonah Winch's clock ticked and ticked, and Wetherell's pen scratched and scratched on his weekly letter to Mr. Willard, although he knew that he was writing the sheerest nonsense. As a matter of fact, he tore up the sheets the next morning without reading them. Mr. Worthington unbuttoned his coat, fumbled in his pocket, and pulled out two cigars, one of which he pushed toward Jethro, who shook his head. Mr. Worthington lighted his cigar and cleared his throat.

"Perhaps you have observed, Mr. Bass," he said, "that this is a rapidly growing section of the state that the people hereabouts are every day demanding modern and efficient means of communication with the outside world."

"Struck you as a mill owner, has it?" said Jethro.

"I do not care to emphasize my private interests," answered Mr. Worthington, at last appearing to get into his stride. "I wish to put the matter on broader grounds. Men like you and me ought not to be so much concerned with our own affairs as with those of the population amongst whom we live. And I think I am justified in putting it to you on these grounds."

"H−have to be justified, do you have to be justified?" Jethro inquired. "Er why?"

This was a poser, and for a moment he stared at Jethro, blankly, until he decided how to take it. Then he crossed his legs and blew smoke toward the ceiling.

"It is certainly fairer to everybody to take the broadest view of a situation," he remarked; "I am trying to regard this from the aspect of a citizen, and I am quite sure that it will appeal to you in the same light. If the spirit which imbued the founders of this nation means anything, Mr. Bass, it means that the able men who are given a chance to rise by their own efforts must still retain the duties and responsibilities of the humblest citizens. That, I take it, is our position, Mr. Bass, yours and mine."

Mr. Worthington had uncrossed his legs, and was now by the inspiration of his words impelled to an upright position. Suddenly he glanced at Jethro and started for Jethro had sunk down on the small of his back, his chin on his chest, in an attitude of lassitude if not of oblivion. There was a silence perhaps a little disconcerting for Mr. Worthington, who chose the opportunity to relight his cigar.

"G−got through?" said Jethro, without moving, "g−got through?"

"Through?" echoed Mr. Worthington, "through what?" "T−through Sunday−school," said Jethro.

Worthington dropped his match and stamped on it, and Wetherell began to wonder how much the man would stand. It suddenly came over the storekeeper that the predicament in which Mr. Worthington found himself − whatever it was must be a very desperate one. He half rose in his chair, sat down again, and lighted another match.

"Er director in the Truro Road, hain't you, Mr. Worthington?" asked Jethro, without looking at him.

"Yes."

"Er principal stockholder ain't you?"

"Yes but that is neither here nor there, sir."

"Road don't pay r−road don't pay, does it?"

"It certainly does not."

"W−would pay if it went to Brampton and Harwich?"

"Mr. Bass, the company consider that they are pledged to the people of this section to get the road through. I am not prepared to say whether the road would pay, but it is quite likely that it would not."

"Ch−charitable organization?" said Jethro, from the depths of his chair.

"The pioneers in such matters take enormous risks for the benefit of the community, sir. We believe that we are entitled to a franchise, and in my opinion the General Court are behaving disgracefully in refusing us one. I will not say all I think about that affair, Mr. Bass. I am convinced that influences are at work −" He broke off with a catch in his throat.

"T−tried to get a franchise, did you?"

"I am not here to quibble with you, Mr. Bass. We tried to get it by every legitimate means, and failed, and you know it as well as I do."

"Er Heth Sutton didn't sign his receipt er did he?"

The storekeeper, not being a politician, was not aware that the somewhat obscure reference of Jethro's to the Speaker of the House concerned an application which Mr. Worthington was supposed to have made to that gentleman, who had at length acknowledged his inability to oblige, and had advised Mr. Worthington to go to headquarters. And Mr. Stephen Merrill, who had come to Brampton out of the kindness of his heart, had only arranged this meeting in a conversation with Jethro that day, after the reform speech.

Mr. Worthington sprang to his feet, and flung out a hand toward Jethro.

"Prove your insinuations, sir," he cried; "I defy you to prove your insinuations."

But Jethro still sat unmoved.

"H−Heth in the charitable organization, too?" he asked.

"People told me I was a fool to believe in honesty, but I thought better of the lawmakers of my state. I'll tell you plainly what they said to me, sir. They said, 'Go to Jethro Bass.'"

"Well, so you have, hain't you? So you have."

"Yes, I have. I've come to appeal to you in behalf of the people of your section to allow that franchise to go through the present legislature."

"Er come to appeal, have you come to appeal?"

"Yes," said Mr. Worthington, sitting down again; "I have come to−night to appeal to you in the name of the farmers and merchants of this region your neighbors, to use your influence to get that franchise. I have come to you with the conviction that I shall not have appealed in vain."

"Er appealed to Heth in the name of the farmers and merchants?"

"Mr. Sutton is Speaker of the House."

"F−farmers and merchants elected him," remarked Jethro, as though stating a fact.

Worthington coughed.

"It is probable that I made a mistake in going to Sutton," he admitted.

"If I w−wanted to catch a pike, w−wouldn't use a pinhook."

"I might have known," remarked Worthington, after a pause, "that Sutton could not have been elected Speaker without your influence." Jethro did not answer that, but still remained sunk in his chair. To all appearances he might have been asleep.

"W−worth somethin' to the farmers and merchants to get that road through w−worth somethin', ain't it?"

Wetherell held his breath. For a moment Mr. Worthington sat very still, his face drawn, and then he wet his lips and rose slowly.

"We may as well end this conversation, Mr. Bass," he said, and though he tried to speak firmly his voice shook; "it seems to be useless. Good night."

He picked up his hat and walked slowly toward the door, but Jethro did not move or speak. Mr. Worthington reached the door, opened it, and the night breeze started the lamp to smoking. Wetherell got up and turned it down, and the first citizen was still standing in the doorway. His back was toward them, but the fingers of his left hand working convulsively caught Wetherell's eye and held it; save for the ticking of the clock and the chirping of the crickets in the grass, there was silence. Then Mr. Worthington closed the door softly, hesitated, turned, and came back and stood before Jethro.

"Mr. Bass," he said, "we've got to have that franchise."

William Wetherell glanced at the countryman who, without moving in his chair, without raising his voice, had brought the first citizen of Brampton to his knees. The thing frightened the storekeeper, revolted him, and yet its drama held him fascinated. By some subtle process which he had actually beheld, but could not fathom, this cold Mr. Worthington, this bank president who had given him sage advice, this preacher of political purity, had been reduced to a frenzied supplicant. He stood bending over Jethro.

"What's your price? Name it, for God's sake."

B−better wait till you get the bill hadn't you? b−better wait till you get the bill."

"Will you put the franchise through?"

"Goin' down to the capital soon?" Jethro inquired.

"I'm going down on Thursday."

"B−better come in and see me," said Jethro. "Very well," answered Mr. Worthington; "I'll be in at two o'clock on Thursday." And then, without another word to either of them, he swung on his heel and strode quickly out of the

store. Jethro did not move.

William Wetherell's hand was trembling so that he could not write, and he could not trust his voice to speak. Although Jethro had never mentioned Isaac Worthington's name to him, Wetherell knew that Jethro hated the first citizen of Brampton.

At length, when the sound of the wheels had died away, Jethro broke the silence.

"Er didn't laugh did he, Will? Didn't laugh once did he?"

"Laugh!" echoed the storekeeper, who himself had never been further from laughter in his life.

"M−might have let him off easier if he'd laughed," said Jethro, "if he'd laughed just once, m−might have let him off easier."

And with this remark he went out of the store and left Wetherell alone.

CHAPTER XIII. MR. WETHERELL DESCENDS INTO THE ARENA

THE weekly letter to the Newcastle Guardian was not finished that night, but Coniston slept, peacefully, unaware of Mr. Worthington's visit; and never, indeed, discovered it, since the historian for various reasons of his own did not see fit to insert the event in his plan of the Town History. Before another sun had set Jethro Bass had departed for the state capital, not choosing to remain to superintend the haying of the many farms which had fallen into his hand, a most unusual omission for him.

Presently rumors of a mighty issue about the Truro Railroad began to be discussed by the politicians at the Coniston store, and Jake Wheeler held himself in instant readiness to answer a summons to the capital which never came.

Delegations from Brampton and Harwich went to petition the Legislature for the franchise, and the Brampton Clarion and Harwich Sentinel declared that the people of Truro County recognized in Isaac Worthington a great and public−spirited man, who ought by all means to be the next governor if the franchise went through.

One evening Lem Hallowell, after depositing a box of trimmings at Ephraim Prescott's harness shop, drove up to the platform of the store with the remark that "things were gittin' pretty hot down to the capital in that franchise fight."

"Hain't you b'en sent for yet, Jake?" he cried, throwing his reins over the backs of his sweating Morgans; "well, that's strange. Guess the fight hain't as hot as we hear about. Jethro hain't had to call out his best men." "I'm a−goin' down if there's trouble," declared Jake, who consistently ignored banter.

"Better git up and git," said Lem; "there's three out of the five railroads against Truro, and Steve Merrill layin' low. Bije Bixby's down there, and Heth Sutton, and Abner Parkinson, and all the big bugs. Better git aboard, Jake."

At this moment the discussion was interrupted by the sight of Cynthia Wetherell coming across the green with an open letter in her hand.

"It's a message from Uncle Jethro," she said.

The announcement was sufficient to warrant the sensation it produced on all sides.

"'Tain't a letter from Jethro, is it?" exclaimed Sam Price, overcome by a pardonable curiosity. For it was well known that one of Jethro's fixed principles in life was embodied in his own motto, "Don't write send."

"It's very funny," answered Cynthia, looking down at the paper with a puzzled expression. "'Dear Cynthia: Judge Bass wished me to say to you that he would be pleased if you and Will would come to the capital and spend a week with him at the Pelican House, and see the sights. The judge says Rias Richardson will tend store. Yours truly, P. Hartington.' That's all," said Cynthia, looking up.

For a moment you could have heard a pine needle drop on the stoop. Then Rias thrust his hands in his pockets and voiced the general sentiment.

"Well, I'll be goldurned!" said he.

"Didn't say nothin' about Jake?" queried Lem.

"No," answered Cynthia, "that's all except two pieces of cardboard with something about the Truro Railroad and our names. I don't know what they are." And she took them from the envelope.

"Guess I could tell you if I was pressed," said Lem, amid a shout of merriment from the group.

"Air you goin', Will?" said Sam Price, pausing with his foot on the step of his buggy, that he might have the complete news before he left. "Godfrey, Will," exclaimed Rias, breathlessly, "you hain't a−goin' to throw up a chance to stay a hull week at the Pelican, be you?" The mere possibility of refusal overpowered Rias.

Those who are familiar with that delightful French song which treats of the leave−taking of one Monsieur Dumollet will appreciate, perhaps, the attentions which were showered upon William Wetherell and Cynthia upon their departure for the capital next morning. Although Mr. Wetherell had at one time been actually a resident of Boston, he received quite as many cautions from his neighbors as Monsieur Dumollet. Billets doux and pistols were, of course, not mentioned, but it certainly behooved him, when he should have arrived at that place of intrigues, to be on the lookout for cabals.

They took the stage−coach from Brampton over the pass: picturesque stage−coach with its apple−green body and leather springs, soon to be laid away forever if the coveted Truro Franchise Bill becomes a law; stage−coach which pulls up defiantly beside its own rival at Truro station, where our passengers take the train down the pleasant waterways and past the little white villages among the fruit trees to the capital. The thrill of anticipation was in Cynthia's blood, and the flush of pleasure on her cheeks, when they stopped at last under the sheds. The conductor snapped his fingers and cried, "This way, Judge," and there was Jethro in his swallow−tailed coat and stove−pipe hat awaiting them. He seized Wetherell's carpet−bag with one hand and Cynthia's arm with the other, and shouldered his way through the people, who parted when they saw who it was.

"Uncle Jethro," cried Cynthia, breathlessly, "I didn't know you were a judge. What are you judge of?"

"J−judge of clothes, Cynthy. D−don't you wish you had the red cloth to wear here?"

"No, I don't," said Cynthia. "I'm glad enough to be here without it." "G−glad to hev you in any fixin's, Cynthy," he said, giving her arm a little squeeze, and by that time they were up the hill and William Wetherell quite winded. For Jethro was strong as an ox, and Cynthia's muscles were like an Indian's.

They were among the glories of Main Street now. The capital was then, and still remains, a typically beautiful New England city, with wide streets shaded by shapely maples and elms, with substantial homes set back amidst lawns and gardens. Here on Main Street were neat brick business buildings and banks and shops, with the parklike grounds of the Capitol farther on, and everywhere, from curb to doorway, were knots of men talking politics; broad−faced, sunburned farmers in store clothes, with beards that hid their shirt fronts; keen−featured, sallow, country lawyers in long black coats crumpled from much sitting on the small of the back; country storekeepers with shrewd eyes, and local proprietors and manufacturers.

"Uncle Jethro, I didn't know you were such a great man," she said.

"H−how did ye find out, Cynthy?"

"The way people treat you here. I knew you were great, of course," she hastened to add.

"H−how do they treat me?" he asked, looking down at her.

"You know," she answered. "They all stop talking when you come along and stare at you. But why don't you speak to them?"

Jethro smiled and squeezed her arm again, and then they were in the corridor of the famous Pelican Hotel, hazy with cigar smoke and filled with politicians. Some were standing, hanging on to pillars, gesticulating, some were ranged in benches along the wall, and a chosen few were in chairs grouped around the spittoons. Upon the appearance of Jethro's party, the talk was hushed, the groups gave way, and they accomplished a kind of triumphal march to the desk. The clerk, descrying them, desisted abruptly from a conversation across the cigar counter, and with all the form of a ceremony dipped the pen with a flourish into the ink and handed it to Jethro.

"Your rooms are ready, Judge," he said.

As they started for the stairs, Jethro and Cynthia leading the way, Wetherell felt a touch on his elbow and turned to confront Mr. Bijah Bixby at very close range, as usual.

"C−come down at last, Will?" he said. "Thought ye would. Need everybody this time you understand."

"I came on pleasure," retorted Mr. Wetherell, somewhat angrily.

Mr. Bixby appeared hugely to enjoy the joke.

"So I callated," he cried, still holding Wetherell's hand in a mild, but persuasive grip. "So I callated. Guess I done you an injustice, Will."

"How's that?"

"You're a leetle mite smarter than I thought you was. So long. Got a leetle business now you understand a leetle business."

Was it possible, indeed, for the simple−minded to come to the capital and not become involved in cabals? With some misgivings William Wetherell watched Mr. Bixby disappear among the throng, kicking up his heels behind, and then went upstairs. On the first floor Cynthia was standing by an open door.

"Dad," she cried, "come and see the rooms Uncle Jethro's got for us!" She took her father's hand and led him in. "See the lace curtains, and the chandelier, and the big bureau with the marble top."

Jethro had parted his coat tails and seated himself enjoyably on the bed.

"D−don't come often," he said, "m−might as well have the best."

"Jethro," said Wetherell, coughing nervously and flumbling in the pocket of his coat, "you've been very kind to us, and we hardly know how to thank you. But I−I didn't have any use for these."

He held out the pieces of cardboard which had come in Cynthia's letter. He dared not look at Jethro, and his eye was fixed instead upon the somewhat grandiose signature of Isaac D. Worthington, which they bore. Jethro took them and tore them up, and slowly tossed the pieces into a cuspidor conveniently situated near the foot of the bed. He rose and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"Er when you get freshened up, come into Number 7," he said.

Number 7! But we shall come to that later. Supper first, in a great pillared dining room filled with notables, if we only had the key. Jethro sits silent at the head of the table eating his crackers and milk, with Cynthia on his left and William Wetherell on his right. Poor William, greatly embarrassed by his sudden projection into the limelight, is helpless in the clutches of a lady−waitress who is demanding somewhat fiercely that he make an immediate choice from a list of dishes which she is shooting at him with astonishing rapidity. But who is this, sitting beside him, who comes to William's rescue, and demands that the lady repeat the bill of fare? Surely a notable, for he has a generous presence, and jet−black whiskers which catch the light, which give the gentleman, as Mr. Bixby remarked, "quite a settin'." Yes, we have met him at last. It is none other than the Honorable Heth Sutton, Rajah of Clovelly, Speaker of the House, who has condescended to help Mr. Wetherell.

His chamberlain, Mr. Bijah Bixby, sits on the other side of the Honorable Heth, and performs the presentation of Mr. Wetherell. But Mr. Sutton, as becomes a man of high position, says little after he has rebuked the waitress, and presently departs with a carefully chosen toothpick; whereupon Mr. Bixby moves into the vacant seat not to Mr. Wetherell's unqualified delight.

"I've knowed him ever sence we was boys," said Mr. Bixby; "you saw how intimate we was. When he wants a thing done, he says, 'Bije, you go out and git 'em.' Never counts the cost. He was nice to you wahn't he, Will?" And then Mr. Bixby leaned over and whispered in Mr. Wetherell's ear, "He knows you understand he knows." "Knows what?" demanded Mr. Wetherell.

Mr. Bixby gave him another admiring look.

"Knows you didn't come down here with Jethro jest to see the sights."

At this instant the talk in the dining room fell flat, and looking up William Wetherell perceived a portly, rubicund man of middle age being shown to his seat by the head waiter. The gentleman wore a great, glittering diamond in his shirt, and a watch chain that contained much fine gold. But the real cause of the silence was plainly in the young woman who walked beside him, and whose effective entrance argued no little practice and experience. She was of a type that catches the eye involuntarily and holds it, tall, well−rounded, fresh−complexioned, with heavy coils of shimmering gold hair. Her gown, which was far from unbecoming, was in keeping with those gifts with which nature had endowed her. She carried her head high, and bestowed swift and evidently fatal glances to right and left during her progress through the room. Mr. Bixby's voice roused the storekeeper from this contemplation of the beauty.

"That's Alvy Hopkins of Gosport and his daughter. Fine gal, hain't she? Ever sence she come down here t'other day she's stirred up more turmoil than any railroad bill I ever seed. She was almost suffocated at the governor's ball with fellers tryin' to git dances some of 'em old fellers, too. And you understand about Alvy?"

"What about him?"

"Alvy says he's a−goin' to be the next governor, or fail up." Mr. Bixby's voice sank to a whisper, and he spoke into Mr. Wetherell's ear. "Alvy says he has twenty−five thousand dollars to put in if necessary. I'll introduce you to him, Will," he added meaningly. "Guess you can help him some you understand?"

"Mr. Bixby!" cried Mr. Wetherell, putting down his knife and fork.

"There!" said Mr. Bixby, reassuringly, "'twon't be no bother. I know him as well as I do you call each other by our given names. Guess I was the first man he sent for last spring. He knows I go through all them river towns. He says, 'Bije, you git 'em.' I understood."

William Wetherell began to realize the futility of trying to convince Mr. Bixby of his innocence in political matters, and glanced at Jethro.

"You wouldn't think he was listenin', would you, Will?" Mr. Bixby remarked.

"Listening?"

"Ears are sharp as a dog's. Callate he kin hear as far as the governor's table, and he don't look as if he knows anything. One way he built up his power listenin' when they're talkin' sly out there in the rotunda. They're almighty surprised when they l'arn he knows what they're up to. Guess you understand how to go along by quiet and listen when they're talkin' sly."

"I never did such a thing in my life," cried William Wetherell, indignantly aghast.

But Mr. Bixby winked.

"So long, Will," he said, "see you in Number 7."

Never, since the days of Pompadour and Du Barry, until modern American politics were invented, has a state been ruled from such a place as Number 7 in the Pelican House familiarly known as the Throne Room. In this historic cabinet there were five chairs, a marble−topped table, a pitcher of iced water, a bureau, a box of cigars and a Bible, a chandelier with all the gas jets burning, and a bed, whereon sat such dignitaries as obtained an audience, railroad presidents, governors and ex−governors and prospective governors, the Speaker, the President of the Senate, Bijah Bixby, Peleg Hartington, mighty chiefs from the North Country, and lieutenants from other parts of the state. These sat on the bed by preference. Jethro sat in a chair by the window, and never took any part in the discussions that raged, but listened. Generally there was some one seated beside him who talked persistently in his ear; as at present, for instance, Mr. Chauncey Weed, Chairman of the Committee on Corporations of the House, who took the additional precaution of putting his hand to his mouth when he spoke. Mr. Stephen Merrill was in the Throne Room that evening, and confidentially explained to the bewildered William Wetherell the exact situation in the Truro Franchise fight. Inasmuch as it has become our duty to describe this celebrated conflict, in a popular and engaging manner, if possible, we shall have to do so through Mr. Wetherell's eyes, and on his responsibility. The biographies of some of the gentlemen concerned have since been published, and for some unaccountable reason contain no mention of the Truro franchise.

"All Gaul," said Mr. Merrill he was speaking to a literary man "all Gaul is divided into five railroads. I am one, the Grand Gulf and Northern, the impecunious one. That is the reason I'm so nice to everybody, Mr. Wetherell. The other day a conductor on my road had a shock of paralysis when a man paid his fare. Then there's Balch, president of the 'Down East' road, as we call it. Balch and I are out of this fight, we don't care whether Isaac D. Worthington gets his franchise or not, or I wouldn't be telling you this. The two railroads which don't want him to

get it, because the Truro would eventually become a competitor with them, are the Central and the Northwestern. Alexander Duncan is president of the Central."

"Alexander Duncan!" exclaimed Wetherell. "He's the richest man in the state, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Mr. Merrill, "and he lives in a big square house right here in the capital. He ain't a bad fellow, Duncan. You'd like him. He loves books. I wish you could see his library."

"I'm afraid there's not much chance of that," answered Wetherell.

"Well, as I say, there's Duncan, of the Central, and the other is Lovejoy, of the Northwestern. Lovejoy's a bachelor and a skinflint. Those two, Duncan and Lovejoy, are using every means in their power to prevent Worthington from getting that franchise. Have I made myself clear?"

"Do you think Mr. Worthington will get it?" asked Wetherell, who had in mind a certain nocturnal visit at his store.

Mr. Merrill almost leaped out of his chair at the question. Then he mopped his face, and winked very deliberately at the storekeeper. Then Mr. Merrill laughed.

"Well, well," he said, "for a man who comes down here to stay with Jethro Bass to ask me that!" Whereupon William Wetherell flushed, and began to perspire himself. "Didn't you hear Isaac D. Worthington's virtuous appeal to the people of Brampton?" said Mr. Merrill.

"Yes," replied Wetherell, getting redder.

"I like you, Will," said Mr. Merrill, unexpectedly, "darned if I don't. I'll tell you what I know about it, and you can have a little fun while you're here, lookin' on, only it won't do to write about it to the Newcastle Guardian. Guess Willard wouldn't publish it, anyhow. I suppose you know that Jethro pulls the strings, and we little railroad presidents dance. We're the puppets now, but after a while, when I'm crowded out, all these little railroads will get together and there'll be a row worth looking at, or I'm mistaken. But to go back to Worthington," continued Mr. Merrill, "he made a little mistake with his bill in the beginning. Instead of going to Jethro, he went to Heth Sutton, and Heth got the bill as far as the Committee on Corporations, and there she's been ever since, with our friend Chauncey Weed, who's whispering over there."

"Mr. Sutton couldn't even get it out of the Committee!" exclaimed Wetherell.

"Not an inch. Jethro saw this thing coming about a year ago, and he took the precaution to have Chauncey Weed and the rest of the Committee in his pocket and of course Heth Sutton's always been there."

William Wetherell thought of that imposing and manly personage, the Honorable Heth Sutton, being in Jethro's pocket, and marvelled. Mr. Chauncey Weed seemed of a species better able to thrive in the atmosphere of pockets.

"Well, as I say, there was the Truro Franchise Bill sound asleep in the Committee, and when Isaac D. Worthington saw that his little arrangement with Heth Sutton wasn't any good, and that the people of the state didn't have anything more to say about it than the Crow Indians, and that the end of the session was getting nearer and nearer, he got desperate and went to Jethro, I suppose. You know as well as I do that Jethro has agreed to put the bill through."

"Then why doesn't he get the Committee to report it and put it through?" asked Wetherell.

"Bless your simple literary nature," exclaimed Mr. Merrill, "Jethro's got more power than any man in the state, but that isn't saying that he doesn't have to fight occasionally. He has to fight now. He has seven of the twelve senators hitched, and the governor. But Duncan and Lovejoy have bought up all the loose blocks of representatives, and it is supposed that the franchise forces only control a quorum. The end of the session is a week off, and never in all my experience have I seen a more praiseworthy attendance on the part of members."

"Do you mean that they are being paid to remain in their seats?" cried the amazed Mr. Wetherell.

"Well," answered Mr. Merrill, with a twinkle in his eye, "that is a little bald and and unparliamentary, perhaps, but fairly accurate. Our friend Jethro is confronted with a problem to tax even his faculties, and to look at him, a man wouldn't suspect he had a care in the world."

Jethro was apparently quite as free from anxiety the next morning when he offered, after breakfast, to show Wetherell and Cynthia the sights of the town, though Wetherell could not but think that the Throne Room and the Truro Franchise Bill were left at a very crucial moment to take care of themselves. Jethro talked to Cynthia or rather, Cynthia talked to Jethro upon innumerable subjects; they looked upon the statue of a great statesman in the park, and Cynthia read aloud the quotation graven on the rock of the pedestal, "The People's Government, made for the People, made by the People, and answerable to the People." After that they went into the state library, where Wetherell was introduced to the librarian, Mr. Storrow. They did not go into the State House because, as everybody knows, Jethro Bass never went there. Mr. Bijah Bixby and other lieutenants might be seen in the lobbies, and the governor might sign bills in his own apartment there, but the real seat of government was that Throne Room into which we have been permitted to enter.

They walked out beyond the outskirts of the town, where there was a grove or picnic ground which was also used as a park by some of the inhabitants. Jethro liked the spot, and was in the habit sometimes of taking refuge there when the atmosphere of the Pelican House became too thick. The three of them had sat down on one of the board benches to rest, when presently two people were seen at a little distance walking among the trees, and the sight of them, for some reason, seemed to give Jethro infinite pleasure.

"Why," exclaimed Cynthia, "one of them is that horrid girl everybody was looking at in the dining room last night."

"D−don't like her, Cynthy?" said Jethro.

"No," said Cynthia, "I don't."

"Pretty hain't she pretty?"

"She's brazen," declared Cynthia.

It was, indeed, Miss Cassandra Hopkins, daughter of that Honorable Alva who according to Mr. Bixby was all ready with a certain sum of money to be the next governor. Miss Cassandra was arrayed fluffily in cool, pink lawn, and she carried a fringed parasol, and she was gazing upward with telling effect into the face of the gentleman by her side. This would have all been very romantic if the gentleman had been young and handsome, but he was certainly not a man to sweep a young girl off her feet. He was tall, angular, though broad−shouldered, with a long, scrawny neck that rose out of a very low collar, and a large head, scantily covered with hair a head that gave a physical as well as a mental effect of hardness. His smooth−shaven face seemed to bear witness that its owner was one who had pushed frugality to the borders of a vice. It was not a pleasant face, but now it wore an almost benign expression under the influence of Miss Cassandra's eyes. So intent, apparently, were both of them upon each other that they did not notice the group on the bench at the other side of the grove. William Wetherell ventured to ask Jethro who the man was.

"N−name's Lovejoy," said Jethro.

"Lovejoy!" ejaculated the storekeeper, thinking of what Mr. Merrill had told him of the opponents of the Truro Franchise Bill. "President of the Northwestern Railroad?"

Jethro gave his friend a shrewd look.

"G−gettin' posted hain't you, Will?" he said.

"Is she going to marry that old man?" asked Cynthia.

Jethro smiled a little. "G−guess not," said he, "guess not, if the old man can help it. Nobody's married him yet, and hain't likely to."

Jethro was unusually silent on the way back to the hotel, but he did not seem to be worried or displeased. He only broke his silence once, in fact, when Cynthia called his attention to a large poster of some bloodhounds on a fence, announcing the fact in red letters that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" would be given by a certain travelling company at the Opera House the next evening.

"L−like to go, Cynthy?"

"Oh, Uncle Jethro, do you think we can go?"

"Never b'en to a show hev you never b'en to a show?"

"Never in my life," said Cynthia.

"We'll all go," said Jethro, and he repeated it once or twice as they came to Main Street, seemingly greatly tickled at the prospect. And there was the Truro Franchise Bill hanging over him, with only a week left of the session, and Lovejoy's and Duncan's men sitting so tight in their seats! William Wetherell could not understand it.

CHAPTER XIV. IN WHICH THE BACK SEATS ARE HEARD FROM

HALF an hour later, when Mr. Wetherell knocked timidly at Number 7, drawn thither by an irresistible curiosity, the door was opened by a portly person who wore a shining silk hat and ample gold watch chain. The gentleman had, in fact, just arrived; but he seemed perfectly at home as he laid down his hat on the marble−topped bureau, mopped his face, took a glass of iced water at a gulp, chose a cigar, and sank down gradually on the bed. Mr. Wetherell recognized him instantly as the father of the celebrated Cassandra.

"Well, Jethro," said the gentleman, "I've got to come into the Throne Room once a day anyhow, just to make sure you don't forget me eh?"

"A−Alvy," said Jethro, "I want you to shake hands with a particular friend of mine, Mr. Will Wetherell of Coniston. Er Will, the Honorable Alvy Hopkins of Gosport."

Mr. Hopkins rose from the bed as gradually as he had sunk down upon it, and seized Mr. Wetherell's hand impressively. His own was very moist.

"Heard you was in town, Mr. Wetherell," he said heartily. "If Jethro calls you a particular friend, it means something, I guess. It means something to me, anyhow."

"Will hain't a politician," said Jethro. "Er Alvy?"

"Hello!" said Mr. Hopkins.

"Er Will don't talk."

"If Jethro had been real tactful," said the Honorable Alva, sinking down again, "he'd have introduced me as the next governor of the state. Everybody knows I want to be governor, everybody knows I've got twenty thousand dollars in the bank to pay for that privilege. Everybody knows I'm going to be governor if Jethro says so."

William Wetherell was a little taken aback at this ingenuous statement of the gentleman from Gosport. He looked out of the window through the foliage of the park, and his eye was caught by the monument there in front of the State House, and he thought of the inscription on the base of it, "The People's Government." The Honorable Alva had not mentioned the people undoubtedly.

"Yes, Mr. Wetherell, twenty thousand dollars." He sighed. "Time was when a man could be governor for ten. Those were the good old days eh, Jethro?"

"A−Alvy, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' is comin' to town to−morrow to−morrow."

"You don't tell me," said the Honorable Alva, acquiescing cheerfully in the change of subject. "We'll go. Pleased to have you, too, Mr. Wetherell."

"Alvy," said Jethro, again, "'Uncle Tom's Cabin' comes to town to−morrow."

Mr. Hopkins stopped fanning himself, and glanced at Jethro questioningly.

"A−Alvy, that give you an idea?" said Jethro, mildly.

Mr. Wetherell looked blank: it gave him no idea whatsoever, except of little Eva and the bloodhounds. For a few moments the Honorable Alva appeared to be groping, too, and then his face began to crease into a smile of comprehension.

"My Godfrey, Jethro, but you are smart!" he exclaimed, with involuntary tribute; "you mean buy up the theatre?"

"C−callate you'll find it's bought up."

"You mean pay for it?" said Mr. Hopkins.

"You've guessed it, Alvy, you've guessed it."

Mr. Hopkins gazed at him in admiration, leaned out of the perpendicular, and promptly drew from his trousers' pocket a roll of stupendous proportions. Wetting his thumb, he began to push aside the top bills. "How much is it?" he demanded.

But Jethro put up his hand.

"No hurry, Alvy n−no hurry. H−Honorable Alvy Hopkins of Gosport p−patron of the theatre. Hain't the first time you've b'en a patron, Alvy."

"Jethro," said Mr. Hopkins, solemnly, putting up his money, "I'm much obliged to you. I'm free to say I'd never have thought of it. If you ain't the all−firedest smartest man in America to−day, I don't except any, even General Grant, then I ain't the next governor of this state."

Whereupon he lapsed into an even more expressive silence, his face still glowing.

"Er Alvy," said Jethro presently, "what's the name of your gal?"

"Well," said Mr. Hopkins, "I guess you've got me. We did christen her Lily, but she didn't turn out exactly Lily. She ain't the type," said Mr. Hopkins, slowly, not without a note of regret, and lapsed into silence.

"W−what did you say her name was, Alvy?"

"I guess her name's Cassandra," said the Honorable Alva.

"C−Cassandry?"

"Well, you see," he explained a trifle apologetically, "she's kind of taken some matters in her own hands, my gal. Didn't like Lily, and it didn't seem to fit her anyway, so she called herself Cassandra. Read it in a book. It means, 'inspirer of love,' or some such poetry, but I don't deny that it goes with her better than Lily would."

"Sh−she's a good deal of a gal, Alvy fine−appearin' gal, Alvy."

"Upon my word, Jethro I didn't know you ever looked at a woman. But I suppose you couldn't help lookin' at my gal she does seem to draw men's eyes as if she was magnetized some way." Mr. Hopkins did not speak as though this quality of his daughter gave him unmixed delight. "But she's a good−hearted gal, Cassy is, high−spirited, and I won't deny she's handsome and smart. She'll kind of grace my position when I'm governor. But to tell you the truth, Jethro, one old friend to another, durned if I don't wish she was married. It's a terrible thing for a father to say, I know, but I'd feel easier about her if she was married to some good man who could hold her. There was young Joe Turner in Gosport, he'd give his soul to have her, and he'd do. Cassy says she's after bigger game than Joe. She's young that's her only excuse. Funny thing happened night before last," continued Mr. Hopkins, laughing. "Lovejoy saw her, and he's b'en out of his head ever since. Al must be pretty near my age, ain't he? Well, there's no fool like an old fool."

"A−Alvy introduce me to Cassandry sometime will you?"

"Why, certainly," answered Mr. Hopkins, heartily, "I'll bring her in here. And now how about gettin' an adjournment to−morrow night for 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'? These night sessions kind of interfere."

Half an hour later, when the representatives were pouring into the rotunda for dinner, a crowd was pressing thickly around the desk to read a placard pinned on the wall above it. The placard announced the coming of Mr. Glover's Company for the following night, and that the Honorable Alva Hopkins of Gosport, ex−Speaker of the House, had bought three hundred and twelve seats for the benefit of the members. And the Honorable Alva himself, very red in the face and almost smothered, could be dimly discerned at the foot of the stairs trying to fight his way out of a group of over−enthusiastic friends and admirers. Alva so it was said on all sides was doing the right thing.

So it was that one sensation followed another at the capital, and the politicians for the moment stopped buzzing over the Truro Franchise Bill to discuss Mr. Hopkins and his master−stroke. The afternoon Chronicle waxed enthusiastic on the subject of Mr. Hopkins's generosity, and predicted that, when Senator Hartington made the motion in the upper house and Mr. Jameson in the lower, the General Court would unanimously agree that there

would be no evening session on the following day. The Honorable Alva was the hero of the hour.

That afternoon Cynthia and her father walked through the green park to make their first visit to the State House. They stood hand in hand on the cool, marble−paved floor of the corridor, gazing silently at the stained and battered battle−flags behind the glass, and Wetherell seemed to be listening again to the appeal of a great President to a great Country in the time of her dire need the soul calling on the body to fight for itself. Wetherell seemed to feel again the thrill he felt when he saw the blue−clad men of this state crowded in the train at Boston: and to hear again the cheers, and the sobs, and the prayers as he looked upon the blood that stained stars and stripes alike with a holy stain. With that blood the country had been consecrated, and the state yes, and the building where they stood. So they went on up the stairs, reverently, nor heeded the noise of those in groups about them, and through a door into the great hall of the representatives of the state.

Life is a mixture of emotions, a jumble of joy and sorrow and reverence and mirth and flippancy, of right feeling and heresy. In the morning William Wetherell had laughed at Mr. Hopkins and the twenty thousand dollars he had put in the bank to defraud the people; but now he could have wept over it, and as he looked down upon the three hundred members of that House, he wondered how many of them represented their neighbors who supposedly had sent them here and how many Mr. Lovejoy's railroad, Mr. Worthington's railroad, or another man's railroad.

But gradually he forgot the battle−flags, and his mood changed. Perhaps the sight of Mr. Speaker Sutton towering above the House, the very essence and bulk of authority, brought this about. He aroused in Wetherell unwilling admiration and envy when he arose to put a question in his deep voice, or rapped sternly with his gavel to silence the tumult of voices that arose from time to time, or while some member was speaking, or the clerk was reading a bill at breathless speed, he turned with wonderful nonchalance to listen to the conversation of the gentlemen on the bench beside him, smiled, nodded, pulled his whiskers, at once conscious and unconscious of his high position. And, most remarkable of all to the storekeeper, not a man of the three hundred, however obscure, could rise that the Speaker did not instantly call him by name.

William Wetherell was occupied by such reflections as these when suddenly there fell a hush through the House. The clerk had stopped reading, the Speaker had stopped conversing, and, seizing his gavel, looked expectantly over the heads of the members and nodded. A sleek, comfortably dressed man arose smilingly in the middle of the House, and subdued laughter rippled from seat to seat as he addressed the chair.

"Mr. Jameson of Wantage."

Mr. Jameson cleared his throat impressively and looked smilingly about him.

"Mr. Speaker and gentlemen of the House," he said, "if I desired to arouse the enthusiasm the just enthusiasm of any gathering in this House, or in this city, or in this state, I should mention the name of the Honorable Alva Hopkins of Gosport. I think I am right."

Mr. Jameson was interrupted, as he no doubt expected, by applause from floor and gallery. He stood rubbing his hands together, and it seemed to William Wetherell that the Speaker did not rap as sharply with his gavel as he had upon other occasions.

"Gentlemen of the House," continued Mr. Jameson, presently, "the Honorable Alva Hopkins, whom we all know and love, has with unparalleled generosity unparalleled, I say bought up three hundred and twelve seats in Foster's Opera House for to−morrow night" (renewed applause), "in order that every member of this august body may have the opportunity to witness that most classic of histrionic productions, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.'" (Loud applause, causing the Speaker to rap sharply.) "That we may show a proper appreciation of this compliment, I move you, Mr. Speaker, that the House adjourn not later than six o'clock to−morrow, Wednesday evening, not to meet again until Thursday morning."

Mr. Jameson of Wantage handed the resolution to a page and sat down amid renewed applause. Mr. Wetherell noticed that many members turned in their seats as they clapped, and glancing along the gallery he caught a flash of red and perceived the radiant Miss Cassandra herself leaning over the rail, her hands clasped in ecstasy. Mr. Lovejoy was not with her he evidently preferred to pay his attentions in private.

"There she is again," whispered Cynthia, who had taken an instinctive and extraordinary dislike to Miss Cassandra. Then Mr. Sutton rose majestically to put the question.

"Gentlemen, are you ready for the question?" he cried. "All those in favor of the resolution of the gentleman from Wantage, Mr. Jameson −" the Speaker stopped abruptly. The legislators in the front seats swung around, and people in the gallery craned forward to see a member standing at his seat in the extreme rear of the hall. He was a little man in an ill−fitting coat, his wizened face clean−shaven save for the broom−shaped beard under his chin, which he now held in his hand. His thin, nasal voice was somehow absurdly penetrating as he addressed the chair. Mr. Sutton was apparently, for once, taken by surprise, and stared a moment, as though racking his brain for the name.

"The gentleman from Suffolk, Mr. Heath," he said, and smiling a little, sat down.

The gentleman from Suffolk, still holding on to his beard, pitched in without preamble.

"We farmers on the back seats don't often git a chance to be heard, Mr. Speaker," said he, amidst a general tittering from the front seats. "We come down here without any l'arnin' of parli'ment'ry law, and before we know what's happened the session's over, and we hain't said nothin'." (More laughter.) "There's b'en a good many times when I wanted to say somethin', and this time I made up my mind I was a−goin' to law or no law." (Applause, and a general show of interest in the gentleman from Suffolk.) "Naow, Mr. Speaker, I hain't ag'in' 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' It's a good play, and it's done an almighty lot of good. And I hain't sayin' nothin' ag'in' Alvy Hopkins nor his munificence. But I do know there's a sight of little bills on that desk that won't be passed if we don't set to−morrow night little bills that are big bills for us farmers. That thar woodchuck bill, for one." (Laughter.) "My constituents want I should have that bill passed. We don't need a quorum for them bills, but we need time. Naow, Mr. Speaker, I say let all them that wants to go and see 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' go and see it, but let a few of us fellers that has woodchuck bills and other things that we've got to git through come down here and pass 'em. You kin put 'em on the docket, and I guess if anything comes along that hain't jest right for everybody, somebody can challenge a quorum and bust up the session. That's all."

The gentleman from Suffolk sat down amidst thunderous applause, and before it died away Mr. Jameson was on his feet, smiling and rubbing his hands together, and was recognized.

"Mr. Speaker," he said, as soon as he could be heard, "if the gentleman from Suffolk desires to pass woodchuck bills" (renewed laughter), "he can do so as far as I'm concerned. I guess I know where most of the members of this House will be to−morrow night −" (Cries of 'You're right,' and sharp rapping of the gavel.) "Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my resolution."

"The gentleman from Wantage," said the Speaker, smiling broadly now, "withdraws his resolution."

As William Wetherell was returning to the Pelican House, pondering over this incident, he almost ran into a distinguished−looking man walking briskly across Main Street.

"It was Mr. Worthington!" said Cynthia, looking after him.

But Mr. Worthington had a worried look on his face, and was probably too much engrossed in his own thoughts to notice his acquaintances. He had, in fact, just come from the Throne Room, where he had been to remind Jethro

that the session was almost over, and to ask him what he meant to do about the Truro Bill. Jethro had given him no satisfaction.

"Duncan and Lovejoy have their people paid to sit there night and day," Mr. Worthington had said. "We've got a bare majority on a full House; but you don't seem to dare to risk it. What are you going to do about it, Mr. Bass?"

"W−want the bill to pass don't you?"

"Certainly," Mr. Worthington had cried, on the edge of losing his temper.

"L−left it to me didn't you?"

"Yes, but I'm entitled to know what's being done. I'm paying for it."

"H−hain't paid for it yet hev you?"

"No, I most assuredly haven't."

"B−better wait till you do."

There was very little satisfaction in this, and Mr. Worthington had at length been compelled to depart, fuming, to the house of his friend the enemy, Mr. Duncan, there to attempt for the twentieth time to persuade Mr. Duncan to call off his dogs who were sitting with such praiseworthy pertinacity in their seats. As the two friends walked on the lawn, Mr. Worthington tried to explain, likewise for the twentieth time, that the extension of the Truro Railroad could in no way lessen the Canadian traffic of the Central, Mr. Duncan's road. But Mr. Duncan could not see it that way, and stuck to his present ally, Mr. Lovejoy, and refused point blank to call off his dogs. Business was business.

It is an apparently inexplicable fact, however, that Mr. Worthington and his son Bob were guests at the Duncan mansion at the capital. Two countries may not be allies, but their sovereigns may be friends. In the present instance, Mr. Duncan's and Mr. Worthington's railroads were opposed, diplomatically, but another year might see the Truro Railroad and the Central acting as one. And Mr. Worthington had no intention whatever of sacrificing Mr. Duncan's friendship. The first citizen of Brampton possessed one quality so essential to greatness that of looking into the future, and he believed that the time would come when an event of some importance might create a perpetual alliance between himself and Mr. Duncan. In short, Mr. Duncan had a daughter, Janet, and Mr. Worthington, as we know, had a son. And Mr. Duncan, in addition to his own fortune, had married one of the richest heiresses in New England. Prudens futuri, that was Mr. Worthington's motto.

The next morning Cynthia, who was walking about the town alone, found herself gazing over a picket fence at a great square house with a very wide cornice that stood by itself in the centre of a shade−flecked lawn. There were masses of shrubbery here and there, and a greenhouse, and a latticed summer−house: and Cynthia was wondering what it would be like to live in a great place like that, when a barouche with two shining horses in silver harness drove past her and stopped before the gate. Four or five girls and boys came laughing out on the porch, and one of them, who held a fishing−rod in his hand, Cynthia recognized. Startled and ashamed, she began to walk on as fast as she could in the opposite direction, when she heard the sound of footsteps on the lawn behind her, and her own name called in a familiar voice. At that she hurried the faster; but she could not run, and the picket fence was half a block long, and Bob Worthington had an advantage over her. Of course it was Bob, and he did not scruple to run, and in a few seconds he was leaning over the fence in front of her. Now Cynthia was as red as a peony by this time, and she almost hated him.

"Well, of all people, Cynthia Wetherell!" he cried; "didn't you hear me calling after you?"

"Yes," said Cynthia.

"Why didn't you stop?"

"I didn't want to," said Cynthia, glancing at the distant group on the porch, who were watching them. Suddenly she turned to him defiantly. "I didn't know you were in that house, or in the capital," she said. "And I didn't know you were," said Bob, upon whose masculine intelligence the meaning of her words was entirely lost. "If I had known it, you can bet I would have looked you up. Where are you staying?"

"At the Pelican House."

"What!" said Bob, "with all the politicians? How did you happen to go there?"

"Mr. Bass asked my father and me to come down for a few days," answered Cynthia, her color heightening again. Life is full of contrasts, and Cynthia was becoming aware of some of them.

"Uncle Jethro?" said Bob.

"Yes, Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia, smiling in spite of herself. He always made her smile.

"Uncle Jethro owns the Pelican House," said Bob.

"Does he? I knew he was a great man, but I didn't know how great he was until I came down here."

Cynthia said this so innocently that Bob repented his flippancy on the spot. He had heard occasional remarks of his elders about Jethro.

"I didn't mean quite that," he said, growing red in his turn. "Uncle Jethro Mr. Bass is a great man of course. That's what I meant."

"And he's a very good man," said Cynthia, who understood now that he had spoken a little lightly of Jethro, and resented it.

"I'm sure of it," said Bob, eagerly. Then Cynthia began to walk on, slowly, and he followed her on the other side of the fence. "Hold on," he cried, "I haven't said half the things I want to say yet."

"What do you want to say?" asked Cynthia, still walking. "I have to go."

"Oh, no, you don't! Wait just a minute won't you?"

Cynthia halted, with apparent unwillingness, and put out her toe between the pickets. Then she saw that there was a little patch on that toe, and drew it in again.

"What do you want to say?" she repeated. "I don't believe you have anything to say at all." And suddenly she flashed a look at him that made his heart thump. "I do I swear I do," he protested. "I'm coming down to the Pelican to−morrow morning to get you to go for a walk."

Cynthia could not but think that the remoteness of the time he set was scarce in keeping with his ardent tone.

"I have something else to do to−morrow morning," she answered.

"Then I'll come tomorrow afternoon," said Bob, instantly.

"Who lives here?" she asked irrelevantly.

"Mr. Duncan. I'm visiting the Duncans."

At this moment a carryall joined the carriage at the gate. Cynthia glanced at the porch again. The group there had grown larger, and they were still staring. She began to feel uncomfortable again, and moved on slowly.

"Mayn't I come?" asked Bob, going after her, and scraping the butt of the rod along the palings.

"Aren't there enough girls here to satisfy you?" asked Cynthia.

"They're enough yes," he said, "but none of 'em could hold a candle to you."

Cynthia laughed outright.

"I believe you tell them all something like that," she said.

"I don't do any such thing," he retorted, and then he laughed himself, and Cynthia laughed again.

"I like you because you don't swallow everything whole," said Bob, "and well, for a good many other reasons." And he looked into her face with such frank admiration that Cynthia blushed and turned away.

"I don't believe a word you say," she answered, and started to walk off, this time in earnest.

"Hold on," cried Bob. They were almost at the end of the fence by this, and the pickets were sharp and rather high, or he would have climbed them.

Cynthia paused hesitatingly.

"I'll come at two o'clock to−morrow," he said; "we're going on a picnic to−day, to Dalton's Bend, on the river. I wish I could get out of it."

Just then there came a voice from the gateway.

"Bob! Bob Worthington!"

They both turned involuntarily. A slender girl with light brown hair was standing there, waving at him.

"Who's that?" asked Cynthia.

"That?" said Bob, in some confusion, "oh, that's Janet Duncan."

"Good−by," said Cynthia.

"I'm coming to−morrow," he called after her, but she did not turn. In a little while she heard the carryall behind her clattering down the street, its passengers laughing and joking merrily. Her face burned, for she thought that they were laughing at her; she wished with all her heart that she had not stopped to talk with him at the palings. The girls, indeed, were giggling as the carryall passed, and she heard somebody call out his name, but nevertheless he leaned out of the seat and waved his hat at her, amid a shout of laughter. Poor Cynthia! She did

not look at him. Tears of vexation were in her eyes, and the light of her joy at this visit to the capital flickered, and she wished she were back in Coniston. She thought it would be very nice to be rich, and to live in a great house in a city, and to go on picnics.

The light flickered, but it did not wholly go out. If it has not been shown that Cynthia was endowed with a fair amount of sense, many of these pages have been written in vain. She sat down for a while in the park and thought of the many things she had to be thankful for not the least of which was Jethro's kindness. And she remembered that she was to see "Uncle Tom's Cabin" that evening.

Such are the joys and sorrows of fifteen!

CHAPTER XV. THE WOODCHUCK SESSION

MR. AMOS CUTHBERT named it so our old friend Amos who lives high up in the ether of Town's End ridge, and who now represents Coniston in the Legislature. He is the same silent, sallow person as when Jethro first took a mortgage on his farm, only his skin is beginning to resemble dried parchment, and he is a trifle more cantankerous. On the morning of that memorable day when "Uncle Tom's Cabin" came to the capital, Amos had entered the Throne Room and given vent to his feelings in regard to the gentleman in the back seat who had demanded an evening sitting on behalf of the farmers.

"Don't that beat all!" cried Amos. "Let them have their darned woodchuck session; there won't nobody go to it. For cussed, crisscross contrariness, give me a moss−back Democrat from a one−hoss, one−man town like Suffolk. I'm a−goin' to see the show."

"G−goin' to the show, be you, Amos?" said Jethro.

"Yes, I be," answered Amos, bitterly. "I hain't a−goin' nigh the house to−night." And with this declaration he departed.

"I wonder if he really is going?" queried Mr. Merrill, looking at the ceiling. And then he laughed.

"Why shouldn't he go?" asked William Wetherell.

Mr. Merrill's answer to this question was a wink, whereupon he, too, departed. And while Wetherell was pondering over the possible meaning of these words the Honorable Alva Hopkins entered, wreathed in smiles, and closed the door behind him. "It's all fixed," he said, taking a seat near the window.

"S−seen your gal Alvy seen your gal?"

Mr. Hopkins gave a glance at Wetherell.

"Will don't talk," said Jethro, and resumed his inspection through the lace curtains of what was going on in the street.

"Cassandry's got him to go," said Mr. Hopkins. "It's all fixed, as sure as Sunday. If it misses fire, then I'll never mention the governorship again. But if it don't miss fire," and the Honorable Alva leaned over and put his hand on Jethro's knee, "if it don't miss fire, I get the nomination. Is that right?"

"Y−you've guessed it, Alvy."

"That's all I want to know," declared the Honorable Alva; "when you say that much, you never go back on it. And you can go ahead and give the orders, Jethro. I have to see that the boys get the tickets. Cassandry's got a head on her shoulders, and she kind of wants to be governor, too." He got as far as the door, when he turned and bestowed upon Jethro a glance of undoubted tribute. "You've done a good many smart things," said he, "but I guess you never beat this, and never will."

"H−hain't done it yet, Alvy," answered Jethro, still looking out through the window curtains at the ever changing groups of gentlemen in the street. These groups had a never ceasing interest for Jethro Bass.

Mr. Wetherell didn't talk, but had he been the most incurable of gossips he felt that he could have done no damage to this mysterious affair, whatever it was. In a certain event, Mr. Hopkins was promised the governorship: so much was plain. And it was also evident that Miss Cassandra Hopkins was in some way to be instrumental. William Wetherell did not like to ask Jethro, but he thought a little of sounding out Mr. Merrill, and then he came to the conclusion that it would be wiser for him not to know.

"Er Will," said Jethro, presently, "you know Heth Sutton Speaker Heth Sutton? "Yes."

Er wouldn't mind askin' him to step in and see me before the session if he was comin' by would you?"

"Certainly not."

"Er if he was comin' by," said Jethro.

Mr. Wetherell found Mr. Speaker Sutton glued to a pillar in the rotunda below. He had some difficulty in breaking through the throng that pressed around him, and still more in attracting his attention, as Mr. Sutton took no manner of notice of the customary form of placing one's hand under his elbow and pressing gently up. Summoning up his courage, Mr. Wetherell tried the second method of seizing him by the buttonhole. He paused in his harangue, one hand uplifted, and turned and glanced at the storekeeper abstractedly.

"Mr. Bass asked me to tell you to drop into Number 7," said Wetherell, and added, remembering express instructions, "if you were going by."

Wetherell had not anticipated the magical effect this casual message would have on Mr. Sutton, nor had he thought that so large and dignified a body would move so rapidly. Before the astonished gentleman who had penned him in could draw a breath, Mr. Sutton had reached the stairway and was mounting it with an agility that did him credit. Five minutes later Wetherell saw the Speaker descending again, the usually impressive quality of his face slightly modified by the twitching of a smile.

Thus the day passed, and the gentlemen of the Lovejoy and Duncan factions sat as tight as ever in their seats, and the Truro Franchise bill still slumbered undisturbed in Mr. Chauncey Weed's committee.

At supper there was a decided festal air about the dining room of the Pelican House, the little band of agricultural gentlemen who wished to have a session not being patrons of that exclusive hotel. Many of the Solons had sent home for their wives, that they might do the utmost justice to the Honorable Alva's hospitality. Even Jethro, as he ate his crackers and milk, had a new coat with bright brass buttons, and Cynthia, who wore a fresh gingham which Miss Sukey Kittredge of Coniston had helped to design, so far relented in deference to Jethro's taste as to tie a red bow at her throat.

The middle table under the chandelier was the immediate firmament of Miss Cassandra Hopkins. And there, beside the future governor, sat the president of the "Northwestern" Railroad, Mr. Lovejoy, as the chief of the revolving satellites. People began to say that Mr. Lovejoy was hooked at last, now that he had lost his head in

such an unaccountable fashion as to pay his court in public; and it was very generally known that he was to make one of the Honorable Alva's immediate party at the performance of "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Mr. Speaker Sutton, of course, would have to forego the pleasure of the theatre as a penalty of his high position. Mr. Merrill, who sat at Jethro's table next to Cynthia that evening, did a great deal of joking with the Honorable Heth about having to preside over a woodchuck session, which the Speaker, so Mr. Wetherell thought, took in astonishingly good part, and seemed very willing to make the great sacrifice which his duty required of him.

After supper Mr. Wetherell took a seat in the rotunda. As an observer of human nature, he had begun to find a fascination in watching the group of politicians there. First of all he encountered Mr. Amos Cuthbert, his little coal−black eyes burning brightly, and he was looking very irritable indeed.

"So you're going to the show, Amos?" remarked the storekeeper, with an attempt at cordiality.

To his bewilderment, Amos turned upon him fiercely.

"Who said I was going to the show?" he snapped.

"You yourself told me."

"You'd ought to know whether I'm a−goin' or not," said Amos, and walked away.

While Mr.Wetherell sat meditating upon this inexplicable retort, a retired, scholarly looking gentleman with a white beard, who wore spectacles, came out of the door leading from the barber shop and quietly took a seat beside him. The storekeeper's attention was next distracted by the sight of one who wandered slowly but ceaselessly from group to group, kicking up his heels behind, and halting always in the rear of the speakers. Needless to say that this was our friend Mr. Bijah Bixby, who was following out his celebrated tactics of "going along by when they were talkin' sly." Suddenly Mr. Bixby's eye alighted on Mr. Wetherell, who by a stretch of imagination conceived that it expressed both astonishment and approval, although he was wholly at a loss to understand these sentiments. Mr. Bixby winked Mr. Wetherell was sure of that. But to his surprise, Bijah did not pause in his rounds to greet him.

Mr. Wetherell was beginning to be decidedly uneasy, and was about to go upstairs, when Mr. Merrill came down the rotunda whistling, with his hands in his pockets. He stopped whistling when he spied the storekeeper, and approached him in his usual hearty manner.

"Well, well, this is fortunate," said Mr. Merrill; "how are you, Duncan? I want you to know Mr. Wetherell. Wetherell writes that weekly letter for the Guardian you were speaking to me about last year. Will, this is Mr. Alexander Duncan, president of the 'Central.'"

"How do you do, Mr. Wetherell," said the scholarly gentleman with the spectacles, putting out his hand. "I'm glad to meet you, very glad, indeed. I read your letters with the greatest pleasure."

Mr. Wetherell, as he took Mr. Duncan's hand, had a variety of emotions which may be imagined, and need not be set down in particular.

"Funny thing," Mr. Merrill continued, "I was looking for you, Duncan. It occurred to me that you would like to meet Mr. Wetherell. I was afraid you were in Boston."

"I have just got back," said Mr. Duncan.

"I wanted Wetherell to see your library. I was telling him about it."

"I should be delighted to show it to him," answered Mr. Duncan. That library, as is well known, was a special weakness of Mr. Duncan's. Poor William Wetherell, who was quite overwhelmed by the fact that the great Mr. Duncan had actually read his letters and liked them, could scarcely utter a sensible word. Almost before he realized what had happened he was following Mr. Duncan out of the Pelican House, when the storekeeper was mystified once more by a nudge and another wink from Mr. Bixby, conveying unbounded admiration.

"Why don't you write a book, Mr. Wetherell?" inquired the railroad president, when they were crossing the park.

"I don't think I could do it," said Mr. Wetherell, modestly. Such incense was overpowering, and he immediately forgot Mr. Bixby.

"Yes, you can," said Mr. Duncan, "only you don't know it. Take your letters for a beginning. You can draw people well enough, when you try. There was your description of the lonely hill−farm on the spur I shall always remember that: the gaunt farmer, toiling every minute between sun and sun; the thin, patient woman bending to a task that never changed or lightened; the children growing up and leaving one by one, some to the cities, some to the West, until the old people are left alone in the evening of life to the sunsets and the storms. Of course you must write a book."

Mr. Duncan quoted other letters, and William Wetherell thrilled. Poor man! he had had little enough incense in his time, and none at all from the great. They came to the big square house with the cornice which Cynthia had seen the day before, and walked across the lawn and through the open door. William Wetherell had a glimpse of a great drawing−room with high windows, out of which was wafted the sound of a piano and of youthful voices and laughter, and then he was in the library. The thought of one man owning all those books overpowered him. There they were, in stately rows, from the floor to the high ceiling, and a portable ladder with which to reach them.

Mr. Duncan, understanding perhaps something of the storekeeper's embarrassment, proceeded to take down his treasures: first editions from the shelves, and folios and missals from drawers in a great iron safe in one corner and he laid them on the mahogany desk. It was the railroad president's hobby, and could he find an appreciative guest, he was happy. It need scarcely be said that he found William Wetherell appreciative, and possessed of a knowledge of Shakesperiana and other matters that astonished his host as well as pleased him. For Wetherell had found his tongue at last.

After a while Mr. Duncan drew out his watch and gave a start.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "it's after eight o'clock. I'll have to ask you to excuse me to−night, Mr. Wetherell. I'd like to show you the rest of them can't you come around to−morrow afternoon?"

Mr. Wetherell, who had forgotten his own engagement and "Uncle Tom's Cabin," said he would be happy to come. And they went out together and began to walk toward the State House.

"It isn't often I find a man who knows anything at all about these things," continued Mr. Duncan, whose heart was quite won. "Why do you bury yourself in Coniston?"

"I went there from Boston for my health," said the storekeeper.

"Jethro Bass lives there, doesn't he?" said Duncan, with a laugh. "I suppose you don't know anything about politics?"

"I know nothing at all," said Wetherell, which was quite true. He had been in dreamland, but now the fact struck him again, with something of a shock, that this mild−mannered gentleman was one of those who had been paying certain legislators to remain in their seats. Wetherell thought of speaking to Mr. Duncan of his friendship with Jethro Bass, but the occasion passed.

"I wish to heaven I didn't have to know anything about politics," Mr. Duncan was saying; "they disgust me. There's a little matter on now, about an extension of the Truro Railroad to Harwich, which wouldn't interest you, but you can't conceive what a nuisance it has been to watch that House day and night, as I've had to. It's no joke to have that townsman of yours, Jethro Bass, opposed to you. I won't say anything against him, for he may be a friend of yours, and I have to use him sometimes myself." Mr. Duncan sighed. "It's all very sordid and annoying. Now this evening, for instance, when we might have enjoyed ourselves with those books, I've got to go to the House, just because some backwoods farmers want to talk about woodchucks. I suppose it's foolish," said Mr. Duncan; "but Bass has tricked us so often that I've got into the habit of being watchful. I should have been here twenty minutes ago."

By this time they had come to the entrance of the State House, and Wetherell followed Duncan in, to have a look at the woodchuck session himself. Several members hurried by and up the stairs, some of them in their Sunday black; and the lobby above seemed, even to the storekeeper's unpractised eye, a trifle active for a woodchuck session. Mr. Duncan muttered something, and quickened his gait a little on the steps that led to the gallery. This place was almost empty. They went down to the rail, and the railroad president cast his eye over the House.

"Good God!" he said sharply, "there's almost a quorum here." He ran his eye over the members. "There is a quorum here."

Mr. Duncan stood drumming nervously with his fingers on the rail, scanning the heads below. The members were scattered far and wide through the seats, like an army in open order, listening in silence to the droning voice of the clerk. Moths burned in the gas flames, and June−bugs hummed in at the high windows and tilted against the walls. Then Mr. Duncan's finger nails whitened as his thin hands clutched the rail, and a sense of a pending event was upon Wetherell. Slowly he realized that he was listening to the Speaker's deep voice.

"'The Committee on Corporations, to whom was referred House Bill Number 109, entitled, An Act to extend the Truro Railroad to Harwich, having considered the same, report the same with the following resolution: Resolved, that the bill ought to pass. Chauncey Weed, for the Committee.'"

The Truro Franchise! The lights danced, and even a sudden weakness came upon the storekeeper. Jethro's trick! The Duncan and Lovejoy representatives in the theatre, the adherents of the bill here! Wetherell saw Mr. Duncan beside him, a tense figure leaning on the rail, calling to some one below. A man darted up the centre, another up the side aisle. Then Mr. Duncan flashed at William Wetherell from his blue eyes such a look of anger as the storekeeper never forgot, and he, too, was gone. Tingling and perspiring, Wetherell leaned out over the railing as the Speaker rapped calmly for order. Hysteric laughter, mingled with hoarse cries, ran over the House, but the Honorable Heth Sutton did not even smile.

A dozen members were on their feet shouting to the chair. One was recognized, and that man Wetherell perceived with amazement to be Mr. Jameson of Wantage, adherent of Jethro's he who had moved to adjourn for "Uncle Tom's Cabin"! A score of members crowded into the aisles, but the Speaker's voice again rose above the tumult.

"The doorkeepers will close the doors! Mr. Jameson of Wantage moves that the report of the Committee be accepted, and on this motion a roll−call is ordered."

The doorkeepers, who must have been inspired, had already slammed the doors in the faces of those seeking wildly to escape. The clerk already had the little, short−legged desk before him and was calling the roll with

incredible rapidity. Bewildered and excited as Wetherell was, and knowing as little of parliamentary law as the gentleman who had proposed the woodchuck session, he began to form some sort of a notion of Jethro's generalship, and he saw that the innocent rural members who belonged to Duncan's and Lovejoy's faction had tried to get away before the roll−call, destroy the quorum, and so adjourn the House. These, needless to say, were not parliamentarians, either. They had lacked a leader, they were stunned by the suddenness of the onslaught, and had not moved quickly enough. Like trapped animals, they wandered blindly about for a few moments, and then sank down anywhere. Each answered the roll−call sullenly, out of necessity, for every one of them was a marked man. Then Wetherell remembered the two members who had escaped, and Mr. Duncan, and fell to calculating how long it would take these to reach Foster's Opera House, break into the middle of an act, and get out enough partisans to come back and kill the bill. Mr. Wetherell began to wish he could witness the scene there, too, but something held him here, shaking with excitement, listening to each name that the clerk called.

Would the people at the theatre get back in time?

Despite William Wetherell's principles, whatever these may have been, he was so carried away that he found himself with his watch in his hand, counting off the minutes as the roll−call went on. Foster's Opera House was some six squares distant, and by a liberal estimate Mr. Duncan and his advance guard ought to get back within twenty minutes of the time he left. Wetherell was not aware that people were coming into the gallery behind him; he was not aware that one sat at his elbow until a familiar voice spoke directly into his ear.

"Er Will held Duncan pretty tight didn't you? He's a hard one to fool, too. Never suspected a mite, did he? Look out for your watch!"

Mr. Bixby seized it or it would have fallen. If his life had depended on it, William Wetherell could not have spoken a word to Mr. Bixby then.

"You done well, Will, sure enough," that gentleman continued to whisper. "And Alvy's gal done well, too you understand. I guess she's the only one that ever snarled up Al Lovejoy so that he didn't know where he was at. But it took a fine, delicate touch for her job and yours, Will. Godfrey, this is the quickest roll−call I ever seed! They've got halfway through Truro County. That fellow can talk faster than a side−show ticket−seller at a circus." The clerk was, indeed, performing prodigies of pronunciation. When he reached Wells County, the last, Mr. Bixby so far lost his habitual sang froid as to hammer on the rail with his fist.

"If there hain't a quorum, we're done for," he said. "How much time has gone away? Twenty minutes! Godfrey, some of 'em may break loose and git here in five minutes!"

"Break loose?" Wetherell exclaimed involuntarily.

Mr. Bixby screwed up his face.

"You understand. Accidents is liable to happen."

Mr. Wetherell didn't understand in the least, but just then the clerk reached the last name on the roll; an instant of absolute silence, save for the June−bugs, followed, while the assistant clerk ran over the figures deftly and handed them to Mr. Sutton, who leaned forward to receive them.

"One hundred and twelve gentlemen have voted in the affirmative and forty−eight in the negative, and the report of the Committee is accepted."

"Ten more'n a quorum!" ejaculated Mr. Bixby, in a voice of thanksgiving, as the turmoil below began again. It seemed as though every man in the opposition was on his feet and yelling at the chair: some to adjourn; some to

indefinitely postpone; some demanding roll−calls; others swearing at these for a division vote would have opened the doors. Others tried to get out, and then ran back down the aisles and called fiercely on the Speaker to open the doors, and threatened him. But the Honorable Heth Sutton did not lose his head, and it may be doubted whether he ever appeared to better advantage than at that moment. He had a voice like one of the Clovelly bulls that fed in his own pastures in the valley, and by sheer bellowing he got silence, or something approaching it, the protests dying down to a hum; had recognized another friend of the bill, and was putting another question.

"Mr. Gibbs of Wareham moves that the rules of the House be so far suspended that this bill be read a second and third time by its title, and be put upon its final passage at this time. And on this motion," thundered Mr. Sutton, above the tide of rising voices, "the yeas and nays are called for. The doorkeepers will keep the doors shut."

"Abbey of Ashburton."

The nimble clerk had begun on the roll almost before the Speaker was through, and checked off the name. Bijah Bixby mopped his brow with a blue pocket−handkerchief.

"My God," he said, "what a risk Jethro's took! they can't git through another roll−call. Jest look at Heth! Ain't he carryin' it magnificent? Hain't as ruffled as I be. I've knowed him ever sence he wahn't no higher'n that desk. Never would have b'en in politics if it hadn't b'en for me. Funny thing, Will you and I was so excited we never thought to look at the clock. Put up your watch. Godfrey, what's this?"

The noise of many feet was heard behind them. Men and women were crowding breathlessly into the gallery.

"Didn't take it long to git noised araound," said Mr. Bixby. "Say, Will, they're bound to have got at 'em in the thea'tre. Don't see how they held 'em off, c−cussed if I do."

The seconds ticked into minutes, the air became stifling, for now the front of the gallery was packed. Now, if ever, the fate of the Truro Franchise hung in the balance, and, perhaps, the rule of Jethro Bass. And now, in the distance, came a faint, indefinable stir, not yet to be identified by Wetherell's ears as a sound, but registered somewhere in his brain as a warning note. Bijah Bixby, as sensitive as he, straightened up to listen, and then the whispering was hushed. The members below raised their heads, and some clutched the seats in front of them and looked up at the high windows. Only the Speaker sat like a wax statue of himself, and glanced neither to the right nor to the left.

"Harkness of Truro," said the clerk.

"He's almost to Wells County again," whispered Bijah, excitedly. "I didn't callate he could do it. Will?" "Yes?"

"Will you hear somethin'?"

A distant shout floated with the night breeze in at the windows; a man on the floor got to his feet and stood straining: a commotion was going on at the back of the gallery, and a voice was heard crying out: −

"For the love of God, let me through!"

Then Wetherell turned to see the crowd at the back parting a little, to see a desperate man in a gorgeous white necktie fighting his way toward the rail. He wore no hat, his collar was wilted, and his normally ashen face had turned white. And, strangest of all, clutched tightly in his hand was a pink ribbon.

"It's Al Lovejoy," said Bijah, laconically.

Unmindful of the awe−stricken stares he got from those about him when his identity became known, Mr. Lovejoy gained the rail and shoved aside a man who was actually making way for him. Leaning far out, he scanned the House with inarticulate rage while the roll−call went monotonously on. Some of the members looked up at him and laughed; others began to make frantic signs, indicative of helplessness; still others telegraphed him obvious advice about reënforcements which, if anything, increased his fury. Mr. Bixby was now fanning himself with the blue handkerchief.

"I hear 'em!" he said, "I hear 'em, Will!"

And he did. The unmistakable hum of the voices of many men and the sound of feet on stone flagging shook the silent night without. The clerk read off the last name on the roll.

"Tompkins of Ulster."

His assistant lost no time now. A mistake would have been fatal, but he was an old hand. Unmindful of the rumble on the wooden stairs below, Mr. Sutton took the list with an admirable deliberation.

"One hundred and twelve gentleman have voted in the affirmative, forty−eight in the negative, the rules of the House are suspended, and" (the clerk having twice mumbled the title of the bill) "the question is: Shall the bill pass? As many as are of opinion that the bill pass will say Aye, contrary minded No."

Feet were in the House corridor now, and voices rising there, and noises that must have been scuffling yes, and beating of door panels. Almost every member was standing, and it seemed as if they were all shouting, "personal privilege," "fraud," "trickery," "open the doors." Bijah was slowly squeezing the blood out of William Wetherell's arm.

"The doorkeepers has the keys in their pockets!" Mr. Bixby had to shout, for once.

Even then the Speaker did not flinch. By a seeming miracle he got a semblance of order, recognized his man, and his great voice rang through the hall and drowned all other sounds.

"And on this question a roll−call is ordered. The doorkeepers will close the doors!"

Then, as in reaction, the gallery trembled with a roar of laughter. But Mr. Sutton did not smile. The clerk scratched off the names with lightning rapidity, scarce waiting for the answers. Every man's color was known, and it was against the rules to be present and fail to vote. The noise in the corridors grew louder, some one dealt a smashing kick on a panel, and Wetherell ventured to ask Mr. Bixby if he thought the doors would hold.

"They can break in all they've a mind to now," he chuckled; "the Truro Franchise is safe."

"What do you mean?" Wetherell demanded excitedly.

"If a member hain't present when a question is put, he can't git into a roll−call," said Bijah.

The fact that the day was lost was evidently brought home to those below, for the strife subsided gradually, and finally ceased altogether. The whispers in the gallery died down, the spectators relaxed a little. Lovejoy alone remained tense, though he seated himself on a bench, and the hot anger in which he had come was now cooled into a vindictiveness that set the hard lines of his face even harder. He still clutched the ribbon. The last part of that famous roll−call was conducted so quietly that a stranger entering the House would have suspected nothing unusual. It was finished in absolute silence.

"One hundred and twelve gentlemen have voted in the affirmative, forty−eight in the negative, and the bill passes. The House will attend to the title of the bill."

"An act to extend the Truro Railroad to Harwich," said the clerk, glibly.

"Such will be the title of the bill unless otherwise ordered by the House," said Mr. Speaker Sutton. "The doorkeepers will open the doors."

Somebody moved to adjourn, the motion was carried, and thus ended what has gone down in history as the Woodchuck Session. Pandemonium reigned. One hundred and forty belated members fought their way in at the four entrances, and mingled with them were lobbyists of all sorts and conditions, residents and visitors to the capital, men and women to whom the drama of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was as nothing to that of the Truro Franchise Bill. It was a sight to look down upon. Fierce wrangles began in a score of places, isolated personal remarks rose above the din, but your New Englander rarely comes to blows; in other spots men with broad smiles seized others by the hands and shook them violently, while Mr. Speaker Sutton seemed in danger of suffocation by his friends. His enemies, for the moment, could get nowhere near him. On this scene Mr. Bijah Bixby gazed with pardonable pleasure.

"Guess there wahn't a mite of trouble about the river towns," he said, "I had 'em in my pocket. Will, let's amble round to the thea'tre. We ought to git in two acts."

William Wetherell went. There is no need to go into the psychology of the matter. It may have been numbness; it may have been temporary insanity caused by the excitement of the battle he had witnessed, for his brain was in a whirl; or Mr. Bixby may have hypnotized him. As they walked through the silent streets toward the Opera House, he listened perforce to Mr. Bixby's comments upon some of the innumerable details which Jethro had planned and quietly carried out while sitting in the window of the Throne Room. A great light dawned on William Wetherell, but too late.

Jethro's trusted lieutenants (of whom, needless to say, Mr. Bixby was one) had been commanded to notify such of their supporters whose fidelity and secrecy could be absolutely depended upon to attend the Woodchuck Session; and, further to guard against surprise, this order had not gone out until the last minute (hence Mr. Amos Cuthbert's conduct). The seats of these members at the theatre had been filled by accommodating townspeople and visitors. Forestalling a possible vote on the morrow to recall and reconsider, there remained some sixty members whose loyalty was unquestioned, but whose reputation for discretion was not of the best. So much for the parliamentary side of the affair, which was a revelation of generalship and organization to William Wetherell. By the time he had grasped it they were come in view of the lights of Foster's Opera House, and they perceived, among a sprinkling of idlers, a conspicuous and meditative gentleman leaning against a pillar. He was ludicrously tall and ludicrously thin, his hands were in his trousers pockets, and the skirts of his Sunday broadcloth coat hung down behind him awry. One long foot was crossed over the other and rested on the point of the toe, and his head was tilted to one side. He had, on the whole, the appearance of a rather mournful stork. Mr. Bixby approached him gravely, seized him by the lower shoulder, and tilted him down until it was possible to speak into his ear. The gentleman apparently did not resent this, although he seemed in imminent danger of being upset.

"How be you, Peleg? Er you know Will?"

"No," said the gentleman.

Mr. Bixby seized Mr. Wetherell under the elbow, and addressed himself to the storekeeper's ear.

"Will, I want you to shake hands with Senator Peleg Hartington, of Brampton. This is Will Wetherell, Peleg, from Coniston you understand."

The senator took one hand from his pocket. "How be you?" he said. Mr. Bixby was once more pulling down on his shoulder.

"H−haow was it here?" he demanded.

"Almighty funny," answered Senator Hartington, sadly, and waved at the lobby. "There wahn't standin' room in the place."

"Jethro Bass Republican Club come and packed the entrance," explained Mr. Bixby with a wink. "You understand, Will? Go on, Peleg."

"Sidewalk and street, too," continued the Mr. Hartington, slowly. "First come along Ball of Towles, hollerin' like blazes. They crumpled him all up and lost him. Next come old man Duncan himself."

"Will kep' Duncan," Mr. Bixby interjected.

"That was wholly an accident," exclaimed Mr. Wetherell, angrily.

"Will wahn't born in the country," said Mr. Bixby.

Mr. Hartington bestowed on the storekeeper a mournful look, and continued:

"Never seed Duncan sweatin' before. He didn't seem to grasp why the boys was there."

"Didn't seem to understand," put in Mr. Bixby, sympathetically.

"'For God's sake, gentlemen,' says he, 'let me in! The Truro Bill!' 'The Truro Bill hain't in the thea'tre, Mr. Duncan,' says Dan Everett. Cussed if I didn't come near laughin'. 'That's "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Mr. Duncan,' says Dan. 'You're a dam fool,' says Duncan. I didn't know he was profane. 'Make room for Mr. Duncan,' says Dan, 'he wants to see the show.' 'I'm a−goin' to see you in jail for this, Everett,' says Duncan. They let him push in about half a rod, and they swallowed him. He was makin' such a noise that they had to close the doors of the thea'tre so's not to disturb the play−actors."

"You understand," said Mr.Bixby to Wetherell. Whereupon he gave another shake to Mr. Hartington, who had relapsed into a sort of funereal meditation.

"Well," resumed that personage, "there was some more come, hollerin' about the Truro Bill. Not many. Guess they'll all have to git their wimmen−folks to press their clothes to−morrow. Then Duncan wanted to git out again, but 'twan't ex'actly convenient. Callated he was suffocatin' seemed to need air. Little mite limp when he broke loose, Duncan was."

The Honorable Peleg stopped again, as if he were overcome by the recollection of Mr. Duncan's plight.

"Er er Peleg!"

Mr. Hartington started.

"What'd they do? what'd they do?"

"Do?"

"How'd they git notice to 'em?"

"Oh," said Mr. Hartington, "cussed if that wahn't funny. Let's see, where was I? After a while they went over t'other side of the street, talkin' sly, waitin' for the act to end. But goldarned if it ever did end."

For once Mr. Bixby didn't seem to understand.

"D−didn't end?"

"No," explained Mr. Hartington; "seems they hitched a kind of nigger minstrel show right on to it banjos and thingumajigs in front of the curtain while they was changin' scenes, and they hitched the second act right on to that. Nobody come out of the thea'ter at all. Funny notion, wahn't it?"

Mr. Bixby's face took on a look of extreme cunning. He smiled broadly and poked Mr. Wetherell in an extremely sensitive portion of his ribs. On such occasions the nasal quality of Bijah's voice seemed to grow.

"You see?" he said.

"Know that little man, Gibbs, don't ye?" inquired Mr. Hartington.

"Airley Gibbs, hain't it? Runs a livery business daown to Rutgers, on Lovejoy's railroad," replied Mr. Bixby, promptly. "I know him. Knew old man Gibbs well's I do you. Mean cuss."

"This Airley's smart wahn't quite smart enough, though. His bright idea come a little mite late. Hunted up old Christy, got the key to his law office right here in the Duncan Block, went up through the skylight, clumb down to the roof of Randall's store next door, shinned up the lightnin' rod on t'other side, and stuck his head plumb into the Opery House window."

"I want to know!" ejaculated Mr. Bixby.

"Somethin' terrible pathetic was goin' on on the stage," resumed Mr. Hartington, "the folks didn't see him at first, they was all cryin' and everythin' was still, but Airley wahn't affected. As quick as he got his breath he hollered right out loud's he could: 'The Truro Bill's up in the House, boys. We're skun if you don't git thar quick.' Then they tell me the lightnin' rod give way; anyhow, he came down on Randall's gravel roof considerable hard, I take it."

Mr. Hartington, apparently, had an aggravating way of falling into mournful revery and of forgetting his subject. Mr. Bixby was forced to jog him again.

"Yes, they did," he said, "they did. They come out like the thea'ter was afire. There was some delay in gettin' to the street, but not much not much. All the Republican Clubs in the state couldn't have held 'em then, and the profanity they used wahn't especially edifyin'."

"Peleg's a deacon you understand," said Mr. Bixby. "Say, Peleg, where was Al Lovejoy?"

"Lovejoy come along with the first of 'em. Must have hurried some they tell me he was settin' way down in front alongside of Alvy Hopkins's gal, and when Airley hollered out she screeched and clutched on to Al, and Al said somethin' he hadn't ought to and tore off one of them pink gew−gaws she was covered with. He was the maddest man I ever see. Some of the club was crowded inside, behind the seats, standin' up to see the show. Al was so anxious to git through he hit Si Dudley in the mouth injured him some, I guess. Pity, wahn't it?"

"Si hain't in politics, you understand," said Mr. Bixby. "Callate Si paid to git in there, didn't he, Peleg?"

"Callate he did," assented Senator Hartington.

A long and painful pause followed. There seemed, indeed, nothing more to be said. The sound of applause floated out of the Opera House doors, around which the remaining loiterers were clustered. "Goin' in, be you, Peleg?" inquired Mr. Bixby.

Mr. Hartington shook his head.

"Will and me had a notion to see somethin' of the show," said Mr. Bixby, almost apologetically. "I kep' my ticket."

"Well," said Mr. Hartington, reflectively, "I guess you'll find some of the show left. That hain't b'en hurt much, so far as I can ascertain."

The next afternoon, when Mr. Isaac D. Worthington happened to be sitting alone in the office of the Truro Railroad at the capital, there came a knock at the door, and Mr. Bijah Bixby entered. Now, incredible as it may seem, Mr. Worthington did not know Mr. Bixby or rather, did not remember him. Mr. Worthington had not had at that time much of an experience in politics, and he did not possess a very good memory for faces.

Mr. Bixby, who had, as we know, a confidential and winning manner, seated himself in a chair very close to Mr. Worthington somewhat to that gentleman's alarm.

"How be you?" said Bijah, "I−I've got a little bill here you understand."

Mr. Worthington didn't understand, and he drew his chair away from Mr. Bixby's.

"I don't know anything about it, sir," answered the president of the Truro Railroad, indignantly; "this is neither the manner nor the place to present a bill. I don't want to see it."

Mr. Bixby moved his chair up again. "Callate you will want to see this bill, Mr. Worthington," he insisted, not at all abashed. "Jethro Bass sent it you understand it's engrossed."

Whereupon Mr. Bixby drew from his capacious pocket a roll, tied with white ribbon, and pressed it into Mr. Worthington's hands. It was the Truro Franchise Bill.

It is safe to say that Mr. Worthington understood.

CHAPTER XVI. "CYNTHIA LOVED YOU"

THERE are certain instruments used by scientists so delicate that they have to be wrapped in cotton wool and kept in dustless places, and so sensitive that the slightest shock will derange them. And there are certain souls which cannot stand the jars of life souls created to register thoughts and sentiments too fine for those of coarser construction. Such was the soul of the storekeeper of Coniston. Whether or not he was one of those immortalized in the famous Elegy, it is not for us to say. A celebrated poet who read the letters to the Guardian at Miss Lucretia Penniman's request has declared Mr. Wetherell to have been a genius. He wrote those letters, as we know, after he had piled his boxes and rolled his barrels into place; after he had added up the columns in his ledger and recorded, each week, the small but ever increasing deficit which he owed to Jethro Bass. Could he have been removed from the barrels and the ledgers, and the debts and the cares and the implications, what might

we have had from his pen? That will never be known.

We left him in the lobby of the Opera House, but he did not go in to see the final act of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." He made his way, alone, back to the hotel, slipped in by a side entrance, and went directly to his room, where Cynthia found him, half an hour later, seated by the open window in the dark.

"Aren't you well, Dad?" she asked anxiously. "Why didn't you come to see the play?"

"I I was detained Cynthia," he said. "Yes I am well." She sat down beside him and felt his forehead and his hands, and the events of the evening which were on her lips to tell him remained unspoken.

"You ought not to have left Coniston," she said; "the excitement is too much for you. We will go back to−morrow."

"Yes, Cynthia, we will go back to−morrow."

"In the morning?"

"On the early train," said Wetherell, "and now you must go to sleep."

"I am glad," said Cynthia, as she kissed him good night. "I have enjoyed it here, and I am grateful to Uncle Jethro for bringing us, but − but I like Coniston best."

William Wetherell could have slept but a few hours. When he awoke the sparrows were twittering outside, the fresh cool smells of the morning were coming in at his windows, and the sunlight was just striking across the roofs through the green trees of the Capitol Park. The remembrance of a certain incident of the night before crept into his mind, and he got up and drew on his clothes and thrust his few belongings into the carpet−bag, and knocked on Cynthia's door. She was already dressed, and her eyes rested searchingly on his face.

"Dad, you aren't well. I know it," she said.

But he denied that he was not.

Her belongings were in a neat little bundle under her arm. But when she went to put them in the bag she gave an exclamation, knelt down, took everything out that he had packed, and folded each article over again with amazing quickness. Then she made a rapid survey of the room lest she had forgotten anything, closed the bag, and they went out and along the corridor. But when Wetherell turned to go down the stairs, she stopped him.

"Aren't you going to say goodby to Uncle Jethro?"

"I I would rather go on and get in the train, Cynthia," he said. "Jethro will understand."

Cynthia was worried, but she did not care to leave him; and she led him, protesting, into the dining room. He had a sinking fear that they might meet Jethro there, but only a few big−boned countrymen were scattered about, attended by sleepy waitresses. Lest Cynthia might suspect how his head was throbbing, Wetherell tried bravely to eat his breakfast. He did not know that she had gone out, while they were waiting, and written a note to Jethro, explaining that her father was ill, and that they were going back to Coniston. After breakfast, when they went to the desk, the clerk stared at them in astonishment.

"Going, Mr. Wetherell?" he exclaimed.

"I find that I have to get back," stammered the storekeeper. "Will you tell me the amount of my bill?"

"Judge Bass gave me instructions that he would settle that."

"It is very kind of Mr. Bass," said Wetherell, "but I prefer to pay it myself."

The man hesitated.

"The judge will be very angry, Mr. Wetherell."

"Kindly give me the bill."

The clerk made it out and handed it over in silence. Wetherell had in his pocket the money from several contributions to the Guardian, and he paid him. Then they set out for the station, bought their tickets and hurried past the sprinkling of people there. The little train for Truro was standing under the sheds, the hissing steam from the locomotive rising perpendicular in the still air of the morning, and soon they were settled in one of the straight−backed seats. The car was almost empty, for few people were going up that day, and at length, after what seemed an eternity of waiting, they started, and soon were in the country once more in that wonderful Truro valley with its fruit trees and its clover scents; with its sparkling stream that tumbled through the passes and mirrored between green meadow−banks the blue and white of the sky. How hungrily they drank in the freshness of it.

They reached Truro village at eleven. Outside the little tavern there, after dinner, the green stage was drawn up; and Tom the driver cracked his long whip over the Morgan leaders and they started, swaying in the sand ruts and jolting over the great stones that cropped out of the road. Up they climbed, through narrow ways in the forest ways hedged with alder and fern and sumach and wild grape, adorned with oxeye daisies and tiger lilies, and the big purple flowers which they knew and loved so well. They passed, too, wild lakes overhung with primeval trees, where the iris and the water−lily grew among the fallen trunks and the water−fowl called to each other across the blue stretches. And at length, when the sun was beginning visibly to fall, they came out into an open cut on the western side and saw again the long line of Coniston once more against the sky.

"Dad," said Cynthia, as she gazed, "don't you love it better than any other place in the world?"

He did. But he could not answer her.

An hour later, from the hilltops above Isaac Worthington's mills, they saw the terraced steeple of Brampton church, and soon the horses were standing with drooping heads and wet sides in front of Mr. Sherman's tavern in Brampton Street; and Lem Hallowell, his honest face aglow with joy, was lifting Cynthia out of the coach as if she were a bundle of feathers.

"Upon my word," he cried, "this is a little might sudden! What's the matter with the capital, Will? Too wicked and sophisticated down thar to suit ye?" By this time, Wetherell, too, had reached the ground, and as Lem Hallowell gazed into his face the laughter in his own died away and gave place to a look of concern. "Don't wonder ye come back," he said, "you're as white as Moses's hoss."

"He isn't feeling very well, Lem, said Cynthia.

"Jest tuckered, that's all," answered Lem; "you git him right into this stage, Cynthy, I won't be long. Hurry them things off, Tom," he called, and himself seized a huge crate from the back of the coach and flung it on his shoulder. He had his cargo on in a jiffy, clucked to his horses, and they turned into the familiar road to Coniston just as the sun was dipping behind the south end of the mountain.

"They'll be surprised some, and disappointed some," said Lem, cheerily; "they was kind of plannin' a little celebration when you come back, Will you and Cynthy. Amandy Hatch was a−goin' to bake a cake, and the minister was callatin' to say some word of welcome. Wahn't goin' to be anything grand jest homelike. But you was right to come if you was tuckered. I guess Cynthy fetched you. Rias he kep' store and done it well, brisker'n I ever see him, Rias was. Wait till I put some of them things back, and make you more comfortable, Will."

He moved a few parcels and packages from Wetherell's feet and glanced at Cynthia as he did so. The mountain cast its vast blue shadow over forest and pasture, and above the pines the white mist was rising from Coniston Water rising in strange shapes. Lem's voice seemed to William Wetherell to have given way to a world−wide silence, in the midst of which he sought vainly for Cynthia and the stage driver. Most extraordinary of all, out of the silence and the void came the checker−paned windows of the store at Coniston, then the store itself, with the great oaks bending over it, then the dear familiar faces, Moses and Amandy, Eph Prescott limping toward them, and little Rias Richardson in an apron with a scoop shovel in his hand, and many others. They were not smiling at the storekeeper's return they looked very grave. Then somebody lifted him tenderly from the stage and said: −

"Don't you worry a mite, Cynthy. Jest tuckered, that's all."

William Wetherell was "just tuckered." The great Dr. Coles, authority on pulmonary troubles, who came all the way from Boston, could give no better verdict than that. It was Jethro Bass who had induced Dr. Coles to come to Coniston much against the great man's inclination, and to the detriment of his patients: Jethro who, on receiving Cynthia's note, had left the capital on the next train and had come to Coniston, and had at once gone to Boston for the specialist.

"I do not know why I came," said the famous physician to Dr. Abraham Rowell of Tarleton, "I never shall know. There is something about that man Jethro Bass which compels you to do his will. He has a most extraordinary personality. Is this storekeeper a great friend of his?"

"The only intimate friend he had in the world," answered Dr. Rowell; "none of us could ever understand it. And as for the girl, Jethro Bass worships her."

"If nursing could cure him, I'd trust her to do it. She's a natural−born nurse."

The two physicians were talking in low tones in the little garden behind the store when Jethro came out of the doorway.

"He looks as if he were suffering, too," said the Boston physician, and he walked toward Jethro and laid a hand upon his shoulders. "I give him until winter, my friend," said Dr. Coles.

Jethro Bass sat down on the doorstep on that same millstone where he had talked with Cynthia many years before and was silent for a long while. The doctor was used to scenes of sorrow, but the sight of this man's suffering unnerved him, and he turned from it.

"D−doctor?" said Jethro, at last.

The doctor turned again. "Yes?" he said.

"D−doctor if Wetherell hadn't b'en to the capital would he have lived if he hadn't been to the capital?"

"My friend," said Dr. Coles, "if Mr. Wetherell had always lived in a warm house, and had always been well fed, and helped over the rough places and shielded from the storms, he might have lived longer. It is a marvel to me that he has lived so long."

And then the doctor went way, back to Boston. Many times in his long professional life had the veil been lifted for him a little. But as he sat in the train he said to himself that in this visit to the hamlet of Coniston he had had the strangest glimpse of all.

William Wetherell rallied, as Dr. Coles had predicted, from that first sharp attack, and one morning they brought up a reclining chair which belonged to Mr. Satterlee, the minister, and set it in the window. There, in the still days of the early autumn, Wetherell looked down upon the garden he had grown to love, and listened to the song of Coniston Water. There Cynthia, who had scarcely left his side, read to him from Keats and Shelley and Tennyson yet the thought grew on her that he did not seem to hear. Even that wonderful passage of Milton's, beginning "So sinks the day−star in the ocean bed," which he always used to beg her to repeat, did not seem to move him now.

The neighbors came and sat with him, but he would not often speak. Cheery Lem Hallowell and his wife, and Cousin Ephraim, to talk about the war, hobbling slowly up the stairs for rheumatism had been added to that trouble of the Wilderness bullet now, and Ephraim was getting along in years; and Rias Richardson stole up in his carpet slippers; and Moses, after his chores were done, and Amandy with her cakes and delicacies, which he left untouched though Amandy never knew it. Yes, and Jethro came. Day by day he would come silently into the room, and sit silently for a space, and go as silently out of it. The farms were neglected now on Thousand Acre Hill. William Wetherell would take his hand, and speak to him, but do no more than that.

There were times when Cynthia leaned over him, listening as he breathed to know whether he slept or were awake. If he were not sleeping, he would speak her name: he repeated it often in those days, as though the sound of it gave him comfort; and he would fall asleep with it on his lips, holding her hand, and thinking, perhaps, of that other Cynthia who had tended and nursed and shielded him in other days. Then she would steal down the stairs to Jethro on the doorstep: to Jethro who would sit there for hours at a time, to the wonder and awe of his neighbors. Although they knew that he loved the storekeeper as he loved no other man, his was a grief that they could not understand. Cynthia used to go to Jethro in the garden. Sorrow had brought them very near together; and though she had loved him before, now he had become her reliance and her refuge. The first time Cynthia saw him, when the worst of the illness had passed and the strange and terrifying apathy had come, she had hidden her head on his shoulder and wept there. Jethro kept that coat, with the tear stains on it, to his dying day, and never wore it again.

"Sometimes sometimes I think if he hadn't gone to the capital, Cynthy, this mightn't hev come," he said to her once.

"But the doctor said that didn't matter, Uncle Jethro," she answered, trying to comfort him. She, too, believed that something had happened at the capital.

"N−never spoke to you about anything there n−never spoke to you, Cynthia?"

"No, never," she said. "He he hardly speaks at all, Uncle Jethro."

One bright morning after the sun had driven away the frost, when the sumachs and maples beside Coniston Water were aflame with red, Rias Richardson came stealing up the stairs and whispered something to Cynthia.

"Dad," she said, laying down her book, "it's Mr. Merrill. Will you see him?"

William Wetherell gave her a great fright. He started up from his pillows, and seized her wrist with a strength which she had not thought remained in his fingers.

"Mr. Merrill!" he cried "Mr. Merrill here!"

"Yes," answered Cynthia, agitatedly, "he's downstairs in the store."

"Ask him to come up," said Wetherell, sinking back again, "ask him to come up."

Cynthia, as she stood in the passage, was of two minds about it. She was thoroughly frightened, and went first to the garden to ask Jethro's advice. But Jethro, so Milly Skinner said, had gone off half an hour before, and did not know that Mr. Merrill had arrived. Cynthia went back again to her father. "Where's Mr. Merrill?" asked Wetherell.

"Dad, do you think you ought to see him? He he might excite you."

"I insist upon seeing him, Cynthia."

William Wetherell had never said anything like that before. But Cynthia obeyed him, and presently led Mr. Merrill into the room. The kindly little railroad president was very serious now. The wasted face of the storekeeper, enhanced as it was by the beard, gave Mr. Merrill such a shock that he could not speak for a few moments he who rarely lacked for cheering words on any occasion. A lump rose in his throat as he went over and stood by the chair and took the sick man's hand.

"I am glad you came, Mr. Merrill," said Wetherell, simply, "I wanted to speak to you. Cynthia, will you leave us alone for a few minutes?"

Cynthia went, troubled and perplexed, wondering at the change in him. He had had something on his mind now she was sure of it something which Mr. Merrill might be able to relieve.

It was Mr. Merrill who spoke first when she was gone.

"I was coming up to Brampton," he said, "and Tom Collins, who drives the Truro coach, told me you were sick. I had not heard of it."

Mr. Merrill, too, had something on his mind, and did not quite know how to go on. There was in William Wetherell, as he sat in the chair with his eyes fixed on his visitor's face, a dignity which Mr. Merrill had not seen before had not thought the man might possess.

"I was coming to see you, anyway," Mr. Merrill said. "I did you a wrong though as God judges me, I did not think of it at the time. It was not until Alexander Duncan spoke to me last week that I thought of it at all."

"Yes," said Wetherell.

"You see," continued Mr. Merrill, wiping his brow, for he found the matter even more difficult than he had imagined, "it was not until Duncan told me how you had acted in his library that I guessed the truth that I remembered myself how you had acted. I knew that you were not mixed up in politics, but I also knew that you were an intimate friend of Jethro's, and I thought that you had been let into the secret of the woodchuck session. I don't defend the game of politics as it is played, Mr. Wetherell, but all of us who are friends of Jethro's are generally willing to lend a hand in any little manœuvre that is going on, and have a practical joke when we can. It was not until I saw you sitting there beside Duncan that the idea occurred to me. It didn't make a great deal of difference whether Duncan or Lovejoy got to the House or not, provided they didn't learn of the matter too early, because some of their men had been bought off that day. It suited Jethro's sense of humor to play the game that way and it was very effective. When I saw you there beside Duncan I remembered that he had spoken about the Guardian letters, and the notion occurred to me to get him to show you his library. I have explained to him that you were innocent. I I hope you haven't been worrying."

William Wetherell sat very still for a while, gazing out of the window, but a new look had come into his eyes.

"Jethro Bass did not know that you that you had used me?" he asked at length.

"No," replied Mr. Merrill, thickly, "no. He didn't know a thing about it he doesn't know it now, I believe."

A smile came upon Wetherell's face, but Mr. Merrill could not look at it.

"You have made me very happy," said the storekeeper, tremulously. "I I have no right to be proud I have taken his money he has supported my daughter and myself all these years. But he had never asked me to to do anything, and I liked to think that he never would."

Mr. Merrill could not speak. The tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"I want you to promise me, Mr. Merrill," he went on presently, "I want you to promise me that you will never speak to Jethro of this, or to my daughter, Cynthia."

Mr. Merrill merely nodded his head in assent. Still he could not speak. "They might think it was this that caused my death. It was not. I know very well that I am worn out, and that I should have gone soon in any case. And I must leave Cynthia to him. He loves her as his own child."

William Wetherell, his faith in Jethro restored, was facing death as he had never faced life. Mr. Merrill was greatly affected.

"You must not speak of dying, Wetherell," said he, brokenly. "Will you forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive, now that you have explained matters, Mr. Merrill," said the storekeeper, and he smiled again. "If my fibre had been a little tougher, this thing would never have happened. There is only one more request I have to make. And that is, to assure Mr. Duncan, from me, that I did not detain him purposely."

"I will see him on my way to Boston," answered Mr. Merrill.

Then Cynthia was called. She was waiting anxiously in the passage for the interview to be ended, and when she came in one glance at her father's face told her that he was happier. She, too, was happier.

"I wish you would come every day, Mr. Merrill," she said, when they descended into the garden after the three had talked awhile. "It is the first time since he fell ill that he seems himself."

Mr. Merrill's answer was to take her hand and pat it. He sat down on the millstone and drew a deep breath of that sparkling air and sighed, for his memory ran back to his own innocent boyhood in the New England country. He talked to Cynthia until Jethro came.

"I have taken a fancy to this girl, Jethro," said the little railroad president, "I believe I'll steal her; a fellow can't have too many of 'em, you know. I'll tell you one thing, you won't keep her always shut up here in Coniston. She's much too good to waste on the desert air." Perhaps Mr. Merrill, too, had been thinking of the Elegy that morning. "I don't mean to run down Coniston it's one of the most beautiful places I ever saw. But seriously, Jethro, you and Wetherell ought to send her to school in Boston after a while. She's about the age of my girls, and she can live in my house. Ain't I right?"

"D−don't know but what you be, Steve," Jethro answered slowly.

"I am right," declared Mr. Merrill, "you'll back me in this, I know it. Why, she's like your own daughter. You remember what I say. I mean it. "What are you thinking about, Cynthia?"

"I couldn't leave Dad and Uncle Jethro," she said.

"Why, bless your soul," said Mr. Merrill, "bring Dad along. We'll find room for him. And I guess Uncle Jethro will get to Boston twice a month if you're there."

And Mr. Merrill got into the buggy with Mr. Sherman and drove away to Brampton, thinking of many things.

"S−Steve's a good man," said Jethro. "C−come up here from Brampton to see your father did he?"

"Yes," answered Cynthia, "he is very kind." She was about to tell Jethro what a strange difference this visit had made in her father's spirits, but some instinct kept her silent. She knew that Jethro had never ceased to reproach himself for inviting Wetherell to the capital, and she was sure that something had happened there which had disturbed her father and brought on that fearful apathy. But the apathy was dispelled now, and she shrank from giving Jethro pain by mentioning the fact.

He never knew, indeed, until many years afterward, what had brought Stephen Merrill to Coniston. When Jethro went up the stairs that afternoon, he found William Wetherell alone, looking out over the garden with a new peace and contentment in his eyes. Jethro drew breath when he saw that look, as if a great load had been lifted from his heart.

"F−feelin' some better to−day, Will?" he said.

"I am well again, Jethro," replied the storekeeper, pressing Jethro's hand for the first time in months.

"S−soon be, Will," said Jethro, "s−soon be."

Wetherell, who was not speaking of the welfare of the body, did not answer.

"Jethro," he said presently, "there is a little box lying in the top of my trunk over there in the corner. Will you get it for me?"

Jethro rose and opened the rawhide trunk and handed the little rosewood box to his friend. Wetherell took it and lifted the lid reverently, with that same smile on his face and far−off look in his eyes, and drew out a small daguerreotype in a faded velvet frame. He gazed at the picture a long time, and then he held it out to Jethro; and Jethro looked at it, and his hand trembled.

It was a picture of Cynthia Ware. And who can say what emotions it awoke in Jethro's heart? She was older than the Cynthia he had known, and yet she did not seem so. There was the same sweet, virginal look in the gray eyes, and the same exquisite purity in the features. He saw her again as if it were yesterday walking in the golden green light under the village maples, and himself standing in the tannery door; he saw the face under the poke bonnet on the road to Brampton, and heard the thrush singing in the woods. And if he could only blot out that scene from his life! remembered her, a transformed Cynthia, remembered that face in the lantern−light when he had flung back the hood that shaded it; and that hair which he had kissed, wet, then, from the sleet. Ah, God, for that briefest of moments she had been his!

So he stared at the picture as it lay in the palm of his hand, and forgot him who had been her husband. But at length he started, as from a dream, and gave it back to Wetherell, who was watching him. Her name had never been mentioned between the two men, and yet she had been the one woman in the world to both.

"It is strange," said William Wetherell, "it is strange that I should have had but two friends in my life, and that she should have been one and you the other. She found me destitute and brought me back to life and married me, and cared for me until she died. And after that − you cared for me."

"You you mustn't think of that, Will, 'twahn't much what I did no more than any one else would hev done." "It was everything," answered the storekeeper, simply; "each of you came between me and destruction. There is something that I have always meant to tell you, Jethro, something that it may be a comfort for you to know. Cynthia loved you."

Jethro Bass did not answer. He got up and stood in the window, looking out.

"When she married me," Wetherell continued steadily, "she told me that there was one whom she had never been able to drive from her heart. And one summer evening, how well I recall it! we were walking under the trees on the Mall and we met my old employer, Mr. Judson, the jeweller. He put me in mind of the young countryman who had come in to buy a locket, and I asked her if she knew you. Strange that I should have remembered your name, wasn't it? It was then that she led me to a bench and confessed that you were the man whom she could not forget. I used to hate you then as much as was in me to hate. I hated and feared you when I first came to Coniston. But now I can tell you I can even be happy in telling you."

Jethro Bass groaned. He put his hand to his throat as though he were stifling. Many, many years ago he had worn the locket there. And now? Now an impulse seized him, and he yielded to it. He thrust his hand in his coat and drew out a cowhide wallet, and from the wallet the oval locket itself. There it was, tarnished with age, but with that memorable inscription still legible, "Cynthy, from Jethro"; not Cynthia, but Cynthy. How the years fell away as he read it! He handed it in silence to the storekeeper, and in silence went to the window again. Jethro Bass was a man who could find no outlet for his agony in speech or tears.

"Yes," said Wetherell, "I thought you would have kept it. Dear, dear, how well I remember it! And I remember how I patronized you when you came into the shop. I believed I should live to be something in the world, then. Yes, she loved you, Jethro. I can die more easily now that I have told you it has been on my mind all these years." The locket fell open in William Wetherell's hand, for the clasp had become worn with time, and there was a picture of little Cynthia within: of little Cynthia, not so little now, a photograph taken in Brampton the year before. Wetherell laid it beside the daguerreotype.

"She looks like her, he said aloud; "but the child is more vigorous, more human less like a spirit. I have always thought of Cynthia Ware as a spirit."

Jethro turned at the words, and came and stood looking over Wetherell's shoulder at the pictures of mother and daughter. In the rosewood box was a brooch and a gold ring Cynthia Ware's wedding ring − and two small slips of yellow paper. William Wetherell opened one of these, disclosing a little braid of brown hair. He folded the paper again and laid it in the locket, and handed that to Jethro.

"It is all I have to give you," he said, "but I know that you will cherish it, and cherish her, when I am gone. She she has been a daughter to both of us."

"Yes," said Jethro, "I will."

William Wetherell lived but a few days longer. They laid him to rest at last in the little ground which Captain Timothy Prescott had hewn out of the forest with his axe, where Captain Timothy himself lies under his slate headstone with the quaint lettering of bygone days. That same autumn Jethro Bass made a pilgrimage to Boston, and now Cynthia Ware sleeps there, too, beside her husband, amid the scenes she loved so well.