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CONISTON

By Winston Churchill

"We have been compelled to see what was weak in democracy as well as what was strong. We have begun obscurely to recognize that things do not go of themselves, and that popular government is not in itself a panacea, is no better than any other form except as the virtue and wisdom of the people make it so, and that when men undertake to do their own kingship, they enter upon, the dangers and responsibilities as well as the privileges of the function. Above all, it looks as if we were on the way to be persuaded that no government can be carried on by declamation."

—JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

First I am to write a love-story of long ago, of a time some little while after General Jackson had got into the White House and had shown the world what a real democracy was. The Era of the first six Presidents had closed, and a new Era had begun. I am speaking of political Eras. Certain gentlemen, with a pious belief in democracy, but with a firmer determination to get on top, arose,—and got in top. So many of these gentlemen arose in the different states, and they were so clever, and they found so

many chinks in the Constitution to crawl through and steal the people's chestnuts, that the Era may be called the Boss-Era. After the Boss came along certain Things without souls, but of many minds, and found more chinks in the Constitution: bigger chinks, for the Things were bigger, and they stole more chestnuts. But I am getting far ahead of my love-story—and of my book.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Let it be known that there was such a thing as social rank in Coniston; and something which, for the sake of an advantageous parallel, we may call an Established Church. Coniston was a Congregational town still, and the deacons and dignitaries of that church were likewise the pillars of the state. Not many years before the time of which we write actual disestablishment had occurred, when the town

ceased—as a town—to pay the salary of Priest Ware, as the minister was called. The father of Jethro Bass, Nathan the currier, had once, in a youthful lapse, permitted a Baptist preacher to immerse him in Coniston Water. This had been the extent of Nathan's religion; Jethro had none at all, and was, for this and other reasons, somewhere near the bottom of the social scale.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Rich!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

making five out of it, instead of four. He remembered that Jethro Bass had for some years been journeying through the town, buying his hides and wool, and collecting the interest on his mortgages.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"H-how be you, Cynthia?" he asked.

"How do you do, Jethro?"

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

"Where be you goin'?"

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

"Wh-what's it about," he demanded.

"Napoleon Bonaparte."

"Who was be?"

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

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

"Yes."

Jethro pondered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"When will you give it to me?"

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

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

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

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

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

conditions presented themselves, and it occurred to him that there were crevices in the town system, and ways into power through the crevices for men clever enough to find them.

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

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

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

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

Cynthia laughed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jethro looked away contemplatively.

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

"Read the book, and you'll see," retorted Cynthia, flicking her horse, which started at all gaits down the road. Jethro stood in his tracks, staring, but this time he did not see her face above the hood of the gig. Presently he trudged on, head downward, pondering upon another problem than Napoleon's. Cynthia, at length, arrived in Brampton Street, in a humor that puzzled the good Miss Lucretia sorely.

CHAPTER II

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

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

Cynthia, driving back from Brampton in the gig, smiled at Aunt Lucy in the window, but she did not so much as glance at the tannery house farther on. The tannery house, be it known, was the cottage where Jethro dwelt, and which had belonged to Nathan, his father; and the tannery sheds were at some

distance behind it, nearer Coniston Water. Cynthia did not glance at the tannery house, for a wave of orthodox indignation had swept over her: at any rate, we may call it so. In other words, she was angry with herself: pitied and scorned herself, if the truth be told, for her actions—an inevitable mood.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why don't you read the book?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Ware took it, mechanically.

"Have you finished it?" he asked kindly.

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

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

The parsonage was of only one story, with a steep, sloping roof. On the left of the doorway was Cynthia's room, and the minister imagined he heard a faint, rustling noise at her window. Presently he arose, barred the door; could be heard moving around in his room for a while, and after that all was silence save for the mournful crying of a whippoorwill in the woods. Then a door opened softly, a white vision stole into the little entry lighted by the fan-window, above, seized the book and stole back. Had the minister been a prying man about his household, he would have noticed next day that Cynthia's candle was burned down to the socket. He saw nothing of the kind: he saw, in fact, that his daughter flitted about the house singing, and he went out into the sun to drop potatoes.

No sooner had he reached the barn than this singing ceased. But how was Mr. Ware to know that?

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

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

CHAPTER III

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

No one takes the state turnpike nowadays except crazy tourists who are willing to risk their necks and their horses' legs for the sake of scenery. The tough little Morgans of that time, which kept their feet like cats, have all but disappeared, but there were places on that road where Lyman Hull put the shoes under his wheels for four miles at a stretch. He was not a companion many people would have chosen with whom to enjoy the beauties of such a trip, and nearly everybody in Coniston was afraid of him. Jethro Bass would sit silent on the seat for hours and—it is a fact to be noted that when he told Lyman to do a thing, Lyman did it; not, perhaps, without cursing and grumbling. Lyman was a profane and wicked man—drover, farmer, trader, anything. He had a cider mill on his farm on the south slopes of Coniston which Mr. Ware had mentioned in his sermons, and which was the resort of the ungodly. The cider was not so good as Squire Northcutt's, but cheaper. Jethro was not afraid of Lyman, and he had a mortgage on the six-horse team, and on the farm and the cider mill.

After six days, Jethro and Lyman drove over Charlestown bridge and into the crooked streets of Boston, and at length arrived at a drover's hotel, or lodging-house that did not, we may be sure, front

on Mount Vernon Street or face the Mall. Lyman proceeded to get drunk, and Jethro to sell the hides and other merchandise which Lyman had hauled for him.

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

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

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

"And I have fitted up some chambers there
Looking toward the golden Eastern air,
And level with the living winds, which flow
Like waves above the living waves below."

Little did William Wetherell guess, when he glanced up at the intruder, that he was looking upon one of the forces of his own life! The countryman wore a blue swallow tail coat (fashioned by the hand of Speedy Bates), a neck-cloth, a coonskin cap, and his trousers were tucked into rawhide boots. He did not seem a promising customer for expensive jewellery, and the literary clerk did not rise, but merely closed his book with his thumb in it.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"D-don't know much about city ways."

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

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

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

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

Wetherell nodded. Still the countryman did not look up.

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

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

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

and Wetherell was surprised that the eyes of Mr. Bass had been caught by the most expensive, for it was far from being the showiest.

"T-twenty dollars?" he asked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"W-wahn't that the price you fixed?"

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

"W-wahn't that the price you fixed?"

"Yes, but—"

"G-guess I'll keep the locket—g-guess I'll keep the locket."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Well?" said Mr. Judson.

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

"Then?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"S-surprised me some," said Jethro.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Cynthy, from Jethro"

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

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

"Cynthy," answered Mr. Judson, involuntarily.

"Then make it Cynthy—make it Cynthy."

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

"When'll you have it done?"

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

"What time—w-what time?"

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

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

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

CHAPTER IV

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

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

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

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

Young Mr. Worthington was from Boston—no less; slim, pale, medium height, but with an alert look, and a high-bridged nose. But his clothes! Sam Price's vocabulary was insufficient here, they were cut in such a way, and Mr. Worthington was downright distinguished-looking under his gray beaver. Why had he come to Brampton? demanded Deacon Ira Perkins. Sam had saved this for the last. Young Mr. Worthington was threatened with consumption, and had been sent to live with his distant relative, Silas Wheelock.

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

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

crushed, straightened. Of the three, the horse had seen the visitor first, and stopped in his tracks.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"W-what was it you took?"

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

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

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

"H-how much you know about it."

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

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

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

"I am living there now."

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

Mr. Worthington fairly leaped off the bark pile.

"What makes you say that?" he demanded.

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

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

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

and Mr. Worthington. Suddenly Jake, implike, turned and stared at Worthington.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You know my name!" he exclaimed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She did not answer this confession, but left him, and presently disappeared beyond the triangle of the green, while Mr. Worthington pursued his way to Brampton by the road,—his thoughts that evening not

on waterfalls or machinery. As for Cynthia's conduct, I do not defend or explain it, for I have found out that the best and wisest of women can at times be coquettish.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What an energetic man!" said Cynthia.

"I want to have my fortune told."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cynthia could not deny that these were laudable ambitions.

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

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

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

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

Mr. Worthington laughed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

He untied her horse and essayed one more topic.

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

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

CHAPTER V

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

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

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

It is a fact—for future consideration—that Isaac Worthington proposed to Cynthia Ware, although neither Speedy Bates nor Deacon Ira Perkins heard him do so. It had been very carefully prepared, that speech, and was a model of proposals for the rising young men of all time. Mr. Worthington preferred to offer himself for what he was going to be—not for what he was. He tendered to Cynthia a note for a large amount, payable in some twenty years, with interest. The astonishing thing to record is that in

twenty years he could have more than paid the note, although he could not have foreseen at that time the Worthington Free Library and the Truro Railroad, and the stained-glass window in the church and the great marble monument on the hill—to another woman. All of these things, and more, Cynthia might have had if she had only accepted that promise to pay! But she did not accept it. He was a trifle more robust than when he came to Brampton in the summer, but perhaps she doubted his promise to pay.

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

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

I am not trying to keep the lovers apart for any mere purposes of fiction,—this is a true chronicle, and they stayed apart most of that winter. Jethro went about his daily tasks, which were now become manifold, and he wore the locket on its little chain himself. He did not think that Cynthia loved him—yet, but he had the effrontery to believe that she might, some day; and he was content to wait. He saw that she avoided him, and he was too proud to go to the parsonage and so incur ridicule and contempt.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I was callatin' to, Jethro."

"Democrat—hain't ye—Democrat?"

"Callate to be."

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

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

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

Samuel rubs his nose.

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

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

"Don't know but what I kin."

"F-fetch the hide—f-fetch the hide."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Always callate to be."

"J-Jacksonian Democrat?"

"Guess I be."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Weather looks a mite soft."

No answer.

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

"G-goin' to town meetin', Eben?"

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

"G-goin' to town meetin', Eben?"

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

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

"D-Democrat—hain't ye—D-Democrat?"

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

"H-heerd the ticket?"

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

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

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

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

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

Yes, we may have our suspicions. But how can we get a bill on this evidence? There are some thirty

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

We can call a host of other witnesses if we like, among them cranky, happy-go-lucky Fletcher Bartlett, who has led forlorn hopes in former years. Court proceedings make tiresome reading, and if those who have been over ours have not arrived at some notion of the simple and innocent method of the new Era of politics note dawning—they never will. Nothing proved. But here is part of the ticket which nobody started:—

For

SENIOR SELECTMAN, FLETCHER BARTLETT.

(Farm and buildings on Thousand Acre Hill mortgaged to Jethro Bass.)

SECOND SELECTMAN, AMOS CUTHBERT.

(Farm and buildings on Town's End Ridge mortgaged to Jethro Bass.)

THIRD SELECTMAN, CHESTER PERKINS.

(Sop of some kind to the Established Church party. Horse and cow mortgaged to Jethro Bass, though his father, the tithing-man, doesn't know it.)

MODERATOR, SAMUEL PRICE.

(Natural ambition—dove of oratory and Jacksonian principles.)

etc., etc.

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

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

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

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

The sheds were not large enough to hold the teams that day. Jethro's barn and tannery were full, and many other barns in the village. And now the peace of mind of the orthodox is a thing of the past. Deacon Lysander Richardson, the moderator, sits aghast in his high place as they come trooping in, men who have not been to town meeting for ten years. Deacon Lysander, with his white band of whiskers that goes around his neck like a sixteenth-century ruff under his chin, will soon be a memory. Now enters one, if Deacon Lysander had known it symbolic of the new Era. One who, though his large head is bent, towers over most of the men who make way for him in the aisle, nodding but not speaking, and takes his place in the chair under the platform on the right of the meeting-pause under one of the high, three-part windows. That chair was always his in future years, and there he sat afterward, silent, apparently taking no part. But not a man dropped a ballot into the box whom Jethro Bass did not see and mark.

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

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

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

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

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

"Jethro Bass for Chairman of the Selectmen!"

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

At last, by mighty efforts of the peace loving in both parties, something like order is restored, the ballots are in the box, and Deacon Lysander is counting them: not like another moderator I have heard of, who spilled the votes on the floor until his own man was elected. No. Had they registered his own death sentence, the deacon would have counted them straight, and needed no town clerk to verify his

figures. But when he came to pronounce the vote, shame and sorrow and mortification overcame him. Coniston, his native town, which he had served and revered, was dishonored, and it was for him, Lysander Richardson, to proclaim her disgrace. The deacon choked, and tears of bitterness stood in his eyes, and there came a silence only broken by the surging of the sleet as he rapped on the table.

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VI

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

"Jethro!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"H-haven't took' Moses—have you?"

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

"H-haven't took—Moses, have you?"

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

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

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

He was jealous!

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

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

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

"Because I'm—interested," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

"Wahn't it charity."

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

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

"Yes."

"M-meant friendship?"

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

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

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

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

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

"J-just friends with Worthington?"

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

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

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

woman—"

"Your woman!"

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

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

"Hush, Jethro."

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

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

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

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

"L-love me, Cynthy—love me, don't you?"

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

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

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

"T-town meetin'?"

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

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

"Knowed it—did you?"

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

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

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

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

"Tell me, did you do this thing?"

"Th-thought you knowed it—th-thought you knowed."

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

"Hain't you guessin' a little mite too much; Cynthy?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VII

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

For a little while we are going to gallop through the years as before we have ambled through the days, although the reader's breath may be taken away in the process. How Cynthia Ware went over the Truro Pass to Boston, and how she became a teacher in a high school there;—largely through the kindness of that Miss Lucretia Penniman of whom we have spoken, who wrote in Cynthia's behalf to certain friends she had in that city; how she met one William Wetherell, no longer a clerk in Mr. Judson's jewellery shop, but a newspaper man with I know not what ambitions—and limitations in

strength of body and will; how, many, many years afterward, she nursed him tenderly through a sickness and—married him, is all told in a paragraph. Marry him she did, to take care of him, and told him so. She made no secret of the maternal in this love.

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

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

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

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

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

He told her the story. Not until the end of it did the significance of the name engraved come to him—Cynthy.

"Cynthy, from Jethro."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But so it came to pass, she was taken from him, who had been the one joy and inspiration of his weary days, and he was driven, wandering, into unfrequented streets that he might not recall, the places where she had once trod, and through the wakeful nights her voice haunted him,—its laughter,

its sweet notes of seriousness; little ways and manners of her look came to twist his heart, and he prayed God to take him, too, until it seemed that Cynthia frowned upon him for his weakness. One mild Sunday afternoon, he took little Cynthia by the hand and led her, toddling, out into the sunny Common, where he used to walk with her mother, and the infant prattle seemed to bring—at last a strange peace to his storm-tossed soul.

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

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

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

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

"I wanted to," said Cynthia.

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

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

The doctor looked at Cynthia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

my life, I guess."

"Saved your life!" exclaimed Wetherell.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So the doctor said."

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

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

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

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

"I would try anything," said Wetherell.

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

"Jonah Winch's!" exclaimed Wetherell.

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

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

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

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

At last they came suddenly upon the little hamlet of Coniston itself. There was the flagpole and the triangular green, scene of many a muster; Jonah Winch's store, with its horse block and checker-paned windows, just as Jonah had left it; Nathan Bass's tannery shed, now weather-stained and neglected, for Jethro lived on Thousand Acre Hill now; the Prescott house, home of the Stark hero, where Ephraim lived, "innocent of paint" (as one of Coniston's sons has put it), "innocent of paint as a Coniston maiden's face"; the white meeting-house, where Priest Ware had preached—and the parsonage.

Cynthia and Wetherell loitered in front of it, while the blue shadow of the mountain deepened into night, until Mr. Satterlee, the minister, found them there, and they went in and stood reverently in the little chamber on the right of the door, which had been Cynthia's.

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

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

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

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

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

"Legislatur' through?" shouted Moses.

The great man shook his head and drove on.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"B-bout as common," said Jethro.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"S-show 'em to me," said Jethro.

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

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

"Cynthia."

There was a long pause.

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

"Cynthia."

"Er-er, Cynthia—not Cynthy?"

"Cynthia," she said again.

He bent over her and lowered his voice.

"M-may I call you Cynthy—Cynthy?" he asked.

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

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

"Whose little gal be you?" he asked.

"Dad's."

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER VIII

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jethro Bass looked at him quickly.

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

"Nothing worth publishing," answered poor William Wetherell.

"J-just dreamed'—dreamed and kept store. S—something to have dreamed—eh—something to have dreamed?"

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

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

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

"C-Cynthy!" he said, "C-Cynthy!"

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

"H-how old be you, Cynthy?"

"Nine," answered Cynthia, promptly.

"L-like the country, Cynthy—like the country better than the city?"

"Oh, yes," said Cynthia.

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

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

"Mis' Darwin?"

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

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

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

"C-couldn't pick flowers in the Common and go barefoot—e—couldn't go barefoot, Cynthy?"

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

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

"Of course you couldn't."

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

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

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

"Hain't lonely here, Cynthy—hain't lonely here?" he said.

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

He did not answer at once.

"Not with you, Cynthy—not with you."

By all of which it will be seen that the acquaintance was progressing. They sat down for a while on the old millstone that formed the step, and there discussed Cynthia's tastes. She was too old for dolls,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Three mornings later, a little after seven o'clock, when the storekeeper and his small daughter were preparing to go to Brampton upon a very troublesome errand, Chester Perkins appeared again. It is always easy to stir up dissatisfaction among the ne'er-do-wells (Jethro had once done it himself), and during the three days which had elapsed since Chester had flung down the gauntlet there had been

more or less of downright treason heard in the store. William Wetherell, who had perplexities of his own, had done his best to keep out of the discussions that had raged on his cracker boxes and barrels, for his head was a jumble of figures which would not come right. And now as he stood there in the freshness of the early summer morning, waiting for Lem Hallowell's stage, poor Wetherell's heart was very heavy.

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

"I have read some," said William Wetherell.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Want to draw money?" he demanded.

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

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

"Dudley Worthington?" exclaimed Wetherell.

The teller smiled.

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

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

He sat behind a table covered with green leather, on which papers were laid with elaborate neatness, and he wore a double-breasted skirted coat of black, with braided lapels, a dark purple blanket cravat

with a large red cameo pin. And Mr. Worthington's features harmonized perfectly with this costume—those of a successful, ambitious man who followed custom and convention blindly; clean-shaven, save for reddish chops, blue eyes of extreme keenness, and thin-upped mouth which had been tightening year by year as the output of the Worthington Minx increased.

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

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

"Not the Wetherell who married Cynthia Ware!"

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

This is what he did say:—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dudley Worthington did not smile.

"Take my advice, Mr. Wetherell, and pay off that note somehow." An odor of the stable pervaded the

room, and a great unkempt grizzled head and shoulders, horse blanket and all, were stuck into it.

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

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

"Take my advice, Mr. Wetherell."

And then the storekeeper went into the bank.

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

"What's the matter?" said Wetherell.

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

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

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

"You must take it back," she said.

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

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

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

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

"That doesn't make any difference."

"I like you better than the other girl."

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No," said he, determinedly.

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

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

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

"Bob Worthington."

"Are you the son of Dudley Worthington?"

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

"But you should be proud of your father."

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

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

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

"Where are you going?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Daddy?"

"Yes."

"Does your trouble feel any better?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CONISTON — VOLUME 01 ***

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