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John Gaythers Garden and the Stories Told Therein

"Are you going to ask me to marry your husband if you should happen to die?"

John Gaythers Garden and the Stories Told Therein By Frank R. Stockton

ILLUSTRATED

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JOHN GAYTHER'S GARDEN

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The garden did not belong to John Gayther; he merely had charge of it. At certain busy seasons he had some men to help him in his work, but for the greater part of the year he preferred doing everything himself.

It was a very fine garden over which John Gayther had charge. It extended this way and that for long distances. It was difficult to see how far it did extend, there were so many old-fashioned box hedges; so many paths overshadowed by venerable grape-arbors; and so many far-stretching rows of peach, plum, and pear trees. Fruit, bushes, and vines there were of which the roll need not be called; and flowers grew everywhere. It was one of the fancies of the Mistress of the House—and she inherited it from her mother—to have flowers in great abundance, so that wherever she might walk through the garden she would always find them.

Often when she found them massed too thickly she would go in among them and thin them out with apparent recklessness, pulling them up by the roots and throwing them on the path, where John Gayther would come and find them and take them away. This heroic action on the part of the Mistress of the House pleased John very much. He respected the fearless spirit which did not hesitate to make sacrifices for the greater good, no matter how many beautiful blossoms she scattered on the garden path. John Gayther might have thinned out all this superfluous growth himself, but he knew the Mistress liked to do it, and he left for her gloved hands many tangled jungles of luxuriant bloom.

[4]

The garden was old, and rich, and aristocratic. It acted generously in the way of fruit, flowers, and vegetables, as if that were something it was expected to do, an action to which it was obliged by its nobility. It would be impossible for it to forget that it belonged to a fine old house and a fine old family.

John Gayther could not boast of lines of long descent, as could the garden and the family. He was comparatively a new-comer, and had not lived in that garden more than seven or eight years; but in that time he had so identified himself with the place, and all who dwelt upon it, that there were times when a stranger might have supposed him to be the common ancestor to the whole estate.

John understood well the mysterious problems of the tillable earth, and he knew, as well as anybody could know, what answers to expect when he consulted the oracles of nature. He was an elderly man, and the gentle exercises of the garden were suited to the disposition of his mind and body. In days gone by he had been a sailor, a soldier, a miner, a ranchman, and a good many other things besides. In those earlier days, according to his own account, John had had many surprising adventures and experiences; but in these later times his memory was by far the most active and vigorous of all his moving forces. This memory was like a hazel wand in the hands of a man who is searching for hidden springs of water. Whenever he wished it to turn and point in any particular place or direction, it so turned and pointed.

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THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

JOHN GAYTHER

I
WHAT I FOUND IN THE SEA

[9]

It was on a morning in June that John Gayther was hoeing peas, drawing the fine earth up about their tender little stems as a mother would tuck the clothes about her little sleeping baby, when, happening to glance across several beds, and rows of box, he saw approaching the Daughter of the House. Probably she was looking for him, but he did not think she had yet seen him. He put down his hoe, feeling, as he did, that this June morning was getting very warm; and he gathered up an armful of pea-sticks which were lying near by. With these he made his way toward a little house almost in the middle of the garden, which was his fortress, his palace, his studio, or his workshop, as the case might be.

It was a low building with a far-outreaching roof, and under the shade of this roof, outside of the little building, John liked to do his rainy-day and very-hot-weather work. From the cool interior came a smell of dried plants and herbs and bulbs and potted earth.

When John reached this garden-house, the young lady was already there. She was not tall; her face was very white, but not pale; and her light hair fluffed itself all about her head, under her wide hat. She wore gold spectacles which greatly enhanced the effect of her large blue eyes. John thought she was the prettiest flower which had ever showed itself in that garden.

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"Good morning, John," she said. "I came here to ask you about plants suitable for goldfishes in a vase. My fishes do not seem to be satisfied with the knowledge that the plants through which they swim were put there to purify the water; they are all the time trying to eat them. Now it strikes me that there ought to be some plants which would be purifiers and yet good for the poor things to eat."

John put down his bundle of pea-sticks by the side of a small stool. "Won't you sit down, miss?" pointing to a garden-bench near by, "and I will see what I can do for you." Then he seated himself upon the stool, took out his knife, and picked up a pea-stick.

"The best thing for me to do," he said, "is to look over a book I have which will tell me just the kind of water plants which your goldfish ought to have. I will do that this evening, and then I will see to it that you shall have those plants, whatever they may be. I do not pretend to be much of a water gardener myself, but it's easy for me to find out what other people know." John now began to trim some of the lower twigs from a pea-stick.

"Talking about water gardens, miss," he said, "I wish you could have seen some of the beautiful ones that I have come across!—more beautiful and lovely than anything on the top of the earth; you may be sure of that. I was reminded of them the moment you spoke to me about your goldfish and their plants."

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"Where were those gardens?" asked the young lady; "and what were they like?"

"They were all on the bottom of the sea, in the tropics," said John Gayther, "where the water is so clear that with a little help you can see everything just as if it were out in the open air—bushes and vines and hedges; all sorts of tender waving plants, all made of seaweed and coral, growing in the white sand; and instead of birds flying about among their branches there were little fishes of every color: canary-colored fishes, fishes like robin-redbreasts, and others which you might have thought were blue jays if they had been up in the air instead of down in the water."

"Where did you say all this is to be seen?" asked the Daughter of the House, who loved all lovely things.

"Oh, in a good many places in warm climates," said John. "But, now I come to think of it, there was one place where I saw more beautiful sights, more grand and wonderful sights, under the water than I believe anybody ever saw before! Would you like me to tell you about it?"

"Indeed—I—would!" said she, taking off her hat.

John now began to sharpen the end of his pea-stick. "It was a good many years ago,"

said he, "more than twenty—and I was then a seafaring man. I was on board a brig, cruising in the West Indies, and we were off Porto Rico, about twenty miles northward, I should say, when we ran into something in the night,—we never could find out what it was,—and we stove a big hole in that brig which soon began to let in a good deal more water than we could pump out. The captain he was a man that [12] knew all about that part of the world, and he told us all that we must work as hard as we could at the pumps, and if we could keep her afloat until he could run her ashore on a little sandy island he knew of not far from St. Thomas, we might be saved. There was a fresh breeze from the west, and he thought he could make the island before we sank.

"I was mighty glad to hear him say this, for I had always been nervous when I was cruising off Porto Rico. Do you know, miss, that those waters are the very deepest in the whole world?"

"No," said she; "I never heard that."

"Well, they are," said John. "If you should take the very tallest mountain there is in any part of the earth and put it down north of Porto Rico, so that the bottom of it shall rest on the bottom of the sea, the top of that mountain would be sunk clean out of sight, so that ships could sail over it just as safely as they sail in any part of the ocean.

"Of course a man would drown just as easily in a couple of fathoms of water as in this deep place; but it is perfectly horrible to think of sinking down, down, down into the very deepest water-hole on the face of the whole earth."

"Didn't you have any boats?" asked the young lady.

"We hadn't any," said John. "We had sold all of them about two months before to a British merchantman who had lost her boats in a cyclone. One of the things our captain wanted to get to St. Thomas for was to buy some more boats. He heard he could get some cheap ones there.

"Well, we pumped and sailed as well as we could, but we hadn't got anywhere near [13] that sandy island the captain was making for, when, one morning after breakfast, our brig, which was pretty low in the water by this time, gave a little hitch and a grind, and stuck fast on something; and if we hadn't been lively in taking in all sail there would have been trouble. But the weather was fine, and the sea was smooth, and when we had time to think about what had happened we were resting on the surface of the sea, just as quiet and tranquil as if we had been a toy ship in a shop-window.

"What we had stuck on was a puzzle indeed! As I said before, our captain knew all about that part of the sea, and, although he knew we were in shallow soundings, he was certain that there wasn't any shoal or rock thereabout that we could get stuck on.

"We sounded all around the brig, and found lots of water at the stern, but not so much forward. We were stuck fast on something, but nobody could imagine what it was. However, we were not sinking any deeper, and that was a comfort; and the captain he believed that if we had had boats we could row to St. Thomas; but we didn't have any boats, so we had to make the best of it. He put up a flag of distress, and waited till some craft should come along and take us off.

"The captain and the crew didn't seem to be much troubled about what had happened, for so long as the sea did not get up they could make themselves very comfortable as they were. But there were two men on board who didn't take things easy. They wanted to know what had happened, and they wanted to know what was [14] likely to happen next. I was one of these men, and a stock-broker from New York was the other. He was an awful nervous, fidgety, meddling sort of a man, who was on this cruise for the benefit of his health, which must have been pretty well worn out with howling, and yelling, and trying to catch profits like a lively boy catches flies. He was always poking his nose into all sorts of things that didn't concern him, and spent about half of his time trying to talk the captain into selling his brig and putting the money into Pacific Lard—or it might have been Mexican Balloon stock, as well as I remember. This man was tingling all over with anxiety to find out what we had stuck on; but as he could not stick his nose into the water and find out, and as there was nobody to tell him, he had to keep on tingling.

"I was just as wild to know what it was the brig was resting on as the stock-broker was; but I had the advantage of him, for I believed that I could find out, and, at any rate, I determined to try. Did you ever hear of a water-glass, miss?"

"No, I never did," said the Daughter of the House, who was listening with great interest.

"Well, I will try to describe one to you," said John Gayther. "You make a light box about twenty inches high and a foot square, and with both ends open. Then you get a pane of glass and fasten it securely in one end of this box. Then you've got your

water-glass—a tall box with a glass bottom.

"The way that you use it is this: You get in a boat, and put the box in the water, glass bottom down. Then you lean over and put your head into the open end, and if you will lay something over the back of your head as a man does when he is taking [15] photographs, so as to keep out the light from above, it will be all the better. Then, miss, you'd be perfectly amazed at what you could see through that glass at the bottom of the box! Even in northern regions, where the water is heavy and murky, you can see a good way down; but all about the tropics, where the water is often so thin and clear that you can see the bottom in some places with nothing but your naked eyes, it is perfectly amazing what you can see with a water-glass! It doesn't seem a bit as if you were looking down into the sea; it is just like gazing about in the upper air. If it isn't too deep, things on the bottom—fishes swimming about, everything—is just as plain and distinct as if there wasn't any water under you and you were just looking down from the top of a house.

"Well, I made up my mind that the only way for me to find out what it was that was under the brig was to make a water-glass and look down into the sea; and so I made one, taking care not to let the stock-broker know anything about it, for I didn't want any of his meddling in my business. I had to tell the captain, but he said he would keep his mouth shut, for he didn't like the stock-broker any more than I did.

"Well, miss, I made that water-glass. And when the stock-broker was taking a nap, for he was clean tired out poking about and asking questions and trying to find out what he might get out of the business if he helped to save the brig, the captain and I, with a few men, quietly let down into the water the aft hatch, one of those big doors they cover the hatchways with, and when that was resting on the water it made a [16] very good raft for one man. And I got down on it, with my water-glass and an oar.

"The first thing I did, of course, was to paddle around the brig to the place where she had been stove in. She wasn't leaking any more, because the water inside of her was just as high as the water outside; so, if we could do anything, this was the time to do it. I looked down into the water on our starboard bow, and I soon found the place where the brig had been stove in, probably by some water-logged piece of wreckage. I located the hole exactly, and I reported to the captain, who was leaning over the side. Then I paddled around the brig to see if I could find out what we were resting on.

"When I had sunk my water-glass well into the water, and had got my head into the top of it, I looked down on a scene which seemed like fairyland. The corals and water plants of different colors, and the white glistening sand, and the fishes, big and little, red, yellow, pink, and blue, swimming about among the branches just as if they had wings instead of fins, that I told you of just now, were all there; and the light down under the water seemed so clear and bright that I could see everything under me that was as big as a pea."

"That must have been an entrancing vision!" said the Daughter of the House.

"Indeed it was," replied John Gayther. "But, would you believe me, miss? I didn't look at it for more than half a minute; for when I turned my water-glass so that I could look under the brig, I could not give a thought to anything else in the world except [17] the astonishing objects our brig was resting on.

"At first I could not believe my eyes. I paddled around and around, and I put down my water-glass, and I stared and I stared, until I felt as if my eyes were coming out of my head! At last I had to believe what I saw. There was no use trying to think that my eyes had made a mistake. It was all just as plain to me as you are now.

"Down in the water, resting on the bottom of this shallow part of the sea, were two great ships—ships of the olden time, with enormously high poops, which were the stern part of old-fashioned vessels, built 'way up high like a four-story house. These two antiquated vessels were lying side by side and close together, with their tall poops reaching far up toward the surface of the sea; and right on top of them, resting partly on one ship and partly on the other, was our brig, just as firmly fixed as if she had been on the stocks in a shipyard!

"The whole thing was so wonderful that it nearly took away my breath. I got around to the stern of the brig, and then I stared down at the two vessels under her until I forgot there was anything else in this whole world than those two great old-fashioned ships and myself. The more I looked the more certain I became that no such vessels had floated on the top of the sea for at least two hundred years. From what I had read about old-time ships, and from the pictures I had seen of them, I made up my mind that one of those vessels was an old Spanish galleon; and the other one looked to me very much as if it were an English-built ship."

"And how did they ever happen to be wrecked there, side by side?" almost gasped [18] the young lady.

"Oh, they had been fighting," said John. "There could be no mistake about that. They

had been fighting each other to the death, and they had gone down together, side by side. And there was our brig, two hundred years afterwards, resting quietly on top of both of them.

"I was still wrapped up, body and soul, in this wonderful discovery, when I heard a hail from the stern of the brig, and there was that stock-broker, shouting to me to know what I was looking at. Of course that put an end to my observations, and I paddled to the side and got on board.

"'Lend me that box,' said the stock-broker, 'and let me get down on your raft. What is it you've been looking at, and what did you see in that box?'

"But he had got hold of the wrong man. 'No, sir,' said I. 'Find a box for yourself, if you want one.' And I held mine so that he could not see that the bottom of it was glass. Then the captain came along and told him not to try to get down on that hatch, for if he did he would topple into the water and get himself drowned, which would have been certain to happen, for he could not swim. Then the hatch was hauled on deck, and I went below with the captain to his cabin to tell him what I had seen. The stock-broker tried awfully hard to come with us, but we wouldn't let him.

"When the captain had heard all I had to tell him, he wasn't struck sentimentally the least bit, as I had been. It did not make any more difference to him whether those two ships had been down there two hundred years or two years; but there was [19] another part to the affair that was very interesting to him.

"'Gayther,' said he, 'it's ten to one that them ships has got treasure aboard, and what we've got to do is to form a company and go to work and get it.'

"'And how would you do that?' said I.

"The captain was from Provincetown, Cape Cod, and it didn't take him two seconds to work out his whole plan.

"'It's this way,' said he. 'The first thing to do is to form a company. I am president and you can be the other officers. When that is all fixed we can go to work, and we'll mend that hole in our bow. Now if you know just where it is, we'll work day and night in that hold, water or no water, and we'll stop it up. Then we'll pump the brig out, and I believe she'll float. Then we'll mark this place with a buoy, and we'll sail away as fast as we can, with our company all formed and everything fixed and settled. Then we'll come back with the vessels and machines, and we'll get out that treasure. We'll divide it into three parts. One part will be mine; one part will be yours; and the other part will go to the crew.'

"'And how about the stock-broker?' said I. 'Going to let him in the company?'

"'No, sir,' said the captain, bringing his fist down on the table. 'Whatever else happens, he is to be kept out.'

"This was a very fine plan, but it didn't altogether suit me. I didn't want to sail away from that spot and perhaps never see those two ships again. There was no knowing what more I might find out with my water-glass if that stock-broker could be kept from bothering me.

"I told the captain this, and he looked hard at me and he said: 'It will take a couple of [20] days to mend that leak and to pump out the brig. If this fine weather keeps on I think we can do it in that time. And if while we are working at it you choose to try to find out more about them two ships, you can do it.'

"'And how can I do it?' said I.

"'If you can go down in a diver's suit you can do it,' said he. 'I don't know whether you know anything about that business, but if you want to try, I have got a whole kit on board, air-pump, armor, and everything. It belongs to a diver that was out with me about a year ago in the Gulf of Mexico. He had to go North to attend to some business, and he told me he would let me know when he would come back and get his diving-kit. But he hasn't come back yet, and the whole business is stowed away here on board. Do you know anything about going down in a diving-suit?'

"Now I had never done anything in the way of diving, but I had heard a good deal about it, and I had seen divers at work, and my whole soul was so jumping and shouting inside of me at the very idea of going down and searching into the secrets of those two old ships that I told the captain I was ready to undertake the diving business just the minute he could get things in shape.

"Well, miss, early the next morning—and I can tell you I didn't sleep much that night —everything was ready for me to go down, and two of the crew who had done that sort of thing before were detailed to attend to the air-pumps and all the other business. The stock-broker he was like a bee on a window-pane; he was buzzing, and [21] kicking, and bumping his head trying to find out what we expected to do. But the captain wouldn't tell him anything; you may be sure I wouldn't; and nobody else

knew.

"As soon as we could get things straightened out I was lowered over the side of the brig, and sunk out of sight into the water. The captain and all the crew, except the men who were attending to me, then went to work to mend the hole in the side of the brig. And the last thing I heard as I went under the water was the stock-broker howling and yelling and rampaging around the deck.

"As I told you before, miss, I had never been down in a diving-suit; but I paid the greatest attention to everything I knew, and I got down to the bottom all right, having a hard time to keep from being scratched to pieces by the barnacles on the sterns of the big ships.

"I clumped about for a while on the sandy bottom so as to get familiar with the air-tubes, signal-cords, and all that, and then I signalled to be hauled up a bit; and, after a good deal of trouble, I got on board the vessel which I was sure was a Spanish galleon. As I stood on her upper deck, looking around, I felt as if I was in a world of wonders. There was water everywhere, of course—in and around and about everything. But I could see so plainly that I forgot that I was not moving about in the open air.

"I can't tell you, miss, everything I saw on that great ship, for it would take too long; but as soon as I could, I set to work to see if I could find the treasure that I hoped was on board of her. Here and there about the decks I saw swords and pistols and old cannon, but not a sign of any of the brave fellows that had fought the ship, for the [22]
fish had eaten them up long ago, bones and all.

"While hunting about, and being careful to keep my air-tube from fouling, I looked into a cabin with the door open; and you will believe me, miss, when I tell you that a cold chill ran down my back when I saw something moving inside, just as if it was a man getting up to see what I wanted. It turned out to be a big fish, about half my size, and he did not ask any questions, but just swam through the open door, almost brushing me, and went his way."

"I wonder you weren't frightened to death!" said the Daughter of the House.

"It would be hard to kill me with fright," said John Gayther, "and I'll prove that to you, miss. As I moved on, still looking for the treasure, I came to the door of another cabin, and this was shut and bolted on the outside. I had a hatchet with me, and with this I knocked back the bolts and forced open the door; and there I saw something to make anybody jump. Sitting on a locker, right in front of the door, was the skeleton of a man. The room had been shut up so tight that no fish big enough to eat bones could get in; but the little things that live in the water and can get through any crack had eaten all of that man except his bones, his gold buttons, that were lying about on the floor, the golden embroidery of his uniform, that was still hanging about on his skeleton, and the iron fetters on his hands and feet. He was most likely a prisoner of rank who was being taken back to Spain, and he had been shut up there through all the fight.

"The first thought that came into my mind when I looked at him was that he might be [23]
Columbus, and that the Spaniards had made up the story about their really getting him back to Spain at the time when he was to be brought home in irons. But thinking more about it, I knew that this could not be true, and so I shut the door so as to keep the poor fellow from any intrusions so long as he might happen to stay there.

"Then I went to work in real earnest to find the treasure, and I tell you, miss, I did find it."

"What!" exclaimed the Daughter of the House. "You really found the treasure on that Spanish galleon?"

"Indeed I did," replied John Gayther. "It was in boxes stowed away in a big room in the stern. I smashed the door, and there were the boxes. I went to work at one of them with my hatchet; and I had just forced up one corner of the lid, and had seen that it was filled with big gold pieces, when I felt a pull on my signal-rope, and knew that they wanted me to come up. So I put my fingers into the crack and got out a few of the coins. I could not take a whole box; it would have been too heavy. And then I went out of that room, and signalled that I was ready to go up. It was time, I can tell you, miss, for I was getting mighty nervous and excited, and I needed rest and something to eat.

"When I was safe on the deck of the brig, I found everybody gathered there, waiting to hear what I had to tell. They had stopped work for dinner, and that is the reason I had been signalled.

"But I didn't say anything to anybody. As soon as my helmet was unscrewed and I was out of my diving-suit I went below with the captain; and although the stock- [24]
broker followed us close and nearly pushed himself into the cabin, we shut the door on him and kept him out. Then I told the captain everything, and I showed him the

three gold coins, which I had kept all the time tightly clinched in my right hand. I can tell you the eyes of both of us were wide open when we looked at those coins. Two of them were dated sixteen hundred and something, and one of them fifteen hundred. They were big fellows, worth about ten dollars apiece. The captain took them and locked them up.

"'Now,' said he, 'do you think you will be able to go down again to-day? If you want to see what's in the other ship you've got to be lively about it, for I think we can get the brig pumped out in twenty-four hours; and if a stiff breeze should spring up to-morrow afternoon—and I am inclined to think it will—we don't want to be caught here. If the other ship's a treasure-ship,' he went on to say, 'you know it would be a good deal better for our company; and so it might be well to find out.'

"I didn't need any spurring to make me go down again, for I was all on fire to know what was on board the other ship, which I was sure was English, having had a good opportunity of looking at it while I was down there.

"So as soon as I had taken a rest and had had my dinner, I went on deck to get ready for another diving expedition. There was the stock-broker, watching me like a snake watching a bird. He didn't stamp around and ask any more questions: he just kept his venomous eye on me as if he would like to kill me because I knew more than he did. [25] But I didn't concern myself about him, and down I went, and this time I got myself aboard the English vessel just as soon as I could.

"It wasn't as interesting as the old Spanish vessel, but still I saw enough to fill up a book if I had time to tell it. There were more signs of fighting than there had been on the other ship. Muskets and swords were scattered about everywhere, and, although she was plainly a merchant-vessel, she had a lot of the small cannon used in those days.

"I looked about a great deal, and it struck me that she had been a merchantman trading with the West Indies, but glad enough to fight a Spanish treasure-ship if she happened to come across one. It was more than likely that her crew had been a regular set of half-buccaneers, willing to trade if there was trade, and fight if there was any fighting on hand. Anyway, the two vessels had had a tough time of it, and each of them had met her match. I could see the grappling-irons which had fastened them together. They had blown so many holes in each other's sides that they had gone to the bottom as peaceably as a pair of twins holding each other by the hands.

"I worked hard on that English ship, and I went everywhere where I dared to go, but I couldn't find any signs that she had carried treasure. I hadn't the least doubt that she was on an outward voyage, and that the Spaniard was homeward bound.

"At last I got down into the hold, and there I found a great number of big hogsheads, that were packed in so well under the deck that they had never moved in all these years. Of course I wanted to know what was in them, for, although it would not be [26] gold or silver, it might be something almost as precious if it happened to be spirits of the olden time.

"After banging and working for some time I got out the bung of one of these hogsheads, and immediately air began to bubble up, and I could hear the water running in. It was plain the hogshead was empty, and I clapped the bung in again as quick as I could. I wasn't accustomed to sounding barrels or hogsheads under water, but as I knew this was an empty one I sounded it with my hatchet; and then I went around and got the same kind of a sound from each of the others that I hammered on. They were all empty, every blessed one of them.

"Now I was certain that this vessel had been outward bound; she had been taking out empty hogsheads, and had expected to carry them back full of West Indian rum, which was a mighty profitable article of commerce in those days. But she had fallen into temptation, and had gone to the bottom; and here were her hogsheads just as tight and just as empty as on the day she set sail from England.

"As I stood looking at the great wall of empty hogsheads in front of me, wondering if it would not be better to give up searching any more on this vessel, which evidently had not been laden with anything valuable, and go again on board the Spanish ship and make some sort of a plan for fastening lines to those treasure-boxes so that they might be hauled up on board the brig, I began to feel a sort of trouble with my breath, as if I might suffocate if I did not get out soon. I knew, of course, that something was the matter with my air-supply, and I signalled for them to pump [27] lively. But it was of no use; my supply of fresh air seemed to be cut off. I began to gasp. I was terribly frightened, you may be sure; for, with air gone and no answer to my signals, I must perish. I jerked savagely at my signal-cord to let them know that I wanted to be pulled up,—it was possible that I might reach the surface before being suffocated,—but the cord offered no resistance; I pulled it toward me as I jerked. It had been cut or broken.

"Then I took hold of my air-tube and pulled it. It, too, was unattached at the other end; it had no connection with the air-pump.

"Breathing with great difficulty, and with my legs trembling under me, a thought flashed through my mind. As rapidly as possible I drew in the india-rubber air-tube. Presently I had the loose end of it in my hand. Then I caught hold of the bung of the hogshead which I had opened and which was just in front of me, and the instant I pulled it out I thrust in the end of the air-tube. To my great delight, it fitted tightly in the bung-hole. And now in an instant I felt as if I was sitting upon the pinnacles of Paradise. Air, fresh air, came to me through the tube! Not in abundance, not freely, for there was some water in the tube and there was a good deal of gurgling. But it was air, fresh air; and every time an exhaled breath escaped through the valve in my helmet, a little air from the hogshead came in to take its place.

"I stood for a while, weak with happiness. I did not know what had happened; I did not care. I could breathe; that was everything in the world to me.

"By gradually raising the tube a few feet at a time I managed to empty the water it contained into the hogshead, and then I breathed more easily. As I did not wish to [28] wait until the air in the hogshead had been exhausted, I went to work on the bung in the next one, and soon transferred the end of my tube to that, which would probably last me a good while, for it was almost entirely free from water.

"Now I began to cogitate and wonder. I pulled in the end of the signal-cord, and I found it had not been rubbed and torn by barnacles; the end of it had been clean cut with a knife. I remembered that this was the case with the air-tube; as I placed it into the bung-hole of the first hogshead I had noticed how smoothly it had been severed.

"Now I felt a tug at the rope by which I was raised and lowered. I didn't like this. If I should be pulled up I might be jerked away from my air-supply and suffocate before I got to the surface. So I took a turn of the rope around a stick of timber near by, and they might pull as much as they chose without disturbing me. There I stood, and thought, and wondered. But, above everything, I could not help feeling all the time how good that air was! It seemed to go through every part of me. It was better than wine; it was better than anything I had ever breathed or tasted. A little while ago I was on the point of perishing. Now before me there were tiers of hogsheads full of air! If it had not been that I would be obliged to eat, I might have stayed down there as long as I pleased.

"I had stayed a long time, and I was at work on the air in a third hogshead—not having half used up the contents of the other two—before I really made up my mind as to what had happened. I was sure that there had been foul play, and I felt quite as [29] sure that the stock-broker was at the bottom of it. Except that man, there was no one on board the brig who would wish to do me a harm. The stock-broker he hated me; I had seen that in his face as plainly as if it had been painted on a sign-board. I knew something which he did not know; I was trying to get something which was to be kept a secret from him. If I could be put out of the way he probably thought he might have some sort of a chance. I could not fathom the man's mind, but that's the way it looked to me.

"I had been down there a long time, and it must have been getting toward the end of the afternoon; so I prepared to leave my watery retirement. I had made a plan, and it worked very well. I placed the end of my air-tube far into the bung-hole of the hogshead, so that I might not accidentally pull it out; I loosened myself from the bit of timber; and then I made my way to the bow of the vessel on which I was. Looking upward, I found that our brig, which was resting on the tall poops of the two sunken vessels, was so suspended above me that her fore chains, which ran under her bowsprit, were almost over my head.

"Now I stood and took some long, deep breaths; then, having made everything ready, I jerked myself out of that diving-suit in a very few seconds, and, standing free, I gave a great leap upward, and went straight to the surface. I am a good swimmer, and with a few strokes I caught the chains. Stealthily I clambered up, making not the least noise, and peeped over the rail. There was nobody forward. The whole ship's company seemed to be crowded aft, where there was a great stir and confusion. I [30] slipped quietly over the rail and, without being seen by anybody, made my way into the forecastle. I hurried to my sea-chest. I took off my wet things and dressed myself in an almost new suit of shore clothes which I had never worn on the brig. I did not lose any more time than I could help, but I took unusual care in dressing myself. I put on a new pair of yellow shoes, and turned up the bottom of my trousers so as to show my red socks. I had a big felt hat which I had bought in Mexico, with a little feather in it; and this I put on, pulling it rakishly over on one side. I put around my neck a long blue silk cravat with white spots, which I tied in the biggest bow I could make. Then, feeling that I ought to have something in my hands, I picked up a capstan-bar, and laying it across my arm after the manner of a cutlass, I went boldly on deck.

"Making as much noise as possible, and advancing with what you might call a majestic tread, I strode to the stern of that brig. At first my approach was not noticed, for there was still a great hubbub, and everybody seemed to be shouting or swearing or shaking his fist. The stock-broker stood on one side, and his tongue was going as fast as anybody's; but I noticed that his hands were tied behind him, and

there was a rope around his neck.

"The captain was the first to see me. He gave me just one look; he turned pale; and then, with a sort of a scared grunt, down he went on his knees.

"When the rest of the men laid eyes on me, you never saw such a scared lot in your life. Their mouths and their eyes went open, and their swarthy faces were as white as you could wash a dirty sail. Some of them shook so that their caps fell off, and one or two began to pray. [31]

"As to the stock-broker, he at first seemed greatly startled; but he recovered himself in a moment. There was nothing superstitious about him, and he knew well enough that I was no spirit risen from the deep, but a living man.

"'Ha, ha!' he shouted. 'Here you are, after trying to rob and cheat us, and making believe to be dead, you water thief!—hiding safe and sound on deck while such a row is being raised here about your death, and all sorts of threats being made against me on account of it. Look at him, my brave men!' said he, turning to the crew; 'look at the fellow who has been trying to rob us! And he is the man you ought to hang to the yard-arm!'

"Then he turned again to me. 'You are a fool of a thief, anyway. After you had gone down under this vessel I found your box with the glass in the bottom of it. I got down close to the water and I watched you. I saw you going about in that big sunken ship looking after treasure, and, no doubt, finding it; filling your pockets with gold and telling nobody. I didn't want to kill you when I cut your air-tube, as I have told these good sailors; but I wanted to make you stop stealing and come up, and I did it. The treasure under this vessel belongs to us all, and you have no right to make a secret business out of it, and keep it for yourself and the captain. Now, my good men,' he shouted to the crew, 'there is the fellow you ought to hang! Look at him, dressed up in fine clothes, while you thought he was soaked and dead at the bottom of the sea! Hang him up, I say! Then we'll get the treasure, and we'll divide it among us fair and even.' [32]

"This was a dangerous moment for me. The men had recovered from their fright. They saw I was no spirit, and they believed that I had been trying to deceive and defraud them. A good many of them drew their knives and came toward me, the stock-broker urging them on. The captain tried to restrain the men who were near him, but they pushed him aside.

"I now stepped forward; I pulled my great hat still further over my face; I glared at the men before me; and I brought my capstan-bar with a tremendous thump upon the deck.

"'Sirrah, varlets!' I roared. 'What mean ye? Stop where ye are, and if one man of ye comes nearer I'll cleave him to the chine! Caitiffs! varlets! hounds! dare ye threaten me? Ods-bodikins, I like it well! By our lady, ye are a merry set of mariners who draw your blades upon a man who is come upon this deck to tell ye how to fill your pockets with old gold! Back there, every man of ye, and put up your knives, ere I split your heads and toss ye into the sea!'

"As I spoke these words my voice and tones were so loud and terrible that I almost frightened myself. The crew fell back as I advanced a step or two, and every man of them sheathed his knife. Even the stock-broker seemed to be overawed by my tremendous voice and my fierce appearance."

"John Gayther," said the Daughter of the House, who had been listening very eagerly, "what made you talk like that, and strut about, and pound the deck? That's not like you. I would not have supposed that you ever could have acted so." [33]

"You will understand it all, miss," said the gardener, "when you remember that for nearly two hours I had been breathing the atmosphere of the sixteenth century. That atmosphere was the air which for two hundred years had been fastened up in those empty hogsheads. I had drawn it into my lungs; it had gone into my blood, my nerves, my brain. I was as a man who swash-buckles—a reckless mariner of the olden time. I longed to take my cutlass in my teeth and board a Spaniard. As I looked upon the villainous stock-broker before me, I felt as if I could take him by the throat, plunge down with him to the deck of the Spanish galleon, and shut him up fast and tight in the room with that manacled Spaniard who could not have been Columbus. I thrilled with a fierce longing for combat. It was the air of the sixteenth century which had permeated my every pore.

"Now I fixed upon the stock-broker a terrible glare and stepped toward him. 'Money miscreant!' I yelled, 'you it was who tried first to murder me, and then to turn the hearts of all these good men against me!' I raised my capstan-bar in the air. 'Aroint thee, fiend!' I yelled. 'Get thee below; and if anon I see thee I will break thy dastardly skull!'

"At this the stock-broker, frightened nearly out of his wits, and with his hands still

tied and the rope around his neck, made a dive for the companionway, and disappeared below. I stood up very bold; I threw out my chest, and gazed around in triumph. The air of the sixteenth century had saved me! Those men would have no more dared to attack me, as I stood roaring out my defiance and my threat, than they would have ventured to give battle to the boldest and the blackest of all bloody buccaneers. [34]

"I now called the men around me, and I told them all my story. You may imagine that they opened their eyes and mouths so wide that I thought some of them would never get them shut again. But the captain—he was from Provincetown, Cape Cod, and he went straight to business.

"'We've mended the leak,' said he, 'and we'll pump all night, and it may be to-morrow we shall float free. Then we'll form a company for the recovery of the treasure on that Spanish galleon. I will take one third of it; Mr. Gayther shall have one third; and one third shall be divided among the crew. Then we'll anchor a buoy near this spot and sail away, to come back again as soon as may be.'

"Everybody agreed to this, and we all went to supper. Early the next morning a breeze blew very fresh from the southwest; then it increased to a gale; and before ten o'clock the waves began to run so high that one of them lifted the brig clean off the sunken ships on which she had been resting, and we were afloat. In ten seconds more we were lying broadside to the wind. Then indeed we had to skip around lively, get up some sails, and put her properly on the wind. Before we had time to draw an easy breath we were scudding along, far from the spot which we had intended to mark with an anchored buoy. There was a good deal of water in the hold, but the brig went merrily on as if glad to get away from those two old sea spectres of the past with which she had been keeping such close company.

"Of course it was impossible to beat up against such a wind, and so we kept on toward St. Thomas. The captain had carefully taken the longitude and latitude of the spot where we had been stranded on the ancient ships, and he was sure he could find the place again by sounding in fair weather. [35]

"Before we reached port, he came on deck with the three gold pieces which I had brought up from the Spanish galleon. One of these he put into his own pocket; one he gave to me; and the other he gave to the crew to be changed into small coin and divided. The stock-broker got nothing, and I saw him no more on that voyage. I had sworn to break his head if my eyes ever fell upon him, and he was wise enough to keep out of my sight."

"And that is all the money you ever got from the galleon?" asked the Daughter of the House.

"Yes," said John Gayther, "that was all. I have the ancient gold piece in my room now, and some day I will show it to you.

"As soon as we could do it, we all went with the captain to New York, and there we organized our company, and sold a lot of stock, and chartered a good steamer with derricks and everything necessary for raising sunken treasure. But, although the weather was fair, and we sounded and sounded day after day at the very point of longitude and latitude where we had left the two great ships of the olden time, we never could find them.

"One day, just before we had concluded to give up the search, we saw another vessel not far away, also sounding. This we afterwards heard belonged to the stock-broker. He had chartered a steamer, and he had on board of her a president, a secretary, a treasurer, a board of trustees, and four derricks. We steamed away and soon left him, and I am very sure that if his company had ever declared any dividends I should have heard of it." [36]

"And that is the end of your story, John Gayther?" said the Daughter of the House, as she rose from her seat.

"Yes, miss; that is the end of it," replied the gardener.

The young lady said no more, but walked away in quiet reflection, while John Gayther picked up the only pea-stick on which he had been at work that morning.

THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

THE DAUGHTER OF THE HOUSE

II
THE BUSHWHACKER NURSE

[39]

The Daughter of the House, her fair cheeks a little flushed, walked rapidly down the broad centre path of the garden, looking for John Gayther, the gardener. She soon saw him at work in a bed of tomato-plants.

"John," said she, "I have just finished composing a story, and I came out to tell it to you before I write it. I want to do this because you compose stories yourself which in some ways are a good deal like this of mine. But I can't tell it to you out here in the sun. Isn't there something you can do in your little house? Haven't you some pea-sticks to sharpen?"

"Oh, yes, miss," said John Gayther, with great alacrity; "and if you will go and make yourself comfortable under the shed I will be there in a few minutes."

It was rather difficult for John Gayther to find any pea-sticks which had not already been stuck into the ground or which wanted sharpening, but he succeeded in getting a small armful of them, and with these he came to where the young lady was seated. He drew up a stool and took out a big knife.

[40]

"Now," said she, gazing through her gold-rimmed spectacles far out into the sunlit garden, "this is the story of a girl."

John Gayther nodded approvingly. The story of a girl was exactly what he would like to hear, provided it was told by the young lady who sat in front of him.

"She was of an independent turn of mind," said the Daughter of the House, "and there were a great many things in this world which bored her, not because they were uninteresting in themselves, but because she could not enjoy them in the way which suited her. She had thought of hundreds of things she would like to do if she only could do them in her own way and without control by other people. She was very anxious to perform deeds, noble deeds if possible, but she could not endure the everlasting control which seems to be thought necessary in this world—at least, for girls. The consequence of this was that she spent a great deal of her time in doing things which made no imprint whatever upon the progress of the world or upon the elevation of her own character.

"Now it happened that at the time of my story there was a war in the land, and a great many people with whom my heroine was acquainted went forth to do battle for their country and their principles, or to act patriotically in some other way than fighting. I forgot to say that my heroine is named Almia—"

"De Ponsett, I suppose," interrupted John Gayther. "Almia de Ponsett is the name of a beautiful new white tea-rose."

[41]

"Not at all," said the young lady, drawing her eyebrows slightly together; "there is no 'de Ponsett' about it, and her name has nothing to do with tea-roses. It is simply Almia. She grew more and more dissatisfied every day the war went on. Everybody who was worth anything was doing something, and here she was doing nothing. What was there she could do? This became the great question of her life. If I were about to write out this story I would say something here about the workings of her mind; but that is not necessary now. But her mind worked a great deal, and the end of it was that she determined to be a nurse. Nursing, indeed, is the only thing a young woman can do in a war.

"But when she began to make inquiries about army nurses—what they ought to do, how they ought to do it, and all that—she ran up against that terrible bugbear of control. Everywhere was control, control, control; and she really began to despair. There were examinations, and training, and applications to the surgeon-general, and to the assistant surgeon, and to special heads of departments and districts and States and counties, for all I know. There was positively no end to the things she would have to do to get a regular appointment to go forth and do her duty to her country. So she threw up the whole business of regular army nursing, and made up her mind to go out into the field of duty to which she had appointed herself, and do the things she ought to do in the way she thought they ought to be done. She likened herself to the knights of old who used to go forth to fight for their ladies and for the upholding of

chivalry. She wanted to be a sort of a free-lance, but she did not want to hire herself to anybody. She did not fancy being anything like a guerilla, and then it suddenly [42] struck her that if she did just as she wanted to do she would resemble a bushwhacker more than anything else. A bushwhacker is an honest man. When there is no war he whacks bushes, that is, he cuts them down; and when there is a war—"

"He whacks the enemy," suggested John Gayther.

The Daughter of the House smiled a little. "Yes," she said; "he tries to do that. But he is entirely independent; he is under nobody; and that suited Almia. A bushwhacker nurse was exactly what she wanted to be, and as soon as this was settled she made all her preparations to go to the war."

"Of course," said John Gayther, "the young lady's parents—or perhaps she did not have any parents?"

The Daughter of the House frowned. "Now, John," said she, "I don't want anything said about parents. There were no parents in this case, at least none to be considered. I don't say whether they were dead or not, but the story has nothing to do with them. Parents would be very embarrassing, and I don't want to stop to bother with them."

John Gayther nodded his head as if he thought she was quite right, and she went on:

"The first thing Almia did was to fit herself out after the fashion she thought best adapted to a bushwhacker nurse. She wore heavy boots, and a bicycle-skirt which just came to the top of the boots; and in this skirt she put ever so many pockets. She wore a little cap with a strap to go under the chin; and from her belt on the left side she hung a very little cask, which she happened to have, something like those carried by the St. Bernard dogs in Switzerland when they go to look for lost travellers; and this she filled with brandy. In her pockets she put every kind of thing that wounded [43] men might want: adhesive plaster, raw cotton, bandages, some pieces of heavy pasteboard to make splints, needles and fine silk for sewing up cuts, and a good many other things suitable for wounded people. And in the right-hand pocket of her skirt she carried a pistol with five barrels."

"My conscience!" exclaimed John Gayther, "that was dangerous. And then, you know, nurses hardly ever carry pistols."

"But this was necessary," said she, "as you will see as the story goes on. Then, when she put on a long waterproof cloak which covered everything, she was ready to go to the war."

John Gayther looked at the Daughter of the House steadfastly and wondered if the Almia of the story had cut off her beautiful hair. He was sure she had had an abundance of light silvery-golden hair which fluffed itself all about her head under her wide hat, and it would be a sort of shock to think of its being cut off. But he asked no questions; he did not want to interrupt too much.

"Almia knew by the papers," continued the Daughter of the House, "that a great battle was expected to take place not far from a town at some distance from her home; and she went to this town by rail, carrying only a small hand-bag in addition to the things she wore under her waterproof. She took lodgings at a hotel, and, after an early breakfast the next morning, she hired a cab to take her out to the battle-field. The cabman drove her several miles into the country, but when he heard the booming of the preliminary cannon with which the battle was then opening, he refused to go any farther, and she was obliged to get out at the corner of a lane and [44] the highroad. She paid the man his fare and gave him five dollars extra, and then she engaged him to call at that place for her at eight o'clock that evening. She was sure the battle would be over by that time, as it would be beginning to get dark. The cabman was sorry to leave her there to walk the rest of the way, but his horse was afraid of cannon, and he did not dare to go any farther.

"Almia took off her waterproof and left it in the cab, and the cabman was a good deal astonished when he saw her without it. He said he supposed she was a reporter and that the little cask was full of ink; he had driven lady reporters about before this. But Almia told him she was a nurse, and that he must not fail to call for her at the time appointed. Then he drove away; and she walked rapidly along the lane, which seemed to lead toward the battle-field. The lane soon began to curve, and she left it and walked across several fields. Soon she came to some outposts, where the sentries wanted to know where she was going. Of course the sentries behind an army are not as strict as those in front of it, and so when she informed them she was a nurse they told her how to get to the field-hospital, which was a mile or more away.

"But Almia did not intend to go to any hospital. She knew if she did she would immediately be put under orders; and now her blood was up, and she could stand no orders. She thought she perceived a faint smell of powder in the air. This made her feel wonderfully independent, and she strode onward with a light and fearless step. But when she came to a bosky copse which concealed her from the sentries, she [45]

turned away from the direction of the hospital, and pressed onward toward the point from which came the heaviest sound of cannon.

"Now you must understand, John Gayther," remarked the Daughter of the House, taking off her broad hat, that the breeze might more freely blow through the masses of her silvery-golden hair, "that when people who are really in earnest, especially people in fiction, go forth to find things they want, they generally find them. And if it is highly desirable that these things should be out of the common they are out of the common. A great deal of what happens in real life, and almost everything in literature, depends on this principle. You, of course, comprehend this, because you compose stories yourself."

"Oh, yes," said the gardener; "I comprehend it perfectly."

"I say all this on account of what is about to happen in this story, and also because I don't want you to make any objection in your mind on account of its not being exactly according to present usages. Almia was pushing steadily through the clump of bushes when she heard, not far away, the clash of arms. Greatly excited, she silently moved on, and peeping out from behind some foliage, she saw in a small open space in the woods two men engaged in single combat. How her heart did beat! She was frightened nearly to death. But she did not think of flight; her eyes were glued upon the fascinating spectacle before her. Often had she heard of two brave swordsmen fighting each other to the bitter end, and often had she dreamed of these noble contests; but her eyes were all unfamiliar with such inspiring sights. This truly was [46] war.

"The combatants were both moderately young men, athletic and active, one with brown hair and the other with black. They had thrown aside their coats and vests, and each wore a broad leathern belt. Fiercely and swiftly their long swords clashed. Sparks flew, and the ring of the steel sounded far into the woods; but there was none to hear save Almia only, and her soul tingled with admiration and terror as the bright blades flashed against the background of semi-gloom which pervaded the woods. She scarcely breathed. Her whole soul was in her eyes."

"I have seen it there before," thought John Gayther, but he said nothing.

"Now there was a tremendous onset from each swordsman, and the ground echoed beneath their rapid footfalls as they stamped around. Then there was a lunge and a sharp nerve-tingling scrape as one blade ran along the other; and then, without a groan, down fell one of these brave warriors flat upon his back upon the grass, the wild flowers, and bits of bark. Instantly the impulses of a woman flashed through every vein and nerve of that onlooking girl. Scarcely had the tall form of the soldier touched the sod when she became a nurse. Springing out from her leafy concealment, she knelt beside the vanquished form of the fallen man. The other soldier, who was about to rest himself by leaning on his sword, sprang back; it seemed as though there had suddenly appeared before him a being from another world."

"Where they wear bicycle-skirts," thought John Gayther.

"Every trace of enthusiastic excitement had passed away from Almia, who now had [47] something in this world to do, and who set about doing it without loss of a second. The man was only wounded, for he opened his eyes and said so, and drawing up his shirt-sleeve he showed Almia that the cut was in the lower part of his left arm. Instantly despatching the other soldier to a neighboring spring for water, she cleansed the wound, and, finding it was not very deep, she drew the edges of the cut together and held them in place with strips of adhesive plaster. When this had been done she wrapped the arm in several folds of bandage, and the man having risen to a sitting posture, she gave him a small draught of brandy from her cask.

"Almia now explained how she happened to appear upon the scene, and, addressing the wounded man, she said she hoped she could soon find some way of conveying him to a hospital. 'Hospital!' he cried, springing to his feet under the revivifying influence of the brandy. 'No hospital for me! I can walk as well as anybody. And now, sir,' he said, speaking to his former opponent, 'am I to consider myself vanquished, and am I to go with you as your prisoner?' The other regarded him without answering, and for the moment Almia, too, was lost in reflection."

At this point John Gayther, who had been in wars, began to wonder, even if soldiers in these days should engage in single combat with long swords, how one of them could be wounded in the left arm; but he did not interrupt the story.

"The first thing that shaped itself clearly in Almia's mind was the fear of being left alone in these woods. Now that she was so near the edge of the battle, there was no [48] knowing what she might meet with next. The soldier who had conquered now spoke. 'Yes, sir,' said he; 'you are my prisoner, and it is my duty to take you to my regiment and deliver you to my officers. I am sorry to do so, but such are the laws of war.' The other soldier bowed his head, simply remarking, 'Proceed; I will follow you.'"

"If I should take a prisoner," thought John Gayther, "I should make him walk in front of me."

"Then Almia stepped forward; she had made up her mind, and she was very resolute. 'Gentlemen,' said she, 'this cannot be. We are nearing the contending forces; there may be stragglers; and I do not wish to be left alone. You are both my prisoners.' The two soldiers looked at her in utter amazement. 'Yes,' said Almia, firmly; 'I mean what I say. I am, it is true, a nurse; but I am a bushwhacker nurse, perfectly independent, and free to act according to the dictates of my judgment. You are my prisoners; and if one of you attempts to escape it will be the duty of the other to assist in arresting his enemy. Do not smile; I am armed.' And with this she took from her pocket the pistol with the five barrels. The two soldiers stopped smiling. 'Yes,' continued Almia; 'I would not wish to do anything of the kind, but if either of you attempts to escape I will call upon him to halt, and if he does not do it I will fire upon his legs while the other soldier attacks him with his sword. You are enemies, and each one of you is bound by his soldiery oaths to prevent the escape of the other. I am absolutely impartial. If either of you should be wounded I would dress his wounds and nurse him carefully without asking to which side he belongs. But if either of you attempts [49] to escape I will, as I said, fire at his legs without asking to which side he belongs.'

"The soldier with the brown hair looked at the one with the black hair. 'If I should attempt to escape,' said he, 'would you assist this lady in restraining me?' 'I would,' answered the other. 'Then I would do the same by you,' said the first speaker. 'Miss, I am your prisoner.' 'And I also,' said the black-haired soldier."

"Well, well," said John Gayther, who had not cut a pea-stick for the last fifteen minutes; "I suppose you could not tell by their uniforms which one of them belonged to your side—I mean the young lady could not tell?"

"Almia had no side," replied the Daughter of the House, "and the soldiers wore no coats, for they had thrown them aside in the heat of the combat; and she purposely took no note whatever of their trousers. She was determined to be absolutely impartial. 'Now, then,' said Almia to her prisoners, 'I am going to get just as close to the battle as I can. I am delighted to have you with me, not only because you can remove wounded prisoners to shady places where I can nurse them, but because you will be a protection to me. Should an unruly soldier appear from either army he will always be met by an enemy and by me.'

"The three now pressed on, for there was no time to lose. The roar of the battle was increasing; reports of musketry as well as cannon rent the air, and the sharp whistling of rifle-balls could frequently be heard. Reaching a wood road, they followed this for some distance, Almia in advance, when suddenly they came upon a man sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree. He had a little blank-book in his hand, and [50] apparently he was making calculations in it with a lead-pencil. At the sound of approaching footsteps he rose to his feet, still holding the open book in his hand. He was a moderately tall man, a little round-shouldered, and about fifty years old. He wore a soldier's hat and coat, but his clothes were so covered with dust it was impossible to perceive to which army he belonged. He had a bushy beard, and that was also very dusty. He wore spectacles, and had a very pleasant smile, and looked from one to the other of the new-comers with much interest. 'I hope,' said he, speaking to the soldiers, 'that this young woman is not your prisoner.' 'No, sir,' said Almia, before the others had time to reply; 'they are my prisoners.' The dusty man looked at her in amazement. 'Yes,' said the man with the black hair; 'she speaks the truth. We are her prisoners.'

"Rapidly Almia explained the situation, and when she had finished, the stranger nodded his head three or four times, and put his blank-book in his pocket. 'Well, well, well,' said he, 'this is what might be expected from the tendency of the times! There are sixteen thousand two hundred and forty more women than men in this State, and many of them are single and have to do something. But a bushwhacker nurse! Truly I never thought of anything like that!'

"'And you?' asked Almia. 'I think it is right that you should give some account of yourself. I do not ask your name, nor do I wish to know which cause you have espoused. But as you appear to be a soldier I am curious to know how you happen to be sitting by the roadside making calculations.' 'I am a soldier,' answered the dusty [51] man, 'but, under the circumstances,'—regarding very closely the trousers of Almia's two companions,—'I am very glad you do not want to know to which side I belong. The facts of the case are these: I am an Exceptional Pedestrian. I am also a very earnest student of social aspects considered in their relation to topography. Yesterday, when my army halted at noon, I set out to make some investigations in connection with my favorite research, and when I returned, much later than I expected, my army had gone on, and I have not yet been able to come up to it, although I have walked a great many miles.'

"'I should say,' remarked the soldier with the black hair, 'that you are a deserter.' 'No,' replied the Exceptional Pedestrian, 'I did not desert my army; it deserted me. And now I wish to say that I have become very much interested in you all, and, if

there is no objection, I should like to join your company for the present.' 'I have no objection myself,' said Almia, 'but what do you say?' she asked, addressing the two soldiers. 'I am afraid, miss,' replied the man with the brown hair, who had recognized some peculiarities in the fashion of the stranger's dusty clothes, 'that if he attempted to leave us I would be obliged to shoot him as a deserter.' 'And I,' said the other, 'would be obliged to do the same thing, because he is my enemy.' 'Under these circumstances,' said the Exceptional Pedestrian, 'I beg to insist that I be allowed to attach myself to your party.'

"Almia felt she had reason to be proud. Here were three military men who were in her power, and who could not get away from her. They were like three mice tied [52] together by the tails, each pulling in a different direction and all remaining in the place where they had been dropped.

"The party now pushed forward toward the battle's edge. 'If glory is your object,' said the Exceptional Pedestrian to Almia, 'it would have been better if you had joined a regular corps of nurses. Then any meritorious action on your part would have been noted and reported to the authorities, and your good conduct would have been recognized. But now you can expect nothing of the kind.' 'I did not come for the sake of glory,' said Almia, flushing slightly; 'I came to succor the suffering, and to do it without trammels.'

"'Trammels are often very desirable,' said he; 'they enable us to proceed to a greater distance along the path of duty than we would be apt to go if we could wander as we please from side to side.'

"Almia was about to reply somewhat sharply to this remark when, suddenly, they heard a sound which made their nerves tingle. It was the clang of sabres and the thunder of countless hoofs. They were in a mass of tangled underbrush, and they peeped out into a wide roadway and beheld the approach of a regiment of cavalry. On came this tidal wave of noble horsemen; it reached the spot where Almia's burning eyes glowed through the crevices of the foliage. Wildly galloping, cavalryman after cavalryman passed her by. The eyes of the horses flashed fire, and their nostrils were widely distended as if they smelt the battle from afar. Their powerful necks were curved; their hoofs spurned the echoing earth; and their riders, with flashing blades waved high above their heads, shouted aloud their battle-cry, while their tall plumes floated madly in the surging air. And, above the thunder of the [53] hoofs, and the clinking and the clanking of the bits and chains, and the creaking of their leathern saddles, rose high the clarion voice of their leader, urging them on to victory or to death.

"Almia had never been so excited in her life; she could scarcely breathe. This was the grandeur of glorious war! Oh, how willingly would she have mounted a fleet steed and have followed those valiant horsemen as they thundered away into the distance!"

John Gayther had seen many a body of cavalry on the march, but he had never beheld anything like this.

"After her excitement Almia felt somewhat weak; she needed food; and when they had crossed the roadway they stopped to rest under the shade of a spreading oak. Unfortunately the soldiers had brought no rations with them, and Almia had only some Albert biscuit, which she did not wish to eat because she had brought them to relieve the faintness of some wounded soldier. 'If you will permit us,' said the soldier with the black hair, 'we two will go out and forage. Each of us will see to it that the other returns.'

"While they were gone the Exceptional Pedestrian conversed with Almia. 'During my investigations of the social aspects of this region,' he said, 'I put many miles between myself and the army to which I belong, but by closely adhering to certain geological and topographical principles I knew I should eventually find it. In fact, when you met with me I was making some final calculations which would not fail to show me where I should find my comrades. There is no better way to discover the position of an army than by observing the inclination of the geological strata. In this section, for instance, [54] the general trend of the beds of limestone and quartz indicates the direction of the running streams, and these naturally flow into the valleys and plains, and the land, being well watered, is more fertile; consequently it was soonest cleared by the settlers, while the higher ground surrounding it is still encumbered by timber growth. An army naturally desires open ground for its operations, for large bodies of cavalry and artillery cannot deploy to advantage through wooded districts. Therefore, if we follow this roadway, which, as you see, slightly descends to the northeast, we shall soon come within sight of the opposing forces.'

"'But,' said Almia, 'the roar of the battle comes over from that way, which must be the northwest.'

"'That may be,' said the Exceptional Pedestrian, 'but the principle remains.'

"The two soldiers now returned, bearing two large apple-pies resting upon two palm-leaf fans. 'These were all we could procure,' said the brown-haired soldier, 'and the

woman would not sell her plates.' The pies were rapidly divided into quarters, and the hungry party began to eat. 'It is true,' said the Exceptional Pedestrian, 'that the character of the apple indicates the elevation above sea-level of the soil in which it grew. The people who grew these apples would have done much better if they had devoted themselves to the cultivation of the huckleberry. These they could have sold, and then have bought much better apples grown in the plains. I also notice that the flour of which this pastry is made was ground from the wheat of this region, which is always largely mixed with cockle. If the people would give up growing wheat for [55] three or four years, cockle would probably disappear, and they would then have flour of a much higher grade.' Almia and the two soldiers could not help smiling when they perceived that while the Exceptional Pedestrian was making these criticisms he ate three quarters of a pie, which was more than his share.

"When the pies had been consumed the little party pressed forward, but not to the northeast, for the two soldiers insisted that the battle raged in the northwest, and they would not go in any other direction, although the Exceptional Pedestrian endeavored to overwhelm them with arguments to prove that he was right. The din of the battle, however, soon proved that he was wrong. Penetrating an extensive thicket, they reached its outer edge, and there gazed upon a far-stretching battle-field.

"Now this would be the place," said the Daughter of the House, "for a fine description, not only of the battle-field, but of the battle which was raging upon it; and, if I ever write this story, I shall tell how one army was posted on one side of a wide valley, while the other army was posted on the other, and how regiments and battalions and detachments from each side came down into the beautiful plain and fought and fired and struggled until the grass was stained with blood; and how the cannon roared from the hills and mowed down whole battalions of infantry below; how brave soldiers fell on every side, wounded and dead, while men with stretchers hurried to carry them away from beneath the hoofs of the charging cavalry. I would tell how the carnage increased every moment; how the yells of fury grew louder; and [56] how the roar of the cannon became more and more terrible.

"But all I can say now is that it was a spectacle to freeze the blood. Poor Almia could scarcely retain consciousness as she gazed upon the awful scenes of woe and suffering which spread out beneath her. And she could do nothing! Her labors would be useful only in cases of isolated woundings. If she were to mingle in the fray she would perish in the general slaughter; and if she were to go and offer assistance in the hospitals she would find herself but as a drop in the bucket, her efforts unrecognized, even if she were not driven away as an interloper. Besides, she did not know where the hospitals were.

"As she gazed upon this scene of horror she perceived an officer, mounted upon a noble charger and followed by several horsemen, take a position upon a hillock not far from the spot where she and her companions were concealed. From this point of vantage the officer, who was evidently a general, could perceive the whole battle-field."

"And get himself picked off by a sharp-shooter," thought John Gayther, but he did not interrupt.

"The brown-haired soldier trembled with emotion, and whispered to Almia, 'That is my Commander-in-Chief.' Even without this information Almia would have known that the stalwart figure upon the pawing steed was an officer in high command; for, after speaking a few words to one of his companions, the latter galloped away into the valley toward the right, and very soon the battle raged more fiercely in that direction, and the booming of the cannon and the cracking of the rifles was more continuous. Then another officer was sent galloping to the left, and in this direction, [57] too, the battle grew fiercer and the carnage increased. Courier after courier was sent away, here and there, until, at last, the commander remained with but one faithful adherent. Since his arrival upon the hillock the horrors of the bloody contest had doubled, and Almia could scarcely endure to look into the valley.

"'Is there no way,' she said in a gasping whisper, 'of stopping this? These two armies are like hordes of demons! Humanity should not permit it!'

"'Humanity has nothing to do with it,' said the Exceptional Pedestrian. 'A declaration of war eliminates humanity as a social factor. Such is the usage of nations.'

"'I don't care for the usage of nations,' said Almia. 'It is vile!'

"Now something very important happened in the battle-field. The Commander-in-Chief rose in his stirrups and peered afar. Then, suddenly turning, he sent his only remaining follower with clattering hoofs to carry a message. 'He is making it worse!' declared Almia. 'Now more brave men will fall; more blood will flow.'

"'Of course,' said the Exceptional Pedestrian. 'He gives no thought to the falling of brave men or the flowing of blood. Upon his commands depends the fate of the battle!'

"'And without his commands?' asked Almia, trembling in every fibre.

"The Exceptional Pedestrian shrugged his shoulders and slightly smiled. 'Without them,' he said, 'there would soon be an end to the battle. He is the soul, the directing [58] spirit, of his army. Unless he directs, the contest cannot be carried on.'

"Almia sprang to her feet, not caring whether she was seen or not. She looked over the battle-field, and her heart was sick within her. Not only did she see the carnage which desecrated the beautiful plain, but she saw, far, far away, the mothers and sisters of those who were dead, dying, and wounded; she saw the whiteness of their faces when their feverish eyes should scan the list of dead and wounded; she saw them groan and fall senseless when they read the names of loved ones. She could bear no more.

"Suddenly she turned. 'Gentlemen,' she said, 'follow me.' And without another word she stepped out into the open field and walked rapidly toward the Commander-in-Chief, whose eyes were fixed so steadfastly on the battle that he did not notice her approach. The three soldiers gazed at her in amazement, and then they followed her. They could not understand her mad action, but they could not desert her.

"Almia stopped at the horse's head. With her left hand she seized his bridle, and in a clear, loud voice she exclaimed, 'Commander-in-Chief, you are my prisoner!' There was no trembling, no nervousness now; body and soul, she was as hard as steel. The general looked down upon her in petrified bewilderment. He gazed at the three soldiers, and again looked down at her. 'Girl!' he thundered, 'what do you mean? Let go my horse!' As he said these words he gave his bridle a jerk; but the noble steed paid no attention to his master. He was not afraid of girls. In former days he had learned to like them; to him a girl meant sugar and savory clover-tops. He bent his [59] head toward Almia, and instantly her hand was in her pocket and she drew forth an Albert biscuit. The horse, which had not tasted food since morning, eagerly took it from her hand, and crunched it in delight.

"The Commander-in-Chief now became furious, and his hand sought the hilt of his sword. If Almia had been a man he would have cut her down. 'Girl!' he cried, 'what do you mean? Are you insane? You men, remove her instantly.'

"Then Almia spoke up bravely, never loosening her hold upon the bridle of the horse. 'I am not insane,' she said. 'I am a nurse, but not a common one; I am a bushwhacker nurse, and that means I am entirely independent. These men are under my control. They are from the opposing armies, and compel each other to obey my commands. I have determined to stop this blood and slaughter. If you do not quietly surrender to me I will fire at one of your legs, and call upon the soldier who is your enemy to attack you with his sword. His duty to his country will compel him to do so.'

"The general, who was now so infuriated he could not speak, jerked savagely at the reins; but Almia had just given the noble animal another biscuit, and his nose was seeking the pocket from which it came. The horse was conquered!

"At this moment a rifle-ball shrieked wildly overhead. The enemy had perceived the little party upon the hillock. The three soldiers, who stood a little below, shouted to Almia to come down or she would be killed. She instantly obeyed this warning, but she did not release her hold upon the general's bridle. She started down the hillock [60] away from the battle, and the horse, who willingly subjected himself to her guidance, trotted beside her. The general did not attempt to restrain him, for he had been startled by the rifle-shots.

"A little below the edge of the hill Almia stopped, and, turning toward the Commander-in-Chief, she said, 'You might as well surrender. I do not wish to injure you, but if you compel me to do so, I must.' And with this she drew the pistol from her pocket.

"'Is that thing loaded?' exclaimed the general.

"'It is,' answered Almia, 'and with five balls.'

"'Please put it back in your pocket,' said the officer, who, for the first time during the terrible battle, showed signs of fear. 'A girl with a pistol,' said he, 'makes me shudder. Why do you stand there?' he shouted to the three men. 'Come here and take her away.'

"But they did not obey, and the black-haired soldier stepped forward. 'You are my enemy, sir,' he said, 'and I am bound to assist in your capture if I can. There are two of your own men here, but only one of them is armed.'

"As he spoke these words a great shell struck the top of the hillock and blew the earth and little stones in every direction. Without a word the whole party retired rapidly to an open space behind a large overhanging rock. The general was very much disturbed. The enemy must be getting nearer. He almost forgot Almia.

"'Look here,' he cried to the brown-haired soldier; 'creep back to the top of the

hillock and tell me how the battle goes.' With furrowed brows he waited, while Almia [61]
fed his horse. The brown-haired soldier came quickly back. 'Tell me,' cried the general, without waiting for the other to speak, 'has my cavalry made its grand charge, and cut off the approach of the left wing of the enemy?'

"'No, sir,' replied the soldier, touching his cap; 'it did not charge in time, and it is now all mixed up with the artillery, which is rapidly retiring.'

"'What!' cried the general, 'retiring?'

"'Yes, sir,' said the soldier; 'I am sorry to say that our whole army is retreating, pell-mell, as fast as it can go. The enemy is in active pursuit, and its left wing is now advancing up this side of the valley. In less than twenty minutes the retreat of our cavalry and artillery will be cut off by the hills, and the infantry is already scattering itself far and wide.'

"'I must go!' shouted the general, drawing his sword from its scabbard. 'I must rally my forces! I must—'

"'No, general,' said the brown-haired soldier; 'that is impossible. If you were now to attempt to approach our army you would throw yourself into the ranks of the enemy.'

"The Commander-in-Chief dropped the bridle from his listless hands, and bowed his head. 'Lost!' he murmured. 'Lost! And this was the decisive battle of the war! If I had been able to order my cavalry to charge, the enemy's left wing would have been cut from their main body. But for you,' he continued, fixing his eyes upon Almia with a look of unutterable sadness, 'I should have done it. You have caused me to lose this battle.'

"Almia drew herself up, her heart swelling with emotion. This was the proudest moment of her life—prouder by far than she had ever expected any moment of her [62]
existence to be. 'Yes,' she said; 'that is what I did. And if this was the decisive battle of the war, then will follow peace; blood will cease to flow, widows and orphans will cease to suffer, and men who have been fighting one another like tigers without really understanding why they sought one another's lives will again meet as friends.'

"'There is a great deal of sense in what you say,' exclaimed the Exceptional Pedestrian. 'I admit I am a soldier, but I do not approve of war. The statistics of social aspects prove—'

"He was interrupted by the brown-haired soldier, who remarked: 'It would be well for us to retire, for doubtless the enemy will soon occupy the ridge.'

"The general took no notice; apparently he was lost in thought.

"'Excuse me, sir,' said the brown-haired man, 'but you must seek a place of safety.'

"The general raised his head. 'Is there a road to the west?' he asked. 'I must take a roundabout way, and join my army, and share its fortunes, whatever they may be.'

"'Yes, sir,' said the Exceptional Pedestrian; 'if you skirt these woods, and follow the upward trend of the limestone- and quartz-beds, and then keep along the crest of the mountain for about eight miles, you will come to the village of Kirksville, where our retreating army will no doubt halt for the night.'

"The general said no more. He turned his horse, whose bridle Almia had now released, and, casting another look of sadness upon the erect form of the bushwhacker nurse, he sped away.

"I will not say anything more of the general, except that after following for half an [63]
hour the directions given to him by the Exceptional Pedestrian, he rode at full speed into the ranks of the enemy, and was obliged to surrender. No evil happened to him, however, for the war was soon ended, and he was released.

"'Now,' said the Exceptional Pedestrian, who was in no way a traitor, but only a person accustomed to making mistakes, 'the day is drawing to a close, and we must hurry away.'

"No one objected, and the three soldiers accompanied Almia back over the way she had taken when she walked to the battle-field. A little after eight o'clock they arrived at the main road, and there Almia found her cab waiting for her.

"'I will probably not see you again,' said the Exceptional Pedestrian, shaking her very cordially by the hand; 'for as the war is now practically over, and my regiment probably scattered, I shall go West. There are many features of our social aspects out there which I wish to study. But before I leave you, miss, I wish to thank you for having made yourself so highly instrumental in bringing this terrible and inhuman war to a close.'

"'Good-by,' said Almia. 'But I think it may be said that it was an Albert biscuit which gave us peace. If that horse had not been used to being fed by girls, my efforts might have come to nothing.'

"When the two younger soldiers bade good-by to Almia they did not say much, but it seemed to her they felt a good deal. At any rate, she knew she felt a good deal. She had known them but a little while, but they had come into her life in such a strange [64] way; for a time she had ruled their destinies, and they had been so good to her! They had stood by her, regardless of everything but her wishes; and then, they were both so handsome, such gallant soldiers. She took their hands, she gazed into their honest faces, a few words of farewell were spoken, and then they helped her into the cab, the door was shut, and she drove away.

"As she turned and looked out of the little window in the back of the cab she saw one of them gazing after her; but the dusk of the evening had come on so rapidly she could not be certain which one of them it was. At a turn in the road she sank into her seat. She was tired; she was faint; and, instinctively thrusting her hand into her pocket, she found there one Albert biscuit which had been left. She drew it out, but when she looked at it, it seemed to her as though it would be a sacrilege to eat it; its companions had done so much for humanity. But she did eat it, and felt stronger.

"For the rest of the drive she sat and wondered and wondered which it was who had looked back, the brown-haired soldier or the black-haired one. Then she tried to think which she would like it to be, but she could not make up her mind.

"Before parting with the soldiers Almia had exchanged cards with them, and they had assured her they would let her know how fortune should treat them. Day after day she watched and waited for the letter-carrier; but a fortnight passed, and he brought her nothing—at least, nothing she cared for.

"At last a letter came. It was from one of the soldiers; she knew that by the address [65] and its general appearance, but of course she did not know the handwriting. She held it in her hand and gazed upon it, and her heart beat fast as she asked herself the question, 'Which one has written first?'

"Presently she opened it. It was from the brown-haired soldier. Her face flushed and her heart said to her, 'This is right; this is what you hoped for.' Then she read the letter, which was long. It told of many things; and, among others, it informed Almia how grateful were the writer's wife and two little girls for the kindness she had shown the husband and father. She had dressed his wounds; she had saved him from being made a prisoner. For the rest of their lives they would never forget her.

"The letter dropped from Almia's hand; she had received a shock, and for a time she could not recover from it. She sat still, looking out into the nothingness of the distant sky. Then her face flushed again, and her heart told her it had made a mistake. She was well pleased that this was the one who had written that he was married.

"Hour after hour and day after day Almia became more and more convinced that she was right. It was the black-haired soldier on whom her thoughts were constantly fixed. And no wonder. In the first place, he was the better soldier of the two. She hated war; but, if men must fight, it is glorious to conquer, and she had seen his quick and practised blade lay low his enemy. The thought of his power made her heart swell. Moreover, he had stood by her in the moment of greatest peril; he it was who had said to the Commander-in-Chief, armed and mounted though he was, that [66] he would attack him if her commands were not obeyed. Then, too, he was a little taller than the other, and handsomer; his chest was broad, he stood erect.

"Day after day she watched and waited, but no letter came. At last, however, there was a ring at the bell, and the black-haired soldier was announced. By a supreme effort Almia controlled herself; she bade her heart be still, and she went down to meet him. She was dressed in white; there were flowers in her hair and in her belt. She could not help wondering what he would think of the difference between her and the girl he had known as a bushwhacker nurse.

"When her eyes fell upon him and their hands met she was the one who had the right to be the more amazed. She had thought him handsome before; he was glorious now. Arrayed in fashionable, well-fitting clothes, wearing only a mustache, and with his hair properly cut, he was a vision of manly beauty. Instantly, without any volition on her part, her heart went out to him; she knew that it belonged to him.

"For twenty minutes, perhaps a little longer, Almia sat with the man she loved; and as she listened to him, saying but little herself, colder and colder grew the heart she had given him. Soon she discovered that he looked upon her as a young lady in whom he took an interest on account of the adventures they had had together, but still as a chance acquaintance. He had come to see her because he had happened to be in the town in which she lived. When he went away she did not ask him to come again, and it was plain that he did not expect such an invitation. The few remarks he made about his future plans precluded the supposition that they might meet again. He was [67] pleasant, he was polite, he was even kind; but when he departed he left her with a heart of stone. There was now nothing in the world for which she cared to live. She despised herself for such a feeling, but existence was a blank. She had loved; perhaps, unwittingly, she had shown her love; and now by day and by night she

moaned and mourned that the bushwhacker nurse had ever met the two brave soldiers with their glittering swords—that she had not passed them by and gone out into the battle-field to be laid low by some chance bullet."

For some little time the Daughter of the House had been speaking in a voice which grew lower and lower, and now she stopped. There were tears in her eyes, brought there by the story she herself was telling. John Gayther dropped his pea-stick and leaned forward.

"Now miss," said he, "I really think your story is not quite right. You must have forgotten something—a good many things. Think it over, and I am sure you will agree with me that that is not the true ending."

She looked at him in surprise. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean this," replied the gardener. "If you will put your mind to it, and seriously consider the whole situation, I believe you will see, just as well as I do, that it really turned out very differently from the way you have just told it. That black-haired soldier did not go away in twenty minutes. It must have been somebody else at some other time who went away so soon. It would have been simply impossible for him to [68] have done it. The longer he sat and looked at Miss Almia, the more he gazed into her beautiful eyes, the more fervently he must have thought that if it depended upon him he would never leave her, never, never again. And she, as she gazed into his handsome features, thrilling with the emotion he could not hide, must have known what was passing in his heart. It did not even need the words he soon spoke to make her understand she was the one thing in the world he loved, and that, in spite of sickness and obstacles of all sorts, he had come that day to tell her so. And when they had sat together for hours, and at last he was obliged to go, and they stood together, his impassioned eyes looking down into her orbs of heavenly blue, you know what must have happened, miss, now, don't you, really? And isn't this the true, true end of the story?"

The eyes of the Daughter of the House were sparkling; a little flush had come upon her cheeks, and a smile upon her lips.

"I do really believe that is the true ending, John," said she; "but how did you ever come to know so much about such things?"

"I can't tell you that, miss," said the gardener; "but sometimes I notice things I cannot see, as when I look upon a flower bud not yet open and know exactly what is inside of it."

With the smile still on her lips and the flush still on her cheeks, the Daughter of the House walked away through the garden. She had determined to make her story end sadly, but John Gayther had known her heart better than she knew it herself.

THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

JOHN GAYTHER

AND IS CALLED

THE LADY IN THE BOX

III [71]
THE LADY IN THE BOX

John Gayther was busy putting the finishing touches to a bed in which he intended to sow his latest planting of bush-beans, or string-beans, or snaps, as they are called in different parts of the country. These were very choice seeds which had been sent to him by a friend abroad, and, consequently, John wanted to get them into the ground as soon as possible. But when he saw entering the garden not only the Daughter of the House but also her mother, the Mistress of the House, a sudden conviction shot through him that there would be no beans planted that morning.

The elder of these two ladies was not very elderly, and she was handsomer than her daughter. She was pleasant to look upon and pleasant to talk to, but she had a mind of her own; John Gayther had found that out long before. She was very fond of flowers, and there were many beds of them which were planted and treated according to her directions and fancies. These beds did not, in fact, form part of the gardener's garden; they belonged to her, and nobody else had anything to say about them. Many things grew there which were not often found in gardens: weeds, for [72] instance, from foreign countries, and some from near-by regions, which the Mistress of the House thought might be made to grow into comely blossoms if they were given the chance. Here she picked and planted, and put in and pulled out, according to her own will; and her pulling out was often done after a fashion which would have discouraged any other gardener but John Gayther, who had long since learned that the Mistress of the House knew what she wanted, and that it would be entirely useless for him to trouble himself about her methods.

The gardener was not altogether happy when he saw these two ladies coming toward him. He felt sure that they were coming for a story, for when the elder lady came to the garden it was not her habit to bring her daughter with her; and neither of them was likely, on ordinary occasions, to walk along in a straightforward way, loitering neither here nor there. Their manner and their pace denoted a purpose.

John Gayther had never dug into a garden-bed as earnestly and anxiously as he now dug into his mind. These ladies were coming for a story. The younger one had doubtless told her mother that there had been stories told in the garden, and now another one was wanted, and it was more than likely that he was expected to tell it. But he did not feel at all easy about telling a story to the Mistress of the House. He knew her so well, and the habits of her mind, that he was fully assured if his fancies should blossom too luxuriantly she would ruthlessly pull them up and throw them on the path. Still he believed she would like fancies, and highly colored ones; but he must be very careful about them. They must be harmonious; they must not interfere [73] with each other; they might be rare and wonderful, but he must not give them long Latin names which meant nothing.

One thing which troubled him was the difficulty of using the first person when telling a story to the Mistress of the House. He could tell his stories best in that fashion, but he did not believe that this hearer would be satisfied with them; she would not be likely to give them enough belief to make them interesting. He had a story all ready to tell to the Daughter of the House, for he had been sure she would want one some day soon, and this one, told in a manner which would please him, he thought would please her; but it was very different with her mother. He must be careful.

When the two ladies came to the bed where the beans were to be planted, the gardener found that he had not mistaken their errand.

"John," said the Mistress of the House, "I hear you tell a very good story, and I want you to tell me one. Let us find a shady place."

There was a pretty summer-house on the upper terrace, a shady place where the air was cool and the view was fine; and there they went: but there was no need of John Gayther's making any pretence of trimming up pea-sticks this time.

"I have a story," said he, his stool at a respectful distance from the two ladies, who were seated on a bench outside the little house.

"Is it about yourself?" asked the Daughter of the House.

"No, miss, not this time," he answered.

"I am sorry for that," she said, "for I like to think of people doing the things they tell [74] about. But I suppose we can't have that every time."

"Oh, no," said her mother; "and if John has an interesting story about anybody else, let him tell it."

The gardener began promptly. "The name of this story is 'The Lady in the Box,'" said he, "and, with the exception of the lady, the principal personage in it was a young man who lived in Florence toward the end of the last century."

"And how did you come to know the story?" asked the Daughter of the House. "Has it ever been told before?"

Now there was need to assert himself, if John Gayther did not wish to lose grace with his hearers, and he was equal to the occasion. "It has never been printed," said he, quietly but boldly. "It came to me in the most straightforward way, step by step."

"Very good," said the Mistress of the House; "I like a story to come in that way."

"The young man, whose name was Jaqui," continued John Gayther, "was of good parts, but not in very good circumstances. He was a student of medicine, and was the assistant of a doctor, which means that he did all the hard work, such as attending to

the shop, mixing the drugs, and even going out to see very poor patients in bad weather. Jaqui's employer—master, in fact—was Dr. Torquino, an elderly man of much reputation in his town. The doctor expected Jaqui to be his successor, and as the years went on the younger man began to visit patients in good circumstances who fell sick in fine weather. At last Dr. Torquino made a bargain with Jaqui by which the latter was to pay certain sums of money to the old man's heirs, and then the [75] stock and good-will of the establishment were formally made over to him; and, shortly afterwards, the old doctor died. But before his death he told Jaqui everything that it was necessary for him to know in regard to the property and the business to which he had succeeded.

The gardener began promptly.

"Torquino's house was a very good one, consisting of three floors. On the ground floor were the shop, the private office, and the living-rooms. The old doctor and Jaqui lodged on the third floor. The second floor was very handsomely furnished, but was not then occupied—at least, not in the ordinary way. It belonged to Dr. Paltravi, the old doctor's former partner; a somewhat younger man, and married. He had been greatly attached to his wife, and had furnished these rooms to suit her fancy. He was a scientific man, and much more devoted to making curious experiments than he was to the ordinary practice of medicine and surgery. In a small room on this floor, at the very back of the house, was Donna Paltravi, in a box."

"Was she dead?" exclaimed the Daughter of the House.

"It was believed by Dr. Torquino that she was not, but he could not be sure of it."

"And her husband?" asked the elder lady. "Was he dead?"

"No," replied the gardener; "at least, there was no reason to suppose so. About forty years before the time of this story he had left Florence, and this was the way of it: Donna Paltravi was a young and handsome woman, but her health was not as satisfactory as it might have been, for she had a tendency to fall into swoons, and to [76] remain in them, sometimes for many hours, coming out of a trance as lively as before she went into it. Now this disposition had a powerful effect upon her husband, and he studied her very closely, with an interest which almost devoured the other powers of his mind. He experimented upon her, and became so expert that he not only could bring her out of her trances whenever he chose, but he could keep her in them; and this he did, sometimes as long as a week, in order to prove to himself that he could do it."

"Shame upon him!" exclaimed the Daughter of the House.

"Never mind," said her mother; "let John go on."

"Well," continued the gardener, "the old doctor told Jaqui a great many things about Paltravi and his wife, and how she came to be at that time in the box. Paltravi had conceived a great scheme, one which he had believed might have immense influence on the happiness of the world. He determined that when his wife next went into a trance he would try to keep her so for fifty years, and then revive her, in the midst of her youth and beauty, to enjoy the world as she should find it."

"There was nothing new about that," said the Mistress of the House. "That is a very old story, and the thing has been written about again and again and again."

"That is very true, madam," answered John Gayther, "and Dr. Paltravi had heard many such stories, but most of them were founded upon traditions and myths and the vaguest kind of hearsay, and some were no more than the fancies of story-tellers. But the doctor wanted to work on solid and substantial ground, and he believed that his [77] wife's exceptional opportunities should not be sacrificed."

"Sacrificed!" exclaimed the Daughter of the House. "I like that!"

"Of course I will not attempt to explain the doctor's motives, or try to excuse him," said the gardener. "I can only tell what he did. He protracted one of his wife's trances, and when it had continued for a month he determined to keep it up for half a century, if it could be done; and he went earnestly to work for the purpose. The old doctor had not altogether approved of his partner's action, but I don't believe he disapproved very much, for he also possessed a good deal of the spirit of scientific investigation. When everything had been arranged, and the lady had been placed in a large and handsome box which had been designed with great care by her husband and constructed under his careful supervision, she was carried into the little room which had been her boudoir; and there her husband watched and guarded her for nearly a year. In all that time there was not the slightest change in her so far as mortal eye could see, but there came a change over her husband. He grew uneasy and restless, and could not sleep at night; and, at last, he told Dr. Torquino he would have to go away; he could not stay any longer and see his beautiful wife lying motionless before him. The desire to revive her had become so great he found it impossible to withstand it, and therefore, in the interest of science and for the advantage of the world, he must put it out of his power to interfere with the success of his own great experiment.

"He wrote down on parchment everything that was necessary for the person to know [78] who had charge of this great treasure, and he made Dr. Torquino swear to guard and to protect Donna Paltravi for forty-nine years, if he should live so long, and, if he did not, that he would deliver his charge into the hands of some worthy and reliable person. If, at the end of the lady's half-century of inanimation, Paltravi should not make his appearance, on account of having died, (for nothing else would keep him away), then the person in charge of the lady was to animate her in the manner which was fully and minutely described on the parchment. Paltravi then departed, and since that time nothing had been heard of him.

"When Jaqui came into possession of Dr. Torquino's house, he felt he owned the contents of only two floors, and that the second floor, especially the little room in the rear, was a great responsibility which he did not desire at all, and of which he would have rid himself if Dr. Torquino had not made him swear that he would guard it sacredly for the ten years which still remained of the intended period of inanimation.

"He had seen the lady in the box, for the old doctor had taken him into her room, and they had removed the top of the box and had looked at her through the great plate of glass which covered her. She was very beautiful and richly dressed, and seemed as if she were merely asleep. But, in spite of her beauty and the interest which attached to her, he wished very much somebody else had her to take care of. Such thoughts, however, were of no use; she went with the business and the property, and he had nothing to say about it.

"Jaqui did not have a very good time after the old doctor's death," continued John [79] Gayther. "It was not even as good as he had expected it to be. For nearly fifteen years he had been living in that house with Dr. Torquino, and in all that time the lady in the box had never troubled him; but now she did trouble him. Various legal persons came to attend to the transfer of the property, and, although they found everything all straight and right so far as the old doctor's possessions were concerned, they were not so well satisfied in regard to the contents of the second floor, some of them thinking the government should have something to say in regard to the property of a man who had been away for forty years; but as Paltravi had made Torquino his heir when he left Florence, and Jaqui had the papers to show, this matter was settled. But, for all that, Jaqui was troubled, and it was about the box of the lady. It was such a peculiar-looking box that several questions were asked as to its contents; and when Jaqui boldly asserted that it contained anatomical preparations, he was asked why it happened to be in that handsome little room. But by the help of money and his generally good reputation Jaqui got rid of the legal people.

"But after this he had to face the neighbors. These heard of the box, and it revived memories, in the minds of some of the elders, of strange stories about Dr. Paltravi. His wife had died several times, according to some of them, and she had at last been carried to her native town in Lombardy for burial. But nobody knew the name of that town, and there were one or two persons who said she never had been buried, but that her husband had preserved her skeleton, and had had it gilded, he was so very fond of her. Jaqui had a good deal of trouble with these people, who had never dared [80] to trouble old Dr. Torquino with their idle curiosity, for he was a man with a high temper and would stand no meddling.

"But when the neighbors had ceased to talk, at least to him, there came a third class of troublers, worse than either of the others. These were some scientific people who long ago had heard of the experiment Dr. Paltravi had been making with his wife. Several of these wrote to Jaqui, and two of them came to see him. These insisted on looking at the lady in the box, and Jaqui was obliged to show her. The two scientists were very much interested—extremely so; but they did not in the least believe the lady was alive. They considered the beautiful figure the most admirable specimen of the preservation of the human body after death that they had ever seen, and that Paltravi was entitled to the greatest credit for the success of his experiment. They were anxious to be informed of the methods by which this wonderful result had been obtained. But this, Jaqui firmly informed them, was now his secret and his property, and he would not divulge it. The scientists acknowledged the justice of this position, and did not urge their point; but each of them, when he went away, resolved that in the course of a few years he would come back, and if the body of the lady was still in good preservation, he would buy it if he could. Jaqui might be poor by that time, or dead.

"Jaqui now thought his troubles were over; but he was mistaken. A new persecutor appeared, who belonged to a fourth class, fortunately not a very large one. This person was a young man who was not only a fool but a poet."

"Unfortunate creature!" exclaimed the Mistress of the House. [81]

"I don't know, madam," said John Gayther. "He was very happy. It was the people with whom he associated in this world who were unfortunate. This young man, whose name was Florino, lived in Milan, and it would have been much better for Jaqui if he had lived in Patagonia. By great bad luck he had overheard one of the scientists who had visited Jaqui talking about what he had seen at his house, and the poet instantly became greatly interested in the story. He plied the learned man with all manner of questions, and very soon made up his mind that he would go to Florence to see the lady in the box. He believed she would make a most admirable subject for a poem from his pen.

"When Florino presented himself to Jaqui he came as the general of an army who settles down before a town to invest it and capture it, if he shall live long enough. At first Jaqui tried to turn him away in the usual manner; but the poet was not to be turned away. He had no feelings which could be hurt, and Jaqui was afraid to hurt his body on account of the police. The young man begged, he argued, he insisted, he persisted. All he wanted was to see, just once, the face of the beautiful lady who had been so wonderfully preserved. He visited the unfortunate Jaqui by day and by night; and at last, when Florino solemnly promised that if he should be given one opportunity of seeing the lady he would go away and never trouble Dr. Jaqui any more, the latter concluded that to agree to this proposition would be the best way to get rid of the youth, and so consented to allow him to gaze upon the face which forty years before had been animated by the soul of Donna Paltravi. [82]

"When the upper part of the lid of the box had been removed and the face of the lady appeared under the plate of glass, the soul of the young poet who tremblingly bent over it was filled with rapturous delight. Never in his life had he seen anything so beautiful, and, more than this, he declared he had never dreamed of features so lovely. For a time it interested Jaqui to listen to the rhapsodies and observe the exaltation of the fool-poet, but he soon had enough of this amorous insanity, and prepared to close the box. Then Florino burst into wild entreaties—only ten minutes more, five minutes, three minutes, anything! So it went on until the poet had been feasting his eyes on the lady for nearly half an hour. Then Jaqui forcibly put him out of the room, closed the box, and locked the door.

"Florino had no more idea of keeping his word than he had of becoming a blacksmith. He persecuted Jaqui more than he had before, and when his solicitations to see the lady again were refused he went so far as to attempt to climb up to her window. Of course Jaqui could have called in the aid of the police, but it would have made it very unpleasant for him to bring the whole affair into court, and Florino knew this as well as he did. After a short time the poet tried a new line of tactics, and endeavored to persuade Jaqui that it was his duty to revive the lady; when this idea once got well into the head of the young man he became a worse lunatic than before. Jaqui attempted to reason with him; but Florino would listen to nothing he had to say, and went on being a fool, and a poet, and a lover, at the same time; and Jaqui began to be [83]

afraid that some day he would get into the room by foul means, break open the box, seize upon the sealed parchment which lay under the lid, and try to revive the lady himself.

"It is quite possible this might have happened had not something very unexpected occurred. Dr. Paltravi came back to his old home. Jaqui recognized him immediately from the description which Torquino had given of him. He was now nearly seventy years old, but he was in good health and vigor; his tall form was still upright, and the dark eyes, which the old doctor had particularly described, were as bright and as piercing as ever they had been.

"He told Jaqui he had hoped to postpone the revival of his wife until the expiration of the fifty years, but that of late his resolution had been weakening. It had become very hard for him to think he must wait ten years more before he came back to his home and his wife. Science was a great thing, but the love of a man for a woman such as he loved was still greater; and when he heard of the death of Dr. Torquino he had instantly made up his mind he would not leave his wife in the custody of any one but his old friend and partner. So here he was, fully resolved to lose no time in reviving his wife and in spending his life here with her in their old home so long as they might survive.

"Jaqui was now a happy man. Here was the owner of the lady, ready to take her off his hands and relieve him of all the perplexing responsibility and misery which her possession had caused him. As he looked at the stalwart figure of the returned [84] husband it made him laugh to think of the fool-poet.

"Dr. Paltravi and Jaqui were both practical men, and that evening they laid out the whole plan for the revivification of the lady in the box. Jaqui was so glad to be rid of her that he willingly undertook to do anything to assist Paltravi in starting out on his new career of domestic happiness.

"It was agreed that it was most important that when she woke again to life Donna Paltravi should not be too much surprised, and her husband did everything he could to prevent anything of the kind. He had her old bedroom swept and garnished and made to look as much as possible as it had been when she last saw it. Then he went out into the town, and was fortunate enough to engage as maid a young girl who was the daughter of the woman who had been his wife's maid forty years before. Then it was decided that this girl, having been well instructed as to what was expected of her, should be the first to see the lady when she should revive; and that after that, when it should be deemed a suitable moment, Jaqui should have an interview with her in the capacity of physician, and explain the state of affairs so that she should not be too greatly excited and shocked by the change in the appearance of her husband. Then, when everything had been made plain, Paltravi was to go to her."

"Those two were a couple of brave men," remarked the Mistress of the House.

"They were very fortunate men, I think," said her daughter. "What would I not give to be the first to talk to a woman who had slept for forty years!"

"Perhaps she is going to sleep indefinitely," answered the Mistress of the House. "But [85] we will let John go on with his story."

"All these plans were carried out," continued John Gayther. "The next day the lady was taken out of the box, removed to her own chamber, and placed upon a couch. The garments she wore were just as fresh and well preserved as she was, and as Dr. Paltravi stood and looked at her, his heart swelling with emotion, he could see no reason why she should not imagine she had fallen asleep forty minutes before instead of forty years. The two doctors went to work, speaking seldom and in whispers, their faces pale and their hearts scarcely beating, so intense was their anxiety regarding the result of this great experiment. Jaqui was almost as much affected as Dr. Paltravi, and, in fact, his fears were greater, for he was not supported by the faith of the other. He could not help thinking of what would follow if everything did not turn out all right.

"But there was no need of anxiety. In a little while respiration was established; the heart began to beat gently; the blood slowly circulated; there was a little quiver about the lips—Donna Paltravi was alive! Her husband, on his knees beside her, lifted his eyes to heaven, and then, his head falling forward, he sank upon the floor."

"Oh," ejaculated the Daughter of the House, "I hope he did not die. That would have been good tragedy, but how dreadful!"

"No," answered the gardener, "he did not die; and Jaqui, his excitement giving him the strength of a giant, took the insensible man in his arms and carried him out of [86] the room."

The Mistress of the House gave a little sigh of relief. "I am so glad he did," said she; "I was actually beginning to be afraid. I really do not want to be present when she first sees him."

John Gayther perfectly understood this remark, and took it to heart. It implied a little lack of faith in his dramatic powers, but it made things a great deal easier for him.

"Without reëntering the room," continued he, "Jaqui partly closed the door, and gazed at the lady through a little crack."

"I do not know about that," said the Mistress of the House; "he should have gone in boldly."

"Excuse me," said John Gayther, "but I think not. This was a very important moment. Nobody knew what would happen. She must not be shocked by seeing a stranger. At the same time, the eye of a professional man was absolutely necessary. Donna Paltravi slightly moved and sighed; then she opened her eyes and gazed for a few minutes at the ceiling; after which she turned her head upon the cushion of the couch, and in a clear, soft voice called out, 'Rita!' This was the name of the girl now in waiting, as it had been the name of her mother, and she instantly appeared from the adjoining room. She had seen all that had happened, and was trembling so much she could scarcely stand; but she was a girl of nerve, and approached and stood by her mistress. 'Rita,' said the lady, without looking at her, 'I am hungry; bring me some wine and a few of those cakes you bought yesterday.'

"Dr. Paltravi had remembered everything that had pleased his wife; he had thought [87]
of the little cakes, and had scoured the town early in the morning to get some which resembled them; he knew her favorite wine, and had given Rita her instructions. Without delay the maid brought the refreshments, and in a few minutes the lady was sitting on the couch, a glass of wine in her hand. 'Rita,' said she, after eating and drinking a little, 'you are dressed very awkwardly this morning. Have you been trying to make your own clothes?'

"The doctor had searched diligently in his wife's closets for some garments belonging to her former maid, and he had thought he had succeeded in getting Rita to dress as her mother had dressed; but he did not remember these things as accurately as his wife remembered them. 'You know I do not like carelessness in dress,' continued Donna Paltravi, 'and now that I look at you more closely—'

"'She is truly alive,' said Jaqui, 'and in full possession of her senses.' And with this he closed the door.

"When the doctor recovered, both he and Jaqui were very glad to take some wine, for they had been under a dreadful strain."

"*Had been!*" exclaimed the Mistress of the House, who understood the heart of woman, and knew very well that the great strain had not yet come. "But what happened next, John?"

"The next thing happened too soon," replied the gardener. "In less than fifteen minutes the maid came to the two doctors and told them her lady demanded to see her husband; and if he were not in the house he must be sent for immediately. This greatly disturbed Jaqui, and he turned pale again. If he could have had his own way [88]
at that moment he would have put the lady back in her box and locked the door of the little room. He did not feel ready to tell the story he had to tell; but there was no help for it: he must do it, and that immediately. 'Go in, Jaqui,' said Dr. Paltravi; 'prepare her mind as well as you can, and then I will see her.'

"'Hurry, please, sir,' said the maid; 'she is very impatient, and I cannot explain to her.'

"Thus reassured, Jaqui followed the maid."

"The quick temper of Donna Paltravi reminds me of Edmond About's story of 'The Man with the Broken Ear,'" said the Mistress of the House. "The hero of that story was a soldier who had been preserved in a dried condition for many years, and who proved to be a very bad subject when he had been dampened and revived."

"I have read that novel," said John Gayther, considerably to the surprise of both his hearers, "and it belongs to the same class as mine,—of course you know all stories are arranged in classes,—but the one I am telling you is much more natural and true to life than the one written by the Frenchman."

"I am quite ready to believe that," said the Mistress of the House. "Now please go on."

The Daughter of the House did not say anything, but she looked very earnestly at the gardener; the conviction was forcing itself upon her that John Gayther himself had a story, and she hoped that some day she might hear it.

"Jaqui was very much surprised when he saw Donna Paltravi. He had seen her face so often that he was perfectly familiar with it, but now he found it had changed. In [89]
color it was not as lifelike as it had been in the box. She was pale, and somewhat excited. 'My maid tells me you are a doctor, sir,' said she. 'But why do you come to

me? If I need a doctor, and my husband is away, why is not Dr. Torquino here?'

"'Madam,' said Jaqui, his voice faltering a little, 'you will excuse the intrusion of a stranger when I tell you that Dr. Torquino is dead.'"

"Rather abrupt," said the Mistress of the House.

"He could not help it, madam," said John Gayther; "it popped out of his head. But it did not matter; Donna Paltravi had a quick perception. 'Oh,' she exclaimed, 'and I not know it!' Then she stopped and looked steadfastly at Jaqui. 'I see,' she said slowly; 'I have been in one of my trances.' Then she grew still paler. 'But my husband, he is not dead? Tell me he is not dead!' she cried.

"'Oh, no,' exclaimed Jaqui; 'he is alive and well, and will be with you very soon.' Donna Paltravi's face lighted with an expression of great happiness; her color returned; and she looked almost as handsome as when she had been lying in the box. 'Blessed be the holy Mary!' said she. 'If he is well it does not matter what has happened. How long have I been in a trance?'

"'I cannot say exactly,' replied Jaqui, very much afraid to speak the truth; 'in fact, I was not here when you went into it: but—'

"'Oh, never mind, never mind!' she exclaimed. 'My husband will tell me everything. I would much rather he should do so. But what ugly-fashioned clothes you are [90] wearing, sir! Does everybody dress in that way now, or is it only doctors? I am sure I must have been asleep for a good while, and that I shall see some wonderful things. It is quite delightful to think of it. I can scarcely wait until my husband comes. I want him to tell me everything.'

"When the greatly relieved Jaqui returned with this news he threw Dr. Paltravi into a state of rapture. His wife knew what had happened; she had not been shocked; she understood; and, above everything else, she longed to see him! After all these forty years he was now—this minute—to be with her again! She was longing to see him! With all the vigor of youth he bounded up the stairs.

"Now," said John Gayther, "we will pass over an interval of time."

"I think that will be very well indeed!" the Mistress of the House said approvingly.

"Not a long one, I hope," said her daughter, "for this is a breathless point in the story. I have worked it out in my own mind in three different ways already."

The gardener smiled with pleasure. He had a high regard for the mind of the Daughter of the House.

"Well," said he, "the interval is very short; it is really not more than twenty minutes. At the end of that brief space of time Jaqui was surprised to see Dr. Paltravi reënter the room he had so recently left in all the wild excitement of an expectant lover. But what a changed man he was! Pale, haggard, wild-eyed, aged, he sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands."

"I was afraid of that! I was afraid of that!" exclaimed the Mistress of the House.

"And I, too," said her daughter, with tears in her eyes; "that was one of the ways in [91] which I worked it out. But it is too dreadful. John Gayther, don't you think you have made a mistake? If you were to consider it all carefully don't you really believe it could not be that, at least not quite that?"

"I am sorry," said the gardener, "but I am sure this story could not have happened in any other way, and I think if you will wait until it is finished you will agree with me.

"For a few minutes the distressed husband could not speak, and then in faltering tones he told Jaqui what had happened. His wife had been so shocked and horrified at his appearance that she had come near fainting. What made it worse was that it was evident she did not regard him as some strange old man. She had recognized him instantly. His form, his features, his carriage were perfectly familiar to her. She had known them all in her young dark-haired husband of forty years before; and here was that same husband gray-headed, gray-bearded, and repulsively old! She had turned away her head; she would not look at him. As soon as she could speak she had demanded to know how long she had been in her trance, and when the matter was explained her anger was unbounded.

"Dr. Paltravi never told Jaqui all that she said, but she must have used very severe language. She declared he had used her shamefully and wickedly in keeping her asleep for so long, and then wakening her to be the wife of a miserable old man just ready to totter into the grave. But she would not be his wife. She vowed she would have nothing to do with him. He had deserted her; he had treated her cruelly; and [92] the holy father, the Pope, would look upon it in that light, and would separate her from him. With bitter reproaches she had told him to go away, and never to let her see him again."

"She ought to have been ashamed of herself," said the Daughter of the House. "I have no sympathy with her. Instead of upbraiding him she ought to have been grateful to him for the wonderful opportunities he had given her."

"But, John," said the Mistress of the House, "I do not believe the Pope could have separated them. The Roman Catholic Church does not sanction divorce."

"Not as a rule, madam," replied the gardener; "but I will touch on this point again. There was a good deal to be said on her side, it is true; but I am not going to take sides with any of the persons in my story. She had driven away the poor doctor, and declared she would have nothing to do with him; and so the unhappy man told Jaqui he was going back to Milan, where he had been living, and would trouble his wife no more. Then up jumped Jaqui in a terrible state of mind. Was he never to get rid of this lady? He declared to Paltravi he could not accept the responsibility. When she had been in the box it had been bad enough, but now it was impossible. He would go away to some place unknown. He would depart utterly and leave everything behind him.

"But on his knees Dr. Paltravi implored Jaqui to stay where he was, and to protect his wife for a time at least. He would send money, he would do everything he could, and perhaps, after a time, some arrangement could be made; but now he must go. He had [93] been ordered to leave, and he must do so. It had not been two days since Paltravi and Jaqui had met, but already it seemed to them that they were old friends. Strange circumstances had bound them together, and Jaqui now found he could not refuse the charge which was thrust upon him; and Dr. Paltravi departed.

"Donna Paltravi did not allow her anger to deprive her of her opportunities. There were so many new things she wanted to see that she set about seeing them with great earnestness and industry, and she enjoyed her new world very much indeed. The news of her revivification spread abroad rapidly, for such a thing could not be concealed; and many people came to see her. She was beautiful and popular, and adopted new fashions as soon as she learned them. Jaqui had nothing to say to all this; he had no right now to keep people from seeing her.

"Very soon there came to her the fool-poet. Now Jaqui began to hope. He had been assured by his priest that, under the circumstances, the church would dissolve this young lady's marriage with Paltravi, and if Florino would marry her Jaqui might look forward to a peaceful life. Now whether the priest had a right to say this I will not take it on myself to say; but he did say it: and so Jaqui did not feel called upon to interfere with the courtship of the fool-poet. He decided that as soon as possible he would go away from that house. He had a dislike for houses with three floors, and his next habitation should be carefully selected; if so much as a preserved bug or a butterfly in a box should be found on the premises, that symbol of evil should be [94] burned and its ashes scattered afar.

"Jaqui had every reason to hope. Florino literally threw himself at the feet of the fair Donna Paltravi; and she was delighted with him. He was somewhat younger than she was, but that had been the case with her first lover, and she had not objected. The two young people got on famously together, although there was now a duenna as well as a maid on the second floor. Jaqui was greatly comforted. He spent a good deal of his spare time going about Florence looking for a desirable house with two floors. The courtship went on merrily, and there was talk of the wedding; and, while Jaqui could not help pitying the poor old man in Milan, he could not altogether blame the gay young woman in Florence, who was now generally looked upon as a lady who had lost her husband.

"It was nearly three weeks after the lady had come out of her box when a strange thing happened: four days elapsed without Florino coming to the house! Jaqui was greatly disturbed and nervous. Suppose the young man had found some other lady to love, or suppose his parents had shut him up! Such suspicions were very disquieting, and Jaqui went to see Florino. He found the fool-poet in a fit of the doleful dumps. At first the young man refused to talk: but, when Jaqui pressed him, he admitted that he had not quarrelled with the lady; that she did not know why he was staying away; that he had received several notes from her, and that he had not answered them. Then Jaqui grew very angry and half drew his sword. This was a matter in which he was concerned. The lady's husband had placed her in his charge, and he would not [95] stand tamely by and see her deserted by her lover, who had given everybody reason to believe that he intended to make her his own.

"But Jaqui put back his sword, for the fool-poet showed no signs of fight, and then he used argument. Just as earnestly as he had formerly tried to keep these two apart did he now endeavor to bring them together. But Florino would listen to no reason, and at last, when driven to bay, he declared he would not marry an old woman—that Donna Paltravi had dozens of gray hairs on each temple, and there were several wrinkles at the corners of her eyes. He was a young man, and wanted a young woman for his wife.

"Jaqui was utterly astounded by what he heard. His mind was suddenly permeated by

a conviction which rendered him speechless. He rose, and without another word he hurried home. As soon as he could he made a visit to Donna Paltravi. He had not seen her for a week or more, and the moment his eyes fell upon her he saw that Florino was right. She was growing old! He spent some time with her, but as she did not allude to any change in herself, of course he did not; but just as he was leaving he made a casual remark about Florino. 'Oh, he has not been here for some time,' said the lady. 'I missed him at first, but now I am glad he does not come. He is very frivolous, and I have a small opinion of his poetry. I think most of it is copied, and he shows poor judgment in his selections.'

"That evening, sitting in his private room, Jaqui thought he saw through everything. Up-stairs on the second floor was a lady who was actually seventy-one years old! Her natural development had been arrested by artificial influences, but as these [96] influences had ceased to operate, there could be no reason to doubt that nature was resuming her authority over the lady, and that she was doing her best to make up for lost time. Donna Paltravi appeared now to be about forty-five years old."

"This is getting to be very curious, John," said the Mistress of the House. "I have often heard of bodies which, on being exhumed, after they have been buried a long time, presented a perfectly natural appearance, but which crumbled into dust when exposed to the air and the light. Would not this lady's apparent youth have crumbled into dust all at once when it was exposed to light and air?"

"I cannot say, madam," said the gardener, respectfully, "what might have happened in other cases, but in this instance the life of youth remained for a good while, and when it did begin to depart the change was gradual."

"You forget, mamma," said the younger lady, "that this is real life, and that it is a story with one thing coming after another, like steps."

"I did forget," said the other, "and I beg your pardon, John."

The gardener bowed his head a little, and went on: "Jaqui was greatly interested in this new development. He made frequent visits to Donna Paltravi, and found, to his surprise, that she was not the vain and frivolous woman he had supposed her to be, but was, in reality, very sensible and intelligent. She talked very well about many things, and even took an interest in science. Jaqui lost all desire to put her back in [97] her box, and spent the greater part of his leisure time in her company."

At this the Mistress of the House smiled, but her daughter frowned.

"Of course," continued the gardener, "he soon fell in love with her."

"Which was natural enough," said the Mistress of the House.

"Whether it was natural enough or not," cried her daughter, "it was not right."

John Gayther looked upon her with pride. He knew that in her fair young mind that which ought to be rose high above thoughts of what was likely to be, which came into the more experienced mind of her mother.

"But you see, miss," said John Gayther, "Jaqui was human. Here was a lady very near his own age, still beautiful, very intelligent, living in the same house with him, glad to see him whenever he chose to visit her. It was all as clear as daylight, and it was not long before he was in such a state of mind that he would have fallen upon Florino with a drawn sword if the fool-poet had dared to renew his addresses to Donna Paltravi."

"I must say," remarked the Mistress of the House, "that although his action was natural enough, he was in great danger of becoming a prose-fool."

"You are right, madam," said the gardener, "and Jaqui had some ideas of that kind himself. But it was of no use. She was an uncommonly attractive lady now that her mind came to the aid of her body. He knew that nature was still working hard to make this blooming middle-aged lady look like the old woman she really was. But [98] love is a powerful antidote to reason, and this was the first time Jaqui had ever been in love. When he thought of it at all, he persuaded himself that it did not matter how old this lady might come to be; he would love her all the same. In fact, he was sure that if she were to turn young again and become frivolous and beautiful, his love would not change. It was getting stronger and stronger every time he saw her."

"What I am thinking about," exclaimed the Daughter of the House, "is that poor old gentleman in Milan. No matter what the others were doing, or what they were thinking, they were treating him shamefully, and Jaqui was not his friend at all."

"You may be right," said her mother; "but, don't you see, this is real life. You must not forget that, my dear."

John Gayther smiled and went on, and the young lady listened, although she did not approve. "Jaqui was a handsome man, and could make himself very agreeable; and it is not surprising that Donna Paltravi became very much attached to him. He could

not fail to see this, and as he was a man of method, he declared to himself one day that upon the next day, at the first moment he could find the lady alone, he would propose marriage to her. He had ceased to think about increase in age and all that. He was perfectly satisfied with her as she was, and he troubled his mind about nothing else.

"But early the next day, before he had a chance to carry out his plans, he received a letter from Dr. Paltravi urging him to come immediately to Milan. The poor [99] gentleman was sick in his bed, and greatly longed to see his friend Jaqui. The letter concluded with the earnest request that Jaqui should not tell Donna Paltravi where he was going, or that he had heard from the unfortunate writer. Jaqui set off at once, for fear he should not find his friend alive, and on the way his emotions were extremely conflicting."

"And very wicked, I have no doubt," said the Daughter of the House. "He hoped that old man would die."

"There is some truth in what you say, miss," answered John Gayther, with a proud glance at the Mistress of the House, who was not ashamed to return it, "for Jaqui could not help thinking that if old Dr. Paltravi, who could not expect any further happiness in this life, and who must die before very long anyhow, owing to his age and misfortunes, should choose to leave the world at this time, it would not only be a good thing for him, but it would make matters a great deal easier for some people he would leave behind him. In real life you cannot help such thoughts as this, miss, unless you are very, very good, far above the average.

"Jaqui found the old doctor very sick indeed, and he immediately set about doing everything he could to make him feel better; but Dr. Paltravi did not care anything about medical treatment. It was not for that he had sent for Jaqui. What he desired was to make arrangements for the future of Donna Paltravi, and he wanted Jaqui to carry out his wishes. In the first place, he asked him to take charge of the lady's fortune and administer it to her advantage; and secondly, he desired that he would marry her. 'If I die knowing that the dear woman who was once my wife is to marry [100] you,' said the sick man, 'and thus be protected and cared for, I shall leave this world grateful and happy. I can never do anything for her myself; but if you will take my place, my friend,—and I am sure Donna Paltravi will easily learn to like you,—that will be the next best thing. Now will you promise me?' Jaqui knelt by the side of the bed, took his friend's hand, and promised. There were tears in his eyes, but whether they were tears of joy or of sorrow it is not for me to say."

"It is for me, though," said the Daughter of the House, very severely. "I know that man thoroughly."

The gardener went on with his story: "Jaqui remained several days with Dr. Paltravi, but he could not do his poor friend any good. The sick man was nervous and anxious; he was afraid that some one else might get ahead of Jaqui and marry Donna Paltravi; and he urged his friend not to stay with him, where he could be of no service, but to go back to Florence and prepare to marry Donna Paltravi when she should become a widow. As Jaqui was also getting nervous, being possessed of the same fears, he at last consented to carry out the old doctor's wishes,—and his own at the same time,—and he returned to Florence.

"In the meantime Donna Paltravi had been somewhat anxious about Jaqui. She had conceived a high regard for him, and she could think of no satisfactory reason why he should go away without saying anything to her, and stay away without writing. She hoped nothing had occurred which would interfere with the very agreeable sentiments which appeared to be springing up between them. This disturbed state of [101] mind was very bad for a lady in the physical condition of Donna Paltravi. If I may use the simile of a clock in connection with her apparent age, I should say that worrying conjecture, had caused some cogs to slip, and that the clock of her age had struck a good many years since Jaqui's absence.

"When he met her she greeted him warmly, plainly delighted to see him; but for a moment he was startled. This lady was really very much older than when he had left her; her hair was nearly gray."

"Served him right!" said the Daughter of the House.

"But when he began to talk to her," continued John Gayther, "his former feelings for her returned. She was charming, and he forgot about her hair. Her conversation greatly interested him; and now that his conscience came to the assistance of his affection (for he was doing exactly what Dr. Paltravi desired him to do), he was quite happy and spent a pleasant evening. But in the morning, as he looked at himself in the mirror, he remembered her gray hair."

At the word "conscience" an indication of a sneer had appeared on the face of the young lady, but she did not interrupt.

"It was about a week after this that Donna Paltravi sat alone in the little room on the

second floor, and Dr. Jaqui sat alone in the little room on the first floor. She was waiting for him to come to her, and he was not intending to go. He believed, with reason, that she was expecting him to propose marriage to her, and he did not intend to offer himself. He was very willing to marry a middle-aged lady, but he did not wish [102] to espouse an old one—at least, an old one who looked her age; and that Donna Paltravi was going to look her full age in a very short time Jaqui had now no doubt whatever. Her face was beginning to show a great many wrinkles, and her hair was not only gray but white in some places. But these changes did not in the least interfere with her good looks, for in some ways she was growing more handsome and stately than she had been before; but our good friend Jaqui—"

"Not my good friend Jaqui, please," interrupted the Daughter of the House.

"Said to himself," continued John Gayther, "that he did not want a mother, but a wife. A few weeks before he would have supposed such a thing impossible, but now a certain sympathy for Florino rose in his heart. So he did not go up-stairs that evening, and the lady was very much disturbed and did not sleep well.

"In a few days Jaqui got ready to go away again, and this time he went to bid the lady good-by. She had heard he was about to take a journey, and as he greeted her he saw she had been weeping but was quite composed now. 'Farewell, my friend,' said she. 'I know what is happening to me, and I know what is happening to you. It will be well for you to stay away for a time, and when you return you will see that we are to be very good friends, greatly interested in the progress of science and civilization.' Then she smiled and shook hands with him.

"Jaqui went to Rome and to Naples, wandering about in an objectless sort of way. He dreaded to go to Milan, because he had not heard that Dr. Paltravi was dead, and it [103] would have been very hard for him to have to explain to the sick man why he had decided not to carry out his wishes. Apart from the disappointment he would feel when he heard that Donna Paltravi was not to have the kind guardianship he had planned for her, the old doctor would be grieved to the soul when he heard his wife had lost the youth he had taken from her, but which he had expected to return in full measure. What made it worse for Jaqui was that he could administer no comfort with the news. He could not sacrifice himself to please the old man; promise or no promise, this was impossible. He had not consented to marry an old lady. Again, from the very bottom of his heart, did Jaqui wish there never had been a lady in a box.

"At last, when he could put it off no longer, he went to Milan; and there he found Dr. Paltravi still alive, but very low and very much troubled because he had not heard from Jaqui. The latter soon perceived it would be utterly useless to try to deceive or in any way to mislead the old man, who, although in sad bodily condition, still preserved his acuteness of mind. Jaqui had to tell him everything, and he began with Florino and ended with himself, not omitting to tell how the lady had recognized the situation, and what she had said. Then, fearing the consequences of this revelation, he put his hand into his leathern bag to take out a bottle of cordial. But Dr. Paltravi waved away medicine, and sat up in bed.

"'Did you say,' he cried, 'she is growing old, and that you believe she will continue to do so until she appears to be the lady of threescore and ten she really is?'

"'Yes,' said Jaqui; 'that is what I said, and that is what I believe.' [104]

"'Then, by all the holy angels,' cried Dr. Paltravi, jumping out of bed, 'she shall be my wife, and nobody else need concern himself about her.'"

"Hurrah!" cried the Daughter of the House, involuntarily springing to her feet. "I was so afraid you would not come to that."

"I was bound to come to that, miss," said John Gayther.

"And did they really marry again?" asked the Mistress of the House.

"No," was the reply; "they did not. There was no need of it. The priests assured them most emphatically that there was not the slightest need of it. And so they came together again after this long interval, which had been forty years to him, but which she had lived in forty days. If they had been together all the time they could not have loved each other more than they did now. To her eyes, so suddenly matured, there appeared a handsome, stately old gentleman seventy years of age; to his eyes, from which the visions of youth had been so suddenly removed, there appeared a beautiful, stately old lady seventy-one years of age. It was just as natural as if one of them had slept all day while the other had remained awake; it was all the same to them both in the evening.

"She soon ceased to think how cruelly she had sent him away from her, for she had been so young when she did it. And he now gave no thought to what she had done, remembering how young she was when she did it. They were as happy as though she had had all the past that rightfully belonged to her, for he had had enough for both of [105] them."

"And Jaqui?" asked the Mistress of the House.

"Oh, Jaqui was the happiest of the three of them, happy himself, and happy in their happiness. Never again did he wish the lady in her box. He looked no further for a smaller house which should contain but two floors; he was as glad to stay where he was as they were to have him. They were three very happy people, all of them greatly interested in the progress of scientific investigation."

"And not one of them deserved to be happy," said the Daughter of the House.

"But you must remember, miss, this is a story about realities," said the gardener.

She sighed a little sigh; she knew that where realities are concerned this sort of thing generally happens.

"That is a very good story, John," said the Mistress of the House, rising from her seat; "but it seems to me that while you were talking you sometimes thought of yourself as Jaqui."

"There is something in that, madam," answered the gardener; "it may have been that during the story I sometimes did think that I myself might have been Jaqui."

"Mamma," said the Daughter of the House, as the two walked out of the garden, "don't you think that John Gayther is very intelligent?"

"I have always thought him remarkably intelligent," her mother replied. "I have noticed that gardeners generally are a thoughtful, intelligent race of men."

"I don't think it is so much the garden as because he has travelled so much," said the young lady, "and I have a strange feeling that he has a story of his own in the past. I wonder if he will ever tell it to me." [106]

"If he has such a story," said the elder lady, "he will never tell it to you."

THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

THE MISTRESS OF THE HOUSE

AND IS CALLED

THE COT AND THE RILL

IV
THE COT AND THE RILL

[109]

A week or so later the Daughter of the House came skipping down one of the broad paths. John Gayther stood still and looked at her, glad to see her coming, as he always was, no matter on what errand she came.

"John," she cried, before she reached him, "you are to stop work!" Then, as she came up to him, she continued: "Yes; there is to be story-telling this morning. We have told papa about it, and he is coming to what he calls the story-telling place with us, and mamma feels inspired to tell the story. So you may take that troubled look out of your face. Please put the big easy garden-chair in the shade of the summer-house. Papa does so like to be comfortable. And the view from there is so fine, you know—a beautiful land view. Papa must be tired of sea views and shore views, and here he will enjoy the mountains!"

Having delivered all this very volubly, the Daughter of the House skipped away. And as John Gayther busied himself in making the "story-telling place" attractive he felt glad that there were others besides himself who liked to tell stories. There was such a thing as overworking a mine. He was that rare thing, a story-teller who is also a good listener. Moreover, John felt very diffident about telling one of his stories before the Master of the House, who was a man prone to speak his mind. Not that John disliked the Master of the House. Far from it. He, with the family, was pleased when the Master of the House returned from a long cruise and proceeded immediately to [110]

make himself very much at home. For the Master of the House was a captain in the navy, and as hearty, bluff, and good-natured as a captain should be.

The captain had been at home some days, and had been in the garden several times, and now John Gayther was filled with admiration as he saw this fine, sturdy figure, clad all in white, approach the summer-house. With an air of supreme content this figure partly stretched itself in the big garden-chair, while the two ladies seated themselves on the bench. John Gayther stood respectfully until the Master of the House motioned to him to sit on his stool.

"Good morning, John," he cried heartily. "We've piped all hands to yarns. I have heard what you can do in this line, and we shall call upon you before long. This time you are privileged to listen. You can let somebody else cut your asparagus and dig your potatoes this morning."

"Papa," said his daughter, "it is too late for asparagus and too early for potatoes. I am afraid you forget about these things when you are at sea."

"Not at all," said her father. "On shipboard we cut our asparagus at any time of the year. The steward does it with a big knife, which he jabs through the covers of the tin [111] cans. As for potatoes, they are always with us."

The Mistress of the House was now prepared to tell her story.

"I am going to tell my story in the first person," she began.

"There is no better person," interrupted the Master of the House.

"I do not intend to describe my hero who is to tell the story," continued his wife. "I will only say that he is moderately young and moderately handsome. Various other things about him you will find out as the story goes on. Now, then, he begins thus: I was driving my wife in a buggy in a mountainous region, and when we reached the top of a little rise in the road, Anita put her hand on my arm. 'Stop,' she said; 'look down there! That is what I like! It is a cot and a rill. You see that cot—not much of a house, to be sure, but it would do. And there, just near enough for the water to tumble over rocks and gurgle over stones to soothe one to sleep on summer nights, is the rill—not much of a rill, perhaps, but I think it could be arranged with a shovel. And then, all the rest is enchanting. I had been looking at it for some time before I spoke. There is a smooth meadow stretching away to a forest, and behind that there are hills, and in the distance you can just see the mountains. Now this is the place where I should like to live. Isn't there any way of making those horses stand still for a minute?'

"I tried my persuasive powers on the animals, and succeeded moderately. 'To live?' I asked. 'And for how long?'

"'Until about the 3d of August,' she replied. 'That will be about three weeks.' [112]

"'You mean,' I said in surprise, 'something like this.'

"'I do not,' answered Anita. 'I mean this very spot. To find something like it would require months. What I want, as I have told you over and over again, is a real cot with a real rill, to which we can go now and live for a little while that unsophisticated life for which my soul is longing.'

"Anita and I were taking a summer outing together, and were trying to get into free nature, away from people we knew, and had been several days at a mountain hotel, and were driving about the country. My black cobs now declined to stand any longer.

"'Drive them down into the valley. There must be a road to that house,' said Anita.

"I drove on for a short distance, and soon came to a wagon-track which descended to the little house. 'Anita,' said I, 'I cannot go down that road; it is too rough and rocky, and we should break something. But why do you want to go down there, anyhow? You are not in earnest about living in such a place as that?'

"'But I am in earnest,' she answered sweetly but decisively. 'I want to stay in this region and explore it. We both of us hate hotels, and I could be very happy in a cot like that (a little arranged, perhaps) until the 3d of August, when we have to go North. But I won't ask you to go down that road, of course. Suppose we come again to-morrow with some quieter horses.'

"'I am sorry,' said I, 'but I cannot do that. Mr. Baxter comes to-morrow. You know it [113] was planned that he should always come Tuesdays.'

"She sighed. 'I suppose everything must give way to business,' she said, 'and I shall have to wait until Wednesday. But one thing must certainly be agreed upon: when we get to that cot there must be no more Mr. Baxter; you can certainly plan for that, can't you?'

"I made no immediate reply, because I was busy turning the horses in rather an awkward place; but when we were on the smooth highway and were trotting gayly

back to the hotel, I discussed the matter more fully with Anita, and I found that what she had been talking about was not a mere fancy. Before coming to this picturesque mountain region she had set her heart upon some sort of camping out in the midst of real nature, and this cot-and-rill business seemed to suit her exactly.

"'I want to go there and live,' she said; 'but I do not mean any Marie Antoinette business, with milk-pails decked with ribbons, and dainty little straw hats. I want to live in a cot like a cotter—that is, for us to live like two cotters. As for myself, I need it; my moral and physical natures demand it. I must have a change, an absolute change, and this is just what I want. I would shut out entirely the world I live in, and it is only in a real and true cot that this can be done as I want to do it.'

"She talked a great deal more on the same subject, and then I told her that if it suited her it suited me, and that on the day after to-morrow we would drive out again and examine the cot. For the rest of the day and the greater part of the evening Anita talked of nothing but her projected life in the valley; and before I went to sleep I was [114] quite as much in love with it as she was. The next day it rained, but Mr. Baxter came all the same; weather never interfered with him."

"Who in the name of common sense is Mr. Baxter?" asked the Master of the House. "I like to know who people are when I am being told what they do."

"I had hoped," said the Mistress of the House, "that I should be able to tell my story so you would find out for yourselves all about the characters, just as in real life if you see a man working in a garden you know he is a gardener."

"But he may not be," said her husband; "he may be a coachman pulling carrots for his horses."

"But, as you wish it," continued the Mistress of the House, "I do not mind telling you that Mr. Baxter was my hero's right-hand man and business manager. And now he will go on:

"After Baxter and I had finished our business I told him about the cot, for if we carried out Anita's plan it would be necessary for him to know where we were. Then, putting on waterproof coats, we rode over to the place which had excited my wife's desire to become a cotter. We found the house small but in good order, with four rooms and an adjunct at one end. There were vines growing over it, and at the side of it a garden—a garden with an irregular hedge around two sides; it was a poor sort of a garden, mostly weeds, I thought, as I glanced at it. The stream of water was a pretty little brook, and Baxter, who rode to the head of it, said he thought it could be made much better.

"The house was the home of a widow with a grown-up daughter and a son about [115] fifteen. We talked to them, asking a great many questions about the surrounding country, and then retired to consult. We did not consider long; in less than ten minutes I had ordered Baxter to buy the house and everything in it, if the people were willing to sell; and then to purchase as much land around it as would be necessary to carry out my plans, which I then and there imparted to him in a general way, leaving him to attend to the details."

"Your nameless hero," said the Master of the House, "must have been in very comfortable circumstances."

"I am glad to see that my story is explaining itself," remarked his wife, and she continued:

"Baxter looked serious for a moment, and said it was a big piece of work; but he did not decline it. Baxter never declined anything.

"'How much time can you give me?' he asked.

"'My wife will want to look at the place to-morrow,' I replied; 'that is, if it does not rain: for she says she does not want to see it first in bad weather.'

"'That's a help,' said Baxter. 'The Weather Bureau promises east winds and rains for to-morrow and perhaps the next day. And, anyway, I know now what you want. I will go back to town by the one-o'clock train and start things going.'

"'There is one thing I object to,' said I, when we were on the country road from which Anita had first seen the cot and the rill: 'the house is in full view from this road. Before we know it we will be making ourselves spectacles to parties from the hotel [116] who happen to discover us and drive out to see how we are getting on.'

"Baxter reflected. 'Oh, I can arrange that,' said he. 'I know this road; it turns again into the highway not far below here. It is really a private road for the benefit of this house and two others nearly a mile farther on. I will include those places in the purchase, and close up the road. Then I will make it a private entrance to this place, with a locked gate. Will that do?'

"'Very well,' said I, laughing. 'But I suppose people could cut across the country and

come in at the other end of the road if they really wanted to look into the valley?'

"'Not after I have finished the job,' said Baxter; and I asked no further questions."

"May I inquire," said the captain, "if that Mr. Baxter is in want of a position?"

"I am afraid, papa," said the Daughter of the House, "that you would have to own a navy before you could employ him."

The gardener smiled. A story built upon these lines interested him. The Mistress of the House went on without regard to the interruptions:

"I found Anita in earnest consultation with her maid Maria and the mistress of the hotel, and it was at least an hour before she could see me. When I told her I had secured the cot, or at least arranged to do so, she was pleased and grateful, especially as I had had to go out into the rain to do it. 'I knew, of course,' she said, 'that Baxter would settle that all right, and so I have been making my arrangements. But there is one favor I want you to grant me: I don't want you to ask me anything [117] about how I am going to manage matters. I don't want to deceive you in any possible way, and so if you do not ask me any questions it will make it easier for me.'

"'Very good,' I replied; 'and I shall ask a similar favor of you.'

"'All right,' said Anita. 'And now that matter is settled.'

"The prophecies of the weather were correct. The next day, Wednesday, it rained, and it also rained on Thursday and Friday; but on Saturday it looked as if it might clear in the afternoon.

"'I am not going to-day,' said Anita. 'I have been working very hard lately, and to-morrow I will take a good rest, and we will start in on Monday.'

"Baxter was very glad of the four days of delay occasioned by the stormy weather, and said that without working on Sunday he could finish everything to his satisfaction. I went down to the cot the next day to see how he was getting on; but Anita asked me no questions, and I asked none of her. I had never known her to be so continuously occupied. As I stood with Baxter in front of the cottage, where there was a fine view of the surrounding country, I asked him how much land he had thought it desirable to purchase.

"'Over there,' he said, 'I bought just beyond that range of trees, about half a mile, I should say. But to the west a little more, just skirting the highroad. To the north I bought to the river, which is three quarters of a mile. But over there to the south I included that stretch of forest-land which extends to the foot-hills of the mountains; the line must be about a mile from here.'

"'That is a very large tract,' said I. 'How did you manage to buy it so quickly?' [118]

"'I had nine real-estate agents here on Thursday morning,' he replied, 'and the sales were all consummated this morning. They all went to work at once, each on a separate owner. We bought for cash, and no one knew his neighbor was selling.'

"I laughed, and asked him how he was going to keep this big estate private for our use. 'We want to wander free, you know, anywhere and everywhere.'

"'That is what I thought,' said he, 'and that is why I took in such a variety of scenery. Nobody will interfere with you. There will be no inhabited house on the place except your own, and I am putting up a fence of chicken-yard wire around the whole estate. There is nothing like chicken-yard wire. It is six feet high and very difficult to climb over, and it is also troublesome to cut.'

"I exclaimed in amazement: 'That will take a long time!'

"'I have contracted to have it done by Saturday morning,' replied Baxter. 'The train with the wire fence and posts is scheduled to arrive here at eleven o'clock to-night, and work will begin immediately. Paulo Montani, the Italian boss who has worked for me before, has taken this contract, and will put twelve hundred men on.'

"'The train will arrive here?' said I. 'What do you mean?'

"'The M. B. & T. line runs within a mile and a half of this place, and my trains will all be switched off at a convenient place near here.'

"'I would not have supposed there was a side-track there,' I remarked.

"'Oh, no,' he replied, 'there was none; but I am now having two built. All the different [119] gangs of men will sleep on the freight-cars, which have been fitted up with bunks. The wood-cutters and the landscape-men, hedgers, sodders, and all that arrived about an hour ago, and I am expecting the mechanics' train late this afternoon. The gardeners will not arrive until to-morrow; but if it keeps on raining, that will give them time enough. They want wet weather for their work.'"

"Excuse me," said the Master of the House, who had now finished his cigar and was

sitting upright in his chair, "but didn't you omit to state that your hero was the King of Siam?"

"I have nothing of the kind to state," answered his wife. "He is merely an American gentleman.

"When I heard of the great works that were going on, I exclaimed: 'Look here, Baxter, you must be careful about what you are doing. If you make this place look like a vast cemetery, all laid out in smooth grass and gravelled driveways, my wife won't like it. She wants to live in a cot, and she wants everything to be cottish and naturally rural.'

"'That is just what I am going to make it,' said he. 'The highest grade of true naturalism is what I am aiming at in house and grounds. To-morrow afternoon you can look at the house. Everything will be done then, and the furniture will all be in place, and if you want any change there will be time enough.'

"The next day I went to the cot; but before I reached it I stopped. 'Baxter,' I said, 'you have done very well with this rill; it is quite a roaring little torrent.'

"'Yes,' said he; 'and down below they are working on some waterfalls, but they are not quite finished.' [120]

"When I reached the house I did not exactly comprehend what I saw; it was the same house, and yet it was entirely different. It seemed to have grown fifty years older than it was when I first saw it. Its color was that of wood beautifully stained by age. There was a low piazza I had not noticed, which was covered with vines. Bright-colored old-fashioned flowers were growing in beds close to the house, and there was a pathway, bordered by box bushes, which led from the front door to a gateway in a stone wall which partly surrounded the green little yard. I had not noticed before the gateway or the stone wall, on which grew bitter-sweet vines and Virginia creeper.

"'Now, you see,' said Baxter, 'this grass here is not smooth green turf, fresh from the lawn-mower. It is natural grass, with wild flowers in it here and there. Nearly all of it was brought from a meadow about a mile away from here. But now step inside a minute. Everything there is of the period of 1849: horsehair, you see, lots of black walnut, color all toned down, and all the ornaments covered with netting to keep the flies off.'

"I was interested and amused; but I told Baxter I did not want to see everything now; I wished to enjoy the place with my wife when we should come to it. He was doing admirably, and I would leave everything to him. As I stood on the little portico and looked over the valley, I saw what seemed to be a regiment of men coming out of the woods and crossing a field.

"'That is the first division of the wire-fence men,' said Baxter, 'going to supper. They are divided into three sections, and one gang relieves another, so that the work is kept going all night by torchlight.' [121]

"As I went away Baxter called my attention to the gate at the entrance of our road. It was of light iron, and it could be opened into a clump of bushes where it was not likely to be noticed. 'If this gate is locked,' said I, 'it might make trouble; it may be necessary for some one to go in or out.'

"'Oh,' said Baxter, 'I have provided for all that. You know Baldwin, who used to superintend your Lake George gardens? I have put him in charge of this gate, and have lodged him in a tent over there in the woods. He will know who to let in.'

"On Monday morning Anita rose very early, and was dressed and ready for breakfast before I woke. The day was a fine one, and her spirits were high. 'You have not the slightest idea,' she said, 'how I am going to surprise you when we get to the cot.' I told her I had no doubt her surprise would be very pleasant, and there I let the matter drop. Soon after breakfast we drove over to the cot, this time with a coachman on the box. When we arrived at the gate, which was open and out of sight, I proposed to Anita that she should send the carriage back and walk to the cot.

"'Good,' said she; 'I do not want to see a carriage for two weeks.'

"I have not time to speak of Anita's delight at everything she saw. She was amazed that plain people such as I had told her owned the house should have lived in such a simple, natural way. 'Everything exactly suits everything else,' she said. 'And it is all so cheap and plain. There is absolutely nothing that does not suit a cot.' She was wild with excitement, and ran about like a girl; and when I followed her into the garden, which I had not seen, I found her in one of the box-bordered paths, clapping her hands. The place was indeed very pretty, filled with old-fashioned flowers and herbs and hop-poles, and all sorts of country plants and blossoms. [122]

"At last we returned to the house. 'Now, Anita,' said I, 'we are here in our little cot—'

"'Where we are going to be as happy as two kittens,' she interrupted.

"'And as I want everything to suit you,' I continued, 'I am going to leave the whole matter of the domestic arrangements in your hands. You have seen the house, and you will know what will be necessary to do. Mention what servants you want, and I will send for them.'

"'First tell me,' said Anita, 'what you did with the people who were here? You said there were three of them.'

"I could not very well answer this question, for I did not know exactly what Baxter had done with them. I was inclined to think, however, that he had sent them to the hotel until arrangements could be made for them to go somewhere else. But I was able to assure Anita that they had gone away.

"'Good,' said she. 'I have been thinking about them, and I was afraid they might find some reason or other to stay about the place, and that would interfere with my plans. And now I will tell you what servants I want. I don't want any. I am going to do the work of this house myself. Now don't open your mouth so wide. There is nothing to [123] frighten you in what I have said. I am thirty-two years old, and although I am not very large, I am perfectly strong and healthy, and I cannot imagine anything in this world that would give me more pleasure than to live in this cot with you for two weeks, and to cook our meals and do everything that is necessary to be done. There are thousands and hundreds of thousands of women who do all that and are just as happy as they can be. That is the kind of happiness I have never had, and I want it now.'

"I sat upright in my slippery horsehair chair and spoke no word. Surely Anita had astonished me more than I could possibly astonish her! Before me sat my beautiful wife: the mistress of my great house in town, with its butlers and footmen, its maids and its men, its horses, its carriages, its grand company, and its stately hospitality; the lady of my famous country estate, with more butlers and footmen and gardeners and stewards and maids and men and stables and carriages and herds and flocks, its house-parties of distinguished guests—here was this wife of mine, so well known in so many fashionable centres; a social star at home and abroad; a delicately reared being, always surrounded by servitors of every grade, who had never found it necessary to stoop to pick up so much as a handkerchief or a rosebud; and here was this superfine lady of high degree, who had just announced to me that she intended to cook our meals, to pare our potatoes, to wash our dishes, and, probably, to sweep our floors. No wonder I opened my mouth.

"'I hope, now,' said Anita, putting her feet out in front of her to keep herself from [124] slipping off the horsehair sofa, 'that you thoroughly understand. I do not want any assistance while we are in this cot. I have sent away Maria, who has gone to visit her parents, and no woman in service is to come on this place while I am here. I have been studying hard with Mrs. Parker at the hotel, who seems to be an excellent housekeeper and accustomed to homely fare, and I have learned how to make and to cook a great many things which are simple and nutritious; I have had appropriate dresses made, and Maria has gone to town and bought me a great variety of household linen, all good and plain, for our damask table-cloths would look perfectly ridiculous here. I have also laid in a great many other things which you will see from time to time.'"

"What a wonderful moment this would have been for a great slump in stocks!" remarked the Master of the House. "Everything swept away but the cot and the rill and the dear little wife with her coarse linen and her determination to keep no servant. The husband of your Anita would have been the luckiest fellow on Wall Street. If I were working on this story I would have the blackest of Black Fridays just here."

"'Now, Harold,' said Anita, 'I do not in the least intend to impose upon you. Because I choose to work is no reason why you should be compelled to do so.'

"'I am glad to hear that,' said I.

"'I knew you would be,' continued Anita. 'But of course neither of us will want very much done for us if we live a cotter's life with these simple surroundings, and so I [125] think one man will be quite enough to do for you all you will want done. But of course if you think it necessary to have two I shall not object.'

"'One will be enough,' said I, 'and I will see about sending for him this afternoon.'

"'I am so glad,' said Anita, 'that you have not got him now, for we can have our first meal in the cot all by ourselves. I'll run up-stairs and dress, and then I will come down and do my first cooking.'

"In a very short time Anita appeared in a neat dress of coarse blue stuff, a little short in the skirts, with a white apron over it.

"'Come, now,' said she, gayly, 'let us go into the kitchen and see what we shall have for dinner. Shall it be dinner or lunch? Cotters dine about noon.'

"'Oh, make it lunch,' said I. 'I am hungry, and I do not want to wait to get up a dinner.' Anita agreed to this, and we went to work to take the lid off a hamper which she told me had been packed by Mrs. Parker and contained everything we should want for several days.

"'Besides,' she said, 'that widow woman has left no end of things, all in boxes and cans, labelled. She must have been a very thrifty person, and it was an excellent piece of business to buy the house just as it stood, with everything in it.'

"Anita found it difficult to make a choice of what she should cook for luncheon. 'Suppose we have some tea?'

"'Very good,' said I, for I knew that was easy to make.

"'Then,' said she, on her knees beside the hamper, with her forefinger against her lips, 'suppose—suppose we have some croquettes. I know how to make some very plain and simple croquettes out of—' [126]

"'Oh, don't let us do that,' said I; 'they will take too long, and I am hungry.'

"'Very well, then,' said Anita. 'Let us have some boiled eggs; they are quick.'

"I agreed to this.

"'The next thing,' said Anita, 'is bread and butter. Would you like some hot soda-biscuit?'

"'No,' said I; 'you would have to make some dough and find the soda, and—isn't there anything ready baked?'

"'Oh, yes,' she answered; 'we have Albert biscuit and—'

"'Albert biscuit will do,' I interrupted.

"'Now,' said she, 'we will soon have our first meal in the cot.'

"'This is a very unassuming lunch,' she said, when we were at last seated at the table, 'but I am going to give you a nice dinner. If you want more than three eggs I will cook you some in a few minutes. I put another stick of wood in the fire so as to keep the water hot.'

"I was in considerable doubt as to what sort of man it would be best for us to have. I would have been very glad to have my special valet, because he was an extremely handy man in many ways; but I thought it better to consider a little before sending for him: he might be incongruous. I had plenty of time to consider, for Anita occupied nearly the whole afternoon in getting up our dinner. She was very enthusiastic about it, and did not want me to help her at all, except to make a fire in the stove. After [127] that, she said, everything would be easy. The wood was all in small pieces and piled up conveniently near. As I glanced around the kitchen I saw that Baxter had had this little room fitted up with every possible culinary requirement.

"We had dinner a little before eight. Anita sat down, hot, red, but radiant with happiness.

"'Now, then,' said she, 'you will find I have prepared for you a high-grade cotter's dinner; by which I mean that it is a meal which all farmers or country people might have every day if they only knew enough, or were willing to learn. I have looked over several books on the subject, and Mrs. Parker told me a great deal. Maria told me a great many things also. They were both poor in early life, and knew what they were talking about. First we will have soup—a plain vegetable soup. I went into the garden and picked the vegetables myself.'

"'I wish you had asked me to do that,' said I.

"'Oh, no,' she answered; 'I do not intend to be inferior to any countrywoman. Then there is roast chicken. After that a lettuce salad with mayonnaise dressing; I do not believe cotters have mayonnaise dressing, nor shall we every day; but this is an exceptional meal. For the next course I have made a pie, and then we shall have black coffee. If you want wine you can get a bottle from the wine-hamper; but I shall not take any: I intend to live consistently through the whole of this experience.'

"There was something a little odd about the soup: it tasted as if a variety of vegetables had been washed in it and then the vegetables thrown away. I removed [128] the soup-plates while Anita went out to get the next course. When she put the dish on the table she said something had given way while the fowl was cooking, and it had immediately stuck its legs high in the air. 'It looks funny,' she remarked, 'but in carving you can cut the legs off first.'

"I found one side of the fowl much better cooked than the other,—in fact, I should have called it kiln-dried,—and the other side had certainly been warmed. The mayonnaise was very peculiar and made me think of the probable necessity of filling the lamps, and I hoped Baxter had had this attended to. The pie was made of

gooseberry jam, the easiest pie in the world to make, Anita told me. 'You take the jam just as it is, and put it between two layers of dough, and then bake it.' The coffee was very like black writing-ink, and, having been made for a long time, was barely tepid.

"Strange as it may appear, however, I ate a hearty dinner. I was very hungry.

"'Now,' said Anita, as she folded her napkin, 'I do not believe you have enjoyed this dinner half as much as I enjoyed the cooking of it, and I am not going to wash up anything, for I will not deprive myself of the pleasure of sitting with you while you smoke your after-dinner cigar on the front porch. These dishes will not be wanted until to-morrow, and if you will take hold of one end of the table we will set it against the wall. There is a smaller table which will do for our breakfast.'

"I drank several glasses of wine as I smoked, but I did not feel any better. If I had known what was going to happen I should have preferred to go hungry. I did not tell [129] Anita I was not feeling well, for that would have made her suffer in mind more than I was suffering in body; but when I had finished my smoke, and she had gone into the house to light the parlor lamp, I hurried over to the barn, where Baxter had had a telephone put up, and I called him up in town, and told him to send me a chef who could hoe and dig a little in the garden.

"'I thought you would want a man of that kind,' Baxter telephoned. 'Will Isadore do? He is at your town house now, and can leave by the ten-o'clock train.'

"I knew Isadore. He was the second chef in my town house, a man of much experience, and good-natured. I told Baxter to make him understand what sort of place he was coming to, and to send him on without delay.

"'Do you want him to live in the house?' asked Baxter. And I replied that I did not.

"'Very good,' said he; 'I will have a tent put up for him near Baldwin's.'

"When I went to the house I told Anita I had engaged a man.

"'I am glad,' said she; 'but I have just thought of something: I cannot possibly cook for a man.'

"'Oh, you won't have to do that,' I answered. 'He will live near here, just the other side of the road.'

"'That will do very well,' said she. 'I do not mind being your servant, Harold, but I cannot be a servant's servant.'"

"Do you know," said the Master of the House, "as this story goes on I feel poorer and poorer every minute—I suppose by comparison. In fact, I do not know that I can [130] afford to light another cigar. But one thought comforts me," he continued: "if I had been living in that cot with my wife I would not have had the stomach-ache; so that balances things somewhat."

The lady smiled.

"The next morning a little after eight o'clock I came down to open the house, and there, standing by the porch, hat in hand, I saw Isadore. He was a middle-aged man, large and solid, with very flat feet and a smoothly shaven face, twinkling eyes, and a benevolent smile. I was very glad to see him, especially before breakfast. I took him away from the house, so that Anita might not overhear our conversation, and then I laid the whole case before him. He was an Alsatian, but his English was perfectly easy to understand.

"'I know precisely what it is that is wanted,' said he, 'and Mr. Baxter has made the arrangements with me. It is that madame shall not suppose anything, but that what she wishes to be done shall be done.'

"'That is the idea,' said I. 'Don't interfere with her, but have everything done all right.'

"'And I am to be man of all work. I like that. You shall see that I am charmed. Now I will go and change my clothes.' And this well-dressed man turned away toward Baldwin's tent.

"When Anita came down the servant I had engaged was at the kitchen door waiting for orders. He was a plainly dressed man, his whole appearance neat but humble. 'He looks like a foreigner,' said Anita.

"'You are right,' I replied; 'he is an Alsatian.'

"'And his name?'

"I was about to tell her Isadore, but I stopped myself. It was barely possible that she [131] might have heard the name of the man who for two years had composed the peculiar and delicious ices of which she was so fond; she might even have seen him, and the name might call up some recollection. 'Did you say your name was Isaac?' I called out

to the man.

"'Yes, sir,' he answered; 'it is that. I am Isaac.'

"'I am going to get breakfast,' said Anita. 'Do you suppose he can build a fire?'

"'Oh, yes,' I replied; 'that is what he is engaged for—to be the man of all work.'

"Prompted by curiosity, I shortly afterwards looked in at the kitchen door. 'While you prepare the table, madame,' the man of all work was saying, 'shall I arrange the coffee for the hot water?'

"'Do you know how to do it?' she asked.

"'Oh, yes, madame,' the good Isaac replied. 'In a little hut in Alsace, where I was born, I was obliged to learn to do all things. My father and my mother had no daughter, and I had to be their daughter as well as their son. I learn to cook the simple food. I milk the cow, I rub the horse, I dig in the garden, I pick the berries in the woods.' As he talked Isaac was not idle; he was busy with the coffee.

"'That is very interesting,' said Anita to me; 'where there are no daughters among the poor the sons must learn a great deal.'

"I remained at the kitchen door to see what would happen next. There was a piece of dough upon a floury board, and when Anita went to lay the table the Alsatian fairly flew upon the dough. It was astonishing to see with what rapidity he manipulated it. [132] When Anita came back she took the dough and divided it into four portions. 'There will be two rolls apiece for us,' she said. 'And now, Isaac, will you put them into the stove? The back part is where we bake things. We are going to have some lamb chops and an omelet,' she said to me as she approached the hamper.

"'Ah, madame,' cried the Alsatian, 'allow me to lift the chops. The raw meat will make your fingers smell.'

"'That is true,' said Anita; 'you may take them out.' And then she went back to the dining-room.

"Isaac knelt by the hamper. Then he lifted his eyes to the skies and involuntarily exclaimed: '*Oh, tonnerre!* They were not put by the ice.' And he gave a melancholy sniff. 'But they will be all right,' he said, turning to me. 'Have trust.' The man of all work handled the chops, and offered to beat the omelet; but Anita would not let him do this: she made it herself, a book open beside her as she did so. Then she told Isaac to put it on the stove, and asked if I were ready for breakfast. As she turned to leave the room I saw her assistant whip her omelet off the stove and slip on it another one. When or where he had made it I had no idea; it must have been while she was looking for the sugar.

"'A most excellent breakfast,' said I, when the meal was over; and I spoke the exact truth.

"'Yes,' said Anita; 'but I think I shall do better after I have had more practice. I wonder if that man really can wash dishes.' On being questioned, Isaac declared that in the humble cot in which he was born he had been obliged to wash dishes; there were no daughters, and his mother was infirm.

"'That is good; and if any of the plates need a little rubbing up afterwards I can do [133] them,' said Anita. 'Now we will take a walk over the place, which we have not done yet.'

"When we returned Isaac was working in the garden. Anita went into the house, and then the man of all work approached me; he had in his hand a little piece of red earthenware, which he held up before me in one hand and touched his cap with the other. 'Sir,' said he, 'is it all pots? Grass, bushes, everything?'

"'Oh, no,' said I. 'What is the matter?'

"'Excuse me,' said he, 'but everywhere I work in the garden I strike pots, and I broke this one. But I will be more careful; I will not rub so deep.'

"For two or three days Anita and I enjoyed ourselves greatly. We walked, we sat in the shade, we lay in hammocks, we read novels. 'That man,' said Anita, 'is of the greatest possible assistance to me. The fact is that, having been taught to do all sorts of things in his infancy, he does the hard work of the kitchen, and all that is necessary for me to do is to give the finishing touches.'

"That afternoon, when I saw the well-known chef Isadore—for some years head cook to the Duke of Oxminster, and willing to accept a second place in the culinary department of my town house only on account of extraordinary privileges and emoluments—when I saw this man of genius coming down the hill carrying a heavy basket which probably contained meats packed in ice, I began to wonder about two things: in the first place, I wondered what exceptional remuneration in addition to his regular salary Baxter had offered Monsieur Isadore in return for his exceptional [134]

services in our cot; and in the second place, I wondered if it were exactly fair to practise such a variety of deceptions upon Anita. But I quieted my conscience by assuring it that I was doing everything for her benefit and happiness, particularly in regard to this man of all work, who was probably saving us from chronic dyspepsia. Besides, it was perfectly fair play, for if she had told me she was going to do all my cooking I never would have come to this cot.

"It was that evening, when we were both in a good humor after a good dinner, that my wife somewhat disturbed my peace of mind. 'Everything is going on so smoothly and in such a pastoral and delightful way,' said she, 'that I want some of our friends to visit us. I want them to see for themselves how enjoyable such a life as this is. I do not believe any of them know anything about it.'

"'Friends!' I exclaimed. 'We do not want people here. We cannot entertain them. Such a thing was never contemplated by either of us, I am sure.'

"'That is true,' said Anita; 'but things are different from what I expected. They are ever and ever so much better. And we can entertain people. We have a guest-room which is fitted up and furnished as well as ours is. If we are satisfied, I am sure anybody ought to be. I tell you who will be a good person to invite for the first one—Mr. Rounders.'

"'Rounders!' I exclaimed. 'He is the last man in the world for a guest in this cot.'

"'No, he is not,' answered Anita. 'He would like it very much indeed. He would be perfectly willing and glad to do anything you do, and to live in any way you live. [135] Besides, he told me, not very long ago, that he often thought of the joys of an humble life, without care, without anxiety, enough, no more, and a peaceful mind.'

"'Very well,' said I; 'this is your picnic, and we will have Rounders and his wife.'

"'No, indeed,' said Anita, very emphatically. 'She cannot come anyway, because she is in Europe. But I would not have her if she were here. If he comes, he is to come alone. Shall I write him a note, or will you? There is no time to waste.'

"She wrote the note, and when it was finished Isaac carried it to Baldwin and told him to have it mailed.

"The more I thought about this invitation the more interested I became in it. No one could be more unsuited to a cotter's life than Godfrey Rounders. He was a rich man of middle age, but he was different from any other rich man with whom I was acquainted. It was impossible to talk to him or even to be with him for five minutes without perceiving that he was completely controlled by the money habit. He knew this, but he could not help it. In business resorts, in society, and in the clubs he met great capitalists, millionaires, and men of wealth of all degrees, who were gentlemen, scholars, kind and deferential in manner, and unobtrusive in dress, and not to be distinguished, so far as conversation or appearance could serve as guides, from those high types of gentlemen which are recognized all over the world. Rounders longed to be like one of these, but he found it to be impossible. He was too old to reform, and the money habit had such a hold over him that I believe even when he slept he was [136] conscious of his wealth. He was not a coarse, vulgar Dives: he had the instincts of a gentleman; but these were powerless. The consciousness of money showed itself on him like a perspiration; wipe his brows as he might, it always reappeared.

"He had not been poor in his early life; his father was a man of moderate means, and Rounders had never known privations and hardships; but, in his intense desire to make people think that his character had not been affected by his money, he sometimes alluded to straits and difficulties he had known in early days, of which he was not now in the least ashamed. But he was so careful to keep these incidents free from any suspicion of real hardships or poverty that he always failed to make the impression he desired. I have seen him quite downcast after an interview with strangers, and I was well aware what was the matter with him. He knew that, in spite of his attempts to conceal the domination of his enslaving habit, these people had discovered it. Considering all this, I came to believe it would please Rounders very much to come to stay a few days with us. Life in a cot, without any people to wait upon him, would be a great thing for him to talk about; it might help to make some people believe that he was getting the better of his money habit.

"In the middle of the night I happened to wake, then I happened to think of Rounders, then I happened to think of a story Baxter had told me, and then I burst out into a loud laugh. Fortunately Anita did not awake; she merely talked in her sleep, and turned over. The story Baxter had told me was this: In the past winter I had given a grand dinner, and Rounders was one of the guests. Isadore's specialty [137] was ices, pastry, salads, and all sorts of delicate preparations, and he had excelled himself on this occasion, especially in the matter of sweets. At an unhappy moment Rounders had said to his neighbor that if she could taste the sort of thing she was eating as his cook made it she would know what it really ought to be. An obliging butler carried this remark to Monsieur Isadore as he was sipping his wine in his dressing-gown and slippers. The interesting part of this anecdote was Baxter's

description of Isadore's rage. The furious cook took a cab and drove directly to Baxter's hotel. The wording of Monsieur Isadore's volcanic remarks I cannot state, but he butchered, cut up, roasted, carved, peppered, and salted Rounders's moral and social character in such a masterly way that Baxter laughed himself hoarse. The fiery cook would have left my service then and there if Baxter had not assured him that if the gilded reptile ever dined with him again Isadore should be informed beforehand, that he might have nothing to do with anything that went on the table. In consequence of this promise, Monsieur Isadore, having withdrawn a deposit of several thousand dollars from one of the trust companies with which Rounders was connected, consented to remain in my household.

"'Now, then,' I asked myself, 'how are we going to get along with Rounders and my man of all work Isaac?' But the invitation had gone, and there was no help for it. I concluded, and I think wisely, that it would be unkind to trouble Anita by telling her anything about this complication, but I would prepare the mind of the good Isaac.

"I went into the garden the next morning, where our man of all work was gathering [138]
vegetables, and when I told him that Mr. Godfrey Rounders was coming to spend a few days with us the face of Isadore—for it was impossible at that moment to think of him as Isaac—was a wonderful sight to see: his brows contracted, his countenance darkened, and his eyes flashed as though they were about to shoot out lightning. Then all color, even his natural ruddiness, departed from his face. He bowed gravely.

"'I have heard it said you have taken some sort of dislike to Mr. Rounders,' said I; 'and while I have nothing to do with it, and do not want to know anything about it, I do not wish to force you into an unpleasant position, and if you would rather go away while Mr. Rounders is here, I will have some one sent to take your place until he leaves. Then we shall want you back again. In this unusual position you have acquitted yourself most admirably.'

"While I was speaking Isadore had been thinking hard and fast; it was easy to see this by the varied expressions which swept over his face. When I had finished he spoke quite blandly:

"'It is that it would be beneath me, sir, to allow any of the dislike of mine to interfere with the comfort or the pleasure of yourself and madame. I beg that you will not believe that I will permit myself even to think of such a thing. I remain so long as it is that you wish me. Is it that you intend that your visitor shall know my position in your town house?'

"'Oh, no,' said I; 'as I have not told my wife, of course I shall not tell him. I am much obliged to you for your willingness to stay. It would be very awkward if you should go.'

"'I understand that, sir,' said Isaac, 'and I would do not one thing to discompose [139]
madame or yourself.'

"Rounders arrived according to schedule, and I met him at the gate, and explained that my wife insisted it would be incongruous for a carriage to drive up to the cot. 'I like that!' exclaimed Rounders. 'I like to walk a little.' I took up one of his valises, the good Isaac carried the two larger ones, while Rounders, with an apologetic look from right to left, as if there might be some person present to whom this action should be explained, took up some canes and umbrellas wrapped in a rug, and we all went down to the cot, where Anita was waiting to receive us.

"'Oh, I like this,' said Rounders, quite cheerfully. 'I do not know when I have gone anywhere without some of my people. But I assure you I like it. At the bottom of our hearts we all like this sort of thing.'

"Anita showed him everything, and probably bored him dreadfully; but our guest was determined to be pleased, and never ceased to say how much he liked everything. There was no foolish pride about him, he said; he believed in coming close to nature; and although a great many of the peaceful joys of humanity were denied the man of affairs, still, when the opportunity came, how gladly our inward natures rose up to welcome it! 'Your wife tells me,' said he, 'that she is cook, housekeeper, everything. This is charming! It must be a joy to you to know she is capable of it. But, my dear friend,' he said, putting his hand on my shoulder, 'you must not let her overwork herself. She will be very apt to do it; the temptation is great. I am sure if I were she the temptation to overwork in these new spheres would be very great.' [140]

"Rounders certainly did overwork himself, and this was in the line of trying to make us believe that he thoroughly liked this plan of ours of living in a cot by a rill, and that he was quite capable of forgetting his ordinary life of affluence and luxury in the simple joys of our rural household. He would have produced an impression on both Anita and me if he had not said so much about it; but I knew what he was trying to do, and made all the necessary allowances for him.

"But, say what he might, I knew he was not satisfied. I could see that he missed his 'people,' by whom he was accustomed to be surrounded and served; and I soon found

out that his meals did not suit him. Anita visited the kitchen much more frequently than she had done just before Rounders arrived, and she talked a great deal about the dishes which were served to us; but, so far as I could judge, she had no more to do with their preparation than she had previously had. I was thoroughly well satisfied with everything; and, although Rounders was not, it was impossible for him to say so when he sat opposite the lady who told him two or three times at every meal that she presided in the kitchen. Of course I would have done everything in my power to give Rounders things to eat that he liked, but I did not know what to do. Our table was just as good, though not as varied, as it was when we were in town; and that Rounders was accustomed to living better than we did I could not for one moment believe. I came to the conclusion that, in spite of his efforts to subdue his dominating habit, he could not resist the temptation to let us know that he was not used to [141] humble life, or even the appearance of it.

"So I enjoyed our three good meals a day,—Anita would not allow us any more,—which were prepared by one of the best cooks on the continent from the choicest materials furnished regularly under Baxter's orders; and if Rounders chose to think that what was good enough for me was not good enough for him, he must go his own way and suffer accordingly. In fortune and in station I was so immeasurably superior to him that it nettled me a little to see him put on airs at the table to which I had invited him. But Rounders was Rounders, and I did not allow my irritation to continue.

"In two or three days our visitor's overwork began to show on him: his naturally plump cheeks hung down, his eyes drooped, and, although he drank a great deal of wine, he was seldom in good spirits. On the fourth day of his visit, after the morning mail had been brought to us by Isaac, Rounders came to me and told me he had just received a letter which would make it necessary for him to go home that afternoon. I expressed my regret, but did not urge him to stay, for it was obvious that he wanted to go. 'I have had a most delightful time,' he said, as he took leave of Anita; 'but business is business, and I cannot put it aside.'

"I believed both these statements to be incorrect: I knew that at that season he was not likely to be called away on business, and he had given me no reason to suppose he was enjoying himself; and as I walked with him to the gate I am afraid I was only stiffly polite. Our spirits rose after his departure. Anita said she had found him an [142] incongruity, and I was tired of the spectacle of a purse-proud man trying to appear like other people. But if I were harsh in my judgment of him I was speedily punished. On the third day after he left I received a message from Baxter, who wanted to see me at Baldwin's tent. He was not allowed to come into the grounds, for Anita said that would look too much like business.

"I found that Baxter's errand was indeed urgent, and that he was fully warranted in disturbing our privacy. The members of an English syndicate were coming down from Canada to make final arrangements with me for the purchase of a great tract of mining land, and as my presence and signature were absolutely necessary in the concluding stages of the transaction, I would be obliged to be in New York on the next day but one.

"I was greatly annoyed by this intelligence. The weather was particularly fine, Anita was reading me a most interesting novel, and I was settling myself down to a thorough enjoyment of our cottage life, which I did not wish interfered with by anybody or anything, and I growlingly asked why the syndicate had chosen such an unsuitable time of the year to come down from Canada. But Baxter did not know. I continued to growl, but there was no way out of it. I must go to New York. For the sake of perhaps half a million dollars, which would not alter our ordinary manner of living, which would not give us any pleasures, privileges, or advantages of any kind which we did not now possess, we must break up our delightful life at the cot and rill, and go back to the humdrum of ordinary society.

"Baxter tried to console me. He said we could easily return when this business had [143] been settled. But I knew that going away would break the charm; I thoroughly understood Anita's nature, and I was sure if she left the cot for a time she would not want to go back to it. But when I told her Baxter's business, and that she would have to have some one come and pack up for her, she flatly declared that no one should do anything of the kind. She would stay where she was.

"'You can't stay here by yourself!' I cried.

"'Of course not,' she said. 'Who could imagine such an absurdity? But I shall not be alone. I was thinking this very morning of Fanny Ransmore and her mother. I want some women guests this time, and they would be delightful after Mr. Rounders. Fanny is as lively as a cricket, and Mrs. Ransmore could take care of anybody. You can tell Baxter to have some one to patrol the grounds at night, and we shall get along beautifully. I am sure you will not be away long.'

"'But can you get the Ransmores?' I asked.

"'Certainly,' said she. 'They are at Newport now; but I will telegraph immediately, and they can start to-night and get here to-morrow afternoon. You need not be afraid they cannot come. They would give up any engagement on earth to be our only guests.'

"The matter was settled according to Anita's plan, and I was more willing to go to New York when I reflected that after the Ransmores came Anita would not be able to read aloud to me."

"At this point," said the Master of the House, "your hero makes me angry. Why should he think he could not go away and leave his wife for three days, when I leave my wife, and daughter too, for three years? His Anita is not worth one twentieth as much as either my wife or daughter. Then again, if I were in his place, I would not allow a disadvantageous half-million to take me away from you two. It is only the absolutely necessary thousands that make me leave you as I do." [144]

"Your sentiments are just as nice as they can be, papa," said the Daughter of the House; "but don't you see if the gentleman did what you would do it would spoil the story?"

John Gaythe smiled with pleasure. Here was a young lady who never forgot the principle of the thing, whatever the thing might be.

"That is true!" exclaimed the captain, stretching himself at full length in his chair. "I did not think of that. Madam, please proceed; let the King of Siam recommence his performances."

"I will merely remark," said the Mistress of the House, "that if the King of Siam undertook to emulate my hero in all his performances, it would be a pretty hard thing for his already overtaxed subjects.

"The Ransmores arrived on time, and were as delighted with the invitation as Anita had said they would be. According to her orders, neither of them brought a maid, which must have been pretty hard on the old lady; but they declared that the fun of waiting on themselves would be greater than anything Newport could possibly offer them.

"I went to New York, attended to my business, which occupied me for three days, and then I thought this would be a good opportunity to take a trip to Philadelphia to look at a large steam-yacht which was in course of construction at the shipyards there. I did not feel in such a hurry to go back to the cot now that the Ransmores were there, and I was sure also that Anita would like to hear about the new yacht, in which we hoped to make a Mediterranean voyage during the winter. But early in the forenoon of my second day in Philadelphia, while I was engaged in a consultation concerning some of the interior fittings of the yacht, I received a telegram from Baxter informing me that my wife had returned from the cot on the previous evening, and was now at our town house. At this surprising intelligence I dropped the business in hand and went to New York by the first train. [145]

"'Of course,' said Anita, when we were alone, 'I will tell you why I left that precious cot. We had a very good time after you left, and I showed the Ransmores everything. The next day Fanny and I determined to go fishing, leaving Mrs. Ransmore to read novels in a hammock, an occupation she adores. Isaac was just as good as he could be all the time; he got rods for us, and made us some beautiful bait out of raw beef, for of course we did not want to handle worms; and we started for the river. We had just reached a place where we could see the water, when Fanny called out that somebody had a chicken-yard there, and that we would have to go around it. We walked ever and ever so far, over all sorts of stones and bushes, until we made up our minds we were inside a chicken-yard and not outside, and so we could not get around it. I was very much put out, and did not like it a bit because we could not reach the river; but Fanny saw through it all, and said she was sure the fence had been put there to keep all sorts of things from disturbing us; and then she proposed fishing in the rill. [146]

"'We tried this a long time, but not a bite could we get; and then Fanny went wandering up the stream to see if she could find a spring, because she said she had heard that trout were often found in cold streams. After a while she came running back, and said she had found the spring, and what on earth did I think it was? She had soon come to what seemed to be the upper end of the rill, and went down on her hands and knees and looked under the edge of a great flat rock, and there she saw the end of an iron pipe through which the water was running. When I heard this I threw down my fishing-rod and would have nothing to do with an artificial rill. I remembered then that I had thought, two or three times, it had improved very much since I had first seen it; and when I asked Mr. Baxter about it last night, he said the original rill had not water enough in it for the little cataracts and ponds, and all that, and so he had brought down water from some other stream about half a mile away.

"'When we went back to the cot Fanny seemed to have her suspicions excited, and she pried into everything, and soon told me that the furniture and all the things in

the cot were only imitation of the things plain country people use, and were, in reality, of the best materials and wonderfully well made, and that it must have cost a lot of money to buy all these imitations of old-fashioned, poor-folksy things. Then she [147] went into the garden and peered about, and told Isaac, who was working there, that she had never seen so many different kinds of vegetables all ripe at the same time. He touched his cap, and said that was a compliment to his gardening. But pretty soon she saw the edge of a flower-pot sticking above the ground, and showed it to me. I made him dig up whole beds of things, and there was nothing but pots and pots, in which everything was growing.

"'I went back to the house and looked about a good deal more, with Fanny at my elbow to tell me how poor people would never have this or that or the other thing. Then I was very angry with myself for not being able to see things without having them pointed out to me by that Fanny Ransmore, who was not invited to pry about and make herself disagreeable in that way.'

"'And were you angry with me?' I asked.

"'Yes,' she answered; 'for a little while. But when I remembered the plans I had made I thought we were about square, and that I had concealed as much from you as you had from me. I was not angry, but I was determined I would not stay in that mock-cot any longer. I could not bear the sight of anything I looked at. I thought the quickest way of settling the matter was to get rid of the whole business at once, and I told Isaac to put a crowbar under the kitchen stove, which was full of burning wood, and turn it over. But he was horrified, and said he might be arrested and put in prison for doing that; and, besides, it would be such a shame to waste so many beautiful things. Fanny and her mother thought so, too. And I asked Isaac where the family lived who [148] used to own the cot, and he said they were still at the hotel, not being able to find any suitable quarters. So I sent for the widow and her daughter and son, and I told them to take the cot just as it was, and to keep it forever, and I would have Mr. Maxwell make out the law papers. They went about shouting with delight at everything they saw, very different from that Fanny! So it was really a very nice thing to do, and I feel a great deal better. And here I am, and you will find Fanny and her mother somewhere in the house whenever you want to see them. After this I think it will be better for us both not to try any affectionate frauds on each other.'

"I was very glad the investigating Fanny had not discovered all my affectionate frauds, and that I was able myself to reveal to Anita the identity of the useful Isaac. This did amaze her, and for a moment I thought she was going to cry; but she was not in the habit of doing much of that sort of thing, and presently she laughed. 'Monsieur Isadore,' she exclaimed, 'working in the garden and washing pots and pans! Why, don't you know some people think he is almost as good as our head chef Leonard?'

"'As good!' I cried. 'He is infinitely better. Leonard could never have done for us what our good Isaac did. And now I must tell you a story about Isadore that Baxter related to me this morning as we drove up from the station.' I then told her the story of Isadore alias Isaac—of his dislike for Mr. Rounders, and of the noble manner in which he had determined to stand by us when he heard that gentleman was about to visit us. 'After Rounders's arrival,' I remarked, 'things went on apparently as well as [149] before—'

"I made him dig up whole beds of things."

"'Apparently!' Anita interrupted. 'They went on better than before. I let Isaac, as we called him, do a great deal more of the cooking than he did before Mr. Rounders came. I thought our meals were remarkably good, and if Mr. Rounders did not like them, as I sometimes thought he did not, I believed it was because he could not help putting on airs even to us.'

"I laughed. 'Well,' said I, 'the state of the case was this: during the whole time Rounders stayed with us, Isadore did not cook one particle of food for him.'

"'That was impossible,' cried Anita. 'I noticed nothing of the kind, and, besides, Mr. Rounders would have found it out immediately.'

"'Of course neither of us noticed it,' said I, 'for Isadore did not serve us with any of the things he gave to Rounders. And as for the latter discovering that he was eating his food raw, he had no idea that such was the case. He supposed he was eating what we ate, and therefore did not like to say anything about it.'

"'But I do not understand!' cried Anita. 'How could any one eat things and not know they were uncooked?'

"'You do not understand,' said I, 'because you do not comprehend the deep and wonderful art of Isadore. Baxter tried to explain some of it to me as he heard it from the lips of the chef himself, but I do not know enough of kitchen magic to understand it. As Isadore waited on us, he was able to bring us well-prepared food, and to give Mr. Rounders something very different, but which looked just like that we had. Even [150] his coffee was served in a cup heated hot in the oven, while the coffee itself had merely been warmed. I cannot explain all these uncooked meals, and if you want to know more you must ask Isadore himself. But Baxter told me that spices and condiments must have been used with wonderful effect, and that the poor man must have lived mostly on biscuits. Isadore said that all his life he would laugh when he thought of Mr. Rounders trying to eat a chicken croquette the inside of which was perfectly raw, while the outside smoked, and looking at the same time with astonishment at you and me as we quietly ate what seemed to be exactly like the thing he had on his plate.'

"'But, Harold,' said Anita, 'that was a shameful way to treat our guest!'

"'That is what Baxter said to Isadore; but the cook excused himself by stating that all this happened in a cot, in a dear little cot, where everything was different from everything else in the world, and where he had tried to make you and me happy, and where he himself had been so happy, especially when he saw Mr. Rounders trying to eat chicken croquettes. He was also so pleased with the life at the cot that he is going to have one of his own when he goes back to Alsace, which will be shortly, as

he has made enough to satisfy his wants, and he intends to retire there and be happy in a cot.'

"Anita reflected for a few moments, and then she said: 'I think life in a cot might be very happy indeed—for Isaac.'"

With this the Mistress of the House rose from her chair.

"Is that at all?" exclaimed her daughter. "There are several things I want to know." [151]

"That is all," replied the story-teller. "Like the good King of Siam, I consider my already overtaxed subjects." And with this she went into the house.

"Do either of you suppose," remarked the Master of the House, "that that Anita woman gave the whole of that great estate to the widow and her two children? How much land do you think, John Gayther, was enclosed inside that chicken wire?"

"I have been calculating it in my head," replied the gardener, "and it must have been over a thousand acres. And for my part, sir, I don't believe it was all given to the widow. When Mr. Baxter came to attend to the papers I think he made over the cot and about seven acres of land, which was quite enough to be attended to by a half-grown boy."

"That is my opinion, too," said the Daughter of the House, "and I think that the opulent owner of that great estate made a deer-park of the rest of it, with reindeer, fallow deer, red deer, stags, and all sorts of deer, and not one of them able to jump over the wire."

"Ah, me!" said the captain, rising and folding his arms as he leaned his broad back against a pillar of the summer-house, "these great volcanoes of wealth, always in eruption, always squirting out town houses, country houses, butlers, chefs, under-chefs, diamonds, lady's-maids, horses, carriages, seaside gardens, thousand-acre poultry-yards, private sidewalks, and clouds of money which obscure the sun, daze my eyes and amaze my soul! John Gayther, I wish you would send me one of your turnip-hoers; I want him to take my second-best shoes to be mended."

THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

THE MASTER OF THE HOUSE

AND IS CALLED

THE GILDED IDOL AND THE KING CONCH-SHELL

V [155]

THE GILDED IDOL AND THE KING CONCH-SHELL

The rose-vines were running riot over the old garden wall, and as it was now midsummer and the season of their full bloom had passed, John Gayther set to work one morning to prune and train them. The idea of doing this was forcibly impressed upon his mind that day by the fact that the Mistress of the House had returned the evening before, and he knew that she would notice the untidy appearance of the rose-vines as soon as it should please her to come into the garden. The family had been at the sea-shore for nearly two weeks, and the gardener had missed them sorely, especially the Daughter of the House. They had now all returned, and the butler had told him that they had brought with them a visitor, a Frenchman. John Gayther, whose mind was always full of the Daughter of the House, immediately inquired if he was young; but the butler's answer was unsatisfactory, as he said the gentleman was neither young nor old, and talked queer English. As the butler himself —who was English—talked what seemed to the gardener queer English, John did not [156] lay much stress upon that statement.

He was soon to make his own observations, however, for a sweet voice he knew well called out to him: "We are all back, John, in the dear old garden!"

John turned, and found four persons had come up quietly and were watching his work. He returned the cordial greetings of the family, and then the Master of the House informally introduced their companion. "We have a foreign gentleman with us, John; he belongs to the same nation as your great hero Lafayette, and therefore I know you will be pleased to have him join our story-telling party. For it has been decided by the ruling power in this house that a story is to be told this morning; so leave your vines, and come with us."

John was obliged to follow as the party took the path to the summer-house, but he went unwillingly. Lafayette was a great and good man, but it did not follow that all his countrymen were of that sort; and, in fact, John knew but little about Frenchmen. He immediately conceived a dislike to this one as he saw him walking by the side of the Daughter of the House and evidently pleased with her company. He greatly disliked the idea of telling a story to this stranger, and determined it should not be made interesting.

There was nothing in the Frenchman's appearance to excite this dislike. There was nothing striking about him. He was a good-looking man verging on middle age perhaps, with a rather short little figure and an airy walk.

"Now," said the Master of the House, when the party were all disposed to the best [157]
advantage, and the Frenchman had gone into an ecstasy over the view from the summer-house, "John Gayther, you are to listen carefully to this story, for I am going to tell it myself, being moved thereto by the story my wife told here."

John, greatly relieved by this announcement, signified his cordial approbation, and the captain began his relation:

"Captain Abner Budlong was a retired sailorman. He was rather small of stature, with mild blue eyes, and a little gold ring in each of his ears. He was in the prime of life, and had been so often wet with salted water and dried by salted winds that he looked as though he might last forever.

"He had ceased to sail in ships, because his last vessel, of which he had been part-owner, had positively declined to sail any longer under him. When this misguided craft decided to go to the bottom of the sea, Captain Abner, in a little boat, accompanied by his crew, betook himself to the surface of the land, and there he determined to stay for the rest of his life. His home was on the sea-shore. In the summer-time he fished and took people out to sail in his boat; and in the cold weather he generally devoted himself to putting things into his house, or arranging or rearranging the things already there. He himself was his family, and therefore there was no difference of opinion as to the ordering of that household.

"The house was divided through the middle by a narrow hallway; that part to the right as one entered the front door was called by Captain Abner the 'bachelor side,' while the portion to the left he designated as the 'married side.' The right half might [158]
have suggested a forecastle, and was neat and clean, with sanded floors and everything coiled up and stowed away in true shipshape fashion. But the other half was viewed by Captain Abner as something in the quarter-deck style. Exactly half the hall was carpeted, and the little parlor opening from it was also carpeted, painted, and papered, and filled with a great variety of furniture and ornaments which the captain had picked up by sea and land. Everything was very pretty and tasteful, according to the captain's ideas of taste and art, and everything was sacred; no collector could have bought anything out of that little parlor, no matter how much money he might offer.

"This parlor and the room above had been furnished, decorated, and ornamented for the future mistress of Captain Abner's household, and he was ready to dedicate them to her services whenever he should be so lucky as to find her. So far, as he sometimes expressed himself, he had not had a chance to sing out, 'There she blows!'

"One afternoon, when Captain Abner was engaged in dusting the ornaments in the parlor, his good friend Samuel Twitty stood in the doorway and accosted him. Sam Twitty had been mate to Captain Abner, and as he had always been accustomed to stand by his captain, he stood by him when he left the sea for the land; although they did not live in the same house, they were great cronies, and were always ready to stand by each other, no matter what happened. Sam's face and figure were distinguished by a pleasant plumpness; he was two or three years the junior of [159]
Captain Abner, and his slippered feet were very flat upon the ground. He held his pipe behind his back in such a position that it hung over the uncarpeted part of the hallway. A pipe in the married part of the house was never allowed.

"'Sam,' said Captain Abner, 'you've hove in sight jes at the right minute, for I'm kind o' puzzled. Here's this conch-shell, which is the biggest I ever seed, and a king conch-shell at that, and I can't make up my mind whether she'd like it here in the middle of the mantelpiece, or whether she'd like to have the gilded idol here, where it would be the fust thing she'd see when she came into the room. Sometimes I'm inclined in the way of the heathen idol, and sometimes in the way of the king conch-

shell. And how am I to know which she likes? What do you think about it?'

"'Well, now, Cap'n Abner,' said Sam, his head cocked a little to one side, 'that's a pretty hard question to answer, considerin' I don't know who she is and what kind o' taste she's got. But I'll tell you what I'd do if I was you. I'd put that king conch-shell on the mantelpiece, or I would put the gilded idol there, it wouldn't matter much which, and then I'd put the other one handy, so that when she fust come in, and you could see she didn't like whatever it was that was in the middle of the mantelpiece, you could whip it off and put the other thing there almost afore she knowed it.'

"'Sam,' said Captain Abner, 'that's a real good rule to go by, and it looks to me as if it might fit other things besides gilded idols and conch-shells. And now that you're here I'd like you to stay and take supper with me. I've got something to tell you.'

"After the evening meal, which was prepared by Captain Abner and his guest, who were both expert maritime cooks and housekeepers, these two old friends sat down to smoke their pipes, the parlor door having been carefully shut. [160]

"'Sam,' said the captain, 'I've got everything ready for her that I can think of. There isn't anything more she'd be likely to want. So now I'm goin' after her, and I'm goin' to start on Monday mornin'.'

"Sam Twitty was astonished. He had had an idea that Captain Abner would go on preparing for her to the end of his days, and it was a shock to him to hear that the work of preparation, in which he had been interested for so many years, and in which he had so frequently assisted, should now be brought suddenly to a close.

"'Ready!' he ejaculated. 'I wouldn't have believed it if ye hadn't told me yourself. And yet, come to think of it, I can't see for the life of me what else you can do for her.'

"'There ain't nothin' else,' said Abner, 'and on Monday mornin' I'm settin' out to look for her.'

"'Do you go by land or by water?' asked Sam.

"'Land,' was the answer. 'There ain't no chance of runnin' across her by sea.'

"'And how are you goin'? Walkin'?'

"'No, sir,' said Abner. 'I'm goin' to hire a horse and a buggy. That's how I'm goin'.'

"'And where are you goin' to steer fust?' asked Sam.

"'I'm goin' fust to Thompsontown, and after I've took my observations there I'll fetch a compass and sail every which way, if need be. There's lots of people of all sorts in [161] Thompsontown, and I don't see why she shouldn't be one of them.'

"'No more do I,' said Sam Twitty. 'I think it's more'n likely she'll be one of them.'

"Very early the next morning, almost before the first streaks of dawn, Captain Abner was awakened by a voice under his window.

"'Shipmate ahoy!' said the voice, which was Sam Twitty's. In a moment Abner's head was out of the window.

"'Cap'n Abner,' said Sam, 'I'm goin' with you.'

"Abner did not immediately answer, but presently he replied: 'Look here, Sam Twitty; you come around after breakfast and tell me that ag'in.'

"Promptly after breakfast Sam appeared.

"'Look a' here,' said Captain Abner, when they had lighted their morning pipes, 'that ain't a bad notion of yours. Somethin' might turn up when I'd want advice, and you might give me some like you gave me about the king conch-shell and the gilded idol. It ain't a bad idea, and, as you say so, I'd like you to come along.'

"Sam did not reply with the alacrity that might have been expected of him. He puffed silently at his pipe and gazed upon the ground. 'You said you was a-goin' in a buggy,' he remarked.

"'Yes; that's what I'm expectin' to do.'

"'Then how am I to get back?' inquired Sam.

"'That's so,' said Abner. 'I never thought of that.'

"'Look a' here, cap'n,' said Abner; 'what do you say to a spring-wagon with seats for four, two in front, and two behind?'

"This suited Captain Abner, and Sam went on to say: 'There'll be another good thing about that; if you get her and bring her back—' [162]

"'Which is what I'm goin' for and intend to do.'

"'Then,' continued Sam, 'you two could sit on the back seat, and I could sit in front and drive.'

"'Did you ever drive, Sam?' asked Captain Abner.

"'Not yet; but I wouldn't mind l'arnin'.'

"'But you won't l'arn with me and her,' said Captain Abner.

"'How are you goin' to manage it, then?' asked Sam. 'You won't want me and her to sit on the back seat, and it wouldn't look jes right for you an' her to be in front, and me behind all by myself, as if I was company.'

"'Don't know,' said Captain Abner. 'We'll get her fust, and then let her sit where she wants to.'

"'There's one thing I wouldn't like to see,' said Sam Twitty, 'and that's you and me sittin' behind, and her a-drivin'.'

"'There won't be none of that,' said Captain Abner; 'that ain't my way.'"

"Is that a good beginning?" asked the Master of the House, suddenly addressing his wife.

"Yes," she replied, "very good; and I see this is to be a real man's story."

"And so it should be, mamma," said the Daughter of the House. "Men know more about men than they do about women."

"Don't be too sure of that," said her father. "But no matter. The two friends started out on Monday morning after breakfast for Thompsontown. Considerable delay was occasioned at the livery-stable by certain pieces of advice which Sam Twitty offered [163] to Captain Abner. In the first place, he objected to a good black horse which had been attached to the wagon, giving it as his opinion that that looked too much like a funeral, and that a cheerful-colored horse would be much better adapted to a matrimonial expedition. A gray horse, slower than the black one, was substituted, and Sam was quite satisfied. Then a great many things in the way of provisions and conveniences came into his mind which he thought would be well to take on the voyage, and he even insisted upon rigging up an extension at the back of the wagon on which her trunk could be carried on the home journey.

"At last they got away, and as they drove slowly out of the little village not one of the inhabitants thereof knew anything about their intended journey, except that they were going to Thompsontown; for Captain Abner and Sam Twitty would have as soon thought of boring a hole in the bottom of a boat in which they were to sail as of telling their neighbors they were going to look for her and to bring her back in that spring-wagon.

"The old gray horse jogged very comfortably over the smooth road until a toll-gate was perceived near by.

"'Now, then, cap'n,' said Sam, as they drew up in front of the little house by the roadside, 'whatever you pay here you ought to charge to the expense of gettin' her.'

"'That's so,' said his companion; 'but if she's all right I ain't goin' to mind no tolls.'

"A pleasant-faced woman now came to the door of the little house and stood expectant, while Captain Abner thrust his hand into his pocket.

"'How much is it?' said he. [164]

"'It's ten cents,' said she.

"Then Sam Twitty, who did not wish to sit silent, remarked that it was a fine day, and the toll-gate woman said that indeed it was. Captain Abner was now looking at some small change in the palm of his hand.

"'I ain't got ten cents,' said he. 'Here's only six, and I can't scrape up another copper. Sam, can you lend me four cents?'

"Sam searched his pockets. 'Haven't got it,' said he. 'Them little things we bought jes afore we started cleaned me out of change.'

"'The same thing's happened to me, too,' said Abner; 'and, madam, I'll have to ask you to change a five-dollar note, which is the smallest I've got.'

"The toll-gate woman said she was very sorry, but indeed she had not five dollars in change, either at the toll-gate or in the house where she lived just behind in a little garden. The day before she had had a good deal of change, but she had paid it all into the company.

"'Then what are we goin' to do?' asked Sam. 'I suppose you won't let us go through without payin'?'

"The woman smiled and shook her head. 'I couldn't do that; it's against the rules. Sometimes when people come along and find they have nothin' to pay toll with they go back and get the money somewhere. It's our rules, and if I broke them I might lose my place.'

"'Which we wouldn't think of makin' you do,' remarked Sam.

"'But that's one thing I can't do,' said Captain Abner. 'I can't turn round and go back. [165] If the folks knew I was turned back because I couldn't pay toll I'd never hear the end of it.'

"'That's so,' agreed Sam. 'It would never do to go back.'

"The toll woman stood and looked at them and smiled. She was a pleasant personage, not inclined to worry over the misfortunes of her fellow-beings.

"'Isn't there a place somewhere near here where I could get a note changed?' asked Abner.

"'I can't say,' answered the toll woman. 'I don't believe any of the houses along the road has got five dollars in change inside of them, and even if you went across the country to any of the farm-houses, you wouldn't be likely to find that much. But if you are not in a hurry and wouldn't mind waitin', it's as like as not that somebody will be along that's got five dollars in change. You don't seem to know this part of the country,' she added.

"'No,' said Abner; 'when me and my mate travels we generally take the public conveyances. This is the fust time we've druv on this road.'

"Then up spoke Sam Twitty: 'Does you and your husband live here and keep the toll-gate, ma'am?'

"The woman looked as though she thought the plump person a little inquisitive, but she smiled and answered, 'My husband used to keep the toll-gate, but since he died I've kept it.'

"Captain Abner looked troubled. 'I don't mind so much waitin' myself,' said he, 'but it's the horse I'm thinkin' about. I promised I'd have him fed at twelve o'clock sharp every day I have him. He's used to it, and I don't want him givin' out afore I'm [166] through with him.'

"'When horses is used to bein' fed at regular times,' said the toll-gate woman, 'they do show it if they don't get fed. But, if you don't mind, I've got a little stable back there, and some corn, and if you choose to drive your horse into the yard and give him a feed I'll charge you jes what anybody else would. And while he's a-feedin' most likely somebody'll come along that's got five dollars in change.'

"For some minutes Sam Twitty had not said a word, but now he most earnestly advised his friend to accept this offer, and, jumping to the ground, he hurried to open the gate so that Captain Abner might drive in. Abner had not yet made up his mind upon the subject, but, as Sam stood there by the open gate, he drove in.

"'Look a' here!' said Sam, as they stood by the stable door. 'This is a jolly good go! Did you take notice of that toll-gate woman? She's tiptop to look at. Did you see how clean she is, and what a nice way of smilin', an' a good deal of red in her cheeks, too, and jes about old enough, I should say, if I was called upon. And, more than that, I should say, judgin' from what I've seen of her, she's as likely to be as accommodatin' as any person I ever did see that I had seed for so short a time. I jes put her into my mind a-goin' into your parlor and sayin' that conch-shells was jes what she liked on mantelpieces. And I could put her in jes as well with the gilded idol.'

"'You seem to do a lot of thinkin' in a mighty short time,' said Abner. 'But what's all that got to do with anything?'

"'Do!' exclaimed Sam. 'It's got lots to do. Why wouldn't she be a good one for *her*? I [167] don't believe you'd find a better one in Thompsontown.'

"'Sam Twitty!' exclaimed Abner, rather testily, 'what are you talkin' about? Do you suppose I'd paint and paper and clean up and furnish one side of my house for her, and then start out on a week's cruise to look for her, and then take and put in her place and give everything I've been gettin' for her for so many years to the fust woman I meet, and she a toll-gate woman at that?'"

The Frenchman, who had been listening with great apparent interest, now looked so inquiringly at the Master of the House that he paused in his story.

"Excuse my interrupt," he said apologetically; "but what is toll-gate woman?"

"My conscience!" exclaimed the captain, "you haven't understood a word of my story!" He then proceeded to explain a toll-gate and its office and emoluments; but it was at once evident that the Frenchman knew all about the thing—he did not know the English words which expressed it; and he had a clear comprehension of the

narrative.

"Those two men pull two ways," he said gleefully; "ought to make a good story."

"It is a good story if my papa tells it," spoke up the Daughter of the House. And John Gayther was pleased to note a sharpness in her voice.

"Yes, miss; that is just what I say—a very much good story. I long for the end to come."

"Not exactly the compliment intended," remarked the Mistress of the House, with a smile.

"How do you think it will end?" asked the Daughter of the House, impulsively, addressing the Frenchman. [168]

"It is not polite to imagine," he replied.

"But I want to know," she persisted. "It is not impolite to guess."

"Well, then, miss, he marry nobody. Too many women in that Villa Thompson. But we sadly interrupt! Beg pardon, captain."

"The captain I am telling about in my story," said the Master of the House, resuming his narrative, "could not silence Sam Twitty.

"'Now I tell you, cap'n,' he said, as he assisted in taking the horse out of the wagon, 'don't you go and miss a chance. Here's a fust-rate woman, with red cheeks and mighty pretty hair, and a widow, too. Even if you don't take her now, it's my advice that you look at her sharp with the idea that if things don't turn out in Thompsontown as you'd like them to, it would be mighty comfortin' to you to pick her up on your way back.'

"When Captain Abner and Sam returned from the stable they looked up and down the far-stretching road, and then, at the invitation of the toll-gate woman, they seated themselves on a bench at the back of the toll-house.

"'Tisn't a very good time for people to be passin',' said she. 'Not many folks is on the road between twelve and one. They're generally feedin' themselves and their horses. But if you can make yourselves comfortable here in the shade, I don't think you'll have to wait very long. I'll jes step in and see if my dinner ain't cooked. There ain't nobody in sight.'

"Sam Twitty rubbed his hands together. 'In my opinion,' said he, 'that woman is a fust-class housekeeper.' [169]

"In a very few minutes she returned. 'If you gentlemen don't mind,' said she, 'I can give you your dinner here at the same price you'd have to pay anywhere else. I always cook a lot on Mondays, so's I can have something cold for the rest of the week. It's on the table now, and you can go in and wait on yourselves.'

"Sam gave a quick glance at Abner. 'You go in with her,' said he, 'and eat your dinner. I'm not hungry, and I'll wait out here and keep the toll-gate. Afterwards I'll get a bite.'

"The toll-gate woman smiled. 'Perhaps it would be better for me to go in and wait on one of you at a time; but I don't think it's likely there'll be anybody passin'.'

"Abner did not object—he was hungry; and he followed the toll-gate woman into her house. Sam Twitty made a motion as if he would dance a little in his slippered feet.

"'That's jes like runnin' across a dead whale what's jes expired of too much fat. All you've got to do is to cut it up and try it down. The fust thing Cap'n Abner does is to run into a widow woman that'll suit him, I believe, better than anybody he'll meet, if he cruises around Thompsontown for a week.'

"Sam sat down on the bench and pictured things in his mind: he took the toll-gate woman all over Captain Abner's house, even into the unmarried part, and everywhere he saw her the same bright-cheeked, pleasantly smiling woman she was here in her own house. The picture pleased him so much that he withdrew his senses [170] from the consideration of everything else, and therefore it was he did not hear wheels on the road, and was awakened from his pleasant dreams by a voice outside the door. He bounced to his slippered feet, and entered the toll-house.

"On the roadway was a buggy and a horse, and in the buggy sat a smiling young woman. Why she smiled Sam could not imagine; but then, he could not see the comical expression on his own face on being thus suddenly aroused to a sense of his duty.

"'How much is the toll?' said the young woman, still smiling.

"Sam looked at her; she was a good-looking young person, and he liked her smile, for it betokened a sense of humor, and that pleased him. 'How much?' he repeated. 'A

vehicle, a man, and a horse—'

"'But this is a girl and a mare,' she interrupted. 'How much is that?'

"Sam looked up and smiled. This young person certainly had a sense of humor. 'I wonder how much that would be,' he said. 'I guess I'll have to get a pencil and paper and work it out.'

"The girl laughed. 'You are not the toll-gate keeper?' she asked.

"'No,' replied Sam. 'I'm keepin' it for her. She's eatin' her dinner. Don't you know the toll yourself? You've paid it before, haven't you?'

"'No, I haven't,' she replied. 'I am visiting in the neighborhood. But I won't haggle about being a girl. I'll pay the price for a man, if you will let me know what it is.'

"An idea came suddenly into Sam Twitty's head: this was a very bright girl, a very attractive girl, who was visiting in the neighborhood, and he determined to keep her [171]
at the toll-gate a few minutes if he could.

"'I don't want to make any mistake,' he said quickly. 'I'll jes pop into the house and see what the toll really'll be for you.'

"'Oh, you needn't do that,' said the young woman. 'Of course it is the same—'

"But Sam was gone; and she laughed and said to herself that the deputy toll-gate keeper was a very funny person. Sam ran to the house, panting. He beckoned to Captain Abner to step outside.

"'Look a' here,' he said; 'you hurry out to the gate and take a good long look at the girl that's there. She's a-visitin' in the neighborhood. Now mind you take a good look at her, and I'll be there in a minute.'

"Without exactly understanding the reason for this earnest injunction, Abner went to the gate. He was accustomed to taking Sam's advice if he saw no good reason against it.

"The toll-gate woman was on her feet, but Sam detained her, and said something about the relation between sex and toll.

"'Well, well,' said the woman, 'she must be a queer one. I'll go out to her.'

"'Oh, no,' cried Sam. 'Sit here and finish your dinner. He's comin' right back, and I'll collect the toll.' Half-way to the toll-house Sam met Abner. 'What do you think of her?' he asked hurriedly. 'Did you take a good look at her?'

"'Yes, I did,' replied his friend, 'and I don't think nothin' of her. What is there to think about her?'

"'Go back to your dinner,' cried Sam. 'I've got to collect her toll.' [172]

"'I want you to tell me,' said the girl, not smiling now, 'do you keep a detective here? Do you think I want to cheat the road out of its toll? I am ready to pay the charge, whatever it is.'

"'Detective!' exclaimed Sam.

"'Yes,' said she; 'that little brown man who came out here and looked at me as if he were determined to know me the next time he saw me.'

"'Oh, him!' said Sam. 'That's a friend of mine, Cap'n Abner Budlong. He's no detective, nor nothin' like one. He jes came out to see who was passin' while I was findin' out about the toll. He's always fond of seein' people.'

"'I should think he was,' said the young woman. 'In fact, I think you are a funny lot, toll-gate woman and all. Now here is a quarter; please take the toll and give me the change, that is, if you know how to calculate.'

"Sam took the money, but he did not immediately make the change. 'I don't want you to think hard of any of us,' said he, 'on account of your bein' kept here a little longer than common. But specially I don't want you to think hard of my friend Cap'n Abner Budlong, the gentleman who stepped out here to see who was passin'. Bless your soul, he's no detective! He's one of the finest fellows I know, and you jes ought to see his house at Shamrick. It's filled with more things that's nice to look at and things that's comfortable to use than any other house in that region. Everything's jes as clean and shipshape—'

"'He must have a good wife,' the young woman interrupted. [173]

"'He hasn't got no wife at all,' said Sam, delighted to get in this piece of information. 'Never had one.'

"The girl looked at him, and then she laughed merrily. 'I really must go on,' she said. 'You truly are a funny lot, all of you.' And as she drove on she looked back, still

laughing.

"Sam Twitty rubbed his hands together quite cheerfully, and went into the house to get his dinner.

"'Did that woman change your five-dollar note?' asked the keeper of the toll-gate.

"'Bless my soul!' exclaimed Sam. 'I never thought to ask her.'

"'What did you ask her?' cried the woman. 'She was out there for the longest time, and I thought of course you was gettin' your note changed.'

"Sam smiled. 'She was very interesting,' said he."

"What a treasure Sam Twitty would be in a matrimonial bureau!" exclaimed the Mistress of the House.

"Provided he exercised a little more caution in the selection of his specimens," suggested John Gayther, respectfully. "Some might be too green and some the other way, you know; he didn't seem over-particular."

"Three travellers passed through," continued the Master of the House, "but not one of them could change a five-dollar note; and Abner chafed at the delay.

"'I don't like wastin' time like this,' said he to Sam, as the two smoked their after-dinner pipes.

"'Wastin'!' exclaimed Sam. 'I don't call this wastin' time. We didn't start till late this mornin', and here we've got sight of two of her a'ready. Here's this one, as red-cheeked and sociable as anybody could expect, and then there's that gal in the buggy.' [174]

"'Gal in the buggy!' exclaimed Abner. 'What on earth are you talkin' about her for?'

"'Why shouldn't I?' asked Sam. 'I tell you, Cap'n Abner, she's the prettiest and the liveliest young woman you'd be likely to meet if you cruised for a year, and she's visitin' right in the neighborhood, and can't be far from Shamrick.'

"'Codwollops!' said Abner, contemptuously.

"In the course of an hour old Joshua Asbury drove up in his farm-wagon, and changed the five-dollar note, and was glad to do it, for he did not like to carry so much inconvenient silver and copper in his pocket. The two friends now made ready to depart.

"'Let's hurry up,' said Sam. 'We've done fust-rate so far, and maybe we'll sight one or two more afore bedtime.'

"'When you come back,' said the woman, 'I'd be glad to have you stop and rest, and give your horse a feed if you want to.'

"Sam Twitty assured her most earnestly that they certainly would stop, whether they wanted rest and a feed or not; and he thanked her warmly as he paid for the kind entertainment she had given them.

"'Sam,' said Abner, when they were on the road, 'the trouble with you is, you're too quick. If you was at the tiller you'd run into the fust port you come to, and there wouldn't be no v'yage at all.'

"'There's no knowin' when a fellow may want to run into port,' replied Sam, 'and it's a good thing to find out all about them as you're coastin' along.' [175]

"A few miles from the toll-gate they came to the bottom of a long hill, and half-way up it they saw, going in the same direction as themselves, a man walking vigorously.

"'By the general cut of his clothes,' said Sam, 'I'd say he is a minister.'

"'I expect you're right,' said Abner. 'Most likely fillin' some fishin' minister's pulpit Sunday, and walkin' home Monday.'

"The pedestrian clergyman walked more slowly as he neared the top of the hill, and the gray horse gradually overhauled him.

"'Look a' here,' said Sam, nudging his companion, 'let's give him a lift. He must be dreadfully hot. And then, by George, Cap'n Abner, jes think what a jolly thing it'll be—goin' after her, and takin' a minister along, sittin' comfortable on the back seat! That's like holdin' a landin'-net ready to scoop her up the minute you get her to the top of the water.'

"They stopped and asked the clergyman if he were going to Thompsontown, and when he said he was, they invited him to get in and take the unoccupied seat. He proved to be an agreeable companion; he was young and very grateful. Sam soon fell into a very friendly conversation with him, and two or three times, when Abner thought that his friend was on the point of saying something that bore too directly on

the object of their journey, he pressed his port boot gently upon Sam's starboard slipper.

"Toward the middle of the afternoon they reached Thompsontown, where the young clergyman said he was going to stop for the night, and go on by train the next day. [176] Sam Twitty was glad to hear this, and advised him to stop at the Spinnaker Boom, where he and Captain Abner intended to stay until they finished the business which brought them to Thompsontown.

"Thompsontown was a seaside resort, and rather a lively place in the season. There was a large hotel for summer visitors who could afford to pay good prices, and several smaller houses of entertainment, such as the Spinnaker Boom, where people of moderate means were made very comfortable.

"It was much too early for supper, and Captain Abner and Sam took a long walk on the beach, and at their invitation the young clergyman joined them. This gentleman, who did not seem to know any one in Thompsontown, proved to be a thorough landsman; but as he was chatty and glad to acquire knowledge, it gave Captain Abner and Sam a great deal of pleasure to talk to him on nautical points and thereby improve his mind. On their return, Sam stopped with a start, and almost dropped his pipe.

"'What's the matter?' cried Captain Abner. 'Did you see her spout?'

"Sam made no answer, but stood with his mouth open. He had remarkably good vision. The clergyman stopped and looked at him inquiringly.

"'They are coming, both of them!' said Sam.

"'Both of who?' asked Abner.

"'The gal in the buggy, and the toll-gate woman.'"

"If I were telling this story," here interrupted the Daughter of the House, excitedly, "I really do not know which one I would marry to Captain Abner!"

"Thank you for the compliment, my dear," said her father. [177]

"Well, there they both were: side by side they were walking along the smooth beach and approaching our three men. Sam's eyes sparkled. The toll-gate woman appeared much more comely and attractive than when engaged in her professional duties earlier in the day. She was now attired in fresh-looking summer clothes, and wore a pretty straw hat. As for the girl of the buggy, she was quite another person. It would have been impossible for any one who had merely seen her within the limited confines of a small vehicle to form any idea of the buoyant air and the lively step of this handsome young woman.

"'Upon my word!' exclaimed Sam Twitty, advancing toward them. 'Who would have expected to meet you two here!'

"At this meeting all our characters were variously affected. The toll-gate woman beamed with pleasure; the young woman of the buggy looked as if she were about to laugh; the young minister looked very much interested, although he could have given no good reason why he should be; the countenance of Captain Abner Budlong betrayed no interest whatever; and Sam Twitty was in a glow of delight.

"'I suppose you are surprised to meet me here,' said the toll-gate woman, 'but this is the way of it: a neighbor and his wife came along soon after you left, and offered to bring me to Thompsontown; and of course I jumped at the chance, and left the toll-gate in charge of my brother, who lives hard by. And in the town, at the house of a friend, I met this young lady, and—' glancing at her companion, she added: 'I really [178] did not catch the name.'

"'Miss Denby,' stated the young person referred to.

"The three men here bowed to Miss Denby; then, stepping nearer to Sam, the toll-gate woman asked in a low voice, 'Who is the minister?'

"'I don't know his name,' said Sam, 'but I'll find out in a minute.' And then he approached the girl of the buggy. 'I am so glad to see you,' he said.

"She laughed outright. 'It is awfully funny,' answered she, 'that you care whether you see me or not.'

"'I don't think it's funny at all,' said Sam. 'But jes let me ask you one thing: what's the name of the toll-gate woman?'

"'Well, I declare!' she exclaimed. 'From the way she talked about you I thought you were old friends. Her name is Mrs. Sickles.'

"Sam skipped over to the young clergyman and put his question: 'Mr-r-r.?'

"'Rippledean,' said the young man.

"In an instant the quick-slippered Sam had joined the party in the bonds of conventional acquaintanceship, having added to the rest of his information the fact that he was Samuel Twitty of Shamrick.

"'You are the funniest people I ever met,' exclaimed the lively Denby girl. 'None of you seems to know the rest.'

"'It is very pleasant to know each other, I am sure,' remarked the toll-gate woman; 'and if I had anything to say about what would be agreeable on such a breezy afternoon as this, now that there's a party of us, I would say it would be to get a boat and take a sail on this sparkling water.'

"'A sail!' cried Sam. 'Why, that will be the best thing in the world, and if you'll wait [179] ten minutes I'll get a boat. Cap'n Silas Peck is a friend of mine, and has got two boats that ain't likely to be out. I'll run down and get one, and have it here in no time.'

"In less than a quarter of an hour the party was seated in Captain Peck's sail-boat, Captain Abner at the tiller, and Sam Twitty in charge of the sheet. They decided to sail out to an island about three miles from shore. A stiff breeze was blowing, and Captain Abner was in his glory. The wind was much too high for ordinary pleasure-boats, and there were no other sails upon the bay; but summer visitors and seafaring men stood along the beach and watched the admirable manner in which that little craft was handled. Word was passed from one to another that it was Captain Abner Budlong of Shamrick who was at the tiller; many of the watchers had heard of Captain Abner and what he had done in days gone by, and they were proud to see what their neighbor of Shamrick was doing now.

"Mrs. Sickles sat beaming, both hands grasping the rail and her feet firmly braced, but with an expression of perfect trust, as she gazed from Captain Abner to Sam Twitty, which would have been edifying to any one of weak habits of faith. The younger woman's hat was off, and her hair was flying like a streamer from a masthead. She drank in the salt breeze with delight, and her eyes sparkled as the boat dipped at the turn of Captain Abner's tiller until the rail cut under the surface of the water as if it were skimming a pan of milk. She looked upon the bright-eyed sailor at the helm as though he were some sort of a salt-water deity whom it was [180] suitable to worship. It was better than sparkling wine to her to dash over the sparkling water.

"The island shore drew near; the little boat bore bravely down upon it, and then with a beautiful sweep fell into the wind; her great wing dropped and hung listless, and her keel gently grazed the sand."

"Very beautiful! Oh, so fine a turn to words!" exclaimed the Frenchman, who was very intent upon the story.

"My papa is a sailor," said the Daughter of the House, proudly. "You should see him bring around a great vessel with a grand sweep, so quietly and so gracefully!"

"You never saw me do anything of the kind," said her father, in surprise.

"I have never seen you," she admitted reluctantly, "but I know just how you would do it."

Her father smiled and laid a hand on her head.

"Well, my dear," he said, "what Sam Twitty told the inmates of the boat was this: 'If there was an egg-shell 'twixt her bow and the beach, Cap'n Abner wouldn't have smashed it.'

"The captain stemmed the praises which now poured upon him, with a jerk of the head. 'That's all very well,' said he, 'but I'm goin' to give Sam Twitty a chance; he'll sail you back.'

"When the party was on shore and the boat safely moored, Sam Twitty began to jump about like a collie dog in charge of a flock of sheep. He had said little in the boat, but his mind had been busily at work with the contemplation of great possibilities. There was much to be done, and but little time to do it in, but Sam's soul warmed up to its [181] work. Casting a rapid glance around, he singled out Captain Abner, and, dashing into the little party, cut him off from his companions, and drove him out of ear-shot.

"'Now, Cap'n Abner,' said he, 'your time's come, and the quicker you get to work the better.'

"'Work!' cried Abner. 'What work have I got to do!'

"'Do!' exclaimed Sam. 'You've got lots to do. Look at that sun. It's settin' jes as steady as if it was bein' towed into port, and you'll never get another chance like this. Here's two women to pop your question to; here is a minister on hand; here's me and the young woman what don't get chosen, for witnesses; here's all them white caps skippin' over the water; and here's this clean stretch of sand. There couldn't be a better place for a sailor to be married in than jes here.'

"'But I tell you, Sam,' said Abner, a little querulously, 'I didn't come here to marry one of them women. I didn't start on this trip to make fast to the fust female person I might fall in with. I set out on a week's cruise, and I want to see a lot of them afore I make a ch'ice.'

"'I tell you, cap'n,' said Sam, very earnestly, 'it won't do. You might hang round Thompsontown for a year, and you wouldn't find any two such women as them two. Here they are, two kinds to pick from: one of them as ripe as a peach, and the other like a cross between a cricket and a blossom. And you've got no time to fool away. When the sun goes down you've got to sail back to Thompsontown, and then one will go one way and the other another, and where the minister will go to, nobody knows. [182] They'll all be scattered and out of sight, and this glorious chance you've got might as well be at the bottom of the sea. Now, cap'n, I tell you, this thing that's right afore you is what you come for. Jes you listen to what I say to you: you go to that Mrs. Sickles and let her see how you're standin' and what your course is. She's no fool, and she can see the sense of gettin' over a sandbar at high tide jes as well as you can.'

"Captain Abner hesitated a moment. 'She's a mighty fine woman, Sam,' said he, 'but if I go and set the case afore her, and she agrees to ship with me, then I can't ask the other one, and there might as well be no other one; and she's as pert a little clipper as ever I seed, Sam, and she likes sailin', that she does.'

"'Now don't you worry about that,' said Sam. 'You jes say all you've got to say to her, and hear all she's got to say, but don't sign no papers and take her aboard until you talk to that other girl. Now hurry up, and walk along the beach a little further off.'

"Without waiting for an answer, Sam Twitty galloped away, or that was what he would have done had he been a sheep-dog. He darted in between Mrs. Sickles and her companions; he turned her down the beach; he talked to her in rapid snaps about the sea, the sky, the sand, and before she knew it he had driven her alongside of Captain Abner. Then, with what might have been compared to a bark of satisfaction, he bounced away to join the others, who were looking for shells.

"In about ten minutes Sam Twitty's port eye told him that Captain Abner and the toll-gate woman were approaching, but in Abner there were signs of a disposition to fall [183] back. In an instant he had bounded between them and was showing shells to the widow. Then, letting her go on by herself, he turned sharply upon Abner.

"'Well,' said he, their heads close together, 'what did she say? Is she all right?'

"Captain Abner threw a glance over the water as if his soul were yearning for the fancied possibilities of Thompsontown. 'Oh, it's all right enough, so far as she counts,' said he. 'I went straight at it, and put the whole thing afore her. I told her about the house and the two parts to it and what they was for, and she said that was charmin'. And I told her about the king conch-shell and the gilded idol, and she said she thought either one of them would be jes lovely, and nothin', she thought, could be better on mantelpieces than gilded idols and king conch-shells. And everything else was jes as slick and smooth as if she was slidin' off the stocks. She's good-lookin' enough, Sam, but she ain't got no mind, and I didn't fix up that house, and bother myself year in and year out a-gettin' it all right, to take it and give it to a woman what's got no mind. She'd be jes as well satisfied to see me a-settin' up on the mantelpiece as if the gilded idol or the king conch-shell was there.'

"'And she don't suit you?' asked Sam, eagerly.

"'No, sir,' replied the other; 'she don't suit.'

"'All right!' exclaimed the ever-ready Sam; 'jes you wait where you are one minute.' In less than that time the agile Sam had rounded up Miss Denby and had her walking along the beach by the side of Captain Abner, and whether she thought that skilful [184] skipper was going to show her some rare seaweed or the state of his mind, Sam considered not for one minute. He had brought the two together, and that was all he cared about.

"The good Mrs. Sickles was standing alone, reflectively gazing upon the little waves, so Sam had no trouble in carrying off the minister to a little distance for confidential remarks.

"'I want you to tell me, sir,' said he, 'if there is any law ag'in' your marryin' a party on the sea-shore, especially when one of them is a sailor?'

"Mr. Rippledean laughed. 'As I am a regularly ordained minister, I can perform a marriage anywhere,' said he, 'provided the parties are of legal age, and there are no objections. But what are you talking about? Who wants to be married?'

"'I can't say jes now,' answered Sam; 'matters isn't settled yet: but everything is goin' ahead lively with a stiff breeze, and I guess we'll get into soundin's pretty soon. I only spoke to you to know if you'd be all right when the couple's ready.'

"'There is nothing the matter with me,' said the young man; 'but I would like to know —'

"'Jes you lay to for a while,' said Sam, 'and I'll tell you all about it.' And then, noticing that Mrs. Sickles was glancing toward the captain and his companion as if she thought to join them, he dashed out upon her to cut her off.

"Meanwhile Miss Denby, with glowing eyes, was saying: 'Yes, I do love to sail, and to sail in a small boat, close to the water, almost as if I were in it, skimming like a bird with my wings dipping. Oh, it is grand! And you have a sail-boat?'

"And the captain answered: 'Indeed I have, and there's none better, either for sailing [185] on the wind, or before the wind, or with next to no wind at all.'

"'How wonderfully you must sail it! I could not keep my eyes off you as you brought us over here. It was grand! You made her do anything you pleased.'

"The captain smiled and nodded. 'But I think of my house as much as I do of my boat, miss,' said he. 'I've got a mighty nice parlor that's as good as any ship's cabin. And now let me put this p'int to you: if you had a big king conch-shell, the prettiest you ever seed, and it was on the middle of the mantelpiece, and you had a gilded idol in another place, would you put the idol where the conch-shell was, and the conch-shell where the idol was, or would you leave 'em both jes where they was afore?'

"The young woman laughed merrily. 'What kind of an idol would it be?' she asked. 'A beautiful piece of carving?'

"'Tain't that,' said Captain Abner; 'it's jes a piece of wood whittled out by a heathen; but it used to be in a temple, and it's gilded all over.'

"'Oh, dear!' said she, 'I don't think much of that sort of an idol. I might like to be a gilded idol myself, if I had the right person to worship me. But as for a wooden idol, I wouldn't put that on the mantelpiece, and I am of the same opinion as to the conch-shell.'

"'But it's a king conch-shell,' said the captain.

"'I don't care,' said she; 'king or queen, it would be all the same to me. But if I were you I think I'd be most of the time in the boat. What is a house, no matter what it has [186] in it, compared to a boat dancing over the waves and speeding before the wind?'

"Captain Abner looked at her. 'I expect you'd like to learn to steer, wouldn't you?'

"'Indeed I would,' she answered. 'There is nothing I would like better.'

"Captain Abner put his hands into his pockets and gently whistled, and, leaving him, Miss Denby ran to join the toll-gate woman. Down swooped Sam Twitty.

"'Is it all right?' he whispered to Abner.

"'All up,' the other answered, 'and I'm glad of it. She don't want no gilded idol, and she don't want no king conch-shell. She wants her hand on the tiller, that's what she wants. She's got too much mind for me. After I've been workin' year in and year out a-gettin' my affairs the way I wants them, I don't fancy anybody comin' down on me and takin' the tiller out of my hands.'

"Sam made two or three steps forward, and then he stood gazing in the direction of the setting sun. Resting on one slippered foot and extending the other before him, he folded his arms and remained a few moments wrapped in thought. Suddenly he turned.

"'Cap'n Abner,' he cried, 'it won't do to sink this chance! It'll never pop up ag'in. You must have spoke pretty plain to that toll-gate woman, considerin' the way she's been turnin' it over in her mind.'

"'Yes, I did,' said Captain Abner, 'and that's the way I found out what she was. But I didn't ask her to ship with me.'

"'And you don't want her to?' said Sam.

"'No, I don't.'

"'And you don't want the other one, nuther?' [187]

"'No, I don't,' replied Captain Abner, doggedly. 'I don't want nuther of 'em. And I say, Sam, the sun's gettin' down and it's about time for us to be settin' sail.'

"'There's a good stretch of sky under that sun yet,' said Sam, 'and jes you wait a bit, cap'n.'

"Sam Twitty walked slowly along the sandy beach; he looked as a sheep-dog might look who was wondering within himself whether or not he had brought back from the fields as many sheep as he had taken out. He stopped, and looked about at the party.

Captain Abner was walking toward the boat; the minister and the Denby girl were standing together, comparing shells; the toll-gate woman was strolling by herself a little higher up the beach, still in a reflective mood. Sam gazed from his companions to the sky, the water, the beautiful glistening sands.

"'It's a shame to lose all this,' he said to himself; 'it's a burnin' shame to sink it all.' Then suddenly, as if his master had whistled, he sped to the side of Mrs. Sickles. Backward and forward these two walked, Sam talking earnestly and the toll-gate woman listening with great interest. Captain Abner now and then gave them an impatient glance, but the other couple did not regard them at all.

"'But, Mr. Twitty,' said Mrs. Sickles, 'this is so unexpected. I had an idea of the kind about Cap'n Abner, for I could not help it, but you—really! I've heard of you often, Mr. Twitty, but I never saw you until to-day.'

"'Now, Mrs. Sickles,' said Sam, 'you couldn't have had a better day to see me in, if you'd waited a year; and a-speakin' quick and sharp as I've got to do, for the sun's [188] keepin' on goin' down, there couldn't be a better day to marry me in.'

"'Oh, Mr. Twitty!' cried Mrs. Sickles, with flushed face.

"'There couldn't be a better time or a better place,' said Sam, 'and a minister right here, and two witnesses.'

"'But, Mr. Twitty,' said she, 'I really thought that Cap'n Budlong—and from what he told me about his house and his things—'

"'Cap'n Abner is one of the finest men in this world,' interrupted Sam, 'and he's got a fust-class house, and I ain't got none, and he's got all sorts of things from all parts of the world that he's put in it. But I can get a house and things to put in it, and I can do without gilded idols and king conch-shells, and, what's still more to the p'int, Mrs. Sickles, I wants you, and he don't.'

"'There's something in that,' said the toll-gate woman, and then she added: 'but as to marryin' you here and now, Mr. Twitty, it's not to be thought of.'

"Sam walked slowly away; one might have thought his head drooped under a rebuke. He approached the young minister and the girl of the buggy.

"'Look a' here,' said he to the former; 'you don't mean to say, sir, that you'd back out of marryin' a couple right here and now, that was growed up and of full age, and nothin' to hinder.'

"'Marry!' cried Miss Denby. 'A wedding right here on this beautiful island! Oh, that would be glorious! Who wants to be married?'

"'I do,' said Sam.

"They both laughed. 'But the other person?' asked Mr. Rippledean. 'There must be a [189] bride if you want a wedding.'

"'Oh, the bride'll be Mrs. Sickles,' said Sam. 'But the trouble is she ain't altogether willin'.'

"'I told you,' said the merry Miss Denby—'you know I told you that you are the funniest people I ever met, and you truly are. People generally come to an agreement between themselves before they speak to the clergyman.'

"'Mr. Twitty,' said the clergyman, 'I strongly advise you to give up your present notions of immediate matrimony, and wait at least until all parties agree upon time and place and upon the other circumstances of this union for which you seem so impatient.'

"'Hello, Sam!' shouted Captain Abner from the water's edge, 'ain't you comin' along?'

"Sam made no answer to any one. He walked silently down toward the boat. Everything seemed to be breaking loose from him, and slipping away. His old friend, who had so long wanted her, and who had prepared his house for her, and had set out to look for her, had declined to take her when he saw her; and he, Sam, who had so thoroughly understood the opportunities which had been spread before the little party that afternoon, and who knew what would happen if these opportunities were allowed to slip out of sight, had been set aside by one woman, laughed at by another, had been advised by a clergyman, and had been scolded by Captain Abner. His soul resented all this, and he saw that the edge of the sun was nearly touching the rim of the distant sea. With a great slap upon his thigh, he sprang to the side of the boat, [190] and turned and faced the others, all of whom were now approaching him.

"'I am to sail this boat back to Thompsontown,' he cried. 'It's been agreed I'm to do it, and I'm goin' to do it; but one thing I'll tell you—the sun can go down, the night can come on, and you can all stay here till mornin' if you like, but this boat don't leave this island with me at the helm till I'm a married man!' With this he skipped on board, sat down in the stern, and clapped his broad hands on the tiller.

"There was a burst of astonishment from the rest of the party as Sam thus seated himself at bay. Even the girl of the buggy did not laugh.

"'But I must go home,' she cried, 'before it is any later. My friends will be waiting supper for me.'

"'Don't matter,' said Sam. 'Supper can wait.'

"'Look a' here,' said Captain Abner.

"'I don't want to look a' here,' said Sam. 'I'm a-lookin' a different way, and it's Mrs. Sickles I'm lookin' at. And you needn't none of you look cross at me. I'm to steer this boat home, that's settled, and I don't steer her an inch till I'm a married man.'

"The others gathered together on the beach and gazed with varied emotions upon the determined figure of Sam as he sat in the stern, his arm resting upon the tiller and one leg crossed leisurely over the other, his protruding slipper lighted up by the rays of the setting sun.

"'What is the matter with him?' asked Mr. Rippledean. 'Is he crazy? Does he really think of forcing us to remain here until he shall be married? I never heard anything —'

"'So delightfully absurd,' interrupted Miss Denby. [191]

"'There's nothin' crazy about Sam Twitty,' said Captain Abner. 'He's as sound as a nut, body and soul. But when Sam makes up his mind he sticks to it. Now sometimes when I make up my mind I don't stick to it. He's a good man all around, and he's got enough to live on, though he never was a cap'n; but you couldn't find a better fust mate than him, or a better sailor, except perhaps somebody what's had a leetle more experience. Sam made up his mind that we was all comin' out here for a weddin', everything fallin' together exactly to suit, wind and tide and everything else. But Sam ain't goin' to force nobody to do nothin'; he ain't that kind. All he's goin' to do is to stay here till he's married.'

"The girl of the buggy clapped her hands. 'Oh, that is fine!' she cried. 'It is like lifting you up on a horse and dashing away with you. Oh, dear Mrs. Sickles, take pity on him and on all of us. If you do not, I shall have to talk to him myself and see if I—'

"Mrs. Sickles was not inclined to give attention to any such idle words as these, and she stepped up to Captain Abner.

"'You seem to think very well of Mr. Twitty, sir,' she said.

"'Indeed I do,' he answered. 'There ain't nobody I think more of, on watch or below, in storm or fine weather, take him as you find him, than I do of him.'

"Sam Twitty had not heard any of the remarks which had been made on shore; he had been communing with himself: but now his active mind would no longer permit him to sit still. Springing to his feet, he stepped forward and stood up in the bow of [192] the boat, and cast his eye over the little party in front of him. Then he spoke:

"'Mrs. Sickles, I want to put a p'int to you that's been put to you afore, but I want to put it a little different. If there was a gilded idol and a king conch-shell that you knowed of, and you was asked which of them you would like to have for your own, and you only could have one—'

"'Oh, dear!' exclaimed Miss Denby, 'here is that delightful gilded idol and conch-shell again! I wonder what they will do now!'

"The toll-gate woman was paling and flushing, and these changes of countenance, combined with her becoming summer dress and her straw hat, made her very attractive to the eye. Without waiting for Sam to finish his remarks, she spoke:

"'I am very sure, Mr. Twitty, that both the things you mention, from what I have heard of them, would be very nice and pleasant; but you see, Mr. Twitty, I don't—'

"Sam suddenly stepped upon the rail, steadying himself by the mast. 'Mrs. Sickles,' he cried, 'I'll put it plainer to you: supposing you couldn't get the gilded idol?'

"Mrs. Sickles now saw very clearly that there was no more time for hesitation. She stepped a little forward.

"'In that case,' she said, 'I'd take the conch-shell.'

"With a bound, Sam Twitty sprang from the shore, and the next moment he had seized the blushing Mrs. Sickles by the hand. For a moment he gazed proudly around, the sunset light casting a ruddy glow upon his countenance which made it almost as rosy as that of his companion. Then he tucked her under his arm and [193] turned toward the minister.

"'Please step this way, Mr. Rippledean,' he said. 'That little bluff there, with grass on it, is the place I've picked out for the ceremony. And, Cap'n Abner, I'll ask you and

that young woman to follow along after us and stand up for witnesses.'

"Just as the upper edge of the sun disappeared beneath the glowing sea, the name of Sickles departed from observation and recognition on that line of longitude. But in the glow upon the faces of Mr. and Mrs. Twitty there was nothing to remind one of a sunset sky. It might have been supposed, rather, that they were gazing eastward, and that the morn was glorious.

"Having gravely saluted his bride, Sam lifted up his voice. He was used to that sort of thing, for he had been a boatswain. 'Cap'n Abner Budlong,' he exclaimed, 'step aft and kiss the bride!'

"When this command had been obeyed with urbane alacrity, Sam called out again, very much as if he were piping all hands to osculation: 'Rev. Mr. Rippledean, step aft and kiss the bride!'

"When the minister had retired from the performance of his duty, Sam cast a speaking glance in the direction of Miss Denby. He looked as if he would say that on this occasion it was a great pity that any one should be left out. The girl of the buggy understood his glance, and lifted up her voice in laughter.

"'Oh, no, Mr. Twitty,' said she, 'it is not the custom to kiss witnesses.'

"'Oh, no,' answered Mrs. Twitty, in tones of approbation; and these were the first [194] words she spoke after she had ceased to be Sickles.

"As that boat of blissfulness sped across the bay, speeding along under a strong breeze from the west, under a sky full of orange-colored clouds, Sam Twitty's strong hand grasped the tiller with an energy which would have been sufficient for the guidance of a ship of the line. As the thin sheets of water curled over the lee scuppers of the boat, the right hand which held Sam's left never trembled nor tightened its hold; and when the clergyman, sitting by Miss Denby, asked her if she felt at all afraid, she cheerily replied:

"'Not with the gilded idol and the king conch-shell both on board—no, not I!'

"The honeymoon of Mr. and Mrs. Twitty was spent in Thompsontown, and lasted three days; for at the end of that time the bride's brother demanded to be released from the care of the toll-gate, having other duties which were incumbent upon him. But when Sam and his wife spoke of leaving the Spinnaker Boom, Captain Abner was perfectly willing to go with them. His face bore an expression of contented resignation.

"'I will drive you two back, Sam,' said he. ''Tain't no more use for me to stay here. I don't believe I'll find her, and I give it up.'

"On the way home the happy Mr. Twitty burst out laughing. 'It do seem awful comical, Cap'n Abner,' said he, 'that, after all we said about comin' home, that me and her should be a-settin' on the back seat and you a-drivin' in front alone.' And when this remark was explained to Mrs. Twitty she laughed very heartily indeed. [195]

"Sam did not go directly back to Shamrick. His wife had a good house, and could not, without due notice, give up her public office, and so he determined to remain, for the present, in the very pleasant quarters thus afforded him. But he vowed with considerable vehemence that Mrs. Twitty should keep the toll-gate no more; this duty, so long as it had to be performed, he would take upon himself, and he found it a most congenial and interesting occupation.

"'Like it!' he exclaimed to his wife, after his first day's experience. 'It's as interestin' as readin' the weekly paper. Everybody that comes along seems ready for some different kind of chat. And when that young woman with the buggy happens to be drivin' this way, she don't pay no toll. I'll pay for her myself, every time, on account of her services as witness.'

"'No, you don't, Sam Twitty,' remarked his consort; 'that young woman pays her own toll, every time. While I'm here I don't want no changes in the customs of this toll-gate.'

"It was about a fortnight after Sam Twitty's wedding that that well-satisfied individual, being called to the gate by the sound of wheels, beheld a buggy, and Miss Denby sitting therein. In answer to Sam's cheerful greeting, she did not laugh, nor even smile.

"'I saw your friend Captain Abner about a week ago,' she said, 'as I drove through Shamrick, and he looked dreadfully solemn. I think his disappointment is wearing on

him. It is a great pity that a man who can sail a boat as he can should have a moment's sorrow on this earth. It almost made me feel sorry he found out I wanted to learn to steer. I think that was the only barrier between us. And he would have taken me out sailing every fine day!' [196]

"'Oh, no, no,' said Sam; 'that would never have done. You could never have kept your hands off the tiller. If he had known what was good for him he would have married her.' These words he spoke in a confidential tone, and pointed with his thumb behind him. 'But he had the chance, and he didn't take it, and now I don't wonder he's doleful.'

"'You ought to go and try to cheer him up,' said Miss Denby, gathering up the reins. 'Do you expect to go on keeping this toll-gate, Mr. Twitty?'

"'I'd like to,' said Sam, 'if you're goin' to keep on travellin' this way.'

"'Oh!' said Miss Denby, with a reproving smile.

"'Yes, indeed,' said Sam; 'for it reminds me of such a happy day.'

"'Oh!' said Miss Denby, as she drove away with her nose in the air.

"A few days after this Sam did go to Shamrick, and walking on the street he met Captain Abner; but, to his surprise, that individual did not look at all doleful. There was a half-smile on his lips, and his step was buoyant. The two old friends clasped hands with much heartiness.

"'You are as gay as a pot of red paint,' said Sam. 'You must be feelin' well.'

"'I should say so,' said Abner; and then, after a portentous pause, he added: 'I've got her.'

"'Got her!' exclaimed Sam, in amazement. 'Where did you get her?' [197]

"'Got her here.'

"'And who is it you've got?'

"'Susan Shellbark.'

"'Susan Shellbark!' cried Sam. 'You don't mean to say that!'

"'It's Susan Shellbark, and I do mean to say that.'

"'Why, you've known her all your life,' said Sam.

"'All my life,' was the answer.

"'Then why didn't you take her afore?' asked his friend.

"'Because I hadn't been to Thompsontown to see what I could get there. Of course I didn't want to take anybody here until I found out what there was in Thompsontown. Now I know there ain't nothin' for me there.'

"'And so you take Susan Shellbark!' interrupted Sam.

"'And so I take Susan Shellbark.'

"Sam looked at his friend for a moment, and then burst out laughing. 'Give me your hand,' he cried. 'I'm mighty glad you've got Susan Shellbark, and I'm mighty glad you went to Thompsontown.'

"'So am I,' said Captain Abner. 'If I hadn't gone to Thompsontown I'd never have got Susan Shellbark.'

"'That's so,' cried Sam. 'And if you hadn't made up your mind to go to Thompsontown, you and me'd never got stuck at the toll-gate with nothin' but a five-dollar note. I'm mighty glad we was stuck, Cap'n Abner; I'm mighty glad we was stuck!'

"Thereupon the two friends shook hands again.

"'But there is one thing I want to ask,' said Sam. 'What about the gilded idol and the king conch-shell?' [198]

"'Oh, that's all right,' said Captain Abner; 'they're both to go on to the mantelpiece, one on one end, and t'other on the other. That's to be the way with everything we've got. You've knowed Susan Shellbark as long as I have, Sam, and you know she'll stick to that bargain.'

"'That's so,' said Sam; 'she'll stick to that bargain. Both of you'll be on the mantelpiece, one on one end, and the other on t'other.'"

"And what became of the girl in the buggy?" asked the Mistress of the House.

"Her later history is unknown to me," said the Master of the House.

"I have not made up my mind about that story, papa," said the Daughter of the House. "It is not altogether satisfactory."

"But very much what usually happens," said John Gayther, in an undertone.

THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

THE FRENCHMAN

AND IS CALLED

MY BALLOON HUNT

VI
MY BALLOON HUNT

[201]

The next morning, after breakfast, the Mistress of the House and John Gayther were walking through the garden together, for her quick eye had detected much that needed attention. Some things she had already decided upon, but there were others in which she thought it best to ask John's advice. They did not always agree; in fact, they were seldom in exact accord: but both were sensible, and he reasoned that, as mistress, she ought to do as she pleased; and she reasoned that, as he had learned the business and she had not, it was just to him and to herself that he should, on many points, be allowed his own way.

The orchard was really a continuation of the lower terrace of the garden, but the Mistress had not been there for some time. "A great many pears, John," she commented as they strolled under the trees; "a fair show of apples: but there are no plums at all."

"Plums have their seasons," said John, sententiously. "They are not always falling in one's way; and these are choice plums and don't come promiscuous—sorter scattered like."

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"I wonder if John means that for philosophy," thought the Mistress. Then aloud: "My daughter brought me a luscious one yesterday, and, really, it looks as if she had gathered the only one."

"Bless her heart!" said John, fervently, "I hope she's goin' to pick them up all along the way she goes."

"That is too much to hope for any one, John," said the Mistress, as they turned to go up into the garden; but in her heart she had the very same hope.

They walked through two terraces filled with luxuriant vegetables and bordered by small fruits, now out of season; then on to the third terrace, bordered by currant-bushes, beautiful now to look upon, hung as they were with a profusion of red tassels. And here there came to them an almost overpowering fragrance; for on the terrace above were great beds of lilies, now in their glory—lilies from many climes, lilies of many hues: great white spikes, small pink clusters, spotted, striped, variegated, white with borders of all colors, even black (or purple so dark it looked black), all standing proudly in the sunshine, and sending to heaven their incense of gratitude.

It was a gorgeous sight, and the two looked at it with delight and a good deal of pride, for it was the design and the handiwork of both.

Then they saw, behind all this glory, a group of people disposed in various comfortable positions about the little summer-house on the upper terrace, where the view was finest.

There was the Master of the House in the big garden-chair; there was the Frenchman, seated on a low grassy knoll; there was the Daughter of the House on the bench she liked; and beside her was the Next Neighbor, who was an intimate friend of the Daughter of the House, and, therefore, a frequent visitor. The nearest house was not in sight, but it could be reached in a moderate walk. Its mistress was a

[203]

young married woman, very pretty to look at and of a lively turn of mind. She waved her hand to the Mistress, while the Master called out: "Come up here, you two! We are waiting for you." When the two complied with the command, the Master continued: "Now make yourselves comfortable and listen to a story our guest has promised us."

The Mistress of the House willingly took the rustic chair the Frenchman brought forward, but John Gayther had no wish to hear the Frenchman's story. He had no fancy for the man, and he did not believe he would fancy his story. "Excuse me," he said to the Master of the House, "but I see that boy Jacob coming through the gate, and I must go with him to weed the melon-bed."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said the Master of the House; "let the boy weed it alone."

"Never!" cried John, in horror. "He will trample on all the vines!"

"Then tell him to do something else." And, without waiting for John to give the order, he called out: "Ahoy, there, boy! Clear out of this garden!"

The boy vanished with celerity, and John Gayther sank upon his stool with an air of resignation. But no sooner had the Frenchman uttered a few sentences than he brightened up, and not only listened attentively but put aside the disagreeable feeling he had had for him. The beginning of the narrative lifted a load from his mind.

The Frenchman, having again betaken himself to the grassy mound, began in an easy, airy way: [204]

"I am a sportsman as well as a Frenchman. It seems hardly necessary to mention both of these things at once, for in my mind they naturally go together. I am expert in many kinds of sports, and it pleases me much, when engaged in such recreations, to employ my mind as well as my body, and in so doing I frequently devise methods of pursuing my favorite sports which are never made use of by ordinary and unimaginative persons.

"My Irene—she is my wife—is also addicted to sport. It was partly for this reason that I married her. It is not always by sharing my dangers and my glories that my dear Irene shows her passion for the outdoor sports which are so fascinating to me; it is often that she does this merely by sympathy. She can remain at home and think of me in the field or on the stream, and be happy. When I return she welcomes, she appreciates. If I overstay my time I do not give myself worry—I know that she will understand that there are contingencies. When she greets me there are no reproaches. She is the wife for a sportsman!

"But it is not always that I rely simply upon the sympathy of my Irene. It was not so when I went in a balloon to hunt tigers. She was then at my side, for there was no other place where she would have been satisfied, or where I would have had her. There are vicissitudes which should be faced together by those who love.

"I had long wished to hunt tigers, and it had come into my head that it would be a grand and novel idea, and also extremely practicable, to shoot at these savage creatures from a balloon. This would be an exhilarating sensation, and it would be safe. In no other way would I take my Irene with me when tiger-hunting; and in no other way, I freely admit, would I be very desirous of going myself. [205]

"I have heard that one of my countrymen had himself shut up in a stout cage and conveyed to a region infested by tigers. There, with his rifle, he sat comfortably in a chair, with a lantern on a table near by. When, at night, the tigers crowded round his cage, he shot them. But this would not have suited me. Suppose a bar of the cage should have been broken!

"But in a balloon it would be different. Poised in the air a moderate distance above the ground, I could shoot at tigers beneath me and laugh at their efforts to reach my height. Therefore it was that I determined to hunt my tigers in a balloon. Irene screamed when I mentioned this plan, but she did not refuse to go with me. She had been in balloons, but she had never seen an unrestricted tiger. Now she could enjoy these two pleasures at once, and be with me.

"This happened in French Tonkin. We were in a little outlying town where there was a garrison, and some engineers who made military observations in a balloon. This was a captive balloon not employed for independent ascensions, and from some of the officers, who were my friends, I procured it for my projected tiger hunt. They were all much interested in my expedition, for if it succeeded there would be a new variety of sport in this monotonous region.

"The balloon was supplied with gas sufficient to carry myself and my Irene, with rifles, provisions, and various necessities, and its lifting power was so proportioned to the weight it carried as to keep it at the height of an ordinary church steeple above the earth. [206]

"About ten miles from the town there was a long stretch of desert and barren land, extending for about a quarter of a mile from a jungle and forest to a river; and here, I was told, tigers were often to be found, sometimes crossing the open country to slake their thirst at the stream, but more frequently to prevent antelopes and other tender animals from slaking their thirst. There could be no better spot than this for my experiment.

"Our journey to the hunting-ground was most delightful. Seating ourselves in the commodious car which hung beneath the balloon, we rose to the height of the rope which restrained its ascent. The lower end of this rope was then seized by natives, active and strong, who ran along, pulling the balloon above them. It was the most comfortable method of progression that I had ever known. There were no jars, scarcely any sense of motion. The great overhanging balloon sheltered us from the sun; we leaned over the side of the car, surveyed the landscape, and breathed the fresh morning air. Then we breakfasted and smoked our cigarettes. I was happy; my Irene was happy. We could have journeyed thus for days.

"But when we came to the appointed place we prepared for business. We had with us a machine for anchoring the balloon, and the natives immediately went to work to drive this deeply into the soil, about half-way between the water and the jungle, so that we might be moored at a proper distance above the ground. There was no wind; [207] the balloon hung almost motionless. It had been arranged that when it should be properly attached the natives should leave us, and return in the evening to pull us back to the town, and to carry away the skins of the tigers we had killed.

"It was truly luxurious hunting! The rifle of my Irene was light and suitable for a lady; mine was of the most improved pattern. We had another one in case of emergencies. We sat and looked down upon the men, urging them to hasten their work and be gone; we were longing for our sport.

"Suddenly there was a cry from one of the natives. Gazing toward the jungle, he yelled: 'A tiger! a tiger!' Instantly our hearts stopped beating and our eyes were turned toward the jungle. There, against the matted leaves and stalks, was a mass of yellow and black—half a tiger. In the bright sunlight we could see it plainly. It had been roused by the noise of the pounding, and was gazing out to see what was the matter. With one united scream, the natives shot away. They scattered; they disappeared utterly and at once. Where they went I know not. We never saw them again. We did not even think of them. Our eyes were set fast upon the black and yellow stripes and the great head. Without volition I grasped my rifle. Irene put her hand upon her weapon, but I whispered to her not to move.

"The tiger came slowly out of the jungle so that we could see him clearly; then he walked toward us. I clutched my rifle still more tightly.

"Suddenly Irene whispered to me: 'We are not fastened; those men did not attach the [208] rope; and we may drift away from him, perhaps across the river, and so lose him. Is it too far for a shot?'

"'Entirely, entirely,' I answered; 'we must wait: and if we do drift across the river we may find some other game there. Be quiet!'

"So we both were quiet; but the balloon did not drift: there was no wind.

"The tiger moved gently toward us; it was dreadful to remain thus motionless and see him come on. He had paid no attention to the escaping natives: he was giving his mind entirely to our balloon. He looked up at us, and he looked down at the end of the rope, a yard or two of which was moving about like a snake as the balloon veered a little this way and that.

"This seemed to interest the tiger. He stopped for a few moments and looked at it. He was now near enough for us to observe him closely. We did so with breathless interest. He was a long tiger, and very thin; his flabby flanks seemed to indicate that he was hungry. Suddenly he gave a quick bound; he ceased to regard the balloon; his eyes were fixed upon the end of the rope. With great leaps he reached it. He arched his back and looked at it as it moved, then he put one paw upon it. We leaned over the edge of the car and watched him.

"The rope was so attached that by putting out her arm Irene could reach it. She seized it and made the lower end of it move more quickly on the ground. The tiger gave a jump, with his eyes on the rope. Then he leaped forward, and over and over again he put his foot upon it and quickly jerked it away.

"'What are you doing?' I whispered. 'Are you mad? You may enrage him. Do not touch [209] the rope! Do not touch it again!' Oh, the recklessness, the unthinking playfulness of woman! How can we guard against it? How can we be safe from it?

"The rope was now still for a moment. It ceased to interest the tiger, and he looked upward. Suddenly an idea came into his head. He seized the rope in his great jaws, and gave a powerful jump backward. Oh, what a jerk, what a shock! It was worse

than an earthquake. It was like a great throb from the heart of the tiger to the heart of the man. I must have turned pale. Did he intend to haul us down? This fearsome thought vented itself in smothered ejaculations, and Irene turned to me and spoke in her usual voice:

"'He cannot do that, for it is impossible for him to haul us down hand over hand or paw over paw. He is only playing. The rope amuses him. And we need not speak in whispers; even if he hears us he cannot understand us. Is it not time to shoot?'

"She is so precipitate, my Irene. I love her, but she lacks that prudent hesitancy which so often gives a man his power over circumstances.

"Still I considered the case: if I were going to shoot at all, this was surely a good time. Everything had come so suddenly that I had not had time to collect myself, to prepare for action.

"I looked steadfastly down at the beast, and so did my Irene. I was becoming calmer. He looked up at us with an air of concentration; he paid no more attention to the rope.

"I lifted my rifle; I scrutinized its every portion; it was in order. Then I leaned over the edge of the car and pointed it downward. I aimed it between his great, earnest [210] eyes, into the very middle of his thoughtful and observant countenance. I pulled the trigger; the explosion shook the car.

"Up from the ground there came a sudden, startling roar. At first I could not see the tiger, but when the smoke moved away I found myself gazing down into his savage, blazing eyes. Roar after roar came up; he sprang from side to side; his tail stiffened and curled, and when he opened his vast mouth, showing the cavern of his throat, his red tongue, and his long white teeth, a shiver ran through me. Instinctively I grasped my Irene by the arm.

"'I do not believe you hit him,' said she. 'See how he bounds! He cannot be hurt. It must be difficult to aim directly downward, but let me try.'

"I did not forbid her. Even by chance she might strike that awful beast in some vital part. She took a long, deliberate aim, and as she fired the tiger gave a veritable scream.

"'Ah, ha!' I cried, 'you hit him. Truly, my Irene, you hit him.'

"'But it was only in the toe,' she said. 'See how he has stopped to lick it with his tongue. I think it is his littlest toe. It is not much.'

"Large toe or small one, that tiger was now an angry beast. Hopping backward a little way, he now crouched to the ground, and then gave a wild spring upward. It was heart-sickening as his great form, with its yellow skin and black stripes, his blazing eyes, his flashing teeth, and his outspread claws, rose toward us through the air. Of course he could not hurt us; we were too high up. Irene's face flushed. 'That was a great leap,' she said.

"I took up my rifle again. It comforted me to see what a small jump the beast had [211] made compared to our distance from the ground. Again I fired, and this time also I did not hit him. I had never practised shooting at things almost beneath me; the slightest motion of Irene disturbed my aim. The report seemed to infuriate the tiger until he was on the verge of madness. He jumped from side to side, he roared, he gnashed his teeth, and it seemed to me that I could smell his horrid breath coming up toward us.

"Suddenly he ceased all motion; he crouched upon the ground; he made no sound; he shut his mouth; he partly shut his eyes, but they were fixed upon me immovably, and they were green as emerald.

"'Now,' said Irene, 'is a good time to take another shot. Shall I try?'

"I raised my hand that she might not move. There was a change coming over the sun. At first I thought my sight was affected and I did not see well, but it was not that. Instinctively I gazed upward. A wandering cloud was slowly moving under the sun. Then I looked down. The tiger's yellow was not so bright, his black stripes were not so clear and sharp-cut, and, more than that, he was coming nearer. The balloon was slowly descending. The truth flashed upon me. Deprived of the direct rays of the sun, the gas was condensing. We were going down, down, slowly but surely down!

"A chill ran through me, an awful premonitory chill. I knew what to do, but there was little I could do. We carried no ballast, for this was a captive balloon. What could I throw out? The extra rifle! Out it went, and fell not far from the tiger; but he did not move; with his green eyes fixed upon the car, he watched it slowly descend. The rifle [212] had relieved it of a little of its weight, but the middle of the cloud was thicker than its edge. The gas was still condensing, the balloon was slowly descending. I became almost frantic. If my Irene had been any one else I believe I would have thrown her

out. But I could not throw out my Irene. Besides, she was so vigorous.

"It was awful, this steady, this merciless descent. It was like entering a tomb with a red tongue and flashing teeth waiting within. The green eyes gleamed with the malice of a waiting devil biding his time and knowing that it was drawing near.

"Down, down we went, and the smell of his horrid breath came up like the forerunner of a cruel death. Now a tremor ran through the whole body of the crouching beast; even his tail trembled like a feather in the wind. He seemed to press himself nearer and nearer to the earth. His eyes were fixed steadily upon the car.

"I knew what this meant. He was about to spring. The moment that we should descend sufficiently low, he would hurl himself into the car; he would not wait for it to touch the ground.

"My thoughts raced through my brain. If anything could be done, it must be done in the next half-minute. I spoke quickly to Irene.

"'Do not lose a second,' I said. 'Get out on the outside of the car; rest lightly upon its edge; hold by the ropes. I will do the same. At the moment I give the word you must jump. Both together; do not hesitate. It will not be much of a fall. We cannot stay here and have him—'

"At this instant the tiger gave a tremendous bound upward, his fore paws, bristling [213]
with claws, stretched over the edge of the car. In that instant I jumped!

"It was a great leap, and as my feet struck the ground and my eyes glanced rapidly about me a feeling of great joy filled my breast. I was on the earth again, master of myself, and the tiger was not there. I looked upward. The great beast was drawing up his hind legs and was climbing into the car, and there was Irene, my Irene, outside of the car, sitting on the edge and holding on to the ropes. I had forgotten to give her the word! How my heart sank! It was terrible!

"I now perceived something that almost paralyzed my every faculty. That balloon was rising. I was a large man and I was heavier than the tiger; with its reduced weight the balloon was slowly going upward. I clasped my hands, I gasped for breath. If I should call to Irene to jump now she would be dashed to pieces, the car was already so high. And then the great truth flashed upon me: 'What matters it? If she leaps she will be killed; if she does not leap—' I could not think of it!

"To be sure, I might seize the rope and pull her down low enough so that she might safely drop; but if I did that the tiger might also jump. Oh, what a position to be in, for one who loves!

"It was now absolutely impossible for either of them safely to leap from the car unless I pulled it down, and my mind was not capable of even considering such an alternative. To meet him here upon the ground, in this awful solitude! To die together, but not in each other's arms; to perish from this bright earth; to reach out [214]
to my Irene; to call to her as she reached out and called to me, when the terrible monster— It was too much!

"But even in my despair I remembered to be humane. I seized the end of the rope. I would not let my Irene float away altogether. I could not. The soul of the husband asserted itself. The cloud had now passed from the face of the sun. The balloon was rising with considerable force, but I could hold it; I was very heavy. I would not desert my Irene.

"As I stood thus, looking upward and holding fast to all that was dear to me in life, I saw Irene, still sitting on the edge of the car, raise one hand and put it to her head. I could see that she was feeling faint; the strain of her position was beginning to tell upon her; at any moment she might fall. Then my quick glance sought the tiger. He was in the car, his great head and two front paws hanging over the edge; his green eyes were steadily fixed on me. Just then Irene, evidently unable to hold any longer to the ropes, gave herself a dexterous twist, and in an instant she was inside the car, her head sinking down out of sight. Oh, noble, most beloved Irene! Sooner than let herself drop and fall at my feet a mangled corpse, she would do anything. She well understood my too sensitive soul, this dear Irene!

"In spite of my emotion I still held firmly to the rope, and the tiger still glared down upon me. It was too far for him to jump; he knew that if he did he would be dashed to pieces. This gave me strength and courage.

"Irene now raised herself and looked over the edge of the car; the tiger by her side did not regard her. I have often read of wild animals, of different kinds and degrees [215]
of fierceness, who, having fallen into a pit together, did not attack each other, but remained as gentle as sheep, being cowed by their fear. Plainly this tiger was cowed. He had never been so far above the earth; he knew that he would die if he leaped; but he kept his sinister green eyes steadily fixed on me.

The great beast was drawing up his hind legs and was climbing into the car.

"Now Irene called down to me. I could not hear what she said, I was in such terrible agitation. And besides, I think she was afraid to speak too loudly, for fear she might startle the black-and-yellow beast. How I longed to hear her dear words, perhaps her last! Mayhap she was bidding me a fond farewell; perhaps she was trying to encourage me and uphold my heart in this terrible trial. It would be like her; she knows my love for her, my dear Irene!

"And then, ah yes! it might be that she was asking my permission to throw herself from the car: that she was beseeching me to turn away my head that she might leap to the ground, and thus end her anxieties and her miseries—I might say our miseries; for if the tiger should follow her he, too, would be killed. I should be left to weep over my dearest, the joy of my life and my heart. The tiger would be dead. In her last breath Irene would know that I was safe. That would be like Irene, my dear Irene! But I would not suffer it. I could not speak, but I shook my head.

"She did not try to say anything more, but she looked down upon me, and so did the tiger. The two heads were not far from each other; they were both regarding me. I grew almost crazy. Never was man placed in more terrible straits than this.

"Suddenly a thought struck me. I seized more tightly the end of the rope, and I ran. I [216]
ran to the river. I plunged, I bounded, I made such great haste that sometimes I stumbled over obstacles, and sometimes the balloon seemed to lift me from the ground; but on, on I went, on to the river!

"When I reached the edge of the water I took courage to stop and look up. They were both still gazing over the edge of the car, both with their eyes strained upon me.

"Then boldly and fearlessly I walked into the river. I walked until the water was up to my knees; until it reached my waist. I walked until the surface of the water lapped my shoulders. I was not afraid; I am a good swimmer. Irene now called down to me. It was plain she was becoming reckless; she would know what I was going to do, no matter what effect her words would have upon the tiger. If she thought I was about to commit suicide, not daring to bear up under her coming fate, she would dissuade me. It would be like her, that dear Irene!

"'What are you going to do?' she cried. And as I looked upward her eyes and those of the tiger were steadily fixed on me.

"'You must get on the outside of the car again,' I cried. 'Do it quickly, without disturbing him. Then I will pull you down, down, a little at a time. When you are far enough down—and I will be the judge of that—I will give you the word; then you must jump. It will not hurt you; the water will break your fall, and I will save you.

Think of nothing else but your trust in me, and jump. The moment you leave the car I let go the rope; then it will instantly be too far for him to jump. Quick! Be ready when I give the word.' And as I spoke I hauled steadily upon the rope. [217]

"Irene looked at me for an instant, and then she stood up in the car. I saw her put one foot upon the seat which surrounds it; then quickly appeared the other foot upon the edge of the car. She raised both arms and joined her hands above her head; she pushed herself between the ropes and leaped. It was all the work of a second.

"She came down beautifully, head foremost. It was a splendid dive. Relieved of her weight, the balloon gave a great jerk, and I let go the rope.

"Irene went down into the water as cleanly and smoothly as if she had been a diving duck. She scarcely made a splash. She was a magnificent swimmer.

"As my dear Irene disappeared beneath the surface of the water I made use of the rapid moments in which I could not expect to see her in glancing upward. The tiger was rising rapidly. His head was stretched out over the edge of the car; I could see his wild and frightened eyes. He was afraid to jump.

"Then I turned to the water. The head of Irene had risen above it; she was striking out bravely for the shore. She did not need my help. She is a grand woman! In a few moments we stood beside each other on the shore. I would have thrown myself into her arms; I would have embraced this dear one, now my own again: but she was so wet; I was so wet. We seized each other by the hands. It is impossible to say whether she wept or not, her face was so wet.

"Then by a sudden instinct we looked upward. The balloon was high above us, rising steadily. We could see the head of the tiger projecting from the car—now such a little head, but I knew that he was gazing at me. Then we heard a sound which came down from above. It was the tiger's roar, but it was such a little roar! I clasped more tightly the hand of my Irene; we did not speak, but gazed steadily upward at the balloon, which had reached a current of air which was carrying it across the country. The sun was now very hot; the gas was expanding; the balloon was rising higher and higher and higher. [218]

"We stood holding each other's hands and gazing. At last there was but a little black spot in the sky; then it faded and shivered, and was gone. Side by side we moved away. We were very wet, but the sun was hot.

"Suddenly I spoke. I could not restrain my burning desire to look deep into the soul of Irene. I owed it to my love of her to know the extent of her love for me. Those words which she called down from the car, which might have been her last words on earth, what were they? I asked her.

"'I said,' she answered, 'that if you would pick up that rifle you threw out, and stand ready, I would jerk open the safety-valve. I would then take up my rifle, and when the car came down we would both shoot him. But you shook your head, and I said no more.'

"I did not answer, but in my heart I said: 'O woman! What art thou, and of what strange feelings art thou made! Thou hast the beauty of the flower and the intellect of the leaf. To let that awful black-and-yellow fiend descend to the earth! To call up to a cruel death and ask it to come down-stairs and meet you on the lowest step! Skies! How can the mind of man conceive of it?' [219]

"And leaving the shores of the river, we toiled homeward over the dreary wastes."

The company were all much interested in this narrative—almost painfully interested. They said as much to the Frenchman, and he was pleased at the impression he had felt sure he would make, and which he always did make, when he told that story. They talked of hunts and wild beasts, but there were no comments upon the story itself. Each one had his or her own thought, however. The Master of the House thought: "What a clever woman!" The Mistress of the House thought: "Just like a Frenchman!" The Next Neighbor wished she had been in the balloon to pitch the tiger on him. The Daughter of the House was fascinated at the idea of the vicinity of the beautiful, ferocious tiger. And John Gayther thought, as he looked wistfully at the Daughter of the House: "I am glad he has a wife!"

THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

POMONA AND JONAS

VII
THE FOREIGN PRINCE AND THE HERMIT'S DAUGHTER

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The Frenchman went away; and after him there was a succession of visitors to the house who were not interested in gardens and were therefore not introduced within the sacred precincts of the summer-house on the upper terrace. The young people took a fancy to a pretty rustic arbor in a secluded spot; but whether it was because they especially admired that part of the garden did not transpire.

But the guests left, one after another; and finally there came to visit the family Euphemia and her Husband. They were old and intimate friends of the family, and the very morning after their arrival they all repaired to the summer-house which overlooked the garden. There was some conversation about the garden,—its beautiful things, and its useful products, and its antiquity,—for Euphemia loved the old garden and its traditions.

The two gentlemen, provided with comfortable chairs, smoked their cigars in peacefulness and content, and the Daughter of the House seemed absorbed in some fancy work. But after some time the Master of the House, turning suddenly to Euphemia's Husband, asked: "What has become of Jonas and Pomona?"

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"Here they are to answer for themselves!" cried the Daughter of the House, springing up, as John Gayther ushered into the garden the Next Neighbor, followed by Pomona and Jonas. The Next Neighbor was also on intimate terms with Euphemia and her Husband, and a devoted and rapturous admirer of Pomona. The couple had descended upon her the night before in a most unexpected fashion, but she gave them a hearty welcome, and rejoiced in them, even after she discovered that she owed the visit to a desire on the part of her guests to see Euphemia's Husband. They knew where he was visiting, but had thought it wiser to go to the Next Neighbor to pay their little visit. And so the explanation of this apparently strange meeting of so many old friends was simple enough.

Chairs and benches were found, and John Gayther brought his stool unasked and joined the party. He had no idea of missing that conversation.

It was soon evident that, while Jonas was as tranquil as usual, Pomona had something on her mind—that she had come with a purpose; and as soon as the inquiries and explanations were over, she addressed the Husband of Euphemia with great earnestness:

"Jone and me came to see you, sir, about something particular; and as we are all friends here, I may as well say it right out."

"The more you say the better we shall be pleased!" the Master of the House exclaimed.

Pomona nodded to him, but turned again to the Husband of Euphemia.

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"We've been told, sir, that some editors have been asking you to get us to enter fiction again; and what we want to say is that we don't want to enter it no more. What we did when we was in it was all very well, but that's past and gone, although I've said to Jone a good many more times than once that if I had to do this or that thing now, that's set down in the book, I'd do it different. But then he always answers that if I'd done that I'd have spoiled the story, and so there was no more to say on that subject. What we've done we gladly did, and we're more than glad we did it for you, sir. But as for doing it again, we can't do it, for it ain't in us. Even if we tried to do the best we could for you, all you'd get would be something like skim-milk—good enough for cottage cheese and bonnyclabber, but nothing like good fresh milk with the cream on it."

"I think you are perfectly right," said Euphemia. "If you don't want to go into fiction again you ought not to be made to do it."

"I would not do such a wicked thing as to put anybody in fiction who did not want to

go there," gravely replied the Husband of Euphemia.

At these words the load that was on Pomona's mind dropped from it entirely.

"Now, sir," said she, "we've got another thing to say; and it will seem queer to you after what we've said already. We do want to go into fiction, but not the way we was in it before. The fact is that between us we've written a story, and we've brought it with us, hoping you wouldn't mind letting Jone read it to you. Of course we was expecting to read it to only two; but as we've got to go back to-day, if the rest of the folks don't mind, Jone can read it anyway." [226]

"I should like it above all things!" exclaimed the Next Neighbor.

"We will not let you go away until it is read," said the Mistress of the House.

"Oh, I do want to hear it!" cried the Daughter of the House.

"Of course Jonas must read it," was Euphemia's quiet comment.

"Heave ahead!" called out the Master of the House.

Pomona smiled gratefully. "It isn't a very long story, but we've been a long time working at it, and we wouldn't think of such a thing as calling it finished until our friends has heard it."

The quiet and good-natured Jonas now drew a manuscript from his pocket and began.

"The name of my story," said he, "is 'The Foreign Prince and the Hermit's Daughter.'"

"We thought of a good many other names for it," said Pomona, "and I wanted to call it 'The Groundless Prince'; but Jone he said that groundless applies to things there is no reason for, and as so many princes are of that kind, somebody's feelings might be hurt. And so I gave in."

"Now this is the way the story begins," said Jonas. "In that period of time which is not modern, and yet is not too far back, and in which a great many out-of-the-way things have happened, a certain young Prince went travelling in foreign parts of the world with the general purpose of broadening his mind. He wanted to study the manners and customs of other nations in order that he might better know how to govern his own people. [227]

"But when, after several years' absence, he came back to the place of his nativity, he found that neighboring nations had made war upon his country—that they had conquered his army and subjugated his people, and had partitioned his principality among themselves. Consequently he found himself in a strange position: he had gone forth to visit foreign lands, and now he returned to find himself a foreigner on the very spot where he was born. In fact, his nationality had been swept away; his country had disappeared.

"But he was still a prince. Nothing could deprive him of his noble birth. But to all the world, save to one person, he was an alien prince, and must always so continue. The exception was a Single Adherent, who had followed him when he began his travels, and whose loyal spirit would not suffer him to leave his master now.

"Slowly, with crossed arms and head bent low, the Prince strode away from the place that had once been his home, his Single Adherent following his footsteps.

"After a long day's journey they came to a little valley chiefly remarkable for streams and rocks. Here, at the entrance of a commodious cave, he beheld an elderly hermit seated upon a stone, calmly surveying the sunset sky. The hermit looked up with a pleasant smile, for it had been long since a traveller had passed that way; and, perceiving that the stranger was not only well-bred but tired, invited him to take a seat upon a stone near by his own, at the same time motioning the Adherent to a smaller stone at a little distance. [228]

"In reply to the numerous questions of the hermit, the Prince soon told his story.

"'Well, well!' exclaimed the hermit. 'Then you are the Prince Ferrando. I might have known it, for you so closely resemble your father.'

"'You knew him, then?' inquired the Prince.

"'I have often seen him,' the hermit replied. 'The likeness is wonderful. And so you have come back to find that your principality does not exist. It is a strange condition of things; but believe me—I mingled a great deal with the world before I came to this cave, and I know what I am talking about—when I tell you that there are many potentates who would be glad to come back from a journey and to find that their dominions had ceased to exist, and that with them had disappeared all the trials, responsibilities, and dangers of sovereignty.'

"'But I am not that sort of person,' said Ferrando. 'I do not allow care to oppress me;

I do not shrink from responsibility; I am not afraid of danger. I travelled far to broaden my mind; I came back prepared to reign wisely over my subjects. But I have no subjects, and therefore I cannot exercise that enlightened rule for which I have, with so much toil and study, prepared myself. Wherever I go I must always be an absolute alien, and as such I must try to learn to consider myself.'

"'Cheer up, my friend,' said the hermit. 'You are too young to give up things in that way. And now allow me, sir, to introduce you to my daughter.'

"Ferrando sprang up quickly, and beheld standing near him a very handsome young woman carrying a large basket filled with water-cress. The Prince bowed low. 'It is very unusual, I think,' said he, 'for a hermit to have a daughter.' [229]

"The hermit smiled. 'Yes,' said he; 'it is rather out of the common; but when I came here to seek rest and peace within these rocky walls, my daughter could not be dissuaded from accompanying me.'

"'It is plain that she possesses a noble soul,' said the Prince, again bowing low.

"'I wonder if he ever thinks that of me?' the Single Adherent asked himself, as he stood respectfully by his low stone.

"When the hermit's daughter had been made aware of Ferrando's former station and his misfortunes, she went away to prepare supper. The meal was soon ready, and consisted of cress fresh from the spring, fried cress, and toasted cress, with cress tea, and also freshly drawn water from a spring."

"Poor young man!" exclaimed the Next Neighbor. "So tired and hungry! Was that all they had to give him?"

"Of course," explained Pomona; "hermits never eat anything but water-cress."

"After supper," continued Jonas, "the hermit filled a pipe with dried water-cress, and offered another to his guest, and the three sat at the entrance of the cave and discussed the Prince's affairs, in which the hermit and his daughter seemed to take a lively interest. At a little distance on the small stone sat the Single Adherent, also smoking a pipe of water-cress, and his inability to enjoy this novel sensation was plainly evident in the radiant beams of the full moon. In the course of an hour the Prince and his Adherent retired to a guest-cave near by; but the hermit and his daughter sat up far into the night discussing the Prince and the peculiar circumstances in which he found himself. [230]

"The next morning after breakfast, the principal dish of which was a salmi of water-cress, the hermit, his daughter, and their guest held council together; while the Adherent stood at a respectful distance, and listened with earnest attention to all that was said.

"'My daughter and I,' said the hermit, 'agree that it is a lamentable thing that a prince such as yourself, so eminently qualified to rule, should have no opportunity to exercise his abilities for sovereignty; therefore we think the best thing you can do is to rent a principality for a term of years. In some ways this would be better than inheriting one, for if you do not like it you can give it up at the end of the term.'

"'But where could I find a principality to let?' exclaimed the Prince. 'I never heard of anything like that!'

"'Very likely,' said the hermit; 'but if you were to look around I think you might find something to suit you which the reigning potentate might be willing to lease.'

"'I am of my father's opinion,' said the hermit's daughter; 'and if you will take my advice you will investigate the country north of this valley. There are several principalities in that direction, and it would not at all surprise me if, before the end of a day's journey, you were to find something that could be rented.'

"The Prince was very much pleased with the interest taken in his affairs by the hermit and his daughter, and he decided to follow their advice. As he and his Single Adherent were about to depart, the hermit said to him: 'I shall be very glad to hear from you, and, if you should succeed in renting a principality, I will willingly give you any advice and assistance in my power. When I mingled with the general world I saw a great deal of governing and all that sort of thing, and it may be I can give you some points which will be of advantage to you.' [231]

"The Prince accepted with thankfulness the kind offer of his host, and when he approached the daughter to take leave of her, she graciously stuck a sprig of water-cress in his buttonhole.

"After walking a few miles the Prince and his Adherent stopped at a roadside inn, where they ate an abnormal breakfast, and then, with invigorated bodies, they continued their journey.

"Late in the afternoon the Prince became a little tired, and suggested that they stop

at a farm-house which stood near the road, and sojourn there for the night. The Adherent, however, was of the opinion that they should go on until they reached the crest of a hill before them; they would then be able to survey the country. He placed a high opinion on the statement of the hermit's daughter that they would be likely to find what they wanted before nightfall.

"When they reached the crest of the hill they were delighted to see before them, at no great distance, a small city. When they had approached it nearer they perceived by the side of the great gate a sign-board which bore the inscription:

PRINCIPALITY TO LET—
FURNISHED
APPLY TO DOWAGER AT THE
PALACE

"The Single Adherent nodded his head as he said to himself: 'This is just about what I [232]
expected.'

"'That hermit's daughter,' said the Prince, 'is a remarkable young woman, and her suppositions should not be disregarded.'

"After passing the night at an inn near the gate, the Prince and his Single Adherent repaired to the palace to make inquiries regarding the principality.

"The Dowager was a middle-aged woman dressed in rusty black, with a quick eye and an eager expression. Having demanded references of Ferrando, she declared herself perfectly satisfied with his statements, for she had met his father, and the likeness was unmistakable. She told him she would be very much pleased to have him for a tenant, and that she was quite sure the principality would suit him exactly. She then showed him all over the palace, the Adherent following and taking notice of everything.

"The furniture and appointments of the princely mansion were somewhat time-worn and shabby, and the Dowager, noticing the scrutinizing glances of the Adherent, thought it wise to state that during the life of her late husband everything in the palace had been kept in the most admirable order; but of course it could not be supposed that she, by herself, could go to the expense of new carpets and furniture-coverings. She assured the Prince, however, that a very little expenditure of money would make the palace look as bright and clean as if it had been recently furnished.

"'Of course you have an army,' remarked the Prince.

"'Oh, yes,' said the Dowager; 'an excellent army—that is, considering the size of my principality. The infantry is very good indeed. In fact, I heard my late husband say, [233]
on an occasion when the infantry corps had just been furnished with new uniforms, that he never saw a finer-looking set of men. The cavalry is also in excellent condition. Of course in time of peace it is not necessary to keep these men supplied with horses, but in an agricultural country it is not difficult to obtain horses whenever they are really needed.'

"'And the artillery?' inquired the Prince.

"'I am sorry to say,' replied the Dowager, 'that the artillery is not yet supplied with cannon. It was the intention of my late husband to furnish them with the necessary cannon, ammunition, horses, and all that, but he never did so. And of course, being a woman, I could not be expected to attend to such things. But I have no doubt whatever that you can easily and inexpensively put this branch of the army on a proper footing; that is, if you care for artillery.'

"The Prince asked no further questions about the army, but inquired if the principality was furnished with a navy.

"'Oh, no,' said the Dowager; 'we have no waterfront, and my late husband used often to say that this impossibility of having a navy saved him a great deal of expense, to say nothing of the trouble warships might get him into when they are out of sight in distant parts of the world.'

"At this point the Dowager was called out by a servant, who in a whisper asked her if the visitors were going to stay to dinner. The Adherent seized this opportunity to say in a low voice:

"'If your Royal Highness will excuse me, I will suggest that you ask if there is a [234]
legislative body, and a judiciary.'

"The Dowager, having shaken her head at the servant, returned to the Prince.

"'Have you a legislature?' asked the Prince.

"'Certainly,' she said. 'I cannot say that I think it is a very good one, for I have more trouble with it than with anything else in the principality; but it has now less than a

year to run, and my advice would be that you should not convene it again. My experience has taught me that one can get along a great deal better without a legislative body than with one. For my part, I do not approve of them at all.'

"'And a judiciary?' remarked the Prince. 'I suppose you have that.'

"The Dowager hesitated a moment as if she did not exactly understand; but she recovered herself, and answered quickly: 'Oh, yes, we have one; but I have so little to do with it that for the moment I forgot it. It has been a very good one indeed, but it has been little used of late, and it may be out of order. I have found that plain, straightforward decrees from the throne are a great deal cheaper and a great deal quicker in their operation than a judicial decision. But if you desire a regularly organized judiciary, it will not cost you much to establish one, if you do not employ your judges by the month or year. I find piece-work a great deal more satisfactory, and you can get so much law for nothing in this country that it is not worth while giving much for it when you have to pay.'

"The countenance of the Single Adherent had been growing darker and darker, and [235]
he now stepped up to the Prince.

"'Your Royal Highness,' said he, 'it might be well to speak of the rent.'

"When the Prince asked the Dowager how much she wanted per year for her principality, she did not immediately answer, but reflected, with her chin in her hand; and then, turning to the Prince, she stated the amount.

"'You must understand,' she added, 'that I would not rent this principality to every one for such a sum as that; but as I know you to be a regular prince who will appreciate the advantages and responsibilities of a place like this, and, as you are unmarried, without encumbrances of any sort, I presume, I would much prefer to let it to you, even at a lower price, than to rent it to a perfect stranger.'

"When the Adherent heard the sum mentioned by the Dowager his countenance grew almost black, and Prince Ferrando stood in silent amazement.

"'It would be impossible for me to pay such a sum as that,' he said at last. 'I have studied political economy, and am familiar with the principles of internal revenue, and the income to be derived from ordinary taxes and imposts in a principality of this size would not enable me to pay that sum.'

"'Oh, you are very much mistaken!' cried the Dowager. 'Of course, as a woman, I have not been able to make the principality pay me what it ought to; but my late husband received a very good revenue from it, and I am sure you could do the same, if not a great deal better: for my late husband was not a good business man; he [236]
thought too much of other people and not enough of his family.'

"The Prince looked at his Adherent, and the latter shook his head violently.

"'It is impossible,' said Prince Ferrando; 'I cannot pay such a sum as that'; and he rose to go.

"'Of course,' said the Dowager, hastily, 'if you think that is too much, and that you would not be able to pay it, I might take off something in your case. I would not do this for everybody, but as it is you, I will take off one per cent. of the amount I have named.'

"For a moment Ferrando stood undecided. He greatly wanted the principality; he would be homeless and forlorn without one; and yet this Dowager was asking him a most outrageous price.

"'I will consider this matter,' said he, 'and if you will give me the refusal of the principality for twenty-four hours I will see you again to-morrow.'

"The Dowager considered this request as favorable to her interests, and, fearing that she had asked him too little, she added: 'Of course, in case of a reduction like this, it must be stipulated in the lease that I reserve some rooms in the palace where I shall board at your expense. You cannot expect me to accept a reduced rent, and to be turned out of my house besides.'

"The Prince bowed; and, without reply, he and his Adherent left the palace, followed by the eager, wistful glances of the Dowager. When they reached the inn the Prince said to his Single Adherent:

"'I am greatly troubled, and I wish I had the advice of that good hermit. I will write a letter to him, and you shall take it. But you must not walk that long distance; to- [237]
morrow you will hire a vehicle and go to the hermit.'

"The Prince wrote his letter, and the Adherent took it to the hermit. The good man and his daughter read it with the greatest interest, and retired to the back of the cave to consider it. Presently the hermit approached the Single Adherent. 'Is there room in your vehicle for three persons?' said he. Receiving an affirmative answer, he

continued: 'Then my daughter and I will go back with you. We think the Prince is in danger of making a very bad bargain; and as we know a great deal about these things, we believe that our presence and advice will be of great advantage to him.'

"So, after the horse had all the water-cress it could eat, the little party started back to the city."

"They must have been the first real-estate agents," remarked the Master of the House.

Pomona was about to reply, but Jonas gave no time:

"When the Prince heard the sound of the wheels, and came down to the door of the inn, he was amazed and delighted to see the hermit and his daughter, and welcomed them with unusual ardor.

"'Of all the people in the world,' he exclaimed, 'I am most happy to see you! I am in great trouble and difficulty, and I want your advice and counsel.'

"'Which is what we came to give you,' said the good hermit, as he warmly pressed the hand of the Prince.

"After supper the Prince and his guests retired to an inner room for consultation, while the Adherent stood in the background. After some discussion it was decided [238] that early in the morning the Prince should go to the palace, and should agree to lease the principality for five years, provided the Dowager would accept one half the sum she had originally asked; and that he should also absolutely refuse to board the Dowager, or to allow her to reserve any part of the palace for her own use. He would promise to pay one quarter's rent in advance if these terms were agreed upon on the spot.

"It was nearly high noon on the following day that the Dowager left the palace, taking with her all her belongings. As she departed she turned and cast a black look at the Adherent.

"'It is to his advice,' she said to herself, 'that I owe this very bad bargain that I have made. If that young fellow had been left to himself he would have agreed to everything I demanded.'

"For an hour or two before she left the Prince had been wandering around the premises, impatiently waiting for her departure. As soon as she was gone, he called to his Adherent, and sent him to the inn to summon the hermit and his daughter to his presence. He wished to be grateful to these good friends, but, as he had a respect to appearances, he did not desire the Dowager to know that these humble persons were to be his first guests in the palace.

"When the hermit and his daughter arrived at the palace they received a princely welcome, and Ferrando informed them that he wished them to make him a visit of at least a week.

"'You have been so good to me that I wish to do the best for you; and so I have arranged that you shall occupy the state suite in the right wing.'

"'We are thankful for this great honor,' said the hermit; 'but, if it would please your [239] Royal Highness, we should prefer the corresponding rooms in the left wing. We think they will suit us better.'

"The Prince raised his eyebrows in surprise, but he gave orders that his guests' wishes should be gratified. The Adherent, who was standing in the background, raised his eyebrows also; but he was not surprised.

"In about half an hour the hermit and his daughter rejoined the Prince in the grand hall. To his utter amazement, Ferrando beheld his guests dressed in rich and handsome garments.

"'Did they bring any trunks with them?' he whispered to his Adherent, as they approached.

"'No, your Royal Highness,' was the answer. 'They brought nothing but a basket of water-cress, which the lady said had been freshly picked and ought not to be wasted.'

"With great dignity the hermit advanced to the Prince, and by his side walked his daughter, who was so beautiful in her silks and laces that the Prince found it impossible to remove his eyes from her.

"'In order to explain this change in our appearance,' said the hermit, 'I will state that the Dowager from whom you rented this principality is my brother's widow. Before he died he arranged that the Dowager should reign over the principality as long as she lived, and that my daughter should then succeed her. At the same time, knowing that his wife did not understand the governing of principalities, he appointed me Assistant Prince, with a salary. This seemed like a very good plan, but it did not work. The Dowager soon showed such a disposition to meddle with everything that [240]

was going on that my position gradually became so intolerable that I determined to retire to a hermit's cell, to which my daughter accompanied me.'

"With his mind scarcely able to grasp the situation, the Prince gazed from the one to the other of his guests. 'Can it be possible,' he said presently, 'that in renting this principality I have interfered with your prospects?'

"'Oh, not at all, not at all,' replied the hermit. 'In the first place, you have given us the great honor of visiting you and of occupying our old suite of apartments. I cannot describe to your Royal Highness the pleasure I felt when I saw my dressing-gown hanging on its accustomed hook, with my favorite slippers beneath it.'

"'I take back my invitation for a week!' cried the Prince. 'Now that I know who you are, you must stay with me for a long time. I wish you could stay always,' he added, his eyes still fixed upon the beautiful young woman. Then, as if to explain this outburst of interest, he said: 'You know, I rely so much on your advice and counsel, and there is no knowing what that Dowager may do next.'

"'You are right,' said the ex-hermit; 'there is no possible way of knowing. But a plan has suggested itself to me which I think may relieve you of any possible annoyance or molestation. My idea is that you shall marry my daughter. Then, in virtue of your lease, you will reign over the principality, and she will be your consort. After a time, when the Dowager departs this life, my daughter, by virtue of inheritance, will reign over the principality, and you will be her consort. Thus you see the Dowager will [241] have no show at all.'

"The countenance of the Prince shone like the sun. 'A heaven-born plan!' he cried. 'From the moment I saw your daughter with the basket of water-cress, I loved her. By your permission, I will embrace her.'

"The permission was given, and he embraced her. She might have said that, from the moment she had understood the peculiar circumstances in which the Prince had found himself, her heart had gone out to him like a dove seeking the nest of its partner; but she did not think it needful to occupy the time with unnecessary statements.

"'Your Royal Highness,' said the Adherent, approaching with a bow, 'I think it is only right to inform you that the Dowager, when she left, said to me that she would return early in the afternoon to superintend the removal of her parrots.'

"'What!' cried the Prince. 'Haven't those beastly birds gone yet? Send them after her without the loss of a minute. I don't want to see her back here again.'

"The ex-hermit, who had drawn his daughter aside for a few words of consultation, now advanced with uplifted hands. 'Nay,' said he; 'if you will excuse me, I think I can suggest a better plan than that. The old lady is bound to come back, and the sooner she comes and goes, the better; but we should be prepared for her. I suggest that a priest be summoned, and that you and my daughter be married immediately. Our position in the palace will then be assured, and the Dowager will have nothing to say, either about our presence here or about anything else. How does my plan suit your [242] Royal Highness?'

"Ferrando did not answer, but, turning to the Adherent, he ordered him to summon a priest without delay, and to order the assemblage in the great hall of all the courtiers and servants who could be found. The Adherent sped away on his errand, and as he did so he smiled and said to himself: 'She is a better manager than the old woman! And her views are broader!'

"When the marriage ceremony had been concluded, the Prince ordered a sumptuous wedding-feast to be spread. But he was soon informed that there was nothing to eat in the house, for the Dowager had not thought it at all incumbent upon her to provide eatables for her tenant.

"'It matters not!' cried the ex-hermit, his face glowing with pleasure. 'There will be time enough to provide a good supper. And, in the meantime, what could be more appropriate for a wedding-repast than the basket of cress which my daughter brought with her?'

"A table was spread, with a great dish of water-cress in the centre. And it may be remarked that the Prince was so wild with delight that if this had been suddenly changed to one containing fried chicken with cream gravy he would not have perceived the difference.

"Early in the afternoon the Dowager returned to the palace to superintend the removal of her parrots. As she entered the great hall she perceived the wedding-party waiting to receive her; and her amazement was such that her toes turned upward and she sat down with great suddenness in a chair which the Adherent [243] thoughtfully placed behind her.

"'How do you do, my dear sister-in-law?' said the ex-hermit. 'I do not wonder you are

surprised to see us here, and in order to relieve your mind I will instantly explain the state of affairs.' Whereupon he explained them.

"The Dowager then found her voice and her strength. Springing to her feet, she cried: 'This is a plot! I have been deceived, and the lease is void. Not one of you has any right in this palace, and I hereby order you out.'

"The ex-hermit smiled, and drew a paper from his pocket. 'Before we obey your orders, my dear sister-in-law,' he remarked, 'I wish to call your attention to a little business matter. You will remember that when I was here with you, acting as your assistant, you found great difficulty in paying me my salary. The first year you told me to take it out of the customs duties. The sum I received was not equal to the amount due me, but I made no complaint. The second year I was obliged to rely on the taxes on internal production; but as you required most of the income from this source, I found myself very short of money at the end of the year. The third year I was obliged to rely upon the taxes on pew-rents; and that, as you are aware, yielded me almost nothing. After that you paid me no salary at all. Here is my bill for the money due me. But if you cannot conveniently pay me, I will agree, in the presence of these good friends, to postpone the settlement until the next time I lay my eyes upon you. If you do not then pay me, I shall then levy upon your personal possessions.'

"The Dowager glared at the Princess Ferrando, and, having shaken her long [244]
forefinger at that beautiful young lady, she departed, and was never seen in the palace again."

Here Jonas folded the paper.

"Is that the end?" asked the Daughter of the House.

"That is all there is of it," said Jonas, sententiously.

"I thought," said the Daughter of the House, "that the story would tell how he governed his rented principality, and if he ever got his own. I worked it out in my mind like a flash that he would govern so well that his own people would go to him and beg him to govern them."

"I think," said the Next Neighbor, "that if that principality was governed at all, it was by that scheming wife."

"There's two ways of ending a story," said Pomona. "One is to wind it up, and the other is to let it run down. Now when a story is running down as if it was a clock, it's often a good deal longer than you think before it stops; so we thought we would wind this one up right there."

Euphemia laughed. "But if you wind it up," she said, "you help it to keep on going."

For a moment Pomona looked embarrassed; but she quickly recovered herself. "I don't mean to wind it up like a clock," she said, "but to wind it up like an old-fashioned clothes-line which isn't wanted again until you have some more things to hang on it."

The Husband of Euphemia stated it as his opinion that that was an excellent way to stop a story; but Euphemia did not agree with him. "I think," she said, "that a story of [245]
that kind ought to end with a moral. They nearly always do."

Pomona now looked at Jonas, and Jonas looked at Pomona.

"Several times, when we was writing the story," said Pomona, "I had a notion that Jone was trying to squeeze a moral into it here and there; but he didn't say nothing about it, and I didn't ask him, and if there's anything more to say about it, it's for him to do it."

Jonas smiled. "My opinion about morals to stories is that the people who read them ought to work them out for themselves," said he. "Some people work out one kind of moral, and others work out another kind. It was a pretty big job to write that story, which I had to do the most of, and I don't think I ought to be called on to put in any moral, which is a good deal like being asked to make bread for the man who buys my wheat."

Pomona looked down at the ground, then up to the sky, and then she remarked:

"If you wouldn't mind hearing a little bit of a story, I'd like to tell you one." No one had any wish to object, and she began: "Once there was a young married man who went to his business in a canoe; every morning he paddled himself down to his business, and every afternoon he paddled himself back. About half-way down the beautiful stream on which he lived there was a little point of rocks projecting out into the water, and the young man was obliged to paddle his canoe very near the opposite shore in order to get out of the way. This was troublesome, and after a while he got tired of it. It would be very much pleasanter, he thought, if he could paddle along the [246]
middle of the stream, without thinking about the rocks. So when, one morning, he was in a great hurry, he said to himself that he would steer his canoe right straight

against that point of rocks and break it off. After that he would have a clear passage up and down the stream. So as soon as he got near enough he carried out his plan. That young man did not go to his office that morning, and the fragments of his canoe was picked up by a poor family and used for kindling-wood. Now," she added, looking deliberately at Jonas, "if you can find a good moral to that story we'd be glad to hear it."

It was very evident to the listeners that Pomona had given a shrewd guess as to the moral of the story Jonas had read, if, indeed, he had had in his mind any moral at all —and that her own was an offset to it, or so intended. So the Next Neighbor came to the rescue.

"I have a great dislike," she announced, "to morals of all sorts. I prefer never to think of morals. They are very perplexing, and often worse than useless. But if there are any morals to those two stories, I should say that the first story has something to do with women who manage too much; and the second, in some occult manner, deals with men who try to reform their wives."

Here every one laughed. And then there followed a lively criticism of the story Jonas had read; but they all agreed that it was worthy of Pomona and Jonas, and should be published. When they had reached this conclusion they were summoned to luncheon.

THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

THE DAUGHTER OF THE HOUSE

AND IS CALLED

THE CONSCIOUS AMANDA

[249]

VIII
THE CONSCIOUS AMANDA

One morning, as John Gayther was working in the melon-bed, the Daughter of the House came to him, and greeted him with such a glow on her face that John knew she had something pleasant to tell him.

"Yes, miss," John replied to her greeting; "it is a beautiful morning, and I know of something more beautiful than the morning."

"I do not see any very great beauty in muskmelons," said the Daughter of the House, demurely.

"Muskmelons are not in my mind at this minute," John replied, letting the hoe fall upon the ground as he looked at her pretty face, all aglow.

"I have something in my mind, John—a very original story. Papa said yesterday I must tell a story, and I have one all ready. I do not believe you ever heard one like it. Come to the summer-house; mamma and papa are already there."

She tripped away, and John followed her, stopping on the way to pick up a basket of seed-pods. He had just established himself on his stool, facing the family group, and had taken some pods to shell as he listened, when his hand was arrested and all the [250] party silenced by a burst of song from the tall lilac-bushes near the hedge. They could not see the bird, but it was evident that he was enjoying his own melody. Such pure, sweet notes—now rippling softly, now with a gay little quiver of joy, now a tender prolonged note, now a succession of trills, high and low, that set the air throbbing, and every now and then a great burst of seraphic music, as if his little heart was so full of happiness he was compelled to pour it forth to all who chose to listen. Our party would gladly have listened for a long time, and have omitted the story altogether; but after some minutes of delicious song the strains suddenly ceased, and a little whirring noise in the lilacs indicated that the bird had flown away.

The Daughter of the House gave a deep sigh. "I was afraid to breathe," she said, "lest

he might fly away."

"I have heard nothing like that this summer," said the Mistress of the House.

"It is the red thrush," said John Gayther, who had listened rapturously. "A pair of them were here in the early spring. I wonder why this one has come back."

"Perhaps," said the Daughter of the House, "it is one of the young ones come back to visit his birthplace. I am afraid, after that ravishing performance, that my story will sound tame enough."

"It will be a different sort of melody," said the Mistress of the House, looking fondly at her daughter.

"My heroine," began the young lady, "cannot appear in the first person, as if she were telling the story; nor in the second person, as if she were listening to one; nor [251] in the third person, as if she were somewhere else; for, in fact, she was not anywhere. And as there is no such thing as a fourth person in grammar, she cannot be put into any class at all."

The captain turned and looked at his daughter. "There seems to be something very foggy about this statement," said he. "I hope the weather will soon clear up, so we can get our bearings."

"We shall see about that," said the young lady. "This heroine of mine, Miss Amanda, never went to sleep. To be sure, she sank into slumber about as often as most people; but when she spoke of having done so she always said she had 'lost consciousness.' She was very methodical about going to sleep and waking up; and at night, just as she was about to lose consciousness, she always said to herself, 'Seven o'clock, seven o'clock, seven o'clock,' over and over again until she was really asleep; and in the morning she woke up at seven precisely. She was not married, and so she was able to live her own life much more independently than if the case had been different. She liked to be independent; and she liked to know as much as she could about everything. In these two things she was generally very successful. But you must not think she was prying or too inquisitive; she was really a very good woman, and very fond of her family, which was composed entirely of brothers and sisters and nephews and nieces.

"She was a very active person, but she was not very strong; and when she was nearly forty years old something happened to her lungs, and her health gave way more and more, until at last there was no hope for her, and she knew she must die."

"Oh, this is an awful way to begin a story!" said the captain. "I don't like it. You ought [252] not to kill your heroine just as you begin."

"If you want to make any remarks about this story, papa," said the Daughter of the House, "which shall be worth anything, you ought to wait until you hear more of it and begin to understand it. When Miss Amanda found she had a very little while to live, she composed herself comfortably, and began to repeat to herself the words, 'Fifty years, fifty years, fifty years,' over and over again. This she did until at last she died; and then there was her funeral; and she was buried; and there was a stone put up over her head with her name on it."

John Gayther smiled with approbation. He felt sure he was going to hear a story to his liking. The captain smoked steadily. As he had been advised, he would wait until he felt firm ground beneath him before he made any further remarks. As for the Mistress of the House, she looked at her daughter, and wondered. The story continued:

"All this happened a few years before the middle of a century, and a few years before the end of a century Miss Amanda regained consciousness. That is to say, she woke up at the end of fifty years, exactly as she had been in the habit of waking up at seven o'clock in the morning. But although she was conscious she did not understand how it was possible she should be so. She did not see; she did not hear; she did not feel. She had no body; no hands or feet; no eyes or ears: she had nothing; and she knew she had nothing. She simply was conscious, and that was all there was about it. She was not surprised; she seemed to take her state and condition as a matter of [253] course, and, to a certain degree, she comprehended it. She remembered perfectly well that she had lost consciousness as she was saying 'Fifty years, fifty years, fifty years' over and over again; and now she knew that, as she had regained consciousness, the fifty years must have passed; so, instead of wondering how things had come to be as they were, she, or rather her consciousness, set itself to work to observe everything around it and about it. This had always been Miss Amanda's habit of mind.

"Now I want to explain," said the young lady, "that in one way it will be troublesome for me to express myself exactly as I tell this story. Of course Miss Amanda did not exist; it was only her consciousness which observed things: but I think it will be a great deal less awkward for me if I speak of that consciousness as Miss Amanda.

None of us really understands consciousnesses with their outsides all hulled off as John is doing with those seeds which he drops into the basin. Each one of those little seeds has within it a power which we do not understand. And that is the way with Miss Amanda's consciousness."

"There," said the captain; "I agree with you. Nobody can object to that."

"The first thing of which Miss Amanda became conscious was the smell of sweet peas. She had always been very fond of these flowers. The air was soft and warm, and that, too, was pleasant to her. She observed a good many other things, such as trees and grass; but she did not know where she was, and she did not see anything she could recognize. You must not forget that when I say she saw anything, I mean [254] she became conscious of it. Presently, however, she did perceive something that was familiar, and if such a thing had been possible her face would have flushed with pleasure. This familiar object was a sun-dial in the middle of a wide grass-mound. The sun-dial was of brass. It was very old, and some of the figures on the round plate were nearly obliterated by time and weather; but Miss Amanda recognized it. It was the same sun-dial she had always known in the home where she had been born. But it was not mounted on a round brick pillar, as when she had known it: now it rested on a handsome stone pedestal; but it was the same sun-dial. She could see the place where the upright part had been mended after her nephew John, then only fourteen, had thrown a stone at it, being jealous of it because it would never do any work in bad weather, whereas he had to go to school, rain or shine.

"'Now,' thought Miss Amanda, 'if this is the old sun-dial, and if this is the mound in front of our house, although it is so much smaller than I remember it, the dear old house must be just behind it.' But when she became conscious in that direction, the dear old house was not there. There was a house, but it looked new and handsome. It had marble steps, with railings and a portico, but it was another house altogether, and everything seemed to be something else except the sun-dial, and even that did not rest on the old brick pillar with projections at the bottom, on which she used to stand, when she was a little girl, in order to see what time it was.

"Now Miss Amanda felt lonely, and a little frightened. She had never been accustomed to finding herself in places entirely strange to her. She felt, too, that she [255] was there in that place, and could not be anywhere else even if she wanted to, and this produced in her a condition which, half a century before, would have been nervousness. But suddenly she perceived something which, although strange, was very pleasant. It was a young girl upon a bicycle coming swiftly toward her over a wide, smooth driveway. Miss Amanda had never been conscious of a bicycle; and as the girl swept rapidly on, it seemed as if she were skimming over the earth without support. At the foot of the marble steps the girl stopped and seemed to fall to the ground; but she had not fallen: she had only stepped lightly from the machine, which she leaned against a post, and then walked rapidly toward the place where the sweet peas grew.

"Miss Amanda greatly admired this girl. She was dressed in an extremely pretty fashion, with a straw hat and short skirts, something like the peasants in southern Europe. She began to pick the sweet-pea blossoms, and soon had a large bunch of them. Now steps were heard coming round the house, and the girl, turning her head, called out: 'Oh, grandpa, wait a minute. I am picking these flowers for you.' From around one end of the house, which was a large one, Miss Amanda saw approaching an elderly gentleman who was small, with short gray hair and a round, ruddy face. He walked briskly, and with a light switch, which he carried in his hand, he made strokes at the heads of a few fluffy dandelions which appeared here and there; but he never hit any of them.

"Instantly Miss Amanda knew him: it was her nephew John—the same boy who had broken the sun-dial! No matter what his age might happen to be, he had the same [256] bright eyes, and the same habit of striking at things without hitting them. Yes, it was John. There could be no possible mistake about it. It was that harum-scarum young scapegrace John. If Miss Amanda had had a heart, it would have gone out to that dear old boy; if she had had eyes they would have been filled with tears of affection as she gazed on him. Of all her family he had been most dear to her, although, as he had often told her, there was no one in the world who found so much fault with him.

"The old gentleman sat down on a rustic seat beneath a walnut-tree, and his granddaughter came running to him, filling the air with the odor of sweet peas. She seated herself at the other end of the bench, and let the flowers drop into her lap. 'Grandpa,' said she, 'these are for you, but I am only going to give you one of them now for your buttonhole. The rest I will put in a vase in your study. But I wanted you to stop here anyway, for I have something to tell you.'

"'Tell on,' said he, when the girl had put a spray bearing three blossoms into his buttonhole. 'Is it anything you want me to do this afternoon?'

"'It isn't anything I want you to do ever,' she said. 'It is about something I must do, and it is just this: grandpa, there are two gentlemen who are about to propose to me,

and I think they will do it very soon.'

"'How in the world do you know that?' he exclaimed. 'Have they sent you printed notices?'

"'How is it that anybody knows such a thing?' she answered. 'We feel it, and we can't be expected to explain it. You must have felt such things when you were young, for I have been told you were often in love.' [257]

"'Never in my life,' said her grandfather, 'have I felt that a young woman was about to propose to me.'

"'Oh, nonsense!' said the girl, laughing. 'But you could feel that she would like you to propose to her. That's the way it would be in your case.'

"Miss Amanda listened with the most eager and overpowering attention. Often in love! That young scapegrace John! But she had no doubt of it. When she had last known him he was not yet eighteen, and he had had several love-scrapes. Of course he must have married, for here was his granddaughter; and who in the world could he have taken to wife? Could it have been that Rebecca Hendricks—that bold, black-eyed girl, who, as everybody knew, had tried so hard to get him? With all the strength of her consciousness Miss Amanda hoped it had not been Rebecca. There was another girl, Mildred Winchester, a sweet young thing, and in every way desirable, whom Miss Amanda had picked out for him when he should be old enough to think about such things, which at that time he wasn't. Rebecca Hendricks ought to have been ashamed of herself. Now she did hope most earnestly that she would hear something which would let her know he had married Mildred Winchester.

"'Well,' said the old gentleman, 'if they do propose, as you seem to have some occult reason for suspecting, have you made up your mind which of them you are going to take?'

"'That is the trouble,' said the girl, a very serious look coming over her face. 'I have not made up my mind what I ought to do. I know I ought to be prepared to give the proper answer to the one who speaks first, whichever one he may be; but I cannot come to a decision which satisfies me, and that is the reason, grandpa, I wanted to talk to you about it. Of course you know who they are—George and Mr. Berkeley.' [258]

"'My dear Mildred,' said the old gentleman, turning quickly around so that he could face her, 'just listen to me.'

"'Mildred, Mildred!' thought Miss Amanda, and her consciousness was pervaded by a joyful thankfulness which knew no limits. 'She must have been named after her grandmother. He surely married Mildred.' And Miss Amanda gazed on the scapegrace John with more affection than she had ever known before. But in the midst of her joy she could not help wondering who it was that that Rebecca Hendricks had finally succeeded in getting. That she got somebody Miss Amanda had not the slightest doubt.

"'Mildred,' said the old gentleman, 'just listen to me. This is a most important thing you have told me, and I have only this to say about it: if you can't make up your mind which one of those young men you will take when they propose, make up your mind now, this minute, not to have either of them. If you love either one of them as you ought to love the man who shall be your husband, you will have no difficulty in deciding. Therefore, if you have a difficulty, you do not really love either of them.'

"For a few minutes the girl sat quietly looking down at the flowers in her lap, and then she said: 'But, grandpa, suppose I do not understand myself properly? Perhaps after a while I might come to a—' [259]

Miss Amanda listened with the most eager and overpowering attention.

"'After a while,' interrupted her grandfather. 'That will not do. You want to understand yourself before a lover proposes to you, not afterwards.'"

The captain sat up straight in his chair. "Now look here," he said; but he addressed the Mistress of the House, not the story-teller. "How does this daughter of ours come to know all these things about lovers, and the weather-signs which indicate proposals of marriage, and all that? Has she been going about in society, making investigations into the rudiments of matrimony, during my last cruise? And would you mind telling me if any young men have been giving her lessons in love-affairs? John Gayther, have you seen any stray lovers prowling about your garden of late?"

The gardener smiled, and said he had seen no such persons. But he said nothing about a very true friend of the Daughter of the House, who lived in a small house in the garden, and who would have been very well pleased to break the head of any stray lover who should wander into his precincts.

"You don't know girls, my dear," said the Mistress of the House, "and you don't know what comes to them naturally, and how much they have to learn. So please let the story go on."

"'Of course,' said the old gentleman, 'I know who they are. Considering how often they have been here of late, I could not well make a mistake about that; and although I am not in favor of anything of the sort, and feel very much inclined to put up a sign, "No lovering on these premises," still, I am a reasonable person' ('You must have changed very much if you are, you dear boy!' thought Miss Amanda), 'and know what is due to young people, and I am obliged to admit that these young men are good enough as young men go. But the making a choice! That is what I object to. I would advise you, my dear, not to think anything more about it until the time shall come when you feel there is no need of making a choice because the thing has settled itself.' [260]

"'But, grandpa,' she said, 'what am I to say if they ask me? I am bound to say something.'

"The old gentleman did not reply, but began switching at some invisible dandelions. 'What you tell me,' he said presently, 'reminds me of my Aunt Amanda. She was a fine woman, and she had two lovers.' ('You little round-faced scamp!' thought Miss Amanda. 'Are you going to tell that child all my love-affairs? And what do you know about them, anyway? I never confided in you. You were nothing but a boy, although you were a very inquisitive one, always wanting to know things, and what you have found out is beyond me to imagine.')

"'Your Aunt Amanda,' said Mildred. 'That's the one in the oval frame in the parlor. She must have been very pretty.'

"'Indeed she was,' said the old gentleman. 'That portrait was painted when she was quite a young girl; but she was pretty until the day of her death. I used to be very fond of her, and thought her the most beautiful being on earth. She always dressed well, and wore curls. Even when she was scolding me I used to sit and look at her, and think that if such a lady, a little bit younger perhaps, but not much, were shut up [261] in a castle with a window to it, I would be delighted to be a knight in armor, and to fight with retainers at the door of that castle until I got her out and rode away with her sitting on the crupper of my saddle, the horse being always, as I well remember, a gray one dappled with dark spots, with powerful haunches and a black tail.' ('You dear boy,' murmured Miss Amanda, 'if I had known that I could not have scolded!') 'Well, as I said before, she had two lovers. One was a handsome young fellow named Garrett Bridges.'

"'It seems to me I have heard that name,' said Mildred.

"'Very likely, very likely,' said her grandfather. 'It has been mentioned a great many times in our family. Garrett had been intended for the army, but he did not get through West Point, and at the time he was making love to my Aunt Amanda his only business was that of expecting an inheritance. But he was so brave and gay and self-confident, and was so handsome and dashing, that everybody said he would be sure to get along, no matter what line of life he undertook.' ('I wonder,' thought Miss Amanda, 'what he did do, after all. I hope I shall hear that.') 'Her other lover,' said the old gentleman, 'was Randolph Castine, a very different sort of young man.' ('You unmitigated little story-teller!' ejaculated Miss Amanda. 'He never made love to me for one minute in his whole life. I wish I could speak to John—oh, I wish I could speak to John!') 'So, then,' continued the old gentleman, 'here were the two young men, both loving my Aunt Amanda; and here was I, intensely jealous of them both.'

"'Oh, grandfather,' laughed Mildred, 'how could you be that?' [262]

"'Easily enough,' said he. 'I was very impressionable and of a very affectionate turn of mind.' ('You had very queer ways of showing it, you young scamp!' said Miss Amanda.) 'And I remember, when I was about ten years old, I once asked my mother if it were wicked to marry aunts; and when she told me it would not do, I said I was very sorry, for I would like to marry Aunt Amanda. I liked her better than anybody else except my mother, and I was sure there was no other person who would take more from me, and slap back less, than Aunt Amanda.' ('I remember that very well,' thought the happy consciousness; 'and when your mother told me about it, how we both laughed!')

"'Well, the better I liked my Aunt Amanda, the less I liked anybody who made love to her; and one night, as I was sitting on the edge of my bed,—it must have been nearly eleven o'clock,—I vowed a vow, which I vowed I would never break, that no presumptuous interloper, especially Garrett Bridges, should ever marry my Aunt Amanda. As to Randolph Castine or any other suitor, I did not think them really worthy of consideration. Garrett Bridges was the dangerous man. He was at our house nearly every day, and, apart from his special obnoxiousness as a suitor to my Aunt Amanda, I hated him on my own account, for he treated me as if I were nothing but a boy.' ('And why shouldn't he?' murmured Miss Amanda. 'You were nearly grown up at that time, but you really behaved more like a boy than a man, and that was one reason I was so fond of you.')

"'I had a good many plans for freeing my Aunt Amanda from the clutches of [263] Mr. Bridges; but the best of them, and the one I finally determined upon, pleased me very much because it was romantic and adventurous. It seemed to me the best way to prevent Mr. Bridges from marrying my Aunt Amanda was to make him marry some one else, and I thought I could do this. There was a girl named Rebecca Hendricks, who lived about a mile from our house, with whom I was very well acquainted. She was a first-class girl in many ways.' ('I would like to know what they were!' exclaimed Miss Amanda. 'I think she was about sixth-class, no matter how you looked at her.') 'For one thing, she was very plucky, and ready for any kind of fun. I knew she liked Mr. Bridges, because I had heard her say so, and her praise of him had frequently annoyed me very much; for I did not want a friend of mine, as she professed to be, to think favorably in any way of such a man as Garrett Bridges. But things were now getting serious, and I did not hesitate to sacrifice my feelings for the sake of my Aunt Amanda. I was always ready to do that.' ('Not always, my boy,' thought Miss Amanda; 'not always, I am afraid.') 'So I resolved to get up a match between Rebecca and Garrett Bridges. As I thought over the matter, it seemed to me that they were exactly suited to each other.' ('That's queer!' thought Miss Amanda. 'I always supposed you thought she was exactly suited to you.') 'Of course I could not say anything to Bridges about the matter, but I went over to Rebecca, and told her the whole plan. She laughed at me, and said it was all pure nonsense, and that if she were going to marry at all she would a great deal rather marry me than Mr. Bridges. But I told her [264] seriously it was of no use to think of me. In the first place, I was four years younger

than she was; and then, I had made up my mind never to marry, no, never, as long as my Aunt Amanda lived. I was going to take care of her when she grew elderly, and I wanted nobody to interfere with that purpose.' ('You dear boy!' said Miss Amanda, with a sort of choke in her affectionate consciousness. 'That is so like you—so like you! And yet I thought you were in love with that Rebecca.') 'Of course I did not give up my plan because she talked in that way,' continued the old gentleman. 'I knew her; I had studied her carefully. Like most boys of my age, I was a deep-minded student of human nature, and could see through and through people.'

"'Of course,' laughed Mildred. 'I have known boys just like that.'

"'But I was about right in regard to Rebecca,' said her grandfather. 'I kept on talking to her, and it was not long before she agreed to let me bring Mr. Bridges to see her—they were not acquainted. I had no trouble with him, for he was always glad to know pretty girls, and he had seen Rebecca. There never was a piece of match-making which succeeded better than that, and it delighted me to act as prompter of the play, while those two were the actors, and I was also the author of the piece.'

"'Grandpa,' said Mildred, 'don't you think all that was rather wrong?'

"'I did not think so then,' he answered, 'and I am not sure I think so now; for really they were very well suited to each other, and there did seem to be danger that the [265] man might marry my Aunt Amanda, and that, as it seemed to me then, and seems to me now, would have been a deplorable thing.' ('If you had known a little more, you scheming youngster,' said Miss Amanda, 'you would have understood that there was not the least danger of anything of the kind—that is to say, I am not *sure* there was any danger.') 'It was not long after these two people became acquainted before I had additional cause for congratulating myself that I had done a wise and prudent thing. Bridges came to see my Aunt Amanda every afternoon, just the same as he had been in the habit of doing, and yet he spent nearly every evening with Rebecca; and that proved to me he was not a fit lover for my Aunt Amanda, no matter how you looked at it.'

"'But the young girl,' said Mildred. 'Didn't you think he was also too fickle for her?'

"'Oh, no,' said the old gentleman; 'I was quite positive that Rebecca could manage him when she got him. She would make him walk straight. I knew her; she was a great girl. Every morning I went to see her to inquire how things were coming on, and she told me one day that Mr. Bridges had proposed to her, and that she had accepted him, and that it was of no use to say anything about it to her father, because he would be sure to be dead set against it. Her mother was not living, and she kept house for her father, who was a doctor, and he had often said he would not let her marry anybody who would not come there and live with him; and, judging from what she had heard him say of Garrett Bridges on one or two occasions, she did not feel encouraged to propose this arrangement for him.

"'So the plan they agreed upon—which, in fact, I suggested, although Rebecca would [266] never have admitted it—was to go off quietly and get married. Then she could write to her father and tell him all about it, and when his anger had cooled down they could make him a visit, and it would depend on him what they should do next. I worked out the whole plan of operation, which Rebecca afterwards laid before Mr. Bridges as the result of her own ingenuity, for which he commended her very much. They both agreed—and you may be sure I did not disagree with them—that the sooner they were married the better. The equinoctial storms were expected before very long, and then a wedding-trip would be unpleasant and sloppy. So they fixed on a certain Wednesday, which suited me very well because my father and mother would then be away from home on a visit, and that would make it easier for me to do my part.' ('You little schemer!' said Miss Amanda. 'Of course you suggested that Wednesday.')

"'This place was quite in the country then, and eight miles from a station, and there was only one train to town, at seven o'clock in the morning. If they could get to the village where the station was at quarter-past six, they would have time to get married before the train came. Old Mr. Lawrence, the Methodist minister, was always up at six o'clock, and he could easily marry them in twenty minutes, and that would give them lots of time to catch the train. I would furnish the conveyance to take them to the village, and would also attend to Rebecca's baggage. Mr. Bridges could have his trunk taken to the station without exciting suspicion. At five o'clock in the morning, I told Rebecca, I would have a horse and buggy tied to a tree by the [267] roadside at a little distance from the doctor's house where the lovers were to meet.

"'The night before, Rebecca was to put all the clothes she wanted to take with her in a pillow-case, which she was to carry to a woodshed near the house. Soon after they started in the buggy I would arrive with a spring-wagon and an empty trunk. I would then get the pillow-case, put it into the trunk, and drive to the station by another road.

"'Mr. Bridges approved of this plan, and thought she was very clever to devise it. So

everything was settled, and I went to the stable the day before, and told Peter I wanted him to get up very early the next morning, and put old Ripstaver in the buggy, and drive him over to Dr. Hendricks's. I told him he must be there before five o'clock, and that he was to tie the horse to a maple-tree this side of the front yard. I said one of the doctor's family had to get to the village very early because there were some things to be done before the train came, and it had been agreed we should lend our buggy. Peter was not quite pleased with the arrangement, and asked why we did not send the old mare—we only kept two horses; but I said she was too slow, and it had been specially arranged that the buggy, with Ripstaver, should be sent. Peter was a great friend of mine, so he agreed to do what I asked, and said he did not mind walking back.' ('I never would have believed,' said Miss Amanda, 'that the boy had such a mind. If I had only known what he was planning to do! If I had only known! But even if I had, it is so hard to tell what is right.')

"'My Aunt Amanda was not in the habit of meddling with anything about the barn or [268] stable; but that afternoon—and I never knew why—she went to the barn, and found Peter dusting off the buggy. He told me she asked if anybody was going to use the buggy that evening, and he replied he was getting it ready to take over to the Hendrickses' in the morning, as some one there wanted to go to the village before the train started for the city. Then she asked what horse he was going to put to it, and he told her old Ripstaver. Then she said she did not think that was a good plan, because Ripstaver was hard to drive, and it would be a great deal better to send the old mare. Peter agreed to this, and so it happened that when I went to the barn the next morning, as soon as I had seen Peter drive away in the buggy, I found the only horse in the stable was old Ripstaver. I was mad enough, I can tell you; for if Rebecca made any noise and woke her father he could overtake that old mare long before she could get to the village. I never did understand how my Aunt Amanda happened to meddle that afternoon.'

"('Of course you couldn't,' said Miss Amanda. 'You were a fine little manager; but when I looked out of my window that afternoon and saw a boy carrying a trunk to the barn I was very likely to suspect something; and when I went down to the barn myself and found Peter getting the buggy ready to go away early the next morning, I suspected a great deal more. I did not know what to do, for I did not want to make a scandal by letting Peter know anything was out of the way, and all I could think of was to have a slow horse put in the buggy instead of a fast one. I thought that might help, anyway.')

"'Well,' continued the old gentleman, 'there was nothing for me to do but to take [269] Ripstaver and the spring-wagon and go after Rebecca's baggage. When I reached the doctor's house, and found the buggy had gone, I got the pillow-case, put it into the trunk, and started off on a back road which joined the turnpike a couple of miles farther on. Near the junction of the two roads was a high hill from which I hoped I might be able to see the buggy, and, if so, I would follow it at a safe distance. As soon as I got to the top of this hill I did see the buggy; but I saw more than that—I saw another buggy not far behind it. There was a roan horse in this one which I knew to belong to the doctor. Bridges was whipping our old mare like everything, and she was doing her best, and galloping; but the doctor's roan was a good one, and he was gaining on them very fast. It was a beautiful race, and I felt like clapping and cheering the doctor, for, although he was spoiling my game, it was a splendid thing to see him driving his roan so fast and so steadily, never letting him break out of a regular trot, and I hated Bridges so much I was glad to see anybody getting the better of him.

"'It was not long before the doctor's buggy caught up with the other one, and then they both stopped; everybody got out, and there must have been a grand talk, but of course I could not hear any of it. The doctor shook his fist, and I could see they were having a lively time. After a bit they stopped talking, the doctor took Rebecca into his buggy and drove back, and Garrett Bridges got into our buggy and went slowly toward the station—to see about his trunk, I suppose. I did not lose any time after that, but drove to the doctor's as fast as old Ripstaver could travel, and I had [270] Rebecca's pillow-case in the woodshed before the doctor arrived. Now I never was able to imagine how the doctor found out that Rebecca had gone. She did not know herself. She said she got out of the house without making any more noise than a cat; and as for her father waking up at the sound of wheels in the public road, that was ridiculous; if he had heard them he would not have paid any attention to them. That was one of the queer things neither of us ever found out.'

"Miss Amanda was amused. ('Of course you didn't; it was not intended that you should. How could you know that, being greatly troubled, I woke up very early that morning, and when I found you were not in your room I put on my overshoes and walked across the fields to Dr. Hendricks's. I did not get there as soon as I hoped I would; but when I rang the door-bell, and the doctor himself came to the door, and I told him I did not want to see him but Rebecca, and he went to look for her and found her gone, and I confided to him as a great secret what I was sure had happened, it did not take him long to get his horse and buggy and go after her. And how glad I

was she had our old mare, and not Ripstaver! But I thought all the time it was you she had run away with, and I never knew until now that it wasn't. The doctor told me afterwards that he and his daughter had agreed not to say anything about it, and he advised me to do the same; but the sly old fellow never told me it was Mr. Bridges and not you. But if I had only known who really was running away with her, I would not have walked across those wet pasture-fields that chilly morning—that is, I do not think I would have done it.') [271]

"'But one thing I did know,' said the old gentleman, 'which I often regretted; and that was that if my Aunt Amanda had not meddled with the horses and so spoiled my plan, Rebecca Hendricks would have married Mr. Bridges, and several evil consequences would have been avoided.' ('I wonder what they were?' thought Miss Amanda.) 'Well, things went on pretty much as they had been going on, and that Garrett Bridges came every day, just as bold as brass, to see my Aunt Amanda, who, of course, knew nothing of his trying to run away with Rebecca. Sometimes I thought of telling her, but that would have made a dreadful mess, and I was bound in honor not to say a word about Rebecca.

"'Mr. Randolph Castine sometimes came to our house, but not often, and I began to wish he would court my Aunt Amanda and marry her. If she had to marry, he would be a thousand times better than Garrett Bridges, and I thought I could go to his house—which was a beautiful one, with hunting and fishing—to see her, and perhaps make long stays in the summer-time, which would have been utterly impossible in the case of Garrett Bridges.' ('You would have been welcome enough in any home of mine,' said Miss Amanda. 'But you are utterly mistaken about Mr. Castine. Alas! he was no lover at all.') 'But although Mr. Castine was a splendid man in every way, he was not a bold lover like Garrett Bridges, and after a while he seemed to get tired and went off to travel. Not very long after that Bridges went off, too. I think perhaps he had received part of the inheritance he was expecting; but I am not sure about that. Anyway, he went. And then my Aunt Amanda had no lover but me. [272]

"'Very soon her health began to fail, and this went on for some time, and nothing did her any good. At last she took to her bed. It seemed to me the weaker and thinner she got the more beautiful she became, and I did everything I could for her, which, of course, was not any good. I remember very well that at this time she never lectured me about anything; but she sometimes mentioned Rebecca Hendricks, always to the effect that she was a very strange girl, and that she could not help thinking her husband, if she ever got one, would be a man who ought to be pitied. I think she was afraid I might marry her; but she need not have worried herself about that—I never had the slightest idea of any such nonsense.' ('But I had every reason to suppose you had such an idea,' said Miss Amanda, 'considering I thought you had tried to run away with her.')

"'Well,' said the old gentleman, 'there is not much more of the story. My Aunt Amanda died, and our family was in great grief for a long time; but none of them grieved as much as I did.' (If Miss Amanda could have embraced her dear nephew John, she would have done so that minute.) 'Then, greatly to our surprise, Randolph Castine suddenly came home. He had heard of my Aunt Amanda's dangerous condition, and he had hurried back to see her and to tell her something before she died. He told my mother, to whom he confided everything, that he had been passionately in love with my Aunt Amanda for a long time, but that he had been so sure she was going to marry Mr. Bridges that he had never given her any reason to suppose he cared for her, which I said then, and I say now, was a very poor way of managing love business. If he had spoken, everything would have been all right, and my Aunt Amanda might have been living now; there are plenty of people who live to be ninety. I am positively sure, now, that she was just as much in love with him as he was with her.' [273]

"Miss Amanda now suffered a great and sudden pain: she seemed to exist only in her memory of her great love for Randolph Castine, and in this present knowledge that he had loved her. Oh, why had she been told that in life she had been dreaming, and that only now she had come to know what had been real! Nothing that was said, nothing that was visible, impressed her consciousness just then; but presently some words of her nephew John forced themselves upon her attention.

"'So she never knew, and he never knew, and two lives were ruined; and she died,' the old gentleman continued, 'my mother thought, as much from disappointed love as from anything else.'

"'And what became of Mr. Castine?' asked Mildred, who had been listening with tears in her eyes.

"'He went away again,' said her grandfather, 'and stayed away a long time; and at last he married a very pleasant lady because he thought it was his duty, having such a fine estate, which ought to be lived on and enjoyed.'

"'Did he have any children?' asked Mildred.

"'Yes; one daughter, who married a Mr. Berkeley of Queen Mary County. It was considered a good match.'

"'Berkeley!' exclaimed the young girl, moving so suddenly toward her grandfather that all the sweet peas in her lap fell suddenly to the ground. 'Berkeley! Why, Arthur [274] Berkeley comes from Queen Mary County! Do you mean he is the grandson of Mr. Castine?'

"'Exactly; that is who he is,' said the old gentleman.

"Mildred sat for a few minutes without saying a word, looking at the ground. 'Grandpa,' she said presently, 'do you know I believe all the time my mind was made up, and I did not know it. And after what you have told me of Arthur Berkeley, grandpa, and your Aunt Amanda, I really think I know myself a great deal better than I did before; and if Arthur should ask me—that is, if he ever does—'

"'And he surely will,' said her grandfather, 'for he came to me this morning, like the honorable fellow he is, and obtained permission to do so.'

"'Grandpa!' exclaimed Mildred; and as she looked up at him there was no beauty in any sweet-pea blossom, or in any other flower on earth, which could equal the brightness and the beauty of her face.

"The pain faded out of the consciousness of Miss Amanda. 'And this is the way it ends!' she murmured. 'This is the way it ends. John's granddaughter and his grandson.' And now it was not pain, but a quiet happiness, which pervaded her consciousness.

"The grandfather and granddaughter rose from the rustic bench and walked slowly toward the house. Miss Amanda looked after them, and blessed them; then she gazed upon the sweet peas on the ground; then she looked once more upon the old dial, still bravely marking each sunny hour; and then, slowly and gradually, Miss Amanda lost consciousness, without saying to herself, 'Seven o'clock' or 'Fifty years' or any other [275] period of time.

"That is the end," said the young lady.

"And quite time!" exclaimed the Master of the House. "Madam," he said, turning to his wife, "did you know of all this knowledge of which your daughter seems possessed—of boy's nature, and woman's love, and the human heart, and all the rest of it? I can't fathom her with my longest line!"

"You may as well give up all idea of that sort of sounding," said the Mistress of the House. "There is no line long enough to fathom the human heart."

"I am thinking," said John Gayther, as he rattled the seeds in the pan, "whether it was worth while for Amanda to become conscious for so short a time, and just to hear a tale like that."

"Was it worth while to learn that the man she had wanted to love her had really loved her?" asked the Daughter of the House, eagerly.

"It doesn't seem the sort of love to wait fifty years to hear about," said John. "I don't like the way they have in novels of making folks keep back things that men and women couldn't help telling."

"Then you don't like my story, John," said the Daughter of the House, in a disappointed tone.

"Indeed, but I do, miss," he replied quickly. "As a story it is just perfect; but as real doings it doesn't pan out square. But then, it is meant for a story, and it couldn't be better or more unlike other stories told here. Nobody could have thought that out that hadn't a deep mind."

The young lady looked critically at John, but she saw he really meant what he said, and she was satisfied.

THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

THE OLD PROFESSOR

AND IS CALLED

MY TRANSLATOPHONE

IX
MY TRANSLATOPHONE

[279]

The Professor was very old, but he was well preserved—always spoken of as "hale and hearty." He still held his position in his college, and still took a good part in teaching mathematics, but he had an assistant who did the heavy work. He had been principal of the school where the Mistress of the House received her education, and she was much attached to him, and he always spent some part of his summer vacation at her house. The Master of the House, of course, was not there every summer, and so this season the Old Professor had a special treat, for there were many things he liked to talk about in which he knew the two ladies could take no interest.

It rained for two days after his arrival at the house, but the third morning was bright and clear, and the Master of the House conducted his visitor to the favorite resort of the family—a spot the Old Professor knew well and loved. They conversed for a while on some deep subjects, and then they were joined by the two ladies and the Next Neighbor, and the serious discourse changed into light talk; and John Gayther coming up to pay his respects to the Old Professor, the Next Neighbor was seized with an inspiration.

"John," she said, "you must tell us a story. Sit right down and begin 'Once upon a time—' know I haven't heard a story for a long time." [280]

"Madam," said John, respectfully, "I always do what the ladies tell me to do; and I am more sorry than I can say, but I have to know beforehand when I am to tell a story, and indeed I haven't one ready."

"Oh, you are clever and can make up as you go along, as the children say."

"John never tells an impromptu story," said the Mistress of the House. "But, my dear Professor," and she turned to the old gentleman, "we are all friends here, and I should so like you to tell us how you got your wife. You once told it to me, and I should like to know what this company will think of the way you won her."

The Old Professor smiled. "I know what you think about it, and I know what I think about it; and, as you say, we are all old friends, and I am rather curious to know what this company will think about it. I will tell my little story." When they were all ready, he began in a clear voice:

"If my Mary were living this story would never have been told; but she has been a blessed spirit now these many years, and has doubtless long known it, and has judged my conduct righteously. Such is my belief." Here he made a reverent pause, and then began again:

"In my early youth I left, for some two or three years, the beaten track—so to speak—of mathematics; or, more properly, mechanics. For I interested myself in inventing, with more or less success, certain scientific machines.

"One of the most successful of these various contrivances, and the one, indeed, in which I was most deeply interested, was a small machine very much resembling in appearance the tube, with a mouth-piece at one end and an ear-piece at the other, frequently used by deaf persons, but very different in its construction and action. In the ordinary instrument the words spoken into the mouth-piece are carried through the tube to the ear, and are then heard exactly as they are spoken. When I used my instrument the person spoke into the mouth-piece exactly as if it were an ordinary tube, but the result was very different, for the great feature of my invention was that, no matter what language was spoken by the person at the mouth-piece, be it Greek, Choctaw, or Chinese, the words came to the ear in perfect English. [281]

"This translation was accomplished by means of certain delicate machinery contained in the end of the mouth-piece, which was longer and larger than that of the ordinary ear-tube, but the outward appearance of which did not indicate that it held anything extraordinary. It would take too long to explain this mechanism to you, and you would not be interested; nor is it necessary to my story.

"When, after countless experiments and disappointments, and days and nights of hard study and hard work, I finished my little machine, which I called a translatophone, I was naturally anxious to see how it would work with some other person than myself at the mouth-piece. In the course of its construction I had frequently tried the machine by putting the ear-piece into my ear and speaking into the mouth-piece such scraps of foreign languages as I was able to command. These experiments were generally satisfactory, but I could not be satisfied that the machine was a success until some one else should speak into it in some foreign tongue of which I knew positively nothing, so that it would be impossible for me to translate it unconsciously. [282]

"This was not an easy thing, and I had determined I would not explain my invention

to the public until I had assured myself that it worked perfectly, and until I had had my property in the invention secured to me by patent right. To go to a foreigner and ask him to speak into my instrument, using a language he could readily assure himself I did not speak or understand, would be the same thing as an avowal of what the translatophone was intended to do. I thought of several plans, but none suited me. I did not want to pretend to be deaf, and, even if I did so, I could not explain why I wished to be spoken to in a language I did not use myself.

"In the midst of my cogitations and uncertainties, I received a note from Mary Armat which, for a time, drove from my mind all thought of translatophone and everything concerning it.

"Miss Mary Armat and I had been friends since the days in which we went to school together. I had always liked her above the other girls of my acquaintance, and about three years previous to the time of this story I had almost made up my mind that I was in love with her, and that I would tell her so. This, however, I had not done. At that time I had become intensely interested in some of my inventions, and, although my feelings toward Mary Armat had not in the least changed, I did not visit her as [283] often as had been my custom, and when I did see her I am afraid I told her more about mechanical combinations than she cared to hear. But so engrossed was I that I stupidly failed to notice this, and I did not perceive that I had been neglecting the most favorable opportunities of declaring the state of my affections until she informed me, not in a private interview, but in the midst of her family circle, that she had made up her mind to become a missionary and go to India to work among the heathen. I was greatly shocked, but I could say nothing then, and afterwards had no opportunity to say anything.

"I did not write to Mary, because she was a most independent and high-spirited girl, and I knew it must be spoken words and not written ones which would satisfy her that I had had good reasons for postponing a declaration of love to her until she had left the country.

"So she went to Burma. I frequently heard of her, but we did not correspond. She had gone into her new work with great zeal. She had learned the Burmese tongue, and had even translated a little English book into that language. For some time she had seemed well satisfied; but I heard through her family that she was getting tired of her Eastern life. The rainy seasons were disagreeable to her, the dry seasons did not agree with her; her school duties were becoming very monotonous; and she had found out that in her heart she did not care for the heathen, especially for heathen children. Therefore she had resigned her position and was on her way home. The note I received from her informed me that she had arrived in New York the day [284] before, and that she would be very glad if I would come to see her."

"*She* did a sensible thing, anyway," commented the Master of the House.

The Daughter of the House opened her mouth to say: "I do not like her. She had no enthusiasm, or real goodness, to give up her work so soon and for such reasons." But she suddenly reflected that Mary had been the speaker's wife, and she shut her mouth with a little vicious snap.

"I went to the Armat house that evening, and I found there a very lively girl awaiting me. Her parents and her two sisters had gone out, and we had the parlor to ourselves. Life in Burma may not have suited Mary Armat, but it certainly had improved her, for she was much more charming than when I had last seen her. Moreover, she was so very friendly, and without doubt so glad to see me, she was so bright and full of high spirits, that it might have been supposed she had arranged matters so that we could have the evening to ourselves, and was eminently pleased with her success.

"I admired her more and more every time I looked at her, and I determined that, as soon as the proper time should come, I would make earnest love to her, and tell her what, perhaps, I should have told her long ago. But just now I had other matters on my mind.

"Above all things I wanted Mary to talk into my translatophone, and to speak in Burmese. I knew nothing whatever of that language, and if she should speak it, and the words should come to my ears in pure English, then no further experiment would be necessary, no doubts could possibly exist. But until I had made this test I did not [285] want her to know what the instrument was intended to do; it was barely possible she might play a trick on me and speak in English. But if the thing succeeded I would tell her everything. We two should be the sole owners of the secret of my great invention —an invention which would not only benefit the English-speaking world, but which might be adapted to the language of any nation, and which would make us rich beyond all ordinary probabilities.

"As soon as I had the opportunity I began to speak of the work I had been engaged upon during Mary's absence; and when I approached the subject I thought I saw on her face an expression which seemed to say, 'Oh, dear! are you going to begin on

that tiresome business again?' But I was not to be turned from my purpose. Such an opportunity as this was too valuable, too important, to be slighted or set aside for anything else. In a few minutes I might discover whether this invention of mine was a success or a failure. I took my translatophone from my pocket, and laid it on the table beside us.

"'What's that?' she exclaimed. 'You don't mean to tell me you have become hard of hearing?'

"'Oh, no,' said I; 'my hearing is just as good as it ever was.'

"'But that is a thing deaf people use,' she said.

"'Well, yes,' I answered; 'it could be used by deaf people, I suppose, although I have never tried it in that way. It is my latest and, I think, my most important invention. It would take too long to explain its mechanism just now—'

"'Indeed it would,' she interrupted quickly. [286]

"'But what I want to do,' I continued, 'is to make a little trial of it with you.'

"'If you mean you want me to speak into that thing,' she said, 'I do not want to do it. I should hate to think you are deaf and needed anything of the sort. Please put it away; I do not even like the looks of it.'

"But I persisted; I told her that I greatly desired that she should speak a few sentences in Burmese into my instrument. I had a certain reason for this which I would explain afterwards.

"'But you do not understand Burmese,' she said in surprise.

"'Not a word of it,' I answered. 'I do not know how it sounds when it is spoken, nor how it looks when it is written. But there are certain tones and chords, and all that sort of thing, in the foreign languages which are very interesting, no matter whether you understand the language or not.'

"'Oh, it is a sort of musical thing, then,' she said.

"'I will not say it is exactly that,' I replied. 'But if you will simply speak to me in Burmese for a minute or two, that is all I ask of you, and afterwards we can talk about its construction and object.'

"'Oh, I do not want to talk any more about it,' said she; 'but if it will satisfy you, I will say a few words to you in Burmese. Do you speak into this hole?' she said as she took up the instrument.

"I arranged the ear-piece very carefully, and covered my other ear with my hand. Immediately she began to speak to me, and every word came to me in clear and beautiful English! But I knew, as well as I knew that I lived, that the words she spoke [287] were Burmese, or belonged to some other language which she knew I did not understand. The proof of this was in the words themselves.

"'I think you are perfectly horrid,' she said, 'and I am glad to have an opportunity to tell you so, even though you do not understand me. I cannot imagine how anybody can be so stupid as to want to talk about horrible ear-trumpets the first time he meets a girl whom he has not seen for years, and who used to like him so much, and who likes him still in spite of his cruel stupidity. I wonder why you thought I wanted to see you the minute I got home? I am awfully disappointed in you, for I did think you would talk to me in a very different way the first time you saw me. And now I am going to tell you something—and I would rather cut my tongue out than say it in English, but it gives me a wicked delight to say it in Burmese: I love you, John Howard. I have loved you for a long time; and that is the reason I went to Burma; and now that I have come back I am obliged to say that I love you still. If you could invent some sort of a tube that would make you see better with your eyes and understand better with your mind, it would be a great deal more suitable than this horrid, snake-like thing for your ear. I do not suppose you will ever hear me speak this way in English, but I tell you again, John Howard, that I love you, and it makes me sick to think what a goose you are.'

"'Now, then,' she said, putting down the tube, 'was there anything peculiar in the tones and chords of that bit of foreign language?'

"Fortunately the only light in the room was behind me, and therefore I had reason to [288] hope that she did not observe the expression of my countenance. Moreover, as soon as she had finished speaking she had turned her face away from me, and was now leaning back in her chair, her mouth tightly shut and her wide-open eyes directed on the opposite wall. She looked like a woman who had taken a peculiar revenge, and who, in the taking of it, had aroused her soul in its utmost recesses.

"For some moments I did not answer her question. In fact, I could not speak at all. My thoughts were in a mad whirl. Not only had I discovered that my invention, the

hope of my life, was an absolute success, but I was most powerfully impressed by the conviction that now I could never tell Mary what my invention was intended to do, for then she would know what it had done.

"'Yes,' I answered, speaking slowly; 'there was a sort of accord, a kind of—'

"I was interrupted in what would have been a very labored sentence by the ringing of the door-bell. Mary instantly rose. It was plain she was laboring under suppressed excitement, for there was no other reason why she should have jumped up in that way. She looked as if she were anxious to see some one, no matter who it was. I, too, felt relieved by the interruption. In my state of wildly conflicting emotions any third person would be a relief.

"The door opened, and Miss Sarah Castle walked in. 'Oh, Mary,' she exclaimed, 'I am so glad to find you at home! As it isn't late and the moon is so bright, I thought I would run over to see you for a few minutes. Oh, Mr. Howard!'

"Sarah Castle was a young woman for whom I had no fancy. Active in mind and body, [289]
and apparently constructed of thoroughly well-seasoned material, she was quick to notice, eager to know, and ready at all times to display an interest in the affairs of her friends, with which, in most cases, said friends would willingly have dispensed. As she took a seat she exclaimed:

"'You don't mean to say, Mary, that you went deaf in Burma?'

"Unfortunately I had forgotten to put my translatophone into my pocket, and it was lying in full view on the table. Mary gave a scornful glance toward the innocent tube.

"'Oh, that?' she said. 'That is not mine. It belongs to Mr. Howard.'

"The words 'Mr. Howard' grated upon my nerves. Up to this moment, except through the translatophone, she had not addressed me by my name in any form; and every tentative lover knows that when his lady addresses him as though he had no name it means that she does not wish to use his formal title and that the time has not arrived for her to call him by his Christian name.

"'You deaf?' cried Sarah, turning to me. 'I have never heard anything of that. When did it come on? It must have been very recent.'

"'Oh, he isn't deaf,' said Mary, impatiently. 'It is only one of his inventions. But tell me something of your brothers. I have not heard a word about them yet.'

"But the knowledge-loving Sarah was not to be bluffed off in this way.

"'Oh, they are all right,' said she. 'They are both in college now. But Mr. Howard deaf! I am truly amazed. Do you have to talk to him through this, Mary?' [290]

"Mary Armat was not an ill-natured girl, but, as I said before, she was a high-spirited one, and was at the time in a state of justifiable irritation.

"'Oh, bother that thing!' she answered. 'I told you it is only one of his inventions, and I wish he would put it in his pocket.'

"'Not just yet,' said Sarah. 'I am really anxious to know about it. Why do you use it, Mr. Howard, if you are not deaf?'

"My face must have displayed my extreme embarrassment at this unanswerable question, for Mary came to my relief.

"'Oh, it is a kind of musical instrument,' she said. 'But don't let us talk any more about it. This is the second time I have seen you, but we have not really had a good chance to say anything to each other.'

"I took advantage of this very strong hint, and rose.

"'Musical!' exclaimed the irrepressible Sarah. 'Oh, Mr. Howard, please play on it just the least little bit!'

"Mary allowed herself an expression of extreme disgust. 'Please not while I am present,' she said; 'I could not abide it.'

"I now advanced to take my leave.

"'Do not go just now,' said Sarah; 'I merely ran over for a minute to ask Mary about the Wilmer reception; but as you are going, Mr. Howard, you might as well see me home. It is later now.'

"I retired to a book-table at the other end of the parlor, and it was a good deal later when the two young ladies had finished talking about the Wilmer reception. [291]

"'I do not understand it at all,' said Miss Castle, when we were on the sidewalk. 'You are not deaf, Mr. Howard, and yet you use an ear-trumpet. What does it mean?'

"Of course I did not know what to say, but I had to say something, and, moreover,

that something must not be wholly inconsistent with my explanation to Mary.

"'Oh, it is a thing,' I answered, 'that is intended to be used in connection with foreign languages.' Then I made a bold stroke: 'It shows the difference in their resonant rhythms.'

"'Well, I am sure I do not understand that,' said Miss Castle. 'But what is the good of it? Does it make them any pleasanter to listen to?'

"I admitted that it did.

"'Whether you understand them or not?' she asked.

"If this young woman had at this moment fallen down a coal-hole I cannot truthfully say that I should have regretted it.

"'I cannot explain that, Miss Castle,' I said, 'for it would take a long time, and here we are at your door.'

"'Come in and let me try it,' said Sarah.

"'Thank you very much,' I replied, 'but I really cannot. I have an engagement at my club. In fact, I was just going to take leave of Miss Armat when you came in.'

"She looked at me scrutinizingly. 'You used to call her Mary Armat when you spoke of her,' said she, 'but I suppose her having been a missionary makes a difference in that [292] way. I do not believe much in club engagements, but of course we have to recognize them. And if you cannot come in now I wish you would call on me soon. If your invention has anything to do with foreign languages I truly want to try it. I am studying German now, and if it will put any resonant rhythm into that language it will be very interesting.'

"I made a hasty and indefinite promise, and gladly saw the front door shut behind Miss Sarah Castle.

"That night I did not sleep; in fact, I did not go to bed. The words Mary Armat had spoken to me in Burmese should have completely engrossed my every thought, but they did not. For one moment my mind was filled with rapture by the knowledge that I was loved by this lovely girl; and in the next I was overwhelmed by anxiety as to what should be done to make it impossible for her to know that I knew she had spoken those words. But whether my thoughts made me happy or distressed me, there seemed to be but one way out of my troubles; I must be content with Mary's love, that is, if I should be so fortunate as to secure it. There might be doubts about this; women are fickle creatures, and Mary had been very much provoked with me when I parted from her."

"I see what is coming," here interrupted the Next Neighbor, "and I don't approve of it at all!"

"It would be hard," continued the Old Professor, after pausing for further remarks, "to turn my back upon the golden future which my invention would give to Mary and me; but I must win her, golden future or not. I sat before my study fire, and planned [293] out my future actions. As soon as I could see Mary alone I would tell her my love, and I would explain to her why I had not spoken when I first saw her. But in order to do this I should have to be very careful. I would say nothing but the truth, but I would be very guarded in telling that truth. She must not imagine that anything she had said had made me speak. She must not imagine that I thought she expected me to speak.

"I would begin by asking her pardon for worrying her with my invention when I knew she disliked problematic mechanics. Then I would tell her, in as few words as possible, that I had expected this little instrument to give me fame and fortune, and therefore I wanted her to know all about it; and then, before she could ask me why I wanted her to know this, I would tell her it was because I wished to lay that fame and fortune at her feet. After that, in the best way my ardent feelings should dictate, I would offer myself to her without fortune, without fame, just the plain John Howard who loved her with all his heart. If she accepted me, I would tell her that the invention had not worked as I had intended it should, and therefore I should put it behind me forever."

"Oh, dear!" cried the Next Neighbor. "I knew it was coming!"

"Maybe it didn't," said the Master of the House.

"Having come to a decision," the Old Professor went on, with more animation, "upon this most important matter, my mind grew easier and I became happier. What was anything a black tube could do for me—what, indeed, was anything in the world—compared to the love of that dear girl? And so I sat and gazed into the fire, and [294] dreamed waking dreams of blessedness.

"After a time, however, it came to me that I must make up my mind what I was going

to do about the translatophone. I might as well take it apart and throw it into the fire at once, and then there would be an end to that danger to the future of which I had been dreaming. Yes; there would be an end to that. But there would also be an end to the great boon I was about to bestow upon the world, a boon the value of which I had not half understood. It truly was a wonderful thing—a most wonderful thing. An American or an Englishman, or any one speaking English, could take with him a translatophone and travel around the world, understanding the language of every nation, of every people—the polished tongues of civilization, the speech of the scholars of the Orient, and even the jabber of the wild savages of Africa. To be sure, he could not expect to answer those who spoke to him, but what of that? He would not wish to speak; he would merely desire to hear. All he would have to do would be to pretend that he was deaf and dumb, and my simple translatophone might put him into communication with the minds of every grade and variety of humanity.

"Then a new thought flashed into my mind. Why only humanity? If I should attach a wide mouth-piece to my instrument, why should I not gather in the songs and cries of the birds? Why should I not hear in plain English what they say to each other? Why should not all creation speak to me so that I could understand? Why should I not know what the dog says when he barks—what words the hen addresses to her chicks when she clucks to them to follow? Why should I not know the secrets of what is now to us a tongue-tied world of nature? [295]

And dreamed waking dreams of blessedness.

"Then I had another idea, that made me jump from my chair and walk the floor. I might know what the monkeys say when they chatter to each other! What discovery in all natural history could be so great as this? The thought that these little creatures, so nearly allied to man, might disclose to me their dispositions, their hopes, their ambitions, their hates, their reflections upon mankind, had such a sudden and powerful influence on me that I felt like seizing my translatophone and rushing off to the Zoölogical Gardens. It was now daybreak. I might obtain admission!

"But I speedily dismissed this idea. If I should ever hear in English what the monkeys might say to me, I must give up Mary. I should be the slave of my discovery. It would be impossible then to destroy the translatophone. I sat down again before the fire. 'Shall I put an end to it now?' I said to myself. Nothing would be easier than to take its delicate movements and smash them on the hearth. Now a prudent thought came to me: suppose Mary should not accept me? Then, with this great invention lost,—for I never should have the heart to make another,—I should have nothing left in the world. No; I would be cautious, lest in every way my future life should be overcast with disappointment. The sun had risen, and I felt I must go out; I must have air.

Before I opened the front door, however, I said to myself, 'Remember it is all settled. It is Mary you must have—that is, if you can get her.'

"Of all things in this world, the mind of man is the most independent, the most [296] headstrong. It will work at your bidding as long as it pleases, and then it will strike out at its own pace and go where it chooses. During a walk of a couple of miles I thought nearly all the time of what the monkeys might say to me if I should attach a wide mouth-piece to my translatophone and place it against the bars of their cage. Over and over again I stopped these thoughts and said to myself: 'But all this is nothing to me. I must consider Mary and nothing else.' Then in a very few minutes I was wondering if the monkeys would ask me questions—if they have as strong a desire to know about us as we have to know about them. From such questions how much I might learn in regard to the mental distance between us and them! But again I put all this away from me and began to plan anew what I should say to Mary. And then again it was not very long before I found myself thinking how intensely interesting it would be to know what the tree-toads say, and what the frogs talk about when they sit calling to each other all night. It might be a little difficult to get near enough to tree-toads and frogs, but I believed I could manage it.

"However, when I returned home I was thinking of Mary.

"It was early in the afternoon, and I was trying to decide what would be the best time to visit the Armat house. The monkeys had not ceased to worry me dreadfully, and I had begun to think that when bees buzz around their hives they must certainly say something interesting to each other. Then a note was brought to me from Mary. I tore it open and read:

> "'I want you to come to see me this afternoon. If you possibly can, come [297] about four o'clock, and bring that speaking-tube with you. Miss Castle has been here nearly all the morning, and some things she has said to me have worried me very much. Please come, and do not forget the ear-trumpet.'

"This she signed merely with her initials.

"Mary's note drove to the winds monkeys, bees, and the rest of the world. What had that wretched mischief-maker, that Castle girl, been saying to her? I did not believe that the mind of Mary Armat was capable of originating an unfounded suspicion of me; but the mind of Sarah Castle was capable of originating anything. She had doubtless suspected that there must be some extraordinary reason for my desire to have people talk to me through a tube in a language I did not understand. She had been too impatient to wait until she could try her German upon me, and she had gone to Mary and had filled her mind with horrible conjectures. One thing was certain: no matter what else happened, I must not take that translatophone to Mary. After what Sarah had said to her there could be no doubt that she would make me speak to her in a foreign language through the tube. It would be easy enough: she could give me a French book and tell me to read a few pages. No matter how badly I should pronounce the words, they would reach her ears in pure English!

"And then!

"I took my translatophone from the cabinet in which I kept it. The easiest way to destroy it was to throw it at once into the fire; but that would fill the house with the [298] smell of burning rubber. No; it was only necessary to destroy the internal movements. I unscrewed the long mouth-piece, and gently withdrew from it the little membrane-covered cylinder, not six inches in length, which formed the soul of my invention. I took it in my hand and gazed upon it. Through its thin, flexible, and almost transparent outer envelope I could see, as I held it to the light, its framework, fine as the thread-like bones of a fish, its elastic chords, its quivering diaphragms, and all the delicate organs of its inner life. It seemed as if I could feel the palpitations of its heart as I breathed upon it. For how many days and months had I been working on this subtle invention—working, and thinking, and dreaming! Here it lay, perfect, finished, ready to tell me more than any man ever has known—a thing almost of life, and ready to be brought to life by the voice of man or beast or bird, or perhaps of any living thing. Could I have the heart to destroy it? Could I have the heart to turn my back upon the gate of the world of wonders which was just opening to me?

"'Yes,' said I to myself; 'I have the heart to do anything that will prevent my losing the love of Mary Armat.'

"Then an evil thought came to me, and tempted me: 'If you choose you can hear the monkeys talk and have Mary too. Everything you want is in your own hands. Don't put that little machine back into the tube. Lock it up safely out of sight, and then go to Mary with your instrument, and you can talk into it and she can listen, and she may talk and you may listen. Yes, you may have your Mary—and she need never [299] know that you understand what the monkeys may say to you, or what she has said to you.'

"I am proud that I entertained this evil thought for but a very short time. I turned

upon it and stormed at it. 'No!' I exclaimed. 'I shall never win Mary by cheating her! Whether I get her or not, I will be worthy of her.'

"Then there came another thought, apparently innocent and certainly persuasive. 'Do not destroy the translatophone. Then, if things do not turn out well between you and Mary, you will still have the monkeys.'

"'No,' I said to myself; 'I must have Mary. I will have nothing to fall back upon. I will allow nothing to exist that might draw me back.'

"There was another thing I might do: I might take my translatophone to her, and explain everything. But would there be any possibility, even if she did not fly from me in shame and never see me again, that I could make her believe in a love which had been so spurred on, even aroused, as she might well imagine mine had been? No; that would never do. Apart from anything else, it would be impossible for me to be so cruel as to let Mary know I had understood the Burmese words she had spoken to me.

"I looked at the clock; it was half-past three. Whatever was to be done must be done now. I cast one more look of longing affection upon the quivering, throbbing little creature, which to me was as much alive as if it had been a tired bird panting in my hand; and then I gently laid it on the hearth. I lifted my left foot and let it hang for an instant over the hopes, the fears, the anxieties, the happy day-dreams those early [300] years of my life had given me, and then, with relentless cruelty, not only to that quivering object but to myself, I brought down my foot with all my strength!

"There was a slight struggle for an instant, during which there came to me quick, muffled sounds, which to my agitated brain sounded like the moans of despair from that vast world of animal intelligence which does not speak to man. From my own heart there came a groan. All was over! From the mysterious inner courts of the animal kingdom no revelations would ever come to me! The thick curtain between the intelligence of man and the intelligence of beast and bird which I had raised for a brief moment had now been dropped forever! I should never make another translatophone.

"I cast no glance upon the hearth, but put on my hat and coat and went to Mary. As I walked there rose behind me a cloud of misty disappointment, while before me there was nothing but dark uncertainty. What would Mary have to say to me? And how should I explain what would seem to her to be a cowardly evasion of her plainly expressed request?

"When I entered the Armat parlor I found Mary alone. This encouraged me a little. I had feared that the yearningly inquisitive Sarah might also be there. In that case how might I hope to preserve one atom of my secret?

"Mary came forward with a smile, and held out her hand; I was so astonished I could not speak.

"'Now don't be cross,' said she. 'As I told you in my note, Sarah Castle was here this morning, and she greatly troubled my mind about you. She told me I was actually [301] snappish with you when she was here last night. She had never heard me speak to any one in such an ill-natured way. She knew very well that I do not care for inventions and machines, but she did not consider this any reason for my treating you in such a manner. She said I ought to have known that your whole soul is wrapped up in the queer things you invent, and that I should have made some allowance for you, even if I did not care about such things myself. Now when she told me this I knew that every word was true, and I was utterly ashamed of myself; and as soon as she left I sent you that note because I wanted you to let me beg your pardon —which you may consider has been done. And now please let me see your speaking-tube. I want you to explain it to me; I want to know how it is made, and what is its object. For I know very well that even if your inventions are not successful they always have very good objects. Please forgive me, and let us sit on the sofa and have a nice talk together such as we should have had last night.'

"My soul shouted with joy within me, and I said to myself: 'We shall have the nice talk we should have had last night, but it shall be the talk you wanted then, and not the one you ask for now.'

"'Now, then,' said she, when we had seated ourselves, 'let us go to work to make experiments with your tube. I am so glad you do not feel about it as I thought you would.'

"'I did not bring it,' I said.

"'Oh, what a pity!' interrupted Mary.

"'No,' said I; 'it is not a pity. It did not work as I expected it would, and there is no use in talking any more about it. I placed great hopes in it, and I had a particular [302] reason for wanting to tell you all about it.' Then I began and bravely told her all about it, that is, all that justice and kindness would permit me to tell. In the

conversation which ensued, which was a very happy exchange of sentiment, it was wonderful how that translatophone was put into the background.

"A great deal of what Mary said in answer to my passionate avowals she had already said to me in Burmese. But the fact that those straightforward, honest words, fresh from a true woman's heart, and spoken only for the satisfaction of her own frank and impetuous nature, had come to me before in plain English she did not imagine, nor did I ever allow her to imagine. This secret of her soul I always regarded as something that came to me in involuntary confidence, and I always respected that confidence."

"Were you never sorry?" asked the Daughter of the House, when the Old Professor ceased.

"No," he said thoughtfully; "I have never been sorry for what I did. I had a very happy life with my Mary—a life far happier than any wonder-exciting invention could have given me."

"Was it fair to the world to destroy an instrument that might have been of great advantage to science?" ventured John Gayther, hesitatingly.

"It is not easy," said the Old Professor, "to decide between what we owe to the world and science, and what we owe to ourselves. You see, I decided in favor of myself. Possibly another man would have decided in favor of the invention."

"Not if he were desperately in love," said the Master of the House. [303]

"All those fine-spun feelings were unnecessary," said the Next Neighbor. "If you had not confused your mind with them you would have seen clearly enough that the first idea which came into your head was the proper one to act upon. It would have been no terrible deception if you had taken the instrument to Mary without the little machine and talked English with her. Later you could have told her you had the invention and you could use it. By that time she would have forgotten that she ever had made that Burmese speech, and would have been glad of the fame and fortune the machine would surely have brought."

The Old Professor looked pained. "I do not deny that some such after-thoughts troubled my mind occasionally for some years. But who can say anything of the 'might have been'? The instrument might have failed, after all; or the information gained have proved not worth the hearing; or—"

Here there was an unlooked-for interruption. The red thrush suddenly burst into song from the midst of the lilac-bushes, and the whole company listened spellbound with delight while the little creature filled the air with melody and sweetness.

When the song ceased, the Professor remarked: "My translatophone would have been worse than useless here. If I could have heard those words I should have lost that delicious melody. Doubtless the words were commonplace enough, but the melody was divine. And it was easy to interpret the spirit of it. It was a song of joy for all that is pleasant, and bright, and happy in this world."

THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

THE NEXT NEIGHBOR

AND IS CALLED

THE VICE-CONSORT

[307]

X
THE VICE-CONSORT

The red thrush seemed now to be part of the pleasantness of the garden. Whether he was drawn to the lilac-bushes by the sweet memory of his former home, or whether he was keeping a tryst with his mate of the nesting season and was calling her to come to him, or whether his coming was pure caprice, of course John Gayther could

not know. But every day he came; and when the sky was clear he sang his merry song; and even when the clouds were overshadowing he could not help uttering little trills of melody. After a time he would fly away; but he left a note of gladness in John's heart that stayed there all day.

The bird did not seem in the least disturbed by the talk on the terrace. If the sound of the voices reached him at all it must have been as a low murmur, and perhaps he liked it. The family now timed their visits to the summer-house, when they were able to go there, by the red thrush; and he seldom disappointed them. It so happened, however, one morning when they were all there, that the lilacs gave forth no sound. They waited for the accustomed music, and a hush fell upon them. They were silent [308] for some time, and then the Old Professor spoke:

"I see John Gayther below the terrace. Can't we have a story, if we cannot have a song?"

John was called up at once, and the Next Neighbor accosted him gayly: "If you had known that I am going to tell a story you would have walked faster."

John answered her with a pleasant smile. He liked the Next Neighbor. He liked the kind of mind she had, for it was thoroughly imbued with an anxious desire to do her duty in this world in the manner in which that duty showed itself to her. He liked her because she was fond of the Daughter of the House. He liked her because she considered her husband to be the handsomest, best, and cleverest man in the world. Perhaps John would have liked this trait best of all if he had not clearly seen that she held in reserve an opinion that this husband would move on a still higher plane if he would place more value on her opinions and statements.

"This is the first time you have favored us," he said courteously.

"Well," she said, "I knew the time would come when I would be called upon, and I could tell many a story about things that have happened to me. I am not exactly the heroine of this tale, but I am intimately concerned in its happenings, and shall tell it in my own way.

"Before I was married I used to feel that all we have to do in this world is to grow up like grass or clover-blossoms, and to perform our parts by being just as green or as sweet-smelling as our natures allow. But I do not think that way now. Along comes a [309] cow, and our careers are ended. Of course we cannot get out of the way of our fate any more than grass can get out of the way of a cow; but it often happens that we can accommodate ourselves to our misfortunes. We can be content to being nibbled close; we can spring up again from the roots; or we can patiently wait until we blossom again the next summer.

"It was about a year after I was married that I began to think about such things. We were spending a fortnight at the country house of one of my old friends, Mrs. Cheston; and although Bernard, my husband, was away most of the time, fishing with Mr. Cheston, we were enjoying ourselves very much. There was a village not far away where there were some very nice people, so that we had a good deal of pleasant social life, and it was not long before I became quite well acquainted with some of the village families.

"One day Mrs. Cheston gave me a luncheon, to which she invited a good many of the village ladies; and, after they were all gone, we two sat on the piazza and talked about them. Two or three of our guests I had not met before, and in the course of our talk Emily mentioned the name of Margaret Temple.

"'Temple?' said I. 'Which one was that? I do not recall her.'

"'You were talking to her some time,' she replied. 'I think she was telling you about the mountains.'

"'Oh, yes,' said I; 'she was pointing out those passes through which people go into the next county. She sat at the other end of the table, didn't she? She was dressed in black.'

"'Oh, no,' said Emily, 'she was not dressed in black. She never wears black. I think [310] she wore a brown dress with some sort of light trimming.'

"'Oh, well,' said I, 'I did not notice her dress, and when I do not notice people's clothes I nearly always think they dress in black. Is she nice?'

"'She is very nice indeed,' said Emily; 'everybody thinks that.'

"'I wish I had seen more of her,' said I.

"Emily did not answer this remark, but a smile came on her face which presently grew into a little laugh. I looked at her in surprise.

"'What is there funny about Miss Temple?' I asked.

"'Really there is nothing funny about her,' she replied, 'but I often laugh to myself

when I think of her.'

"I suddenly became very much interested in Miss Temple. 'Tell me why you do that,' I said. 'I always like to know why people laugh at other people.'

"Emily now became very sober. 'You must not think,' she said, 'that there is anything ridiculous about Margaret Temple. There is not a finer woman to be found anywhere, and I do not believe there is anybody who laughs at her except myself. You know I am very apt to see the funny side of things.'

"'And so am I!' I exclaimed. 'Do tell me about Miss Temple. It is so seldom there is anything amusing about a really nice person.'

"Emily was silent for a moment, and then she said: 'Well, I do not know that there is any real harm in telling you what makes me laugh. A good many people know all about it; but I would not, for the world, have Margaret Temple find out that I told you.' [311]

"I assured her with great earnestness that if she would tell me, I would never breathe it to any living soul.

"'Very well,' said Emily; 'I will trust you. As I said, it really isn't funny, but it is just this. It is a positive fact that five married ladies (I am certain of this number, and it may be more) have gone to Margaret Temple, during the past few years, and each one has asked her to become her husband's second wife in case she should die.'

"I did not laugh; I exclaimed in amazement: 'Why did they all ask her? I did not notice anything particularly attractive about her.'

"'I think that is the point,' said Emily. 'I do not think a woman is likely to want her husband to take an attractive woman for his second wife. If she had the chance to choose her successor, she would like her husband to have a really nice person, good in every way, but not one with whom he would be likely to fall violently in love. Don't you see the point of that?'

"I replied that it was easy enough to see the point, but that there was another one. 'You must remember,' said I, 'that husbands are generally very particular; if one has had a young and handsome wife he would not be likely to be satisfied with anything less.'

"Emily shook her head. 'I am older than you, Rosa, and have had more opportunities of noticing widowers. There are a great many things for them to think about when they marry a second time: their children, their positions, and all that. I believe that if a man and his wife discussed it, which they would not be likely to do, they would be very apt to be of the same mind in regard to the sort of person who ought to come in as number two. For my part, I do not wonder at all that so many women have cast their eyes on Margaret Temple as a person they would like to have take their places when they are gone. For one thing, you know they would not be jealous of her; this is very important. Then, they would be as certain as anything can be certain in this world that their children, if they had any, as well as their husbands, would be in most excellent hands. Often, when I have been thinking about her, I have called Margaret Temple the Vice-consort; but I have never told any one this. Please remember.' [312]

"So far I had not seen a thing to laugh at, but I was deeply interested. 'How came all this to be known?' I asked. 'Has Miss Temple gone about telling people?'

"'Oh, no, indeed; she is not that sort of person. A good many of the village ladies know it, and I think they always have heard it from those prudent ladies who were providing for their husbands' futures. People talk about it, of course, but they are very careful that nothing they say shall reach Margaret Temple's ears.'

"'Tell me about some of the people,' I said, 'who want to secure Miss Temple as a successor. Do they all feel as though they are likely to die?'

"'Not all of them,' answered Emily. 'There is Mrs. Hendrickson, who was obliged to go to Arizona on account of her father's property. He was very rich, and died not long ago. Her husband has to stay at home to attend to his business, and she could not take her little baby; and although she is just as healthy as anybody, she knew all the dangers of railroad travelling, and all sorts of things in that far-away place; and, before she packed her trunk, she went to Margaret Temple and asked her to promise that if she died out there, she, Margaret, would marry Mr. Hendrickson. This I know for certain, for Mrs. Hendrickson told me herself.' [313]

"'Did Miss Temple promise?'

"'That I did not hear,' replied Emily. 'Mrs. Hendrickson was in a great hurry, and perhaps she did not intend to tell me, anyway. But I do not believe Margaret absolutely refused; at least, it would not have been prudent for her to do so. The Hendricksons are rich, and he is a fine man. There would be nothing in the way of such a match.'

"'Except the return of the wife,' I remarked.

"Emily smiled. 'And then there was poor Mrs. Windham,' she continued. 'Everybody knew she asked Margaret. She left a son about eight years old who is very delicate. The poor woman has not been dead long enough for anything to come of that, but I do not believe anything ever will. There are people who say that Mr. Windham drinks; but I have seen no signs of it. Then there is another one—and no matter what you may hear people say about these things, you must never mention that I told you this. Mrs. Barnes, the rector's wife, has spoken to Margaret on the subject. She looks very well, so far as I can judge; but there is consumption in her family. She is almost bigoted in regard to the duties of a rector's wife. She tries just as hard as she can to fill the position properly herself, and she knows Mr. Barnes would never be satisfied [314] with any one who did not agree with him as she does about the responsibilities of a rector's wife.'

"'Does Margaret Temple agree with him?' I asked.

"'I do not know, for I never talked with her on the subject,' replied Emily, 'but she is very apt to think what is right. Besides, it is believed that Mrs. Barnes has not only spoken to Margaret, but to the rector himself; and if he had not thought the plan a good one, Mrs. Barnes would have dropped it; and, from things I have heard her say, I know she has not dropped it.'

"Emily looked as though she were about to rise, and I quickly exclaimed: 'But that is only three. Who are the others?'

"'One of them,' said she, 'is Mrs. Clinton. There is nothing the matter with her physically, but she is very rich, and is prudent and careful about everything that belongs to her, while her husband is not a business man at all and never has anything to do with money matters of importance. There are three children, and she has reason to feel anxious about them should they and their property be left in the charge of Mr. Clinton, or to the tender mercies of some woman who would marry him for the sake of his wealth. You can see for yourself that it is no wonder she casts her eyes upon Margaret. I believe Mrs. Clinton could die happy if she could see her husband and Margaret Temple promise themselves to each other at her bedside.'

"'That seems to me to be horrid,' said I; 'but of course it would be extremely sensible. And the other one?'

"'Oh, that matter does not amount to much,' said Emily. 'Old Mrs. Gloucester lives at [315] the other end of the village, and she does not visit much, so you have not seen her. Her husband is old enough, dear knows, but not quite so old as she is. She is very much afraid that she will die and leave him with nobody to take care of him, for they have no children. They are very well off, and I dare say she thinks it would be a good thing for Margaret as well as for the old gentleman.'

"'That is shameful,' said I; 'it would be the same thing as engaging a trained nurse.'

"Emily laughed. 'I never heard how Margaret received this remarkable proposition,' she said, 'but I hope she was angry.'

"'But, at any rate, it could never come to anything,' said I.

"'Of course not,' answered Mrs. Cheston.

"It is not surprising that after this conversation I took a great interest in Margaret Temple; and when she called the next morning I had a long and undisturbed talk with her, Mrs. Cheston being out. I am very fond of analyzing human character, and I often do it while I am riding in the street-cars; and it was not long before I had made up my mind as to what sort of woman Margaret Temple was. I set her down as what may be called a balanced person. In fact, I thought at the time she was a little too well balanced; if some of her characteristics had been a little more pronounced I think she would have been more interesting. But I liked her very much, and I remember I was almost as well pleased when she was talking to me as when she was listening, and I am sure there are very few persons, men or women, of whom I can [316] say this."

Here a smile came upon the faces of the company, but they were too polite to make any comment on what had called forth the smile. The Master of the House asked permission to light a cigar, and the Old Professor, who never smoked, remarked: "There is deep philosophy in all this."

"I don't know about the philosophy," said the Next Neighbor, "but it is absolute truth. Well, after a time I began to wish that Miss Temple lived near our home, because she would be such an admirable person for a friend and neighbor. Then, suddenly, without any warning, there flashed through me the strangest feeling I ever had in my life. I must have turned pale, for Miss Temple asked me if I did not feel ill. I soon recovered from the effects of this strange feeling, and went on talking; but I was very glad when Mrs. Cheston came home, and took the conversation out of my hands.

"For two or three days after this my mind was very much troubled, and Bernard thought that the air of that part of the country did not agree with me, and that we ought to go to the sea-shore. But this I positively refused to consider. There could be no sea-shore for me until a good many things had been settled. It was at this time that I first began to think that we cannot grow up fresh and green and blossom undisturbed, and that we must consider untimely cows coming along.

"To make the state of my mind clearly understood, I must say that there is an hereditary disease in my family. I had never thought anything about it, for there had [317] been no reason why I should; but now I did think about it, and there did seem to be reason. My grandfather had had this disease, and had died of it. To be sure, he was very old; but that did not matter: he died of it, all the same. It never troubled my father, but this made no difference, so far as I was concerned, for I have always heard that hereditary diseases are apt to skip a generation, and if this one had skipped, there was nobody for it to skip to but me; for I have no brothers or sisters.

"The more I thought on this subject, the more troubled my mind became, and at last I believed it to be my duty to speak to Bernard, although I did not tell him all my thoughts; for I had had a good many that were not necessarily connected with hereditary diseases. I was positively amazed at the way my husband received what I told him. I had expected that perhaps he might pooh-pooh the whole thing, but he did nothing of the kind. He became very serious, and talked to me in the most earnest way.

"'Now, Rosa,' said he, 'I am glad you told me about this, and I want to impress it upon your mind that you must be very careful. In the first place, you must totally give up hot spirits and water. You must not drink more than two glasses of wine, or three at the utmost, at any of your meals. When you get up in the morning you must totally abstain from drinking those mixtures that are taken by some people to give appetite for breakfast. At night you must try to do without any sort of punch or toddy to make you sleep. If you will take this advice, and restrict yourself to water and milk, and not over-rich food, I think you may reasonably expect to live longer than your [318] grandfather did, although I cannot imagine why any one should want to live that long.'

"Of course I was angry at all this, for I saw then that he was making fun of me; and I said no more to him, for he was not in the right frame of mind to listen to me. But I did not stop thinking.

"I now became very intimate with Miss Temple. I began to like her very much, and I think she liked me. I continued to study her, and I became convinced that she was a woman to whom a very fastidious man might be attracted—I do not mean that he would fall in love with her, but that he would be perfectly satisfied with her. In fact, I summed up her character by assuring myself that in every way she was perfectly satisfactory. I have known other women who were more charming, but they all had faults; and I do not see how any one could have found fault with Miss Temple.

"One day we had taken a long walk, and were on our way home when I began to talk to her about my own affairs. I thought I knew her so well in a general way that the time had come for me to find out some things more definitely. I began in an offhand but cautious manner to talk about Bernard. I alluded to his love of outdoor sports, and mentioned that I thought it my duty frequently to speak to him in regard to the terrible consequences which might follow a false step when he was out fishing, and that I thought it necessary to repeat this advice very often, for it was my opinion he paid very little attention to it. I also made several other allusions to his indisposition to take care of himself, and remarked how very necessary it was for me to look after [319] his health. I mentioned his great carelessness in regard to flannel, and told her that it was often quite late in the autumn before he would make any change in his clothing.

"Then I spoke of his domestic habits; and, as I saw Miss Temple seemed much interested, I talked a good deal about them. He was the most loving husband in the world, I said, and was always anxious to know what he could do for me more than he was already doing; but when we were in the city he did like to go out in the evenings, and I thought he went to his club too often. Of course, I said, I did not say anything to him about it, for I would not want him to think that I desired him to deny himself the company of other gentlemen; but the habit of club attendance was one that might grow on a man, especially a young one, and there were a good many other things that might result from it, such as excessive smoking. So I had thought it well to offer him additional inducements for spending his evenings at home, and I had begun a regular system of reading aloud. It had proved very beneficial to both of us, for I chose good, standard books; and although he sometimes went to sleep, that was to be expected, for Bernard was a hard-working man. As for myself, I liked this reading aloud very much, although at first it was rather tiresome, as I had never been used to it. Then I asked her if she liked reading aloud—it is such a good way of giving pleasure to others at the same time that you are pleasing yourself. She smiled, and said she was very fond of reading aloud.

"Then I changed the subject to churches and preachers, for I did not want her to think I was saying too much about my husband, and asked her who was the best [320] preacher in the village. When she said it was Mr. Barnes, I asked her if she went to his church. She answered that she did, and then I told her that I was also an Episcopalian, but that Bernard's parents were Methodists. I did not think, however, that this would make much difference, for when he began to go regularly to church, I was sure he would rather go with me than to travel off somewhere by himself.

"I did not suppose that Miss Temple would care so much about what I was saying, but she did seem to care, and listened attentively to every word.

"'You must not think I am talking too much about my family affairs,' I remarked, 'but doesn't it strike you that a really good wife ought to try just as hard as she can to be on good terms with her husband's family, no matter how queer they may be? I mean the women in it; for they are more likely to be queer than the men. For if she does not do this,' I continued, 'the worst of the trouble, if there is any, will come on him. He will have to take sides either with his wife or his sisters,—and mother too, if he happens to have one,—and that would be sure to make him unhappy if he is a good-hearted man, such as Bernard is.'

"At this Miss Temple burst out laughing, and it was the first time I had ever heard her laugh so heartily. As soon as she could speak she exclaimed: 'Are you going to ask me to marry your husband if you should happen to die?'

"I must have turned as red as the most scarlet poppy, for I felt my face burn. I hesitated a little, but I was obliged to tell the truth, and so I stammered out that I [321] had been thinking of something of the kind.

"'Oh, please don't look so troubled,' said she. 'Several persons have spoken to me on the same subject; but I never should have dreamed that such an idea would come into your head. I think it is the funniest thing in the world!' And then she laughed again.

"I was greatly embarrassed, and all I could say was that I hoped I had not offended her.

"'Oh, not in the least,' she said. 'I am getting used to this sort of thing, and I can bear it.'

"This remark helped me very much, for I resented it. 'I do not see what there is to bear,' I said. 'Such a man as Bernard—and then I have special reasons—'

"'Oh, yes,' she interrupted quickly; 'each one has a special reason. But there is one general reason that is common to all. Now tell me, my dear,'—and as she spoke she took both my hands and looked steadily into my face,—'were you not about to ask me to marry your husband, in case of your death, because you could think of it without being jealous of me, and because you are afraid he might marry some one of whom you would probably be jealous if you knew of it?'

"She looked at me in such a kind, strong way that I was obliged to confess that this was my reason for speaking to her about Bernard. 'I cannot exactly explain,' I added, and my face burned again, 'why I should think about you in this way; but I hope you will not imagine—'

"'Oh, I shall not imagine anything that will be disagreeable to you,' she said; and she [322] looked just as good-humored as possible."

"Does that lady live in any place where my wife can get at her?" asked the Master of the House, as the Next Neighbor paused to take breath.

"I have not yet developed a disease," said the Mistress of the House.

"Well, when you do, please find that woman. She is a very good sort."

"I shall have an opinion on that subject, papa," said the Daughter of the House.

"You little minx!" he replied. "I shall see that you are provided for before that."

"It is not well to joke about so serious a matter," said the Next Neighbor, "as you will see when I finish my story.

"For a little while Miss Temple walked on in silence, and I tried hard to think of what would be proper for me to say next, when suddenly she stopped.

"'We are not far from the house now,' she said, 'and before we get there I want to set your mind at rest by telling you that if you should die before your husband, and if nothing should happen at any time or in any way to interfere with such a plan, I will marry your Bernard and take good care of him. I have never made such a positive promise to any one, but I do not mind making it to you. I am sure I need not ask you to say nothing about this compact to your husband.'

"I was stunned, but I managed to stammer: 'Oh, no, indeed!'

"Fortunately for me, Miss Temple did not stay to supper. I do not think I could have borne to see her and Bernard together. It was bad enough as it was. I felt greatly [323] humiliated; I could not understand how I could have done such a thing. It was worse than selling a birthright—it was giving away the dearest thing on earth. I trembled from head to foot when Bernard came home from fishing. I do not believe I ever before greeted him so affectionately. My emotion troubled him, and he asked me if I were ill, and if I had been lonely and bored while he was away. He was just as good as good could be, and began to talk again about going to the sea-shore. I did not object this time, for I could not know what would be best to do.

"In the evening, after every one else had gone indoors, I begged him to sit longer on the piazza, and to smoke another cigar. He was quite surprised, because, as he said, I had never asked him to do such a thing before, but had rather discouraged his smoking. But I declared I wanted to sit with him in the moonlight all by ourselves. And so we did until his cigar was finished.

"For the first hour of that night I did not sleep a wink, my mind was so troubled. I felt as though I were not really Bernard's wife, but some sort of a guardian angel who was watching over him to see that somebody else made him happy. After I had thus been in the depths of grief for a long while, I became angry.

"'She shall never have him!' I said to myself. 'I will make it the object of my life to live longer than he does. My grandfather lived to be much older than ordinary men, and why should not I have as long a life? Perhaps it was the things he ate and drank, and [324] his jovial disposition, that gave him such longevity. If I were sure of this I would be willing to take hot drinks at night, and wine at dinner. No; Bernard must not be left behind.' It was while making up my mind very firmly about this that I fell asleep.

"The next morning I was possessed with an overwhelming desire to go to see Miss Temple. Why I should do so I could not tell myself. I certainly did not want to see her; I did not wish to speak to her; I did not want her to say anything to me: but I felt that I must go; and I went. She received me very pleasantly, and did not say one word about our conversation of the day before. There were a good many things I should have liked to say, but I did not know how, unless she gave me the opportunity. But she did not, and so it happened that we talked only about something she was sewing —I do not know whether it was a shirt-waist or an army blanket. In fact, I did not hear one word she said about her stupid work, whatever it was, I was so busy re-studying her face, her character, and everything about her. I now found she was much more than satisfactory—she was really good-looking. Her eyes were not very large, but they were soft and dark. Her voice was clear and sweet. I had noticed this before, but, until now, I had not thought of it as an objection. There were a good many other things that might be very effective to a man, especially to one with half-healed sorrows. I acknowledged to myself that I had been mistaken in her, and I did not doubt she had deceived a good many other people in that neighborhood.

"When I rose to leave, she stood for a moment, looking at me as though she expected me to say something on the subject which was certainly interesting to her as well as [325] to me. But now I did not want to talk, and I gave her no chance to say anything. I walked rapidly home, feeling as jealous of Margaret Temple as any woman could feel of another.

"I was glad that day that Bernard liked to go fishing, for my mind was in such a condition that I did not think of anything that might happen to him—at least, anything but just one thing, and that was awful. Emily Cheston supposed I had a headache, and I let her think so, for it gave me more time to myself. I looked at the thing that threatened to crush all my happiness, on every possible side. Early in the morning a ray of relief had come to my troubled mind, and this was that I did not believe he would have her, anyway. But I had seen her since, and no such ray comforted me now.

"I knew, as I had not known before, what a power she might have over a man. Widowers, I thought, are generally ready enough to marry again; but, no matter what they think about it, they mostly wait a good while, for the sake of appearances. But this would be different. When a man knows that his wife had selected some one as her successor—and he would be sure to know this, the woman would see to that—he would not feel it necessary to wait. He would be carrying out his dead wife's wishes, and of course in this there should be no delay. Oh, horrible! When I thought of myself as Bernard's dead wife, and that woman living, I actually kicked the stool my feet were resting on. I vowed in my mind the thing should never be. I felt better after I had made this vow, although I had not thought of any way by which I could carry it [326] out. Certainly I was not going to say anything to Bernard about it, one way or another."

Here the Next Neighbor paused again. And at that moment the red thrush gave a little low trill, as much as to say: "Listen to me now." Then he twittered and chirped in a tentative way as if he had not made up his mind about singing, and the party on the terrace felt like clapping to encourage him.

"I wonder if he knows he has an audience," said the Daughter of the House, in a very low tone.

"He knows it is impolite to interrupt the story," said her father. "No; there he goes!"

And, sure enough, the bird, having decided that on the whole it would help matters in whatever direction he wished them to be helped, sang out, clear and loud, what seemed to his audience the most delightful song he had yet given them.

When he had finished, the Next Neighbor said: "That was so full of soul I hate to go on with my very material story."

"It strikes me," said the Old Professor, "that there is a good deal of soul in your story."

"Thank you," said the Next Neighbor, as she again took up the thread of her narrative.

"That evening, prompted by a sudden impulse, I went up to Bernard, and, looking into his face, I declared that I would never leave him.

"'What!' he exclaimed. 'Has any one been asking you to leave me?'

"'Of course not,' said I, a little irritated—he has such queer ways of taking what I say. 'I mean I am not going to die before you do. I am not going to leave you in this world to take care of yourself.'

"He looked at me as though he did not understand me, and I do not suppose he did, [327]
although he only said: 'I am delighted to hear that, my dear girl. But how are you going to manage it? How about that hereditary disease you were talking of the other day?'

"'I have nothing to say about that,' I answered; 'but if I live as long as my grandfather did, I do not believe that your being a little older than I am would—I mean that you would not be left alone. Don't you understand?'

"Bernard did not laugh. 'You are the dearest little woman in the world,' he said, 'and I believe you would do anything to make me happy—you would even be willing to survive me, so that I should never lose you. But don't let us talk any more about such doleful things. We are both going to live to be a great deal older than your grandfather. Now I will tell you something pleasant: I had a letter this morning, just as I was starting out. I put it in my pocket, and did not have time to open it until we were eating our lunch. It is from my brother George, who is going to England next month, you know; and as he wants to see something of us before he starts, he intends to spend a few days in the village, so that he can be with us. He is coming to-morrow.'

"A ray of hope shot into my heart so bright that I could almost feel it burn.

"'Well,' said Bernard, 'what have you to say to this? Aren't you glad that George is coming?'

"'Glad!' I replied. 'I am more than delighted.'

"Bernard looked as though he did not understand this extraordinary ecstasy; but as
he was used to not understanding me, I do not suppose he thought it worth while to [328]
bother himself about it.

"George was a fine young fellow, and, next to Bernard, I thought he was the best man in the world. It will be remembered that I had no brother, and George was always as kind and brotherly as he could be. I was fond of him even before I was married; in fact, I knew him quite well before I became acquainted with Bernard; and I was always glad to see him. But I had never been so delighted to think he was coming as I was then. My face must have shown this, for Bernard laughingly said:

"'You must be awfully glad to see George.'

"'I am glad,' I answered; and as I spoke I thought that if he knew everything he would understand why my eyes glistened, as I am sure they did.

"The reason of my great joy was that a plan had suddenly come into my mind. George had spoken to me several times about marrying, and he had told me just what kind of a wife he wanted; and now, as I remembered what he had said on the subject, it seemed to me he had been describing Margaret Temple. He wanted a wife who was good-looking but not a belle, and she must be sensible and practical, a good housekeeper, and a charming hostess. Besides, she must be intellectual, and fond of books, and appreciate art, and all that. Moreover, he had said he would like her to be just about a year older than himself, because he thought that was a good proportion in a young couple. It was apt to make the man look up to his wife a little, which might not be the case if he were the elder. I remembered this, because when he told me I wished very much that I were a year older than Bernard.

"Now, as I said before, all this seemed as though he had been talking of Miss Temple; [329]
and I, knowing her so well, could see other points than those he mentioned in which she would suit him as no other woman could. If George would fall in love with Miss Temple,—and there was no earthly reason why he should not, for Bernard told me he was going to make him stay a week,—then everything would be all right; all my anxieties, my forebodings, and my jealousies would be gone, and I should be as happy as I was before I met that dear girl, Miss Temple.

"This was not all idle fancy. My plan was founded on good, practical ideas. If George married Margaret everything would be settled in an absolutely perfect way. If I should die Bernard would not need to marry anybody; in fact, I did not believe that in this case he would want to. He would go to live with George and Margaret; their home would be his home, and he would always have both of them to take care of him and to make him happy in every possible way in which anybody could make him happy. In my mind's eye I could see him in the best room in the house, with all sorts of comforts and luxuries about him—our present comforts and luxuries would make a great show gathered together in one room; and then I saw Margaret and George standing at the open door, asking if there were anything he would like, and what they could do for him. As this mental picture came before me my eyes involuntarily went around that room to see if there were a picture of me on the wall; and there it was, and no portrait of any other woman anywhere about.

"In a flash the whole thing became so horrible to me that I threw myself on the bed and began to cry convulsively. Bernard heard me, and came up-stairs, and I was [330]
obliged to tell him I had a sudden pain. He does not like sudden pains, and sat down and talked to me a good while about what I had been eating. Before long, however, I grew calm, and was able to think about my plans in a common-sense, practical way. Truly there could be nothing better for my present comfort and Bernard's future happiness: Margaret and George to take care of him, and my image undimmed in his heart. I felt like one who has insured his life for the benefit of a loved one, so, no matter what might happen to him, he would have, as long as he lived, the joy of knowing what he had done for the loved one.

"When George came the next day he was just the same splendid old George, and I do not believe any one ever received a warmer welcome from a sister-in-law than I gave him. Bernard made a little fun of me, as usual, and said he believed I would rather see George than him.

"'Nonsense,' said I; 'I am always glad to see you, but I am especially glad to see George.'

"Bernard whistled, and looked at me in the same queer way that he looked at me when he once had said laughingly that he believed if I had never met him I would have married George, and I had answered that if I had been sure he did not exist it might have been a good thing for me to marry George.

"Miss Temple did not come to the house that morning, as she so often did, but I asked Emily to send over and invite her to tea; for I did not wish to lose any time in the carrying out of my plans. It was about the middle of the afternoon when Bernard and his brother came in from a walk. I had been anxious to see George, because I [331]
wanted to talk with him about Margaret before he met her. I was going to speak very guardedly, of course; but I knew it would be well to prepare his mind, and I had made up my mind exactly what I was going to say.

"I artfully managed so that George and I walked over the lawn to a bench in the shade of a big tree where there was something or other—I entirely forget what it was—which I said I would show him. Mr. and Mrs. Cheston and Bernard were on the piazza, but I did not ask them to join us.

"We sat down on the bench, and, in a general sort of way, I asked him what he had been doing, meaning presently to bring up the subject of Margaret, for I did not know what time she might drop in. But George was just as anxious to talk as I was, and, being a man, he was a little more pushing, and he said:

"'Now, little Rosa, I am so glad you came down here with me, for I have something on my mind I want to tell you, and I want to do it myself, before anybody else interferes. It is just this: I am engaged to be married, and as soon as I get back from England I am going to—' And then he opened his eyes very wide and looked hard at me. 'What is the matter, Rosa?' he exclaimed. 'Don't you feel well?'

"In one instant all my plans and hopes and happy dreams of the future had dropped to the ground, and had been crushed into atoms.

"'Well!' said I, and I think I spoke in a queer voice. 'I am very well. There is nothing the matter with me. What is her name?'

"He told me; but I had never heard it before, and it was of no more importance to me [332]
than the buzzing of a bee.

"'It will be very nice,' I said; 'and now let us go up to the house and tell the others.'

"I think that for a woman who had just received such a blow as had been dealt to me I behaved very well indeed. But I was cold and, I suspect, pale. I listened as the others talked, but I did not say much myself; and, as soon as I could make some excuse, I went up to my room. There I threw myself into a great chair, and gently cried myself to sleep. I did not sob loudly, because I did not want Bernard to come up again. When I awoke I had a dreadful headache, and I made up my mind I would not go down to tea. I could do no good by going down, and, so far as I was concerned, it did not matter in the least whether Margaret was there or not. In fact, I did not care about anything. Let George marry whoever he pleased. If I should die Margaret Temple had promised to take care of Bernard. Everything was settled, and there was no sense in making any more plans. So I got ready for another nap, and when Bernard came up I told him I had a headache, and did not want any tea.

"That evening Bernard sat and looked at me without speaking, as was sometimes his habit, and then he said:

"'Rosa, I do not understand this at all, and I want you to tell me why you were so extravagantly glad when you found my brother George was coming here, and why you were so overcome by your emotions when you heard of his engagement.'

"'Oh, Bernard,' I cried, 'if it were anybody else I might tell everything, but I cannot [333] tell you—I cannot tell you!' And I am sure I spoke truly, for how could I have told that dear man what I had said to Margaret Temple; and how jealous I had been of her afterwards; and how I had planned for her to marry George; and that, after my funeral, he should go to live with them; and about my picture on the wall; and all the rest of it? It was simply impossible. And if he did not know all this, how could he understand my feelings when I heard that George was engaged?

"I could not answer him; I could only sob, and repeat what I had said before—that if it were anybody else I might speak, but that I could never tell him. Soon after that he went down-stairs, and I went to sleep.

"Bernard was never cross with me,—I do not believe he could be if he tried,—but the next morning he was very quiet, and soon after breakfast he and Mr. Cheston and George went fishing. If the incidents of the day before had not occurred I suppose they would have done something in which Emily and I could have joined; but some sort of change had come over things, and it was plain enough that even George did not want me. So I sat alone under the tree where George had told me of his engagement, feeling very much troubled and very lonely. I wanted to tell everything to somebody, but there was no one to tell. It would be impossible to speak to Emily; she would have no sympathy with me; and if I should tell her everything I had planned, I knew she would laugh at me unmercifully. I think it would have pleased me better to speak to George than to any one else; he had always been so [334] sympathetic and kind; but now things were changed, and he would not care to interest himself in the affairs of any woman except the one to whom he was engaged. It was terrible to sit there and think that there was not a person in the world, not even my husband, to whom I could look for sympathy and comfort. If I had not been out in the open air, where people could have seen me, I should have cried.

"Happening to look up, I saw some one on the piazza. It was that horrible Margaret Temple; and when she gazed about from side to side she saw me under the tree, and as I, apparently, took no notice of her, she stepped down from the piazza and came walking across the lawn toward me. If I had been a man I should have cursed my fate; not only was I deprived of every comfort, but here came the disturber of my peace to make me still more unhappy.

"I do not remember what she said when she reached me, but I know she spoke very pleasantly; nor do I remember what I replied, but I am sure I did not speak pleasantly. I was out of humor with the whole world, and particularly with her. She brought a little chair that was near by, and sat down by me. She was a very straightforward person about speaking, and so she said, without any preface:

"'Have you told your husband of that arrangement you made with me if he should survive you?'

"'Of course I have not!' I exclaimed. 'Do you think I would tell him a thing like that, especially when I said I would not? The fact is,' I continued,—and it was very hard for me to keep from crying as I spoke,—'I am just loaded down with trouble, and I cannot [335] tell anybody.'

"'I knew you were troubled,' she replied, 'and that is the reason I came this morning. Why can't you tell me what is the matter?'

"At first this made me angry, and I felt like bouncing off to the house and never speaking to her again; but in the next instant I changed my mind. It would serve her right if I told her everything; and so I did. I made her feel exactly how I had felt when I had thought of her in my place, and how I had determined that it should never be.

Then I went on and told her all my plans about George and herself; and how Bernard was to board with them if I died. I made the story a good deal longer than I have made it here. Then I finished by telling her of George's engagement, and how nothing had come of the whole thing except that Bernard had supposed that I thought too much of George, and had gone away that morning as cold as a common acquaintance; and that I felt as though my whole life had been wrecked, and that she had done it.

"It was easy to see that she was not affected as she should have been by what I said. In fact, she looked as though she wanted to laugh; but her respect for me prevented that.

"'I do not see,' she said, 'how I have wrecked your life.'

"'That may be so,' I answered, 'but it is because you do not want to see it. I should think that even you would admit that it is enough to drive me crazy to see any woman waiting and longing for the day which would give her that which I prize more than anything else in the world. And to think what you are aspiring to! None of the old [336] left-overs that other people have offered to you, but my Bernard, the very prince of men! I do not wonder you were so quick to promise me you would take him!'

"She jumped up, and I thought she was going away; but she did not go, and turned again toward me, and remarked, just as coolly as anybody could speak: 'Well, I do not wonder, either. Your Bernard is a most estimable man, and if nothing should happen in any way or at any time to interfere in the case of his surviving you I shall be happy to marry him. I think I would make him a very good wife.'

"At this I sprang to my feet, and I am sure my eyes and cheeks were blazing. 'Do you mean,' I cried, 'that you would make him a better wife than I do?'

"'That is a question,' she said, 'that is not easy to answer, and needs a good deal of consideration.' And she spoke with as much deliberation as if she were trying to decide whether it would be better to cover a floor with matting or carpet. 'For one thing, I do not believe I would nag him.'

"'Nag!' I exclaimed. 'What do you mean by that? Do you suppose I nag him?'

"'I do not know anything about it,' she answered, 'except what you told me yourself; and what you said was my reason for agreeing so quickly to your proposition.'

"'Nag!' I cried. But then I stopped. I thought it would be better to wait until I could think over what I had said to her before I pursued this subject. 'But I can tell you one thing,' I continued, 'and that is that you need not have any hopes in the direction of [337] my husband. I am going to tell him everything just as soon as he comes home, even about you and George; and I am going to make him promise that, no matter what happens, he will never marry you.'

"Do you mean," I cried, "that you would make him a better wife than I do?"

"I think these words made some impression on her, for she answered very quickly: 'I am not sure that it will be wise to tell him everything; but if you are determined to do so, I must insist that you will tell him something more; and that is that I am engaged to be married, and have been for nearly a year.'

"'And you have been deceiving all these anxious wives?' I cried.

"'I never made promises to any one but to you,' she answered; 'and I would not have done that if I had not liked you so much.'

"'You have a funny way of liking,' I remarked.

"She merely smiled, and went on: 'And I should not have told you of my engagement if I had not thought it would be safer to do so, considering the story you are going to tell your husband.'

"'And it is because I consider it safer that I am going to tell him that story,' I replied.

"That afternoon, as soon as I was alone with Bernard,—I did not give him any time to show me any of his common-acquaintance coolness,—I told him the whole thing from beginning to end. He listened so earnestly that one might have thought he was in church; but when I came to the part about his boarding with George and Miss Temple he could not help laughing. He excused himself, however, and told me to go on. He looked very happy when I had told him my story, and no one would have supposed that he had ever assumed the air of a mere common acquaintance. [338]

"'You are such a good little wife!' he exclaimed. 'And you are always trying to do things to make me happy. But you must not take so much labor and anxiety upon yourself. I want to help you in every way that I can, and in such a case you ought to let me do it.'

"'But how could you help me in the trouble I have been telling you about?' I asked.

"'Easily enough,' he answered. 'Now, if you had taken me into your confidence, I would have told you that I consider Miss Temple too tall a woman for my fancy.'

"'She is,' I said. 'I did not think so at first, but I can see it plainly now.'

"'Then, again, she is too practical-minded.'

"'Entirely too much so,' I agreed.

"'And in other respects she is not up to my standard,' continued Bernard. 'So I think, Rosa, that if you should ever take up such a scheme again we should act together. I am sure my opinion would be of great advantage to you in helping you to select some one who should take up the work of making me happy—'

"'You are perfectly horrid!' I exclaimed; and I stopped his mouth.

"That was the end of the matter; but I never learned to like Margaret Temple. To be sure, I thought seriously of some things she had said; but then, people can consider things people say without liking the people who say them. I pity her husband."

Just then came the summons to luncheon, and this story was not commented upon.

THIS STORY IS TOLD BY

JOHN GAYTHER

AND IS CALLED

BLACKGUM AG'IN' THUNDER

XI
BLACKGUM AG'IN' THUNDER

[341]

John Gayther and the Daughter of the House walked in the garden. The melons were ripe now, and it was a pleasure to push aside the coarse leaves and find beneath them the tropical-looking fruit with the pretty network tracery covering the gray-green rind. The grape-vines, too, were things of beauty, hanging full of great white, yellow, red, and purple clusters. The tomatoes gleamed scarlet and purple-red thickly among the plants. The cabbages had curled themselves up into compact heads that looked like big folded roses set in an open cluster of leaves. There were rows of green-leaved turnips, red-leaved beets, and feathery-leaved carrots. The ears were standing stiff in the corn rows.

In the orchard the peaches were rosy and downy, the plums ready to drop with lusciousness; ruddy-cheeked pears were crowded on the drooping branches; the apples, not so plentiful, were taking on the colors that proclaimed their near fruition; and even the knotty quinces were growing fair and golden. On the upper terrace the stately, delicate cosmos was waving in the wind; great beds of low marigolds were [342] flaunting their rich colors in the bright sunlight; the dahlias lifted into the air, stiffly and proudly, their great blossoms of varying forms; the clove-pinks, lowly and delicate in color, gave forth the fragrance of the springtime which they had held stored up in their tender blossoms; and the early chrysanthemums were unfolding their plumes.

"I love the late August-time," said John Gayther, as the two sat down to rest in the summer-house after a long stay in the garden. "I have a singular feeling, which I hope is not irreverent, that the great Creator is pleased with me for having brought this work to perfection, and the thought gives me great peace of mind."

"It does sound a little presumptuous, John," said the young lady.

"Not in the way I mean it," replied John. "We are told that God gives abundantly of the fruits and blossoms that gladden our hearts and eyes. But this is only partly true. There may be some lands where nothing need be done to these God-given fruits and vegetables and flowers. I do not know. But in this happy land, although he does abundantly give us the material to work upon, he expects us to do the work. Else what would be the use of gardens? And if there were no need of gardens there would be no gardens; and how desolate would life be without gardens!"

"I see what you mean, John," said the young lady. "We could not go into the woods, or on to the plains, and find the fruits and vegetables that grow so well in this garden. If they were there at all they would be poor and undeveloped."

"Exactly so," said John. "And in my garden I garner up God's gifts; and I select the

best, and then the best of the best, and so on and on; and I watch, oh, so carefully, for everything hurtful; and I water; and I prune off the dead branches; and enrich the ground. And so I work and work, with God's help of the sunshine and the rain; and at last, when it all comes to what we see to-day, I cannot but feel that God is pleased with me for bringing about the fruition he knew I could accomplish with the material given by what some people call nature and I call God. That is what a garden is for, and in that way it glorifies him." [343]

They were both silent for some time. The young girl was thinking that while all that John had said was true, she could not, like him, love this season best of all. Its very perfection and full fruition were saddening, for that must inevitably be followed by decay. The old man was thinking that while youth and its promise for the future was beautiful, the resignation and peacefulness of an accomplished life was far more beautiful.

The red thrush broke into song and startled them both. The old man listened to it as if it were a pæan of thanksgiving for the garden and all that it had given, and wished he were able to join his voice with the music of the bird. As the young girl listened it seemed to her that the song was as clear and sweet and happy as it had been in the spring. And she marvelled.

"What a pity! We have missed the bird!" A voice broke into the stillness that had followed the song. It was the Mistress of the House who was approaching, followed by the Master of the House, the Next Neighbor, and the Old Professor.

"I was wondering why you were not all here some time ago," said the Daughter of the House.

"Kept by company," said the Master of the House, as they all came forward and took their accustomed places. "Not half as agreeable as the bird, nor as interesting as the story John promised to tell. I hope it will not be as solemn as your countenance, John." [344]

Nobody was ever solemn long when the Master of the House was present, and John Gayther's countenance immediately was lighted up by a smile. "I could not think of telling you a solemn story," he said, "and this one is about a peculiar character I knew. His name was Abner Batterfield, and he was a farmer. One day he was forty-five years old. He was also tired. Having finished hoeing his last row of corn, he sat down on a bench at his front door, took off his wide and dilapidated straw hat, and wiped his brow. Presently his wife came out. She was a little more than forty-five years old, and of phenomenal physical and mental endurance. She had lived seventeen years with Abner, and her natural vigor was not impaired.

"'Supper's ready,' said she.

"Her husband heaved a sigh, and stretched out his weary legs in unison.

"'Supper,' he repeated; 'it's allus eat, and work, and sleep!'

"'Perhaps you'd like to leave out the eatin',' said Mrs. Batterfield; 'that would save lots.'

"Her husband ignored this remark. His farm was small, but it was too big for him. He had no family except himself and wife, but the support of that family taxed his energies. There was a certain monotony connected with coming out short at the end of the year which was wearisome to his soul.

"'Mrs. B.,' said he, 'I've made up my mind to start over again.' [345]

"'Goin' back to the corn-field?' she asked. 'You'd better have your supper first.'

"'No,' said he; 'it's different. I've been thinkin' about it all day, and I'm goin' to begin life over ag'in.'

"'At your age it would be more fit fer you to consider the proper endin' of it,' said she.

"'I knew you'd say that, Mrs. B.; I knew you'd say that! You never do agree with me in any of my plans and undertakin's.'

"'Which accounts fer our still havin' a roof over our heads,' said she.

"'But, I can tell you, this time I'm a-goin' ahead. I don't care what people say; I don't care what they do, or what they don't do; I'm goin' ahead. It'll be blackgum ag'in' thunder this time, and I'm blackgum. You've heard about the thunder and lightnin' tacklin' a blackgum-tree?'

"'Ever since I was born,' said she.

"'Well, there's a awful scatterin' of dust and chips when that sort of a fight is on; but nobody ever yet heard of thunder gettin' the better of a blackgum-tree. And I'm goin' to be a blackgum!'

"Mrs. Batterfield made no reply to this remark, but in her heart she said: 'And I'm goin' to be thunder.'

"The next morning, Abner Batterfield put on his best clothes, and walked to the little town about two miles distant. He didn't enter the business part of the place, but turned into a shady side street where stood a small one-story building, almost by itself. This was the village library, and the librarian was sitting in the doorway, reading a book. He was an elderly man of comfortable contour, and wore no glasses, even for the finest print. [346]

"'Mornin', Abner,' said the librarian; 'have you brought back that book?'

"Abner seated himself on the door-step. 'No, I haven't, Mr. Brownsill,' said he; 'I forgot it. I forgot it, but I remember some things that's in it, and I've come to talk about 'em.'

"'Very good,' said the librarian, closing the volume of Salmon's Geographical Grammar with his finger at page 35, treating of paradoxes, and remarked: 'Well, Abner, what is it?'

"Then Abner Batterfield told his tale. He was going to make a fresh start; he was going to spend the rest of his life in some manner worthy of him. He hadn't read much of the book he had taken out of the library, for in his present way of spending his life there didn't seem to be any very good time for reading, but he had read enough of it to make him feel that it was time for him to make a fresh start, and he was going to do it.

"'And I may have a tough time,' said Abner; 'but it'll be blackgum ag'in' thunder, and I'm blackgum!'

"The librarian smiled. 'What are you going to do?' said he.

"'That's a thing,' said Abner, 'I'm not so certain about. I've been thinkin' of enterin' the ministry; but the bother about that is, I can't make up my mind which particular denomination to enter. There's such a difference in 'em.'

"'That's true,' said Mr. Brownsill; 'that's very true! But haven't you a leaning for some one of them in particular?'

"'In thinkin' it over,' said Abner, 'I've been drawn to the Quakers. So far's I kin find out, there's nothin' a Quaker preacher has to do if he don't want to.' [347]

"'But then, on the other hand,' said the librarian, 'there's no pay.'

"'Which won't work at all,' said Abner, 'so that's got to be dropped. As to the Methodists, there's too much work. A man might as well stick to hoein' corn.'

"'What do you think of the Catholics?' asked the librarian, meditatively. 'I should think a monk in a cell might suit you. I don't believe you'd be expected to do much work in a cell.'

"Abner cogitated. 'But there ain't no pay to that, no more'n if I was a Quaker. And there's Mrs. B. to be considered. I tell you, Mr. Brownsill, it's awful hard makin' a ch'ice.'

"The librarian opened his book and took a good look at the number of the page on which paradoxes were treated, so that he might remember it; then he rose and put the book upon the table, and, turning to Abner, he looked at him steadfastly.

"'Abner Batterfield,' said he, 'I understand the state of your mind, and it is plain enough that it's pretty hard for you to make a choice of a new path in life; but perhaps I can help you. How would you like to be a librarian?'

"'Me!' exclaimed Abner, amazed.

"'I don't mean,' said Mr. Brownsill, 'that you should take up this business for life without knowing whether you like it or not, but I can offer you what might be called a sample situation. I want to go away for a couple of weeks to visit my relations, and if you will come and attend to the library while I am gone, it might be a good thing for both of us. Then, if you don't like the business of a librarian, you might sample some other calling or profession.' [348]

"Abner rose from the door-step, and, entering the room, stood before Mr. Brownsill. 'That's the most sensible thing,' said he, 'that I ever heard said in all my life. Sample first, and go into afterwards; that's sound reason. Mr. Brownsill, I will do it.'

"'Good!' said the librarian. 'And the duties are not difficult.'

"'And the pay?' asked Abner.

"'Just what I get,' said Mr. Brownsill.

"The bargain was made, and Abner immediately began taking lessons in the duties of

a librarian.

"When he went home he told his tale to Mrs. B. 'I have hoed my last row of corn,' said he, 'and when it's fit to cut and shock we'll hire a man. There's librarians, Mrs. B., so Mr. Brownsill told me, that gets thousands a year. Think of that, Mrs. B.—thousands a year!'

"Mrs. Batterfield made no reply to this remark, but in her heart she said: 'And I am thunder.'

"Early the next morning, long before the ordinary time for opening the library, Abner was at his post. He took the key from the concealed nail where Mr. Brownsill was wont to hang it. He opened the door and windows, as the librarian told him he must do; he swept the floor; he dusted the books; and then he took the water-pail, and proceeded to the pump hard by. He filled it, then he sat down and wiped his brow. He had done so much sitting down and brow-wiping in his life that it had become a habit with him, even when he was neither hot nor tired. [349]

"This little library was certainly a very pleasant place in which to earn one's living—ten thousand times more to his taste than the richest corn-field. Around the walls were book-shelves, some of them nearly filled with books, most of which, judging from their bindings, were of a sober if not a sombre turn of mind.

"'Some of these days,' said Abner, 'I am goin' to read those books; I never did have time to read books.'

"From the ceiling there hung, too high to be conveniently dusted, a few stuffed birds, and one small alligator. 'Some of these days,' said Abner to himself, 'I am goin' to get on a step-ladder and look at them birds and things; I never did properly know what they was.'

"Now footsteps were heard on the sidewalk, and Abner jumped up quickly and redusted a book upon the table. There entered two little girls, the elder one with her hair plaited down her back. They looked in surprise at Abner, who smiled.

"'I guess you want to see Mr. Brownsill,' he said. 'Well, I am in his place now, and all you got to do is to tell me what book you want.'

"'Please, sir,' said the one with plaits, 'mother wants to know if you can change a quarter of a dollar.'

"This proposed transaction seemed to Abner to be a little outside of a librarian's business, but he put his hand in his pocket and said he would see. When he had extracted all the change that pocket contained he found that he was the owner of three nickels and five copper cents. He tried some other pockets, but there was no money in any of them. He was disappointed; he did not want to begin his intercourse with the townspeople by failing to do the first favor asked of him. He looked around the room; he rubbed his nose. In a moment an idea struck him. [350]

"'How much do you want to get out of this quarter?' said he.

"'Ten cents, sir,' said the girl with the plaits. 'The woman's waitin' fer it now.'

"'I'll tell you,' said Abner, 'what I can do. All I have got is twenty cents. Two of these nickels will do for the woman, and then for the other five cents you can take out a book for a week. A duodecimo volume for a week is five cents. Is there any duodecimo volume you would like?'

"The girl with the plaits said she didn't know, and that all she wanted was change for a quarter.

"'Which this will be,' said Abner.

"Asking the little girls to follow him, he approached the book-shelves. 'Now here's something,' said he, presently, taking down a book. 'It's Buck's Theological Dictionary, and it's got a lot of different things in it. Some of them your mother might like to read to you, and some of them she might like to read to herself. I once read one piece in that book myself. It is about the Inquisition, and when I began it I couldn't stop until I got to the end of it. I guess your mother might like to read that, even if she don't read it to you.'

"The little girl said she didn't know whether her mother would like it or not, but what she had been sent for was change for a quarter.

"'This will be the same thing,' said Abner; 'twenty cents in money, and five cents for a duodecimo for one week. So take the money and the book, my dear, and tell your mother that if she keeps it out longer than one week there'll be a fine.' [351]

"The child and the duodecimo departed, and Abner sat down again, and wiped his brow. 'There's one customer,' said he, 'and that's the way to do business. They come to get you to do somethin' for them, and before they know it they're doin' business with you, payin' cash in advance. But there's one thing I forgot. I oughter asked them

young ones what their mother's name was. But I'll remember 'em, specially the one with the plaited hair, so it's all the same.'

"The little girls went home. 'It's a new man at the library,' said the one with the plaits, 'and he hadn't got no more'n twenty cents in money; but he sent you a book for the other five cents.'

"The mother, with her baby in her lap, sent the ten cents to the woman who was waiting, and then took the book, which opened quite naturally at the article on the Inquisition, and began to read. And, although the baby grew restless and began to cry, she didn't stop reading until she had finished that article. 'It's fully worth five cents,' she said to herself, as she put it on the shelf for future perusal.

"It was not long before the thought struck Abner that he was losing opportunities which spread themselves around him, so he jumped up and took down a book. The volume proved to be one of 'Elegant Extracts'; but after reading certain reflections 'Upon Seeing Mr. Pope's House at Binfield' he thought he would like something more in the nature of a story, and took up a thinner volume entitled 'Dick's Future State.' [352] He turned over the leaves, hoping to meet with some of the adventures of Dick; but his attention was arrested by a passage which asserted that arithmetic would be one of the occupations to be followed in heaven. He was about to put away the book in disgust—for to him there was no need of a man's being good in this world if he were to be condemned to arithmetic in the next—when the light from the open door was darkened by a large body who approached in carpet slippers, making no noise. This proved to be a round and doleful negro woman, a greater part of her face wrapped up in a red-and-green handkerchief. Her attire was somewhat nondescript, and entirely unsuggestive of literary inclinations. She groaned as she entered the room.

"'Whar Mr. Bro'nsill?' she asked, with one hand to her face.

"Abner was amazed. Was it possible that this woman could read, and that she cared for books? He explained the situation, and assured her that he could attend to her just as well as the regular librarian.

"'I's mighty glad to hear dat,' said the woman, 'I's mighty glad to hear dat, for I hasn't slep' one wink for dis tooth. Mr. Bro'nsill he allus pulls my teeth, and dey nebber has been one what ached as bad as dis.'

"With this she began to unwrap her swollen face.

"'You needn't do that,' cried Abner. 'I can't pull teeth. You must go to the dentist.'

"'That'll be fifty cents,' said the woman, 'and Mr. Bro'nsill he don' charge nothin'. I know whar he keeps his pinchers. Dey's in dat drawer in de table. And you kin pull it [353] out jes as well as anudder pusson. I'd pull hit out ef I wuz anudder pusson.'

"Abner shook his head. 'I never pulled a tooth,' he said. 'I don't know nothin' about it.'

"'Don' dey tell somethin' about pullin' teeth in dese here books?' said the woman.

"Abner shook his head. 'There may be,' he said, 'but I don't know where to find it.'

"'And you's de librarian,' said she, in a tone of supreme contempt, 'and don' know how to fin' what's in de books!' And with this she re-wrapped her face and wabbled away.

"'I hope the next one will want a book,' said Abner to himself, 'and won't want nothin' else. If I'm to be librarian I want to fork out books.'

"The morning passed, and no one else appeared. The forenoon was not the time when people generally came for books in that town.

"After he had eaten the dinner he had brought, Abner sat down to meditate a little. He was not sure that the life of a librarian would suit him. It was almost as lonesome as hoeing corn.

"Some time after these reflections—it might have been a minute, it might have been an hour—he was awakened by a man's voice, and suddenly started upright in his chair.

"'Hello!' said the voice. 'You keepin' library for old Brownsill?'

"'That's what I'm doin',' said Abner; 'he's away for his holiday.'

"The new-comer, Joe Pearson, was an odd creature. I remember him well. He had been assistant to the town clerk, but was now out of a position. He was a stout man [354] with little eyes, and wore a shiny black coat, and no collar.

"'I am glad to hear it,' he said. 'Mr. Brownsill's a little too sharp for my fancy; I'd rather do business with you. Have you got any books on eggs?'

"'I don't know,' said Abner, 'but I can look. What kind of eggs?'

"'I don't suppose there's a different book for every kind of egg,' said Joe; 'I guess they're lumped.'

"'All right,' said Abner; 'step up to the shelves, and we'll take a look. Now here's one that I've just been glancin' over myself. It seems to have a lot of different things in it: it's called "Elegant Extracts."'

"'"Elegant Extracts" won't do,' said Joe; 'they ain't eggs.'

"'E, E, E,' said Abner, looking along the line, and anxious to make a good show in the eyes of his acquaintance, who had the reputation of being a man of considerable learning. '"Experimental Christianity"—but that won't do.'

"After fifteen or twenty minutes occupied in scrutiny of backs of books, Joe Pearson gave up the search. 'I don't believe there's a book on eggs in the whole darned place,' said he. 'That's just like Brownsill; he hasn't got no fancy for nothin' practical.'

"'What do you want to know about eggs?' said Abner.

"Mr. Pearson did not immediately answer, but after a few moments of silent consideration he walked to the door and closed it. Then he sat down, and invited Abner to sit by him. 'Look here, Abner Batterfield,' said he; 'I've got a idee that's goin' to make my fortune. I want somebody to help me, and I don't see why you [355]
couldn't do it as well as anybody else. For one thing, you've got a farm.'

"As he said this Abner started back. 'Confound the farm!' he said. 'I've given up farmin', and I don't want nothin' more to do with it.'

"'Yes, you will,' said Pearson, 'when I've told you what I'm goin' to do. But it won't be common farmin': it'll be mighty different. There's money in this kind of farmin', and no work, nuther, to mention.'

"Abner now became interested.

"'It concerns eggs,' said Pearson. 'Abner, did you ever hear about the eggs of the great auk?'

"'Great hawk!' said Abner.

"'Not *hawk*! Auk—a-u-k.'

"'Never seen the bird,' said Abner.

"'I reckon not,' said the other. 'They say they disappeared some time before the war; but I don't believe that. I've been readin' a piece about 'em, Abner, and I tell you it just roused me up, and that's the reason I've come here s'posin' I might find a book that might give me some new p'ints. But I reckon I know enough to work on.'

"'Is there anything uncommon about 'em?' asked Abner.

"'Uncommon!' exclaimed the other. 'Do you know what a great auk's egg is wuth? It's one thousand eight hundred dollars!'

"'A car-load?' asked Abner.

"'Stuff!' ejaculated Mr. Pearson. 'It's that much for *one*; and that one blowed—nothin' but a shell—not a thing inside. And eighteen hundred dollars!'

"'By George!' exclaimed Abner. 'Eighteen hundred dollars!'

"'And that's the lowest figure. Great auk eggs is wuth twenty-one thousand and six [356]
hundred dollars a dozen!'

"Abner rose from his chair. 'Joe Pearson,' he said, 'what are you talkin' about?'

"'I'm talkin' about makin' the biggest kind of money, and if you choose to go in with me you can make big money too. I'm all correct, and I can show you the figures.'

"Abner now sat down and leaned over toward Pearson. 'Whar's it likely to fin' nests?' said he.

"'Nests!' exclaimed Pearson, in disdain. 'If I could find two of 'em—fresh ones—I'd call my fortune made.'

"'I should say so,' said Abner, 'sellin' for thirty-six hundred dollars! But what is there so all-fired good about 'em to make 'em sell like that?'

"'Scerceness,' said Joe. 'Apart from scerceness they ain't no better'n any other egg. But there's mighty few of 'em in market now, and all of them's blowed.'

"'And no good?' said Abner.

"'They say not,' said the other. 'For scerceness they're better blowed than stale, which they're bound to be if they're kept.'

"'But what's your idea about 'em?' said Abner.

"'That's what I'm goin' to tell you,' replied Pearson. 'There's a general notion that there ain't no more great auks, specially hen great auks, and that's why their eggs are so scerce. But I don't see the p'int of that. It don't stand to reason; for now and then somebody gets a great auk egg. If you find 'em they've got to be laid; and if they're laid there's got to be hen great auks somewhere. Now the p'int is to find out [357] where them great auks lay. It may be a awful job to do it, but if I can do it, and get just two eggs, my fortune's made, and yourn too.'

"Abner, did you ever hear about the eggs of the great auk?"

"'Would you divide the thirty-six hundred dollars even?'—now very much interested.

"'Divide!' sneered Pearson. 'Do you suppose I'd sell 'em? No, sir; I'd set 'em under a turkey, or perhaps a big hen. Then, sir, I'd go into the great auk business. I'd sell auk eggs, and make my fortune, and yourn too.'

"'And young ones, if we get a lot?'

"'No, sir!' exclaimed Pearson. 'Nobody'd own no auks but me. You can't catch 'em alive. And I wouldn't sell no eggs at all till they'd first been blowed. I'd keep the business all in my own hands. Abner, I've been thinkin' a great deal about this thing. You've heard about the lively sixpence and the slow dollar? Well, sir, I'm goin' to sell them auk eggs for sixteen hundred dollars, two for three thousand.'"

"John Gayther," said the Master of the House, "you will not make me believe that you ever knew two such fools."

"In the course of my life," said the Old Professor, "I have known several of them."

"Not looking for auks' eggs?" inquired the Next Neighbor.

"Something just as impracticable," he said.

"The North Pole, for instance," suggested the Mistress of the House.

"I think," said John, "they are more likely to find that than my friends were to find what they sought. But we shall see. Abner looked at his companion. 'That would be [358] better than 'most any other kind of business,' said he. 'Where do you go to get them eggs?'

"'Way up north,' said Pearson; 'and the furder north you go the more likely you are to find 'em.'

"'I don't know about goin' north,' said Abner, reflectively; 'there's Mrs. B. to

consider.'

"'But I don't want you to go,' said Pearson. 'I'm goin' north. And when I've found a couple o' auk eggs, I'll pack 'em up nice and warm in cotton, and send 'em down to you, and have 'em hatched. That's where your farm'll come in. You've got to have a farm and turkeys or big hens if you want to raise auks. Then I'll go on lookin', and, most likely, I'll get a couple more.'

"'That'll be a good thing,' said Abner; 'the more the merrier. I'll go in with you, Joe Pearson. That's the sort of business that'll just suit me. But I'll tell you one thing, Joe: I wouldn't put the price of them eggs down at first; I'd wait until a couple of dozen had been laid and blowed, and then, perhaps, I'd put the price down.'

"'No, sir,' said Joe; 'I'll put the price down at the very beginning. Sixteen hundred dollars, or three thousand for two, is enough for any eggs, and we oughter be satisfied with it.'

"'And when are you goin' to start north?' asked Abner.

"'That's the p'int,' said Pearson, 'that's the p'int. You see, Abner, I ain't got no family, and I can start north whenever I please, as far as that's concerned. But there's obstacles. For one thing, I ain't got the right kind of clothes; and then there's other [359] things. It's awful hard lines startin' out on a business like this, and the more money there is in it the harder the lines.'

"'But you can do it, Joe,' said Abner. 'I feel in my bones you can do it. It'll be blackgum ag'in' thunder, but you'll be blackgum, and you'll come out all right.'

"'I can't be blackgum nor nothin' else,' said Pearson, 'if I don't get no help; specially if I don't get no help from the party what's goin' to get a lot of the money.'

"Abner reflected. 'If we was to set any auk eggs next month, it'll be well on into next summer before we'd have eggs to sell.'

"Pearson also reflected. 'Yes,' he said; 'and it might be a little later than that. You've got to leave a margin. I allus leave a margin. Then I'm safe.'

"'Yes,' said Abner; 'then you're safe.'

"Joe Pearson was a man of resourceful discretion. He rose now. 'Abner,' said he, 'I've got to go; I've got a lot of things on my hands. And I want you to remember that what I've said to you I said to you, and I wouldn't have no other man know nothin' about it. If anybody else should hear of this thing, and go north, and get ahead of me, it would be—well, I don't know what to say it would be, I've such feelin's about it. I've offered to take you in because you've got a farm, and because I think you're a good man, and would know how to take care of auks when they was hatched. But there's a lot for me to do. There's maps to look over, and time-tables; and I must be off. But I'll stop in to-morrer, Abner, and we'll talk this over again.'

"When Pearson had gone, Abner sat and stared steadily at a knot-hole in the floor. [360] 'Mrs. B.,' he said to himself, 'has allus been a great one on eggs. She's the greatest one on eggs I ever knowed. If she'd go in, now, the thing 'u'd be just as good as done. When she knows what's ahead of us she oughter go in. That's all I've got to say about it.'

"The significance of these reflections depended upon the fact that Mrs. Batterfield had a small income. It was upon this fact that there depended the other fact that there were three meals a day in the Batterfield household. It was this fact, also, which was the cause of Mr. Joe Pearson's visit to the library. He was very well acquainted with Abner, although he knew Mrs. Batterfield but slightly; but he was aware of her income.

"After reflecting for about twenty minutes or half an hour upon the exciting proposition which had been made to him, Abner grew very impatient. 'No use of my stayin' here,' he said; 'there's nobody goin' to get out books in this hot weather; so I'll just shut up shop and go home. I never did want to see Mrs. Batterfield as much as I want to see her now.'

"'Libraries seem to shut up early,' said Mrs. Batterfield, as her husband walked into the front yard.

"'Yes, they do,' said Abner, 'in summer-time.'

"All the way from town he had been rehearsing to himself the story he was going to tell; but he hadn't finished it yet, and he wanted to get it all straight before he began, so he walked over to the barn and sat down on an inverted horse-bucket to get his story all straight before he began. When he got it all straight he concluded not to tell it until after supper. But when that meal was finished, and everything had been [361] cleared away, and Mrs. Batterfield had gone to sit on the front porch, as was her evening custom, he sat down by her and told his story.

"He made the tale as attractive as he possibly could make it. He even omitted the fact that Joe Pearson intended to sell his first eggs for sixteen hundred dollars instead of eighteen hundred, and he diminished by very many hundred miles the length of Joe Pearson's probable journey to the north. In fact, had his suppositions been nearly correct, the remaining specimens of the great auk would have been birds of very temperate dispositions, so far as latitude was concerned.

"Mrs. Batterfield listened with great attention. She was engaged upon some sewing on which her eyes were fixed, but her ears drank in every word that Abner said. When he had finished, she laid down her sewing, for it was beginning to get a little dark for even her sharp eyes, and remarked: 'And he wants some warm clothes? Furs, I suppose?'

"'Yes,' said Abner; 'I expect they'd be furs.'

"'And travelling expenses?' she asked.

"'Yes; I suppose he'd want help in that way. Of course, since he's makin' me such a big offer, he'll expect me to put in somethin'.'

"Mrs. Batterfield made no reply, but folded up her sewing and went indoors. He waited until she had time to retire, then he closed the house and went up himself.

"'She'll want to sleep on that,' said he; 'it'll be a good thing for her to sleep on it. She mayn't like it at first, but I'll go at her ag'in to-morrer, and I'm goin' to stick to it. I reckon it'll be the worst rassle we ever had; but it's blackgum ag'in' thunder, and I'm [362] blackgum.'

"When Abner reached his chamber he found his wife sitting quietly by the table, on which burned a lamp.

"'Hello!' said he. 'I thought you'd be abed and asleep!'

"'I didn't want to do my talkin' out front,' said she, 'for there might be people passin' along the road. I think you said this was to be a case of blackgum ag'in' thunder!'

"'Yes,' said Abner, in a somewhat uncertain tone.

"'Well, then,' said Mrs. Batterfield, 'I'm thunder.'

"It was very late when that couple went to bed, but it was very early the next morning when Abner rose. He split a great deal of fire-wood before breakfast, and very soon after that meal he put his hoe on his shoulder and went to his corn-field. He remembered that there were three rows of corn which he had hoed upon only one side.

"The library was not opened that day, and it remained closed until Mr. Brownsill returned. The failure in the supply of books did not occasion very much comment in the town, for everybody agreed that Mr. Brownsill was a good man and ought to have a holiday. There were four persons in the place—a little girl with plaited hair and a sister; a colored woman with a bad tooth; and Joe Pearson—who knew that Abner Batterfield had held, for a time, the office of librarian.

"When his vacation had expired, Mr. Brownsill came home, and on the second morning after his arrival, Abner Batterfield appeared before him.

"'I had to come in town,' said Abner, 'and so I thought I'd step in here and see about [363] my pay.'

"The librarian looked at him. 'How long were you here?' he asked. 'I've been told that the library was shut up for two weeks.'

"'I was here for three quarters of a day,' said Abner. 'That's about as near as I can calculate.'

"The librarian took up a pencil and made a calculation.

"'By the way,' said he, 'you must have done some business. I miss our copy of Buck's Theological Dictionary; but I find no entry about it.'

"'That was took out as change,' said Abner. 'Five cents for a duodecimo for a week, and the rest in change. If the woman hasn't brought it back she owes a week's fine.'

"'Who was the woman?' asked the librarian.

"'I don't know,' said Abner; 'but she has a daughter with plaited hair and a small sister. While I'm in town I'll try to look 'em up.'

"'In the meantime,' said Mr. Brownsill, 'I'll have to charge you for the book; and, deducting your pay for three quarters of a day, you now owe me seventy-five cents. I don't suppose there's any use talking about the fines I have got down against you?'

"'I don't believe there is,' said Abner.

"The librarian could not help smiling, so dejected was the tone in which these last words were spoken.

"'By the way,' said he, 'how about your great fight you were talking about—blackgum ag'in' thunder? How did that turn out?'

"Abner in his turn smiled.

"'Blackgum was split as fine as matches,' said he."

"I can't help feeling sorry for the old fellow," said the Next Neighbor, when John had concluded his story. "I always have sympathy with great ambitions." [364]

"And if Joe Pearson had got far enough north," said the Mistress of the House, "he would have found no eggs, but he might have stumbled over the North Pole."

"It is a pity the old fellow had to tell his wife," said the Master of the House. "Women ruin great ambitions by too much common-sense. A great many of the inventions we now consider necessary would have been utterly lost to us if some men's brains had not been a little addled. A woman would have set them straight, and that would have been the end. That is the reason so few women are inventors; they have too much sense."

"That is a very left-handed compliment," said the Daughter of the House. "You are always decrying inventions, which is strange. How would you like to sail a ship without steam?"

"It would be a great deal pleasanter, my dear, and much cleaner."

"There are patent contrivances for garden-work," said John Gayther, "and I don't say that they don't help, especially in planting-time; but, like the captain, I prefer the old ways that bring the gardener and the earth close together. The old, simple instruments seem like friends. I feel as if something went from me through the hoe-handle to the plants; and when the seed drops from my hands instead of from a seeder, it seems to me it takes a message direct from me to the earth that receives it."

The stories are all told. The winter has come. The orchard is stripped of its leaves, and, sere and brown, they cover the garden paths and are strewn over the box borders. The fruits are all garnered. The bare vines that cover the summer-house are like dead memories of what has been. The vegetable-beds are empty. The black frost has settled upon bloom and foliage on the upper terrace. The sweet, blithe song of the red thrush has ceased. The family have gone to a sunnier clime. And John Gayther walks alone in his garden. [365]

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