

The Gilded Age, Part 4. eBook

The Gilded Age, Part 4. by Mark Twain

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

Whatever may have been the language of Harry's letter to the Colonel, the information it conveyed was condensed or expanded, one or the other, from the following episode of his visit to New York:

He called, with official importance in his mien, at No.— Wall street, where a great gilt sign betokened the presence of the head-quarters of the "Columbus River Slack-Water Navigation Company." He entered and gave a dressy porter his card, and was requested to wait a moment in a sort of ante-room. The porter returned in a minute; and asked whom he would like to see?

"The president of the company, of course."

"He is busy with some gentlemen, sir; says he will be done with them directly."

That a copper-plate card with "Engineer-in-Chief" on it should be received with such tranquility as this, annoyed Mr. Brierly not a little. But he had to submit. Indeed his annoyance had time to augment a good deal; for he was allowed to cool his heels a frill half hour in the ante-room before those gentlemen emerged and he was ushered into the presence. He found a stately dignitary occupying a very official chair behind a long green morocco-covered table, in a room with sumptuously carpeted and furnished, and well garnished with pictures.

"Good morning, sir; take a seat—take a seat."

"Thank you sir," said Harry, throwing as much chill into his manner as his ruffled dignity prompted.

"We perceive by your reports and the reports of the Chief Superintendent, that you have been making gratifying progress with the work.—We are all very much pleased."

"Indeed? We did not discover it from your letters—which we have not received; nor by the treatment our drafts have met with—which were not honored; nor by the reception of any part of the appropriation, no part of it having come to hand."

"Why, my dear Mr. Brierly, there must be some mistake, I am sure we wrote you and also Mr. Sellers, recently—when my clerk comes he will show copies—letters informing you of the ten per cent. assessment."

"Oh, certainly, we got those letters. But what we wanted was money to carry on the work—money to pay the men."



“Certainly, certainly—true enough—but we credited you both for a large part of your assessments—I am sure that was in our letters.”

“Of course that was in—I remember that.”

“Ah, very well then. Now we begin to understand each other.”

“Well, I don’t see that we do. There’s two months’ wages due the men, and——”

“How? Haven’t you paid the men?”

“Paid them! How are we going to pay them when you don’t honor our drafts?”

“Why, my dear sir, I cannot see how you can find any fault with us. I am sure we have acted in a perfectly straight forward business way.—Now let us look at the thing a moment. You subscribed for 100 shares of the capital stock, at \$1,000 a share, I believe?”



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“Yes, sir, I did.”

“And Mr. Sellers took a like amount?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Very well. No concern can get along without money. We levied a ten per cent. assessment. It was the original understanding that you and Mr. Sellers were to have the positions you now hold, with salaries of \$600 a month each, while in active service. You were duly elected to these places, and you accepted them. Am I right?”

“Certainly.”

“Very well. You were given your instructions and put to work. By your reports it appears that you have expended the sum of \$9,610 upon the said work. Two months salary to you two officers amounts altogether to \$2,400—about one-eighth of your ten per cent. assessment, you see; which leaves you in debt to the company for the other seven-eighths of the assessment—viz, something over \$8,000 apiece. Now instead of requiring you to forward this aggregate of \$16,000 or \$17,000 to New York, the company voted unanimously to let you pay it over to the contractors, laborers from time to time, and give you credit on the books for it. And they did it without a murmur, too, for they were pleased with the progress you had made, and were glad to pay you that little compliment—and a very neat one it was, too, I am sure. The work you did fell short of \$10,000, a trifle. Let me see—\$9,640 from \$20,000 salary \$2,400 added—ah yes, the balance due the company from yourself and Mr. Sellers is \$7,960, which I will take the responsibility of allowing to stand for the present, unless you prefer to draw a check now, and thus——”

“Confound it, do you mean to say that instead of the company owing us \$2,400, we owe the company \$7,960?”

“Well, yes.”

“And that we owe the men and the contractors nearly ten thousand dollars besides?”

“Owe them! Oh bless my soul, you can’t mean that you have not paid these people?”

“But I do mean it!”

The president rose and walked the floor like a man in bodily pain. His brows contracted, he put his hand up and clasped his forehead, and kept saying, “Oh, it is, too bad, too bad, too bad! Oh, it is bound to be found out—nothing can prevent it—nothing!”

Then he threw himself into his chair and said:



“My dear Mr. Brierson, this is dreadful—perfectly dreadful. It will be found out. It is bound to tarnish the good name of the company; our credit will be seriously, most seriously impaired. How could you be so thoughtless—the men ought to have been paid though it beggared us all!”

“They ought, ought they? Then why the devil—my name is not Bryerson, by the way—why the mischief didn’t the compa—why what in the nation ever became of the appropriation? Where is that appropriation?—if a stockholder may make so bold as to ask.”

The appropriation?—that paltry \$200,000, do you mean?”

“Of course—but I didn’t know that \$200,000 was so very paltry. Though I grant, of course, that it is not a large sum, strictly speaking. But where is it?”

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“My dear sir, you surprise me. You surely cannot have had a large acquaintance with this sort of thing. Otherwise you would not have expected much of a result from a mere *initial* appropriation like that. It was never intended for anything but a mere nest egg for the future and real appropriations to cluster around.”

“Indeed? Well, was it a myth, or was it a reality? Whatever become of it?”

“Why the—matter is simple enough. A Congressional appropriation costs money. Just reflect, for instance—a majority of the House Committee, say \$10,000 apiece—\$40,000; a majority of the Senate Committee, the same each—say \$40,000; a little extra to one or two chairman of one or two such committees, say \$10,000 each—\$20,000; and there’s \$100,000 of the money gone, to begin with. Then, seven male lobbyists, at \$3,000 each —\$21,000; one female lobbyist, \$10,000; a high moral Congressman or Senator here and there—the high moral ones cost more, because they give tone to a measure—say ten of these at \$3,000 each, is \$30,000; then a lot of small-fry country members who won’t vote for anything whatever without pay—say twenty at \$500 apiece, is \$10,000; a lot of dinners to members—say \$10,000 altogether; lot of jimcracks for Congressmen’s wives and children—those go a long way—you can’t spend too much money in that line—well, those things cost in a lump, say \$10,000—along there somewhere; and then comes your printed documents—your maps, your tinted engravings, your pamphlets, your illuminated show cards, your advertisements in a hundred and fifty papers at ever so much a line —because you’ve got to keep the papers all light or you are gone up, you know. Oh, my dear sir, printing bills are destruction itself. Ours so far amount to—let me see—10; 52; 22; 13;—and then there’s 11; 14; 33 —well, never mind the details, the total in clean numbers foots up \$118,254.42 thus far!”

“What!”

“Oh, yes indeed. Printing’s no bagatelle, I can tell you. And then there’s your contributions, as a company, to Chicago fires and Boston fires, and orphan asylums and all that sort of thing—head the list, you see, with the company’s full name and a thousand dollars set opposite —great card, sir—one of the finest advertisements in the world—the preachers mention it in the pulpit when it’s a religious charity—one of the happiest advertisements in the world is your benevolent donation. Ours have amounted to sixteen thousand dollars and some cents up to this time.”

“Good heavens!”

“Oh, yes. Perhaps the biggest thing we’ve done in the advertising line was to get an officer of the U. S. government, of perfectly Himalayan official altitude, to write up our little internal improvement for a religious paper of enormous circulation—I tell you that makes our bonds go handsomely among the pious poor. Your religious paper is by far the best vehicle for a thing of this kind, because

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they'll 'lead' your article and put it right in the midst of the reading matter; and if it's got a few Scripture quotations in it, and some temperance platitudes and a bit of gush here and there about Sunday Schools, and a sentimental snuffle now and then about 'God's precious ones, the honest hard-handed poor,' it works the nation like a charm, my dear sir, and never a man suspects that it is an advertisement; but your secular paper sticks you right into the advertising columns and of course you don't take a trick. Give me a religious paper to advertise in, every time; and if you'll just look at their advertising pages, you'll observe that other people think a good deal as I do—especially people who have got little financial schemes to make everybody rich with. Of course I mean your great big metropolitan religious papers that know how to serve God and make money at the same time—that's your sort, sir, that's your sort—a religious paper that isn't run to make money is no use to us, sir, as an advertising medium—no use to anybody—in our line of business. I guess our next best dodge was sending a pleasure trip of newspaper reporters out to Napoleon. Never paid them a cent; just filled them up with champagne and the fat of the land, put pen, ink and paper before them while they were red-hot, and bless your soul when you come to read their letters you'd have supposed they'd been to heaven. And if a sentimental squeamishness held one or two of them back from taking a less rosy view of Napoleon, our hospitalities tied his tongue, at least, and he said nothing at all and so did us no harm. Let me see—have I stated all the expenses I've been at? No, I was near forgetting one or two items. There's your official salaries—you can't get good men for nothing. Salaries cost pretty lively. And then there's your big high-sounding millionaire names stuck into your advertisements as stockholders—another card, that—and they are stockholders, too, but you have to give them the stock and non-assessable at that—so they're an expensive lot. Very, very expensive thing, take it all around, is a big internal improvement concern—but you see that yourself, Mr. Bryerman—you see that, yourself, sir.”

“But look here. I think you are a little mistaken about it's ever having cost anything for Congressional votes. I happen to know something about that. I've let you say your say—now let me say mine. I don't wish to seem to throw any suspicion on anybody's statements, because we are all liable to be mistaken. But how would it strike you if I were to say that I was in Washington all the time this bill was pending? and what if I added that I put the measure through myself? Yes, sir, I did that little thing. And moreover, I never paid a dollar for any man's vote and never promised one. There are some ways of doing a thing that are as good as others which other people don't happen to think about, or don't have the knack of succeeding in, if they do happen to think of them. My dear sir, I am obliged to knock some of your expenses in the head—for never a cent was paid a Congressman or Senator on the part of this Navigation Company.”

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The president smiled blandly, even sweetly, all through this harangue, and then said:

“Is that so?”

“Every word of it.”

“Well it does seem to alter the complexion of things a little. You are acquainted with the members down there, of course, else you could not have worked to such advantage?”

“I know them all, sir. I know their wives, their children, their babies—I even made it a point to be on good terms with their lackeys. I know every Congressman well—even familiarly.”

“Very good. Do you know any of their signatures? Do you know their handwriting?”

“Why I know their handwriting as well as I know my own—have had correspondence enough with them, I should think. And their signatures—why I can tell their initials, even.”

The president went to a private safe, unlocked it and got out some letters and certain slips of paper. Then he said:

“Now here, for instance; do you believe that that is a genuine letter? Do you know this signature here?—and this one? Do you know who those initials represent—and are they forgeries?”

Harry was stupefied. There were things there that made his brain swim. Presently, at the bottom of one of the letters he saw a signature that restored his equilibrium; it even brought the sunshine of a smile to his face.

The president said:

“That one amuses you. You never suspected him?”

“Of course I ought to have suspected him, but I don’t believe it ever really occurred to me. Well, well, well—how did you ever have the nerve to approach him, of all others?”

“Why my friend, we never think of accomplishing anything without his help. He is our mainstay. But how do those letters strike you?”

“They strike me dumb! What a stone-blind idiot I have been!”

“Well, take it all around, I suppose you had a pleasant time in Washington,” said the president, gathering up the letters; “of course you must have had. Very few men could go there and get a money bill through without buying a single”



“Come, now, Mr. President, that’s plenty of that! I take back everything I said on that head. I’m a wiser man to-day than I was yesterday, I can tell you.”

“I think you are. In fact I am satisfied you are. But now I showed you these things in confidence, you understand. Mention facts as much as you want to, but don’t mention names to anybody. I can depend on you for that, can’t I?”

“Oh, of course. I understand the necessity of that. I will not betray the names. But to go back a bit, it begins to look as if you never saw any of that appropriation at all?”

“We saw nearly ten thousand dollars of it—and that was all. Several of us took turns at log-rolling in Washington, and if we had charged anything for that service, none of that \$10,000 would ever have reached New York.”



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“If you hadn’t levied the assessment you would have been in a close place I judge?”

“Close? Have you figured up the total of the disbursements I told you of?”

“No, I didn’t think of that.”

“Well, lets see:

Spent in Washington, say,	\$191,000
Printing, advertising, <i>etc.</i> , say	\$118,000
Charity, say,	\$16,000

Total, \$325,000

The money to do that with, comes from
--Appropriation, \$200,000

Ten per cent. assessment on capital of
\$1,000,000 \$100,000

Total, \$300,000

“Which leaves us in debt some \$25,000 at this moment. Salaries of home officers are still going on; also printing and advertising. Next month will show a state of things!”

“And then—burst up, I suppose?”

“By no means. Levy another assessment”

“Oh, I see. That’s dismal.”

“By no means.”

“Why isn’t it? What’s the road out?”

“Another appropriation, don’t you see?”

“Bother the appropriations. They cost more than they come to.”

“Not the next one. We’ll call for half a million—get it and go for a million the very next month.”—“Yes, but the cost of it!”

The president smiled, and patted his secret letters affectionately. He said:



“All these people are in the next Congress. We shan’t have to pay them a cent. And what is more, they will work like beavers for us—perhaps it might be to their advantage.”

Harry reflected profoundly a while. Then he said:

“We send many missionaries to lift up the benighted races of other lands. How much cheaper and better it would be if those people could only come here and drink of our civilization at its fountain head.”

“I perfectly agree with you, Mr. Beverly. Must you go? Well, good morning. Look in, when you are passing; and whenever I can give you any information about our affairs and pro’spects, I shall be glad to do it.”

Harry’s letter was not a long one, but it contained at least the calamitous figures that came out in the above conversation. The Colonel found himself in a rather uncomfortable place—no \$1,200 salary forthcoming; and himself held responsible for half of the \$9,640 due the workmen, to say nothing of being in debt to the company to the extent of nearly \$4,000. Polly’s heart was nearly broken; the “blues” returned in fearful force, and she had to go out of the room to hide the tears that nothing could keep back now.

There was mourning in another quarter, too, for Louise had a letter. Washington had refused, at the last moment, to take \$40,000 for the Tennessee Land, and had demanded \$150,000! So the trade fell through, and now Washington was wailing because he had been so foolish. But he wrote that his man might probably return to the city soon, and then he meant to sell to him, sure, even if he had to take \$10,000. Louise had a good cry-several of them, indeed—and the family charitably forebore to make any comments that would increase her grief.



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Spring blossomed, summer came, dragged its hot weeks by, and the Colonel's spirits rose, day by day, for the railroad was making good progress. But by and by something happened. Hawkeye had always declined to subscribe anything toward the railway, imagining that her large business would be a sufficient compulsory influence; but now Hawkeye was frightened; and before Col. Sellers knew what he was about, Hawkeye, in a panic, had rushed to the front and subscribed such a sum that Napoleon's attractions suddenly sank into insignificance and the railroad concluded to follow a comparatively straight course instead of going miles out of its way to build up a metropolis in the muddy desert of Stone's Landing.

The thunderbolt fell. After all the Colonel's deep planning; after all his brain work and tongue work in drawing public attention to his pet project and enlisting interest in it; after all his faithful hard toil with his hands, and running hither and thither on his busy feet; after all his high hopes and splendid prophecies, the fates had turned their backs on him at last, and all in a moment his air-castles crumbled to ruins about him. Hawkeye rose from her fright triumphant and rejoicing, and down went Stone's Landing! One by one its meagre parcel of inhabitants packed up and moved away, as the summer waned and fall approached. Town lots were no longer salable, traffic ceased, a deadly lethargy fell upon the place once more, the "Weekly Telegraph" faded into an early grave, the wary tadpole returned from exile, the bullfrog resumed his ancient song, the tranquil turtle sunned his back upon bank and log and drowsed his grateful life away as in the old sweet days of yore.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Philip Sterling was on his way to Ilium, in the state of Pennsylvania. Ilium was the railway station nearest to the tract of wild land which Mr. Bolton had commissioned him to examine.

On the last day of the journey as the railway train Philip was on was leaving a large city, a lady timidly entered the drawing-room car, and hesitatingly took a chair that was at the moment unoccupied. Philip saw from the window that a gentleman had put her upon the car just as it was starting. In a few moments the conductor entered, and without waiting an explanation, said roughly to the lady,

"Now you can't sit there. That seat's taken. Go into the other car."

"I did not intend to take the seat," said the lady rising, "I only sat down a moment till the conductor should come and give me a seat."

"There aint any. Car's full. You'll have to leave."

"But, sir," said the lady, appealingly, "I thought—"



“Can’t help what you thought—you must go into the other car.”

“The train is going very fast, let me stand here till we stop.”

“The lady can have my seat,” cried Philip, springing up.

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The conductor turned towards Philip, and coolly and deliberately surveyed him from head to foot, with contempt in every line of his face, turned his back upon him without a word, and said to the lady,

“Come, I’ve got no time to talk. You must go now.”

The lady, entirely disconcerted by such rudeness, and frightened, moved towards the door, opened it and stepped out. The train was swinging along at a rapid rate, jarring from side to side; the step was a long one between the cars and there was no protecting grating. The lady attempted it, but lost her balance, in the wind and the motion of the car, and fell! She would inevitably have gone down under the wheels, if Philip, who had swiftly followed her, had not caught her arm and drawn her up. He then assisted her across, found her a seat, received her bewildered thanks, and returned to his car.

The conductor was still there, taking his tickets, and growling something about imposition. Philip marched up to him, and burst out with,

“You are a brute, an infernal brute, to treat a woman that way.”

“Perhaps you’d like to make a fuss about it,” sneered the conductor.

Philip’s reply was a blow, given so suddenly and planted so squarely in the conductor’s face, that it sent him reeling over a fat passenger, who was looking up in mild wonder that any one should dare to dispute with a conductor, and against the side of the car.

He recovered himself, reached the bell rope, “Damn you, I’ll learn you,” stepped to the door and called a couple of brakemen, and then, as the speed slackened; roared out,

“Get off this train.”

“I shall not get off. I have as much right here as you.”

“We’ll see,” said the conductor, advancing with the brakemen. The passengers protested, and some of them said to each other, “That’s too bad,” as they always do in such cases, but none of them offered to take a hand with Philip. The men seized him, wrenched him from his seat, dragged him along the aisle, tearing his clothes, thrust him from the car, and, then flung his carpet-bag, overcoat and umbrella after him. And the train went on.

The conductor, red in the face and puffing from his exertion, swaggered through the car, muttering “Puppy, I’ll learn him.” The passengers, when he had gone, were loud in their indignation, and talked about signing a protest, but they did nothing more than talk.

The next morning the Hooverville Patriot and Clarion had this “item”:—



SLIGHTUALLY *overboard*.

“We learn that as the down noon express was leaving H—— yesterday a lady! (God save the mark) attempted to force herself into the already full palatial car. Conductor Slum, who is too old a bird to be caught with chaff, courteously informed her that the car was full, and when she insisted on remaining, he persuaded her to go into the car where she belonged. Thereupon a young sprig, from the

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East, blustered like a Shanghai rooster, and began to sass the conductor with his chin music. That gentleman delivered the young aspirant for a muss one of his elegant little left-handers, which so astonished him that he began to feel for his shooter. Whereupon Mr. Slum gently raised the youth, carried him forth, and set him down just outside the car to cool off. Whether the young blood has yet made his way out of Bascom's swamp, we have not learned. Conductor Slum is one of the most gentlemanly and efficient officers on the road; but he ain't trifled with, not much. We learn that the company have put a new engine on the seven o'clock train, and newly upholstered the drawing-room car throughout. It spares no effort for the comfort of the traveling public."

Philip never had been before in Bascom's swamp, and there was nothing inviting in it to detain him. After the train got out of the way he crawled out of the briars and the mud, and got upon the track. He was somewhat bruised, but he was too angry to mind that. He plodded along over the ties in a very hot condition of mind and body. In the scuffle, his railway check had disappeared, and he grimly wondered, as he noticed the loss, if the company would permit him to walk over their track if they should know he hadn't a ticket.

Philip had to walk some five miles before he reached a little station, where he could wait for a train, and he had ample time for reflection. At first he was full of vengeance on the company. He would sue it. He would make it pay roundly. But then it occurred to him that he did not know the name of a witness he could summon, and that a personal fight against a railway corporation was about the most hopeless in the world. He then thought he would seek out that conductor, lie in wait for him at some station, and thrash him, or get thrashed himself.

But as he got cooler, that did not seem to him a project worthy of a gentleman exactly. Was it possible for a gentleman to get even with such a fellow as that conductor on the letter's own plane? And when he came to this point, he began to ask himself, if he had not acted very much like a fool. He didn't regret striking the fellow—he hoped he had left a mark on him. But, after all, was that the best way? Here was he, Philip Sterling, calling himself a gentleman, in a brawl with a vulgar conductor, about a woman he had never seen before. Why should he have put himself in such a ridiculous position? Wasn't it enough to have offered the lady his seat, to have rescued her from an accident, perhaps from death? Suppose he had simply said to the conductor, "Sir, your conduct is brutal, I shall report you." The passengers, who saw the affair, might have joined in a report against the conductor, and he might really have accomplished something. And, now! Philip looked at his torn clothes, and thought with disgust of his haste in getting into a fight with such an autocrat.

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At the little station where Philip waited for the next train, he met a man—who turned out to be a justice of the peace in that neighborhood, and told him his adventure. He was a kindly sort of man, and seemed very much interested.

“Dum ’em,” said he, when he had heard the story.

“Do you think any thing can be done, sir?”

“Wal, I guess tain’t no use. I hain’t a mite of doubt of every word you say. But suin’s no use. The railroad company owns all these people along here, and the judges on the bench too. Spiled your clothes! Wal, ‘least said’s soonest mended.’ You haint no chance with the company.”

When next morning, he read the humorous account in the Patriot and Clarion, he saw still more clearly what chance he would have had before the public in a fight with the railroad company.

Still Philip’s conscience told him that it was his plain duty to carry the matter into the courts, even with the certainty of defeat. He confessed that neither he nor any citizen had a right to consult his own feelings or conscience in a case where a law of the land had been violated before his own eyes. He confessed that every citizen’s first duty in such case is to put aside his own business and devote his time and his best efforts to seeing that the infraction is promptly punished; and he knew that no country can be well governed unless its citizens as a body keep religiously before their minds that they are the guardians of the law, and that the law officers are only the machinery for its execution, nothing more. As a finality he was obliged to confess that he was a bad citizen, and also that the general laxity of the time, and the absence of a sense of duty toward any part of the community but the individual himself were ingrained in him, and he was no better than the rest of the people.

The result of this little adventure was that Philip did not reach Ilium till daylight the next morning, when he descended sleepy and sore, from a way train, and looked about him. Ilium was in a narrow mountain gorge, through which a rapid stream ran. It consisted of the plank platform on which he stood, a wooden house, half painted, with a dirty piazza (unroofed) in front, and a sign board hung on a slanting pole—bearing the legend, “Hotel. P. Dusenheimer,” a sawmill further down the stream, a blacksmith-shop, and a store, and three or four unpainted dwellings of the slab variety.

As Philip approached the hotel he saw what appeared to be a wild beast crouching on the piazza. It did not stir, however, and he soon found that it was only a stuffed skin. This cheerful invitation to the tavern was the remains of a huge panther which had been killed in the region a few weeks before. Philip examined his ugly visage and strong crooked fore-arm, as he was waiting admittance, having pounded upon the door.

“Yait a bit. I’ll shoost—put on my trowsers,” shouted a voice from the window, and the door was soon opened by the yawning landlord.

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“Morgen! Didn’t hear d’ drain oncet. Dem boys geeeps me up zo spate. Gom right in.”

Philip was shown into a dirty bar-room. It was a small room, with a stove in the middle, set in a long shallow box of sand, for the benefit of the “spitters,” a bar across one end—a mere counter with a sliding glass-case behind it containing a few bottles having ambitious labels, and a wash-sink in one corner. On the walls were the bright yellow and black handbills of a traveling circus, with pictures of acrobats in human pyramids, horses flying in long leaps through the air, and sylph-like women in a paradisaic costume, balancing themselves upon the tips of their toes on the bare backs of frantic and plunging steeds, and kissing their hands to the spectators meanwhile.

As Philip did not desire a room at that hour, he was invited to wash himself at the nasty sink, a feat somewhat easier than drying his face, for the towel that hung in a roller over the sink was evidently as much a fixture as the sink itself, and belonged, like the suspended brush and comb, to the traveling public. Philip managed to complete his toilet by the use of his pocket-handkerchief, and declining the hospitality of the landlord, implied in the remark, “You won’d dake notin’?” he went into the open air to wait for breakfast.

The country he saw was wild but not picturesque. The mountain before him might be eight hundred feet high, and was only a portion of a long unbroken range, savagely wooded, which followed the stream. Behind the hotel, and across the brawling brook, was another level-topped, wooded range exactly like it. Ilium itself, seen at a glance, was old enough to be dilapidated, and if it had gained anything by being made a wood and water station of the new railroad, it was only a new sort of grime and rawness. P. Dusenheimer, standing in the door of his uninviting groggery, when the trains stopped for water; never received from the traveling public any patronage except facetious remarks upon his personal appearance. Perhaps a thousand times he had heard the remark, “Ilium fuit,” followed in most instances by a hail to himself as “AEneas,” with the inquiry “Where is old Anchises?” At first he had replied, “Dere ain’t no such man;” but irritated by its senseless repetition, he had latterly dropped into the formula of, “You be dam.”

Philip was recalled from the contemplation of Ilium by the rolling and growling of the gong within the hotel, the din and clamor increasing till the house was apparently unable to contain it; when it burst out of the front door and informed the world that breakfast was on the table.



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The dining room was long, low and narrow, and a narrow table extended its whole length. Upon this was spread a cloth which from appearance might have been as long in use as the towel in the barroom. Upon the table was the usual service, the heavy, much nicked stone ware, the row of plated and rusty castors, the sugar bowls with the zinc tea-spoons sticking up in them, the piles of yellow biscuits, the discouraged-looking plates of butter. The landlord waited, and Philip was pleased to observe the change in his manner. In the barroom he was the conciliatory landlord. Standing behind his guests at table, he had an air of peremptory patronage, and the voice in which he shot out the inquiry, as he seized Philip's plate, "Beefsteak or liver?" quite took away Philip's power of choice. He begged for a glass of milk, after trying that green hued compound called coffee, and made his breakfast out of that and some hard crackers which seemed to have been imported into Ilium before the introduction of the iron horse, and to have withstood a ten years siege of regular boarders, Greeks and others.

The land that Philip had come to look at was at least five miles distant from Ilium station. A corner of it touched the railroad, but the rest was pretty much an unbroken wilderness, eight or ten thousand acres of rough country, most of it such a mountain range as he saw at Ilium.

His first step was to hire three woodsmen to accompany him. By their help he built a log hut, and established a camp on the land, and then began his explorations, mapping down his survey as he went along, noting the timber, and the lay of the land, and making superficial observations as to the prospect of coal.

The landlord at Ilium endeavored to persuade Philip to hire the services of a witch-hazel professor of that region, who could walk over the land with his wand and tell him infallibly whether it contained coal, and exactly where the strata ran. But Philip preferred to trust to his own study of the country, and his knowledge of the geological formation. He spent a month in traveling over the land and making calculations; and made up his mind that a fine vein of coal ran through the mountain about a mile from the railroad, and that the place to run in a tunnel was half way towards its summit.

Acting with his usual promptness, Philip, with the consent of Mr. Bolton, broke ground there at once, and, before snow came, had some rude buildings up, and was ready for active operations in the spring. It was true that there were no outcroppings of coal at the place, and the people at Ilium said he "mought as well dig for plug terbaccer there;" but Philip had great faith in the uniformity of nature's operations in ages past, and he had no doubt that he should strike at this spot the rich vein that had made the fortune of the Golden Briar Company.

CHAPTER XXX.



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Once more Louise had good news from her Washington—Senator Dilworthy was going to sell the Tennessee Land to the government! Louise told Laura in confidence. She had told her parents, too, and also several bosom friends; but all of these people had simply looked sad when they heard the news, except Laura. Laura's face suddenly brightened under it—only for an instant, it is true, but poor Louise was grateful for even that fleeting ray of encouragement. When next Laura was alone, she fell into a train of thought something like this:

“If the Senator has really taken hold of this matter, I may look for that invitation to his house at, any moment. I am perishing to go! I do long to know whether I am only simply a large-sized pigmy among these pigmies here, who tumble over so easily when one strikes them, or whether I am really—.” Her thoughts drifted into other channels, for a season. Then she continued:— “He said I could be useful in the great cause of philanthropy, and help in the blessed work of uplifting the poor and the ignorant, if he found it feasible to take hold of our Land. Well, that is neither here nor there; what I want, is to go to Washington and find out what I am. I want money, too; and if one may judge by what she hears, there are chances there for a—.” For a fascinating woman, she was going to say, perhaps, but she did not.

Along in the fall the invitation came, sure enough. It came officially through brother Washington, the private Secretary, who appended a postscript that was brimming with delight over the prospect of seeing the Duchess again. He said it would be happiness enough to look upon her face once more—it would be almost too much happiness when to it was added the fact that she would bring messages with her that were fresh from Louise's lips.

In Washington's letter were several important enclosures. For instance, there was the Senator's check for \$2,000—“to buy suitable clothing in New York with!” It was a loan to be refunded when the Land was sold. Two thousand—this was fine indeed. Louise's father was called rich, but Laura doubted if Louise had ever had \$400 worth of new clothing at one time in her life. With the check came two through tickets—good on the railroad from Hawkeye to Washington via New York—and they were “dead-head” tickets, too, which had been given to Senator Dilworthy by the railway companies. Senators and representatives were paid thousands of dollars by the government for traveling expenses, but they always traveled “deadhead” both ways, and then did as any honorable, high-minded men would naturally do—declined to receive the mileage tendered them by the government. The Senator had plenty of railway passes, and could easily spare two to Laura—one for herself and one for a male escort. Washington suggested that she get some old friend of the family to come with her, and said the Senator would “deadhead” him home again as soon as he had grown tired, of the



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sights of the capital. Laura thought the thing over. At first she was pleased with the idea, but presently she began to feel differently about it. Finally she said, "No, our staid, steady-going Hawkeye friends' notions and mine differ about some things—they respect me, now, and I respect them—better leave it so—I will go alone; I am not afraid to travel by myself." And so communing with herself, she left the house for an afternoon walk.

Almost at the door she met Col. Sellers. She told him about her invitation to Washington.

"Bless me!" said the Colonel. "I have about made up my mind to go there myself. You see we've got to get another appropriation through, and the Company want me to come east and put it through Congress. Harry's there, and he'll do what he can, of course; and Harry's a good fellow and always does the very best he knows how, but then he's young—rather young for some parts of such work, you know—and besides he talks too much, talks a good deal too much; and sometimes he appears to be a little bit visionary, too, I think the worst thing in the world for a business man. A man like that always exposes his cards, sooner or later. This sort of thing wants an old, quiet, steady hand—wants an old cool head, you know, that knows men, through and through, and is used to large operations. I'm expecting my salary, and also some dividends from the company, and if they get along in time, I'll go along with you Laura—take you under my wing—you mustn't travel alone. Lord I wish I had the money right now. —But there'll be plenty soon—plenty."

Laura reasoned with herself that if the kindly, simple-hearted Colonel was going anyhow, what could she gain by traveling alone and throwing away his company? So she told him she accepted his offer gladly, gratefully. She said it would be the greatest of favors if he would go with her and protect her—not at his own expense as far as railway fares were concerned, of course; she could not expect him to put himself to so much trouble for her and pay his fare besides. But he wouldn't hear of her paying his fare—it would be only a pleasure to him to serve her. Laura insisted on furnishing the tickets; and finally, when argument failed, she said the tickets cost neither her nor any one else a cent—she had two of them—she needed but one—and if he would not take the other she would not go with him. That settled the matter. He took the ticket. Laura was glad that she had the check for new clothing, for she felt very certain of being able to get the Colonel to borrow a little of the money to pay hotel bills with, here and there.

She wrote Washington to look for her and Col. Sellers toward the end of November; and at about the time set the two travelers arrived safe in the capital of the nation, sure enough.

CHAPTER XXXI



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She the, gracious lady, yet no paines did spare
To doe him ease, or doe him remedy:
Many restoratives of vertues rare
And costly cordialles she did apply,
To mitigate his stubborne malady.
Spenser's Faerie Queens.

Mr. Henry Brierly was exceedingly busy in New York, so he wrote Col. Sellers, but he would drop everything and go to Washington.

The Colonel believed that Harry was the prince of lobbyists, a little too sanguine, may be, and given to speculation, but, then, he knew everybody; the Columbus River navigation scheme was, got through almost entirely by his aid. He was needed now to help through another scheme, a benevolent scheme in which Col. Sellers, through the Hawkinses, had a deep interest.

"I don't care, you know," he wrote to Harry, "so much about the niggroes. But if the government will buy this land, it will set up the Hawkins family—make Laura an heiress—and I shouldn't wonder if Beriah Sellers would set up his carriage again. Dilworthy looks at it different, of course. He's all for philanthropy, for benefiting the colored race. There's old Balsam, was in the Interior—used to be the Rev. Orson Balsam of Iowa—he's made the riffle on the Injun; great Injun pacificator and land dealer. Balaam'a got the Injun to himself, and I suppose that Senator Dilworthy feels that there is nothing left him but the colored man. I do reckon he is the best friend the colored man has got in Washington."

Though Harry was in a hurry to reach Washington, he stopped in Philadelphia; and prolonged his visit day after day, greatly to the detriment of his business both in New York and Washington. The society at the Bolton's might have been a valid excuse for neglecting business much more important than his. Philip was there; he was a partner with Mr. Bolton now in the new coal venture, concerning which there was much to be arranged in preparation for the Spring work, and Philip lingered week after week in the hospitable house. Alice was making a winter visit. Ruth only went to town twice a week to attend lectures, and the household was quite to Mr. Bolton's taste, for he liked the cheer of company and something going on evenings. Harry was cordially asked to bring his traveling-bag there, and he did not need urging to do so. Not even the thought of seeing Laura at the capital made him restless in the society of the two young ladies; two birds in hand are worth one in the bush certainly.

Philip was at home—he sometimes wished he were not so much so. He felt that too much or not enough was taken for granted. Ruth had met him, when he first came, with a cordial frankness, and her manner continued entirely unrestrained. She neither sought his company nor avoided it, and this perfectly level treatment irritated him more than any other could have done. It was impossible to advance much in love-making

with one who offered no obstacles, had no concealments and no embarrassments, and whom any approach to sentimentality would be quite likely to set into a fit of laughter.



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“Why, Phil,” she would say, “what puts you in the dumps to day? You are as solemn as the upper bench in Meeting. I shall have to call Alice to raise your spirits; my presence seems to depress you.”

“It’s not your presence, but your absence when you are present,” began Philip, dolefully, with the idea that he was saying a rather deep thing. “But you won’t understand me.”

“No, I confess I cannot. If you really are so low, as to think I am absent when I am present, it’s a frightful case of aberration; I shall ask father to bring out Dr. Jackson. Does Alice appear to be present when she is absent?”

“Alice has some human feeling, anyway. She cares for something besides musty books and dry bones. I think, Ruth, when I die,” said Philip, intending to be very grim and sarcastic, “I’ll leave you my skeleton. You might like that.”

“It might be more cheerful than you are at times,” Ruth replied with a laugh. “But you mustn’t do it without consulting Alice. She might not like it.”

“I don’t know why you should bring Alice up on every occasion. Do you think I am in love with her?”

“Bless you, no. It never entered my head. Are you? The thought of Philip Sterling in love is too comical. I thought you were only in love with the Ilium coal mine, which you and father talk about half the time.”

This is a specimen of Philip’s wooing. Confound the girl, he would say to himself, why does she never tease Harry and that young Shepley who comes here?

How differently Alice treated him. She at least never mocked him, and it was a relief to talk with one who had some sympathy with him. And he did talk to her, by the hour, about Ruth. The blundering fellow poured all his doubts and anxieties into her ear, as if she had been the impassive occupant of one of those little wooden confessionals in the Cathedral on Logan Square. Has, a confessor, if she is young and pretty, any feeling? Does it mend the matter by calling her your sister?

Philip called Alice his good sister, and talked to her about love and marriage, meaning Ruth, as if sisters could by no possibility have any personal concern in such things. Did Ruth ever speak of him? Did she think Ruth cared for him? Did Ruth care for anybody at Fallkill? Did she care for anything except her profession? And so on.

Alice was loyal to Ruth, and if she knew anything she did not betray her friend. She did not, at any rate, give Philip too much encouragement. What woman, under the circumstances, would?



“I can tell you one thing, Philip,” she said, “if ever Ruth Bolton loves, it will be with her whole soul, in a depth of passion that will sweep everything before it and surprise even herself.”

A remark that did not much console Philip, who imagined that only some grand heroism could unlock the sweetness of such a heart; and Philip feared that he wasn't a hero. He did not know out of what materials a woman can construct a hero, when she is in the creative mood.



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Harry skipped into this society with his usual lightness and gaiety. His good nature was inexhaustible, and though he liked to relate his own exploits, he had a little tact in adapting himself to the tastes of his hearers. He was not long in finding out that Alice liked to hear about Philip, and Harry launched out into the career of his friend in the West, with a prodigality of invention that would have astonished the chief actor. He was the most generous fellow in the world, and picturesque conversation was the one thing in which he never was bankrupt. With Mr. Bolton he was the serious man of business, enjoying the confidence of many of the monied men in New York, whom Mr. Bolton knew, and engaged with them in railway schemes and government contracts. Philip, who had so long known Harry, never could make up his mind that Harry did not himself believe that he was a chief actor in all these large operations of which he talked so much.

Harry did not neglect to endeavor to make himself agreeable to Mrs. Bolton, by paying great attention to the children, and by professing the warmest interest in the Friends' faith. It always seemed to him the most peaceful religion; he thought it must be much easier to live by an internal light than by a lot of outward rules; he had a dear Quaker aunt in Providence of whom Mrs. Bolton constantly reminded him. He insisted upon going with Mrs. Bolton and the children to the Friends Meeting on First Day, when Ruth and Alice and Philip, "world's people," went to a church in town, and he sat through the hour of silence with his hat on, in most exemplary patience. In short, this amazing actor succeeded so well with Mrs. Bolton, that she said to Philip one day,

"Thy friend, Henry Brierly, appears to be a very worldly minded young man. Does he believe in anything?"

"Oh, yes," said Philip laughing, "he believes in more things than any other person I ever saw."

To Ruth, Harry seemed to be very congenial. He was never moody for one thing, but lent himself with alacrity to whatever her fancy was. He was gay or grave as the need might be. No one apparently could enter more fully into her plans for an independent career.

"My father," said Harry, "was bred a physician, and practiced a little before he went into Wall street. I always had a leaning to the study. There was a skeleton hanging in the closet of my father's study when I was a boy, that I used to dress up in old clothes. Oh, I got quite familiar with the human frame."

"You must have," said Philip. "Was that where you learned to play the bones? He is a master of those musical instruments, Ruth; he plays well enough to go on the stage."

"Philip hates science of any kind, and steady application," retorted Harry. He didn't fancy Philip's banter, and when the latter had gone out, and Ruth asked,

“Why don’t you take up medicine, Mr. Brierly?”



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Harry said, "I have it in mind. I believe I would begin attending lectures this winter if it weren't for being wanted in Washington. But medicine is particularly women's province."

"Why so?" asked Ruth, rather amused.

"Well, the treatment of disease is a good deal a matter of sympathy. A woman's intuition is better than a man's. Nobody knows anything, really, you know, and a woman can guess a good deal nearer than a man."

"You are very complimentary to my sex."

"But," said Harry frankly; "I should want to choose my doctor; an ugly woman would ruin me, the disease would be sure to strike in and kill me at sight of her. I think a pretty physician, with engaging manners, would coax a fellow to live through almost anything."

"I am afraid you are a scoffer, Mr. Brierly."

"On the contrary, I am quite sincere. Wasn't it old what's his name? that said only the beautiful is useful?"

Whether Ruth was anything more than diverted with Harry's company; Philip could not determine. He scorned at any rate to advance his own interest by any disparaging communications about Harry, both because he could not help liking the fellow himself, and because he may have known that he could not more surely create a sympathy for him in Ruth's mind. That Ruth was in no danger of any serious impression he felt pretty sure, felt certain of it when he reflected upon her severe occupation with her profession. Hang it, he would say to himself, she is nothing but pure intellect anyway. And he only felt uncertain of it when she was in one of her moods of raillery, with mocking mischief in her eyes. At such times she seemed to prefer Harry's society to his. When Philip was miserable about this, he always took refuge with Alice, who was never moody, and who generally laughed him out of his sentimental nonsense. He felt at his ease with Alice, and was never in want of something to talk about; and he could not account for the fact that he was so often dull with Ruth, with whom, of all persons in the world, he wanted to appear at his best.

Harry was entirely satisfied with his own situation. A bird of passage is always at its ease, having no house to build, and no responsibility. He talked freely with Philip about Ruth, an almighty fine girl, he said, but what the deuce she wanted to study medicine for, he couldn't see.

There was a concert one night at the Musical Fund Hall and the four had arranged to go in and return by the Germantown cars. It was Philip's plan, who had engaged the seats, and promised himself an evening with Ruth, walking with her, sitting by her in the hall,



and enjoying the feeling of protecting that a man always has of a woman in a public place. He was fond of music, too, in a sympathetic way; at least, he knew that Ruth's delight in it would be enough for him.

Perhaps he meant to take advantage of the occasion to say some very serious things. His love for Ruth was no secret to Mrs. Bolton, and he felt almost sure that he should have no opposition in the family. Mrs. Bolton had been cautious in what she said, but Philip inferred everything from her reply to his own questions, one day, "Has thee ever spoken thy mind to Ruth?"



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Why shouldn't he speak his mind, and end his doubts? Ruth had been more tricky than usual that day, and in a flow of spirits quite inconsistent, it would seem, in a young lady devoted to grave studies.

Had Ruth a premonition of Philip's intention, in his manner? It may be, for when the girls came down stairs, ready to walk to the cars; and met Philip and Harry in the hall, Ruth said, laughing,

"The two tallest must walk together" and before Philip knew how it happened Ruth had taken Harry's arm, and his evening was spoiled. He had too much politeness and good sense and kindness to show in his manner that he was hit. So he said to Harry,

"That's your disadvantage in being short." And he gave Alice no reason to feel during the evening that she would not have been his first choice for the excursion. But he was none the less chagrined, and not a little angry at the turn the affair took.

The Hall was crowded with the fashion of the town. The concert was one of those fragmentary drearinesses that people endure because they are fashionable; tours de force on the piano, and fragments from operas, which have no meaning without the setting, with weary pauses of waiting between; there is the comic basso who is so amusing and on such familiar terms with the audience, and always sings the Barber; the attitudinizing tenor, with his languishing "Oh, Summer Night;" the soprano with her "Batti Batti," who warbles and trills and runs and fetches her breath, and ends with a noble scream that brings down a tempest of applause in the midst of which she backs off the stage smiling and bowing. It was this sort of concert, and Philip was thinking that it was the most stupid one he ever sat through, when just as the soprano was in the midst of that touching ballad, "Comin' thro' the Rye" (the soprano always sings "Comin' thro' the Rye" on an encore)—the Black Swan used to make it irresistible, Philip remembered, with her arch, "If a body kiss a body" there was a cry of "Fire!"

The hall is long and narrow, and there is only one place of egress. Instantly the audience was on its feet, and a rush began for the door. Men shouted, women screamed, and panic seized the swaying mass. A second's thought would have convinced every one that getting out was impossible, and that the only effect of a rush would be to crash people to death. But a second's thought was not given. A few cried:

"Sit down, sit down," but the mass was turned towards the door. Women were down and trampled on in the aisles, and stout men, utterly lost to self-control, were mounting the benches, as if to run a race over the mass to the entrance.

Philip who had forced the girls to keep their seats saw, in a flash, the new danger, and sprang to avert it. In a second more those infuriated men would be over the benches and crushing Ruth and Alice under their boots. He leaped upon the bench in front of them and struck out before him with all his might, felling one man who was rushing on



him, and checking for an instant the movement, or rather parting it, and causing it to flow on either side of him. But it was only for an instant; the pressure behind was too great, and, the next Philip was dashed backwards over the seat.



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And yet that instant of arrest had probably saved the girls, for as Philip fell, the orchestra struck up “Yankee Doodle” in the liveliest manner. The familiar tune caught the ear of the mass, which paused in wonder, and gave the conductor’s voice a chance to be heard—“It’s a false alarm!”

The tumult was over in a minute, and the next, laughter was heard, and not a few said, “I knew it wasn’t anything.” “What fools people are at such a time.”

The concert was over, however. A good many people were hurt, some of them seriously, and among them Philip Sterling was found bent across the seat, insensible, with his left arm hanging limp and a bleeding wound on his head.

When he was carried into the air he revived, and said it was nothing. A surgeon was called, and it was thought best to drive at once to the Bolton’s, the surgeon supporting Philip, who did not speak the whole way. His arm was set and his head dressed, and the surgeon said he would come round all right in his mind by morning; he was very weak. Alice who was not much frightened while the panic lasted in the hall, was very much unnerved by seeing Philip so pale and bloody. Ruth assisted the surgeon with the utmost coolness and with skillful hands helped to dress Philip’s wounds. And there was a certain intentness and fierce energy in what she did that might have revealed something to Philip if he had been in his senses.

But he was not, or he would not have murmured “Let Alice do it, she is not too tall.”

It was Ruth’s first case.

CHAPTER, XXXII.

Washington’s delight in his beautiful sister was measureless. He said that she had always been the queenliest creature in the land, but that she was only commonplace before, compared to what she was now, so extraordinary was the improvement wrought by rich fashionable attire.

“But your criticisms are too full of brotherly partiality to be depended on, Washington. Other people will judge differently.”

“Indeed they won’t. You’ll see. There will never be a woman in Washington that can compare with you. You’ll be famous within a fortnight, Laura. Everybody will want to know you. You wait—you’ll see.”

Laura wished in her heart that the prophecy might come true; and privately she even believed it might—for she had brought all the women whom she had seen since she left home under sharp inspection, and the result had not been unsatisfactory to her.



During a week or two Washington drove about the city every day with her and familiarized her with all of its salient features. She was beginning to feel very much at home with the town itself, and she was also fast acquiring ease with the distinguished people she met at the Dilworthy table, and losing what little of country timidity she had brought with her from Hawkeye. She noticed with secret pleasure the



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little start of admiration that always manifested itself in the faces of the guests when she entered the drawing-room arrayed in evening costume: she took comforting note of the fact that these guests directed a very liberal share of their conversation toward her; she observed with surprise, that famous statesmen and soldiers did not talk like gods, as a general thing, but said rather commonplace things for the most part; and she was filled with gratification to discover that she, on the contrary, was making a good many shrewd speeches and now and then a really brilliant one, and furthermore, that they were beginning to be repeated in social circles about the town.

Congress began its sittings, and every day or two Washington escorted her to the galleries set apart for lady members of the households of Senators and Representatives. Here was a larger field and a wider competition, but still she saw that many eyes were uplifted toward her face, and that first one person and then another called a neighbor's attention to her; she was not too dull to perceive that the speeches of some of the younger statesmen were delivered about as much and perhaps more at her than to the presiding officer; and she was not sorry to see that the dapper young Senator from Iowa came at once and stood in the open space before the president's desk to exhibit his feet as soon as she entered the gallery, whereas she had early learned from common report that his usual custom was to prop them on his desk and enjoy them himself with a selfish disregard of other people's longings.

Invitations began to flow in upon her and soon she was fairly "in society." "The season" was now in full bloom, and the first select reception was at hand that is to say, a reception confined to invited guests. Senator Dilworthy had become well convinced; by this time, that his judgment of the country-bred Missouri girl had not deceived him—it was plain that she was going to be a peerless missionary in the field of labor he designed her for, and therefore it would be perfectly safe and likewise judicious to send her forth well panoplied for her work.—So he had added new and still richer costumes to her wardrobe, and assisted their attractions with costly jewelry-loans on the future land sale.

This first select reception took place at a cabinet minister's—or rather a cabinet secretary's mansion. When Laura and the Senator arrived, about half past nine or ten in the evening, the place was already pretty well crowded, and the white-gloved negro servant at the door was still receiving streams of guests.—The drawing-rooms were brilliant with gaslight, and as hot as ovens. The host and hostess stood just within the door of entrance; Laura was presented, and then she passed on into the maelstrom of be-jeweled and richly attired low-necked ladies and white-kid-gloved and steel pen-coated gentlemen and wherever she moved she was followed by a buzz of admiration that was grateful to all her senses—so grateful, indeed, that her white face was tinged and its beauty heightened by a perceptible suffusion of color. She caught such remarks as, "Who is she?" "Superb woman!" "That is the new beauty from the west," *etc.*, *etc.*

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Whenever she halted, she was presently surrounded by Ministers, Generals, Congressmen, and all manner of aristocratic, people. Introductions followed, and then the usual original question, "How do you like Washington, Miss Hawkins?" supplemented by that other usual original question, "Is this your first visit?"

These two exciting topics being exhausted, conversation generally drifted into calmer channels, only to be interrupted at frequent intervals by new introductions and new inquiries as to how Laura liked the capital and whether it was her first visit or not. And thus for an hour or more the Duchess moved through the crush in a rapture of happiness, for her doubts were dead and gone, now she knew she could conquer here. A familiar face appeared in the midst of the multitude and Harry Brierly fought his difficult way to her side, his eyes shouting their gratification, so to speak:

"Oh, this is a happiness! Tell me, my dear Miss Hawkins—"

"Sh! I know what you are going to ask. I do like Washington—I like it ever so much!"

"No, but I was going to ask—"

"Yes, I am coming to it, coming to it as fast as I can. It is my first visit. I think you should know that yourself."

And straightway a wave of the crowd swept her beyond his reach.

"Now what can the girl mean? Of course she likes Washington—I'm not such a dummy as to have to ask her that. And as to its being her first visit, why bang it, she knows that I knew it was. Does she think I have turned idiot? Curious girl, anyway. But how they do swarm about her! She is the reigning belle of Washington after this night. She'll know five hundred of the heaviest guns in the town before this night's nonsense is over. And this isn't even the beginning. Just as I used to say—she'll be a card in the matter of—yes sir! She shall turn the men's heads and I'll turn the women's! What a team that will be in politics here. I wouldn't take a quarter of a million for what I can do in this present session—no indeed I wouldn't. Now, here—I don't altogether like this. That insignificant secretary of legation is—why, she's smiling on him as if he—and now on the Admiral! Now she's illuminating that, stuffy Congressman from Massachusetts—vulgar ungrammatical shovel-maker—greasy knave of spades. I don't like this sort of thing. She doesn't appear to be much distressed about me—she hasn't looked this way once. All right, my bird of Paradise, if it suits you, go on. But I think I know your sex. I'll go to smiling around a little, too, and see what effect that will have on you"



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And he did “smile around a little,” and got as near to her as he could to watch the effect, but the scheme was a failure—he could not get her attention. She seemed wholly unconscious of him, and so he could not flirt with any spirit; he could only talk disjointedly; he could not keep his eyes on the charmers he talked to; he grew irritable, jealous, and very, unhappy. He gave up his enterprise, leaned his shoulder against a fluted pilaster and pouted while he kept watch upon Laura’s every movement. His other shoulder stole the bloom from many a lovely cheek that brushed him in the surging crush, but he noted it not. He was too busy cursing himself inwardly for being an egotistical imbecile. An hour ago he had thought to take this country lass under his protection and show her “life” and enjoy her wonder and delight—and here she was, immersed in the marvel up to her eyes, and just a trifle more at home in it than he was himself. And now his angry comments ran on again:

“Now she’s sweetening old Brother Balaam; and he—well he is inviting her to the Congressional prayer-meeting, no doubt—better let old Dilworthy alone to see that she doesn’t overlook that. And now its Splurge, of New York; and now its Batters of New Hampshire—and now the Vice President! Well I may as well adjourn. I’ve got enough.”

But he hadn’t. He got as far as the door—and then struggled back to take one more look, hating himself all the while for his weakness.

Toward midnight, when supper was announced, the crowd thronged to the supper room where a long table was decked out with what seemed a rare repast, but which consisted of things better calculated to feast the eye than the appetite. The ladies were soon seated in files along the wall, and in groups here and there, and the colored waiters filled the plates and glasses and the, male guests moved hither and thither conveying them to the privileged sex.

Harry took an ice and stood up by the table with other gentlemen, and listened to the buzz of conversation while he ate.

From these remarks he learned a good deal about Laura that was news to him. For instance, that she was of a distinguished western family; that she was highly educated; that she was very rich and a great landed heiress; that she was not a professor of religion, and yet was a Christian in the truest and best sense of the word, for her whole heart was devoted to the accomplishment of a great and noble enterprise—none other than the sacrificing of her landed estates to the uplifting of the down-trodden negro and the turning of his erring feet into the way of light and righteousness. Harry observed that as soon as one listener had absorbed the story, he turned about and delivered it to his next neighbor and the latter individual straightway passed it on. And thus he saw it travel the round of the gentlemen and overflow rearward among the ladies. He could not trace it backward to its fountain head, and so he could not tell who it was that started it.



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One thing annoyed Harry a great deal; and that was the reflection that he might have been in Washington days and days ago and thrown his fascinations about Laura with permanent effect while she was new and strange to the capital, instead of dawdling in Philadelphia to no purpose. He feared he had “missed a trick,” as he expressed it.

He only found one little opportunity of speaking again with Laura before the evening’s festivities ended, and then, for the first time in years, his airy self-complacency failed him, his tongue’s easy confidence forsook it in a great measure, and he was conscious of an unheroic timidity. He was glad to get away and find a place where he could despise himself in private and try to grow his clipped plumes again.

When Laura reached home she was tired but exultant, and Senator Dilworthy was pleased and satisfied. He called Laura “my daughter,” next morning, and gave her some “pin money,” as he termed it, and she sent a hundred and fifty dollars of it to her mother and loaned a trifle to Col. Sellers. Then the Senator had a long private conference with Laura, and unfolded certain plans of his for the good of the country, and religion, and the poor, and temperance, and showed her how she could assist him in developing these worthy and noble enterprises.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Laura soon discovered that there were three distinct aristocracies in Washington. One of these, (nick-named the Antiques,) consisted of cultivated, high-bred old families who looked back with pride upon an ancestry that had been always great in the nation’s councils and its wars from the birth of the republic downward. Into this select circle it was difficult to gain admission. No. 2 was the aristocracy of the middle ground—of which, more anon. No. 3 lay beyond; of it we will say a word here. We will call it the Aristocracy of the Parvenus—as, indeed, the general public did. Official position, no matter how obtained, entitled a man to a place in it, and carried his family with him, no matter whence they sprang. Great wealth gave a man a still higher and nobler place in it than did official position. If this wealth had been acquired by conspicuous ingenuity, with just a pleasant little spice of illegality about it, all the better. This aristocracy was “fast,” and not averse to ostentation.

The aristocracy of the Antiques ignored the aristocracy of the Parvenus; the Parvenus laughed at the Antiques, (and secretly envied them.)

There were certain important “society” customs which one in Laura’s position needed to understand. For instance, when a lady of any prominence comes to one of our cities and takes up her residence, all the ladies of her grade favor her in turn with an initial call, giving their cards to the servant at the door by way of introduction. They come singly, sometimes; sometimes in couples; and always in elaborate full dress. They talk



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two minutes and a quarter and then go. If the lady receiving the call desires a further acquaintance, she must return the visit within two weeks; to neglect it beyond that time means "let the matter drop." But if she does return the visit within two weeks, it then becomes the other party's privilege to continue the acquaintance or drop it. She signifies her willingness to continue it by calling again any time within twelve-months; after that, if the parties go on calling upon each other once a year, in our large cities, that is sufficient, and the acquaintanceship holds good. The thing goes along smoothly, now. The annual visits are made and returned with peaceful regularity and bland satisfaction, although it is not necessary that the two ladies shall actually see each other oftener than once every few years. Their cards preserve the intimacy and keep the acquaintanceship intact.

For instance, Mrs. A. pays her annual visit, sits in her carriage and sends in her card with the lower right hand corner turned down, which signifies that she has "called in person;" Mrs. B. sends down word that she is "engaged" or "wishes to be excused"—or if she is a Parvenu and low-bred, she perhaps sends word that she is "not at home." Very good; Mrs. A. drives, on happy and content. If Mrs. A.'s daughter marries, or a child is born to the family, Mrs. B. calls, sends in her card with the upper left hand corner turned down, and then goes along about her affairs—for that inverted corner means "Congratulations." If Mrs. B.'s husband falls downstairs and breaks his neck, Mrs. A. calls, leaves her card with the upper right hand corner turned down, and then takes her departure; this corner means "Condolence." It is very necessary to get the corners right, else one may unintentionally condole with a friend on a wedding or congratulate her upon a funeral. If either lady is about to leave the city, she goes to the other's house and leaves her card with "P. P. C." engraved under the name—which signifies, "Pay Parting Call." But enough of etiquette. Laura was early instructed in the mysteries of society life by a competent mentor, and thus was preserved from troublesome mistakes.

The first fashionable call she received from a member of the ancient nobility, otherwise the Antiques, was of a pattern with all she received from that limb of the aristocracy afterward. This call was paid by Mrs. Major-General Fulke-Fulkerson and daughter. They drove up at one in the afternoon in a rather antiquated vehicle with a faded coat of arms on the panels, an aged white-wooled negro coachman on the box and a younger darkey beside him—the footman. Both of these servants were dressed in dull brown livery that had seen considerable service.

The ladies entered the drawing-room in full character; that is to say, with Elizabethan stateliness on the part of the dowager, and an easy grace and dignity on the part of the young lady that had a nameless something about it that suggested conscious superiority. The dresses of both ladies were exceedingly rich, as to material, but as notably modest as to color and ornament. All parties having seated themselves, the

dowager delivered herself of a remark that was not unusual in its form, and yet it came from her lips with the impressiveness of Scripture:



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“The weather has been unpropitious of late, Miss Hawkins.”

“It has indeed,” said Laura. “The climate seems to be variable.”

“It is its nature of old, here,” said the daughter—stating it apparently as a fact, only, and by her manner waving aside all personal responsibility on account of it. “Is it not so, mamma?”

“Quite so, my child. Do you like winter, Miss Hawkins?” She said “like” as if she had, an idea that its dictionary meaning was “approve of.”

“Not as well as summer—though I think all seasons have their charms.”

“It is a very just remark. The general held similar views. He considered snow in winter proper; sultriness in summer legitimate; frosts in the autumn the same, and rains in spring not objectionable. He was not an exacting man. And I call to mind now that he always admired thunder. You remember, child, your father always admired thunder?”

“He adored it.”

“No doubt it reminded him of battle,” said Laura.

“Yes, I think perhaps it did. He had a great respect for Nature. He often said there was something striking about the ocean. You remember his saying that, daughter?”

“Yes, often, Mother. I remember it very well.”

“And hurricanes... He took a great interest in hurricanes. And animals. Dogs, especially—hunting dogs. Also comets. I think we all have our predilections. I think it is this that gives variety to our tastes.”

Laura coincided with this view.

“Do you find it hard and lonely to be so far from your home and friends, Miss Hawkins?”

“I do find it depressing sometimes, but then there is so much about me here that is novel and interesting that my days are made up more of sunshine than shadow.”

“Washington is not a dull city in the season,” said the young lady. “We have some very good society indeed, and one need not be at a loss for means to pass the time pleasantly. Are you fond of watering-places, Miss Hawkins?”

“I have really had no experience of them, but I have always felt a strong desire to see something of fashionable watering-place life.”



“We of Washington are unfortunately situated in that respect,” said the dowager. “It is a tedious distance to Newport. But there is no help for it.”

Laura said to herself, “Long Branch and Cape May are nearer than Newport; doubtless these places are low; I’ll feel my way a little and see.” Then she said aloud:

“Why I thought that Long Branch—”

There was no need to “feel” any further—there was that in both faces before her which made that truth apparent. The dowager said:

“Nobody goes there, Miss Hawkins—at least only persons of no position in society. And the President.” She added that with tranquility.

“Newport is damp, and cold, and windy and excessively disagreeable,” said the daughter, “but it is very select. One cannot be fastidious about minor matters when one has no choice.”



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The visit had spun out nearly three minutes, now. Both ladies rose with grave dignity, conferred upon Laura a formal invitation to call, and then retired from the conference. Laura remained in the drawing-room and left them to pilot themselves out of the house—an inhospitable thing, it seemed to her, but then she was following her instructions. She stood, steeped in reverie, a while, and then she said:

“I think I could always enjoy icebergs—as scenery but not as company.”

Still, she knew these two people by reputation, and was aware that they were not icebergs when they were in their own waters and amid their legitimate surroundings, but on the contrary were people to be respected for their stainless characters and esteemed for their social virtues and their benevolent impulses. She thought it a pity that they had to be such changed and dreary creatures on occasions of state.

The first call Laura received from the other extremity of the Washington aristocracy followed close upon the heels of the one we have just been describing. The callers this time were the Hon. Mrs. Oliver Higgins, the Hon. Mrs. Patrique Oreille (pronounced O-relay,) Miss Bridget (pronounced Breezhay) Oreille, Mrs. Peter Gashly, Miss Gashly, and Miss Emmeline Gashly.

The three carriages arrived at the same moment from different directions. They were new and wonderfully shiny, and the brasses on the harness were highly polished and bore complicated monograms. There were showy coats of arms, too, with Latin mottoes. The coachmen and footmen were clad in bright new livery, of striking colors, and they had black rosettes with shaving-brushes projecting above them, on the sides of their stove-pipe hats.

When the visitors swept into the drawing-room they filled the place with a suffocating sweetness procured at the perfumer's. Their costumes, as to architecture, were the latest fashion intensified; they were rainbow-hued; they were hung with jewels—chiefly diamonds. It would have been plain to any eye that it had cost something to upholster these women.

The Hon. Mrs. Oliver Higgins was the wife of a delegate from a distant territory—a gentleman who had kept the principal “saloon,” and sold the best whiskey in the principal village in his wilderness, and so, of course, was recognized as the first man of his commonwealth and its fittest representative.

He was a man of paramount influence at home, for he was public spirited, he was chief of the fire department, he had an admirable command of profane language, and had killed several “parties.” His shirt fronts were always immaculate; his boots daintily polished, and no man could lift a foot and fire a dead shot at a stray speck of dirt on it with a white handkerchief with a finer grace than he; his watch chain weighed a pound;

the gold in his finger ring was worth forty five dollars; he wore a diamond cluster-pin and he parted his hair behind. He had always



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been, regarded as the most elegant gentleman in his territory, and it was conceded by all that no man thereabouts was anywhere near his equal in the telling of an obscene story except the venerable white-haired governor himself. The Hon. Higgins had not come to serve his country in Washington for nothing. The appropriation which he had engineered through Congress for the maintenance, of the Indians in his Territory would have made all those savages rich if it had ever got to them.

The Hon. Mrs. Higgins was a picturesque woman, and a fluent talker, and she held a tolerably high station among the Parvenus. Her English was fair enough, as a general thing—though, being of New York origin, she had the fashion peculiar to many natives of that city of pronouncing saw and law as if they were spelt sawr and lawr.

Petroleum was the agent that had suddenly transformed the Gashlys from modest hard-working country village folk into “loud” aristocrats and ornaments of the city.

The Hon. Patrique Oreille was a wealthy Frenchman from Cork. Not that he was wealthy when he first came from Cork, but just the reverse. When he first landed in New York with his wife, he had only halted at Castle Garden for a few minutes to receive and exhibit papers showing that he had resided in this country two years—and then he voted the democratic ticket and went up town to hunt a house. He found one and then went to work as assistant to an architect and builder, carrying a hod all day and studying politics evenings. Industry and economy soon enabled him to start a low rum shop in a foul locality, and this gave him political influence. In our country it is always our first care to see that our people have the opportunity of voting for their choice of men to represent and govern them—we do not permit our great officials to appoint the little officials. We prefer to have so tremendous a power as that in our own hands. We hold it safest to elect our judges and everybody else. In our cities, the ward meetings elect delegates to the nominating conventions and instruct them whom to nominate. The publicans and their retainers rule the ward meetings (for every body else hates the worry of politics and stays at home); the delegates from the ward meetings organize as a nominating convention and make up a list of candidates—one convention offering a democratic and another a republican list of incorruptibles; and then the great meek public come forward at the proper time and make unhampered choice and bless Heaven that they live in a free land where no form of despotism can ever intrude.

Patrick O’Riley (as his name then stood) created friends and influence very, fast, for he was always on hand at the police courts to give straw bail for his customers or establish an alibi for them in case they had been beating anybody to death on his premises. Consequently he presently became a political leader, and was elected to a petty office under the city government. Out of a meager salary he soon saved money enough to open quite a stylish liquor saloon higher up town, with a faro bank attached and plenty of capital to conduct it with. This gave him fame and great respectability. The position

of alderman was forced upon him, and it was just the same as presenting him a gold mine. He had fine horses and carriages, now, and closed up his whiskey mill.

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By and by he became a large contractor for city work, and was a bosom friend of the great and good Wm. M. Weed himself, who had stolen \$20,600,000 from the city and was a man so envied, so honored,—so adored, indeed, that when the sheriff went to his office to arrest him as a felon, that sheriff blushed and apologized, and one of the illustrated papers made a picture of the scene and spoke of the matter in such a way as to show that the editor regretted that the offense of an arrest had been offered to so exalted a personage as Mr. Weed.

Mr. O'Riley furnished shingle nails to, the new Court House at three thousand dollars a keg, and eighteen gross of 60-cent thermometers at fifteen hundred dollars a dozen; the controller and the board of audit passed the bills, and a mayor, who was simply ignorant but not criminal, signed them. When they were paid, Mr. O'Riley's admirers gave him a solitaire diamond pin of the size of a filbert, in imitation of the liberality of Mr. Weed's friends, and then Mr. O'Riley retired from active service and amused himself with buying real estate at enormous figures and holding it in other people's names. By and by the newspapers came out with exposures and called Weed and O'Riley "thieves,"—whereupon the people rose as one man (voting repeatedly) and elected the two gentlemen to their proper theatre of action, the New York legislature. The newspapers clamored, and the courts proceeded to try the new legislators for their small irregularities. Our admirable jury system enabled the persecuted ex-officials to secure a jury of nine gentlemen from a neighboring asylum and three graduates from Sing-Sing, and presently they walked forth with characters vindicated. The legislature was called upon to spew them forth—a thing which the legislature declined to do. It was like asking children to repudiate their own father. It was a legislature of the modern pattern.

Being now wealthy and distinguished, Mr. O'Riley, still bearing the legislative "Hon." attached to his name (for titles never die in America, although we do take a republican pride in poking fun at such trifles), sailed for Europe with his family. They traveled all about, turning their noses up at every thing, and not finding it a difficult thing to do, either, because nature had originally given those features a cast in that direction; and finally they established themselves in Paris, that Paradise of Americans of their sort.—They staid there two years and learned to speak English with a foreign accent—not that it hadn't always had a foreign accent (which was indeed the case) but now the nature of it was changed. Finally they returned home and became ultra fashionables. They landed here as the Hon. Patrique Oreille and family, and so are known unto this day.

Laura provided seats for her visitors and they immediately launched forth into a breezy, sparkling conversation with that easy confidence which is to be found only among persons accustomed to high life.



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"I've been intending to call sooner, Miss Hawkins," said the Hon. Mrs. Oreille, "but the weather's been so horrid. How do you like Washington?"

Laura liked it very well indeed.

Mrs. Gashly—"Is it your first visit?"

Yea, it was her first.

All—"Indeed?"

Mrs. Oreille—"I'm afraid you'll despise the weather, Miss Hawkins. It's perfectly awful. It always is. I tell Mr. Oreille I can't and I won't put up with any such a climate. If we were obliged to do it, I wouldn't mind it; but we are not obliged to, and so I don't see the use of it. Sometimes its real pitiful the way the childern pine for Parry —don't look so sad, Bridget, 'ma chere'—poor child, she can't hear Parry mentioned without getting the blues."

Mrs. Gashly—"Well I should think so, Mrs. Oreille. A body lives in Paris, but a body, only stays here. I dote on Paris; I'd druther scrimp along on ten thousand dollars a year there, than suffer and worry here on a real decent income."

Miss Gashly—"Well then, I wish you'd take us back, mother; I'm sure I hate this stoopid country enough, even if it is our dear native land."

Miss Emmeline Gashly—"What and leave poor Johnny Peterson behind?" [An airy genial laugh applauded this sally].

Miss Gashly—"Sister, I should think you'd be ashamed of yourself!"

Miss Emmeline—"Oh, you needn't ruffle your feathers so: I was only joking. He don't mean anything by coming to, the house every evening —only comes to see mother. Of course that's all!" [General laughter].

Miss G. prettily confused—"Emmeline, how can you!"

Mrs. G.—"Let your sister alone, Emmeline. I never saw such a tease!"

Mrs. Oreille—"What lovely corals you have, Miss Hawkins! Just look at them, Bridget, dear. I've a great passion for corals—it's a pity they're getting a little common. I have some elegant ones—not as elegant as yours, though—but of course I don't wear them now."

Laura—"I suppose they are rather common, but still I have a great affection for these, because they were given to me by a dear old friend of our family named Murphy. He



was a very charming man, but very eccentric. We always supposed he was an Irishman, but after he got rich he went abroad for a year or two, and when he came back you would have been amused to see how interested he was in a potato. He asked what it was! Now you know that when Providence shapes a mouth especially for the accommodation of a potato you can detect that fact at a glance when that mouth is in repose—foreign travel can never remove that sign. But he was a very delightful gentleman, and his little foible did not hurt him at all. We all have our shams—I suppose there is a sham somewhere about every individual, if we could manage to ferret it out. I would so like to go to France. I suppose our society here compares very favorably with French society does it not, Mrs. Oreille?”



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Mrs. O.—“Not by any means, Miss Hawkins! French society is much more elegant—much more so.”

Laura—“I am sorry to hear that. I suppose ours has deteriorated of late.”

Mrs. O.—“Very much indeed. There are people in society here that have really no more money to live on than what some of us pay for servant hire. Still I won't say but what some of them are very good people—and respectable, too.”

Laura—“The old families seem to be holding themselves aloof, from what I hear. I suppose you seldom meet in society now, the people you used to be familiar with twelve or fifteen years ago?”

Mrs. O.—“Oh, no—hardly ever.”

Mr. O'Riley kept his first rum-mill and protected his customers from the law in those days, and this turn of the conversation was rather uncomfortable to madame than otherwise.

Hon. Mrs. Higgins—“Is Francois' health good now, Mrs. Oreille?”

Mrs. O.—(Thankful for the intervention)—“Not very. A body couldn't expect it. He was always delicate—especially his lungs—and this odious climate tells on him strong, now, after Parry, which is so mild.”

Mrs. H.—“I should think so. Husband says Percy'll die if he don't have a change; and so I'm going to swap round a little and see what can be done. I saw a lady from Florida last week, and she recommended Key West. I told her Percy couldn't abide winds, as he was threatened with a pulmonary affection, and then she said try St. Augustine. It's an awful distance—ten or twelve hundred mile, they say but then in a case of this kind—a body can't stand back for trouble, you know.”

Mrs. O.—“No, of course that's off. If Francois don't get better soon we've got to look out for some other place, or else Europe. We've thought some of the Hot Springs, but I don't know. It's a great responsibility and a body wants to go cautious. Is Hildebrand about again, Mrs. Gashly?”

Mrs. G.—“Yes, but that's about all. It was indigestion, you know, and it looks as if it was chronic. And you know I do dread dyspepsia. We've all been worried a good deal about him. The doctor recommended baked apple and spoiled meat, and I think it done him good. It's about the only thing that will stay on his stomach now-a-days. We have Dr. Shovel now. Who's your doctor, Mrs. Higgins?”

Mrs. H.—“Well, we had Dr. Spooner a good while, but he runs so much to emetics, which I think are weakening, that we changed off and took Dr. Leathers. We like him



very much. He has a fine European reputation, too. The first thing he suggested for Percy was to have him taken out in the back yard for an airing, every afternoon, with nothing at all on."

Mrs. O. and Mrs. G.—"What!"

Mrs. H.—"As true as I'm sitting here. And it actually helped him for two or three days; it did indeed. But after that the doctor said it seemed to be too severe and so he has fell back on hot foot-baths at night and cold showers in the morning. But I don't think there, can be any good sound help for him in such a climate as this. I believe we are going to lose him if we don't make a change."



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Mrs. O. "I suppose you heard of the fright we had two weeks ago last Saturday? No? Why that is strange—but come to remember, you've all been away to Richmond. Francois tumbled from the sky light—in the second-story hall clean down to the first floor—"

Everybody—"Mercy!"

Mrs. O.—"Yes indeed—and broke two of his ribs—"

Everybody—"What!"

Mrs. O. "Just as true as you live. First we thought he must be injured internally. It was fifteen minutes past 8 in the evening. Of course we were all distracted in a moment—everybody was flying everywhere, and nobody doing anything worth anything. By and by I flung out next door and dragged in Dr. Sprague; President of the Medical University no time to go for our own doctor of course—and the minute he saw Francois he said, 'Send for your own physician, madam;' said it as cross as a bear, too, and turned right on his heel, and cleared out without doing a thing!"

Everybody—"The mean, contemptible brute!"

Mrs. O—"Well you may say it. I was nearly out of my wits by this time. But we hurried off the servants after our own doctor and telegraphed mother—she was in New York and rushed down on the first train; and when the doctor got there, lo and behold you he found Francois had broke one of his legs, too!"

Everybody—"Goodness!"

Mrs. O.—"Yes. So he set his leg and bandaged it up, and fixed his ribs and gave him a dose of something to quiet down his excitement and put him to sleep—poor thing he was trembling and frightened to death and it was pitiful to see him. We had him in my bed—Mr. Oreille slept in the guest room and I laid down beside Francois—but not to sleep bless you no. Bridget and I set up all night, and the doctor staid till two in the morning, bless his old heart.—When mother got there she was so used up with anxiety, that she had to go to bed and have the doctor; but when she found that Francois was not in immediate danger she rallied, and by night she was able to take a watch herself. Well for three days and nights we three never left that bedside only to take an hour's nap at a time. And then the doctor said Francois was out of danger and if ever there was a thankful set, in this world, it was us."

Laura's respect for these, women had augmented during this conversation, naturally enough; affection and devotion are qualities that are able to adorn and render beautiful a character that is otherwise unattractive, and even repulsive.



Mrs. Gashly—"I do believe I would a died if I had been in your place, Mrs. Oreille. The time Hildebrand was so low with the pneumonia Emmeline and me were all, alone with him most of the time and we never took a minute's sleep for as much as two days, and nights. It was at Newport and we wouldn't trust hired nurses. One afternoon he had a fit, and jumped up and run out on the portico of the hotel with nothing in the world



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on and the wind a blowing liken ice and we after him scared to death; and when the ladies and gentlemen saw that he had a fit, every lady scattered for her room and not a gentleman lifted his hand to help, the wretches! Well after that his life hung by a thread for as much as ten days, and the minute he was out of danger Emmeline and me just went to bed sick and worn out. I never want to pass through such a time again. Poor dear Francois—which leg did he break, Mrs. Oreille!”

Mrs. O.—“It was his right hand hind leg. Jump down, Francois dear, and show the ladies what a cruel limp you’ve got yet.”

Francois demurred, but being coaxed and delivered gently upon the floor, he performed very satisfactorily, with his “right hand hind leg” in the air. All were affected—even Laura—but hers was an affection of the stomach. The country-bred girl had not suspected that the little whining ten-ounce black and tan reptile, clad in a red embroidered pigmy blanket and reposing in Mrs. Oreille’s lap all through the visit was the individual whose sufferings had been stirring the dormant generousities of her nature. She said:

“Poor little creature! You might have lost him!”

Mrs. O.—“O pray don’t mention it, Miss Hawkins—it gives me such a turn!”

Laura—“And Hildebrand and Percy—are they—are they like this one?”

Mrs. G.—“No, Hilly has considerable Skye blood in him, I believe.”

Mrs. H.—“Percy’s the same, only he is two months and ten days older and has his ears cropped. His father, Martin Farquhar Tupper, was sickly, and died young, but he was the sweetest disposition.—His mother had heart disease but was very gentle and resigned, and a wonderful ratter.” —[** As impossible and exasperating as this conversation may sound to a person who is not an idiot, it is scarcely in any respect an exaggeration of one which one of us actually listened to in an American drawing room—otherwise we could not venture to put such a chapter into a book which, professes to deal with social possibilities.—*The authors.*]

So carried away had the visitors become by their interest attaching to this discussion of family matters, that their stay had been prolonged to a very improper and unfashionable length; but they suddenly recollected themselves now and took their departure.

Laura’s scorn was boundless. The more she thought of these people and their extraordinary talk, the more offensive they seemed to her; and yet she confessed that if one must choose between the two extreme aristocracies it might be best, on the whole, looking at things from a strictly business point of view, to herd with the Parvenus; she was in Washington solely to compass a certain matter and to do it at any cost, and

these people might be useful to her, while it was plain that her purposes and her schemes for pushing them would not find favor in the eyes of the Antiques. If it came to choice—and it might come to that, sooner or later—she believed she could come to a decision without much difficulty or many pangs.



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But the best aristocracy of the three Washington castes, and really the most powerful, by far, was that of the Middle Ground: It was made up of the families of public men from nearly every state in the Union—men who held positions in both the executive and legislative branches of the government, and whose characters had been for years blemishless, both at home and at the capital. These gentlemen and their households were unostentatious people; they were educated and refined; they troubled themselves but little about the two other orders of nobility, but moved serenely in their wide orbit, confident in their own strength and well aware of the potency of their influence. They had no troublesome appearances to keep up, no rivalries which they cared to distress themselves about, no jealousies to fret over. They could afford to mind their own affairs and leave other combinations to do the same or do otherwise, just as they chose. They were people who were beyond reproach, and that was sufficient.

Senator Dilworthy never came into collision with any of these factions. He labored for them all and with them all. He said that all men were brethren and all were entitled to the honest unselfish help and countenance of a Christian laborer in the public vineyard.

Laura concluded, after reflection, to let circumstances determine the course it might be best for her to pursue as regarded the several aristocracies.

Now it might occur to the reader that perhaps Laura had been somewhat rudely suggestive in her remarks to Mrs. Oreille when the subject of corals was under discussion, but it did not occur to Laura herself. She was not a person of exaggerated refinement; indeed, the society and the influences that had formed her character had not been of a nature calculated to make her so; she thought that “give and take was fair play,” and that to parry an offensive thrust with a sarcasm was a neat and legitimate thing to do. She some times talked to people in a way which some ladies would consider, actually shocking; but Laura rather prided herself upon some of her exploits of that character. We are sorry we cannot make her a faultless heroine; but we cannot, for the reason that she was human.

She considered herself a superior conversationist. Long ago, when the possibility had first been brought before her mind that some day she might move in Washington society, she had recognized the fact that practiced conversational powers would be a necessary weapon in that field; she had also recognized the fact that since her dealings there must be mainly with men, and men whom she supposed to be exceptionally cultivated and able, she would need heavier shot in her magazine than mere brilliant “society” nothings; whereupon she had at once entered upon a tireless and elaborate course of reading, and had never since ceased to devote every unoccupied moment to this sort of preparation. Having now acquired a happy



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smattering of various information, she used it with good effect—she passed for a singularly well informed woman in Washington. The quality of her literary tastes had necessarily undergone constant improvement under this regimen, and as necessarily, also; the duality of her language had improved, though it cannot be denied that now and then her former condition of life betrayed itself in just perceptible inelegancies of expression and lapses of grammar.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

When Laura had been in Washington three months, she was still the same person, in one respect, that she was when she first arrived there—that is to say, she still bore the name of Laura Hawkins. Otherwise she was perceptibly changed.—

She had arrived in a state of grievous uncertainty as to what manner of woman she was, physically and intellectually, as compared with eastern women; she was well satisfied, now, that her beauty was confessed, her mind a grade above the average, and her powers of fascination rather extraordinary. So she, was at ease upon those points. When she arrived, she was possessed of habits of economy and not possessed of money; now she dressed elaborately, gave but little thought to the cost of things, and was very well fortified financially. She kept her mother and Washington freely supplied with money, and did the same by Col. Sellers—who always insisted upon giving his note for loans—with interest; he was rigid upon that; she must take interest; and one of the Colonel's greatest satisfactions was to go over his accounts and note what a handsome sum this accruing interest amounted to, and what a comfortable though modest support it would yield Laura in case reverses should overtake her.

In truth he could not help feeling that he was an efficient shield for her against poverty; and so, if her expensive ways ever troubled him for a brief moment, he presently dismissed the thought and said to himself, "Let her go on—even if she loses everything she is still safe—this interest will always afford her a good easy income."

Laura was on excellent terms with a great many members of Congress, and there was an undercurrent of suspicion in some quarters that she was one of that detested class known as "lobbyists;" but what belle could escape slander in such a city? Fairminded people declined to condemn her on mere suspicion, and so the injurious talk made no very damaging headway. She was very gay, now, and very celebrated, and she might well expect to be assailed by many kinds of gossip. She was growing used to celebrity, and could already sit calm and seemingly unconscious, under the fire of fifty lognettes in a theatre, or even overhear the low voice "That's she!" as she passed along the street without betraying annoyance.



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The whole air was full of a vague vast scheme which was to eventuate in filling Laura's pockets with millions of money; some had one idea of the scheme, and some another, but nobody had any exact knowledge upon the subject. All that any one felt sure about, was that Laura's landed estates were princely in value and extent, and that the government was anxious to get hold of them for public purposes, and that Laura was willing to make the sale but not at all anxious about the matter and not at all in a hurry. It was whispered that Senator Dilworthy was a stumbling block in the way of an immediate sale, because he was resolved that the government should not have the lands except with the understanding that they should be devoted to the uplifting of the negro race; Laura did not care what they were devoted to, it was said, (a world of very different gossip to the contrary notwithstanding,) but there were several other heirs and they would be guided entirely by the Senator's wishes; and finally, many people averred that while it would be easy to sell the lands to the government for the benefit of the negro, by resorting to the usual methods of influencing votes, Senator Dilworthy was unwilling to have so noble a charity sullied by any taint of corruption—he was resolved that not a vote should be bought. Nobody could get anything definite from Laura about these matters, and so gossip had to feed itself chiefly upon guesses. But the effect of it all was, that Laura was considered to be very wealthy and likely to be vastly more so in a little while. Consequently she was much courted and as much envied: Her wealth attracted many suitors. Perhaps they came to worship her riches, but they remained to worship her. Some of the noblest men of the time succumbed to her fascinations. She frowned upon no lover when he made his first advances, but by and by when she was hopelessly enthralled, he learned from her own lips that she had formed a resolution never to marry. Then he would go away hating and cursing the whole sex, and she would calmly add his scalp to her string, while she mused upon the bitter day that Col. Selby trampled her love and her pride in the dust. In time it came to be said that her way was paved with broken hearts.

Poor Washington gradually woke up to the fact that he too was an intellectual marvel as well as his gifted sister. He could not conceive how it had come about (it did not occur to him that the gossip about his family's great wealth had any thing to do with it). He could not account for it by any process of reasoning, and was simply obliged to accept the fact and give up trying to solve the riddle. He found himself dragged into society and courted, wondered at and envied very much as if he were one of those foreign barbers who flit over here now and then with a self-conferred title of nobility and marry some rich fool's absurd daughter. Sometimes at a dinner party or a reception he would find himself



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the centre of interest, and feel unutterably uncomfortable in the discovery. Being obliged to say something, he would mine his brain and put in a blast and when the smoke and flying debris had cleared away the result would be what seemed to him but a poor little intellectual clod of dirt or two, and then he would be astonished to see everybody as lost in admiration as if he had brought up a ton or two of virgin gold. Every remark he made delighted his hearers and compelled their applause; he overheard people say he was exceedingly bright—they were chiefly mammas and marriageable young ladies. He found that some of his good things were being repeated about the town. Whenever he heard of an instance of this kind, he would keep that particular remark in mind and analyze it at home in private. At first he could not see that the remark was anything better than a parrot might originate; but by and by he began to feel that perhaps he underrated his powers; and after that he used to analyze his good things with a deal of comfort, and find in them a brilliancy which would have been unapparent to him in earlier days—and then he would make a note, of that good thing and say it again the first time he found himself in a new company. Presently he had saved up quite a repertoire of brilliancies; and after that he confined himself to repeating these and ceased to originate any more, lest he might injure his reputation by an unlucky effort.

He was constantly having young ladies thrust upon his notice at receptions, or left upon his hands at parties, and in time he began to feel that he was being deliberately persecuted in this way; and after that he could not enjoy society because of his constant dread of these female ambushes and surprises. He was distressed to find that nearly every time he showed a young lady a polite attention he was straightway reported to be engaged to her; and as some of these reports got into the newspapers occasionally, he had to keep writing to Louise that they were lies and she must believe in him and not mind them or allow them to grieve her.

Washington was as much in the dark as anybody with regard to the great wealth that was hovering in the air and seemingly on the point of tumbling into the family pocket. Laura would give him no satisfaction. All she would say, was:

“Wait. Be patient. You will see.”

“But will it be soon, Laura?”

“It will not be very long, I think.”

“But what makes you think so?”

“I have reasons—and good ones. Just wait, and be patient.”



“But is it going to be as much as people say it is?”

“What do they say it is?”

“Oh, ever so much. Millions!”

“Yes, it will be a great sum.”

“But how great, Laura? Will it be millions?”

“Yes, you may call it that. Yes, it will be millions. There, now—does that satisfy you?”



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“Splendid! I can wait. I can wait patiently—ever so patiently. Once I was near selling the land for twenty thousand dollars; once for thirty thousand dollars; once after that for seven thousand dollars; and once for forty thousand dollars—but something always told me not to do it. What a fool I would have been to sell it for such a beggarly trifle! It is the land that’s to bring the money, isn’t it Laura? You can tell me that much, can’t you?”

“Yes, I don’t mind saying that much. It is the land.

“But mind—don’t ever hint that you got it from me. Don’t mention me in the matter at all, Washington.”

“All right—I won’t. Millions! Isn’t it splendid! I mean to look around for a building lot; a lot with fine ornamental shrubbery and all that sort of thing. I will do it to-day. And I might as well see an architect, too, and get him to go to work at a plan for a house. I don’t intend to spare and expense; I mean to have the noblest house that money can build.” Then after a pause—he did not notice Laura’s smiles “Laura, would you lay the main hall in encaustic tiles, or just in fancy patterns of hard wood?”

Laura laughed a good old-fashioned laugh that had more of her former natural self about it than any sound that had issued from her mouth in many weeks. She said:

“You don’t change, Washington. You still begin to squander a fortune right and left the instant you hear of it in the distance; you never wait till the foremost dollar of it arrives within a hundred miles of you,” —and she kissed her brother good bye and left him weltering in his dreams, so to speak.

He got up and walked the floor feverishly during two hours; and when he sat down he had married Louise, built a house, reared a family, married them off, spent upwards of eight hundred thousand dollars on mere luxuries, and died worth twelve millions.

CHAPTER XXXV.

Laura went down stairs, knocked at the study door, and entered, scarcely waiting for the response. Senator Dilworthy was alone—with an open Bible in his hand, upside down. Laura smiled, and said, forgetting her acquired correctness of speech,

“It is only me.”

“Ah, come in, sit down,” and the Senator closed the book and laid it down. “I wanted to see you. Time to report progress from the committee of the whole,” and the Senator beamed with his own congressional wit.



“In the committee of the whole things are working very well. We have made ever so much progress in a week. I believe that you and I together could run this government beautifully, uncle.”

The Senator beamed again. He liked to be called “uncle” by this beautiful woman.

“Did you see Hopperson last night after the congressional prayer meeting?”

“Yes. He came. He’s a kind of—”

“Eh? he is one of my friends, Laura. He’s a fine man, a very fine man. I don’t know any man in congress I’d sooner go to for help in any Christian work. What did he say?”



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“Oh, he beat around a little. He said he should like to help the negro, his heart went out to the negro, and all that—plenty of them say that but he was a little afraid of the Tennessee Land bill; if Senator Dilworthy wasn’t in it, he should suspect there was a fraud on the government.”

“He said that, did he?”

“Yes. And he said he felt he couldn’t vote for it. He was shy.”

“Not shy, child, cautious. He’s a very cautious man. I have been with him a great deal on conference committees. He wants reasons, good ones. Didn’t you show him he was in error about the bill?”

“I did. I went over the whole thing. I had to tell him some of the side arrangements, some of the—”

“You didn’t mention me?”

“Oh, no. I told him you were daft about the negro and the philanthropy part of it, as you are.”

“Daft is a little strong, Laura. But you know that I wouldn’t touch this bill if it were not for the public good, and for the good of the colored race; much as I am interested in the heirs of this property, and would like to have them succeed.”

Laura looked a little incredulous, and the Senator proceeded.

“Don’t misunderstand me, I don’t deny that it is for the interest of all of us that this bill should go through, and it will. I have no concealments from you. But I have one principle in my public life, which I should like you to keep in mind; it has always been my guide. I never push a private interest if it is not Justified and ennobled by some larger public good. I doubt Christian would be justified in working for his own salvation if it was not to aid in the salvation of his fellow men.”

The Senator spoke with feeling, and then added,

“I hope you showed Hopperson that our motives were pure?”

“Yes, and he seemed to have a new light on the measure: I think will vote for it.”

“I hope so; his name will give tone and strength to it. I knew you would only have to show him that it was just and pure, in order to secure his cordial support.”

“I think I convinced him. Yes, I am perfectly sure he will vote right now.”



“That’s good, that’s good,” said the Senator; smiling, and rubbing his hands. “Is there anything more?”

“You’ll find some changes in that I guess,” handing the Senator a printed list of names. “Those checked off are all right.”

“Ah—’m—’m,” running his eye down the list. “That’s encouraging. What is the ‘C’ before some of the names, and the ‘B. B.’?”

“Those are my private marks. That ‘C’ stands for ‘convinced,’ with argument. The ‘B. B.’ is a general sign for a relative. You see it stands before three of the Hon. Committee. I expect to see the chairman of the committee to-day, Mr. Buckstone.”

“So, you must, he ought to be seen without any delay. Buckstone is a worldly sort of a fellow, but he has charitable impulses. If we secure him we shall have a favorable report by the committee, and it will be a great thing to be able to state that fact quietly where it will do good.”



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“Oh, I saw Senator Balloon”

“He will help us, I suppose? Balloon is a whole-hearted fellow. I can’t help loving that man, for all his drollery and waggishness. He puts on an air of levity sometimes, but there aint a man in the senate knows the scriptures as he does. He did not make any objections?”

“Not exactly, he said—shall I tell you what he said?” asked Laura glancing furtively at him.

“Certainly.”

“He said he had no doubt it was a good thing; if Senator Dilworthy was in it, it would pay to look into it.”

The Senator laughed, but rather feebly, and said, “Balloon is always full of his jokes.”

“I explained it to him. He said it was all right, he only wanted a word with you,” continued Laura. “He is a handsome old gentleman, and he is gallant for an old man.”

“My daughter,” said the Senator, with a grave look, “I trust there was nothing free in his manner?”

“Free?” repeated Laura, with indignation in her face. “With me!”

“There, there, child. I meant nothing, Balloon talks a little freely sometimes, with men. But he is right at heart. His term expires next year and I fear we shall lose him.”

“He seemed to be packing the day I was there. His rooms were full of dry goods boxes, into which his servant was crowding all manner of old clothes and stuff: I suppose he will paint ‘Pub. Docs’ on them and frank them home. That’s good economy, isn’t it?”

“Yes, yes, but child, all Congressmen do that. It may not be strictly honest, indeed it is not unless he had some public documents mixed in with the clothes.”

“It’s a funny world. Good-bye, uncle. I’m going to see that chairman.”

And humming a cheery opera air, she departed to her room to dress for going out. Before she did that, however, she took out her note book and was soon deep in its contents; marking, dashing, erasing, figuring, and talking to herself.

“Free! I wonder what Dilworthy does think of me anyway? One . . . two. . . eight . . . seventeen . . . twenty-one, . . . ’m’m . . . it takes a heap for a majority. Wouldn’t Dilworthy open his eyes if he knew some of the things Balloon did say to me. There. . . . Hopperson’s influence ought to count twenty . . . the sanctimonious old curmudgeon.



Son-in-law. . . . sinecure in the negro institution That about gauges him The three committeemen sons-in-law. Nothing like a son-in-law here in Washington or a brother-in-law And everybody has 'em Let's see: sixty-one. . . . with places twenty-five persuaded—it is getting on; we'll have two-thirds of Congress in time Dilworthy must surely know I understand him. Uncle Dilworthy Uncle Balloon!—Tells very amusing stories when ladies are not present I should think so 'm 'm. Eighty-five. There. I must find that chairman. Queer. . . . Buckstone acts Seemed to be in love I was sure of it. He promised to come here. . . . and he hasn't. . . . Strange. Very strange I must chance to meet him to-day.”



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Laura dressed and went out, thinking she was perhaps too early for Mr. Buckstone to come from the house, but as he lodged near the bookstore she would drop in there and keep a look out for him.

While Laura is on her errand to find Mr. Buckstone, it may not be out of the way to remark that she knew quite as much of Washington life as Senator Dilworthy gave her credit for, and more than she thought proper to tell him. She was acquainted by this time with a good many of the young fellows of Newspaper Row; and exchanged gossip with them to their mutual advantage.

They were always talking in the Row, everlastingly gossiping, bantering and sarcastically praising things, and going on in a style which was a curious commingling of earnest and persiflage. Col. Sellers liked this talk amazingly, though he was sometimes a little at sea in it—and perhaps that didn't lessen the relish of the conversation to the correspondents.

It seems that they had got hold of the dry-goods box packing story about Balloon, one day, and were talking it over when the Colonel came in. The Colonel wanted to know all about it, and Hicks told him. And then Hicks went on, with a serious air,

“Colonel, if you register a letter, it means that it is of value, doesn't it? And if you pay fifteen cents for registering it, the government will have to take extra care of it and even pay you back its full value if it is lost. Isn't that so?”

“Yes. I suppose it's so.”

“Well Senator Balloon put fifteen cents worth of stamps on each of those seven huge boxes of old clothes, and shipped that ton of second-hand rubbish, old boots and pantaloons and what not through the mails as registered matter! It was an ingenious thing and it had a genuine touch of humor about it, too. I think there is more real: talent among our public men of to-day than there was among those of old times—a far more fertile fancy, a much happier ingenuity. Now, Colonel, can you picture Jefferson, or Washington or John Adams franking their wardrobes through the mails and adding the facetious idea of making the government responsible for the cargo for the sum of one dollar and five cents? Statesmen were dull creatures in those days. I have a much greater admiration for Senator Balloon.”

“Yes, Balloon is a man of parts, there is no denying it”

“I think so. He is spoken of for the post of Minister to China, or Austria, and I hope will be appointed. What we want abroad is good examples of the national character.



“John Jay and Benjamin Franklin were well enough in their day, but the nation has made progress since then. Balloon is a man we know and can depend on to be true to himself.”

“Yes, and Balloon has had a good deal of public experience. He is an old friend of mine. He was governor of one of the territories a while, and was very satisfactory.”



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“Indeed he was. He was ex-officio Indian agent, too. Many a man would have taken the Indian appropriation and devoted the money to feeding and clothing the helpless savages, whose land had been taken from them by the white man in the interests of civilization; but Balloon knew their needs better. He built a government saw-mill on the reservation with the money, and the lumber sold for enormous prices—a relative of his did all the work free of charge—that is to say he charged nothing more than the lumber world bring.” “But the poor Injuns—not that I care much for Injuns—what did he do for them?”

“Gave them the outside slabs to fence in the reservation with. Governor Balloon was nothing less than a father to the poor Indians. But Balloon is not alone, we have many truly noble statesmen in our country’s service like Balloon. The Senate is full of them. Don’t you think so Colonel?”

“Well, I dunno. I honor my country’s public servants as much as any one can. I meet them, Sir, every day, and the more I see of them the more I esteem them and the more grateful I am that our institutions give us the opportunity of securing their services. Few lands are so blest.”

“That is true, Colonel. To be sure you can buy now and then a Senator or a Representative but they do not know it is wrong, and so they are not ashamed of it. They are gentle, and confiding and childlike, and in my opinion these are qualities that ennoble them far more than any amount of sinful sagacity could. I quite agree with you, Col. Sellers.”

“Well”—hesitated the, Colonel—“I am afraid some of them do buy their seats—yes, I am afraid they do—but as Senator Dilworthy himself said to me, it is sinful,—it is very wrong—it is shameful; Heaven protect me from such a charge. That is what Dilworthy said. And yet when you come to look at it you cannot deny that we would have to go without the services of some of our ablest men, sir, if the country were opposed to —to— bribery. It is a harsh term. I do not like to use it.”

The Colonel interrupted himself at this point to meet an engagement with the Austrian minister, and took his leave with his usual courtly bow.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

In due time Laura alighted at the book store, and began to look at the titles of the handsome array of books on the counter. A dapper clerk of perhaps nineteen or twenty years, with hair accurately parted and surprisingly slick, came bustling up and leaned over with a pretty smile and an affable—

“Can I—was there any particular book you wished to see?”



“Have you Taine’s England?”

“Beg pardon?”

“Taine’s Notes on England.”

The young gentleman scratched the side of his nose with a cedar pencil which he took down from its bracket on the side of his head, and reflected a moment:

“Ah—I see,” [with a bright smile]—“Train, you mean—not Taine. George Francis Train. No, ma’m we—”



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“I mean Taine—if I may take the liberty.”

The clerk reflected again—then:

“Taine Taine Is it hymns?”

“No, it isn’t hymns. It is a volume that is making a deal of talk just now, and is very widely known—except among parties who sell it.”

The clerk glanced at her face to see if a sarcasm might not lurk somewhere in that obscure speech, but the gentle simplicity of the beautiful eyes that met his, banished that suspicion. He went away and conferred with the proprietor. Both appeared to be non-plussed. They thought and talked, and talked and thought by turns. Then both came forward and the proprietor said:

“Is it an American book, ma’m?”

“No, it is an American reprint of an English translation.”

“Oh! Yes—yes—I remember, now. We are expecting it every day. It isn’t out yet.”

“I think you must be mistaken, because you advertised it a week ago.”

“Why no—can that be so?”

“Yes, I am sure of it. And besides, here is the book itself, on the counter.”

She bought it and the proprietor retired from the field. Then she asked the clerk for the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table—and was pained to see the admiration her beauty had inspired in him fade out of his face. He said with cold dignity, that cook books were somewhat out of their line, but he would order it if she desired it. She said, no, never mind. Then she fell to conning the titles again, finding a delight in the inspection of the Hawthornes, the Longfellows, the Tennysons, and other favorites of her idle hours. Meantime the clerk’s eyes were busy, and no doubt his admiration was returning again—or may be he was only gauging her probable literary tastes by some sagacious system of admeasurement only known to his guild. Now he began to “assist” her in making a selection; but his efforts met with no success—indeed they only annoyed her and unpleasantly interrupted her meditations. Presently, while she was holding a copy of “Venetian Life” in her hand and running over a familiar passage here and there, the clerk said, briskly, snatching up a paper-covered volume and striking the counter a smart blow with it to dislodge the dust:

“Now here is a work that we’ve sold a lot of. Everybody that’s read it likes it”—and he intruded it under her nose; “it’s a book that I can recommend—’The Pirate’s Doom, or



the Last of the Buccaneers.' I think it's one of the best things that's come out this season."

Laura pushed it gently aside her hand and went on and went on filching from "Venetian Life."

"I believe I do not want it," she said.

The clerk hunted around awhile, glancing at one title and then another, but apparently not finding what he wanted.

However, he succeeded at last. Said he:



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“Have you ever read this, ma’m? I am sure you’ll like it. It’s by the author of ‘The Hooligans of Hackensack.’ It is full of love troubles and mysteries and all sorts of such things. The heroine strangles her own mother. Just glance at the title please,— ‘Gonderil the Vampire, or The Dance of Death.’ And here is ‘The Jokist’s Own Treasury, or, The Phunny Phellow’s Bosom Phriend.’ The funniest thing!—I’ve read it four times, ma’m, and I can laugh at the very sight of it yet. And ‘Gonderil,’—I assure you it is the most splendid book I ever read. I know you will like these books, ma’m, because I’ve read them myself and I know what they are.”

“Oh, I was perplexed—but I see how it is, now. You must have thought I asked you to tell me what sort of books I wanted—for I am apt to say things which I don’t really mean, when I am absent minded. I suppose I did ask you, didn’t I?”

“No ma’m,—but I—”

“Yes, I must have done it, else you would not have offered your services, for fear it might be rude. But don’t be troubled—it was all my fault. I ought not to have been so heedless—I ought not to have asked you.”

“But you didn’t ask me, ma’m. We always help customers all we can. You see our experience—living right among books all the time—that sort of thing makes us able to help a customer make a selection, you know.”

“Now does it, indeed? It is part of your business, then?”

“Yes’m, we always help.”

“How good it is of you. Some people would think it rather obtrusive, perhaps, but I don’t—I think it is real kindness—even charity. Some people jump to conclusions without any thought—you have noticed that?”

“O yes,” said the clerk, a little perplexed as to whether to feel comfortable or the reverse; “Oh yes, indeed, I’ve often noticed that, ma’m.”

“Yes, they jump to conclusions with an absurd heedlessness. Now some people would think it odd that because you, with the budding tastes and the innocent enthusiasms natural to your time of life, enjoyed the Vampires and the volume of nursery jokes, you should imagine that an older person would delight in them too—but I do not think it odd at all. I think it natural—perfectly natural in you. And kind, too. You look like a person who not only finds a deep pleasure in any little thing in the way of literature that strikes you forcibly, but is willing and glad to share that pleasure with others—and that, I think, is noble and admirable—very noble and admirable. I think we ought all—to share our pleasures with others, and do what we can to make each other happy, do not you?”

“Oh, yes. Oh, yes, indeed. Yes, you are quite right, ma’m.”

But he was getting unmistakably uncomfortable, now, notwithstanding Laura's confiding sociability and almost affectionate tone.



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“Yes, indeed. Many people would think that what a bookseller—or perhaps his clerk—knows about literature as literature, in contradistinction to its character as merchandise, would hardly, be of much assistance to a person—that is, to an adult, of course—in the selection of food for the mind—except of course wrapping paper, or twine, or wafers, or something like that—but I never feel that way. I feel that whatever service you offer me, you offer with a good heart, and I am as grateful for it as if it were the greatest boon to me. And it is useful to me—it is bound to be so. It cannot be otherwise. If you show me a book which you have read—not skimmed over or merely glanced at, but read—and you tell me that you enjoyed it and that you could read it three or four times, then I know what book I want—”

“Thank you!—th—”

—“to avoid. Yes indeed. I think that no information ever comes amiss in this world. Once or twice I have traveled in the cars—and there you know, the peanut boy always measures you with his eye, and hands you out a book of murders if you are fond of theology; or Tupper or a dictionary or T. S. Arthur if you are fond of poetry; or he hands you a volume of distressing jokes or a copy of the American Miscellany if you particularly dislike that sort of literary fatty degeneration of the heart—just for the world like a pleasant spoken well-meaning gentleman in any, bookstore. But here I am running on as if business men had nothing to do but listen to women talk. You must pardon me, for I was not thinking.—And you must let me thank you again for helping me. I read a good deal, and shall be in nearly every day and I would be sorry to have you think me a customer who talks too much and buys too little. Might I ask you to give me the time? Ah-two-twenty-two. Thank you very much. I will set mine while I have the opportunity.”

But she could not get her watch open, apparently. She tried, and tried again. Then the clerk, trembling at his own audacity, begged to be allowed to assist. She allowed him. He succeeded, and was radiant under the sweet influences of her pleased face and her seductively worded acknowledgements with gratification. Then he gave her the exact time again, and anxiously watched her turn the hands slowly till they reached the precise spot without accident or loss of life, and then he looked as happy as a man who had helped a fellow being through a momentous undertaking, and was grateful to know that he had not lived in vain. Laura thanked him once more. The words were music to his ear; but what were they compared to the ravishing smile with which she flooded his whole system? When she bowed her adieu and turned away, he was no longer suffering torture in the pillory where she had had him trussed up during so many distressing moments, but he belonged to the list of her conquests and was a flattered and happy thrall, with the dawn-light of love breaking over the eastern elevations of his heart.

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It was about the hour, now, for the chairman of the House Committee on Benevolent Appropriations to make his appearance, and Laura stepped to the door to reconnoiter. She glanced up the street, and sure enough—