

Coniston — Volume 04 eBook

Coniston — Volume 04 by Winston Churchill

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CHAPTER XI

The next morning Cynthia's heart was heavy as she greeted her new friends at Miss Sadler's school. Life had made a woman of her long ago, while these girls had yet been in short dresses, and now an experience had come to her which few, if any, of these could ever know. It was of no use for her to deny to herself that she loved Bob Worthington—loved him with the full intensity of the strong nature that was hers. To how many of these girls would come such a love? and how many would be called upon to make such a renunciation as hers had been? No wonder she felt out of place among them, and once more the longing to fly away to Coniston almost overcame her. Jethro would forgive her, she knew, and stretch out his arms to receive her, and understand that some trouble had driven her to him.

She was aroused by some one calling her name—some one whose voice sounded strangely familiar. Cynthia was perhaps the only person in the school that day who did not know that Miss Janet Duncan had entered it. Miss Sadler certainly knew it, and asked Miss Duncan very particularly about her father and mother and even her brother. Miss Sadler knew, even before Janet's unexpected arrival, that Mr. and Mrs. Duncan had come to Boston after Christmas, and had taken a large house in the Back Bay in order to be near their son at Harvard. Mrs. Duncan was, in fact, a Bostonian, and more at home there than at any other place.

Miss Sadler observed with a great deal of astonishment the warm embrace that Janet bestowed on Cynthia. The occurrence started in Miss Sadler a train of thought, as a result of which she left the drawing-room where these reunions were held, and went into her own private study to write a note. This she addressed to Mrs. Alexander Duncan, at a certain number on Beacon Street, and sent it out to be posted immediately. In the meantime, Janet Duncan had seated herself on the sofa beside Cynthia, not having for an instant ceased to talk to her. Of what use to write a romance, when they unfolded themselves so beautifully in real life! Here was the country girl she had seen in Washington already in a fine way to become the princess, and in four months! Janet would not have thought it possible for any one to change so much in such a time. Cynthia listened, and wondered what language Miss Duncan would use if she knew how great and how complete that change had been. Romances, Cynthia thought sadly, were one thing to theorize about and quite another thing to endure—and smiled at the thought. But Miss Duncan had no use for a heroine without a heartache.

It is not improbable that Miss Janet Duncan may appear with Miss Sally Broke in another volume. The style of her conversation is known, and there is no room to reproduce it here. She, too, had a heart, but she was a young woman given to infatuations, as Cynthia rightly guessed. Cynthia must spend many afternoons at her house—lunch with her, drive with her. For one omission Cynthia was thankful: she did

not mention Bob Worthington's name. There was the romance under Miss Duncan's nose, and she did not see it. It is frequently so with romancers.



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Cynthia's impassiveness, her complete poise, had fascinated Miss Duncan with the others. Had there been nothing beneath that exterior, Janet would never have guessed it, and she would have been quite as happy. Cynthia saw very clearly that Mr. Worthington or no other man or woman could force Bob to marry Janet.

The next morning, in such intervals as her studies permitted, Janet continued her attentions to Cynthia. That same morning she had brought a note from her father to Miss Sadler, of the contents of which Janet knew nothing. Miss Sadler retired into her study to read it, and two newspaper clippings fell out of it under the paper-cutter. This was the note:—

"My dear Miss Sadler:

"Mrs. Duncan has referred your note to me, and I enclose two clippings which speak for themselves. Miss Wetherell, I believe, stands in the relation of ward to the person to whom they refer, and her father was a sort of political assistant to this person. Although, as you say, we are from that part of the country (Miss Sadler had spoken of the Duncans as the people of importance there), it was by the merest accident that Miss Wetherell's connection with this Jethro Bass was brought to my notice.

"Sincerely yours,

"Alexander Duncan."

It is pleasant to know that there were people in the world who could snub Miss Sadler; and there could be no doubt, from the manner in which she laid the letter down and took up the clippings, that Miss Sadler felt snubbed: equally, there could be no doubt that the revenge would fall on other shoulders than Mr. Duncan's. And when Miss Sadler proceeded to read the clippings, her hair would have stood on end with horror had it not been so efficiently plastered down. Miss Sadler seized her pen, and began a letter to Mrs. Merrill. Miss Sadler's knowledge of the proprieties—together with other qualifications—had made her school what it was. No Cynthia Wetherells had ever before entered its sacred portals, or should again.

The first of these clippings was the article containing the arraignment of Jethro Bass which Mr. Merrill had shown to his wife, and which had been the excuse for Miss Penniman's call. The second was one which Mr. Duncan had clipped from the Newcastle Guardian of the day before, and gave, from Mr. Worthington's side, a very graphic account of the conflict which was to tear the state asunder. The railroads were tired of paying toll to the chief of a band of thieves and cutthroats, to a man who had long throttled the state which had nourished him, to—in short,—to Jethro Bass. Miss Sadler was not much interested in the figures and metaphors of political compositions. Right had found a champion—the article continued—in Mr. Isaac D. Worthington of Brampton, president of the Truro Road and owner of large holdings elsewhere. Mr.



Worthington, backed by other respectable property interests, would fight this monster of iniquity to the death, and release the state from his thralldom. Jethro Bass, the article alleged, was already about his abominable work—had long been so—as in mockery of that very vigilance which is said to be the price of liberty. His agents were busy in every town of the state, seeing to it that the slaves of Jethro Bass should be sent to the next legislature.



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And what was this system which he had built up among these rural communities? It might aptly be called the System of Mortgages. The mortgage—dread name for a dreadful thing—was the chief weapon of the monster. Even as Jethro Bass held the mortgages of Coniston and Tarleton and round about, so his lieutenants held mortgages in every town and hamlet of the state, What was a poor farmer to do—? His choice was not between right and wrong, but between a roof over the heads of his wife and children and no roof. He must vote for the candidate of Jethro Bass end corruption or become a homeless wanderer. How the gentleman and his other respectable backers were to fight the system the article did not say. Were they to buy up all the mortgages? As a matter of fact, they intended to buy up enough of these to count, but to mention this would be to betray the methods of Mr. Worthington's reform. The first bitter frontier fighting between the advance cohorts of the new giant and the old—the struggle for the caucuses and the polls—had begun. Miss Sadler cared but little and understood less of all this matter. She lingered over the sentences which described Jethro Bass as a monster of iniquity, as a pariah with whom decent men would have no intercourse, and in the heat of her passion that one who had touched him had gained admittance to the most exclusive school for young ladies in the country she wrote a letter.

Miss Sadler wrote the letter, and three hours later tore it up and wrote another and more diplomatic one. Mrs. Merrill, though not by any means of the same importance as Mrs. Duncan, was not a person to be wantonly offended, and might—knowing nothing about the monster—in the goodness of her heart have taken the girl into her house. Had it been otherwise, surely Mrs. Merrill would not have had the effrontery! She would give Mrs. Merrill a chance. The bell of release from studies was ringing as she finished this second letter, and Miss Sadler in her haste forgot to enclose the clippings. She ran out in time to intercept Susan Merrill at the door, and to press into her hands the clippings and the note, with a request to take both to her mother.

Although the Duncans dined in the evening, the Merrills had dinner at half-past one in the afternoon, when the girls returned from school. Mr. Merrill usually came home, but he had gone off somewhere for this particular day, and Mrs. Merrill had a sewing circle. The girls sat down to dinner alone. When they got up from the table, Susan suddenly remembered the note which she had left in her coat pocket. She drew out the clippings with it.

"I wonder what Miss Sadler is sending mamma clippings for," she said. "Why, Cynthia, they're about your uncle. Look!"

And she handed over the article headed "Jethro Bass." Jane, who had quicker intuitions than her sister, would have snatched it from Cynthia's hand, and it was a long time before Susan forgave herself for her folly. Thus Miss Sadler had her revenge.



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It is often mercifully ordained that the mightiest blows of misfortune are tempered for us. During the winter evenings in Coniston, Cynthia had read little newspaper attacks on Jethro, and scorned them as the cowardly devices of enemies. They had been, indeed, but guarded and covert allusions—grimaces from a safe distance. Cynthia's first sensation as she read was anger—anger so intense as to send all the blood in her body rushing to her head. But what was this? "Right had found a champion at last" in—in Isaac D. Worthington! That was the first blow, and none but Cynthia knew the weight of it. It sank but slowly into her consciousness, and slowly the blood left her face, slowly but surely: left it at length as white as the lace curtain of the window which she clutched in her distress. Words which somebody had spoken were ringing in her ears. Whatever happens! "Whatever happens I will never desert you, never deny you, as long as I live." This, then, was what he had meant by newspapers, and why he had come to her!

The sisters, watching her, cried out in dismay. There was no need to tell them that they were looking on at a tragedy, and all the love and sympathy in their hearts went out to her.

"Cynthia! Cynthia! What is it?" cried Susan, who, thinking she would faint, seized her in her arms. "What have I done?"

Cynthia did not faint, being made of sterner substance. Gently, but with that inexorable instinct of her kind which compels them to look for reliance within themselves even in the direst of extremities, Cynthia released herself from Susan's embrace and put a hand to her forehead.

"Will you leave me here a little while—alone?" she said.

It was Jane now who drew Susan out and shut the door of the parlor after them. In utter misery they waited on the stairs while Cynthia fought out her battle for herself.

When they were gone she sank down into the big chair under the reading lamp—the very chair in which he had sat only two nights before. She saw now with a terrible clearness the thing which for so long had been but a vague premonition of disaster, and for a while she forgot the clippings. And when after a space the touch of them in her hand brought them back to her remembrance, she lacked the courage to read them through. But not for long. Suddenly her fear of them gave place to a consuming hatred of the man who had inspired these articles: of Isaac D. Worthington, for she knew that he must have inspired them. And then she began again to read them.

Truth, though it come perverted from the mouth of an enemy, has in itself a note to which the soul responds, let the mind deny as vehemently as it will. Cynthia read, and as she read her body was shaken with sobs, though the tears came not. Could it be

true? Could the least particle of the least of these fearful insinuations be true? Oh, the treason of those whispers in a voice that was surely not her own, and

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yet which she could not hush! Was it possible that such things could be printed about one whom she had admired and respected above all men—nay, whom she had so passionately adored from childhood? A monster of iniquity, a pariah! The cruel, bitter calumny of those names! Cynthia thought of his goodness and loving kindness and his charity to her and to many others. His charity! The dreaded voice repeated that word, and sent a thought that struck terror into her heart: Whence had come the substance of that charity? Then came another word—mortgage. There it was on the paper, and at sight of it there leaped out of her memory a golden-green poplar shimmering against the sky and the distant blue billows of mountains in the west. She heard the high-pitched voice of a woman speaking the word, and even then it had had a hateful sound, and she heard herself asking, “Uncle Jethro, what is a mortgage?” He had struck his horse with the whip.

Loyal though the girl was, the whispers would not hush, nor the doubts cease to assail her. What if ever so small a portion of this were true? Could the whole of this hideous structure, tier resting upon tier, have been reared without something of a foundation? Fiercely though she told herself she would believe none of it, fiercely though she hated Mr. Worthington, fervently though she repeated aloud that her love for Jethro and her faith in him had not changed, the doubts remained. Yet they remained unacknowledged.

An hour passed. It was a thing beyond belief that one hour could have held such a store of agony. An hour passed, and Cynthia came dry-eyed from the parlor. Susan and Jane, waiting to give her comfort when she was recovered a little from this unknown but overwhelming affliction, were fain to stand mute when they saw her to pay a silent deference to one whom sorrow had lifted far above them and transfigured. That was the look on Cynthia’s face. She went up the stairs, and they stood in the hall not knowing what to do, whispering in awe-struck voices. They were still there when Cynthia came down again, dressed for the street. Jane seized her by the hand.

“Where are you going, Cynthia?” she asked.

“I shall be back by five,” said Cynthia.

She went up the hill, and across to old Louisburg Square, and up the hill again. The weather had cleared, the violet-paned windows caught the slanting sunlight and flung it back across the piles of snow. It was a day for wedding-bells. At last Cynthia came to a queerly fashioned little green door that seemed all askew with the slanting street, and rang the bell, and in another moment was standing on the threshold of Miss Lucretia Penniman’s little sitting room. To Miss Lucretia, at her writing table, one glance was sufficient. She rose quickly to meet the girl, kissed her unresponsive cheek, and led her

to a chair. Miss Lucretia was never one to beat about the bush, even in the gravest crisis.



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"You have read the articles," she said.

Read them! During her walk hither Cynthia had been incapable of thought, but the epithets and arraignments and accusations, the sentences and paragraphs, were printed now, upon her brain, never, she believed, to be effaced. Every step of the way she had been unconsciously repeating them.

"Have you read them?" asked Cynthia.

"Yes, my dear."

"Has everybody read them?" Did the whole world, then, know of her shame?

"I am glad you came to me, my dear," said Miss Lucretia, taking her hand. "Have you talked of this to any one else?"

"No," said Cynthia, simply.

Miss Lucretia was puzzled. She had not looked for apathy, but she did not know all of Cynthia's troubles. She wondered whether she had misjudged the girl, and was misled by her attitude.

"Cynthia," she said, with a briskness meant to hide emotion for Miss Lucretia had emotions, "I am a lonely old woman, getting too old, indeed, to finish the task of my life. I went to see Mrs. Merrill the other day to ask her if she would let you come and live with me. Will you?"

Cynthia shook her head.

"No, Miss Lucretia, I cannot," she answered.

"I won't press it on you now," said Miss Lucretia.

"I cannot, Miss Lucretia. I'm going to Coniston."

"Going to Coniston!" exclaimed Miss Lucretia.

The name of that place—magic name, once so replete with visions of happiness and content—seemed to recall Cynthia's spirit from its flight. Yes, the spirit was there, for it flashed in her eyes as she turned and looked into Miss Lucretia's face.

"Are these the articles you read?" she asked; taking the clippings from her muff.

Miss Lucretia put on her spectacles.

"I have seen both of them," she said.



“And do you believe what they say about—about Jethro Bass?”

Poor Miss Lucretia! For once in her life she was at a loss. She, too, paid a deference to that face, young as it was. She had robbed herself of sleep trying to make up her mind what she would say upon such an occasion if it came. A wonderful virgin faith had to be shattered, and was she to be the executioner? She loved the girl with that strange, intense affection which sometimes comes to the elderly and the lonely, and she had prayed that this cup might pass from her. Was it possible that it was her own voice using very much the same words for which she had rebuked Mrs. Merrill?

“Cynthia,” she said, “those articles were written by politicians, in a political controversy. No such articles can ever be taken literally.”

“Miss Lucretia, do you believe what it says about Jethro Bass?” repeated Cynthia.

How was she to avoid those eyes? They pierced into, her soul, even as her own had pierced into Mrs. Merrill's. Oh, Miss Lucretia, who pride yourself on your plain speaking, that you should be caught quibbling! Miss Lucretia blushed for the first time in many, years, and into her face came the light of battle.



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"I am a coward, my dear. I deserve your rebuke. To the best of my knowledge and belief, and so far as I can judge from the inquiries I have undertaken, Jethro Bass has made his living and gained and held his power by the methods described in those articles."

Miss Lucretia took off her spectacles and wiped them. She had committed a fine act of courage.

Cynthia stood up.

"Thank you," she said, "that is what I wanted to know."

"But—" cried Miss Lucretia, in amazement and apprehension, "but what are you going to do?"

"I am going to Coniston," said Cynthia, "to ask him if those things are true."

"To ask him!"

"Yes. If he tells me they are true, then I shall believe them."

"If he tells you?" Miss Lucretia gasped. Here was a courage of which she had not reckoned. "Do you think he will tell you?"

"He will tell me, and I shall believe him, Miss Lucretia."

"You are a remarkable girl, Cynthia," said Miss Lucretia, involuntarily. Then she paused for a moment. "Suppose he tells you they are true? You surely can't live with him again, Cynthia."

"Do you suppose I am going to desert him, Miss Lucretia?" she asked. "He loves me, and—and I love him." This was the first time her voice had faltered. "He kept my father from want and poverty, and he has brought me up as a daughter. If his life has been as you say, I shall make my own living!"

"How?" demanded Miss Lucretia, the practical part of her coming uppermost.

"I shall teach school. I believe I can get a position, in a place where I can see him often. I can break his heart, Miss Lucretia, I—I can bring sadness to myself, but I will not desert him."

Miss Lucretia stared at her for a moment, not knowing what to say or do. She perceived that the girl had a spirit as strong as her own: that her plans were formed, her mind made up, and that no arguments could change her.



“Why did you come to me?” she asked irrelevantly.

“Because I thought that you would have read the articles, and I knew if you had, you would have taken the trouble to inform yourself of the world’s opinion.”

Again Miss Lucretia stared at her.

“I will go to Coniston with you,” she said, “at least as far as Brampton.”

Cynthia’s face softened a little at the words.

“I would rather go alone, Miss Lucretia,” she answered gently, but with the same firmness. “I—I am very grateful to you for your kindness to me in Boston. I shall not forget it—or you. Good-by, Miss Lucretia.”

But Miss Lucretia, sobbing openly, gathered the girl in her arms and pressed her. Age was coming on her indeed, that she should show such weakness. For a long time she could not trust herself to speak, and then her words were broken. Cynthia must come to her at the first sign of doubt or trouble: this, Miss Lucretia’s house, was to be a refuge in any storm that life might send—and Miss Lucretia’s heart. Cynthia promised, and when she went out at last through the little door her own tears were falling, for she loved Miss Lucretia.

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Cynthia was going to Coniston. That journey was as fixed, as inevitable, as things mortal can be. She would go to Coniston unless she perished on the way. No loving entreaties, no fears of Mrs. Merrill or her daughters, were of any avail. Mrs. Merrill too, was awed by the vastness of the girl's sorrow, and wondered if her own nature were small by comparison. She had wept, to be sure, at her husband's confession, and lain awake over it in the night watches, and thought of the early days of their marriage.

And then, Mrs. Merrill told herself, Cynthia would have to talk with Mr. Merrill. How was he to come unscathed out of that? There was pain and bitterness in that thought, and almost resentment against Cynthia, quivering though she was with sympathy for the girl. For Mrs. Merrill, though the canker remained, had already pardoned her husband and had asked the forgiveness of God for that pardon. On other occasions, in other crisis, she had waited and watched for him in the parlor window, and to-night she was at the door before his key was in the lock, while he was still stamping the snow from his boots. She drew him into the room and told him what had happened.

"Oh, Stephen," she cried, "what are you going to say to her?"

What, indeed? His wife had sorrowed, but she had known the obstacles and perils by which he had been beset. But what was he to say to Cynthia? Her very name had grown upon him, middle-aged man of affairs though he was, until the thought of it summoned up in his mind a figure of purity, and of the strength which was from purity. He would not have believed it possible that the country girl whom they had taken into their house three months before should have wrought such an influence over them all.

Even in the first hour of her sorrow which she had spent that afternoon in the parlor, Cynthia had thought of Mr. Merrill. He could tell her whether those accusations were true or false, for he was a friend of Jethro's. Her natural impulse—the primeval one of a creature which is hurt—had been to hide herself; to fly to her own room, and perhaps by nightfall the courage would come to her to ask him the terrible questions. He was a friend of Jethro's. An illuminating flash revealed to her the meaning of that friendship—if the accusations were true. It was then she had thought of Miss Lucretia Penniman, and somehow she had found the courage to face the sunlight and go to her. She would spare Mr. Merrill.

But had she spared him? Sadly the family sat down to supper without her, and after supper Mr. Merrill sent a message to his club that he could not attend a committee meeting there that evening. He sat with his wife in the little writing room, he pretending to read and she pretending to sew, until the silence grew too oppressive, and they spoke of the matter that was in their hearts. It was one of the bitterest evenings in Mr. Merrill's life, and there is no need to linger on it. They talked earnestly of Cynthia, and of her future. But they both knew why she did not come down to them.



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“So she is really going to Coniston,” said Mr. Merrill.

“Yes,” answered Mrs. Merrill, “and I think she is doing right, Stephen.”

Mr. Merrill groaned. His wife rose and put her hand on his shoulder.

“Come, Stephen,” she said gently, “you will see her in the morning.

“I will go to Coniston with her,” he said.

“No,” replied Mrs. Merrill “she wants to go alone. And I believe it is best that she should.”

CHAPTER XII

Great afflictions generally bring in their train a host of smaller sorrows, each with its own little pang. One of these sorrows had been the parting with the Merrill family. Under any circumstance it was not easy for Cynthia to express her feelings, and now she had found it very difficult to speak of the gratitude and affection which she felt. But they understood—dear, good people that they were: no eloquence was needed with them. The ordeal of breakfast over, and the tearful “God bless you, Miss Cynthia,” of Ellen the parlor-maid, the whole family had gone with her to the station. For Susan and Jane had spent their last day at Miss Sadler’s school.

Mr. Merrill had sent for the conductor and bidden him take care of Miss Wetherell, and recommend her in his name to a conductor on the Truro Road. The man took off his cap to Mr. Merrill and called him by name and promised. It was a dark day, and long after the train had pulled out Cynthia remembered the tearful faces of the family standing on the damp platform of the station. As they fled northward through the flat river-meadows, the conductor would have liked to talk to her of Mr. Merrill; there were few employees on any railroad who did not know the genial and kindly president of the Grand Gulf and sympathize with his troubles. But there was a look on the girl’s face that forbade intrusion. Passengers stared at her covertly, as though fascinated by that look, and some tried to fathom it. But her eyes were firmly fixed upon a point far beyond their vision. The car stopped many times, and flew on again, but nothing seemed to break her absorption.

At last she was aroused by the touch of the conductor on her sleeve. The people were beginning to file out of the car, and the train was under the shadow of the snow-covered sheds in the station of the state capital. Cynthia recognized the place, though it was cold and bare and very different in appearance from what it had been on the summer’s evening when she had come into it with her father. That, in effect, had been her first glimpse of the world, and well she recalled the thrill it had given her. The joy of such



things was gone now, the rapture of holidays and new sights. These were over, so she told herself. Sorrow had quenched the thrills forever.

The kind conductor led her to the eating room, and when she would not eat his concern drew greater than ever. He took a strange interest in this young lady who had such a face and such eyes. He pointed her out to his friend the Truro conductor, and gave him some sandwiches and fruit which he himself had bought, with instructions to press them on her during the afternoon.



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Cynthia could not eat. She hated this place, with its memories. Hated it, too, as a mart where men were bought and sold, for the wording of those articles ran in her head as though some priest of evil were chanting them in her ears. She did not remember then the sweeter aspect of the old town, its pretty homes set among their shaded gardens—homes full of good and kindly people. State House affairs were far removed from most of these, and the sickness and corruption of the body politic. And this political corruption, had she known it, was no worse than that of the other states in the wide Union: not so bad, indeed, as many, though this was small comfort. No comfort at all to Cynthia, who did not think of it.

After a while she rose and followed the new conductor to the Truro train, glad to leave the capital behind her. She was going to the hills—to the mountains. They, in truth, could not change, though the seasons passed over them, hot and cold, wet and dry. They were immutable in their goodness. Presently she saw them, the lower ones: the waters of the little stream beside her broke the black bonds of ice and raced over the rapids; the engine was puffing and groaning on the grade. Then the sun crept out, slowly, from the indefinable margin of vapor that hung massed over the low country.

Yes, she had come to the hills. Up and up climbed the train, through the little white villages in the valley nooks, banked with whiter snow; through the narrow gorges,—sometimes hanging over them,—under steep granite walls seared with ice-filled cracks, their brows hung with icicles.

Truro Pass is not so high as the Brenner, but it has a grand, wild look in winter, remote as it is from the haunts of men. A fitting refuge, it might be, for a great spirit heavy with the sins of the world below. Such a place might have been chosen, in the olden time, for a monastery—a gray fastness built against the black forest over the crag looking down upon the green clumps of spruces against the snow. Some vague longing for such a refuge was in Cynthia's heart as she gazed upon that silent place, and then the waters had already begun to run westward—the waters of Tumble Down brook, which flowed into Coniston Water above Brampton. The sun still had more than two hours to go on its journey to the hill crests when the train pulled into Brampton station. There were but a few people on the platform, but the first face she saw as she stepped from the car was Lem Hallowell's. It was a very red face, as we know, and its owner was standing in front of the Coniston stage, on runners now. He stared at her for an instant, and no wonder, and then he ran forward with outstretched hands.

“Cynthy—Cynthy Wetherell!” he cried. “Great Godfrey!”

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He got so far, he seized her hands, and then he stopped, not knowing why. There were many more ejaculations and welcomes and what not on the end of his tongue. It was not that she had become a lady—a lady of a type he had never before seen. He meant to say that, too, in his own way, but he couldn't. And that transformation would have bothered Lem but little. What was the change, then? Why was he in awe of her—he, Lem Hallowell, who had never been in awe of any one? He shook his head, as though openly confessing his inability to answer that question. He wanted to ask others, but they would not come.

“Lem,” she said, “I am so glad you are here.”

“Climb right in, Cynthia. I'll get the trunk.” There it lay, the little rawhide one before him on the boards, and he picked it up in his bare hands as though it had been a paper parcel. It was a peculiarity of the stage driver that he never wore gloves, even in winter, so remarkable was the circulation of his blood. After the trunk he deposited, apparently with equal ease, various barrels and boxes, and then he jumped in beside Cynthia, and they drove down familiar Brampton Street, as wide as a wide river; past the meeting-house with the terraced steeple; past the postoffice,—Cousin Ephraim's postoffice,—where Lem gave her a questioning look—but she shook her head, and he did not wait for the distribution of the last mail that day; past the great mansion of Isaac D. Worthington, where the iron mastiffs on the lawn were up to their muzzles in snow. After that they took the turn to the right, which was the road to Coniston.

Well-remembered road, and in winter or summer, Cynthia knew every tree and farmhouse beside it. Now it consisted of two deep grooves in the deep snow; that was all, save for a curving turnout here and there for team to pass team. Well-remembered scene! How often had Cynthia looked upon it in happier days! Such a crust was on the snow as would bear a heavy man; and the pasture hillocks were like glazed cakes in the window of a baker's shop. Never had the western sky looked so yellow through the black columns of the pine trunks. A lonely, beautiful road it was that evening.

For a long time the silence of the great hills was broken only by the sweet jingle of the bells on the shaft. Many a day, winter and summer, Lem had gone that road alone, whistling, and never before heeding that silence. Now it seemed to symbolize a great sorrow: to be in subtle harmony with that of the girl at his side. What that sorrow was he could not guess. The good man yearned to comfort her, and yet he felt his comfort too humble to be noticed by such sorrow. He longed to speak, but for the first time in his life feared the sound of his own voice. Cynthia had not spoken since she left the station, had not looked at him, had not asked for the friends and neighbors whom she had loved so well—had not asked for Jethro! Was there any sorrow on earth to be felt like that? And was there one to feel it?

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At length, when they reached the great forest, Lem Hallowell knew that he must speak or cry aloud. But what would be the sound of his voice—after such an age of disuse? Could he speak at all? Broken and hoarse and hideous though the sound might be, he must speak. And hoarse and broken it was. It was not his own, but still it was a voice.

“Folks—folks’ll be surprised to see you, Cynthy.”

No, he had not spoken at all. Yes, he had, for she answered him.

“I suppose they will, Lem.”

“Mighty glad to have you back, Cynthy. We think a sight of you. We missed you.”

“Thank you, Lem.”

“Jethro hain’t lookin’ for you by any chance, be he?”

“No,” she said. But the question startled her. Suppose he had not been at home! She had never once thought of that. Could she have borne to wait for him?

After that Lem gave it up. He had satisfied himself as to his vocal powers, but he had not the courage even to whistle. The journey to Coniston was faster in the winter, and at the next turn of the road the little village came into view. There it was, among the snows. The pain in Cynthia’s heart, so long benumbed, quickened when she saw it. How write of the sharpness of that pain to those who have never known it? The sight of every gable brought its agony,—the store with the checker-paned windows, the harness shop, the meeting-house, the white parsonage on its little hill. Rias Richardson ran out of the store in his carpet slippers, bareheaded in the cold, and gave one shout. Lem heeded him not; did not stop there as usual, but drove straight to the tannery house and pulled up under the butternut tree. Milly Skinner ran out on the porch, and gave one long look, and cried:—

“Good Lord, it’s Cynthy!”

“Where’s Jethro?” demanded Lem.

Milly did not answer at once. She was staring at Cynthia.

“He’s in the tannery shed,” she said, “choppin’ wood.” But still she kept her eyes on Cynthia’s face. “I’ll fetch him.”

“No,” said Cynthia, “I’ll go to him there.”

She took the path, leaving Millicent with her mouth open, too amazed to speak again, and yet not knowing why.



In the tannery shed! Would Jethro remember what happened there almost six and thirty years before? Would he remember how that other Cynthia had come to him there, and what her appeal had been?

Cynthia came to the doors. One of these was open now—both had been closed that other evening against the storm of sleet—and she caught a glimpse of him standing on the floor of chips and bark—tan-bark no more. Cynthia caught a glimpse of him, and love suddenly welled up into her heart as waters into a spring after a drought. He had not seen her, not heard the sound of the sleigh-bells. He was standing with his foot upon the sawbuck and the saw across his knee, he was staring at the woodpile, and there was stamped upon his face a look which no man or woman had ever seen there, a look of utter loneliness and desolation, a look as of a soul condemned to wander forever through the infinite, cold spaces between the worlds—alone.



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Cynthia stopped at sight of it. What had been her misery and affliction compared to this? Her limbs refused her, though she knew not whether she would have fled or rushed into his arms. How long she stood thus, and he stood, may not be said, but at length he put down his foot and took the saw from his knee, his eyes fell upon her, and his lips spoke her name.

“Cynthy!”

Speechless, she ran to him and flung her arms about his neck, and he dropped the saw and held her tightly—even as he had held that other Cynthia in that place in the year gone by. And yet not so. Now he clung to her with a desperation that was terrible, as though to let go of her would be to fall into nameless voids beyond human companionship and love. But at last he did release her, and stood looking down into her face, as if seeking to read a sentence there.

And how was she to pronounce that sentence! Though her faith might be taken away, her love remained, and grew all the greater because he needed it. Yet she knew that no subterfuge or pretence would avail her to hide why she had come. She could not hide it. It must be spoken out now, though death was preferable.

And he was waiting. Did he guess? She could not tell. He had spoken no word but her name. He had expressed no surprise at her appearance, asked no reasons for it. Superlatives of suffering or joy or courage are hard to convey—words fall so far short of the feeling. And Cynthia’s pain was so far beyond tears.

“Uncle Jethro,” she said, “yesterday something—something happened. I could not stay in Boston any longer.”

He nodded.

“I had to come to you. I could not wait.”

He nodded again.

“I—I read something.” To take a white-hot iron and sear herself would have been easier than this.

“Yes,” he said.

She felt that the look was coming again—the look which she had surprised in his face. His hands dropped lifelessly from her shoulders, and he turned and went to the door, where he stood with his back to her, silhouetted against the eastern sky all pink from the reflection of sunset. He would not help her. Perhaps he could not. The things were true. There had been a grain of hope within her, ready to sprout.



“I read two articles from the Newcastle Guardian about you—about your life.”

“Yes,” he said. But he did not turn.

“How you had—how you had earned your living. How you had gained your power,” she went on, her pain lending to her voice an exquisite note of many modulations.

“Yes—Cynthy,” he said, and still stared at the eastern sky.

She took two steps toward him, her arms outstretched, her fingers opening and closing. And then she stopped.

“I would believe no one,” she said, “I will believe no one—until—unless you tell me. Uncle Jethro,” she cried in agony, “Uncle Jethro, tell me that those things are not true!”

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She waited a space, but he did not stir. There was no sound, save the song of Coniston Water under the shattered ice.

“Won’t you speak to me?” she whispered. “Won’t you tell me that they are not true?”

His shoulders shook convulsively. O for the right to turn to her and tell her that they were lies! He would have bartered his soul for it. What was all the power in the world compared to this priceless treasure he had lost? Once before he had cast it away, though without meaning to. Then he did not know the eternal value of love—of such love as those two women had given him. Now he knew that it was beyond value, the one precious gift of life, and the knowledge had come too late. Could he have saved his life if he had listened to that other Cynthia?

“Won’t you tell me that they are not true?”

Even then he did not turn to her, but he answered. Curious to relate, though his heart was breaking, his voice was steady—steady as it always had been.

“I—I’ve seen it comin’, Cynthy,” he said. “I never knowed anything I was afraid of before—but I was afraid of this. I knowed what your notions of right and wrong was—your—your mother had them. They’re the principles of good people. I—I knowed the day would come when you’d ask, but I wanted to be happy as long as I could. I hain’t been happy, Cynthy. But you was right when you said I’d tell you the truth. S-so I will. I guess them things which you speak about are true—the way I got where I am, and the way I made my livin’. They—they hain’t put just as they’d ought to be, perhaps, but that’s the way I done it in the main.”

It was thus that Jethro Bass met the supreme crisis of his life. And who shall say he did not meet it squarely and honestly? Few men of finer fibre and more delicate morals would have acquitted themselves as well. That was a Judgment Day for Jethro; and though he knew it not, he spoke through Cynthia to his Maker, confessing his faults freely and humbly, and dwelling on the justness of his punishment; putting not forward any good he may have done; nor thinking of it; nor seeking excuse because of the light that was in him. Had he been at death’s door in the face of nameless tortures, no man could have dragged such a confession from him. But a great love had been given him, and to that love he must speak the truth, even at the cost of losing it.

But he was not to lose it. Even as he was speaking a thrill of admiration ran through Cynthia, piercing her sorrow. The superb strength of the man was there in that simple confession, and it is in the nature of woman to admire strength. He had fought his fight, and gained, and paid the price without a murmur, seeking no palliation. Cynthia had not come to that trial—so bitter for her—as a judge. If the reader has seen youth and innocence sitting in the seat of justice, with age and experience at the bar, he has mistaken Cynthia. She came to Coniston inexorable, it is true, because hers was a



nature impelled to do right though it perish. She did not presume to say what Jethro's lights and opportunities might have been. Her own she knew, and by them she must act accordingly.



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When he had finished speaking, she stole silently to his side and slipped her hand in his. He trembled violently at her touch.

“Uncle Jethro,” she said in a low tone, “I love you.”

At the words he trembled more violently still.

“No, no, Cynthy,” he answered thickly, “don’t say that—I—I don’t expect it, Cynthy, I know you can’t—’twouldn’t be right, Cynthy. I hain’t fit for it.”

“Uncle Jethro,” she said, “I love you better than I have ever loved you in my life.”

Oh, how welcome were the tears! and how human! He turned, pitifully incredulous, wondering that she should seek by deceit to soften the blow; he saw them running down her cheeks, and he believed. Yes, he believed, though it seemed a thing beyond belief. Unworthy, unfit though he were, she loved him. And his own love as he gazed at her, sevenfold increased as it had been by the knowledge of losing her, changed in texture from homage to worship—nay, to adoration. His punishment would still be heavy; but whence had come such a wondrous gift to mitigate it?

“Oh, don’t you believe me?” she cried, “can’t you see that it is true?”

And yet he could only hold her there at arm’s length with that new and strange reverence in his face. He was not worthy to touch her, but still she loved him.

The flush had faded from the eastern sky, and the faintest border of yellow light betrayed the ragged outlines of the mountain as they walked together to the tannery house.

Millicent, in the kitchen, was making great preparations—for Millicent. Miss Skinner was a person who had hitherto laid it down as a principle of life to pay deference or do honor to no human made of mere dust, like herself. Millicent’s exception; if Cynthia had thought about it, was a tribute of no mean order. Cynthia, alas, did not think about it: she did not know that, in her absence, the fire had not been lighted in the evening, Jethro supping on crackers and milk and Milly partaking of the evening meal at home. Moreover, Miss Skinner had an engagement with a young man. Cynthia saw the fire, and threw off her sealskin coat which Mr. and Mrs. Merrill had given her for Christmas, and took down the saucepan from the familiar nail on which it hung. It was a miraculous fact, for which she did not attempt to account, that she was almost happy: happy, indeed, in comparison to that which had been her state since the afternoon before. Millicent snatched the saucepan angrily from her hand.

“What be you doin’, Cynthy?” she demanded.



Such was Miss Skinner's little way of showing deference. Though deference is not usually vehement, Miss Skinner's was very real, nevertheless.

"Why, Milly, what's the matter?" exclaimed Cynthia, in astonishment.

"You hain't a-goin' to do any cookin', that's all," said Milly, very red in the face.

"But I've always helped," said Cynthia. "Why not?"

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Why not? A tribute was one thing, but to have to put the reasons for that tribute, into words was quite another.

“Why not?” cried Milly, “because you hain’t a-goin’ to, that’s all.”

Strange deference! But Cynthia turned and looked at the girl with a little, sad smile of comprehension and affection. She took her by the shoulders and kissed her.

Whereupon a most amazing thing happened—Millicent burst into tears—wild, ungovernable tears they were.

“Because you hain’t a-goin’ to,” she repeated, her words interspersed with violent sobs. “You go ’way, Cynthia,” she cried, “git out!”

“Milly,” said Cynthia, shaking her head, “you ought to be ashamed of yourself.” But they were not words of reproof. She took a little lamp from the shelf, and went up the narrow stairs to her own room in the gable, where Lemuel had deposited the rawhide trunk.

Though she had had nothing all day, she felt no hunger, but for Milly’s sake she tried hard to eat the supper when it came. Before it had fairly begun Moses Hatch had arrived, with Amandy and Eben; and Rias Richardson came in, and other neighbors, to say a word of welcome to hear (if the truth be not too disparaging to their characters) the reasons for her sudden appearance, and such news of her Boston experiences as she might choose to give them. They had learned from Lem Hallowell that Cynthia had returned a lady: a real lady, not a sham one who relied on airs and graces, such as had come to Coniston the summer before to look for a summer place on the painter’s recommendation. Lem was not a gossip, in the disagreeable sense of the term, and he had not said a word to his neighbors of his feelings on that terrible drive from Brampton. Knowing that some blow had fallen upon Cynthia, he would have spared her these visits if he could. But Lem was wise and kind, so he merely said that she had returned a lady.

And they had found a lady. As they stood or sat around the kitchen (Eben and Rias stood), Cynthia talked to them—about Coniston: rather, be it said, that they talked about Coniston in answer to her questions. The sledding had been good; Moses had hauled so many thousand feet of lumber to Brampton; Sam Price’s woman (she of Harwich) had had a spell of sciatica; Chester Perkins’s bull had tossed his brother-in-law, come from lowy on a visit, and broke his leg; yes, Amandy guessed her dyspepsy was somewhat improved since she had tried Graham’s Golden Remedy—it made her feel real lighthearted; Eben (blushing furiously) was to have the Brook Farm in the spring; there was a case of spotted fever in Tarleton.

Yes, Lem Hallowell had been right, Cynthia was a lady, but not a mite stuck up. What was the difference in her? Not her clothes, which she wore as if she had been used to



them all her life. Poor Cynthia, the clothes were simple enough. Not her manner, which was as kind and sweet as ever. What was it that compelled their talk about themselves, that made them refrain from asking those questions about Boston, and why she had come back? Some such query was running in their minds as they talked, while Jethro, having finished his milk and crackers, sat silent at the end of the table with his eyes upon her. He rose when Mr. Satterlee came in.

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Mr. Satterlee looked at her, and then he went quietly across the room and kissed her. But then Mr. Satterlee was the minister. Cynthia thought his hair a little thinner and the lines in his face a little deeper. And Mr. Satterlee thought perhaps he was the only one of the visitors who guessed why she had come back. He laid his thin hand on her head, as though in benediction, and sat down beside her.

“And how is the learning, Cynthia?” he asked.

Now, indeed, they were going to hear something at last. An intuition impelled Cynthia to take advantage of that opportunity.

“The learning has become so great, Mr. Satterlee,” she said, “that I have come back to try to make some use of it. It shall be wasted no more.”

She did not dare to look at Jethro, but she was aware that he had sat down abruptly. What sacrifice will not a good woman make to ease the burden of those whom she loves! And Jethro’s burden would be heavy enough. Such a woman will speak almost gayly, though her heart be heavy. But Cynthia’s was lighter now than it had been.

“I was always sure you would not waste your learning, Cynthia,” said Mr. Satterlee, gravely; “that you would make the most of the advantages God has given you.”

“I am going to try, Mr. Satterlee. I cannot be content in idleness. I was wasting time in Boston, and I—I was not happy so far away from you all—from Uncle Jethro. Mr. Satterlee, I am going to teach school. I have always wanted to, and now I have made up my mind to do it.”

This was Jethro’s punishment. But had she not lightened it for him a little by choosing this way of telling him that she could not eat his bread or partake of his bounty? Though by reason of that bounty she was what she was, she could not live and thrive on it longer, coming as it did from such a source. Mr. Satterlee might perhaps surmise the truth, but the town and village would think her ambition a very natural one, certainly no better time could have been chosen to announce it.

“To teach school.” She was sure now that Mr. Satterlee knew and approved, and perceived something, at least, of her little ruse. He was a man whose talents fitted him for a larger flock than he had at Coniston, but he possessed neither the graces demanded of city ministers nor the power of pushing himself. Never was a more retiring man. The years she had spent in his study had not gone for nothing, for he who has cherished the bud can predict what the flower will be, and Mr. Satterlee knew her spiritually better than any one else in Coniston. He had heard of her return, and had walked over to the tannery house, full of fears, the remembrance of those expressions of simple faith in Jethro coming back to his mind. Had the revelation which he had so long expected come at last? and how had she taken it? would it embitter her? The

good man believed that it would not, and now he saw that it had not, and rejoiced accordingly.



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“To teach school,” he said. “I expected that you would wish to, Cynthia. It is a desire that most of us have, who like books and what is in them. I should have taught school if I had not become a minister. It is a high calling, and an absorbing one, to develop the minds of the young.” Mr. Satterlee was often a little discursive, though there was reason for it on this occasion, and Moses Hatch half closed his eyes and bowed his head a little out of sheer habit at the sound of the minister’s voice. But he raised it suddenly at the next words. “I was in Brampton yesterday, and saw Mr. Graves, who is on the prudential committee of that district. You may not have heard that Miss Goddard has left. They have not yet succeeded in filling her place, and I think it more than likely that you can get it.”

Cynthia glanced at Jethro, but the habit of years was so strong in him that he gave no sign.

“Do you think so, Mr. Satterlee?” she said gratefully. “I had heard of the place, and hoped for it, because it is near enough for me to spend the Saturdays and Sundays with Uncle Jethro. And I meant to go to Brampton tomorrow to see about it.”

“I will go with you,” said the minister; “I have business in Brampton to-morrow.” He did not mention that this was the business.

When at length they had all departed, Jethro rose and went about the house making fast the doors, as was his custom, while Cynthia sat staring through the bars at the dying embers in the stove. He knew now, and it was inevitable that he should know, what she had made up her mind to do. It had been decreed that she, who owed him everything, should be made to pass this most dreadful of censures upon his whole life. Oh, the cruelty of that decree!

How, she mused, would it affect him? Had the blow been so great that he would relinquish those practices which had become a lifelong habit with him? Would he (she caught her breath at this thought) would he abandon that struggle with Isaac D. Worthington in which he was striving to maintain the mastery of the state by those very practices? Cynthia hated Mr. Worthington. The term is not too strong, and it expresses her feeling. But she would have got down on her knees on the board floor of the kitchen that very night and implored Jethro to desist from that contest, if she could. She remembered how, in her innocence, she had believed that the people had given Jethro his power,—in those days when she was so proud of that very power,—now she knew that he had wrested it from them. What more supreme sacrifice could he make than to relinquish it! Ah, there was a still greater sacrifice that Jethro was to make, had she known it.

He came and stood over her by the stove, and she looked up into his face with these yearnings in her eyes. Yes, she would have thrown herself on her knees, if she could. But she could not. Perhaps he would abandon that struggle. Perhaps—perhaps his

heart was broken. And could a man with a broken heart still fight on? She took his hand and pressed it against her face, and he felt that it was wet with her tears.



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“B-better go to bed now, Cynthy,” he said; “m-must be worn out—m-must be worn out.”

He stooped and kissed her on the forehead. It was thus that Jethro Bass accepted his sentence.

CHAPTER XIII

At sunrise, in that Coniston hill-country, it is the western hills which are red; and a distant hillock on the meadow farm which was soon to be Eden's looked like the daintiest conical cake with pink icing as Cynthia surveyed the familiar view the next morning. There was the mountain, the pastures on the lower slopes all red, too, and higher up the dark masses of bristling spruce and pine and hemlock mottled with white where the snow-covered rocks showed through.

Sunrise in January is not very early, and sunrise at any season is not early for Coniston. Cynthia sat at her window, and wondered whether that beautiful landscape would any longer be hers. Her life had grown up on it; but now her life had changed. Would the beauty be taken from it, too? Almost hungrily she gazed at the scene. She might look upon it again—many times, perhaps—but a conviction was strong in her that its daily possession would now be only a memory.

Mr. Satterlee was as good as his word, for he was seated in the stage when it drew up at the tannery house, ready to go to Brampton. And as they drove away Cynthia took one last look at Jethro standing on the porch. It seemed to her that it had been given her to feel all things, and to know all things: to know, especially, this strange man, Jethro Bass, as none other knew him, and to love him as none other loved him. The last severe wrench was come, and she had left him standing there alone in the cold, divining what was in his heart as though it were in her own. How worthless was this mighty power which he had gained, how hateful, when he could not bestow the smallest fragment of it upon one whom he loved? Someone has described hell as disqualification in the face of opportunity. Such was Jethro's torment that morning as he saw her drive away, the minister in the place where he should have been, at her side, and he, Jethro Bass, as helpless as though he had indeed been in the pit among the flames. Had the prudential committee at Brampton promised the appointment ten times over, he might still have obtained it for her by a word. And he must not speak even that word. Who shall say that a large part of the punishment of Jethro Bass did not come to him in the life upon this earth.

Some such thoughts were running in Cynthia's head as they jingled away to Brampton that dazzling morning. Perhaps the stage driver, too, who knew something of men and things and who meddled not at all, had made a guess at the situation. He thought that Cynthia's spirits seemed lightened a little, and he meant to lighten them more; so he

joked as much as his respect for his passengers would permit, and told the news of Brampton. Not the least of the

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news concerned the first citizen of that place. There was a certain railroad in the West which had got itself much into Congress, and much into the newspapers, and Isaac D. Worthington had got himself into that railroad: was gone West, it was said on that business, and might not be back for many weeks. And Lem Hallowell remembered when Mr. Worthington was a slim-cheated young man wandering up and down Coniston Water in search of health. Good Mr. Satterlee, thinking this a safe subject, allowed himself to be led into a discussion of the first citizen's career, which indeed had something fascinating in it.

Thus they jingled into Brampton Street and stopped before the cottage of Judge Graves—a courtesy title. The judge himself came to the door and bestowed a pronounced bow on the minister, for Mr. Satterlee was honored in Brampton. Just think of what Ezra Graves might have looked like, and you have him. He greeted Cynthia, too, with a warm welcome—for Ezra Graves,—and ushered them into a best parlor which was reserved for ministers and funerals and great occasions in general, and actually raised the blinds. Then Mr. Satterlee, with much hemming and hawing, stated the business which had brought them, while Cynthia looked out of the window.

Mr. Graves sat and twirled his lean thumbs. He went so far as to say that he admired a young woman who scorned to live in idleness, who wished to impart the learning with which she had been endowed. Fifteen applicants were under consideration for the position, and the prudential committee had so far been unable to declare that any of them were completely qualified. (It was well named, that prudential committee?) Mr. Graves, furthermore, volunteered that he had expressed a wish to Colonel Prescott (Oh, Ephraim, you too have got a title with your new honors!), to Colonel Prescott and others, that Miss Wetherell might take the place. The middle term opened on the morrow, and Miss Bruce, of the Worthington Free Library, had been induced to teach until a successor could be appointed, although it was most inconvenient for Miss Bruce.

Could Miss Wetherell start in at once, provided the committee agreed? Cynthia replied that she would like nothing better. There would be an examination before Mr. Errol, the Brampton Superintendent of Schools. In short, owing to the pressing nature of the occasion, the judge would take the liberty of calling the committee together immediately. Would Mr. Satterlee and Miss Wetherell make themselves at home in the parlor?

It very frequently happens that one member of a committee is the brain, and the other members form the body of it. It was so in this case. Ezra Graves typified all of prudence there was about it, which, it must be admitted, was a great deal. He it was who had weighed in the balance the fifteen applicants and found them wanting. Another member of the committee was that comfortable Mr. Dodd, with the tuft of yellow beard, the hardware dealer whom we have

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seen at the baseball game. Mr. Dodd was not a person who had opinions unless they were presented to him from certain sources, and then he had been known to cling to them tenaciously. It is sufficient to add that, when Cynthia Wetherell's name was mentioned to him, he remembered the girl to whom Bob Worthington had paid such marked attentions on the grand stand. He knew literally nothing else about Cynthia. Judge Graves, apparently, knew all about her; this was sufficient, at that time, for Mr. Dodd; he was sick and tired of the whole affair, and if, by the grace of heaven, an applicant had been sent who conformed with Judge Graves's multitude of requirements, he was devoutly thankful. The other member, Mr. Hill, was a feed and lumber dealer, and not a very good one, for he was always in difficulties; certain scholarly attainments were attributed to him, and therefore he had been put on the committee. They met in Mr. Dodd's little office back of the store, and in five minutes Cynthia was a schoolmistress, subject to examination by Mr. Errol.

Just a word about Mr. Errol. He was a retired lawyer, with some means, who took an interest in town affairs to occupy his time. He had a very delicate wife, whom he had been obliged to send South at the beginning of the winter. There she had for a while improved, but had been taken ill again, and two days before Cynthia's appointment he had been summoned to her bedside by a telegram. Cynthia could go into the school, and her examination would take place when Mr. Errol returned.

All this was explained by the judge when, half an hour after he had left them, he returned to the best parlor. Miss Wetherell would, then, be prepared to take the school the following morning. Whereupon the judge shook hands with her, and did not deny that he had been instrumental in the matter.

"And, Mr. Satterlee, I am so grateful to you," said Cynthia, when they were in the street once more.

"My dear Cynthia, I did nothing," answered the minister, quite bewildered by the quick turn affairs had taken; "it is your own good reputation that got you the place."

Nevertheless Mr. Satterlee had done his share in the matter. He had known Mr. Graves for a long time, and better than any other person in Brampton. Mr. Graves remembered Cynthia Ware, and indeed had spoken to Cynthia that day about her mother. Mr. Graves had also read poor William Wetherell's contributions to the Newcastle Guardian, and he had not read that paper since they had ceased. From time to time Mr. Satterlee had mentioned his pupil to the judge, whose mind had immediately flown to her when the vacancy occurred. So it all came about.

"And now," said Mr. Satterlee, "what will you do, Cynthia? We've got the good part of a day to arrange where you will live, before the stage returns."



“I won’t go back to-night, I think,” said Cynthia, turning her head away; “if you would be good enough to tell Uncle Jethro to send my trunk and some other things.”



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"Perhaps that is just as well," assented the minister, understanding perfectly. "I have thought that Miss Bruce might be glad to board you," he continued, after a pause. "Let us go to see her."

"Mr. Satterlee," said Cynthia, "would you mind if we went first to see Cousin Ephraim?"

"Why, of course, we must see Ephraim," said Mr. Satterlee, briskly. So they walked on past the mansion of the first citizen, and the new block of stores which the first citizen had built, to the old brick building which held the Brampton post-office, and right through the door of the partition into the sanctum of the postmaster himself, which some one had nicknamed the Brampton Club. On this occasion the postmaster was seated in his shirt sleeves by the stove, alone, his listeners being conspicuously absent. Cynthia, who had caught a glimpse of him through the little mail-window, thought he looked very happy and comfortable.

"Great Tecumseh!" he cried,—an exclamation he reserved for extraordinary occasions, "if it hain't Cynthy!"

He started to hobble toward her, but Cynthia ran to him.

"Why," said he, looking at her closely after the greeting was over, "you be changed, Cynthy. Mercy, I don't know as I'd have dared done that if I'd seed you first. What have you b'en doin' to yourself? You must have seed a whole lot down there in Boston. And you're a full-blown lady, too."

"Oh, no, I'm not, Cousin Eph," she answered, trying to smile.

"Yes, you be," he insisted, still scrutinizing her, vainly trying to account for the change. Tact, as we know, was not Ephraim's strong point. Now he shook his head. "You always was beyond me. Got a sort of air about you, and it grows on you, too. Wouldn't be surprised," he declared, speaking now to the minister, "wouldn't be a mite surprised to see her in the White House, some day."

"Now, Cousin Eph," said Cynthia, coloring a little, "you mustn't talk nonsense. What have you done with your coat? You have no business to go without it with your rheumatism."

"It hain't b'en so bad since Uncle Sam took me over again, Cynthy," he answered, "with nothin' to do but sort letters in a nice hot room." The room was hot, indeed. "But where did you come from?"

"I grew tired of being taught, Cousin Eph. I—I've always wanted to teach. Mr. Satterlee has been with me to see Mr. Graves, and they've given me Miss Goddard's place. I'm coming to Brampton to live, to-day."



“Great Tecumseh!” exclaimed Ephraim again, overpowered by the yews. “I want to know! What does Jethro say to that?”

“He—he is willing,” she replied in a low voice.

“Well,” said Ephraim, “I always thought you’d come to it. It’s in the blood, I guess—teachin’. Your mother had it too. I’m kind of sorry for Jethro, though, so I be. But I’m glad for myself, Cynthy. So you’re comin’ to Brampton to live with me!”



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"I was going to ask Miss Bruce to take me in," said Cynthia.

"No you hain't, anything of the kind," said Ephraim, indignantly. "I've got a little house up the street, and a room all ready for you."

"Will you let me share expenses, Cousin Eph?"

"I'll let you do anything you want," said he, "so's you come. Don't you think she'd ought to come and take care of an old man, Mr. Satterlee?"

Mr. Satterlee turned. He had been contemplating, during this conversation, a life-size print of General Grant under two crossed flags, that was hung conspicuously on the wall.

"I do not think you could do better, Cynthia," he answered, smiling. The minister liked Ephraim, and he liked a little joke, occasionally. He felt that one would not be, particularly out of place just now; so he repeated, "I do not think you could do better than to accept the offer of Colonel Prescott."

Ephraim grew very red, as was his wont when twitted about his new title. He took things literally.

"I hain't a colonel, no more than you be, Mr. Satterlee. But the boys down here will have it so."

Three days later, by the early train which leaves the state capital at an unheard-of hour in the morning, a young man arrived in Brampton. His jaw seemed squarer than ever to the citizens who met the train out of curiosity, and to Mr. Dodd, who was expecting a pump; and there was a set look on his face like that of a man who is going into a race or a fight. Mr. Dodd, though astonished, hastened toward him.

"Well, this is unexpected, Bob," said he. "How be you? Harvard College failed up?"

For Mr. Dodd never let slip a chance to assure a member of the Worthington family of his continued friendship.

"How are you, Mr. Dodd?" answered Bob, nodding at him carelessly, and passing on. Mr. Dodd did not dare to follow. What was young Worthington doing in Brampton, and his father in the West on that railroad business? Filled with curiosity, Mr. Dodd forgot his pump, but Bob was already striding into Brampton Street, carrying his bag. If he had stopped for a few moments with the hardware dealer, or chatted with any of the dozen people who bowed and stared at him, he might have saved himself a good deal of trouble. He turned in at the Worthington mansion, and rang the bell, which was answered by Sarah, the housemaid.



“Mr. Bob!” she exclaimed.

“Where’s Mrs. Holden?” he asked.

Mrs. Holden was the elderly housekeeper. She had gone, unfortunately, to visit a bereaved relative; unfortunately for Bob, because she, too, might have told him something.

“Get me some breakfast, Sarah. Anything,” he commanded, “and tell Silas to hitch up the black trotters to my cutter.”

Sarah, though in consternation, did as she was bid. The breakfast was forthcoming, and in half an hour Silas had the black trotters at the door. Bob got in without a word, seized the reins, the cutter flew down Brampton Street (observed by many of the residents thereof) and turned into the Coniston road. Silas said nothing. Silas, as a matter of fact, never did say anything. He had been the Worthington coachman for five and twenty years, and he was known in Brampton as Silas the Silent. Young Mr. Worthington had no desire to talk that morning.



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The black trotters covered the ten miles in much quicker time than Lem Hallowell could do it in his stage, but the distance seemed endless to Bob. It was not much more than half an hour after he had left Brampton Street, however, that he shot past the store, and by the time Rias Richardson in his carpet slippers reached the platform the cutter was in front of the tannery house, and the trotters, with their sides smoking, were pawing up the snow under the butternut tree.

Bob leaped out, hurried up the path, and knocked at the door. It was opened by Jethro Bass himself!

“How do you do, Mr. Bass,” said the young man, gravely, and he held out his hand. Jethro gave him such a scrutinizing look as he had given many a man whose business he cared to guess, but Bob looked fearlessly into his eyes. Jethro took his hand.

“C-come in,” he said.

Bob went into that little room where Jethro and Cynthia had spent so many nights together, and his glance flew straight to the picture on the wall,—the portrait of Cynthia Wetherell in crimson and seed pearls, so strangely set amidst such surroundings. His glance went to the portrait, and his feet followed, as to a lodestone. He stood in front of it for many minutes, in silence, and Jethro watched him. At last he turned.

“Where is she?” he asked.

It was a queer question, and Jethro’s answer was quite as lacking in convention.

“G-gone to Brampton—gone to Brampton.”

“Gone to Brampton! Do you mean to say—? What is she doing there?” Bob demanded.

“Teachin’ school,” said Jethro; “g-got Miss Goddard’s place.”

Bob did not reply for a moment. The little schoolhouse was the only building in Brampton he had glanced at as he came through. Mrs. Merrill had told him that she might take that place, but he had little imagined she was already there on her platform facing the rows of shining little faces at the desks. He had deemed it more than possible that he might see Jethro at Coniston, but he had not taken into account that which he might say to him. Bob had, indeed, thought of nothing but Cynthia, and of the blow that had fallen upon her. He had tried to realize the, multiple phases of the situation which confronted him. Here was the man who, by the conduct of his life, had caused the blow; he, too, was her benefactor; and again, this same man was engaged in the bitterest of conflicts with his father, Isaac D. Worthington, and it was this conflict which had precipitated that blow. Bob could not have guessed, by looking at Jethro Bass, how great was the sorrow which had fallen upon him. But Bob knew that Jethro



hated his father, must hate him now, because of Cynthia, with a hatred given to few men to feel. He thought that Jethro would crush Mr. Worthington and ruin him if he could; and Bob believed he could.

What was he to say? He did not fear Jethro, for Bob Worthington had courage enough; but these things were running in his mind, and he felt the power of the man before him, as all men did. Bob went to the window and came back again. He knew that he must speak.

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“Mr. Bass,” he said at last, “did Cynthia ever mention me to you?”

“No,” said Jethro.

“Mr. Bass, I love her. I have told her so, and I have asked her to be my wife.”

There was no need, indeed, to have told Jethro this. The shock of that revelation had come to him when he had seen the trotters, had been confirmed when the young man had stood before the portrait. Jethro’s face might have twitched when Bob stood there with his back to him.

Jethro could not speak. Once more there had come to him a moment when he would not trust his voice to ask a question. He dreaded the answer, though none might have surmised this. He knew Cynthia. He knew that, when she had given her heart, it was for all time. He dreaded the answer; because it might mean that her sorrow was doubled.

“I believe,” Bob continued painfully, seeing that Jethro would say nothing, “I believe that Cynthia loves me. I should not dare to say it or to hope it, without reason. She has not said so, but—” the words were very hard for him, yet he stuck manfully to the truth; “but she told me to write to my father and let him know what I had done, and not to come back to her until I had his answer. This,” he added, wondering that a man could listen to such a thing without a sign, “this was before—before she had any idea of coming home.”

Yes, Cynthia, did love him. There was no doubt about it in Jethro’s mind. She would not have bade Bob write to his father if she had not loved him. Still Jethro did not speak, but by some intangible force compelled Bob to go on.

“I shall write to my father as soon as he comes back from the West, but I wish to say to you, Mr. Bass, that whatever his answer contains, I mean to marry Cynthia. Nothing can shake me from that resolution. I tell you this because my father is fighting you, and you know what he will say.” (Jethro knew Dudley Worthington well enough to appreciate that this would make no particular difference in his opposition to the marriage except to make that opposition more vehement.) “And because you do not know me,” continued Bob. “When I say a thing, I mean it. Even if my father cuts me off and casts me out, I will marry Cynthia. Good-by, Mr. Bass.”

Jethro took the young man’s hand again. Bob imagined that he even pressed it—a little—something he had never done before.

“Good-by, Bob.”

Bob got as far as the door.



“Er—go back to Harvard, Bob?”

“I intend to, Mr. Bass.”

“Er—Bob?”

“Yes?”

“D-don’t quarrel with your father—don’t quarrel with your father.”

“I shan’t be the one to quarrel, Mr. Bass.”

“Bob—hain’t you pretty young—pretty young?”

“Yes,” said Bob, rather unexpectedly, “I am.” Then he added, “I know my own mind.”

“P-pretty young. Don’t want to get married yet awhile—do you?”

“Yes, I do,” said Bob, “but I suppose I shan’t be able to.”

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“Er—wait awhile, Bob. Go back to Harvard. W-wouldn’t write that letter if I was you.”

“But I will. I’ll not have him think I’m ashamed of what I’ve done. I’m proud of it, Mr. Bass.”

In the eyes of Coniston, which had been waiting for his reappearance, Bob Worthington jumped into the sleigh and drove off. He left behind him Jethro Bass, who sat in his chair the rest of the morning with his head bent in revery so deep that Millicent had to call him twice to his simple dinner. Bob left behind him, too, a score of rumors, sprung full grown into life with his visit. Men and women an incredible distance away heard them in an incredible time: those in the village found an immediate pretext for leaving their legitimate occupation and going to the store, and a gathering was in session there when young Mr. Worthington drove past it on his way back. Bob thought little about the rumors, and not thinking of them it did not occur to him that they might affect Cynthia. The only person then in Coniston whom he thought about was Jethro Bass. Bob decided that his liking for Jethro had not diminished, but rather increased; he admired Jethro for the advice he had given, although he did not mean to take it. And for the first time he pitied him.

Bob did not know that rumor, too, was spreading in Brampton. He had his dinner in the big walnut dining room all alone, and after it he smoked his father’s cigars and paced up and down the big hall, watching the clock. For he could not go to her in the school hours. At length he put on his hat and hurried out, crossing the park-like enclosure in the middle of the street; bowed at by Mr. Dodd, who always seemed to be on hand, and others, and nodding absently in return. Concealment was not in Bob Worthington’s nature. He reached the post-office, where the partition door was open, and he walked right into a comparatively full meeting of the Brampton Club. Ephraim sat in their midst, and for once he was not telling war stories. He was silent. And the others fell suddenly silent, too, at Bob’s entrance.

“How do you do, Mr. Prescott?” he said, as Ephraim struggled to his feet. “How is the rheumatism?”

“How be you, Mr. Worthington?” said Ephraim; “this is a kind of a surprise, hain’t it?” Ephraim was getting used to surprises. “Well, it is good-natured of you to come in and shake hands with an old soldier.”

“Don’t mention it, Mr. Prescott,” answered honest Bob, a little abashed, “I should have done so anyway, but the fact is, I wanted to speak to you a moment in private.”

“Certain,” said Ephraim, glancing helplessly around him, “jest come out front.” That space, where the public were supposed to be, was the only private place in the Brampton post-office. But the members of the Brampton Club could take a hint, and

with one consent began to make excuses. Bob knew them all from boyhood and spoke to them all. Some of them ventured to ask him if Harvard had bust up.



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“Where does Cynthia-live?” he demanded, coming straight to the point.

Ephraim stared at him for a moment in a bewildered fashion, and then a light began to dawn on him.

“Lives with me,” he answered. He was quite as ashamed, for Bob’s sake, as if he himself had asked the question, and he went on talking to cover that embarrassment. “It’s made some difference, too, sence she come. House looks like a different place. Afore she, come I cooked with a kit, same as I used to in the harness shop. I l’arned it in the army. Cynthy’s got a stove.”

It was not the way Ephraim would have gone about a love affair, had he had one. Sam Price’s were the approved methods in that section of the country, though Sam had overdone them somewhat. It was an unheard-of thing to ask a man right out like that where a girl lived.

“Much obliged,” said Bob, and was gone. Ephraim raised his hands in despair, and hobbled to the little window to get a last look at him. Where were the proprieties in these days? The other aspect of the affair, what Mr. Worthington would think of it when he returned, did not occur to the innocent mind of the old soldier until people began to talk about it that afternoon. Then it worried him into another attack of rheumatism.

Half of Brampton must have seen Bob Worthington march up to the little yellow house which Ephraim had rented from John Billings. It had four rooms around the big chimney in the middle, and that was all. Simple as it was, an architect would have said that its proportions were nearly perfect. John Billings had it from his Grandfather Post, who built it, and though Brampton would have laughed at the statement, Isaac D. Worthington’s mansion was not to be compared with it for beauty. The old cherry furniture was still in it, and the old wall papers and the panelling in the little room to the right which Cynthia had made into a sitting room.

Half of Brampton, too, must have seen Cynthia open the door and Bob walk into the entry. Then the door was shut. But it had been held open for an appreciable time, however,—while you could count twenty,—because Cynthia had not the power to close it. For a while she could only look into his eyes, and he into hers. She had not seen him coming, she had but answered the knock. Then, slowly, the color came into her cheeks, and she knew that she was trembling from head to foot.

“Cynthia,” he said, “mayn’t I come in?”

She did not answer, for fear her voice would tremble, too. And she could not send him away in the face of all Brampton. She opened the door a little wider, a very little, and he went in. Then she closed it, and for a moment they stood facing each other in the entry, which was lighted only by the fan-light over the door, Cynthia with her back against the



wall. He spoke her name again, his voice thick with the passion which had overtaken him like a flood at the sight of her—a passion to seize her in his arms, and cherish and comfort and protect her forever and ever. All this he felt and more as he looked into her face and saw the traces of her great sorrow there. He had not thought that that face could be more beautiful in its strength and purity, but it was even so.



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“Cynthia-my love!” he cried, and raised his arms. But a look as of a great fear came into her eyes, which for one exquisite moment had yielded to his own; and her breath came quickly, as though she were spent—as indeed she was. So far spent that the wall at her back was grateful.

“No!” she said; “no—you must not—you must not—you must not!” Again and again she repeated the words, for she could summon no others. They were a mandate—had he guessed it—to herself as to him. For the time her brain refused its functions, and she could think of nothing but the fact that he was there, beside her, ready to take her in his arms. How she longed to fly into them, none but herself knew—to fly into them as into a refuge secure against the evil powers of the world. It was not reason that restrained her then, but something higher in her, that restrained him likewise. Without moving from the wall she pushed open the door of the sitting room.

“Go in there,” she said.

He went in as she bade him and stood before the flickering logs in the wide and shallow chimney-place—logs that seemed to burn on the very hearth itself, and yet the smoke rose unerring into the flue. No stove had ever desecrated that room. Bob looked into the flames and waited, and Cynthia stood in the entry fighting this second great battle which had come upon her while her forces were still spent with that other one. Woman in her very nature is created to be sheltered and protected; and the yearning in her, when her love is given, is intense as nature itself to seek sanctuary in that love. So it was with Cynthia leaning against the entry wall, her arms full length in front of her, and her hands clasped as she prayed for strength to withstand the temptation. At last she grew calmer, though her breath still came deeply, and she went into the sitting room.

Perhaps he knew, vaguely, why she had not followed him at once. He had grown calmer himself, calmer with that desperation which comes to a man of his type when his soul and body are burning with desire for a woman. He knew that he would have to fight for her with herself. He knew now that she was too strong in her position to be carried by storm, and the interval had given him time to collect himself. He did not dare at first to look up from the logs, for fear he should forget himself and be defeated instantly.

“I have been to Coniston, Cynthia,” he said.

“Yes.”

“I have been to Coniston this morning, and I have seen Mr. Bass, and I have told him that I love you, and that I will never give you up. I told you so in Boston, Cynthia,” he said; “I knew that this this trouble would come to you. I would have given my life to have saved you from it—from the least part of it. I would have given my life to have been able to say ‘it shall not touch you.’ I saw it flowing in like a great sea between you

and me, and yet I could not tell you of it. I could not prepare you for it. I could only tell you that I would never give you up, and I can only repeat that now.”



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“You must, Bob,” she answered, in a voice so low that it was almost a whisper; “you must give me up.”

“I would not,” he said, “I would not if the words were written on all the rocks of Coniston Mountain. I love you.”

“Hush,” she said gently. “I have to say some things to you. They will be very hard to say, but you must listen to them.”

“I will listen,” he said doggedly; “but they will not affect my determination.”

“I am sure you do not wish to drive me away from Brampton,” she continued, in the same low voice, “when I have found a place to earn my living near-near Uncle Jethro.”

These words told him all he had suspected—almost as much as though he had been present at the scene in the tannery shed in Coniston. She knew now the life of Jethro Bass, but he was still “Uncle Jethro” to her. It was even as Bob had supposed,—that her affection once given could not be taken away.

“Cynthia,” he said, “I would not by an act or a word annoy or trouble you. If you bade me, I would go to the other side of the world to-morrow. You must know that. But I should come back again. You must know, that, too. I should come back again for you.”

“Bob,” she said again, and her voice faltered a very little now, “you must know that I can never be your wife.”

“I do not know it,” he exclaimed, interrupting her vehemently, “I will not know it.”

“Think,” she said, “think! I must say what I, have to say, however it hurts me. If it had not been for—for your father, those things never would have been written. They were in his newspaper, and they express his feelings toward—toward Uncle Jethro.”

Once the words were out, she marvelled that she had found the courage to pronounce them.

“Yes,” he said, “yes, I know that, but listen—”

“Wait,” she went on, “wait until I have finished. I am not speaking of the pain I had when I read these things, I—I am not speaking of the truth that may be in them—I have learned from them what I should have known before, and felt, indeed, that your father will never consent to—to a marriage between us.”

“And if he does not,” cried Bob, “if he does not, do you think that I will abide by what he says, when my life’s happiness depends upon you, and my life’s welfare? I know that you are a good woman, and a true woman, that you will be the best wife any man could



have. Though he is my father, he shall not deprive me of my soul, and he shall not take my life away from me.”

As Cynthia listened she thought that never had words sounded sweeter than these—no, and never would again. So she told herself as she let them run into her heart to be stored among the treasures there. She believed in his love—believed in it now with all her might. (Who, indeed, would not?) She could not demean herself now by striving to belittle it or doubt its continuance, as she had in Boston. He was young, yes; but he would never be any older than this, could never love again like this. So much was given her, ought she not to be content? Could she expect more?



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She understood Isaac Worthington, now, as well as his son understood him. She knew that, if she were to yield to Bob Worthington, his father would disown and disinherit him. She looked ahead into the years as a woman will, and allowed herself for the briefest of moments to wonder whether any happiness could thrive in spite of the violence of that schism—any happiness for him. She would be depriving him of his birthright, and it may be that those who are born without birthrights often value them the most. Cynthia saw these things, and more, for those who sit at the feet of sorrow soon learn the world's ways. She saw herself pointed out as the woman whose designs had beggared and ruined him in his youth, and (agonizing and revolting thought!) the name of one would be spoken from whom she had learned such craft. Lest he see the scalding tears in her eyes, she turned away and conquered them. What could she do? Where should she hide her love that it might not be seen of men? And how, in truth, could she tell him these things?

“Cynthia,” he went on, seeing that she did not answer, and taking heart, “I will not say a word against my father. I know you would not respect me if I did. We are different, he and I, and find happiness in different ways.” Bob wondered if his father had ever found it. “If I had never met you and loved you, I should have refused to lead the life my father wishes me to lead. It is not in me to do the things he will ask. I shall have to carve out my own life, and I feel that I am as well able to do it as he was. Percy Broke, a classmate of mine and my best friend, has a position for me in a locomotive works in which his father is largely interested. We are going in together, the day after we graduate; it is all arranged, and his father has agreed. I shall work very hard, and in a few years, Cynthia, we shall be together, never to part again. Oh, Cynthia,” he cried, carried away by the ecstasy of this dream which he had, summoned up, “why do you resist me? I love you as no man has ever loved,” he exclaimed, with scornful egotism and contempt of those who had made the world echo with that cry through the centuries, “and you love me! Ah, do you think I do not see it—cannot feel it? You love me—tell me so.”

He was coming toward her, and how was she to prevent his taking her by storm? That was his way, and well she knew it. In her dreams she had felt herself lifted and borne off, breathless in his arms, to Elysium. Her breath was going now, her strength was going, and yet she made him pause by the magic of a word. A concession was in that word, but one could not struggle so piteously and concede nothing.

“Bob,” she said, “do you love me?”

Love her! If there was a love that acknowledged no bounds, that was confined by no superlatives, it was his. He began to speak, but she interrupted him with a wild passion that was new to her. As he sat in the train on his way back to Cambridge through the darkening afternoon, the note of it rang in his ears and gave him hope—yes, and through many months afterward.



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“If you love me I beg, I implore, I beseech you in the name of that love—for your, sake and my sake, to leave me. Oh, can you not see why you must go?”

He stopped, even as he had before in the parlor in Mount Vernon Street. He could but stop in the face of such an appeal—and yet the blood beat in his head with a mad joy.

“Tell me that you love me,—once,” he cried,—“once, Cynthia.”

“Do-do not ask me,” she faltered. “Go.”

Her words were a supplication, not a command. And in that they were a supplication he had gained a victory. Yes, though she had striven with all her might to deny, she had bade him hope. He left her without so much as a touch of the hand, because she had wished it. And yet she loved him! Incredible fact! Incredible conjury which made him doubt that his feet touched the snow of Brampton Street, which blotted, as with a golden glow, the faces and the houses of Brampton from his sight. He saw no one, though many might have accosted him. That part of him which was clay, which performed the menial tasks of his being, had kindly taken upon itself to fetch his bag from the house to the station, and to board the train.

Ah, but Brampton had seen him!

CHAPTER XIV

Great events, like young Mr. Worthington’s visit to Brampton, are all very well for a while, but they do not always develop with sufficient rapidity to satisfy the audiences of the drama. Seven days were an interlude quite long enough in which to discuss every phase and bearing of this opening scene, and after that the play in all justice ought to move on. But there it halted—for a while—and the curtain obstinately refused to come up. If the inhabitants of Brampton had only known that the drama, when it came, would be well worth waiting for, they might have been less restless.

It is unnecessary to enrich the pages of this folio with all the footnotes and remarks of, the sages of Brampton. These can be condensed into a paragraph of two—and we can ring up the curtain when we like on the next scene, for which Brampton had to wait considerably over a month. There is to be no villain in this drama with the face of an Abbe Maury like the seven cardinal sins. Comfortable looking Mr. Dodd of the prudential committee, with his chin-tuft of yellow beard, is cast for the part of the villain, but will play it badly; he would have been better suited to a comedy part.

Young Mr. Worthington left Brampton on the five o’clock train, and at six Mr. Dodd met his fellow-member of the committee, Judge Graves.

“Called a meetin’?” asked Mr. Dodd, pulling the yellow tuft.



“What for?” said the judge, sharply.

“What be you a-goin’ to do about it?” said Mr. Dodd.

“Do about what?” demanded the judge, looking at the hardware dealer from under his eyebrows.

Mr. Dodd knew well enough that this was not ignorance on the part of Mr. Graves, whose position in the matter had been very well defined in the two sentences he had spoken. Mr. Dodd perceived that the judge was trying to get him to commit himself, and would then proceed to annihilate him. He, Levi Dodd, had no intention of walking into such a trap.

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“Well,” said he, with a final tug at the tuft, “if that’s the way you feel about it.”

“Feel about what?” said the judge, fiercely.

“Callate you know best,” said Mr. Dodd, and passed on up the street. But he felt the judge’s gimlet eyes boring holes in his back. The judge’s position was very fine, no doubt for the judge. All of which tends to show that Levi Dodd had swept his mind, and that it was ready now for the reception of an opinion.

Six weeks or more, as has been said, passed before the curtain rose again, but the snarling trumpets of the orchestra played a fitting prelude. Cynthia’s feelings and Cynthia’s life need not be gone into during this interval knowing her character, they may well be imagined. They were trying enough, but Brampton had no means of guessing them. During the weeks she came and went between the little house and the little school, putting all the strength that was in her into her duties. The Prudential Committee, which sometimes sat on the platform, could find no fault with the performance of these duties, or with the capability of the teacher, and it is not going too far to state that the children grew to love her better than Miss Goddard had been loved. It may be declared that children are the fittest citizens of a republic, because they are apt to make up their own minds on any subject without regard to public opinion. It was so with the scholars of Brampton village lower school: they grew to love the new teacher, careless of what the attitude of their elders might be, and some of them could have been seen almost any day walking home with her down the street.

As for the attitude of the elders—there was none. Before assuming one they had thought it best, with characteristic caution, to await the next act in the drama. There were ladies in Brampton whose hearts prompted them, when they called on the new teacher, to speak a kindly word of warning and advice; but somehow, when they were seated before her in the little sitting room of the John Billings house, their courage failed them. There was something about this daughter of the Coniston storekeeper and ward of Jethro Bass that made them pause. So much for the ladies of Brampton. What they said among themselves would fill a chapter, and more.

There was, at this time, a singular falling-off in the attendance of the Brampton Club. Ephraim sat alone most of the day in his Windsor chair by the stove, pretending to read newspapers. But he did not mention this fact to Cynthia. He was more lonesome than ever on the Saturdays and Sundays which she spent with Jethro Bass.



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Jethro Bass! It is he who might be made the theme of the music of the snarling trumpets. What was he about during those six weeks? That is what the state at large was beginning to wonder, and the state at large was looking on at a drama, too. A rumor reached the capital and radiated thence to every city and town and hamlet, and was followed by other rumors like confirmations. Jethro Bass, for the first time in a long life of activity, was inactive: inactive, too, at this most critical period of his career, the climax of it, with a war to be waged which for bitterness and ferocity would have no precedent; with the town meetings at hand, where the frontier fighting was to be done, and no quarter given. Lieutenants had gone to Coniston for further orders and instructions, and had come back without either. Achilles was sulking in the tannery house—some said a broken Achilles. Not a word could be got out of him, or the sign of an intention. Jake Wheeler moped through the days in Rias Richardson's store, too sore at heart to speak to any man, and could have wept if tears had been a relief to him. No more blithe errands over the mountain to Clovelly and elsewhere, though Jake knew the issue now and itched for the battle, and the vassals of the hill-Rajah under a jubilant Bijah Bixby were arming cap-a-pie. Lieutenant-General-and-Senator Peleg Hartington of Brampton, in his office over the livery stable, shook his head like a mournful stork when questioned by brother officers from afar. Operations were at a standstill, and the sinews of war relaxed. Rural givers of mortgages, who had not had the opportunity of selling them or had feared to do so, began (mirabile dictu) to express opinions. Most ominous sign of all—the proprietor of the Pelican Hotel had confessed that the Throne Room had not been engaged for the coming session.

Was it possible that Jethro Bass lay crushed under the weight of the accusations which had been printed, and were still being printed, in the Newcastle Guardian? He did not answer them, or retaliate in other newspapers, but Jethro Bass had never made use of newspapers in this way. Still, nothing ever printed about him could be compared with those articles. Had remorse suddenly overtaken him in his old age? Such were the questions people we're asking all over the state—people, at least, who were interested in politics, or in those operations which went by the name of politics: yes, and many private citizens—who had participated in politics only to the extent of voting for such candidates as Jethro in his wisdom had seen fit to give them, read the articles and began to say that boss domination was at an end. A new era was at hand, which they fondly (and very properly) believed was to be a golden era. It was, indeed, to be a golden era—until things got working; and then the gold would cease. The Newcastle Guardian, with unconscious irony, proclaimed the golden era; and declared that its columns, even in other days and under other ownership, had upheld the wisdom of Jethro Bass. And he was still a wise man, said the Guardian, for he had had sense enough to give up the fight.



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Had he given up the fight? Cynthia fervently hoped and prayed that he had, but she hoped and prayed in silence. Well she knew, if the event in the tannery shed had not made him abandon his affairs, no appeal could do so. Her happiest days in this period were the Saturdays and Sundays spent with him in Coniston, and as the weeks went by she began to believe that the change, miraculous as it seemed, had indeed taken place. He had given up his power. It was a pleasure that made the weeks bearable for her. What did it matter—whether he had made the sacrifice for the sake of his love for her? He had made it.

On these Saturdays and Sundays they went on long drives together over the hills, while she talked to him of her life in Brampton or the books she was reading, and of those she had chosen for him to read. Sometimes they did not turn homeward until the delicate tracery of the branches on the snow warned them of the rising moon. Jethro was often silent for hours at a time, but it seemed to Cynthia that it was the silence of peace—of a peace he had never known before. There came no newspapers to the tannery house now: during the mid-week he read the books of which she had spoken William Wetherell's books; or sat in thought, counting, perhaps; the days until she should come again. And the boy of those days for him was more pathetic than much that is known to the world as sorrow.

And what did Coniston think? Coniston, indeed, knew not what to think, when, little by little, the great men ceased to drive up to the door of the tannery house, and presently came no more. Coniston sank then from its proud position as the real capital of the state to a lonely hamlet among the hills. Coniston, too, was watching the drama, and had had a better view of the stage than Brampton, and saw some reason presently for the change in Jethro Bass. Not that Mr. Satterlee told, but such evidence was bound, in the end, to speak for itself. The Newcastle Guardian had been read and debated at the store—debated with some heat by Chester Perkins and other mortgagors; discussed, nevertheless, in a political rather than a moral light. Then Cynthia had returned home; her face had awed them by its sorrow, and she had begun to earn her own living. Then the politicians had ceased to come. The credit belongs to Rias Richardson for having been the first to piece these three facts together, causing him to burn his hand so severely on the stove that he had to carry it bandaged in soda for a week. Cynthia Wetherell had reformed Jethro.

Though the village loved and revered Cynthia, Coniston as a whole did not rejoice in that reform. The town had fallen from its mighty estate, and there were certain envious ones who whispered that it had remained for a young girl who had learned city ways to twist Jethro around her finger; that she had made him abandon his fight with Isaac D. Worthington because Mr. Worthington had a son—but there is no use writing such scandal. Stripped of his power—even though he stripped himself—Jethro began to lose their respect, a trait tending to prove that the human race may have had wolves for ancestors as well as apes. People had small opportunity, however, of showing a lack of respect to his person, for in these days he noticed no one and spoke to none.



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When the lion is crippled, the jackals begin to range. A jackal reconnoitered the lair to see how badly the lion was crippled, and conceived with astounding insolence the plan of capturing the lion's quarry. This jackal, who was an old one, well knew how to round up a quarry, and fled back over the hills to consult with a bigger jackal, his master. As a result, two days before March town-meeting day, Mr. Bijah Bixby paid a visit to the Harwich bank and went among certain Coniston farmers looking over the sheep, his clothes bulging out in places when he began, and seemingly normal enough when he had finished. History repeats itself, even among lions and jackals. Thirty-six years before there had been a town-meeting in Coniston and a surprise. Established Church, decent and orderly selectmen and proceedings had been toppled over that day, every outlying farm sending its representative through the sleet to do it. And now retribution was at hand. This March-meeting day was mild, the grass showing a green color on the south slopes where the snow had melted, and the outlying farmers drove through mud-holes up to the axles. Drove, albeit, in procession along the roads, grimly enough, and the sheds Jock Hallowell had built around the meeting-house could not hold the horses; they lined the fences and usurped the hitching posts of the village street, and still they came. Their owners trooped with muddy boots into the meeting-house, and when the moderator rapped for order the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen, Jethro Bass, was not in his place; never, indeed, would be there again. Six and thirty years he had been supreme in that town—long enough for any man. The beams and king posts would know him no more. Mr. Amos Cuthbert was elected Chairman, not without a gallant and desperate but unsupported fight of a minority led by Mr. Jake Wheeler, whose loyalty must be taken as a tribute to his species. Farmer Cuthbert was elected, and his mortgage was not foreclosed! Had it been, there was more money in the Harwich bank.

There was no telegraph to Coniston in these days, and so Mr. Sam Price, with his horse in a lather, might have been seen driving with unseemly haste toward Brampton, where in due time he arrived. Half an hour later there was excitement at Newcastle, sixty-five miles away, in the office of the Guardian, and the next morning the excitement had spread over the whole state.

Jethro Bass was dethroned in Coniston—discredited in his own town!

And where was Jethro? Did his heart ache, did he bow his head as he thought of that supremacy, so hardly won, so superbly held, gone forever? Many were the curious eyes on the tannery house that day, and for days after, but its owner gave no signs of concern. He read and thought and chopped wood in the tannery shed as usual. Never, I believe, did man, shorn of power, accept his lot more quietly. His struggle was over, his battle was fought, a greater peace than he had ever thought to hope for was won.



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For the opinion and regard of the world he had never cared. A greater reward awaited him, greater than any knew—the opinion and regard and the praise of one whom he loved beyond all the world. On Friday she came to him, on Friday at sunset, for the days were growing longer, and that was the happiest sunset of his life. She said nothing as she raised her face to his and kissed him and clung to him in the little parlor, but he knew, and he had his reward. So much for earthly power Cynthia brought the little rawhide trunk this time, and came to Coniston for the March vacation—a happy two weeks that was soon gone. Happy by comparison, that is, with what they both had suffered, and a haven of rest after the struggle and despair of the wilderness. The bond between them had, in truth, never been stronger, for both the young girl and the old man had denied themselves the thing they held most dear. Jethro had taken refuge and found comfort in his love. But Cynthia! Her greatest love had now been bestowed elsewhere.

If there were letters for the tannery house, Milly Skinner, who made it a point to meet the stage, brought them. And there were letters during Cynthia's sojourn,—many of them, bearing the Cambridge postmark. One evening it was Jethro who laid the letter on the table beside her as she sat under the lamp. He did not look at her or speak, but she felt that he knew her secret—felt that he deserved to have from her own lips what he had been too proud—yes—and too humble to ask. Whose sympathy could she be sure of, if not of his? Still she had longed to keep this treasure to herself. She took the letter in her hand.

“I do not answer them, Uncle Jethro, but—I cannot prevent his writing them,” she faltered. She did not confess that she kept them, every one, and read them over and over again; that she had grown, indeed, to look forward to them as to a sustenance. “I—I do love him, but I will not marry him.”

Yes, she could be sure of Jethro's sympathy, though he could not express it in words. Yet she had not told him for this. She had told him, much as the telling had hurt her, because she feared to cut him more deeply by her silence.

It was a terrible moment for Jethro, and never had he desired the gift of speech as now. Had it not been for him; Cynthia might have been Robert Worthington's wife. He sat down beside her and put his hand over hers that lay on the letter in her lap. It was the only answer he could make, but perhaps it was the best, after all. Of what use were words at such a time!

Four days afterward, on a Monday morning, she went back to Brampton to begin the new term.

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That same Monday a circumstance of no small importance took place in Brampton—nothing less than the return, after a prolonged absence in the West and elsewhere, of its first citizen. Isaac D. Worthington was again in residence. No bells were rung, indeed, and no delegation of citizens as such, headed by the selectmen, met him at the station; and other feudal expressions of fealty were lacking. No staff flew Mr. Worthington's arms; nevertheless the lord of Brampton was in his castle again, and Brampton felt that he was there. He arrived alone, wearing the silk hat which had become habitual with him now, and stepping into his barouche at the station had been driven up Brampton Street behind his grays, looking neither to the right nor left. His reddish chop whiskers seemed to cling a little more closely to his face than formerly, and long years of compression made his mouth look sterner than ever. A hawk-like man, Isaac Worthington, to be reckoned with and feared, whether in a frock coat or in breastplate and mail.

His seneschal, Mr. Flint, was awaiting him in the library. Mr. Flint was large and very ugly, big-boned, smooth-shaven, with coarse features all askew, and a large nose with many excrescences, and thick lips. He was forty-two. From a foreman of the mills he had risen, step by step, to his present position, which no one seemed able to define. He was, indeed, a seneschal. He managed the mills in his lord's absence, and—if the truth be told—in his presence; knotty questions of the Truro Railroad were brought to Mr. Flint and submitted to Mr. Worthington, who decided them, with Mr. Flint's advice; and, within the last three months, Mr. Flint had invaded the realm of politics, quietly, as such a man would, under the cover of his patron's name and glory. Mr. Flint it was who had bought the Newcastle Guardian, who went occasionally to Newcastle and spoke a few effective words now and then to the editor; and, if the truth will out, Mr. Flint had largely conceived that scheme about the railroads which was to set Mr. Worthington on the throne of the state, although the scheme was not now being carried out according to Mr. Flint's wishes. Mr. Flint was, in a sense, a Bismarck, but he was not as yet all powerful. Sometimes his august master or one of his fellow petty sovereigns would sweep Mr. Flint's plans into the waste basket, and then Mr. Flint would be content to wait. To complete the character sketch, Mr. Flint was not above hanging up his master's hat and coat, which he did upon the present occasion, and went up to Mr. Worthington's bedroom to fetch a pocket handkerchief out of the second drawer. He even knew where the handkerchiefs were kept. Lucky petty sovereigns sometimes possess Mr. Flint's to make them emperors.

The august personage seated himself briskly at his desk.

"So that scoundrel Bass is actually discredited at last," he said, blowing his nose in the pocket handkerchief Mr. Flint had brought him. "I lose patience when I think how long we've stood the rascal in this state. I knew the people would rise in their indignation when they learned the truth about him."



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Mr. Flint did not answer this. He might have had other views.

"I wonder we did not think of it before," Mr. Worthington continued. "A very simple remedy, and only requiring a little courage and—and—" (Mr. Worthington was going to say money, but thought better of it) "and the chimera disappears. I congratulate you, Flint."

"Congratulate yourself," said Mr. Flint; "that would not have been my way."

"Very well, I congratulate myself," said the august personage, who was in too good a humor to be put out by the rejection of a compliment. "You remember what I said: the time was ripe, just publish a few biographical articles telling people what he was, and Jethro Bass would snuff out like a candle. Mr. Duncan tells me the town-meeting results are very good all over the state. Even if we hadn't knocked out Jethro Bass, we'd have a fair majority for our bill in the next legislature."

"You know Bass's saying," answered Mr. Flint, "You can hitch that kind of a hoss, but they won't always stay hitched."

"I know, I know," said Mr. Worthington; "don't croak, Flint. We can buy more hitch ropes, if necessary. Well, what's the outlay up to the present? Large, I suppose. Well, whatever it is, it's small compared to what we'll get for it." He laughed a little and rubbed his hands, and then he remembered that capacity in which he stood before the world. Yes, and he stood before himself in the same capacity. Isaac Worthington may have deceived himself, but he may or may not have been a hero to his seneschal. "We have to fight fire with fire," he added, in a pained voice. "Let me see the account."

"I have tabulated the expense in the different cities and towns," answered Mr. Flint; "I will show you the account in a little while. The expenses in Coniston were somewhat greater than the size of the town justified, perhaps. But Sutton thought—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mr. Worthington, "if it had cost as much to carry Coniston as Newcastle, it would have been worth it—for the moral effect alone."

Moral effect! Mr. Flint thought of Mr. Bixby with his bulging pockets going about the hills, and smiled at the manner in which moral effects are sometimes obtained.

"Any news, Flint?"

No news yet, Mr. Flint might have answered. In a few minutes there might be news, and plenty of it, for it lay ready to be hatched under Mr. Worthington's eye. A letter in the bold and upright hand of his son was on the top of the pile, placed there by Mr. Flint himself, who had examined Mr. Worthington's face closely when he came in to see how much he might know of its contents. He had decided that Mr. Worthington was in too good a humor to know anything of them. Mr. Flint had not steamed the letter open, and



read the news; but he could guess at them pretty shrewdly, and so could have the biggest fool in Brampton. That letter contained the opening scene of the next act in the drama.



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Mr. Worthington cut the envelope and began to read, and while he did so Mr. Flint, who was not afraid of man or beast, looked at him. It was a manly and straight forward letter, and Mr. Worthington, no matter what his opinions on the subject were, should have been proud of it. Bob announced, first of all, that he was going to marry Cynthia Wetherell; then he proceeded with praiseworthy self-control (for a lover) to describe Cynthia's character and attainments: after which he stated that Cynthia had refused him—twice, because she believed that Mr. Worthington would oppose the marriage, and had declared that she would never be the cause of a breach between father and son. Bob asked for his father's consent, and hoped to have it, but he thought it only right to add that he had given his word and his love, and did not mean to retract either. He spoke of his visit to Brampton, and explained that Cynthia was teaching school there, and urged his father to see her before he made a decision. Mr. Worthington read it through to the end, his lips closing tighter and tighter until his mouth was but a line across his face. There was pain in the face, too, the kind of pain which anger sends, and which comes with the tottering of a pride that is false. Of what gratification now was the overthrow of Jethro Bass?

He stared at the letter for a moment after he had finished it, and his face grew a dark red. Then he seized the paper and tore it slowly, deliberately, into bits.

Dudley Worthington was not thinking then—not he!—of the young man in the white beaver who had called at the Social Library many years before to see a young woman whose name, too, had been Cynthia.—He was thinking, in fact, for he was a man to think in anger, whether it were not possible to remove this Cynthia from the face of the earth—at least to a place beyond his horizon and that of his son. Had he worn the chain mail instead of the frock coat he would have had her hung outside the town walls.

“Good God!” he exclaimed. And the words sounded profane indeed as he fixed his eyes upon Mr. Flint. “You knew that Robert had been to Brampton.”

“Yes,” said Flint, “the whole village knew it.”

“Good God!” cried Mr. Worthington again, “why was I not informed of this? Why was I not warned of this? Have I no friends? Do you pretend to look after my interests and not take the trouble to write me on such a subject.”

“Do you think I could have prevented it?” asked Mr. Flint, very calmly.

“You allow this—this woman to come here to Brampton and teach school in a place where she can further her designs? What were you about?”

“When the prudential committee appointed her, nothing of this was known, Mr. Worthington.”



“Yes, but now—now! What are you doing, what are they doing to allow her to remain? Who are on that committee?”

Mr. Flint named the men. They had been reelected, as usual, at the recent town-meeting. Mr. Errol, who had also been reelected, had returned but had not yet issued the certificate or conducted the examination.



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“Send for them, have them here at once,” commanded Mr. Worthington, without listening to this.

“If you take my advice, you will do nothing of the kind,” said Mr. Flint, who, as usual, had the whole situation at his fingers’ ends. He had taken the trouble to inform himself about the girl, and he had discovered, shrewdly enough, that she was the kind which might be led, but not driven. If Mr. Flint’s advice had been listened to, this story might have had quite a different ending. But Mr. Flint had not reached the stage where his advice was always listened to, and he had a maddened man to deal with now. At that moment, as if fate had determined to intervene, the housemaid came into the room.

“Mr. Dodd to see you, sir,” she said.

“Show him in,” shouted Mr. Worthington; “show him in!”

Mr. Dodd was not a man who could wait for a summons which he had felt in his bones was coming. He was ordinarily, as we have seen, officious. But now he was thoroughly frightened. He had seen the great man in the barouche as he drove past the hardware store, and he had made up his mind to go up at once, and have it over with. His opinions were formed now, He put a smile on his face when he was a foot outside of the library door.

“This is a great pleasure, Mr. Worthington, a great pleasure, to see you back,” he said, coming forward. “I callated—”

But the great man sat in his chair, and made no attempt to return the greeting.

“Mr. Dodd, I thought you were my friend,” he said.

Mr. Dodd went all to pieces at this reception.

“So I be, Mr. Worthington—so I be,” he cried. “That’s why I’m here now. I’ve b’en a friend of yours ever since I can remember—never fluctuated. I’d rather have chopped my hand off than had this happen—so I would. If I could have foreseen what she was, she’d never have had the place, as sure as my name’s Levi Dodd.”

If Mr. Dodd had taken the trouble to look at the seneschal’s face, he would have seen a well-defined sneer there.

“And now that you know what she is,” cried Mr. Worthington, rising and smiting the pile of letters on his desk, “why do you keep her there an instant?”

Mr. Dodd stopped to pick up the letters, which had flown over the floor. But the great man was now in the full tide of his anger.



“Never mind the letters,” he shouted; “tell me why you keep her there.”

“We called we’d wait and see what steps you’d like taken,” said the trembling townsman.

“Steps! Steps! Good God! What kind of man are you to serve in such a place when you allow the professed ward of Jethro Bass—of Jethro Bass, the most notoriously depraved man in this state, to teach the children of this town. Steps! How soon can you call your committee together?”

“Right away,” answered Mr. Dodd, breathlessly. He would have gone on to exculpate himself, but Mr. Worthington’s inexorable finger was pointing at the door.



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“If you are a friend of mine,” said that gentleman, “and if you have any regard for the fair name of this town, you will do so at once.”

Mr. Dodd departed precipitately, and Mr. Worthington began to pace the room, clasping his hands now in front of him, now behind him, in his agony: repeating now and again various appellations which need not be printed here, which he applied in turn to the prudential committee, to his son, and to Cynthia Wetherell.

“I’ll run her out of Brampton,” he said at last.

“If you do,” said Mr. Flint, who had been watching him apparently unmoved, “you may have Jethro Bass on your back.”

“Jethro Bass?” shouted Mr. Worthington, with a laugh that was not pleasant to hear, “Jethro Bass is as dead as Julius Caesar.”

It was one thing for Mr. Dodd to promise so readily a meeting of the committee, and quite another to decide how he was going to get through the affair without any more burns and scratches than were absolutely necessary. He had reversed the usual order, and had been in the fire—now he was going to the frying-pan. He stood in the street for some time, pulling at his tuft, and then made his way to Mr. Jonathan Hill’s feed store. Mr. Hill was reading “Sartor Resartus” in his little office, the temperature of which must have been 95, and Mr. Dodd was perspiring when he got there.

“It’s come,” said Mr. Dodd, sententiously.

“What’s come?” inquired Mr. Hill, mildly.

“Isaac D.’s come, that’s what,” said Mr. Dodd. “I hain’t b’en sleepin’ well of nights, lately. I can’t think what we was about, Jonathan, puttin’ that girl in the school. We’d ought to’ve knowed she wahn’t fit.”

“What’s the matter with her?” inquired Mr. Hill.

“Matter with her!” exclaimed his fellow-committeeman, “she lives with Jethro Bass—she’s his ward.”

“Well, what of it?” said Mr. Hill, who never bothered himself about gossip or newspapers, or indeed about anything not between the covers of a book, except when he couldn’t help it.

“Good God!” exclaimed Mr. Dodd, “he’s the most notorious, depraved man in the state. Hain’t we got to look out for the fair name of Brampton?”

Mr. Hill sighed and closed his book.



“Well,” he said; “I’d hoped we were through with that. Let’s go up and see what Judge Graves says about it.”

“Hold on,” said Mr. Dodd, seizing the feed dealer by the coat, “we’ve got to get it fixed in our minds what we’re goin’ to do, first. We can’t allow no notorious people in our schools. We’ve got to stand up to the jedge, and tell him so. We app’inted her on his recommendation, you know.”

“I like the girl,” replied Mr. Hill. “I don’t think we ever had a better teacher. She’s quiet, and nice appearin’, and attends to her business.”

Mr. Dodd pulled his tuft, and cocked his head.

“Mr. Worthington holds a note of yours, don’t he, Jonathan?”



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Mr. Hill reflected. He said he thought perhaps Mr. Worthington did.

“Well,” said Mr. Dodd, “I guess we might as well go along up to the judge now as any time.”

But when they got there Mr. Dodd’s knock was so timid that he had to repeat it before the judge came to the door and peered at them over his spectacles.

“Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?” he asked, severely, though he knew well enough. He had not been taken by surprise many times during the last forty years. Mr. Dodd explained that they wished a little meeting of the committee. The judge ushered them into his bedroom, the parlor being too good for such an occasion.

“Now, gentlemen,” said he, “let us get down to business. Mr. Worthington arrived here to-day, he has seen Mr. Dodd, and Mr. Dodd has seen Mr. Hill. Mr. Worthington is a political opponent of Jethro Bass, and wishes Miss Wetherell dismissed. Mr. Dodd and Mr. Hill have agreed, for various reasons which I will spare you, that Miss Wetherell should be dismissed. Have I stated the case, gentlemen, or have I not?”

Mr. Graves took off his spectacles and wiped them, looking from one to the other of his very uncomfortable fellow-members. Mr. Hill did not attempt to speak; but Mr. Dodd, who was not sure now that this was not the fire and the other the frying-pan, pulled at his tuft until words came to him.

“Judge,” he said finally, “I must say I’m a mite surprised. I must say your language is unwarranted.”

“The truth is never unwarranted,” said the judge.

“For the sake of the fair name of Brampton,” began Mr. Dodd, “we cannot allow—”

“Mr. Dodd,” interrupted the judge, “I would rather have Mr. Worthington’s arguments from Mr. Worthington himself, if I wanted them at all. There is no need of prolonging this meeting. If I were to waste my breath until six o’clock, it would be no use. I was about to say that your opinions were formed, but I will alter that, and say that your minds are fixed. You are determined to dismiss Miss Wetherell. Is it not so?”

“I wish you’d hear me, Judge,” said Mr. Dodd, desperately.

“Will you kindly answer me yes or no to that question,” said the judge; “my time is valuable.”

“Well, if you put it that way, I guess we are agreed that she hadn’t ought to stay. Not that I’ve anything against her personally—”



“All right,” said the judge, with a calmness that made them tremble. They had never bearded him before. “All right, you are two to one and no certificate has been issued. But I tell you this, gentlemen, that you will live to see the day when you will bitterly regret this injustice to an innocent and a noble woman, and Isaac D. Worthington will live to regret it. You may tell him I said so. Good day, gentlemen.”

They rose.

“Jedge,” began Mr. Dodd again, “I don’t think you’ve been quite fair with us.”



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“Fair!” repeated the judge, with unutterable scorn. “Good day, gentlemen.” And he slammed the door behind them.

They walked down the street some distance before either of them spoke.

“Goliah,” said Mr. Dodd, at last, “did you ever hear such talk? He’s got the drattedest temper of any man I ever knew, and he never callates to make a mistake. It’s a little mite hard to do your duty when a man talks that way.”

“I’m not sure we’ve done it,” answered Mr. Hill.

“Not sure!” ejaculated the hardware dealer, for he was now far enough away from the judge’s house to speak in his normal tone, “and she connected with that depraved—”

“Hold on,” said Mr. Hill, with an astonishing amount of spirit for him, “I’ve heard that before.”

Mr. Dodd looked at him, swallowed the wrong way and began to choke.

“You hain’t wavered, Jonathan?” he said, when he got his breath.

“No, I haven’t,” said Mr. Hill, sadly; “but I wish to hell I had.”

Mr. Dodd looked at him again, and began to choke again. It was the first time he had known Jonathan Hill to swear.

“You’re a-goin’ to stick by what you agreed—by your principles?”

“I’m going to stick by my bread and butter,” said Mr. Hill, “not by my principles. I wish to hell I wasn’t.”

And so saying that gentleman departed, cutting diagonally across the street through the snow, leaving Mr. Dodd still choking and pulling at his tuft. This third and totally-unexpected shaking-up had caused him to feel somewhat deranged internally, though it had not altered the opinions now so firmly planted in his head. After a few moments, however, he had collected himself sufficiently to move on once more, when he discovered that he was repeating to himself, quite unconsciously, Mr. Hill’s profanity “I wish to hell I wasn’t.” The iron mastiffs glaring at him angrily out of the snow banks reminded him that he was in front of Mr. Worthington’s door, and he thought he might as well go in at once and receive the great man’s gratitude. He certainly deserved it. But as he put his hand on the bell Mr. Worthington himself came out of the house, and would actually have gone by without noticing Mr. Dodd if he had not spoken.



“I’ve got that little matter fixed, Mr. Worthington,” he said, “called the committee, and we voted to discharge the—the young woman.” No, he did not deliver Judge Graves’s message.

“Very well, Mr. Dodd,” answered the great man, passing on so that Mr. Dodd was obliged to follow him in order to hear, “I’m glad you’ve come to your senses at last. Kindly step into the library and tell Miss Bruce from me that she may fill the place tomorrow.”

“Certain,” said Mr. Dodd, with his hand to his chin. He watched the great man turn in at his bank in the new block, and then he did as he was bid.



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By the time school was out that day the news had leaped across Brampton Street and spread up and down both sides of it that the new teacher had been dismissed. The story ran fairly straight—there were enough clues, certainly. The great man's return, the visit of Mr. Dodd, the call on Judge Graves, all had been marked. The fiat of the first citizen had gone forth that the ward of Jethro Bass must be got rid of; the designing young woman who had sought to entrap his son must be punished for her amazing effrontery.

Cynthia came out of school happily unaware that her name was on the lips of Brampton: unaware, too, that the lord of the place had come into residence that day. She had looked forward to living in the same town with Bob's father as an evil which was necessary to be borne, as one of the things which are more or less inevitable in the lives of those who have to make their own ways in the world. The children trooped around her, and the little girls held her hand, and she talked and laughed with them as she came up the street in the eyes of Brampton,—came up the street to the block of new buildings where the bank was. Stepping out of the bank, with that businesslike alertness which characterized him, was the first citizen—none other. He found himself entangled among the romping children and—horror of horrors he bumped into the schoolmistress herself! Worse than this, he had taken off his hat and begged her pardon before he looked at her and realized the enormity of his mistake. And the schoolmistress had actually paid no attention to him, but with merely heightened color had drawn the children out of his way and passed on without a word. The first citizen, raging inwardly, but trying to appear unconcerned, walked rapidly back to his house. On the street of his own town, before the eyes of men, he had been snubbed by a school-teacher. And such a schoolteacher!

Mr. Worthington, as he paced his library burning with the shame of this occurrence, remembered that he had had to glance at her twice before it came over him who she was. His first sensation had been astonishment. And now, in spite of his bitter anger, he had to acknowledge that the face had made an impression on him—a fact that only served to increase his rage. A conviction grew upon him that it was a face which his son, or any other man, would not be likely to forget. He himself could not forget it.

In the meantime Cynthia had reached her home, her cheeks still smarting, conscious that people had stared at her. This much, of course, she knew—that Brampton believed Bob Worthington to be in love with her: and the knowledge at such times made her so miserable that the thought of Jethro's isolation alone deterred her from asking Miss Lucretia Penniman for a position in Boston. For she wrote to Miss Lucretia about her life and her reading, as that lady had made her promise to do. She sat down now at the cherry chest of drawers that was also a desk, to write: not to pour out her troubles, for she never had done that,—but to calm her mind by drawing little character sketches of her pupils. But she had only written the words, "My dear Miss Lucretia," when she looked out of the window and saw Judge Graves coming up the path, and ran to open the door for him.



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“How do you do, Judge?” she said, for she recognized Mr. Graves as one of her few friends in Brampton. “I have sent to Boston for the new reader, but it has not come.”

The judge took her hand and pressed it and led her into the little sitting room. His face was very stern, but his eyes, which had flung fire at Mr. Dodd, looked at her with a vast compassion. Her heart misgave her.

“My dear,” he said,—it was long since the judge had called any woman “my dear,”—“I have bad news for you. The committee have decided that you cannot teach any longer in the Brampton school.”

“Oh, Judge,” she answered, trying to force back the tears which would come, “I have tried so hard. I had begun to believe that I could fill the place.”

“Fill the place!” cried the judge, startling her with his sudden anger. “No woman in the state can fill it better than you.”

“Then why am I dismissed?” she asked breathlessly.

The judge looked at her in silence, his blue lips quivering. Sometimes even he found it hard to tell the truth. And yet he had come to tell it, that she might suffer less. He remembered the time when Isaac D. Worthington had done him a great wrong.

“You are dismissed,” he said, “because Mr. Worthington has come home, and because the two other members of the committee are dogs and cowards.” Mr. Graves never minced matters when he began, and his voice shook with passion. “If Mr. Errol had examined you, and you had your certificate, it might have been different. Errol is not a sycophant. Worthington does not hold his mortgage.”

“Mortgage!” exclaimed Cynthia. The word always struck terror to her soul.

“Mr. Worthington holds Mr. Hill’s mortgage,” said Mr. Graves, more than ever beside himself at the sight of her suffering. “That man’s tyranny is not to be borne. We will not give up, Cynthia. I will fight him in this matter if it takes my last ounce of strength, so help me God!”

Mortgage! Cynthia sank down in the chair by the desk. In spite of the misery the news had brought, the thought that his father, too, who was fighting Jethro Bass as a righteous man, dealt in mortgages and coerced men to do his will, was overwhelming. So she sat for a while staring at the landscape on the old wall paper.

“I will go to Coniston to-night,” she said at last.

“No,” cried the judge, seizing her shoulder in his excitement, “no. Do you think that I have been your friend—that I am your friend?”



“Oh, Judge Graves—”

“Then stay here, where you are. I ask it as a favor to me. You need not go to the school to-morrow—indeed, you cannot. But stay here for a day or two at least, and if there is any justice left in a free country, we shall have it. Will you stay, as a favor to me?”

“I will stay, since you ask it,” said Cynthia. “I will do what you think right.”

Her voice was firmer than he expected—much firmer. He glanced at her quickly, with something very like admiration in his eye.



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“You are a good woman, and a brave woman,” he said, and with this somewhat surprising tribute he took his departure instantly.

Cynthia was left to her thoughts, and these were harassing and sorrowful enough. One idea, however, persisted through them all. Mr. Worthington, whose power she had lived long enough in Brampton to know, was an unjust man and a hypocrite. That thought was both sweet and bitter: sweet, as a retribution; and bitter, because he was Bob's father. She realized, now, that Bob knew these things, and she respected and loved him the more, if that were possible, because he had refrained from speaking of them to her. And now another thought came, and though she put it resolutely from her, persisted. Was she not justified now in marrying him? The reasoning was false, so she told herself. She had no right to separate Bob from his father, whatever his father might be. Did not she still love Jethro Bass? Yes, but he had renounced his ways. Her heart swelled gratefully as she spoke the words to herself, and she reflected that he, at least, had never been a hypocrite.

Of one thing she was sure, now. In the matter of the school she had right on her side, and she must allow Judge Graves to do whatever he thought proper to maintain that right. If Isaac D. Worthington's character had been different, this would not have been her decision. Now she would not leave Brampton in disgrace, when she had done nothing to merit it. Not that she believed that the judge would prevail against such mighty odds. So little did she think so that she fell, presently, into a despondency which in all her troubles had not overtaken her—the despondency which comes even to the pure and the strong when they feel the unjust strength of the world against them. In this state her eyes fell on the letter she had started to Miss Lucretia Penniman, and in desperation she began to write.

It was a short letter, reserved enough, and quite in character. It was right that she should defend herself, which she did with dignity, saying that she believed the committee had no fault to find with her duties, but that Mr. Worthington had seen fit to bring influence to bear upon them because of her connection with Jethro Bass.

It was not the whole truth, but Cynthia could not bring herself to write of that other reason. At the end she asked, very simply, if Miss Lucretia could find her something to do in Boston in case her dismissal became certain. Then she put on her coat, and walked to the postoffice to post the letter, for she resolved that there could be no shame without reason for it. There was a little more color in her cheeks, and she held her head high, preparing to be slighted. But she was not slighted, and got more salutations, if anything, than usual. She was, indeed, in the right not to hide her head, and policy alone would have forbade it, had Cynthia thought of policy.

CHAPTER XV



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Public opinion is like the wind—it bloweth where it listeth. It whistled around Brampton the next day, whirling husbands and wives apart, and families into smithereens. Brampton had a storm all to itself—save for a sympathetic storm raging in Coniston—and all about a school-teacher.

Had Cynthia been a certain type of woman, she would have had all the men on her side and all of her own sex against her. It is a decided point to be recorded in her favor that she had among her sympathizers as many women as men. But the excitement of a day long remembered in Brampton began, for her, when a score or more of children assembled in front of the little house, tramping down the snow on the grass plots, shouting for her to come to school with them. Children give no mortgages, or keep no hardware stores.

Cynthia, trying to read in front of the fire, was all in a tremble at the sound of the high-pitched little voices she had grown to love, and she longed to go out and kiss them, every one. Her nature, however, shrank from any act which might appear dramatic or sensational. She could not resist going to the window and smiling at them, though they appeared but dimly—little dancing figures in a mist. And when they shouted, the more she shook her head and put her finger to her lips in reproof and vanished from their sight. Then they trooped sadly on to school, resolved to make matters as disagreeable as possible for poor Miss Bruce, who had not offended in any way.

Two other episodes worthy of a place in this act of the drama occurred that morning, and one had to do with Ephraim. Poor Ephraim! His way had ever been to fight and ask no questions, and in his journey through the world he had gathered but little knowledge of it. He had limped home the night before in a state of anger of which Cynthia had not believed him capable, and had reappeared in the sitting room in his best suit of blue.

“Where are you going, Cousin Eph?” Cynthia had asked suspiciously.

“Never you mind, Cynthia.”

“But I do mind,” she said, catching hold of his sleeve. “I won’t let you go until you confess.”

“I’m a-goin’ to tell Isaac Worthington what I think of him, that’s whar I’m a-goin’,” cried Ephraim “what I always hev thought of him sence he sent a substitute to the war an’ acted treasonable here to home talkin’ ag’in’ Lincoln.”

“Oh, Cousin Eph, you mustn’t,” said Cynthia, clinging to him with all her strength in her dismay. It had taken every whit of her influence to persuade him to relinquish his purpose. Cynthia knew very well that Ephraim meant to lay hands on Mr. Worthington, and it would indeed have been a disastrous hour for the first citizen if the old soldier had



ever got into his library. Cynthia pointed out, as best she might, that it would be an evil hour for her, too, and that her cause would be greatly injured by such a proceeding; she knew very well that it would ruin Ephraim, but he would not have listened to such an argument.



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The next thing he wished to do was to go to Coniston and rouse Jethro. Cynthia's heart stood still when he proposed this, for it touched upon her greatest fear,—which had impelled her to go to Coniston. But she had hoped and believed that Jethro, knowing her feelings, would do nothing—since for her sake he had chosen to give up his power. Now an acute attack of rheumatism had come to her rescue, and she succeeded in getting Ephraim off to bed, swathed in bandages.

The next morning he had insisted upon hobbling away to the postoffice, where in due time he was discovered by certain members of the Brampton Club nailing to the wall a new engraving of Abraham Lincoln, and draping it with a little silk flag he had bought in Boston. By which it will be seen that a portion of the Club were coming back to their old haunt. This portion, it may be surmised, was composed of such persons alone as were likely to be welcomed by the postmaster. Some of these had grievances against Mr. Worthington or Mr. Flint; others, in more prosperous circumstances, might have been moved by envy of these gentlemen; still others might have been actuated largely by righteous resentment at what they deemed oppression by wealth and power. These members who came that morning comprised about one-fourth of those who formerly had been in the habit of dropping in for a chat, and their numbers were a fair indication of the fact that those who from various motives took the part of the schoolteacher in Brampton were as one to three.

It is not necessary to repeat their expressions of indignation and sympathy. There was a certain Mr. Gamaliel Ives in the town, belonging to an old Brampton family, who would have been the first citizen if that other first citizen had not, by his rise to wealth and power, so completely overshadowed him. Mr. Ives owned a small mill on Coniston Water below the town. He fairly bubbled over with civic pride, and he was an authority on all matters pertaining to Brampton's history. He knew the "Hymn to Coniston" by heart. But we are digressing a little. Mr. Ives, like that other Gamaliel of old, had exhorted his fellow-townsmen to wash their hands of the controversy. But he was an intimate of Judge Graves, and after talking with that gentleman he became a partisan overnight; and when he had stopped to get his mail he had been lured behind the window by the debate in progress. He was in the midst of some impromptu remarks when he recognized a certain brisk step behind him, and Isaac D. Worthington himself entered the sanctum!

It must be explained that Mr. Worthington sometimes had an important letter to be registered which he carried to the postoffice with his own hands. On such occasions—though not a member of the Brampton Club—he walked, as an overlord will, into any private place he chose, and recognized no partitions or barriers. Now he handed the letter (addressed to a certain person in Cambridge, Massachusetts) to the postmaster.



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“You will kindly register that and give me a receipt, Mr. Prescott,” he said.

Ephraim turned from his contemplation of the features of the martyred President, and on his face was something of the look it might have worn when he confronted his enemies over the log-works at Five Forks. No, for there was a vast contempt in his gaze now, and he had had no contempt for the Southerners, and would have shaken hands with any of them the moment the battle was over. Mr. Worthington, in spite of himself, recoiled a little before that look, fearing, perhaps, physical violence.

“I hain’t a-goin’ to hurt you, Mr. Worthington,” Ephraim said, “but I am a-goin’ to ask you to git out in front, and mighty quick. If you hev any business with the postmaster, there’s the window,” and Ephraim pointed to it with his twisted finger. “I don’t allow nobody but my friends here, Mr. Worthington, and people I respect.”

Mr. Worthington looked—well, eye-witnesses give various versions as to how he looked. All agree that his lip trembled; some say his eyes watered: at any rate, he quailed, stood a moment undecided, and then swung on his heel and walked to the partition door. At this safe distance he turned.

“Mr. Prescott,” he said, his voice quivering with passion and perhaps another emotion, “I will make it my duty to report to the postmaster-general the manner in which this office is run. Instead of attending to your business, you make the place a resort for loafers and idlers. Good morning, sir.”

Ten minutes later Mr. Flint himself came to register the letter. But it was done at the window, and the loafers and idlers were still there.

The curtain had risen again, indeed, and the action was soon fast enough for the most impatient that day. No sooner had the town heard with bated breath of the expulsion of the first citizen from the inner sanctuary of the post-office, than the news of another event began to go the rounds. Mr. Worthington had other and more important things to think about than minor postmasters, and after his anger and—yes, and momentary fear had subsided, he forgot the incident except to make a mental note to remember to deprive Mr. Prescott of his postmastership, which he believed could be done readily enough now that Jethro Bass was out of the way. Then he had stepped into the bank, which he had come to regard as his own bank, as he regarded most institutions in Brampton. He had, in the old days, been president of it, as we know. He stepped into the bank, and then—he stepped out again.

Most people have experienced that sickly feeling of the diaphragm which sometimes comes from a sudden shock. Mr. Worthington had it now as he hurried up the street, and he presently discovered that he was walking in the direction opposite to that of his own home. He crossed the street, made a pretence of going into Mr. Goldthwaite’s drug store, and hurried back again. When he reached his own library, he found Mr. Flint busy



there at his desk. Mr. Flint rose. Mr. Worthington sat down and began to pull the papers about in a manner which betrayed to his seneschal (who knew every mood of his master) mental perturbation.



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“Flint,” he said at last, striving his best for an indifferent accent, “Jethro Bass is here—I ran across him just now drawing money in the bank.”

“I could have told you that this morning,” answered Mr. Flint. “Wheeler, who runs errands for him in Coniston, drove him in this morning, and he’s been with Peleg Hartington for two hours over Sherman’s livery stable.”

An interval of silence followed, during which Mr. Worthington shuffled with his letters and pretended to read them.

“Graves has called a mass meeting to-night, I understand,” he remarked in the same casual way. “The man’s a demagogue, and mad as a loon. I believe he sent back one of our passes once, didn’t he? I suppose Bass has come in to get Hartington to work up the meeting. They’ll be laughed out of the town hall, or hissed out.”

“I guess you’ll find Bass has come down for something else,” said Mr. Flint, looking up from a division report.

“What do you mean?” demanded Mr. Worthington, changing his attitude to one of fierceness. But he was well aware that whatever tone he took with his seneschal, he never fooled him.

“I mean what I told you yesterday,” said Flint, “that you’ve stirred up the dragon.”

Even Mr. Flint did not know how like a knell his words sounded in Isaac Worthington’s ears.

“Nonsense!” he cried, “you’re talking nonsense, Flint. We maimed him too thoroughly for that. He hasn’t power enough left to carry his own town.”

“All right,” said the seneschal.

“What do you mean by that?” said his master, with extreme irritation.

“I mean what I said yesterday, that we haven’t maimed him at all. He had his own reasons for going into his hole, and he never would have come out again if you hadn’t goaded him. Now he’s out, and we’ll have to step around pretty lively, I can tell you, or he’ll maim us.”

All of which goes to show that Mr. Flint had some notion of men and affairs. He became, as may be predicted, the head of many material things in later days, and he may sometime reappear in company with other characters in this story.

The sickly feeling in Mr. Worthington’s diaphragm had now returned.



“I think you will find you are mistaken, Flint,” he said, attempting dignity now. “Very much mistaken.”

“Very well,” said Flint, “perhaps I am. But I believe you’ll find he left for the capital on the eleven o’clock, and if you take the trouble to inquire from Bedding you will probably learn that the Throne Room is bespoken for the session.”

All of that which Mr, Flint had predicted turned out to be true. The dragon had indeed waked up. It all began with the news Milly Skinner had got from the stage driver, imparted to Jethro as he sat reading about Hiawatha. And terrible indeed had been that awakening. This dragon did not bellow and roar and lash his tail when he was roused, but he stood up, and there seemed to emanate from him a fire which frightened poor Milly Skinner, upset though she was by the news of Cynthia’s dismissal. O, wondrous and paradoxical might of love, which can tame the most powerful of beasts, and stir them again into furies by a touch!



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Coniston was the first to tremble, as though the forces stretching themselves in the tannery house were shaking the very ground, and the name of Jethro Bass took on once more, as by magic, a terrible meaning. When Vesuvius is silent, pygmies may make faces on the very lip of the crater, and they on the slopes forget the black terror of the fiery hail. Jake Wheeler himself, loyal as he was, did not care to look into the crater now that he was summoned; but a force pulled him all the way to the tannery house. He left behind him an awe-stricken gathering at the store, composed of inhabitants who had recently spoken slightly of the volcano.

We are getting a little mixed in our metaphors between lions and dragons and volcanoes, and yet none of them are too strong to represent Jethro Bass when he heard that Isaac Worthington had had the teacher dismissed from Brampton lower school. He did not stop to reason then that action might distress her. The beast in him awoke again; the desire for vengeance on a man whom he had hated most of his life, and who now had dared to cause pain to the woman whom he loved with all his soul, and even idolize, was too great to resist. He had no thought of resisting it, for the waters of it swept over his soul like the Atlantic over a lost continent. He would crush Isaac Worthington if it took the last breath from his body.

Jake went to the tannery house and received his orders—orders of which he made a great mystery afterward at the store, although they consisted simply of directions to be prepared to drive Jethro to Brampton the next morning. But the look of the man had frightened Jake. He had never seen vengeance so indelibly written on that face, and he had never before realized the terrible power of vengeance. Mr. Wheeler returned from that meeting in such a state of trepidation that he found it necessary to accompany Rias to a certain keg in the cellar; after which he found his tongue. His description of Jethro's appearance awed his hearers, and Jake declared that he would not be in Isaac Worthington's shoes for all of Isaac Worthington's money. There were others right here in Coniston, Jake hinted, who might now find it convenient to emigrate to the far West.

Jethro's face had not changed when Jake drove him out of Coniston the next morning. Good Mr. Satterlee saw it, and felt that the visit he had wished to make would have been useless; Mr. Amos Cuthbert and Mr. Sam Price saw it, from a safe distance within the store, and it is a fact that Mr. Price seriously thought of taking Mr. Wheeler's advice about a residence in the West; Mr. Cuthbert, of a sterner nature, made up his mind to be hung and quartered. A few minutes before Jethro walked into his office over the livery stable, Senator Peleg Hartington would have denied, with that peculiar and mournful scorn of which he was master, that Jethro Bass could ever again have any influence over him. Peleg was, indeed, at that moment preparing, in his own way, to make overtures to the party of Isaac D. Worthington. Jethro walked into the office, leaving Jake below with Mr. Sherman; and Senator Hartington was very glad he had not made the overtures. And when he accompanied Jethro to the station when he left for the capital, the senator felt that the eyes of men were upon him.



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And Cynthia? Happily, Cynthia passed the day in ignorance that Jethro had gone through Brampton. Ephraim, though he knew of it, did not speak of it when he came home to his dinner; Mr. Graves had called, and informed her of the meeting in the town hall that night.

“It is our only chance,” he said obdurately, in answer to her protests. “We must lay the case before the people of Brampton. If they have not the courage to right the wrong, and force your reinstatement through public opinion, there is nothing more to be done.”

To Cynthia, the idea of having a mass meeting concerning herself was particularly repellent.

“Oh, Judge Graves!” she cried, “if there isn’t any other way, please drop the matter. There are plenty of teachers who will—be acceptable to everybody.”

“Cynthia,” said the judge, “I can understand that this publicity is very painful to you. I beg you to remember that we are contending for a principle. In such cases the individual must be sacrificed to the common good.”

“But I cannot go to the meeting—I cannot.”

“No,” said the judge; “I don’t think that will be necessary.”

After he was gone, she could think of nothing but the horror of having her name—yes, and her character—discussed in that public place; and it seemed to her, if she listened, she could hear a clatter of tongues throughout the length of Brampton Street, and that she must fain stop her ears or go mad. The few ladies who called during the day out of kindness or curiosity, or both, only added to her torture. She was not one who could open her heart to acquaintances: the curious ones got but little satisfaction, and the kind ones thought her cold, and they did not perceive that she was really grateful for their little attentions. Gratitude, on such occasions, does not always consist in pouring out one’s troubles in the laps of visitors.

So the visitors went home, wondering whether it were worth while after all to interest themselves in the cause of such a self-contained and self-reliant young woman. In spite of all her efforts, Cynthia had never wholly succeeded in making most of the Brampton ladies believe that she did not secretly deem herself above them. They belonged to a reserved race themselves; but Cynthia had a reserve which was even different from their own.

As night drew on the predictions of Mr. Worthington seemed likely to be fulfilled, and it looked as if Judge Graves would have a useless bill to pay for gas in the new town hall. The judge had never been a man who could compel a following, and he had no magnetism with which to lead a cause: the town tradesmen, especially those in the new



brick block, would be chary as to risking the displeasure of their best customer. At half-past seven Mr. Graves: came in, alone, and sat on the platform staring grimly at his gas. Is there a lecturer, or, a playwright, or a politician, who has not, at one time or another, been in the judge's place? Who cannot sympathize with him as he watched the thin and hesitating stream of people out of the corner of his eye as they came in at the door? The judge despised them with all his soul, but it is human nature not to wish to sit in a hall or a theatre that is three-quarters empty.



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At sixteen minutes to eight a mild excitement occurred, an incident of some significance which served to detain many waverers. Senator Peleg Hartington walked up the aisle, and the judge rose and shook him by the hand, and as Deacon Hartington he was invited to sit on the platform. The senator's personal influence was not to be ignored; and it had sufficed to carry his district in the last election against the Worthington forces, in spite of the abdication of Jethro Bass. Mr. Page, the editor of the Clarion, Senator Hartington's organ, was also on the platform. But where was Mr. Ives? Where was that Gamaliel who had been such a warm partisan in the postoffice that morning?

"Saw him outside the hall—wahn't but ten minutes ago," said Deacon Hartington, sadly; "thought he was a-comin' in."

Eight o'clock came, and no Mr. Ives; ten minutes past—fifteen minutes past. If the truth must be told, Mr. Ives had been on the very threshold of the hall, and one glance at the poor sprinkling of people there had decided him. Mr. Ives had a natural aversion to being laughed at, and as he walked back on the darker side of the street he wished heartily that he had stuck to his original Gamaliel-advocacy of no interference, of allowing the Supreme Judge to decide. Such opinions were inevitably just, Mr. Ives was well aware, though not always handed down immediately. If he were to humble the first citizen, Mr. Ives reflected that a better opportunity might present itself. The whistle of the up-train served to strengthen his resolution, for he was reminded thereby that his mill often had occasion to ask favors of the Truro Railroad.

In the meantime it was twenty minutes past eight in the town hall, and Mr. Graves had not rapped for order. Deacon Hartington sat as motionless as a stork on the borders of a glassy lake at sunrise, the judge had begun seriously to estimate the gas bill, and Mr. Page had chewed up the end of a pencil. There was one, at least, in the audience of whom the judge could be sure. A certain old soldier in blue sat uncompromisingly on the front bench with his hands crossed over the head of his stick; but the ladies and gentlemen nearest the door were beginning to vanish, one by one, silently as ghosts, when suddenly the judge sat up. He would have rubbed his eyes, had he been that kind of a man. Four persons had entered the hall—he was sure of it—and with no uncertain steps as if frightened by its emptiness. No, they came boldly. And after them trooped others, and still others were heard in the street beyond, not whispering, but talking in the unmistakable tones of people who had more coming behind them. Yes, and more came. It was no illusion, or delusion: there they were filling the hall as if they meant to stay, and buzzing with excitement. The judge was quivering with excitement now, but he, too, was only a spectator of the drama. And what a drama, with a miracle-play for Brampton!



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Mr. Page rose from his chair and leaned over the edge of the platform that something might be whispered in his ear. The news, whatever it was, was apparently electrifying, and after the first shock he turned to impart it to Mr. Graves; but turned too late, for the judge had already rapped for order and was clearing his throat. He could not account for this extraordinary and unlooked-for audience, among whom he spied many who had thought it wiser not to protest against the dictum of the first citizen, and many who had professed to believe that the teacher's connection with Jethro Bass was a good and sufficient reason for dismissal. The judge was prepared to take advantage of the tide, whatever its cause.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I take the liberty of calling this meeting to order. And before a chairman be elected, I mean to ask your indulgence to explain my purposes in requesting the use of this hall to-night. In our system of government, the inalienable and most precious gift—"

Whatever the gift was, the judge never explained. He paused at the words, and repeated them, and stopped altogether because no one was paying any attention to him. The hall was almost full, the people had risen, with a hum, and as one man had turned toward the door. Mr. Gamaliel Ives was triumphantly marching down the aisle, and with him was—well, another person. Nay, personage would perhaps be the better word.

Let us go back for a moment. There descended from that train of which we have heard the whistle a lady with features of no ordinary moulding, with curls and a string bonnet and a cloak that seemed strangely to harmonize with the lady's character. She had the way of one in authority, and Mr. Sherman himself ran to open the door of his only closed carriage, and the driver galloped off with her all the way to the Brampton House. Once there, the lady seized the pen as a soldier seizes the sword, and wrote her name in most uncompromising characters on the register, Miss Lucretia Penniman, Boston. Then she marched up to her room.

Miss Lucretia Penniman, author of the "Hymn to Coniston," in the reflected glory of whose fame Brampton had shone for thirty years! Whose name was lauded and whose poem was recited at every Fourth of July celebration, that the very children might learn it and honor its composer! Stratford-on-Avon is not prouder of Shakespeare than Brampton of Miss Lucretia, and now she was come back, unheralded, to her birthplace. Mr. Raines, the clerk, looked at the handwriting on the book, and would not believe his own sight until it was vouched for by sundry citizens who had followed the lady from the station—on foot. And then there was a to-do.

Send for Mr. Gamaliel Ives; send for Miss Bruce, the librarian; send for Mr. Page, editor of the Clarion, and notify the first citizen. He, indeed, could not be sent for, but had he known of her coming he would undoubtedly have had her met at the portals and

presented with the keys in gold. Up and down the street flew the news which overshadowed and blotted out all other, and the poor little school-teacher was forgotten.

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One of these notables was at hand, though he did not deserve to be. Mr. Gamaliel Ives sent up his card to Miss Lucretia, and was shown deferentially into the parlor, where he sat mopping his brow and growing hot and cold by turns. How would the celebrity treat him? The celebrity herself answered the question by entering the room in such stately manner as he had expected, to the rustle of the bombazine. Whereupon Mr. Ives bounced out of his chair and bowed, though his body was not formed to bend that way.

“Miss Penniman,” he exclaimed, “what an honor for Brampton! And what a pleasure, the greater because so unexpected! How cruel not to have given us warning, and we could have greeted you as your great fame deserves! You could never take time from your great duties to accept the invitations of our literary committee, alas! But now that you are here, you will find a warm welcome, Miss Penniman. How long it has been—thirty years,—you see I know it to a day, thirty years since you left us. Thirty years, I may say, we have kept burning the vestal fire in your worship, hoping for this hour.”

Miss Lucretia may have had her own ideas about the propriety of the reference to the vestal fire.

“Gamaliel,” she said sharply, “straighten up and don’t talk nonsense to me. I’ve had you on my knee, and I knew your mother and father.”

Gamaliel did straighten up, as though Miss Lucretia had applied a lump of ice to the small of his back. So it is when the literary deities, vestal or otherwise, return to their Stratfords. There are generally surprises in store for the people they have had on their knees, and for others.

“Gamaliel,” said Miss Lucretia, “I want to see the prudential committee for the village district.”

“The prudential committee!” Mr. Ives fairly shrieked the words in his astonishment.

“I tried to speak plainly,” said Miss Lucretia. “Who are on that committee?”

“Ezra Graves,” said Mr. Ives, as though mechanically compelled, for his head was spinning round. “Ezra Graves always has run it, until now. But he’s in the town hall.”

“What’s he doing there?”

Mr. Ives was no fool. Some inkling of the facts began to shoot through his brain, and he saw his chance.

“He called a mass meeting to protest against the dismissal of a teacher.”

“Gamaliel,” said Miss Lucretia, “you will conduct me to that meeting. I will get my cloak.”



Mr. Ives wasted no time in the interval, and he fairly ran out into the office. Miss Lucretia Penniman was in town, and would attend the mass meeting. Now, indeed, it was to be a mass meeting. Away flew the tidings, broadcast, and people threw off their carpet slippers and dressing gowns, and some who had gone to bed got up again. Mr. Dodd heard it, and changed his shoes three times, and his intentions three times three. Should he go, or should he not? Already he heard in imagination the first distant note of the populace, and he was not of the metal to defend a Bastille or a Louvre for his royal master with the last drop of his blood.



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In the meantime Gamaliel Ives was conducting Miss Lucretia toward, the town hall, and speaking in no measured tones of indignation of the cringing, truckling qualities of that very Mr. Dodd. The injustice to Miss Wetherell, which Mr. Ives explained as well as he could, made his blood boil: so he declared.

And note we are back again at the meeting, when the judge, with his hand on his Adam's apple, is pronouncing the word "gift." Mr. Ives is triumphantly marching down the aisle, escorting the celebrity of Brampton to the platform, and quite aware of the heart burnings of his fellow-citizens on the benches. And Miss Lucretia, with that stern composure with which celebrities accept public situations, follows up the steps as of right and takes the chair he assigns her beside the chairman. The judge, still grasping his Adam's apple, stares at the newcomer in amazement, and recognizes her in spite of the years, and trembles. Miss Lucretia Penniman! Blucher was not more welcome to Wellington, or Lafayette to Washington, than was Miss Lucretia to Ezra Graves as he turned his back on the audience and bowed to her deferentially. Then he turned again, cleared his throat once more to collect his senses, and was about to utter the familiar words, "We have with us tonight," when they were taken out of his mouth—taken out of his mouth by one who had in all conscience stolen enough thunder for one man,—Mr. Gamaliel Ives.

"Mr. Chairman," said Mr. Ives, taking a slight dropping of the judge's lower jaw for recognition, "and ladies and gentlemen of Brampton. It is our great good fortune to have with us to-night, most unexpectedly, one of whom Brampton is, and for many years has been, justly proud." (Cheers.) "One whose career Brampton has followed with a mother's eyes and with a mother's heart. One who has chosen a broader field for the exercise of those great powers with which Nature endowed her than Brampton could give. One who has taken her place among the luminaries of literature of her time." (Cheers.) "One who has done more than any other woman of her generation toward the uplifting of the sex which she honors." (Cheers and clapping of hands.) "And one who, though her lot has fallen among the great, has not forgotten the home of her childhood. For has she not written those beautiful lines which we all know by heart?

'Ah, Coniston! Thy lordly form I see
Before mine eyes in exile drear.'

"Mr. Chairman and fellow-townsmen and women, I have the extreme honor of introducing to you one whom we all love and revere, the author of the 'Hymn to Coniston,' the editor of the *Woman's Hour*, Miss Lucretia Penniman." (Loud and long-continued applause.)



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Well might Brampton be proud, too, of Gamaliel Ives, president of its literary club, who could make such a speech as this on such short notice. If the truth be told, the literary club had sent Miss Lucretia no less than seven invitations, and this was the speech Mr. Ives had intended to make on those seven occasions. It was unquestionably a neat speech, and Judge Graves or no other chairman should cheat him out of making it. Mr. Ives, with a wave of his hand toward the celebrity, sat down by no means dissatisfied with himself. What did he care how the judge glared. He did not see how stiffly Miss Lucretia sat in her chair. She could not take him on her knee then, but she would have liked to.

Miss Lucretia rose, and stood quite as stiffly as she had sat, and the judge rose, too. He was very angry, but this was not the time to get even with Mr. Ives. As it turned out, he did not need to bother about getting even.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said he, “in the absence of any other chairman I take pleasure in introducing to you Miss Lucretia Penniman.”

More applause was started, but Miss Lucretia put a stop to it by the lifting of a hand. Then there was a breathless silence. Then she cast her eyes around the hall, as though daring any one to break that silence, and finally they rested upon Mr. Ives.

“Mr. Chairman,” she said, with an inclination toward the judge, “my friends—for I hope you will be my friends when I have finished” (Miss Lucretia made it quite clear by her tone that it entirely depended upon them whether they would be or not), “I understood when I came here that this was to be a mass meeting to protest against an injustice, and not a feast of literature and oratory, as Gamaliel Ives seems to suppose.”

She paused, and when the first shock of amazement was past an audible titter ran through the audience, and Mr. Ives squirmed visibly.

“Am I right, Mr. Chairman?” asked Miss Lucretia.

“You are unquestionably right, Miss Penniman,” answered the chairman, rising, “unquestionably.”

“Then I will proceed,” said Miss Lucretia. “I wrote the Hymn to Coniston’ many years ago, when I was younger, and yet it is true that I have always remembered Brampton with kindly feelings. The friends of our youth are dear to us. We look indulgently upon their failings, even as they do on ours. I have scanned the faces here in the hall tonight, and there are some that have not changed beyond recognition in thirty years. Ezra Graves I remember, and it is a pleasure to see him in that chair.” (Mr. Graves inclined his head, reverently. None knew how the inner man exulted.) “But there was one who was often in Brampton in those days,” Miss Lucretia continued, “whom we all loved and with whom we found no fault, and I confess that when I have thought of



Brampton I have oftenest thought of her. Her name," said Miss Lucretia, her hand now in the reticule, "her name was Cynthia Ware."



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There was a decided stir among the audience, and many leaned forward to catch every word.

“Even old people may have an ideal,” said Miss Lucretia, “and you will forgive me for speaking of mine. Where should I speak of it, if not in this village, among those who knew her and among their children? Cynthia Ware, although she was younger than I, has been my ideal, and is still. She was the daughter of the Rev. Samuel Ware of Coniston, and a descendant of Captain Timothy Prescott, whom General Stark called ‘Honest Tim.’ She was, to me, all that a woman should be, in intellect, in her scorn of all that is ignoble and false, and in her loyalty to her friends.” Here the handkerchief came out of the reticule. “She went to Boston to teach school, and some time afterward I was offered a position in New York, and I never saw her again. But she married in Boston a man of learning and literary attainments, though his health was feeble and he was poor, William Wetherell.” (Another stir.) “Mr. Wetherell was a gentleman—Cynthia Ware could have married no other—and he came of good and honorable people in Portsmouth. Very recently I read a collection of letters which he wrote to the Newcastle Guardian, which some of you may know. I did not trust my own judgment as to those letters, but I took them to an author whose name is known wherever English is spoken, but which I will not mention. And the author expressed it as his opinion, in writing to me, that William Wetherell was undoubtedly a genius of a high order, and that he would have been so recognized if life had given him a chance. Mr. Wetherell, after his wife died, was taken in a dying condition to Coniston, where he was forced, in order to earn his living, to become the storekeeper there. But he took his books with him, and found time to write the letters of which I have spoken, and to give his daughter an early education such as few girls have.

“My friends, I am rejoiced to see that the spirit of justice and the sense of right are as strong in Brampton as they used to be—strong enough to fill this town hall to overflowing because a teacher has been wrongly—yes, and iniquitously—dismissed from the lower school.” (Here there was a considerable stir, and many wondered whether Miss Lucretia was aware of the irony in her words.) “I say wrongly and iniquitously, because I have had the opportunity in Boston this winter of learning to know and love that teacher. I am not given to exaggeration, my friends, and when I tell you that I know her, that her character is as high and pure as her mother’s, I can say no more. I am here to tell you this to-night because I do not believe you know her as I do. During the seventy years I have lived I have grown to have but little faith in outward demonstration, to believe in deeds and attainments rather than expressions. And as for her fitness to teach, I believe that even the prudential committee could find no fault with that.” (I wonder whether Mr. Dodd was in the back of the hall.) “I can find no fault with it. I am constantly called upon to recommend teachers, and I tell you I should have no hesitation in sending Cynthia Wetherell to a high school, young as she is.”



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“And now, my friends, why was she dismissed? I have heard the facts, though not from her. Cynthia Wetherell does not know that I have come to Brampton, unless somebody has told her, and did not know that I was coming. I have heard the facts, and I find it difficult to believe that so great a wrong could be attempted against a woman, and if the name of Cynthia Wetherell had meant no more to me than the letters in it I should have travelled twice as far as Brampton, old as I am, to do my utmost to right that wrong. I give you my word of honor that I have never been so indignant in my life. I do not come here to stir up enmities among you, and I will mention no more names. I prefer to believe that the prudential committee of this district has made a mistake, the gravity of which they must now realize, and that they will reinstate Cynthia Wetherell to-morrow. And if they should not of their own free will, I have only to look around this meeting to be convinced that they will be compelled to. Compelled to, my friends, by the sense of justice and the righteous indignation of the citizens of Brampton.”

Miss Lucretia sat down, her strong face alight with the spirit that was in her. Not the least of the compelling forces in this world is righteous anger, and when it is exercised by a man or a woman whose life has been a continual warfare against the pests of wrong, it is well-nigh irresistible. While you could count five seconds the audience sat silent, and then began such tumult and applause as had never been seen in Brampton—all started, so it is said, by an old soldier in the front row with his stick. Isaac D. Worthington, sitting alone in the library of his mansion, heard it, and had no need to send for Mr. Flint to ask what it was, or who it was had fired the Third Estate. And Mr. Dodd heard it. He may have been in the hall, but now he sat at home, seeing visions of the lantern, and he would have fled to the palace had he thought to get any sympathy from his sovereign. No, Mr. Dodd did not hold the Bastille or even fight for it. Another and a better man gave up the keys, for heroes are sometimes hidden away in meek and retiring people who wear spectacles and have a stoop to their shoulders. Long before the excitement died away a dozen men were on their feet shouting at the chairman, and among them was the tall, stooping man with spectacles. He did not shout, but Judge Graves saw him and made up his mind that this was the man to speak. The chairman raised his hand and rapped with his gavel, and at length he had obtained silence.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “I am going to recognize Mr. Hill of the prudential committee, and ask him to step up on the platform.”

There fell another silence, as absolute as the first, when Mr. Hill walked down the aisle and climbed the steps. Indeed, people were stupefied, for the feed dealer was a man who had never opened his mouth in town-meeting; who had never taken an initiative of any kind; who had allowed other men to take advantage of him, and had never resented it. And now he was going to speak. Would he defend the prudential committee, or would he declare for the teacher? Either course, in Mr. Hill’s case, required courage, and he had never been credited with any. If Mr. Hill was going to speak at all, he was going to straddle.

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He reached the platform, bowed irresolutely to the chairman, and then stood awkwardly with one knee bent, peering at his audience over his glasses. He began without any address whatever.

“I want to say,” he began in a low voice, “that I had no intention of coming to this meeting. And I am going to confess—I am going to confess that I was afraid to come.” He raised his voice a little defiantly at the words, and paused. One could almost hear the people breathing. “I was afraid to come for fear that I should do the very thing I am going to do now. And yet I was impelled to come. I want to say that my conscience has not been clear since, as a member of the prudential committee, I gave my consent to the dismissal of Miss Wetherell. I know that I was influenced by personal and selfish considerations which should have had no weight. And after listening to Miss Penniman I take this opportunity to declare, of my own free will, that I will add my vote to that of Judge Graves to reinstate Miss Wetherell.”

Mr. Hill bowed slightly, and was about to descend the steps when the chairman, throwing parliamentary dignity to the winds, arose and seized the feed dealer’s hand. And the people in the hall almost as one man sprang to their feet and cheered, and some—Ephraim Prescott among these—even waved their hats and shouted Mr. Hill’s name. A New England audience does not frequently forget itself, but there were few present who did not understand the heroism of the man’s confession, who were not carried away by the simple and dramatic dignity of it. He had no need to mention Mr. Worthington’s name, or specify the nature of his obligations to that gentleman. In that hour Jonathan Hill rose high in the respect of Brampton, and some pressed into the aisle to congratulate him on his way back to his seat. Not a few were grateful to him for another reason. He had relieved the meeting of the necessity of taking any further action: of putting their names, for instance, in their enthusiasm to a paper which the first citizen might see.

Judge Graves, whose sense of a climax was acute, rapped for order.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, in a voice not wholly free from emotion, “you will all wish to pay your respects to the famous lady, who is with us. I see that the Rev. Mr. Sweet is present, and I suggest that we adjourn, after he has favored us with a prayer.”

As the minister came forward, Deacon Hartington dropped his head and began to flutter his eyelids. The Rev. Mr. Sweet prayed, and so was brought to an end the most exciting meeting ever held in Brampton town hall.

But Miss Lucretia did not like being called “a famous lady.”



CHAPTER XVI

While Miss Lucretia was standing, unwillingly enough, listening to the speeches that were poured into her ear by various members of the audience, receiving the incense and myrrh to which so great a celebrity was entitled, the old soldier hobbled away to his little house as fast as his three legs would carry him. Only one event in his life had eclipsed this in happiness—the interview in front of the White House. He rapped on the window with his stick, thereby frightening Cynthia half out of her wits as she sat musing sorrowfully by the fire.



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“Cousin Ephraim,” she said, taking off his corded hat, “what in the world’s the matter with you?”

“You’re a schoolmarm again, Cynthy.”

“Do you mean to say?”

“Miss Lucretia Penniman done it.”

“Miss Lucretia Penniman!” Cynthia began to think his rheumatism was driving him out of his mind.

“You bet. ‘Long toward the openin’ of the engagement there wahn’t scarcely anybody thar but me, and they was a-goin’. But they come fast enough when they l’arned she was in town, and she blew ’em up higher’n the Petersburg crater. Great Tecumseh, there’s a woman! Next to General Grant, I’d sooner shake her hand than anybody’s livin’.”

“Do you mean to say that Miss Lucretia is in Brampton and spoke at the mass meeting?”

“Spoke!” exclaimed Ephraim, “callate she did—some. Tore ’em all up. They’d a hung Isaac D. Worthington or Levi Dodd if they’d a had ’em thar.”

Cynthia, striving to be calm herself, got him into a chair and took his stick and straightened out his leg, and then Ephraim told her the story, and it lost no dramatic effect in his telling. He would have talked all night. But at length the sound of wheels was heard in the street, Cynthia flew to the door, and a familiar voice came out of the darkness.

“You need not wait, Gamaliel. No, thank you, I think I will stay at the hotel.”

Gamaliel was still protesting when Miss Lucretia came in and seized Cynthia in her arms, and the door was closed behind her.

“Oh, Miss Lucretia, why did you come?” said Cynthia, “if I had known you would do such a thing, I should never have written that letter. I have been sorry to-day that I did write it, and now I’m sorrier than ever.”

“Aren’t you glad to see me?” demanded Miss Lucretia.

“Miss Lucretia!”

“What are friends for?” asked Miss Lucretia, patting her hand. “If you had known how I wished to see you, Cynthia, and I thought a little trip would be good for such a provincial



Bostonian as I am. Dear, dear, I remember this house. It used to belong to Gabriel Post in my time, and right across from it was the Social Library, where I have spent so many pleasant hours with your mother. And this is Ephraim Prescott. I thought it was, when I saw him sitting in the front row, and I think he must have been very lonesome there at one time.”

“Yes, ma’am,” said Ephraim, giving her his gnarled fingers; “I was just sayin’ to Cynthy that I’d ruther shake your hand than anybody’s livin’ exceptin’ General Grant.”

“And I’d rather shake yours than the General’s,” said Miss Lucretia, for the Woman’s Hour had taken the opposition side in a certain recent public question concerning women.

“If you’d a fit with him, you wouldn’t say that, Miss Lucretia.”

“I haven’t a word to say against his fighting qualities,” she replied.

“Guess the General might say the same of you,” said Ephraim. “If you’d a b’en a man, I callate you’d a come out of the war with two stars on your shoulder. Godfrey, Miss Lucretia, you’d ought to’ve b’en a man.”



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“A man!” cried Miss Lucretia, “and ‘stars on my shoulder’! I think this kind of talk has gone far enough, Ephraim Prescott.”

“Cousin Eph,” said Cynthia, laughing, “you’re no match for Miss Lucretia, and it’s long past your bedtime.”

“A man!” repeated Miss Lucretia, after he had retired, and after Cynthia had tried to express her gratitude and had been silenced. They sat side by side in front of the chimney. “I suppose he meant that as a compliment. I never yet saw the man I couldn’t back down, and I haven’t any patience with a woman who gives in to them.” Miss Lucretia poked vigorously a log which had fallen down, as though that were a man, too, and she was putting him back in his proper place.

Cynthia, strange to say, did not reply to this remark.

“Cynthia,” said Miss Lucretia, abruptly, “you don’t mean to say that you are in love!”

Cynthia drew a long breath, and grew as red as the embers.

“Miss Lucretia!” she exclaimed, in astonishment and dismay.

“Well,” Miss Lucretia said, “I should have thought you could have gotten along, for a while at least, without anything of that kind. My dear,” she said leaning toward Cynthia, “who is he?”

Cynthia turned away. She found it very hard to speak of her troubles, even to Miss Lucretia, and she would have kept this secret even from Jethro, had it been possible.

“You must let him know his place,” said Miss Lucretia, “and I hope he is in some degree worthy of you.”

“I do not intend to marry him,” said Cynthia, with head still turned away.

It was now Miss Lucretia who was silent.

“I came near getting married once,” she said presently, with characteristic abruptness.

“You!” cried Cynthia, looking around in amazement.

“You see, I am franker than you, my dear—though I never told any one else. I believe you can keep a secret.”

“Of course I can. Who—was it anyone in Brampton, Miss Lucretia?” The question was out before Cynthia realized its import. She was turning the tables with a vengeance.



“It was Ezra Graves,” said Miss Lucretia.

“Ezra Graves!” And then Cynthia pressed Miss Lucretia’s hand in silence, thinking how strange it was that both of them should have been her champions that evening.

Miss Lucretia poked the fire again.

“It was shortly after that, when I went to Boston, that I wrote the ‘Hymn to Coniston.’ I suppose we must all be fools once or twice, or we should not be human.”

“And—weren’t you ever—sorry?” asked Cynthia.

Again there was a silence.

“I could not have done the work I have had to do in the world if I had married. But I have often wondered whether that work was worth the while. Such a feeling must come over all workers, occasionally. Yes,” said Miss Lucretia, “there have been times when I have been sorry, my dear, though I have never confessed it to another soul. I am telling you this for your own good—not mine. If you have the love of a good man, Cynthia, be careful what you do with it.”



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The tears had come into Cynthia's eyes.

"I should have told you, Miss Lucretia," she faltered. "If I could have married him, it would have been easier."

"Why can't you marry him?" demanded Miss Lucretia, sharply—to hide her own emotion.

"His name," said Cynthia, "is Bob Worthington:"

"Isaac Worthington's son?"

"Yes."

Another silence, Miss Lucretia being utterly unable to say anything for a space.

"Is he a good man?"

Cynthia was on the point of indignant-protest, but she stopped herself in time.

"I will tell you what he has done," she answered, "and then you shall judge for yourself."

And she told Miss Lucretia, simply, all that Bob had done, and all that she herself had done.

"He is like his mother, Sarah Hollingsworth; I knew her well," said Miss Lucretia. "If Isaac Worthington were a man, he would be down on his knees begging you to marry his son. He tried hard enough to marry your own mother."

"My mother!" exclaimed Cynthia, who had never believed that rumor.

"Yes," said Miss Lucretia, "and you may thank your stars he didn't succeed. I mistrusted him when he was a young man, and now I know that he hasn't changed. He is a coward and a hypocrite."

Cynthia could not deny this.

"And yet," she said, after a moment's silence, "I am sure you will say that I have been right. My own conscience tells me that it is wrong to deprive Bob of his inheritance, and to separate him from his father, whatever his father—may be."

"We shall see what happens in five years," said Miss Lucretia.

"Five years!" said Cynthia, in spite of herself.



“Jacob served seven for Rachel,” answered Miss Lucretia; “that period is scarcely too short to test a man, and you are both young.”

“No,” said Cynthia, “I cannot marry him, Miss Lucretia. The world would accuse me of design, and I feel that I should not be happy. I am sure that he would never reproach me, even if things went wrong, but—the day might come when—when he would wish that it had been otherwise.”

Miss Lucretia kissed her.

“You are very young, my dear,” she repeated, “and none of us may say what changes time may bring forth. And now I must go.”

Cynthia insisted upon walking with her friend down the street to the hotel—an undertaking that was without danger in Brampton. And it was only a step, after all. A late moon floated in the sky, throwing in relief the shadow of the Worthington mansion against the white patches of snow. A light was still burning in the library.

The next morning after breakfast Miss Lucretia appeared at the little house, and informed Cynthia that she would walk to school with her.

“But I have not yet been notified by the Committee,” said Cynthia. There was a knock at the door, and in walked Judge Ezra Graves. Miss Lucretia may have blushed, but it is certain that Cynthia did. Never had she seen the judge so spick and span, and he wore the broadcloth coat he usually reserved for Sundays. He paused at the threshold, with his hand on his Adam’s apple.



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“Good morning, ladies,” he said, and looked shyly at Miss Lucretia and cleared his throat, and spoke with the elaborate decorum he used on occasions, “Miss Penniman, I wish to thank you again for your noble action of last evening.”

“Don’t ‘Miss Penniman’ me, Ezra Graves,” retorted Miss Lucretia; “the only noble action I know of was poor Jonathan Hill’s—unless it was paying for the gas.”

This was the way in which Miss Lucretia treated her lover after thirty years! Cynthia thought of what the lady had said to her a few hours since, by this very fire, and began to believe she must have dreamed it. Fires look very differently at night—and sometimes burn brighter then. The judge parted his coat tails, and seated himself on the wooden edge of a cane-bottomed chair.

“Lucretia,” he said, “you haven’t changed.”

“You have, Ezra,” she replied, looking at the Adam’s apple.

“I’m an old man,” said Ezra Graves.

Cynthia could not help thinking that he was a very different man, in Miss Lucretia’s presence, than when at the head of the prudential committee.

“Ezra,” said Miss Lucretia, “for a man you do very well.”

The judge smiled.

“Thank you, Lucretia,” said he. He seemed to appreciate the full extent of the compliment.

“Judge Graves,” said Cynthia, “I can tell you how good you are, at least, and thank you for your great kindness to me, which I shall never forget.”

She took his withered hands from his knees and pressed them. He returned the pressure, and then searched his coat tails, found a handkerchief, and blew his nose violently.

“I merely did my duty, Miss Wetherell,” he said. “I would not wilfully submit to a wrong.”

“You called me Cynthia yesterday.”

“So I did,” he answered, “so I did.” Then he looked at Miss Lucretia.

“Ezra,” said that lady, smiling a little, “I don’t believe you have changed, after all.”

What she meant by that nobody knows.



“I had thought, Cynthia,” said the judge, “that it might be more comfortable for you to have me go to the school with you. That is the reason for my early call.”

“Judge Graves, I do appreciate your kindness,” said Cynthia; “I hope you won’t think I’m rude if I say I’d rather go alone.”

“On the contrary, my dear,” replied the judge, “I think I can understand and esteem your feeling in the matter, and it shall be as you wish.”

“Then I think I had better be going,” said Cynthia. The judge rose in alarm at the words, but she put her hand on his shoulder. “Won’t you sit down and stay,” she begged, “you haven’t seen Miss Lucretia for how many years,—thirty, isn’t it?”

Again he glanced at Miss Lucretia, uncertainly. “Sit down, Ezra,” she commanded, “and for goodness’ sake don’t be afraid of the cane bottom. You won’t go through it. I should like to talk to you, and most of the gossips of our day are dead. I shall stay in Brampton to-day, Cynthia, and eat supper with you here this evening.”



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Cynthia, as she went out of the door, wondered what they would talk about. Then she turned toward the school. It was not the March wind that burned her cheeks; as she thought of the mass meeting the night before, which was all about her, she wished she might go to school that morning through the woods and pasture lots rather than down Brampton Street. What—what would Bob say when he heard of the meeting? Would he come again to Brampton? If he did, she would run away to Boston with Miss Lucretia. Every day it had been a trial to pass the Worthington house, but she could not cross the wide street to avoid it. She hurried a little, unconsciously, when she came to it, for there was Mr. Worthington on the steps talking to Mr. Flint. How he must hate her now, Cynthia reflected! He did not so much as look up when she passed.

The other citizens whom she met made up for Mr. Worthington's coldness, and gave her a hearty greeting, and some stopped to offer their congratulations. Cynthia did not pause to philosophize: she was learning to accept the world as it was, and hurried swiftly on to the little schoolhouse. The children saw her coming, and ran to meet her and escorted her triumphantly in at the door. Of their welcome she could be sure. Thus she became again teacher of the lower school.

How the judge and Miss Lucretia got along that morning, Cynthia never knew. Miss Lucretia spent the day in her old home, submitting to hero-worship, and attended an evening party in her honor at Mr. Gamaliel Ives's house—a mansion not so large as the first citizen's, though it had two bay-windows and was not altogether unimposing. The first citizen, needless to say, was not there, but the rest of the elite attended. Mr. Ives will tell you all about the entertainment if you go to Brampton, but the real reason Miss Lucretia consented to go was to please Lucy Baird, who was Gamaliel's wife, and to chat with certain old friends whom she had not seen. The next morning she called at the school to bid Cynthia good-by, and to whisper something in her ear which made her very red before all the scholars. She shook her head when Miss Lucretia said it, for it had to do with an incident in the 29th chapter of Genesis.

While Jonathan Hill was being made a hero of in the little two-by-four office of the feed store the morning after the mass meeting (though nobody offered to take over his mortgage), Mr. Dodd was complaining to his wife of shooting pains, and "callated" he would stay at home that day.

"Shootin' fiddlesticks!" said Mrs. Dodd. "Get along down to the store and face the music, Levi Dodd. You'd have had shootin' pains if you'd a went to the meetin'."

"I might stop by at Mr. Worthington's house and explain how powerless I was—"

"For goodness' sake git out, Levi. I guess he knows how powerless you are with your shootin' pains. If you only could forget Isaac D. Worthington for three minutes, you wouldn't have 'em."

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Mr. Dodd's two clerks saw him enter the store by the back door and he was very much interested in the new ploughs which were piled up in crates outside of it. Then he disappeared into his office and shut the door, and supposedly became very much absorbed in book-keeping. If any one called, he was out—any one. Plenty of people did call, but he was not disturbed—until ten o'clock. Mr. Dodd had a very sensitive ear, and he could often recognize a man by his step, and this man he recognized.

"Where's Mr. Dodd?" demanded the owner of the step, indignantly.

"He's out, Mr. Worthington. Anything I can do for you, Mr. Worthington?"

"You can tell him to come up to my house the moment he comes in."

Unfortunately Mr. Dodd in the office had got into a strained position. He found it necessary to move a little; the day-book fell heavily to the floor, and the perspiration popped out all over his forehead. Come out, Levi Dodd. The Bastille is taken, but there are other fortresses still in the royal hands where you may be confined.

"Who's in the office?"

"I don't know, sir," answered the clerk, winking at his companion, who was sorting nails.

In three strides the great man had his hand on the office door and had flung it open, disclosing the culprit cowering over the day-book on the floor.

"Mr. Dodd," cried the first citizen, "what do you mean by—?"

Some natures, when terrified, are struck dumb. Mr. Dodd's was the kind which bursts into speech.

"I couldn't help it, Mr. Worthington," he cried, "they would have it. I don't know what got into 'em. They lost their senses, Mr. Worthington, plumb lost their senses. If you'd a b'en there, you might have brought 'em to. I tried to git the floor, but Ezry Graves—"

"Confound Ezra Graves, and wait till I have done, can't you," interrupted the first citizen, angrily. "What do you mean by putting a bath-tub into my house with the tin loose, so that I cut my leg on it?"

Mr. Dodd nearly fainted from sheer relief.

"I'll put a new one in to-day, right now," he gasped.

"See that you do," said the first citizen, "and if I lose my leg, I'll sue you for a hundred thousand dollars."



“I was a-goin’ to explain about them losin’ their heads at the mass meetin’—”

“Damn their heads!” said the first citizen. “And yours, too,” he may have added under his breath as he stalked out. It was not worth a swing of the executioner’s axe in these times of war. News had arrived from the state capital that morning of which Mr. Dodd knew nothing. Certain feudal chiefs from the North Country, of whose allegiance Mr. Worthington had felt sure, had obeyed the summons of their old sovereign, Jethro Bass, and had come South to hold a conclave under him at the Pelican. Those chiefs of the North Country, with their clans behind them as one man, what a power they were in



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the state! What magnificent qualities they had, in battle or strategy, and how cunning and shrewd was their generalship! Year after year they came down from their mountains and fought shoulder to shoulder, and year after year they carried back the lion's share of the spoils between them. The great South, as a whole, was powerless to resist them, for there could be no lasting alliance between Harwich and Brampton and Newcastle and Gosport. Now their king had come back, and the North Country men were rallying again to his standard. No wonder that Levi Dodd's head, poor thing that it was, was safe for a while.

"Organize what you have left, and be quick about it," said Mr. Flint, when the news had come, and they sat in the library planning a new campaign in the face of this evident defection. There was no time to cry over spilt milk or reinstated school-teachers. The messages flew far and wide to the manufacturing towns to range their guilds into line for the railroads. The seneschal wrote the messages, and sent the summons to the sleek men of the cities, and let it be known that the coffers were full and not too tightly sealed, that the faithful should not lack for the sinews of war. Mr. Flint found time, too, to write some carefully worded but nevertheless convincing articles for the Newcastle Guardian, very damaging to certain commanders who had proved unfaithful.

"Flint," said Mr. Worthington, when they had worked far into the night, "if Bass beats us, I'm a crippled man."

"And if you postpone the fight now that you have begun it? What then?"

The answer, Mr. Worthington knew, was the same either way. He did not repeat it. He went to his bed, but not to sleep for many hours, and when he came down to his breakfast in the morning, he was in no mood to read the letter from Cambridge which Mrs. Holden had put on his plate. But he did read it, with what anger and bitterness may be imagined. There was the ultimatum,—respectful, even affectionate, but firm. "I know that you will, in all probability, disinherit me as you say, and I tell you honestly that I regret the necessity of quarrelling with you more than I do the money. I do not pretend to say that I despise money, and I like the things that it buys, but the woman I love is more to me than all that you have."

Mr. Worthington laid the letter down, and there came irresistibly to his mind something that his wife had said to him before she died, shortly after they had moved into the mansion. "Dudley, how happy we used to be together before we were rich!" Money had not been everything to Sarah Worthington, either. But now no tender wave of feeling swept over him as he recalled those words. He was thinking of what weapon he had to prevent the marriage beyond that which was now useless—disinheritance. He would disinherit Bob, and that very day. He would punish his son to the utmost of his power

for marrying the ward of Jethro Bass. He wondered bitterly, in case a certain event occurred, whether he would have much to alienate.



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When Mr. Flint arrived, fresh as usual in spite of the work he had accomplished and the cigars he had smoked the night before, Mr. Worthington still had the letter in his hand, and was pacing his library floor, and broke into a tirade against his son.

“After all I have done for him, building up for him a position and a fortune that is only surpassed by young Duncan’s, to treat me in this way, to drag down the name of Worthington in the mire. I’ll never forgive him. I’ll send for Dixon and leave the money for a hospital in Brampton. Can’t you suggest any way out of this, Flint?”

“No,” said Flint, “not now. The only chance you have is to ignore the thing from now on. He may get tired of her—I’ve known such things to happen.”

“When she hears that I’ve disinherited him, she will get tired of him,” declared Mr. Worthington.

“Try it and see, if you like,” said Flint.

“Look here, Flint, if the woman has a spark of decent feeling, as you seem to think, I’ll send for her and tell her that she will ruin Robert if she marries him.” Mr. Worthington always spoke of his son as “Robert.”

“You ought to have thought of that before the mass meeting. Perhaps it would have done some good then.”

“Because this Penniman woman has stirred people up—is that what you mean? I don’t care anything about that. Money counts in the long run.”

“If money counted with this school-teacher, it would be a simple matter. I think you’ll find it doesn’t.”

“I’ve known you to make some serious mistakes,” snapped Mr. Worthington.

“Then why do you ask for my advice?”

“I’ll send for her, and appeal to her better nature,” said Mr. Worthington, with an unconscious and sublime irony.

Flint gave no sign that he heard. Mr. Worthington seated himself at his desk, and after some thought wrote on a piece of note-paper the following lines: “My dear Miss Wetherell, I should be greatly obliged if you would find it convenient to call at my house at eight o’clock this evening,” and signed them, “Sincerely Yours.” He sealed them up in an envelope and addressed it to Miss Wetherell, at the schoolhouse; and handed it to Mr. Flint. That gentleman got as far as the door, and then he hesitated and turned.



“There is just one way out of this for you, that I can see, Mr. Worthington,” he said. “It’s a desperate measure, but it’s worth thinking about.”

“What’s that?”

It took some courage for Mr. Flint, to make the suggestion. “The girl’s a good girl, well educated, and by no means bad looking. Bob might do a thousand times worse. Give your consent to the marriage, and Jethro Bass will go back to Coniston.”

It was wisdom such as few lords get from their seneschals, but Isaac D. Worthington did not so recognize it. His anger rose and took away his breath as he listened to it.

“I will never give my consent to it, never—do you hear?—never. Send that note!” he cried.



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Mr. Flint walked out, sent the note, and returned and took his place silently at his own table. He was a man of concentration, and he put his mind on the arguments he was composing to certain political leaders. Mr. Worthington merely pretended to work as he waited for the answer to come back. And presently, when it did come back, he tore it open and read it with an expression not often on his lips. He flung the paper at Mr. Flint.

“Read that,” he said.

This is what Mr. Flint read: “Miss Wetherell begs to inform Mr. Isaac D. Worthington that she can have no communication or intercourse with him whatsoever.”

Mr. Flint handed it back without a word. His opinion of the school-teacher had risen mightily, but he did not say so. Mr. Worthington took the note, too, without a word. Speech was beyond him, and he crushed the paper as fiercely as he would have liked to have crushed Cynthia, had she been in his hands.

One accomplishment which Cynthia had learned at Miss Sadler’s school was to write a letter in the third person, Miss Sadler holding that there were occasions when it was beneath a lady’s dignity to write a direct note. And Cynthia, sitting at her little desk in the schoolhouse during her recess, had deemed this one of the occasions. She could not bring herself to write, “My dear Mr. Worthington.” Her anger, when the note had been handed to her, was for the moment so great that she could not go on with her classes; but she had controlled it, and compelled Silas to stand in the entry until recess, when she sat with her pen in her hand until that happy notion of the third person occurred to her. And after Silas had gone she sat still; though trembling a little at intervals, picturing with some satisfaction Mr. Worthington’s appearance when he received her answer. Her instinct told her that he had received his son’s letter, and that he had sent for her to insult her. By sending for her, indeed, he had insulted her irrevocably, and that is why she trembled.

Poor Cynthia! her troubles came thick and fast upon her in those days. When she reached home, there was the letter which Ephraim had left on the table addressed in the familiar, upright handwriting, and when Cynthia saw it, she caught her hand sharply at her breast, as if the pain there had stopped the beating of her heart. Well it was for Bob’s peace of mind that he could not see her as she read it, and before she had come to the end there were drops on the sheets where the purple ink had run. How precious would have been those drops to him! He would never give her up. No mandate or decree could separate them—nothing but death. And he was happier now so he told her—than he had been for months: happy in the thought that he was going out into the world to win bread for her, as became a man. Even if he had not her to strive for, he saw now that such was the only course for him. He could not conform.

It was a manly letter,—how manly Bob himself never knew. But Cynthia knew, and she wept over it and even pressed it to her lips—for there was no one to see. Yes, she



loved him as she would not have believed it possible to love, and she sat through the afternoon reading his words and repeating them until it seemed that he were there by her side, speaking them. They came, untrammelled and undefiled, from his heart into hers.



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And now that he had quarrelled with his father for her sake, and was bent with all the determination of his character upon making his own way in the world, what was she to do? What was her duty? Not one letter of the twoscore she had received (so she kept their count from day to day)—not one had she answered. His faith had indeed been great. But she must answer this: must write, too, on that subject of her dismissal, lest it should be wrongly told him. He was rash in his anger, and fearless; this she knew, and loved him for such qualities as he had.

She must stay in Brampton and do her work,—so much was clearly her duty, although she longed to flee from it. And at last she sat down and wrote to him. Some things are too sacred to be set forth on a printed page, and this letter is one of those things. Try as she would, she could not find it in her heart at such a time to destroy his hope,—or her own. The hope which she would not acknowledge, and the love which she strove to conceal from him seeped up between the words of her letter like water through grains of sand. Words, indeed, are but as grains of sand to conceal strong feelings, and as Cynthia read the letter over she felt that every line betrayed her, and knew that she could compose no lines which would not.

She said nothing of the summons which she had received that morning, or of her answer; and her account of the matter of the dismissal and reinstatement was brief and dignified, and contained no mention of Mr. Worthington's name or agency. It was her duty, too, to rebuke Bob for the quarrel with his father, to point out the folly of it, and the wrong, and to urge him as strongly as she could to retract, though she felt that all this was useless. And then—then came the betrayal of hope. She could not ask him never to see her again, but she did beseech him for her sake, and for the sake of that love which he had declared, not to attempt to see her: not for a year, she wrote, though the word looked to her like eternity. Her reasons, aside from her own scruples, were so obvious, while she taught in Brampton, that she felt that he would consent to banishment—until the summer holidays in July, at least: and then she would be in Coniston,—and would have had time to decide upon future steps. A reprieve was all she craved,—a reprieve in which to reflect, for she was in no condition to reflect now. Of one thing she was sure, that it would not be right at this time to encourage him although she had a guilty feeling that the letter had given him encouragement in spite of all the prohibitions it contained. "If, in the future years," thought Cynthia, as she sealed the envelope, "he persists in his determination, what then?" You, Miss Lucretia, of all people in the world, have planted the seeds with your talk about Genesis!

The letter was signed "One who will always remain your friend, Cynthia Wetherell." And she posted it herself.

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When Ephraim came home to supper that evening, he brought the Brampton Clarion, just out, and in it was an account of Miss Lucretia Penniman's speech at the mass meeting, and of her visit, and of her career. It was written in Mr. Page's best vein, and so laudatory was it that we shall have to spare Miss Lucretia in not repeating it here: yes, and omit the encomiums, too, on the teacher of the Brampton lower school. Mr. Worthington was not mentioned, and for this, at least, Cynthia drew along breath of relief, though Ephraim was of the opinion that the first citizen should have been scored as he deserved, and held up to the contempt of his fellow-townsmen. The dismissal of the teacher, indeed, was put down to a regrettable misconception on the part of "one of the prudential committee," who had confessed his mistake in "a manly and altogether praiseworthy speech." The article was as near the truth, perhaps, as the Clarions may come on such matters—which is not very near. Cynthia would have been better pleased if Mr. Page had spared his readers the recital of her qualities, and she did not in the least recognize the paragon whom Miss Lucretia had befriended and defended. She was thankful that Mr. Page did not state that the celebrity had come up from Boston on her account. Miss Penniman had been "actuated by a sudden desire to see once more the beauties of her old home, to look into the faces of the old friends who had followed her career with such pardonable pride." The speech of the president of the literary club, you may be sure, was printed in full, for Mr. Ives himself had taken the trouble to write it out for the editor—by request, of course.

Cynthia turned over the sheet, and read many interesting items: one concerning the beauty and fashion and intellect which attended the party at Mr. Gamaliel Ives's; in the Clovelly notes she saw that Miss Judy Hatch, of Coniston, was visiting relatives there; she learned the output of the Worthington Mills for the past week. Cynthia was about to fold up the paper and send it to Miss Lucretia, whom she thought it would amuse, when her eyes were arrested by the sight of a familiar name.

"Jethro Bass come to life again.
From the State Tribune."

That was the heading. "One of the greatest political surprises in many years was the arrival in the capital on Wednesday of Judge Bass, whom it was thought, had permanently retired from politics. This, at least, seems to have been the confident belief of a faction in the state who have at heart the consolidation of certain lines of railroads. Judge Bass was found by a Tribune reporter in the familiar Throne Room at the Pelican, but, as usual, he could not be induced to talk for publication. He was in conference throughout the afternoon with several well-known leaders from the North Country. The return of Jethro Bass to activity seriously complicates the railroad situation, and many prominent politicians are freely



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predicting to-night that, in spite of the town-meeting returns, the proposed bill for consolidation will not go through. Judge Bass is a man of such remarkable personality that he has regained at a stroke much of the influence that he lost by the sudden and unaccountable retirement which electrified the state some months since. His reappearance, the news of which was the one topic in all political centres yesterday, is equally unaccountable. It is hinted that some action on the part of Isaac D. Worthington has brought Jethro Bass to life. They are known to be bitter enemies, and it is said that Jethro Bass has but one object in returning to the field—to crush the president of the Truro Railroad. Another theory is that the railroads and interests opposed to the consolidation have induced Judge Bass to take charge of their fight for them. All indications point to the fiercest struggle the state has ever seen in June, when the Legislature meets. The Tribune, whose sentiments are well known to be opposed to the iniquity of consolidation, extends a hearty welcome to the judge. No state, we believe, can claim a party leader of a higher order of ability than Jethro Bass.”

Cynthia dropped the paper in her lap, and sat very still. This, then, was what happened when Jethro had heard of her dismissal—he had left Coniston without writing her a word and passed through Brampton without seeing her. He had gone back to that life which he had abandoned for her sake; the temptation had been too strong, the desire for vengeance too great. He had not dared to see her. And yet the love for her which had been strong enough to make him renounce the homage of men, and even incur their ridicule, had incited him to this very act of vengeance.

What should she do now, indeed? Had those peaceful and happy Saturdays and Sundays in Coniston passed away forever? Should she follow him to the capital and appeal to him? Ah no, she felt that were a useless pain to them both. She believed, now, that he had gone away from her for all time, that the veil of limitless space was set between, them. Silently she arose,—so silently that Ephraim, dozing by the fire, did not awake. She went into her own room and wept, and after many hours fell into a dreamless sleep of sheer exhaustion.

The days passed, and the weeks; the snow ran from the brown fields, and melted at length even in the moist crotches under the hemlocks of the northern slopes; the robin and bluebird came, the hillsides were mottled with exquisite shades of green, and the scent of fruit blossom and balm of Gilead was in the air. June came as a maiden and grew into womanhood. But Jethro Bass did not return to Coniston.

CHAPTER XVII



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The legends which surround the famous war which we are about to touch upon are as dim as those of Troy or Tuscany. Decorous chronicles and biographies and monographs and eulogies exist, bound in leather and stamped in gold, each lauding its own hero: chronicles written in really beautiful language, and high-minded and noble, out of which the heroes come unstained. Horatius holds the bridge, and not a dent in his armor; and swims the Tiber without getting wet or muddy. Castor and Pollux fight in the front rank at Lake Regillus, in the midst of all that gore and slaughter, and emerge all white and pure at the end of the day—but they are gods.

Out of the classic wars to which we have referred sprang the great Roman Republic and Empire, and legend runs into authentic and written history. Just so, *parva componere magnis*, out of the cloud-wrapped conflicts of the five railroads of which our own Gaul is composed, emerged one imperial railroad, authentically and legally written down on the statute books, for all men to see. We cannot go behind that statute except to collect the legends and write homilies about the heroes who held the bridges.

If we were not in mortal terror of the imperial power, and a little fearful, too, of tiring our readers, we would write out all the legends we have collected of this first fight for consolidation, and show the blood, too.

In the statute books of a certain state may be found a number of laws setting forth the various things that a railroad or railroads may do, and on the margin of these pages is invariably printed a date, that being the particular year in which these laws were passed. By a singular coincidence it is the very year at which we have now arrived in our story. We do not intend to give a map of the state, or discuss the merits or demerits of the consolidation of the Central and the Northwestern and the Truro railroads. Such discussions are not the province of a novelist, and may all be found in the files of the Tribune at the State Library. There were, likewise, decisions without number handed down by the various courts before and after that celebrated session,—opinions on the validity of leases, on the extension of railroads, on the rights of individual stockholders—all dry reading enough.

At the risk of being picked to pieces by the corporation lawyers who may read these pages, we shall attempt to state the situation and with all modesty and impartiality—for we, at least, hold no brief. When Mr. Isaac D. Worthington obtained that extension of the Truro Railroad (which we have read about from the somewhat verdant point of view of William Wetherell), that railroad then formed a connection with another road which ran northward from Harwich through another state, and with which we have nothing to do. Having previously purchased a line to the southward from the capital, Mr. Worthington's railroad was in a position to compete with Mr. Duncan's (the "Central")

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for Canadian traffic, and also to cut into the profits of the “Northwestern,” Mr. Lovejoy’s road. In brief, the Truro Railroad found itself very advantageously placed, as Mr. Worthington and Mr. Flint had foreseen. There followed a period of bickering and recrimination, of attempts of the other two railroads to secure representation in the Truro directorate, of suits and injunctions and appeals to the Legislature and I know not what else—in all of which affairs Mr. Bijah Bixby and other gentlemen we could name found both pleasure and remuneration.

Oh, that those halcyon days of the little wars would come again, when a captain could ride out almost any time at the head of his band of mercenaries and see honest fighting and divide honest spoils! There was much knocking about of men and horses, but very little bloodshed, so we are told. Mr. Bixby will sit on the sunny side of his barns in Clovelly and tell you stories of that golden period with tears in his eyes, when he went to conventions with a pocketful of proxies from the river towns, and controlled in the greatest legislative year of all a “block” which included the President of the Senate, for which he got the fabulous sum of——. He will tell you, but I won’t. Mr. Bixby’s occupation is gone now. We have changed all that, and we are ruled from imperial Rome. If you don’t do right, they cut off your (political) head, and it is of no use to run away, because there is no one to run to.

It was Isaac D. Worthington—or shall we say Mr. Flint?—who was responsible for this pernicious change for the worse, who conceived the notion of leasing for the Truro the Central and the Northwestern,—thus making one railroad out of the three. If such a gigantic undertaking could be got through, Mr. Worthington very rightly deemed that the other railroads of the state would eventually fall like ripe fruit into their caps—owning the ground under the tree, as they would. A movement, which we need not go unto, was first made upon the courts, and for a while adverse decisions came down like summer rain. A genius by the name of Jethro Bass had for many years presided (in the room of the governor and council at the State House) at the political birth of justices of the Supreme Court. None of them actually wore livery, but we have seen one of them—along time ago—in a horse blanket. None of them were favorable to the plans of Mr. Worthington and Mr. Duncan.

We have listened to the firing on the skirmish lines for a long time, and now the real battle is at hand. It is June, and the Legislature is meeting, and Bijah Bixby has come down to the capital at the head of his regiment of mercenaries, of which Mr. Sutton is the honorary colonel; the clans are here from the north, well quartered and well fed; the Throne Room, within the sacred precincts of which we have been before, is occupied. But there is another headquarters now, too, in the Pelican House—a Railroad Room; larger than the Throne Room, with a bath-room leading out of it. Another old friend of ours, Judge Abner Parkinson of Harwich, he who gave the sardonic laugh when Sam Price applied for the post of road agent, may often be seen in that Railroad Room from

now on. The fact is that the judge is about to become famous far beyond the confines of Harwich; for he, and none other, is the author of the Consolidation Bill itself.

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Mr. Flint is the generalissimo of the allied railroads, and sits in his headquarters early and late, going over the details of the campaign with his lieutenants; scanning the clauses of the bill with Judge Parkinson for the last time, and giving orders to the captains of mercenaries as to the disposition of their forces; writing out passes for the deserving and the true. For these latter, also, and for the wavering there is a claw-hammer on the marble-topped mantel wielded by Mr. Bijah Bixby, pro tem chief of staff—or of the hammer, for he is self-appointed and very useful. He opens the mysterious packing cases which come up to the Railroad Room thrice a week, and there is water to be had in the bath-room—and glasses. Mr. Bixby also finds time to do some of the scouting about the rotunda and lobbies, for which he is justly celebrated, and to drill his regiment every day. The Honorable Heth Sutton, M.C.,—who held the bridge in the Woodchuck Session,—is there also, sitting in a corner, swelled with importance, smoking big Florizel cigars which come from—somewhere. There are, indeed, many great and battle-scarred veterans who congregate in that room—too numerous and great to mention; and saunterers in the Capitol Park opposite know when a council of war is being held by the volumes of smoke which pour out of the window, just as the Romans are made cognizant by the smoking of a chimney of when another notable event takes place.

Who, then, are left to frequent the Throne Room? Is that ancient seat of power deserted, and does Jethro Bass sit there alone behind the curtains, in his bitterness, thinking of other bright June days that are gone?

Of all those who had been amazed when Jethro Bass suddenly emerged from his retirement and appeared in the capital some months before, none were more thunderstruck than certain gentlemen who had been to Coniston repeatedly, but in vain, to urge him to make this very fight. The most important of these had been Mr. Balch, president of the “Down East” Road, and the representatives of two railroads of another state. They had at last offered Jethro fabulous sums to take charge of their armies in the field—sums, at least, that would seem fabulous to many people, and had seemed so to them. When they heard that the lion had roused and shaken himself and had unaccountably come forth of his own accord, they hastened to the state capital to renew their offers. Another shock, but of a different kind, was in store for them. Mr. Balch had not actually driven the pack-mules, laden with treasure, to the door of the Pelican House, where Jethro might see them from his window; but he requested a private audience, and it was probably accidental that the end of his personal check-book protruded a little from his pocket. He was a big, coarse-grained man, Mr. Balch, who had once been a brakeman, and had risen by what is known as horse sense to the presidency of his road. There was a wonderful sunset beyond the Capitol, but Mr. Balch did not talk about the sunset, although Jethro was watching it from behind the curtains.



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"If you are willing to undertake this fight against consolidation," said Mr. Balch, "we are ready to talk business with you."

"D-don't know what you're going to, do," answered Jethro; "I'm going to prevent consolidation, if I can."

"All right," said Balch, smiling. He regarded this reply as one of Jethro's delicate euphemisms. "We're prepared to give that same little retainer."

Jethro did not look up. Mr. Balch went to the table and seized a pen and filled out a check for an amount that shall be nameless.

"I have made it payable to bearer, as usual," he said, and he handed it to Jethro.

Jethro took it, and absently tore it into little pieces, and threw the pieces on the floor. Mr. Balch watched him in consternation. He began to think the report that Jethro had reached his second childhood was true.

"What in Halifax are you doing, Bass?" he cried.

"W-want to stop this consolidation, don't you—want' to stop it?"

"Certainly I do."

"G-goin' to do all you can to stop it hain't you?"

"Certainly I am."

"I-I'll help you," said Jethro.

"Help us!" exclaimed Balch. "Great Scott, we want you to take charge of it."

"I-I'll do all I can, but I won't guarantee it—w-won't guarantee it," said Jethro.

"We don't ask you to guarantee it. If you'll do all you can, that's enough. You won't take a retainer?"

"W-won't take anything," said Jethro.

"You mean to say you don't want anything for your for your time and your services if the bill is defeated?"

"T-that's about it, Ed. Little p-private matter with both of us. You don't want consolidation, and I don't. I hain't offered to give you a retainer—have I?"



“No,” said the astounded Mr. Balch. He scratched his head and fingered the leaves of his check-book. The captains over the tens and the captains over the hundreds would want little retainers—and who was to pay these? “How about the boys?” asked Mr. Balch.

“S-still got the same office in the depot—hain’t you, Ed, s-same office?”

“Yes.”

“G-guess the boys hev b’en there before,” said Jethro.

Mr. Balch went away, meditating upon those sayings, and took the train for Boston. If he had waked up of a fine morning to find himself at the head of some benevolent and charitable organization, instead of the “Down East” Railroad, he could not have been more astonished than he had been at the unaccountable change of heart of Jethro Bass. He did not know what to make of it, and told his colleagues so; and at first they feared one of two things,—treachery or lunacy. But a little later a rumor reached Mr. Balch’s ears that Jethro’s hatred of Isaac D. Worthington was at the bottom of his reappearance in public life, although Jethro himself never mentioned Mr. Worthington’s name. Jethro sat in the Throne Room, consulting, directing day after day, and when the Legislature assembled, “the boys” began to call at Mr. Balch’s office. But Mr. Balch never again broached the subject of money to Jethro Bass.

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We have to sing the song of sixpence for the last time in these pages; and as it is an old song now, there will be no encores. If you can buy one member of the lower house for ten dollars, how many members can you buy for fifty? It was no such problem in primary arithmetic that Mr. Balch and his associates had to solve—theirs was in higher mathematics, in permutations and combinations, and in least squares. No wonder the old campaigners speak with tears in their eyes of the days of that ever memorable summer. There were spoils to be picked up in the very streets richer than the sack of the thirty cities; and as the session wore on it is affirmed by men still living that money rained down in the Capitol Park and elsewhere like manna from the skies, if you were one of a chosen band. If you were, all you had to do was to look in your vest pockets when you took your clothes off in the evening and extract enough legal tender to pay your bill at the Pelican for a week. Mr. Lovejoy having been overheard one day to make a remark concerning the diet of hogs, the next morning certain visitors to the capital were horrified to discover trails of corn leading from the Pelican House to their doorways. Men who had never seen a receiving teller opened bank accounts. No, it was not a problem in simple arithmetic, and Mr. Balch and Mr. Flint, and even Mr. Duncan and Mr. Worthington, covered whole sheets with figures during the stifling days in July. Some men are so valuable that they can be bought twice, or even three times, and they make figuring complicated.

Jethro Bass did no calculating. He sat behind the curtains, and he must have kept the figures in his head.

The battle had closed in earnest, and for twelve long, sultry weeks it raged with unabated fierceness. Consolidation had a terror for the rural mind, and the state Tribune skilfully played its stream upon the constituents of those gentlemen who stood tamely at the Worthington hitching-posts, and the constituents flocked to the capital; that able newspaper, too, found space to return, with interest, the attacks of Mr. Worthington's organ, the Newcastle Guardian. These amenities are much too personal to reproduce here, now that the smoke of battle has rolled away. An epic could be written upon the conflict, if there were space: Canto One, the first position carried triumphantly, though at some expense, by the Worthington forces, who elect the Speaker. That had been a crucial time before the town meetings, when Jethro abdicated. The Worthington Speaker goes ahead with his committees, and it is needless to say that Mr. Chauncey Weed is not made Chairman of the Committee on Corporations. As an offset to this, the Jethro forces gain on the extreme right, where the Honorable Peleg Hartington is made President of the Senate, *etc.*



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For twelve hot weeks, with a public spirit which is worthy of the highest praise, the Committee sit in their shirt sleeves all day long and listen to arguments for and against consolidation; and ask learned questions that startle rural witnesses; and smoke big Florizel cigars (a majority of them). Judge Abner Parkinson defends his bill, quoting from the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence and the Bible; a celebrated lawyer from the capital riddles it, using the same authorities, and citing the Federalist and the Golden Rule in addition. The Committee sit open-minded, listening with laudable impartiality; it does not become them to arrive at a hasty decision on a question of such magnitude. In the meantime the House passes an important bill dealing with the bounty on hedgehogs, and there are several card games going on in the cellar, where it is cool.

The governor of the state is a free lance, and may be seen any afternoon walking through the park, consorting with no one. He may be recognized even at a distance by his portly figure, his silk hat, and his dignified mien. Yes, it is an old and valued friend, the Honorable Alva Hopkins, patron of the drama, and sometimes he has a beautiful young woman (still unattached) by his side. He lives in a suite of rooms at the Pelican. It is a well-known fact (among Mr. Worthington's supporters) that the Honorable Alva promised in January, when Mr. Bass retired, to sign the Consolidation Bill, and that he suddenly became open-minded in March, and has remained open-minded ever since, listening gravely to arguments, and giving much study to the subject. He is an executive now, although it is the last year of his term, and of course he is never seen either in the Throne Room or the Railroad Room. And besides, he may become a senator.

August has come, and the forces are spent and panting, and neither side dares to risk the final charge. The reputation of Jethro Bass is at stake. Should he risk and lose, he must go back to Coniston a beaten man, subject to the contempt of his neighbors and his state. People do not know that he has nothing now to go back to, and that he cares nothing for contempt. As he sits in his window day after day he has only one thought and one wish,—to ruin Isaac D. Worthington. And he will do it if he can. Those who know—and among them is Mr. Balch himself—say that Jethro has never conducted a more masterly campaign than this, and that all the others have been mere childish trials of strength compared to it. So he sits there through those twelve weeks while the session slips by, while his opponents grumble, and while even his supporters, eager for the charge, complain. The truth is that in all the years of his activity he has never had such an antagonist as Mr. Flint. Victory hangs in the balance, and a false move will throw it to either side.

Victory hangs now, to be explicit, upon two factors. The first and most immediate of these is a certain canny captain of many wars whose regiment is still at the disposal of either army—for a price, a regiment which has hitherto remained strictly neutral. And what a regiment it is! A block of river towns and a senator, and not a casualty since they

marched boldly into camp twelve weeks ago. Mr. Batch is getting very much worried about this regiment, and beginning to doubt Jethro's judgment.



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"I tell you, Bass," he said one evening, "if you allow him to run around loose much longer, we're lost, that's all there is to it!" (Mr. Batch referred to the captain in question.) "They'll buy up his block at his figure—see, if they don't. They're getting desperate. Don't you think I'd better bid him in?"

"B-bid him in if you've a mind to; Ed."

"Look here, Jethro," said Mr. Batch, savagely biting off the end of a cigar, "I'm beginning to think you don't care a continental about this business. Which side are you on, anyway?" The heat and the length and the uncertainty of the struggle were telling on the nerves of the railroad president. "You sit there from morning till night and won't say anything; and now, when there's only one block out, you won't give the word to buy it."

"N-never told you to buy anything, did I—Ed?"

"No," answered Mr. Batch, "you haven't. I don't know what the devil's got into you."

"D-done all the payin' without consultin' me, hain't you, Ed?"

"Yes; I have. What are you driving at?"

"D-done it if I hadn't b'en here, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, and more too," said Mr. Batch.

"W-wouldn't make much difference to you if I wasn't here—would it?"

"Great Scott, Jethro, what do you mean?" cried the railroad president, in genuine alarm; "you're not going to pull out, are you?"

"W-wouldn't make much odds if I did—would it, Ed?"

"The devil it wouldn't!" exclaimed Mr. Balch. "If you pulled out, we'd lose the North Country, and Peleg, and Gosport, and nobody can tell which way Alva Hopkins will swing. I guess you know what he'll do—you're so d—d secretive I can't tell whether you do or not. If you pulled out, they'd have their bill on Friday."

"H-hain't under any obligations to you, Ed—am I?"

"No," said Mr. Batch, "but I don't see why you keep harping on that."

"J-dust wanted to have it clear," said Jethro, and relapsed into silence.

There was a fireproof carpet on the Throne Room, and Mr. Batch flung down his cigar and stamped on it and went out. No wonder he could not understand Jethro's sudden



scruples about money and obligations—about railroad money, that is. Jethro was spending some of his own, but not in the capital, and in a manner which was most effective. In short, at the very moment when Mr. Batch stamped on his cigar, Jethro had the victory in his hands—only he did not choose to say so. He had had a mysterious telegram that day from Harwich, signed by Chauncey Weed, and Mr. Weed himself appeared at the door of Number 7, fresh from his travels, shortly after Mr. Batch had gone out of it. Mr. Weed closed the door gently, and locked it, and sat down in a rocking chair close to Jethro and put his hand over his mouth. We cannot hear what Mr. Weed is saying. All is mystery here, and in order to preserve that mystery we shall delay for a little the few words which will explain Mr. Weed's successful mission.

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Mr. Batch, angry and bewildered, descended into the rotunda, where he shortly heard two astounding pieces of news. The first was that the Honorable Heth Sutton had abandoned the Florizel cigars and had gone home to Clovelly. The second; that Mr. Bijah Bixby had resigned the claw-hammer and had ceased to open the packing cases in the Railroad Room. Consternation reigned in that room, so it was said (and this was true). Mr. Worthington and Mr. Duncan and Mr. Lovejoy were closeted there with Mr. Flint, and the door was locked and the transom shut, and smoke was coming out of the windows.

Yes, Mr. Bijah Bixby is the canny captain of whom Mr. Balch spoke: he it is who owns that block of river towns, intact, and the one senator. Impossible! We have seen him opening the packing cases, we have seen him working for the Worthington faction for the last two years. Mr. Bixby was very willing to open boxes, and to make himself useful and agreeable; but it must be remembered that a good captain of mercenaries owes a sacred duty to his followers. At first Mr. Flint had thought he could count on Mr. Bixby; after a while he made several unsuccessful attempts to talk business with him; a particularly difficult thing to do, even for Mr. Flint, when Mr. Bixby did not wish to talk business. Mr. Balch had found it quite as difficult to entice Mr. Bixby away from the boxes and the Railroad Room. The weeks drifted on, until twelve went by, and then Mr. Bixby found himself, with his block of river towns and one senator, in the incomparable position of being the arbiter of the fate of the Consolidation Bill in the House and Senate. No wonder Mr. Balch wanted to buy the services of that famous regiment at any price!

But Mr. Bixby, for once in his life, had waited too long.

When Mr. Balch, rejoicing, but not a little indignant at not having been taken into confidence, ascended to the Throne Room after supper to question Jethro concerning the meaning of the things he had heard, he found Senator Peleg Hartington seated mournfully on the bed, talking at intervals, and Jethro listening.

“Come up and eat out of my hand,” said the senator.

“Who?” demanded Mr. Balch.

“Bije,” answered the senator.

“Great Scott, do you mean to say you’ve got Bixby?” exclaimed the railroad president. He felt as if he would like to shake the senator, who was so deliberate and mournful in his answers. “What did you pay him?”

Mr. Hartington appeared shocked by the question.

“Guess Heth Sutton will settle with him,” he said.

“Heth Sutton! Why the—why should Heth pay him?”



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“Guess Heth’d like to make him a little present, under the circumstances. I was goin’ through the barber shop,” Mr. Hartington continued, speaking to Jethro and ignoring the railroad president, “and I heard somebody whisperin’ my name. Sound came out of that little shampoo closet; went in there and found Bije. ‘Peleg,’ says he, right into my ear, ‘tell Jethro it’s all right—you understand. We want Heth to go back—break his heart if he didn’t—you understand. If I’d knowed last winter Jethro meant business, I wouldn’t hev’ helped Gus Flint out. Tell Jethro he can have ‘em—you know what I mean.’ Bije waited a little mite too long,” said the senator, who had given a very fair imitation of Mr. Bixby’s nasal voice and manner.

“Well, I’m d—d!” ejaculated Mr. Balch, staring at Jethro. “How did you work it?”

“Sent Chauncey through the deistrict,” said Mr. Hartington.

Mr. Chauncey Weed had, in truth, gone through a part of the congressional district of the Honorable Heth Sutton with a little leather bag. Mr. Weed had been able to do some of his work (with the little leather bag) in the capital itself. In this way Mr. Bixby’s regiment, Sutton was the honorary colonel, had been attacked in the rear and routed. Here was to be a congressional convention that autumn, and a large part of Mr. Sutton’s district lay in the North Country, which, as we have seen, was loyal to Jethro to the back bone. The district, too, was largely rural, and therefore anti-consolidation, and the inability of the Worthington forces to get their bill through had made it apparent that Jethro Bass was as powerful as ever. Under these circumstances it had not been very difficult for a gentleman of Mr. Chauncey Weed’s powers of persuasion to induce various lieutenants in the district to agree to send delegates to the coming convention who would be conscientiously opposed to Mr. Sutton’s renomination: hence the departure from the capital of Mr. Sutton; hence the generous offer of Mr. Bixby to put his regiment at the disposal of Mr. Bass—free of charge.

The second factor on which victory hung (we can use the past tense now) was none other than his Excellency Alva Hopkins, governor of the state. The bill would never get to his Excellency now—so people said; would never get beyond that committee who had listened so patiently to the twelve weeks of argument. These were only rumors, after all, for the rotunda never knows positively what goes on in high circles; but the rotunda does figuring, too, when at length the problem is reduced to a simple equation, with Bijah Bixby as x . If it were true that Bijah had gone over to Jethro Bass, the Consolidation Bill was dead.

CHAPTER XVIII



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When Jethro Bass walked out of the hotel that evening men looked at him, and made way for him, but none spoke to him. There was something in his face that forbade speech. He was a great man once more—a greater man than ever; and he had, if the persistent rumors were true, accomplished an almost incomprehensible feat, even for Jethro Bass. There was another reason, too, why they stared at him. In all those twelve weeks of that most trying of all sessions he had not once gone into the street, and he had been less than ever common in the eyes of men. Twice a day he had descended to the dining room for a simple meal—that was all; and fewer had gained entrance to Room Number 7 this session than ever before.

There is a river that flows by the capital, a wide and gentle river bordered by green meadows and fringed with willows; higher up, if you go far enough, a forest comes down to the water on the western side. Jethro walked through the hooded bridge, and up the eastern bank until he could see the forest like a black band between the orange sky and the orange river, and there he sat down upon a fallen log on the edge of the bank. But Jethro was thinking of another scene,—of a granite-ribbed pasture on Coniston Mountain that swings in limitless space, from either end of which a man may step off into eternity. William Wetherell, in one of his letters, had described that place as the Threshold of the Nameless Worlds, and so it had seemed to Jethro in the years of his desolation. He was thinking of it now, even as it had been in his mind that winter's evening when Cynthia had come to Coniston and had surprised him with that look of terrible loneliness on his face.

Yes, and he was thinking of Cynthia. When, indeed, had he not been thinking of her? How many tunes had he rehearsed the events in the tannery house—for they were the events of his life now. The triumphs over his opponents and enemies fell away, and the pride of power. Such had not been his achievements. She had loved him, and no man had reached a higher pinnacle than that.

Why he had forfeited that love for vengeance, he could not tell. The embers of a man's passions will suddenly burst into flame, and he will fiddle madly while the fire burns his soul. He had avenged her as well as himself; but had he avenged her, now that he held Isaac Worthington in his power? By crushing him, had he not added to her trouble and her sorrow? She had confessed that she loved Isaac Worthington's son, and was not he (Jethro) widening the breach between Cynthia and the son by crushing the father? Jethro had not thought of this. But he had thought of her, night and day, as he had sat in his room directing the battle. Not a day had passed that he had not looked for a letter, hoping against hope. If she had written to him once, if she had come to him once, would he have desisted? He could not say—the fires of hatred had burned so fiercely, and still burned so fiercely, that he clenched his fists when it came over him that Isaac Worthington was at last in his power.

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A white line above the forest was all that remained of the sunset when he rose up and took from his coat a silver locket and opened it and held it to the fading light. Presently he closed it again, and walked slowly along the river bank toward the little city twinkling on its hill. He crossed the hooded bridge and climbed the slope, stopping for a moment at a little stationery shop; he passed through the groups which were still loudly discussing this thing he had done, and gained his room and locked the door. Men came to it and knocked and got no answer. The room was in darkness, and the night breeze stirred among the trees in the park and blew in at the window.

At last Jethro got up and lighted the gas and paused at the centre table. He was to violate more than one principle of his life that night, though not without a struggle; and he sat for a long while looking at the blank paper before him. Then he wrote, and sealed the letter—which contained three lines—and pulled the bell cord. The call was answered by a messenger who had been far many years in the service of the Pelican House, and who knew many secrets of the gods. The man actually grew pale when he saw the address on the envelope which was put in his hand and read the denomination of the crisp note under it that was the price of silence.

“F-find the gentleman and give it to him yourself. Er—John?”

“Yes, Mr. Bass?”

“If you don’t find him, bring it—back.”

When the man had gone, Jethro turned down the gas and went again to his chair by the window. For a while voices came up to him from the street, but at length the groups dispersed, one by one; and a distant clock boomed out eleven solemn strokes. Twice the clock struck again, at the half-hour and midnight, and the noises in the house—the banging of doors and the jangling of keys and the hurrying of feet in the corridors—were hushed. Jethro took no thought of these or of time, and sat gazing at the stars in the depths of the sky above the capital dome until a shadow emerged from the black mass of the trees opposite and crossed the street. In a few minutes there were footsteps in the corridor,—stealthy footsteps—and a knock on the door. Jethro got up and opened it, and closed it again and locked it. Then he turned up the gas.

“S-sit down,” he said, and nodded his head toward the chair by the table.

Isaac Worthington laid his silk hat on the table, and sat down. He looked very haggard and worn in that light, very unlike the first citizen who had entered Brampton in triumph on his return from the West not many months before. The long strain of a long fight, in which he had risked much for which he had labored a life to gain, had told on him, and there were crow’s-feet at the corners of, his eyes, and dark circles under them. Isaac Worthington had never lost before, and to destroy the fruits of such a man’s ambition is to destroy the man. He was not as young as he had once been. But now, in the very

hour of defeat, hope had rekindled the fire in the eyes and brought back the peculiar, tight-lipped, mocking smile to the mouth. An hour ago, when he had been pacing Alexander Duncan's library, the eyes and the mouth had been different.



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Long habit asserts itself at the strangest moments. Jethro Bass took his seat by the window, and remained silent. The clock tolled the half-hour after midnight.

“You wanted to see me,” said Mr. Worthington, finally.

Jethro nodded, almost imperceptibly.

“I suppose,” said Mr. Worthington, slowly, “I suppose you are ready to sell out.” He found it a little difficult to control his voice.

“Yes,” answered Jethro, “r-ready to sell out.”

Mr. Worthington was somewhat taken aback by this simple admission. He glanced at Jethro sitting motionless by the window, and in his heart he feared him: he had come into that room when the gas was low, afraid. Although he would not confess it to himself, he had been in fear of Jethro Bass all his life, and his fear had been greater than ever since the March day when Jethro had left Coniston. And could he have known, now, the fires of hatred burning in Jethro’s breast, Isaac Worthington would have been in terror indeed.

“What have you got to sell?” he demanded sharply.

“G-guess you know, or you wouldn’t have come here.”

“What proof have I that you have it to sell?”

Jethro looked at him for an instant.

“M-my word,” he said.

Isaac Worthington was silent for a while: he was striving to calm himself, for an indefinable something had shaken him. The strange stillness of the hour and the stranger atmosphere which seemed to surround this transaction filled him with a nameless dread. The man in the window had been his lifelong enemy: more than this, Jethro Bass, was not like ordinary men—his ways were enshrouded in mystery, and when he struck, he struck hard. There grew upon Isaac Worthington a sense that this midnight hour was in some way to be the culmination of the long years of hatred between them.

He believed Jethro: he would have believed him even if Mr. Flint had not informed him that afternoon that he was beaten, and bitterly he wished he had taken Mr. Flint’s advice many months before. Denunciation sprang to his lips which he dared not utter. He was beaten, and he must pay—the pound of flesh. Isaac Worthington almost thought it would be a pound of flesh.



“How much do you want?” he said.

Again Jethro looked at him.

“B-biggest price you can pay,” he answered.

“You must have made up your mind what you want. You’ve had time enough.”

“H-have made up my mind,” said Jethro.

“Make your demand,” said Mr. Worthington, “and I’ll give you my answer.”

“B-biggest price you can pay,” said Jethro, again.

Mr. Worthington’s nerves could stand it no longer.

“Look here,” he cried, rising in his chair, “if you’ve brought me here to trifle with me, you’ve made a mistake. It’s your business to get control of things that belong to other people, and sell them out. I am here to buy. Nothing but necessity brings me here, and nothing but necessity will keep me here a moment longer than I have to stay to finish this abominable affair. I am ready to pay you twenty thousand dollars the day that bill becomes a law.”



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This time Jethro did not look at him.

“P-pay me now,” he said.

“I will pay you the day the bill becomes a law. Then I shall know where I stand.”

Jethro did not answer this ultimatum in any manner, but remained perfectly still looking out of the window. Mr. Worthington glanced at him, twice, and got his fingers on the brim of his hat, but he did not pick it up. He stood so for a while, knowing full well that if he went out of that room his chance was gone. Consolidation might come in other years, but he, Isaac Worthington, would not be a factor in it.

“You don’t want a check, do you?” he said at last.

“No—d-don’t want a check.”

“What in God’s name do you want? I haven’t got twenty thousand dollars in currency in my pocket.”

“Sit down, Isaac Worthington,” said Jethro.

Mr. Worthington sat down—out of sheer astonishment, perhaps.

“W-want the consolidation—don’t you? Want it bad—don’t you?”

Mr. Worthington did, not answer. Jethro stood over him now, looking down at him from the other side of the narrow table.

“Know Cynthia Wetherell?” he said.

Then Isaac Worthington understood that his premonitions had been real. The pound of flesh was to be demanded, but strangely enough, he did not yet comprehend the nature of it.

“I know that there is such a person,” he answered, for his pride would not permit him to say more.

“W-what do you know about her?”

Isaac Worthington was bitterly angry—the more so because he was helpless, and could not question Jethro’s right to ask. What did he know about her? Nothing, except that she had intrigued to marry his son. Bob’s letter had described her, to be sure, but he could not be expected to believe that: and he had not heard Miss Lucretia Penniman’s speech. And yet he could not tell Jethro that he knew nothing about her, for he was shrewd enough to perceive the drift of the next question.



“Kn-know anything against her?” said Jethro.

Mr. Worthington leaned back in his chair.

“I can’t see what Miss Wetherell has to do with the present occasion,” he replied.

“H-had her dismissed by the prudential committee had her dismissed—didn’t you?”

“They chose to act as they saw fit.”

“T-told Levi Dodd to dismiss her—didn’t you?”

That was a matter of common knowledge in Brampton, having leaked out through Jonathan Hill.

“I must decline to discuss this,” said Mr. Worthington.

“W-wouldn’t if I was you.”

“What do you mean?”

“What I say. T-told Levi Dodd to dismiss her, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I did.” Isaac Worthington had lost in self-esteem by not saying so before.

“Why? Wahn’t she honest? Wahn’t she capable? Wahn’t she a lady?”

“I can’t say that I know anything against Miss Wetherell’s character, if that’s what you mean.”



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“F-fit to teach—wahn’t she—fit to teach?”

“I believe she has since qualified before Mr. Errol.”

“Fit to teach—wahn’t fit to marry your son—was she?”

Isaac Worthington clutched the table and started from his chair. He grew white to his lips with anger, and yet he knew that he must control himself.

“Mr. Bass,” he said, “you have something to sell, and I have something to buy—if the price is not ruinous. Let us confine ourselves to that. My affairs and my son’s affairs are neither here nor there. I ask you again, how much do you want for this Consolidation Bill?”

“N-no money will buy it.”

“What!”

“C-consent to this marriage, c-consent to this marriage.” There was yet room for Isaac Worthington to be amazed, and for a while he stared up at Jethro, speechless.

“Is that your price?” he asked at last.

“Th-that’s my price,” said Jethro.

Isaac Worthington got up and went to the window and stood looking out above the black mass of trees at the dome outlined against the star-flecked sky. At first his anger choked him, and he could not think; he had just enough reason left not to walk out of the door. But presently habit asserted itself in him, too, and he began to reflect and calculate in spite of his anger. It is strange that memory plays so small a part in such a man. Before he allowed his mind to dwell on the fearful price, he thought of his ambitions gratified; and yet he did not think then of the woman to whom he had once confided those ambitions—the woman who was the girl’s mother. Perhaps Jethro was thinking of her.

It may have been—I know not—that Isaac Worthington wondered at this revelation of the character of Jethro Bass, for it was a revelation. For this girl’s sake Jethro was willing to forego his revenge, was willing at the end of his days to allow the world to believe that he had sold out to his enemy, or that he had been defeated by him.

But when he thought of the marriage, Isaac Worthington ground his teeth. A certain sentiment which we may call pride was so strong in him that he felt ready to make almost any sacrifice to prevent it. To hinder it he had quarrelled with his son, and driven him away, and threatened disinheritance. The price was indeed heavy—the heaviest he could pay. But the alternative—was not that heavier? To relinquish his dream of power,



to sink for a while into a crippled state; for he had spent large sums, and one of those periodical depressions had come in the business of the mills, and those Western investments were not looking so bright now.

So, with his hands opening and closing in front of him, Isaac Worthington fought out his battle. A terrible war, that, between ambition and pride—a war to the knife. The issue may yet have been undecided when he turned round to Jethro with a sneer which he could not resist.

“Why doesn’t she marry him without my consent?”



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In a moment Mr. Worthington knew he had gone too far. A certain kind of an eye is an incomparable weapon, and armed men have been cowed by those who possess it, though otherwise defenceless. Jethro Bass had that kind of an eye.

“G-guess you wouldn’t understand if I was to tell you,” he said.

Mr. Worthington walked to the window again, perhaps to compose himself, and then came back again.

“Your proposition is,” he said at length, “that if I give my consent to this marriage, we are to have Bixby and the governor, and the Consolidation Bill will become a law. Is that it?”

“Th-that’s it,” said Jethro, taking his accustomed seat.

“And this consent is to be given when the bill becomes a law?”

“Given now. T-to-night.”

Mr. Worthington took another turn as far as the door, and suddenly came and stood before Jethro.

“Well, I consent.”

Jethro nodded toward the table.

“Er—pen and paper there,” he said.

“What do you want me to do?” demanded Mr. Worthington.

“W-write to Bob—write to Cynthy. Nice letters.”

“This is carrying matters with too high a hand, Mr. Bass. I will write the letters to-morrow morning.” It was intolerable that he, the first citizen of Brampton, should have to submit to such humiliation.

“Write ’em now. W-want to see ’em.”

“But if I give you my word they will be written and sent to you to-morrow afternoon?”

“T-too late,” said Jethro; “sit down and write ’em now.”

Mr. Worthington went irresolutely to the table, stood for a minute, and dropped suddenly into the chair there. He would have given anything (except the realization of his ambitions) to have marched out of the room and to have slammed the door behind him. The letter paper and envelopes which Jethro had bought stood in a little pile, and Mr. Worthington picked up the pen. The clock struck two as he wrote the date, as though to



remind him that he had written it wrong. If Flint could see him now! Would Flint guess? Would anybody guess? He stared at the white paper, and his rage came on again like a gust of wind, and he felt that he would rather beg in the streets than write such a thing. And yet—and yet he sat there. Surely Jethro Bass must have known that he could have taken no more exquisite vengeance than this, to compel a man—and such a man—to sit down in the white heat of passion—and write two letters of forgiveness! Jethro sat by the window, to all appearances oblivious to the tortures of his victim.



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He who has tried to write a note—the simplest note when his mind was harassed, will understand something of Isaac Worthington's sensations. He would no sooner get an inkling of what his opening sentence was to be than the flames of his anger would rise and sweep it away. He could not even decide which letter he was to write first: to his son, who had defied him and who (the father knew in his heart) condemned him? or to the schoolteacher, who was responsible for all his misery; who—Mr. Worthington believed—had taken advantage of his son's youth by feminine wiles of no mean order so as to gain possession of him. I can almost bring myself to pity the first citizen of Brampton as he sits there with his pen poised over the paper, and his enemy waiting to read those tender epistles of forgiveness which he has yet to write. The clock has almost got round to the half-hour again, and there is only the date—and a wrong one at that.

“My dear Miss Wetherell,—Circumstances (over which I have no control?)”—ought he not to call her Cynthia? He has to make the letter credible in the eyes of the censor who sits by the window. “My dear Miss Wetherell, I have come to the conclusion”—two sheets torn up, or thrust into Mr. Worthington's pocket. By this time words have begun to have a colorless look. “My dear Miss Wetherell,—Having become convinced of the sincere attachment which my son Robert has for you, I am writing him to-night to give my full consent to his marriage. He has given me to understand that you have hitherto persistently refused to accept him because I have withheld that consent, and I take this opportunity of expressing my admiration of this praiseworthy resolution on your part.” (If this be irony, it is sublime! Perhaps Isaac Worthington has a little of the artist in him, and now that he is in the heat of creation has forgotten the circumstances under which he is composing.) “My son's happiness and career in life are of such moment to me that, until the present, I could not give my sanction to what I at first regarded as a youthful fancy. Now that, my son, for your sake, has shown his determination and ability to make his own way in the world,” (Isaac Worthington was not a little proud of this) “I have determined that it is wise to withdraw my opposition, and to recall Robert to his proper place, which is near me. I am sure that my feelings in this matter will be clear to you, and that you will look with indulgence upon any acts of mine which sprang from a natural solicitation for the welfare and happiness of my only child. I shall be in Brampton in a day or two, and I shall at once give myself the pleasure of calling on you. Sincerely yours, Isaac D. Worthington.”



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Perhaps a little formal and pompous for some people, but an admirable and conciliatory letter for the first citizen of Brampton. Written under such trying circumstances, with I know not how many erasures and false starts, it is little short of a marvel in art: neither too much said, nor too little, for a relenting parent of Mr. Worthington's character, and I doubt whether Talleyrand or Napoleon or even Machiavelli himself could have surpassed it. The second letter, now that Mr. Worthington had got into the swing, was more easily written. "My dear Robert" (it said), "I have made up my mind to give my consent to your marriage to Miss Wetherell, and I am ready to welcome you home, where I trust I shall see you shortly. I have not been unimpressed by the determined manner in which you have gone to work for yourself, but I believe that your place is in Brampton, where I trust you will show the same energy in learning to succeed me in the business which I have founded there as you have exhibited in Mr. Broke's works. Affectionately, your Father."

A very creditable and handsome letter for a forgiving father. When Mr. Worthington had finished it, and had addressed both the envelopes, his shame and vexation had, curious to relate, very considerably abated. Not to go too deeply into the somewhat contradictory mental and cardiac processes of Mr. Worthington, he had somehow tricked himself by that magic exercise of wielding his pen into thinking that he was doing a noble and generous action: into believing that in the course of a very few days—or weeks, at the most, he would have recalled his erring son and have given Cynthia his blessing. He would, he told himself, have been forced eventually to yield when that paragon of inflexibility, Bob, dictated terms to him at the head of the locomotive works. Better let the generosity be on his (Mr. Worthington's) side. At all events, victory had never been bought more cheaply. Humiliation, in Mr. Worthington's eyes, had an element of publicity in it, and this episode had had none of that element; and Jethro Bass, moreover, was a highwayman who had held a pistol to his head. In such logical manner he gradually bolstered up again his habitual poise and dignity. Next week, at the latest, men would point to him as the head of the largest railroad interests in the state.

He pushed back his chair, and rose, merely indicating the result of his labors by a wave of his hand. And he stood in the window as Jethro Bass got up and went to the table. I would that I had a pen able to describe Jethro's sensations when he read them. Unfortunately, he is a man with few facial expressions. But I believe that he was artist enough himself to appreciate the perfections of the first citizen's efforts. After a much longer interval than was necessary for their perusal, Mr. Worthington turned.

"G-guess they'll do," said Jethro, as he folded them up. He was too generous not to indulge, for once, in a little well-deserved praise. "Hain't underdone it, and hain't overdone it a mite hev you? M-man of resource. Callate you couldn't hev beat that if you was to take a week to it."



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"I think it only fair to tell you," said Mr. Worthington, picking up his silk hat, "that in those letters I have merely anticipated a very little my intentions in the matter. My son having proved his earnestness, I was about to consent to the marriage of my own accord."

"G-goin' to do it anyway—was you?"

"I had so determined."

"A-always thought you was high-minded," said Jethro.

Mr. Worthington was on the point of giving a tart reply to this, but restrained himself.

"Then I may look upon the matter as settled?" he said. "The Consolidation Bill is to become a law?"

"Yes," said Jethro, "you'll get your bill." Mr. Worthington had got his hand on the knob of the door when Jethro stopped him with a word. He had no facial expressions, but he had an eye, as we have seen—an eye that for the second time appeared terrible to his visitor. "Isaac Worthington," he said, "a-act up to it. No trickery—or look out—look out."

Then, the incident being closed so far as he was concerned, Jethro went back to his chair by the window, but it is to be recorded that Isaac Worthington did not answer him immediately. Then he said:—

"You seem to forget that you are talking to a gentleman."

"That's so," answered Jethro, "so you be."

He sat where he was long after the sky had whitened and the stars had changed from gold to silver and gone out, and the sunlight had begun to glance upon the green leaves of the park. Perhaps he was thinking of the life he had lived, which was spent now: of the men he had ruled, of the victories he had gained from that place which would know him no more. He had won the last and the greatest of his victories there, compared to which the others had indeed been as vanities. Perhaps he looked back over the highway of his life and thought of the woman whom he had loved, and wondered what it had been if she had trod it by his side. Who will judge him? He had been what he had been; and as the Era was, so was he. Verily, one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh.

When Mr. Isaac Worthington arrived at Mr. Duncan's house, where he was staying, at three o'clock in the morning, he saw to his surprise light from the library windows lying in bars across the lawn under the trees. He found Mr. Duncan in that room with Somers, his son, who had just returned from a seaside place, and they were discussing a very grave event. Miss Janet Duncan had that day eloped with a gentleman who—to judge from the photograph Somers held—was both handsome and romantic-looking.



He had long hair and burning eyes, and a title not to be then verified, and he owned a castle near some place on the peninsula of Italy not on the map.

CHAPTER XIX



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We are back in Brampton, owning, as we do, an annual pass over the Truro Railroad. Cynthia has been there all the summer, and as it is now the first of September, her school has begun again. I do not by any means intend to imply that Brampton is not a pleasant place to spend the summer: the number of its annual visitors is a refutation of that; but to Cynthia the season had been one of great unhappiness. Several times Lem Hollowell had stopped the stage in front of Ephraim's house to beg her to go to Coniston, and Mr. Satterlee had come himself; but she could not have borne to be there without Jethro. Nor would she go to Boston, though urged by Miss Lucretia; and Mrs. Merrill and the girls had implored her to join them at a seaside place on the Cape.

Cynthia had made a little garden behind Ephraim's house, and she spent the summer there with her flowers and her books, many of which Lem had fetched from Coniston. Ephraim loved to sit there of an evening and smoke his pipe and chat with Ezra Graves and the neighbors who dropped in. Among these were Mr. Gamaliel Ives, who talked literature with Cynthia; and Lucy Baird, his wife, who had taken Cynthia under her wing. I wish I had time to write about Lucy Baird. And Mr. Jonathan Hill came—his mortgage not having been foreclosed, after all. When Cynthia was alone with Ephraim she often read to him,—generally from books of a martial flavor,—and listened with an admirable hypocrisy to certain narratives which he was in the habit of telling.

They never spoke of Jethro. Ephraim was not a casuist, and his sense of right and wrong came largely through his affections. It is safe to say that he never made an analysis of the sorrow which he knew was afflicting the girl, but he had had a general and most sympathetic understanding of it ever since the time when Jethro had gone back to the capital; and Ephraim never brought home his Guardian or his Clarion now, but read them at the office, that their contents might not disturb her.

No wonder that Cynthia was unhappy. The letters came, almost every day, with the postmark of the town in New Jersey where Mr. Broke's locomotive works were; and she answered them now (but oh, how scrupulously!), though not every day. If the waters of love rose up through the grains of sand, it was, at least, not Cynthia's fault. Hers were the letters of a friend. She was reading such and such a book—had he read it? And he must not work too hard. How could her letters be otherwise when Jethro Bass, her benefactor, was at the capital working to defeat and perhaps to ruin Bob's father? when Bob's father had insulted and persecuted her? She ought not to have written at all; but the lapses of such a heroine are very rare, and very dear.



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Yes, Cynthia's life was very bitter that summer, with but little hope on the horizon of it. Her thoughts were divided between Bob and Jethro. Many a night she lay awake resolving to write to Jethro, even to go to him, but when morning came she could not bring herself to do so. I do not think it was because she feared that he might believe her appeal would be made in behalf of Bob's father. Knowing Jethro as she did, she felt that it would be useless, and she could not bear to make it in vain; if the memory of that evening in the tannery shed would not serve, nothing would serve. And again—he had gone to avenge her.

It was inevitable that she should hear tidings from the capital. Isaac Worthington's own town was ringing with it. And as week after week of that interminable session went by, the conviction slowly grew upon Brampton that its first citizen had been beaten by Jethro Bass. Something of Mr. Worthington's affairs was known: the mills, for instance, were not being run to their full capacity. And then had come the definite news that Mr. Worthington was beaten, a local representative having arrived straight from the rotunda. Cynthia overheard Lem Hallowell telling it to Ephraim, and she could not for the life of her help rejoicing, though she despised herself for it. Isaac Worthington was humbled now, and Jethro had humbled him to avenge her. Despite her grief over his return to that life, there was something to compel her awe and admiration in the way he had risen and done this thing after men had fallen from him. Her mother had had something of these same feelings, without knowing why.

People who had nothing but praise for him before were saying hard things about Isaac Worthington that night. When the baron is defeated, the serfs come out of their holes in the castle rock and fling their curses across the moat. Cynthia slept but little, and was glad when the day came to take her to her scholars, to ease her mind of the thoughts which tortured it.

And then, when she stopped at the post-office to speak to Ephraim on her way homeward in the afternoon, she heard men talking behind the partition, and she stood, as one stricken, listening beside the window. Other tidings had come in the shape of a telegram. The first rumor had been false. Brampton had not yet received the details, but the Consolidation Bill had gone into the House that morning, and would be a law before the week was out. A part of it was incomprehensible to Cynthia, but so much she had understood. She did not wait to speak to Ephraim, and she was going out again when a man rushed past her and through the partition door. Cynthia paused instinctively, for she recognized him as one of the frequenters of the station and a bearer of news.

"Jethro's come home, boys," he shouted; "come in on the four o'clock, and went right off to Coniston. Guess he's done for, this time, for certain. Looks it. By Godfrey, he looks eighty! Callate his day's over, from the way the boys talked on the train."



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Cynthia lingered to hear no more, and went out, dazed, into the September sunshine: Jethro beaten, and broken, and gone to Coniston. Resolution came to her as she walked. Arriving home, she wrote a little note and left it on the table for Ephraim; and going out again, ran by the back lane to Mr. Sherman's livery stable behind the Brampton House, and in half an hour was driving along that familiar road to Coniston, alone; for she had often driven Jethro's horses, and knew every turn of the way. And as she gazed at the purple mountain through the haze and drank in the sweet scents of the year's fulness, she was strangely happy. There was the village green in the cool evening light, and the flagstaff with its tip silvered by the departing sun. She waved to Rias and Lem and Moses at the store, but she drove on to the tannery house, and hitched the horse at the rough granite post, and went in, and through the house, softly, to the kitchen.

Jethro was standing in the doorway, and did not turn. He may have thought she was Millicent Skinner. Cynthia could see his face. It was older, indeed, and lined and worn, but that fearful look of desolation which she had once surprised upon it, and which she in that instant feared to see, was not there. Jethro's soul was at peace, though Cynthia could not understand why it was so. She stole to him and flung her arms about his neck, and with a cry he seized her and held her against him for I know not how long. Had it been possible to have held her there always, he would never have let her go. At last he looked down into her tear-wet face, into her eyes that were shining with tears.

"D-done wrong, Cynthy."

Cynthia did not answer that, for she remembered how she, too, had exulted when she had believed him to have accomplished Isaac Worthington's downfall. Now that he had failed, and she was in his arms, it was not for her to judge—only to rejoice.

"Didn't look for you to come back—didn't expect it."

"Uncle Jethro!" she faltered. Love for her had made him go, and she would not say that, either.

"D-don't hate me, Cynthy—don't hate me?"

She shook her head.

"Love me—a little?"

She reached up her hands and brushed back his hair, tenderly, from his forehead. Such—a loving gesture was her answer.

"You are going to stay here always, now," she said, in a low voice, "you are never going away again."



“G-goin’ to stay always,” he answered. Perhaps he was thinking of the hillside clearing in the forest—who knows! “You’ll come-sometime, Cynthia—sometime?”

“I’ll come every Saturday and Sunday, Uncle Jethro,” she said, smiling up at him. “Saturday is only two days away, now. I can hardly wait.”

“Y-you’ll come sometime?”

“Uncle Jethro, do you think I’ll be away from you, except—except when I have to?”

“C-come and read to me—won’t you—come and read?”



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“Of course I will!”

“C-call to mind the first book you read to me, Cynthy?”

“It was ‘Robinson Crusoe,’” she said.

“‘R-Robinson Crusoe.’ Often thought of that book. Know some of it by heart. R-read it again, sometime, Cynthy?”

She looked up at him a little anxiously. His eyes were on the great hill opposite, across Coniston Water.

“I will, indeed, Uncle Jethro, if we can find it,” she answered.

“Guess I can find it,” said Jethro. “R-remember when you saw him makin’ a ship?”

“Yes,” said Cynthia, “and I had my feet in the pool.”

The book had made a profound impression upon Jethro, partly because Cynthia had first read it to him, and partly for another reason. The isolation of Crusoe; depicted by Defoe’s genius, had been comparable to his own isolation, and he had pondered upon it much of late. Yes, and upon a certain part of another book which he had read earlier in life: Napoleon had ended his days on St. Helena.

They walked out under the trees to the brook-side and stood listening to the tinkling of the cowbells in the wood lot beyond. The light faded early on these September evenings, and the smoky mist had begun to rise from the water when they turned back again. The kitchen windows were already growing yellow, and through them the faithful Millicent could be seen bustling about in her preparations for supper. But Cynthia, having accomplished her errand, would not go in. She could not have borne to have any one drive back with her to Brampton then, and she must not be late upon the road.

“I will come Friday evening, Uncle Jethro,” she said, as she kissed him and gave one last, lingering look at his face. Had it been possible, she would not have left him, and on her way to Brampton through the gathering darkness she mused anxiously upon that strange calmness he had shown after defeat.

She drove her horse on to the floor of Mr. Sherman’s stable, that gentleman himself gallantly assisting her to alight, and walked homeward through the lane. Ephraim had not yet returned from the postoffice, which did not close until eight, and Cynthia smiled when she saw the utensils of his cooking-kit strewn on the hearth. In her absence he invariably unpacked and used it, and of course Cynthia at once set herself to cleaning and packing it again. After that she got her own supper—a very simple affair—and was putting the sitting room to rights when Ephraim came thumping in.



“Well, I swan!” he exclaimed when he saw her. “I didn’t look for you to come back so soon, Cynthia. Put up the kit—hev you?” He stood in front of the fireplace staring with apparent interest at the place where the kit had been, and added in a voice which he strove to make quite casual, “How be Jethro?”

“He looks older, Cousin Eph,” she answered, after a pause, “and I think he is very tired. But he seems he seems more tranquil and contented than I hoped to find him.”



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"I want to know," said Ephraim. "I am glad to hear it. Glad you went up, Cynthy—you done right to go.

"I'd have gone with you, if you'd only told me. I'll git a chance to go up Sunday."

There was an air of repressed excitement about the veteran which did not escape Cynthia. He held two letters in his hand, and, being a postmaster, he knew the handwriting on both. One had come from that place in New Jersey, and drew no comment. But the other! That one had been postmarked at the capital, and as he had sat at his counter at the post-office waiting for closing time he had turned it over and over with many ejaculations and futile guesses. Past master of dissimulation that he was, he had made up his mind—if he should find Cynthia at home—to lay the letters indifferently on the table and walk into his bedroom. This campaign he now proceeded to carry out.

Cynthia smiled again when he was gone, and shook her head and picked up the letters: Bob's was uppermost and she read that first, without a thought of the other one. And she smiled as she read for Bob had had a promotion. He was not yet at the head of the locomotive works, he hastened to add, for fear that Cynthia might think that Mr. Broke had resigned the presidency in his favor; and Cynthia never failed to laugh at these little facetious asides. He was now earning the princely sum of ninety dollars a month—not enough to marry on, alas! On Saturday nights he and Percy Broke scrubbed as much as possible of the grime from their hands and faces and went to spend Sunday at Elberon, the Broke place on the Hudson; from whence Miss Sally Broke, if she happened to be at home, always sent Cynthia her love. As Cynthia is still a heroine, I shall not describe how she felt about Sally Broke's love. There was plenty of Bob's own in the letter. Cynthia would not have blamed him if he had fallen in love with Miss Broke. It seemed to her little short of miraculous that, amidst such surroundings, he could be true to her.

After a period which was no briefer than that usually occupied by Bob's letters, Cynthia took the other one from her lap, and stared at it in much perplexity before she tore it open. We have seen its contents over Mr. Worthington's shoulder, and our hearts will not stop beating—as Cynthia's did. She read it twice before the full meaning of it came to her, and after that she could not well mistake it,—the language being so admirable in every way. She sat very still for a long while, and presently she heard Ephraim go out. But Cynthia did not move. Mr. Worthington relented and Bob recalled! The vista of happiness suddenly opened up, widened and widened until it was too bright for Cynthia's vision, and she would compel her mind to dwell on another prospect,—that of the father and son reconciled. Although her temples throbbed, she tried to analyze the letter. It implied that Mr. Worthington had allowed Bob to remain away on a sort of probation; it implied that it had been dictated by a strong paternal love mingled with a strong paternal justice. And then there was the appeal to her: "You will look with indulgence upon any acts of mine which sprang from a natural solicitation for the

welfare and happiness of my only child.” A terrible insight is theirs to whom it is given to love as Cynthia loved.



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Suddenly there came a knock which frightened her, for her mind was running on swiftly from point to point: had, indeed, flown as far as Coniston by now, and she was thinking of that strange look of peace on Jethro's face which had troubled her. One letter she thrust into her dress, but the other she laid aside, and her knees trembled under her as she rose and went into the entry and raised the latch and opened the door. There was a moon, and the figure in the frock coat and the silk hat was the one which she expected to see. The silk hat came off very promptly.

"I hope I am not disturbing you, Miss Wetherell," said the owner of it.

"No," answered Cynthia, faintly.

"May I come in?"

Cynthia held open the door a little wider, and Mr. Worthington walked in. He seemed very majestic and out of place in the little house which Gabriel Post had built, and he carried into it some of the atmosphere of the walnut and high ceilings of his own mansion. His manner of laying his hat, bottom up, on the table, and of unbuttoning his coat, subtly indicated the honor which he was conferring upon the place. And he eyed Cynthia, standing before him in the lamplight, with a modification of the hawk-like look which was meant to be at once condescending and conciliatory. He did not imprint a kiss upon her brow, as some prospective fathers-in-law would have done. But his eyes, perhaps involuntarily, paid a tribute to her personal appearance which heightened her color. She might not, after all, be such a discredit to the Worthington family.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked.

"Thank you, Cynthia," he said; "I hope I may now be allowed to call you Cynthia?"

She did not answer him, but sat down herself, and he followed her example; with his eyes still upon her.

"You have doubtless received my letter," began Mr. Worthington. "I only arrived in Brampton an hour ago, but I thought it best to come to you at once, under the circumstances."

"Yes," replied Cynthia, "I received the letter."

"I am glad," said Mr. Worthington. He was beginning to be a little taken aback by her calmness and her apparent absence of joy. It was scarcely the way in which a school-teacher should receive the advances of the first citizen, come to give a gracious consent to her marriage with his son. Had he known it, Cynthia was anything but calm. "I am glad," he said, "because I took pains to explain the exact situation in that letter, and to set forth my own sentiments. I hope you understood them."



“Yes, I understood them,” said Cynthia, in a low tone.

This was enigmatical, to say the least. But Mr. Worthington had come with such praiseworthy intentions that he was disposed to believe that the girl was overwhelmed by the good fortune which had suddenly overtaken her. He was therefore disposed to be a little conciliatory.



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“My conduct may have appeared harsh to you,” he continued. “I will not deny that I opposed the matter at first. Robert was still in college, and he has a generous, impressionable nature which he inherits from his poor mother—the kind of nature likely to commit a rash act which would ruin his career. I have since become convinced that he has—ahem—inherited likewise a determination of purpose and an ability to get on in the world which I confess I had underestimated. My friend, Mr. Broke, has written me a letter about him, and tells me that he has already promoted him.”

“Yes,” said Cynthia.

“You hear from him?” inquired Mr. Worthington, giving her a quick glance.

“Yes,” said Cynthia, her color rising a little.

“And yet,” said Mr. Worthington, slowly, “I have been under the impression that you have persistently refused to marry him.”

“That is true,” she answered.

“I cannot refrain from complimenting you, Cynthia, upon such rare conduct,” said he. “You will be glad to know that it has contributed more than anything else toward my estimation of your character, and has strengthened me in my resolution that I am now doing right. It may be difficult for you to understand a father’s feelings. The complete separation from my only son was telling on me severely, and I could not forget that you were the cause of that separation. I knew nothing about you, except—” He hesitated, for she had turned to him.

“Except what?” she asked.

Mr. Worthington coughed. Mr. Flint had told him, that very morning, of her separation from Jethro, and of the reasons which people believed had caused it. Unfortunately, we have not time to go into that conversation with Mr. Flint, who had given a very good account of Cynthia indeed. After all (Mr. Worthington reflected), he had consented to the marriage, and there was no use in bringing Jethro’s name into the conversation. Jethro would be forgotten soon.

“I will not deny to You that I had other plans for my son,” he said. “I had hoped that he would marry a daughter of a friend of mine. You must be a little indulgent with parents, Cynthia,” he added with a little smile, “we have our castles in the air, too. Sometimes, as in this case, by a wise provision of providence they go astray. I suppose you have heard of Miss Duncan’s marriage.”

“No,” said Cynthia.



“She ran off with a worthless Italian nobleman. I believe, on the whole,” he said, with what was an extreme complaisance for the first citizen, “that I have reason to congratulate myself upon Robert’s choice. I have made inquiries about you, and I find that I have had the pleasure of knowing your mother, whom I respected very much. And your father, I understand, came of very good people, and was forced by circumstances to adopt the means of livelihood he did. My attention has been called to the letters he wrote to the Guardian, which I hear have been highly praised by competent critics, and I have ordered a set of them for the files of the library. You yourself, I find, are highly thought of in Brampton” (a, not unimportant factor, by the way); “you have been splendidly educated, and are a lady. In short, Cynthia, I have come to give my formal consent to your engagement to my son Robert.”



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“But I am not engaged to him,” said Cynthia.

“He will be here shortly, I imagine,” said Mr. Worthington.

Cynthia was trembling more than ever by this time. She was very angry, and she had found it very difficult to repress the things which she had been impelled to speak. She did not hate Isaac Worthington now—she despised him. He had not dared to mention Jethro, who had been her benefactor, though he had done his best to have her removed from the school because of her connection with Jethro.

“Mr. Worthington,” she said, “I have not yet made up my mind whether I shall marry your son.”

To say that Mr. Worthington’s breath was taken away when he heard these words would be to use a mild expression. He doubted his senses.

“What?” he exclaimed, starting forward, “what do you mean?”

Cynthia hesitated a moment. She was not frightened, but she was trying to choose her words without passion.

“I refused to marry him,” she said, “because you withheld your consent, and I did not wish to be the cause of a quarrel between you. It was not difficult to guess your feelings toward me, even before certain things occurred of which I will not speak. I did my best, from the very first, to make Bob give up the thought of marrying me, although I loved and honored him. Loving him as I do, I do not want to be the cause of separating him from his father, and of depriving him of that which is rightfully his. But something was due to myself. If I should ever make up my mind to marry him,” continued Cynthia, looking at Mr. Worthington steadfastly, “it will not be because your consent is given or withheld.”

“Do you tell me this to my face?” exclaimed Mr. Worthington, now in a rage himself at such unheard-of presumption.

“To your face,” said Cynthia, who got more self-controlled as he grew angry. “I believe that that consent, which you say you have given freely, was wrung from you.”

It was unfortunate that the first citizen might not always have Mr. Flint by him to restrain and caution him. But Mr. Flint could have no command over his master’s sensations, and anger and apprehension goaded Mr. Worthington to indiscretion.

“Jethro Bass told you this!” he cried out.



“No,” Cynthia answered, not in the least surprised by the admission, “he did not tell me—but he will if I ask him. I guessed it from your letter. I heard that he had come back to-day, and I went to Coniston to see him, and he told me—he had been defeated.”

Tears came into her eyes at the remembrance of the scene in the tannery house that afternoon, and she knew now why Jethro’s face had worn that look of peace. He had made his supreme sacrifice—for her. No, he had told her nothing, and she might never have known. She sat thinking of the magnitude of this thing Jethro had done, and she ceased to speak, and the tears coursed down her cheeks unheeded.



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Isaac Worthington had a habit of clutching things when he was in a rage, and now he clutched the arms of the chair. He had grown white. He was furious with her, furious with himself for having spoken that which might be construed into a confession. He had not finished writing the letters before he had stood self-justified, and he had been self-justified ever since. Where now were these arguments so wonderfully plausible? Where were the refutations which he had made ready in case of a barely possible need? He had gone into the Pelican House intending to tell Jethro of his determination to agree to the marriage. That was one. He had done so—that was another—and he had written the letters that Jethro might be convinced of his good will. There were still more, involving Jethro's character for veracity and other things. Summoning these, he waited for Cynthia to have done speaking, but when she had finished—he said nothing. He looked at her, and saw the tears on her face, and he saw that she had completely forgotten his presence.

For the life of him, Isaac Worthington could not utter a word. He was a man, as we know, who did not talk idly, and he knew that Cynthia would not hear what he said; and arguments and denunciations lose their effect when repeated. Again, he knew that she would not believe him. Never in his life had Isaac Worthington been so ignored, so put to shame, as by this school-teacher of Brampton. Before, self-esteem and sophistry had always carried him off between them; sometimes, in truth, with a wound—the wound had always healed. But he had a feeling, to-night, that this woman had glanced into his soul, and had turned away from it. As he looked at her the texture of his anger changed; he forgot for the first time that which he had been pleased to think of as her position in life, and he feared her. He had matched his spirit against hers.

Before long the situation became intolerable to him, for Cynthia still sat silent. She was thinking of how she had blamed Jethro for going back to that life, even though his love for her had made him do it. But Isaac Worthington did not know of what she was thinking—he thought only of himself and his predicament. He could not remain, and yet he could not go—with dignity. He who had come to bestow could not depart like a whipped dog.

Suddenly a fear transfixed him: suppose that this woman, from whom he could not hide the truth, should tell his son what he had done. Bob would believe her. Could he, Isaac Worthington, humble his pride and ask her to keep her suspicions to herself? He would then be acknowledging that they were more than suspicions. If he did so, he would have to appear to forgive her in spite of what she had said to him. And Bob was coming home. Could he tell Bob that he had changed his mind and withdrawn his consent to the marriage? There would be the reason, and again Bob would believe her. And again, if he withdrew his consent, there was Jethro to reckon with. Jethro must have a weapon still, Mr. Worthington thought, although he could not imagine what it might be. As Isaac Worthington sat there, thinking, it grew clear, to him at last that there was but one exit out of a, very desperate situation.



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He glanced at Cynthia again, this time appraisingly. She had dried her eyes, but she made no effort to speak. After all, she would make such a wife for his son as few men possessed. He thought of Sarah Hollingsworth. She had been a good woman, but there had been many times when he had deplored—especially in his travels the lack of other qualities in his wife. Cynthia, he thought, had these qualities,—so necessary for the wife of one who would succeed to power—though whence she had got them Isaac Worthington could not imagine. She would become a personage; she was a woman of whom they had no need to be ashamed at home or abroad. Having completed these reflections, he broke the silence.

“I am sorry that you should have been misled into thinking such a thing as you have expressed, Cynthia,” he said, “but I believe that I can understand something of the feelings which prompted you. It is natural that you should have a resentment against me after everything that has happened. It is perhaps natural, too, that I should lose my temper under the circumstances. Let us forget it. And I trust that in the future we shall grow into the mutual respect and affection which our nearer relationship will demand.”

He rose, and took up his hat, and Cynthia rose too. There was something very fine, he thought, about her carriage and expression as she stood in front of him.

“There is my hand,” he said,—“will you take it?”

“I will take it,” Cynthia answered, “because you are Bob’s father.”

And then Mr. Worthington went away.

CHAPTER XX

I am able to cite one notable instance, at least, to disprove the saying a part of which is written above, and I have yet to hear of a case in which a gentleman ever hesitated a single instant on account of the first letter of a lady’s last name. I know, indeed, of an occasion when locomotives could not go fast enough, when thirty miles an hour seemed a snail’s pace to a young man who sat by the open window of a train that crept northward on a certain hazy September morning up the beautiful valley of a broad river which we know.

It was after three o’clock before he caught sight of the familiar crest of Farewell Mountain, and the train ran into Harwich. How glad he was to see everybody there, whether he knew them or not! He came near hugging the conductor of the Truro accommodation; who, needless to say, did not ask him for a ticket, or even a pass. And then the young man went forward and almost shook the arms off of the engineer and the fireman, and climbed into the cab, and actually drove the engine himself as far as Brampton, where it arrived somewhat ahead of schedule, having taken some of the

curves and bridges at a speed a little beyond the law. The engineer was richer by five dollars, and the son of a railroad president is a privileged character, anyway.



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Yes, here was Brampton, and in spite of the haze the sun had never shone so brightly on the terraced steeple of the meeting-house. He leaped out of the cab almost before the engine had stopped, and beamed upon everybody on the platform,—even upon Mr. Dodd, who chanced to be there. In a twinkling the young man is in Mr. Sherman's hack, and Mr. Sherman galloping his horse down Brampton Street, the young man with his head out of the window, smiling; grinning would be a better word. Here are the iron mastiffs, and they seem to be grinning, too. The young man flings open the carriage door and leaps out, and the door is almost broken from its hinges by the maple tree. He rushes up the steps and through the hall, and into the library, where the first citizen and his seneschal are sitting.

"Hello, Father, you see I didn't waste any time," he cried; grasping his father's hand in a grip that made Mr. Worthington wince. "Well, you are a trump, after all. We're both a little hot-headed, I guess, and do things we're sorry for,—but that's all over now, isn't it? I'm sorry. I might have known you'd come round when you found out for yourself what kind of a girl Cynthia was. Did you ever see anybody like her?"

Mr. Flint turned his back, and started to walk out of the room.

"Don't go, Flint, old boy," Bob called out, seizing Mr. Flint's hand, too. "I can't stay but a minute, now. How are you?"

"All right, Bob," answered Mr. Flint, with a curious, kindly look in his eyes that was not often there. "I'm glad to see you home. I have to go to the bank."

"Well, Father," said Bob, "school must be out, and I imagine you know where I'm going. I just thought I'd stop in to—to thank you, and get a benediction."

"I am very happy to have you back, Robert," replied Mr. Worthington, and it was true. It would have been strange indeed if some tremor of sentiment had not been in his voice and some gleam of pride in his eye as he looked upon his son.

"So you saw her, and couldn't resist her," said Bob. "Wasn't that how it happened?"

Mr. Worthington sat down again at the desk, and his hand began to stray among the papers. He was thinking of Mr. Flint's exit.

"I do not arrive at my decisions quite in that way, Robert," he answered.

"But you have seen her?"

"Yes, I have seen her."



There was a hesitation, an uneasiness in his father's tone for which Bob could not account, and which he attributed to emotion. He did not guess that this hour of supreme joy could hold for Isaac Worthington another sensation.

"Isn't she the finest girl in the world?" he demanded. "How does she seem? How does she look?"

"She looks extremely well," said Mr. Worthington, who had now schooled his voice. "In fact, I am quite ready to admit that Cynthia Wetherell possesses the qualifications necessary for your wife. If she had not, I should never have written you."



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Bob walked to the window.

“Father;” he said, speaking with a little difficulty, “I can’t tell you how much I appreciate your—your coming round. I wanted to do the right thing, but I just couldn’t give up such a girl as that.”

“We shall let bygones be bygones, Robert,” answered Mr. Worthington, clearing his throat.

“She never would have me without your consent. By the way,” he cried, turning suddenly, “did she say she’d have me now?”

“I believe,” said Mr. Worthington, clearing his throat again, “I believe she reserved her decision.”

“I must be off,” said Bob, “she goes to Coniston on Fridays. I’ll drive her out. Good-by, Father.”

He flew out of the room, ran into Mrs. Holden, whom he astonished by saluting on the cheek, and astonished even more by asking her to tell Silas to drive his black horses to Gabriel Post’s house—as the cottage was still known in Brampton. And having hastily removed some of the cinders, he flew out of the door and reached the park-like space in the middle of Brampton Street. Then he tried to walk decorously, but it was hard work. What if she should not be in?

The door and windows of the little house were open that balmy afternoon, and the bees were buzzing among the flowers which Cynthia had planted on either side of the step. Bob went up the path, and caught a glimpse of her through the entry standing in the sitting room. She was, indeed, waiting for the Coniston stage, and she did not see him. Shall I destroy the mental image of the reader who has known her so long by trying to tell what she looked like? Some heroines grow thin and worn by the troubles which they are forced to go through. Cynthia was not this kind of a heroine. She was neither tall nor short, and the dark blue gown which she wore set off (so Bob thought) the curves of her figure to perfection. Her face had become a little more grave—yes, and more noble; and the eyes and mouth had an indescribable, womanly sweetness.

He stood for a moment outside the doorway gazing at her; hesitating to desecrate that revery, which seemed to him to have a touch of sadness in it. And then she turned her head, slowly, and saw him, and her lips parted, and a startled look came into her eyes, but she did not move. He came quickly into the room and stopped again, quivering from head to foot with the passion which the sight of her never failed to unloose within him. Still she did not speak, but her lip trembled, and the love leaping in his eyes kindled a yearning in hers,—a yearning she was powerless to resist. He may by that strange power have drawn her toward him—he never knew. Neither of them could have given



evidence on that marvellous instant when the current bridged the space between them. He could not say whether this woman whom he had seized by force before had shown alike vitality in her surrender. He only knew that her arms were woven about his neck, and that the kiss of which he had dreamed was again on his lips, and that he felt once more her wonderful, supple body pressed against his, and her heart beating, and her breast heaving. And he knew that the strength of the love in her which he had gained was beyond estimation.



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Thus for a time they swung together in ethereal space, breathless with the motion of their flight. The duration of such moments is—in words—limitless. Now he held her against him, and again he held her away that his eyes might feast upon hers until she dropped her lashes and the crimson tide flooded into her face and she hid it again in the refuge she had longed for,—murmuring his name. But at last, startled by some sound without and so brought back to earth, she led him gently to the window at the side and looked up at him searchingly. He was tanned no longer.

“I was afraid you had been working too hard,” she said.

“So you do love me?” was Bob’s answer to this remark.

Cynthia smiled at him with her eyes: gravely, if such a thing may be said of a smile.

“Bob, how can you ask?”

“Oh, Cynthia,” he cried, “if you knew what I have been through, you wouldn’t have held out, I know it. I began to think I should never have you.”

“But you have me now,” she said, and was silent.

“Why do you look like that?” he asked.

She smiled up at him again.

“I, too, have suffered, Bob,” she said. “And I have thought of you night and day.”

“God bless you, sweetheart,” he cried, and kissed her again,—many times. “It’s all right now, isn’t it? I knew my father would give his consent when he found out what you were.”

The expression of pain which had troubled him crossed her face again, and she put her hand on his shoulder.

“Listen, dearest,” she said, “I love you. I am doing this for you. You must understand that.”

“Why, yes, Cynthia, I understand it—of course I do,” he answered, perplexed. “I understand it, but I don’t deserve it.”

“I want you to know,” she continued in a low voice, “that I should have married you anyway. I—I could not have helped it.”

“Cynthia!”



“If you were to go back to the locomotive works’ tomorrow, I would marry you.”

“On ninety dollars a month?” exclaimed Bob.

“If you wanted me,” she said.

“Wanted you! I could live in a log cabin with you the rest of my life.”

She drew down his face to hers, and kissed him.

“But I wished you to be reconciled with your father,” she said; “I could not bear to come between you. You—you are reconciled, aren’t you?”

“Indeed, we are,” he said.

“I am glad, Bob,” she answered simply. “I should not have been happy if I had driven you away from the place where you should be, which is your home.”

“Wherever you are will be my home; sweetheart,” he said, and pressed her to him once more.

At length, looking past his shoulder into the street, she saw Lem Hallowell pulling up the Brampton stage before the door.

“Bob,” she said, “I must go to Coniston and see Uncle Jethro. I promised him.”

Bob’s answer was to walk into the entry, where he stood waving the most joyous of greetings at the surprised stage driver.



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"I guess you won't get anybody here, Lem," he called out.

"But, Bob," protested Cynthia, from within, afraid to show her face just then, "I have to go, I promised. And—and I want to go," she added when he turned.

"I'm running a stage to Coniston to-day myself, Lem," said he "and I'm going to steal your best passenger."

Lemuel immediately flung down his reins and jumped out of the stage and came up the path and into the entry, where he stood confronting Cynthia.

"Hev you took him, Cynthy?" he demanded.

"Yes, Lem," she answered, "won't you congratulate me?"

The warm-hearted stage driver did congratulate her in a most unmistakable manner.

"I think a sight of her, Bob," he said after he had shaken both of Bob's hands and brushed his own eyes with his coat sleeve. "I've knowed her so long—" Whereupon utterance failed him, and he ran down the path and jumped into his stage again and drove off.

And then Cynthia sent Bob on an errand—not a very long one, and while he was gone, she sat down at the table and tried to realize her happiness, and failed. In less than ten minutes Bob had come back with Cousin Ephraim, as fast as he could hobble. He flung his arms around her, stick and all, and he was crying. It is a fact that old soldiers sometimes cry. But his tears did not choke his utterance.

"Great Tecumseh!" said Cousin Ephraim, "so you've went and done it, Cynthy. Siege got a little mite too hot. I callated she'd capitulate in the end, but she held out uncommon long."

"That she did," exclaimed Bob, feelingly.

"I—I was tellin' Bob I hain't got nothin' against him," continued Ephraim.

"Oh, Cousin Eph," said Cynthia, laughing in spite of herself, and glancing at Bob, "is that all you can say?"

"Cousin Eph's all right," said Bob, laughing too. "We understand each other."

"Callate we do," answered Ephraim. "I'll go so far as to say there hain't nobody I'd ruther see you marry. Guess I'll hev to go back to the kit, now. What's to become of the old pensioner, Cynthy?"



“The old pensioner needn’t worry,” said Cynthia.

Then drove up Silas the Silent, with Bob’s buggy and his black trotters. All of Brampton might see them now; and all of Brampton did see them. Silas got out,—his presence not being required,—and Cynthia was helped in, and Bob got in beside her, and away they went, leaving Ephraim waving his stick after them from the doorstep.

It is recorded against the black trotters that they made very poor time to Coniston that day, though I cannot discover that either of them was lame. Lem Hallowell, who was there nearly an hour ahead of them, declares that the off horse had a bunch of branches in his mouth. Perhaps Bob held them in on account of the scenery that September afternoon. Incomparable scenery! I doubt if two lovers of the renaissance



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ever wandered through a more wondrous realm of pleasance—to quote the words of the poet. Spots in it are like a park, laid out by that peerless landscape gardener, nature: dark, symmetrical pine trees on the sward, and maples in the fulness of their leaf, and great oaks on the hillsides, and, coppices; and beyond, the mountain, the evergreens massed like cloud-shadows on its slopes; and all-trees and coppice and mountain—flattened by the haze until they seemed woven in the softest of blues and blue greens into one exquisite picture of an ancient tapestry. I, myself, have seen these pictures in that country, and marvelled.

So they drove on through that realm, which was to be their realm, and came all too soon to Coniston green. Lem Hallowell had spread the well-nigh incredible news, that Cynthia Wetherell was to marry the son of the mill-owner and railroad president of Brampton, and it seemed to Cynthia that every man and woman and child of the village was gathered at the store. Although she loved them, every one, she whispered something to Bob when she caught sight of that group on the platform, and he spoke to the trotters. Thus it happened that they flew by, and were at the tannery house before they knew it; and Cynthia, all unaided, sprang out of the buggy and ran in, alone. She found Jethro sitting outside of the kitchen door with a volume on his knee, and she saw that the print of it was large, and she knew that the book was “Robinson Crusoe.”

Cynthia knelt down on the grass beside him and caught his hands in hers.

“Uncle Jethro,” she said, “I am going to marry Bob Worthington.”

“Yes, Cynthy,” he answered. And taking the initiative for the first time in his life, he stooped down and kissed her.

“I knew—you would be happy—in my happiness,” she said, the tears brimming in her eyes.

“N-never have been so happy, Cynthy,—never have.”

“Uncle Jethro, I never will desert you. I shall always take care of you.”

“R-read to me sometimes, Cynthy—r-read to me?”

But she could not answer him. She was sobbing on the pages of that book he had given her—long ago.

I like to dwell on happiness, and I am reluctant to leave these people whom I have grown to love. Jethro Bass lived to take Cynthia’s children down by the brook and to show them the pictures, at least, in that wonderful edition of “Robinson Crusoe.” He would never depart from the tannery house, but Cynthia went to him there, many times



a week. There is a spot not far from the Coniston road, and five miles distant alike from Brampton and Coniston, where Bob Worthington built his house, and where he and Cynthia dwelt many years; and they go there to this day, in the summer-time. It stands in the midst of broad lands, and the ground in front of it slopes down to Coniston Water, artificially widened here by a stone dam into a little lake. From the balcony of the summer-house which overhangs the lake there is a wonderful view of Coniston Mountain, and Cynthia Worthington often sits there with her sewing or her book, listening to the laughter of her children, and thinking, sometimes, of bygone days.



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AFTERWORD

The reality of the foregoing pages has to the author, at least, become so vivid that he regrets the necessity of having to add an afterword. Every novel is, to some extent, a compound of truth and fiction, and he has done his best to picture conditions as they were, and to make the spirit of his book true. Certain people who were living in St. Louis during the Civil War have been mentioned as the originals of characters in "The Crisis," and there are houses in that city which have been pointed out as fitting descriptions in that novel. An author has, frequently, people, houses, and localities in mind when he writes; but he changes them, sometimes very materially, in the process of literary construction.

It is inevitable, perhaps, that many people of a certain New England state will recognize Jethro Bass. There are different opinions extant concerning the remarkable original of this character; ardent defenders and detractors of his are still living, but all agree that he was a strange man of great power. The author disclaims any intention of writing a biography of him. Some of the things set down in this book he did, and others he did not do. Some of the anecdotes here related concerning him are, in the main, true, and for this material the author acknowledges his indebtedness particularly to Colonel Thomas B. Cheney of Ashland, New Hampshire, and to other friends who have helped him. Jethro Bass was typical of his Era, and it is of the Era that this book attempts to treat.

Concerning the locality where Jethro Bass was born and lived, it will and will not be recognized. It would have been the extreme of bad taste to have put into these pages any portraits which might have offended families or individuals, and in order that it may be known that the author has not done so he has written this Afterword. Nor has he particularly chosen for the field of this novel a state of which he is a citizen, and for which he has a sincere affection. The conditions here depicted, while retaining the characteristics of the locality, he believes to be typical of the Era over a large part of the United States.

Many of the Puritans who came to New England were impelled to emigrate from the old country, no doubt, by an aversion to pulling the forelock as well as by religious principles, and the spirit of these men prevailed for a certain time after the Revolution was fought. Such men lived and ruled in Coniston before the rise of Jethro Bass.

Self-examination is necessary for the moral health of nations as well as men, and it is the most hopeful of signs that in the United States we are to-day going through a period of self-examination.



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We shall do well to ascertain the causes which have led us gradually to stray from the political principles laid down by our forefathers for all the world to see. Some of us do not even know what those principles were. I have met many intelligent men, in different states of the Union, who could not even repeat the names of the senators who sat for them in Congress. Macaulay said, in 1852, "We now know, by the clearest of all proof, that universal suffrage, even united with secret voting, is no security, against the establishment of arbitrary power." To quote James Russell Lowell, writing a little later: "We have begun obscurely to recognize that . . . popular government is not in itself a panacea, is no better than any other form except as the virtue and wisdom of the people make it so."

As Americans, we cannot but believe that our political creed goes down in its foundations to the solid rock of truth. One of the best reasons for our belief lies in the fact that, since 1776, government after government has imitated our example. We have, by our very existence and rise to power, made any decided retrogression from these doctrines impossible. So many people have tried to rule themselves, and are still trying, that one begins to believe that the time is not far distant when the United States, once the most radical, will become the most conservative of nations.

Thus the duty rests to-day, more heavily than ever, upon each American citizen to make good to the world those principles upon which his government was built. To use a figure suggested by the calamity which has lately befallen one of the most beloved of our cities, there is a theory that earthquakes are caused by a necessary movement on the part of the globe to regain its axis. Whether or not the theory be true, it has its political application. In America to-day we are trying—whatever the cost—to regain the true axis established for us by the founders of our Republic.

HARLAKENDEN *house*, May 7, 1906.