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# CONISTON

By Winston Churchill

BOOK 2.

## CHAPTER IX

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

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

"Why not?"

Mr. Price leaned out of the wagon.

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

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

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

bewilderment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"H-how much did you git for your wool, Chester—h-how much?"

"Guess you hain't here to talk about wool, Bije," said Chester, red with anger.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bijah looked around.

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

There was a deep silence.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How much did you git out of it, Bije?" demanded Chester.

"Hain't looked through my clothes yet," said Bijah, his face screwed up tighter than ever. "N-never look through my clothes till I git home, Chester, it hain't safe."

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

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

"Wetherell, hain't it?"

The victim nodded helplessly.

"Want to see you a minute."

"What is it?"

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

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

"If the boys was to see me speakin' to you, they might git suspicious—you understand," he confided, his manner conveying a hint that they shared some common policy.

"I don't meddle with politics," said Wetherell, desperately.

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

"None whatever."

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

"None."

You hear it?"

"Sometimes I can't help it."

"Ex'actly! You hear it."

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

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

"Mr. Bixby—"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes."

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

How was Wetherell to know, in his fright, that Mr. Bixby had for once indulged in an overabundance of zeal in Jethro's behalf? He went to the door, laughter came to him across the green from the harness shop, and his eye following the sound, fastened on Bijah seated comfortably in the midst of the group there. Bitterly the storekeeper comprehended that, had he possessed courage, he would have marched straight after Mr. Bixby and confronted him before them all with the charge of bribery. The blood throbbed in his temples, and yet he sat there, trembling, despising himself, repeating that he might have had the courage if Jethro Bass had not bought the mortgage. The fear of the man had entered the storekeeper's soul.

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

"Yes."

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

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

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

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

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

"What be you a-goin' to do, Lem?"

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

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

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

"No, you won't," said Lem, "you'll stay right whar you be."

"Chester wants to git credit for the move," suggested Sam Price, slyly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

William set his cup down quickly.

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

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

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

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

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

"Ready, Will?"

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

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

"Too good!" exclaimed the storekeeper.

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

Lemuel apparently thought that gentlemen and politics were contradictions. He began to whistle, while Wetherell sat and wondered that any one could be so care-free on such a mission. The day faded, and went out, and the lights of Harwich twinkled in the valley. Wetherell was almost tempted to mention his trouble to this man, as he had been to Ephraim: the fear that each might think he wished to borrow money held him back.

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

"Have you room enough?"

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

"You don't think—"

"Don't think what?"

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

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

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

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

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

"Like to make you acquainted with Jedge Abner Parkinson, Mr. Wetherell, and Jim Irving. Jim's the sheriff of Truro County, and I guess the jedge don't need any recommendation as a lawyer from me. You won't mind stayin' awhile with the jedge while Jim and I go down town with the team? You're both literary folks."

Wetherell followed the judge into the house. He was sallow, tall and spare and stooping, clean-shaven, with a hooked nose and bright eyes—the face of an able and adroit man, and he wore the long black coat of the politician-lawyer. The room was filled with books, and from these Judge Parkinson immediately took his cue, probably through a fear that Wetherell might begin on the subject of Lemuel's errand. However, it instantly became plain that the judge was a true book lover, and despite the fact that Lem's visit had disturbed him not a little, he soon grew animated in a discussion on the merits of Sir Walter Scott, paced the room, pitched his nasal voice higher and higher, covered his table with volumes of that author to illustrate his meaning. Neither of them heard a knock, and they both stared dumfounded at the man who filled the doorway.

It was Jethro Bass!

He entered the room with characteristic unconcern, as if he had just left it on a trivial errand, and without a "How do you do?" or a "Good evening," parted his coat tails, and sat down in the judge's armchair. The judge dropped the volume of Scott on the desk, and as for Wetherell, he realized for once

the full meaning of the biblical expression of a man's tongue cleaving to the roof of his mouth; the gleam of one of Jethro's brass buttons caught his eye and held it fascinated.

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

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

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

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

"Most through the Legislature?" inquired the judge.

"'Bout as common," said Jethro.

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

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

"Er—indicted us, Judge?" said Jethro.

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes—I'm sorry—"

"Have you app'inted one?"

"No."

"G-got any candidates?"

The judge scratched his head.

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

"Well, have you?"

"No," said the judge.

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

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

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

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

The judge appeared to reflect.

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

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

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

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

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

"I-I'm a candidate."

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

"When?" said Jethro, sitting still.

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

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

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

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

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

"I'll wait," said Jethro.

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

"G-guess that's about it."

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

"Er—interested in roads,—Will,—interested in roads?"

The judge stopped writing to listen, since it was now the turn of the other victim.

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

"C-come over for the drive—c-come over for the drive?"

"Yes," replied the storekeeper, rather faintly.

"H-how's Cynthy?" said Jethro.

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

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

"W-who's the agent?" said Jethro.

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

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

"Wh-what?" ejaculated Lem.

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

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

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



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

"Will," said he, "don't you tell this to a soul. We'll have some fun out of some of the boys to-morrow."

The storekeeper promised, but he had an unpleasant presentiment that he himself might be one of the boys in question.

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

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

## CHAPTER X

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

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

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

"H-how's that, Sam—how's that?"

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

"D-don't say so!" said Jethro.

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

"C-court'll hev to app'int an agent?"

"I callate."

"Er—you a candidate—Sam—you a candidate?"

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

"G-goin' to Harwich—hain't you?"

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

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

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

Perhaps there is no need to go into the details of Mr. Price's discomfiture on the occasion of this

interview. The judge was by nature of a sour disposition, but he haw-hawed so loudly as he explained to Mr. Price the identity of the road agent that the judge of probate in the next office thought his colleague had gone mad. Afterward Mr. Price stood for some time in the entry, where no one could see him, scratching his head and repeating his favorite exclamation, "I want to know!" It has been ascertained that he omitted to pay his respects to the spinster on that day.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"So-so, Mis' Northcutt, so-so."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Whar's Chester?" said Lem Hallowell.

Joe pulled a long face.

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

Lem sat down on the counter and laughed until he was forced to brush the tears from his cheeks at the idea of Chester Perkins being Jethro's candidate. Where was reform now? If Chester were elected, it would be in the eyes of the world as Jethro's man. No wonder he sat in a corner and refused to eat.

"Guess you'll ketch it next, Will, for goin' over to Harwich with Lem," Joe remarked playfully to the storekeeper, as he departed.

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

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

"G-great resource—readin'—great resource," he remarked.

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

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

Wetherell felt like saying that his reading had not been able to do that lately. Then he made the plunge, and shuddered as he made it.

"Mr. Bass—I—I have been waiting to speak to you about that mortgage."

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

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

"Yes, I did—yes, I did."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But this did not shake his composure.

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

William Wetherell was beginning to think that Jethro knew something also of such refinements of cruelty as were practised by Caligula. He drew forth his cowhide wallet and produced from it a folded

piece of newspaper which must, Wetherell felt sure, contain the mortgage in question.

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

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

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

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

"Sometimes when I hain't busy, I drop into the state library at the capital and enjoy myself. It's like goin' to another world without any folks to bother you. Er—er—there's books I'd like to talk to you about—sometime."

"But I thought you told me you didn't read much, Mr. Bass?"

He made no direct reply, but unfolded the newspaper in his hand, and then Wetherell saw that it was only a clipping.

"H-happened to run across this in a newspaper—if this hain't this county, I wahn't born and raised here. If it hain't Coniston Mountain about seven o'clock of a June evening, I never saw Coniston Mountain. Er—listen to this."

Whereupon he read, with a feeling which Wetherell had not supposed he possessed, an extract: and as the storekeeper listened his blood began to run wildly. At length Jethro put down the paper without glancing at his companion.

"There's somethin' about that that fetches you spinnin' through the air," he said slowly. "Sh-showed it to Jim Willard, editor of the Newcastle Guardian. Er—what do you think he said?"

"I don't know," said Wetherell, in a low voice.

"Willard said, 'Bass, w-wish you'd find me that man. I'll give him five dollars every week for a letter like that—er—five dollars a week.'"

He paused, folded up the paper again and put it in his pocket, took out a card and handed it to Wetherell.

James G. Willard, Editor.  
Newcastle Guardian.

"That's his address," said Jethro. "Er—guess you'll know what to do with it. Er—five dollars a week—five dollars a week."

"How did you know I wrote this article?" said Wetherell, as the card trembled between his fingers.

"K-knewed the place was Coniston seen from the 'east, knowed there wahn't any one is Brampton or Harwich could have done it—g-guessed the rest—guessed the rest."

Wetherell could only stare at him like a man who, with the halter about his neck, has been suddenly reprieved. But Jethro Bass did not appear to be waiting for thanks. He cleared his throat, and had Wetherell not been in such a condition himself, he would actually have suspected him of embarrassment.

"Er—Wetherell?"

"Yes?"

"W-won't say nothin' about the mortgage—p-pay it when you can."

This roused the storekeeper to a burst of protest, but he stemmed it.

"Hain't got the money, have you?"

"No—but—"

"If I needed money, d'ye suppose I'd bought the mortgage?"

"No," answered the still bewildered Wetherell, "of course not." There he stuck, that other suspicion of political coercion suddenly rising uppermost. Could this be what the man meant? Wetherell put his hand to his head, but he did not dare to ask the question. Then Jethro Bass fixed his eyes upon him.

"Hain't never mixed any in politics—hev you n-never mixed any?"

Wetherell's heart sank.

"No," he answered.

"D-don't—take my advice—d-don't."

"What!" cried the storekeeper, so loudly that he frightened himself.

"D-don't," repeated Jethro, imperturbably.

There was a short silence, the storekeeper being unable to speak. Coniston Water, at the foot of the garden, sang the same song, but it seemed to Wetherell to have changed its note from sorrow to joy.

"H-hear things, don't you—hear things in the store?"

"Yes."

"Don't hear 'em. Keep out of politics, Will, s-stick to store-keepin' and—and literature."

Jethro got to his feet and turned his back on the storekeeper and picked up the parcel he had brought.

"C-Cynthy well?" he inquired.

"I—I'll call her," said Wetherell, huskily. "She—she was down by the brook when you came."

But Jethro Bass did not wait. He took his parcel and strode down to Coniston Water, and there he found Cynthia seated on a rock with her toes in a pool.

"How be you, Cynthy?" said he, looking down at her.

"I'm well, Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia.

"R-remembered what I told you to call me, hev you," said Jethro, plainly pleased. "Th-that's right. Cynthy?"

Cynthia looked up at him inquiringly.

"S-said you liked books—didn't you? S-said you liked books?"

"Yes, I do," she replied simply, "very much."

He undid the wrapping of the parcel, and there lay disclosed a book with a very gorgeous cover. He thrust it into the child's lap.

"It's 'Robinson Crusoe!'" she exclaimed, and gave a little shiver of delight that made ripples in the pool. Then she opened it—not without awe, for William Wetherell's hooks were not clothed in this magnificent manner. "It's full of pictures," cried Cynthia. "See, there he is making a ship!"

"Y-you read it, Cynthy?" asked Jethro, a little anxiously.

No, Cynthia hadn't.

"L-like it, Cynthy—I-like it?" said he, not quite so anxiously.

Cynthia looked up at him with a puzzled expression.

"F-fetched it up from the capital for you, Cynthy—for you."

"For me!"

A strange thrill ran through Jethro Bass as he gazed upon the wonder and delight in the face of the child.

"F-fetched it for you, Cynthy."

For a moment Cynthia sat very still, and then she slowly closed the book and stared at the cover again, Jethro looking down at her the while. To tell the truth, she found it difficult to express the emotions which the event had summoned up.

"Thank you—Uncle Jethro," she said.

Jethro, however, understood. He had, indeed, never failed to understand her from the beginning. He parted his coat tails and sat down on the rock beside her, and very gently opened the book again, to the first chapter.

"G-goin' to read it, Cynthy?"

"Oh, yes," she said, and trembled again.

"Er—read it to me?"

So Cynthia read "Robinson Crusoe" to him while the summer afternoon wore away, and the shadows across the pool grew longer and longer.

## CHAPTER XI

Thus William Wetherell became established in Coniston, and was started at last—poor man—upon a life that was fairly tranquil. Lem Hallowell had once covered him with blushes by unfolding a newspaper in the store and reading an editorial beginning: "We publish today a new and attractive feature of the Guardian, a weekly contribution from a correspondent whose modesty is to be compared only with his genius as a writer. We are confident that the readers of our Raper will appreciate the letter in another column signed 'W. W.'" And from that day William was accorded much of the deference due to a litterateur which the fates had hitherto denied him. Indeed, during the six years which we are about to skip over so lightly, he became a marked man in Coniston, and it was voted in towns meeting that he be intrusted with that most important of literary labors, the Town History of Coniston.

During this period, too, there sprang up the strangest of intimacies between him and Jethro Bass. Surely no more dissimilar men than these have ever been friends, and that the friendship was sometimes misjudged was one of the clouds on William Wetherell's horizon. As the years went on he was still unable to pay off the mortgage; and sometimes, indeed, he could not even meet the interest, in spite of the princely sum he received from Mr. Willard of the Guardian. This was one of the clouds on Jethro's horizon, too, if men had but known it, and he took such moneys as Wetherell insisted upon giving him grudgingly enough. It is needless to say that he refrained from making use of Mr. Wetherell politically, although no poorer vessel for political purposes was ever constructed. It is quite as needless to say, perhaps, that Chester Perkins never got to be Chairman of the Board of Selectmen.

After Aunt Listy died, Jethro was more than ever to be found, when in Coniston, in the garden or the kitchen behind the store. Yes, Aunt Listy is dead. She has flitted through these pages as she flitted through life itself, arrayed by Jethro like the rainbow, and quite as shadowy and unreal. There is no politician of a certain age in the state who does not remember her walking, clad in dragon-fly colors, through the streets of the capital on Jethro's arm, or descending the stairs of the Pelican House to supper. None of Jethro's detractors may say that he ever failed in kindness to her, and he loved her as much as was in his heart to love any woman after Cynthia Ware. As for Aunt Listy, she never seemed to feel any resentment against the child Jethro brought so frequently to Thousand Acre Hill. Poor Aunt Listy! some people used to wonder whether she ever felt any emotion at all. But I believe that she did, in her own way.

It is a well-known fact that Mr. Bijah Bixby came over from Clovelly, to request the place of superintendent of the funeral, a position which had already been filled. A special office, too, was created on this occasion for an old supporter of Jethro's, Senator Peleg Hartington of Brampton. He was made chairman of the bearers, of whom Ephraim Prescott was one.

After this, as we have said, Jethro was more than ever at the store—or rather in that domestic domain behind it which Wetherell and Cynthia shared with Miss Millicent Skinner. Moses Hatch was wont to ask Cynthia how her daddies were. It was he who used to clear out the road to the little schoolhouse among the birches when the snow almost buried the little village, and on sparkling mornings after the storms his oxen would stop to breathe in front of the store, a cluster of laughing children clinging to the

snow-plough and tumbling over good-natured Moses in their frolics. Cynthia became a country girl, and grew long and lithe of limb, and weather-burnt, and acquired an endurance that spoke wonders for the life-giving air of Coniston. But she was a serious child, and Wetherell and Jethro sometimes wondered whether she was ever a child at all. When Eben Hatch fell from the lumber pile on the ice, it was she who bound the cut in his head; and when Tom Richardson unexpectedly embraced the schoolhouse stove, Cynthia, not Miss Rebecca Northcutt, took charge of the situation.

It was perhaps inevitable, with such a helpless father, that the girl should grow up with a sense of responsibility, being what she was. Did William Wetherell go to Brampton, Cynthia examined his apparel, and he was marched shamefacedly back to his room to change; did he read too late at night, some unseen messenger summoned her out of her sleep, and he was packed off to bed. Miss Millicent Skinner, too, was in a like mysterious way compelled to abdicate her high place in favor of Cynthia, and Wetherell was utterly unable to explain how this miracle was accomplished. Not only did Millicent learn to cook, but Cynthia, at the age of fourteen, had taught her. Some wit once suggested that the national arms of the United States should contain the emblem of crossed frying-pans, and Millicent was in this respect a true American. When Wetherell began to suffer from her pies and doughnuts, the revolution took place—without stampeding, or recriminations, or trouble of any kind. One evening he discovered Cynthia, decked in an apron, bending over the stove, and Millicent looking on with an expression that was (for Millicent) benign.

This was to some extent explained, a few days later, when Wetherell found himself gazing across the counter at the motherly figure of Mrs. Moses Hatch, who held the well-deserved honor of being the best cook in Coniston.

"Hain't had so much stomach trouble lately, Will?" she remarked.

"No," he answered, surprised; "Cynthia is learning to cook."

"Guess she is," said Mrs. Moses. "That gal is worth any seven grown-up women in town. And she was four nights settin' in my kitchen before I knowed what she was up to."

"So you taught her, Amanda?"

"I taught her some. She callated that Milly was killin' you, and I guess she was."

During her school days, Jethro used frequently to find himself in front of the schoolhouse when the children came trooping out—quite by accident, of course. Winter or summer, when he went away on his periodical trips, he never came back without a little remembrance in his carpet bag, usually a book, on the subject of which he had spent hours in conference with the librarian at the state library at the capital. But in June of the year when Cynthia was fifteen, Jethro yielded to that passion which was one of the man's strangest characteristics, and appeared one evening in the garden behind the store with a bundle which certainly did not contain a book. With all the gravity of a ceremony he took off the paper, and held up in relief against the astonished Cynthia a length of cardinal cloth. William Wetherell, who was looking out of the window, drew his breath, and even Jethro drew back with an exclamation at the change wrought in her. But Cynthia snatched the roll from his hand and wound it up with a feminine deftness.

"Wh-what's the matter, Cynthia?"

"Oh, I can't wear that, Uncle Jethro," she said.

"C-can't wear it! Why not?"

Cynthia sat down on the grassy mound under the apple tree and clasped her hands across her knees. She looked up at him and shook her head.

"Don't you see that I couldn't wear it, Uncle Jethro?"

"Why not?" he demanded. "Ch-change it if you've a mind to hev green."

She shook her head, and smiled at him a little sadly.

"T-took me a full hour to choose that, Cynthia," said he. "H-had to go to Boston so I got it there."

He was, indeed, grievously disappointed at this reception of his gift, and he stood eying the cardinal cloth very mournfully as it lay on the paper. Cynthia, remorseful, reached up and seized his hand.

"Sit down here, Uncle Jethro." He sat down on the mound beside her, very much perplexed. She still held his hand in hers. "Uncle Jethro," she said slowly, "you mustn't think I'm not grateful."

"N-no," he answered; "I don't think that, Cynthia. I know you be."

"I am grateful—I'm very grateful for everything you give me, although I should love you just as much if you didn't give me anything."

She was striving very hard not to offend him, for in some ways he was as sensitive as Wetherell himself. Even Coniston folk had laughed at the idiosyncrasy which Jethro had of dressing his wife in brilliant colors, and the girl knew this.

"G-got it for you to wear to Brampton on the Fourth of July, Cynthia," he said.

"Uncle Jethro, I couldn't wear that to Brampton!"

"You'd look like a queen," said he.

"But I'm not a queen," objected Cynthia.

"Rather hev somethin' else?"

"Yes," she said, looking at him suddenly with the gleam of laughter in her eyes, although she was on the verge of tears.

"Wh-what?" Jethro demanded.

"Well," said Cynthia, demurely gazing down at her ankles, "shoes and stockings." The barefooted days had long gone by.

Jethro laughed. Perhaps some inkling of her reasons came to him, for he had a strange and intuitive understanding of her. At any rate, he accepted her decision with a meekness which would have astonished many people who knew only that side of him which he showed to the world. Gently she released her hand, and folded up the bundle again and gave it to him.

"B-better keep it—hadn't you?"

"No, you keep it. And I will wear it for you when I am rich, Uncle Jethro."

Jethro did keep it, and in due time the cardinal cloth had its uses. But Cynthia did not wear it on the Fourth of July.

That was a great day for Brampton, being not only the nation's birthday, but the hundredth year since the adventurous little band of settlers from Connecticut had first gazed upon Coniston Water at that place. Early in the morning wagon loads began to pour into Brampton Street from Harwich, from Coniston, from Tarleton Four Corners, and even from distant Clovelly, and Brampton was banner-hung for the occasion—flags across the stores, across the dwellings, and draped along the whole breadth of the meeting-house; but for sheer splendor the newly built mansion of Isaac D. Worthington outshone them all. Although its owner was a professed believer in republican simplicity, no such edifice ornamented any town to the west of the state capital. Small wonder that the way in front of it was blocked by a crowd lost in admiration of its Gothic proportions! It stands to-day one of many monuments to its builder, with its windows of one pane (unheard-of magnificence), its tower of stone, its porch with pointed arches and scroll-work. No fence divides its grounds from the public walk, and on the smooth-shaven lawn between the ornamental flower beds and the walk stand two stern mastiffs of iron, emblematic of the solidity and power of their owner. It was as much to see this house as to hear the oratory that the countryside flocked to Brampton that day.

All the day before Cynthia and Milly, and many another housewife, had been making wonderful things for the dinners they were to bring, and stowing them in the great basket ready for the early morning start. At six o'clock Jethro's three-seated farm wagon was in front of the store. Cousin Ephraim Prescott, in a blue suit and an army felt hat with a cord, got up behind, a little stiffly by reason of that Wilderness bullet; and there were also William Wetherell and Lem Hallowell, his honest face shining, and Sue, his wife, and young Sue and Jock and Lilian, all a-quiver with excitement in their Sunday best.

And as they drove away there trotted up behind them Moses and Amandy Hatch, with their farm team, and all the little Hatches,—Eben and George and Judy and Liza. As they jogged along they drank in the fragrance of the dew-washed meadows and the pines, and a great blue heron stood knee-deep on the far side of Deacon Lysander's old mill-pond, watching them philosophically as they passed.



It was eight o'clock when they got into the press of Brampton Street, and there was a hush as they made their way slowly through the throng, and many a stare at the curious figure in the old-fashioned blue swallowtail and brass buttons and tall hat, driving the farm wagon. Husbands pointed him out to their wives, young men to sisters and sweethearts, some openly, some discreetly. "There goes Jethro Bass," and some were bold enough to say, "Howdy, Jethro?" Jake Wheeler was to be observed in the crowd ahead of them, hurried for once out of his Jethro step, actually running toward the tavern, lest such a one arrive unheralded. Commotion is perceived on the tavern porch,—Mr. Sherman, the proprietor, bustling out, Jake Wheeler beside him; a chorus of "How be you, Jethros?" from the more courageous there,—but the farm team jogs on, leaving a discomfited gathering, into the side street, up an alley, and into the cool, ammonia-reeking sheds of lank Jim Sanborn's livery stable. No obsequiousness from lank Jim, who has the traces slipped and the reins festooned from the bits almost before Jethro has lifted Cynthia to the floor. Jethro, walking between Cynthia and her father, led the way, Ephraim, Lem, and Sue Hallowell following, the children, in unwonted shoes and stockings, bringing up the rear. The people parted, and presently they found themselves opposite the new-scrolled band stand among the trees, where the Harwich band in glittering gold and red had just been installed. The leader, catching sight of Jethro's party, and of Ephraim's corded army hat, made a bow, waved his baton, and they struck up "Marching through Georgia." It was, of course, not dignified to cheer, but I think that the blood of every man and woman and child ran faster with the music, and so many of them looked at Cousin Ephraim that he slipped away behind the line of wagons. So the day began.

"Jest to think of bein' that rich, Will!" exclaimed Amanda Hatch to the storekeeper, as they stood in the little group which had gathered in front of the first citizen's new mansion. "I own it scares me. Think how much that house must hev cost, and even them dogs," said Amanda, staring at the mastiffs with awe. "They tell me he has a grand piano from New York, and guests from Boston railroad presidents. I call Isaac Worthington to mind when he wahn't but a slip of a boy with a cough, runnin' after Cynthy Ware." She glanced down at Cynthia with something of compassion. "Just to think, child, he might have be'n your father!"

"I'm glad he isn't," said Cynthia, hotly.

"Of course, of course," replied the good-natured and well-intentioned Amanda, "I'd sooner have your father than Isaac Worthington. But I was only thinkin' how nice it would be to be rich."

Just then one of the glass-panelled doors of this house opened, and a good-looking lad of seventeen came out.

"That's Bob Worthington," said Amanda, determined that they should miss nothing. "My! it wahn't but the other day when he put on long pants. It won't be a great while before he'll go into the mills and git all that money. Guess he'll marry some city person. He'd ought to take you, Cynthy."

"I don't want him," said Cynthia, the color flaming into her cheeks. And she went off across the green in search of Jethro.

There was a laugh from the honest country folk who had listened. Bob Worthington came to the edge of the porch and stood there, frankly scanning the crowd, with an entire lack of self-consciousness. Some of them shifted nervously, with the New Englander's dislike of being caught in the act of sight-seeing.

"What in the world is he starin' at me for?" said Amanda, backing behind the bulkier form of her husband. "As I live, I believe he's comin' here."

Young Mr. Worthington was, indeed, descending the steps and walking across the lawn toward them, nodding and smiling to acquaintances as he passed. To Wetherell's astonishment he made directly for the place where he was standing and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Wetherell?" he said. "Perhaps you don't remember me,—Bob Worthington."

"I can't say that I should have known you," answered the storekeeper. They were all absurdly silent, thinking of nothing to say and admiring the boy because he was at ease.

"I hope you have a good seat at the exercises," he said, pressing Wetherell's hand again, and before he could thank him, Bob was off in the direction of the band stand.

"One thing," remarked Amanda, "he ain't much like his dad. You'd never catch Isaac Worthington bein' that common."

Just then there came another interruption for William Wetherell, who was startled by the sound of a voice in his ear—a nasal voice that awoke unpleasant recollections. He turned to confront, within the

distance of eight inches, the face of Mr. Bijah Bixby of Clovelly screwed up into a greeting. The storekeeper had met Mr. Bixby several times since that first memorable meeting, and on each occasion, as now, his hand had made an involuntary movement to his watch pocket.

"Hain't seed you for some time, Will," remarked Mr. Bixby; "goin' over to the exercises? We'll move along that way," and he thrust his hand under Mr. Wetherell's elbow. "Whar's Jethro?"

"He's here somewhere," answered the storekeeper, helplessly, moving along in spite of himself.

"Keepin' out of sight, you understand," said Bijah, with a knowing wink, as much as to say that Mr. Wetherell was by this time a past master in Jethro tactics. Mr. Bixby could never disabuse his mind of a certain interpretation which he put on the storekeeper's intimacy with Jethro. "You done well to git in with him, Will. Didn't think you had it in you when I first looked you over."

Mr. Wetherell wished to make an indignant denial, but he didn't know exactly how to begin.

"Smartest man in the United States of America—guess you know that," Mr. Bixby continued amiably. "They can't git at him unless he wants 'em to. There's a railroad president at Isaac Worthington's who'd like to git at him to-day,—guess you know that,—Steve Merrill."

Mr. Wetherell didn't know, but he was given no time to say so.

"Steve Merrill, of the Grand Gulf and Northern. He hain't here to see Worthington; he's here to see Jethro, when Jethro's a mind to. Guess you understand."

"I know nothing about it," answered Wetherell, shortly. Mr. Bixby gave him a look of infinite admiration, as though he could not have pursued any more admirable line.

"I know Steve Merrill better'n I know you," said Mr. Bixby, "and he knows me. Whenever he sees me at the state capital he says, 'How be you, Bije?' just as natural as if I was a railroad president, and slaps me on the back. When be you goin' to the capital, Will? You'd ought to come down and be thar with the boys on this Truro Bill. You could reach some on 'em the rest of us couldn't git at."

William Wetherell avoided a reply to this very pointed inquiry by escaping into the meeting-house, where he found Jethro and Cynthia and Ephraim already seated halfway up the aisle.

On the platform, behind a bank of flowers, are the velvet covered chairs which contain the dignitaries of the occasion. The chief of these is, of course, Mr. Isaac Worthington, the one with the hawk-like look, sitting next to the Rev. Mr. Sweet, who is rather pudgy by contrast. On the other side of Mr. Sweet, next to the parlor organ and the quartette, is the genial little railroad president Mr. Merrill, batting the flies which assail the unprotected crown of his head, and smiling benignly on the audience.

Suddenly his eye becomes fixed, and he waves a fat hand vigorously at Jethro, who answers the salute with a nod of unwonted cordiality for him. Then comes a hush, and the exercises begin.

There is a prayer, of course, by the Rev. Mr. Sweet, and a rendering of "My Country" and "I would not Change my Lot," and other choice selections by the quartette; and an original poem recited with much feeling by a lady admirer of Miss Lucretia Penniman, and the "Hymn to Coniston" declaimed by Mr. Gamaliel Ives, president of the Brampton Literary Club. But the crowning event is, of course, the oration by Mr. Isaac D. Worthington, the first citizen, who is introduced under that title by the chairman of the day; and as the benefactor of Brampton, who has bestowed upon the town the magnificent gift which was dedicated such a short time ago, the Worthington Free Library.

Mr. Isaac D. Worthington stood erect beside the table, his hand thrust into the opening of his coat, and spoke at the rate of one hundred and eight words a minute, for exactly one hour. He sketched with much skill the creed of the men who had fought their way through the forests to build their homes by Coniston Water, who had left their clearings to risk their lives behind Stark and Ethan Allen for that creed; he paid a graceful tribute to the veterans of the Civil War, scattered among his hearers—a tribute, by the way, which for some reason made Ephraim very indignant. Mr. Worthington went on to outline the duty of citizens of the present day, as he conceived it, and in this connection referred, with becoming modesty, to the Worthington Free Library. He had made his money in Brampton, and it was but right that he should spend it for the benefit of the people of Brampton. The library, continued Mr. Worthington when the applause was over, had been the dream of a certain delicate youth who had come, many years ago, to Brampton for his health. (It is a curious fact, by the way, that Mr. Worthington seldom recalled the delicate youth now, except upon public occasions.)

Yes, the dream of that youth had been to benefit in some way that community in which circumstances had decreed that he should live, and in this connection it might not be out of place to mention a bill then before the Legislature of the state, now in session. If the bill became a law, the greatest modern factor of prosperity, the railroad, would come to Brampton. The speaker was interrupted here by more applause. Mr. Worthington did not deem it dignified or necessary to state that the railroad to which he referred was the Truro Railroad; and that he, as the largest stockholder, might indirectly share that prosperity with Brampton. That would be wandering too far, from his subject, which, it will be recalled, was civic duties. He took a glass of water, and went on to declare that he feared—sadly feared—that the ballot was not held as sacred as it had once been. He asked the people of Brampton, and of the state, to stop and consider who in these days made the laws and granted the franchises. Whereupon he shook his head very slowly and sadly, as much as to imply that, if the Truro Bill did not pass, the corruption of the ballot was to blame. No, Mr. Worthington could think of no better subject on this Birthday of Independence than a recapitulation of the creed of our forefathers, from which we had so far wandered.

In short, the first citizen, as became him, had delivered the first reform speech ever heard in Brampton, and the sensation which it created was quite commensurate to the occasion. The presence in the audience of Jethro Bass, at whom many believed the remarks to have been aimed, added no little poignancy to that sensation, although Jethro gave no outward signs of the terror and remorse by which he must have been struck while listening to Mr. Worthington's ruminations of the corruption of the ballot. Apparently unconscious of the eyes upon him, he walked out of the meeting-house with Cynthia by his side, and they stood waiting for Wetherell and Ephraim under the maple tree there.

The be-ribboned members of the Independence Day committee were now on the steps, and behind them came Isaac Worthington and Mr. Merrill. The people, scenting a dramatic situation, lingered. Would the mill owner speak to the boss? The mill owner, with a glance at the boss, did nothing of the kind, but immediately began to talk rapidly to Mr. Merrill. That gentleman, however, would not be talked to, but came running over to Jethro and seized his hand, leaving Mr. Worthington to walk on by himself.

"Jethro," cried the little railroad president, "upon my word. Well, well. And Miss Jethro," he took off his hat to Cynthia, "well, well. Didn't know you had a girl, Jethro."

"W-wish she was mine, Steve," said Jethro. "She's a good deal to me as it is. Hain't you, Cynthia?"

"Yes," said Cynthia.

"Well, well," said Mr. Merrill, staring at her, "you'll have to look out for her some day—keep the boys away from her—eh? Upon my word! Well, Jethro," said he, with a twinkle in his eye, "are you goin' to reform? I'll bet you've got an annual over my road in your pocket right now."

"Enjoy the speech-makin', Steve?" inquired Mr. Bass, solemnly.

Mr. Merrill winked at Jethro, and laughed heartily.

"Keep the boys away from her, Jethro," he repeated, laying his hand on the shoulder of the lad who stood beside him. "It's a good thing Bob's going off to Harvard this fall. Seems to me I heard about some cutting up at Andover—eh, Bob?"

Bob grinned, showing a line of very white teeth.

Mr. Merrill took Jethro by the arm and led him off a little distance, having a message of some importance to give him, the purport of which will appear later. And Cynthia and Bob were left face to face. Of course Bob could have gone on, if he had wished it.

"Don't remember me, do you?" he said.

"I do now," said Cynthia, looking at him rather timidly through her lashes. Her face was hot, and she had been, very uncomfortable during Mr. Merrill's remarks. Furthermore, Bob had not taken his eyes off her.

"I remembered you right away," he said reproachfully; "I saw you in front of the house this morning, and you ran away."

"I didn't runaway," replied Cynthia, indignantly.

"It looked like it, to me," said Bob.. "I suppose you were afraid I was going to give you anther whistle."

Cynthia bit her lip, and then she laughed. Then she looked around to see where Jethro was, and discovered that they were alone in front of the meeting-house. Ephraim and her father had passed on while Mr. Merrill was talking.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob.

"I'm afraid they've gone," said Cynthia. "I ought to be going after them. They'll miss me."

"Oh, no, they won't," said Bob, easily, "let's sit down under the tree. They'll come back."

Whereupon he sat down under the maple. But Cynthia remained standing, ready to fly. She had an idea that it was wrong to stay—which made it all the more delightful.

"Sit down—Cynthia," said he.

She glanced down at him, startled. He was sitting, with his legs crossed, looking up at her intently.

"I like that name," he observed. "I like it better than any girl's name I know. Do be good-natured and sit down." And he patted the ground close beside him.

Shy laughed again. The laugh had in it an exquisite note of shyness, which he liked.

"Why do you want me to sit down?" she asked suddenly.

"Because I want to talk to you."

"Can't you talk to me standing up?"

"I suppose I could," said Bob, "but—I shouldn't be able to say such nice things to you."

The corners of her mouth trembled a little.

"And whose loss would that be?" she asked.

Bob Worthington was surprised at this retort, and correspondingly delighted. He had not expected it in a country storekeeper's daughter, and he stared at Cynthia so frankly that she blushed again, and turned away. He was a young man who, it may be surmised, had had some experience with the other sex at Andover and elsewhere. He had not spent all of his life in Brampton.

"I've often thought of you since that day when you wouldn't take the whistle," he declared. "What are you laughing at?"

"I'm laughing at you," said Cynthia, leaning against the tree, with her hands behind her.

"You've been laughing at me ever since you've stood there," he said, aggrieved that his declarations should not be taken more seriously.

"What have you thought about me?" she demanded. She was really beginning to enjoy this episode.

"Well—" he began, and hesitated—and broke down and laughed—Cynthia laughed with him.

"I can tell you what I didn't think," said Bob.

"What?" asked Cynthia, falling into the trap.

"I didn't think you'd be so—so good-looking," said he, quite boldly.

"And I didn't think you'd be so rude," responded Cynthia. But though she blushed again, she was not exactly displeased.

"What are you going to do this afternoon?" he asked. "Let's go for a walk."

"I'm going back to Coniston."

"Let's go for a walk now," said he, springing to his feet. "Come on."

Cynthia looked at him and shook her head smilingly.

"Here's Uncle Jethro—"

"Uncle Jethro!" exclaimed Bob, "is he your uncle?"

"Oh, no, not really. But he's just the same. He's very good to me."

"I wonder whether he'd mind if I called him Uncle Jethro, too," said Bob, and Cynthia laughed at the notion. This young man was certainly very comical, and very frank. "Good-by," he said; "I'll come to see you some day in Coniston."

## CHAPTER XII

That evening, after Cynthia had gone to bed, William Wetherell sat down at Jonah Winch's desk in the rear of the store to gaze at a blank sheet of paper until the Muses chose to send him subject matter for his weekly letter to the Guardian. The window was open, and the cool airs from the mountain spruces mingled with the odors of corn meal and kerosene and calico print. Jethro Bass, who had supped with the storekeeper, sat in the wooden armchair silent, with his head bent. Sometimes he would sit there by the hour while Wetherell wrote or read, and take his departure when he was so moved without saying good night. Presently Jethro lifted his chin, and dropped it again; there was a sound of wheels without, and, after an interval, a knock at the door.

William Wetherell dropped his pen with a start of surprise, as it was late for a visitor in Coniston. He glanced at Jethro, who did not move, and then he went to the door and shot back the great forged bolt of it, and stared out. On the edge of the porch stood a tallish man in a double-breasted frock coat.

"Mr. Worthington!" exclaimed the storekeeper.

Mr. Worthington coughed and pulled at one of his mutton-chop whiskers, and seemed about to step off the porch again. It was, indeed, the first citizen and reformer of Brampton. No wonder William Wetherell was mystified.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked. "Have you missed your way?"

Wetherell thought he heard him muttering, "No, no," and then he was startled by another voice in his ear. It was Jethro who was standing beside him.

"G-guess he hain't missed his way a great deal. Er—come in—come in."

Mr. Worthington took a couple of steps forward.

"I understood that you were to be alone," he remarked, addressing Jethro with an attempted severity of manner.

"Didn't say so—d-didn't say so, did I?" answered Jethro.

"Very well," said Mr. Worthington, "any other time will do for this little matter."

"Er—good night," said Jethro, shortly, and there was the suspicion of a gleam in his eye as Mr. Worthington turned away. The mill-owner, in fact, did not get any farther than the edge of the porch before he wheeled again.

"The affair which I have to discuss with you is of a private nature, Mr. Bass," he said.

"So I callated," said Jethro.

"You may have the place to yourselves, gentlemen," Wetherell put in uneasily, and then Mr. Worthington came as far as the door, where he stood looking at the storekeeper with scant friendliness. Jethro turned to Wetherell.

"You a politician, Will?" he demanded.

"No," said Wetherell.

"You a business man?"

"No," he said again.

"You ever tell folks what you hear other people say?"

"Certainly not," the storekeeper answered; "I'm not interested in other people's business."

"Exactly," said Jethro. "Guess you'd better stay."

"But I don't care to stay," Wetherell objected.

"Stay to oblige me—stay to oblige me?" he asked.

"Well, yes, if you put it that way," Wetherell said, beginning to get some amusement out of the situation.

He did not know what Jethro's object was in this matter; perhaps others may guess.

Mr. Worthington, who had stood by with ill-disguised impatience during this colloquy, now broke in.

"It is most unusual, Mr. Bass, to have a third person present at a conference in which he has no manner of concern. I think on the whole, since you have insisted upon my coming to you—"

"H-hain't insisted that I know of," said Jethro.

"Well," said Mr. Worthington, "never mind that.

"Perhaps it would be better for me to come to you some other time, when you are alone."

In the meantime Wetherell had shut the door, and they had gradually walked to the rear of the store. Jethro parted his coat tails, and sat down again in the armchair. Wetherell, not wishing to be intrusive, went to his desk again, leaving the first citizen standing among the barrels.

"W-what other time?" Jethro asked.

"Any other time," said Mr. Worthington.

"What other time?"

"To-morrow night?" suggested Mr. Worthington, striving to hide his annoyance.

"B-busy to-morrow night," said Jethro.

"You know that what I have to talk to you about is of the utmost importance," said Worthington. "Let us say Saturday night."

"B-busy Saturday night," said Jethro. "Meet you to-morrow."

"What time?"

"Noon," said Jethro, "noon."

"Where?" asked Mr. Worthington, dubiously.

"Band stand in Brampton Street," said Jethro, and the storekeeper was fain to bend over his desk to conceal his laughter, busying himself with his books. Mr. Worthington sat down with as much dignity as he could muster on one of Jonah's old chairs, and Jonah Winch's clock ticked and ticked, and Wetherell's pen scratched and scratched on his weekly letter to Mr. Willard, although he knew that he was writing the sheerest nonsense. As a matter of fact, he tore up the sheets the next morning without reading them. Mr. Worthington unbuttoned his coat, fumbled in his pocket, and pulled out two cigars, one of which he pushed toward Jethro, who shook his head. Mr. Worthington lighted his cigar and cleared his throat.

"Perhaps you have observed, Mr. Bass," he said, "that this is a rapidly growing section of the state—that the people hereabouts are every day demanding modern and efficient means of communication with the outside world."

"Struck you as a mill owner, has it?" said Jethro.

"I do not care to emphasize my private interests," answered Mr. Worthington, at last appearing to get into his stride again. "I wish to put the matter on broader grounds. Men like you and me ought not to be so much concerned with our own affairs as with those of the population amongst whom we live. And I think I am justified in putting it to you on these grounds."

"H-have to be justified, do you—have to be justified?" Jethro inquired.

"Er—why?"

This was a poser, and for a moment he stared at Jethro, blankly, until he decided how to take it. Then he crossed his legs and blew smoke toward the ceiling.

"It is certainly fairer to everybody to take the broadest view of a situation," he remarked; "I am trying to regard this from the aspect of a citizen, and I am quite sure that it will appeal to you in the same light. If the spirit which imbued the founders of this nation means anything, Mr. Bass, it means that the able men who are given a chance to rise by their own efforts must still retain the duties and responsibilities of the humblest citizens. That, I take it, is our position, Mr. Bass,—yours and mine."

Mr. Worthington had uncrossed his legs, and was now by the inspiration of his words impelled to an upright position. Suddenly he glanced at Jethro, and started for Jethro had sunk down on the small of his back, his chin on his chest, in an attitude of lassitude if not of oblivion. There was a silence perhaps a little disconcerting for Mr. Worthington, who chose the opportunity to relight his cigar.

"G-got through?" said Jethro, without moving, "g-got through?"

"Through?" echoed Mr. Worthington, "through what?"

"T-through Sunday-school," said Jethro.

Worthington dropped his match and stamped on it, and Wetherell began to wonder how much the man would stand. It suddenly came over the storekeeper that the predicament in which Mr. Worthington found himself whatever it was—must be a very desperate one. He half rose in his chair, sat down again, and lighted another match.

"Er—director in the Truro Road, hain't you, Mr. Worthington?" asked Jethro, without looking at him.

"Yes."

"Er—principal stockholder—ain't you?"

"Yes—but that is neither here nor there, sir."

"Road don't pay—r-road don't pay, does it?"

"It certainly does not."

"W-would pay if it went to Brampton and Harwich?"

"Mr. Bass, the company consider that they are pledged to the people of this section to get the road through. I am not prepared to say whether the road would pay, but it is quite likely that it would not."

"Ch-charitable organization?" said Jethro, from the depths of his chair.

"The pioneers in such matters take enormous risks for the benefit of the community, sir. We believe that we are entitled to a franchise, and in my opinion the General Court are behaving disgracefully in refusing us one. I will not say all I think about that affair, Mr. Bass. I am convinced that influences are at work—" He broke off with a catch in his throat.

"T-tried to get a franchise, did you?"

"I am not here to quibble with you, Mr. Bass. We tried to get it by every legitimate means, and failed, and you know it as well as I do."

"Er—Heth Sutton didn't sign his receipt—er—did he?"

The storekeeper, not being a politician, was not aware that the somewhat obscure reference of Jethro's to the Speaker of the House concerned an application which Mr. Worthington was supposed to have made to that gentleman, who had at length acknowledged his inability to oblige, and had advised Mr. Worthington to go to headquarters. And Mr. Stephen Merrill, who had come to Brampton out of the kindness of his heart, had only arranged this meeting in a conversation with Jethro that day, after the reform speech.

Mr. Worthington sprang to his feet, and flung out a hand toward Jethro.

"Prove your insinuations, air," he cried; "I defy you to prove your insinuations."

But Jethro still sat unmoved.

"H-Heth in the charitable organization, too?" he asked.

"People told me I was a fool to believe in honesty, but I thought better of the lawmakers of my state. I'll tell you plainly what they said to me, sir. They said, 'Go to Jethro Bass.'"

"Well, so you have, hain't you? So you have."

"Yes, I have. I've come to appeal to you in behalf of the people of your section to allow that franchise to go through the present Legislature."

"Er—come to appeal, have you—come to appeal?"

"Yes," said Mr. Worthington, sitting down again; "I have come to-night to appeal to you in the name of the farmers and merchants of this region—your neighbors,—to use your influence to get that franchise. I have come to you with the conviction that I shall not have appealed in vain."

"Er—appealed to Heth in the name of the farmers and merchants?"

"Mr. Sutton is Speaker of the House."

"F-farmers and merchants elected him," remarked Jethro, as though stating a fact.

Worthington coughed.

"It is probable that I made a mistake in going to Sutton," he admitted.

"If I w-wanted to catch a pike, w-wouldn't use a pin-hook."

"I might have known," remarked Worthington, after a pause, "that Sutton could not have been elected Speaker without your influence."

Jethro did not answer that, but still remained sunk in his chair. To all appearances he might have been asleep.

"W-worth somethin' to the farmers and merchants to get that road through—w-worth somethin', ain't it?"

Wetherell held his breath. For a moment Mr. Worthington sat very still, his face drawn, and then he wet his lips and rose slowly.

"We may as well end this conversation, Mr. Bass," he said, and though he tried to speak firmly his voice shook, "it seems to be useless. Good night."

He picked up his hat and walked slowly toward the door, but Jethro did not move or speak. Mr. Worthington reached the door opened it, and the night breeze started the lamp to smoking. Wetherell got up and turned it down, and the first citizen was still standing in the doorway. His back was toward them, but the fingers of his left hand—working convulsively caught Wetherell's eye and held it; save for the ticking of the clock and the chirping of the crickets in the grass, there was silence. Then Mr. Worthington closed the door softly, hesitated, turned, and came back and stood before Jethro.

"Mr. Bass," he said, "we've got to have that franchise."

William Wetherell glanced at the countryman who, without moving in his chair, without raising his voice, had brought the first citizen of Brampton to his knees. The thing frightened the storekeeper, revolted him, and yet its drama held him fascinated. By some subtle process which he had actually beheld, but could not fathom, this cold Mr. Worthington, this bank president who had given him sage advice, this preacher of political purity, had been reduced to a frenzied supplicant. He stood bending over Jethro.

"What's your price? Name it, for God's sake."

"B-better wait till you get the bill—hadn't you? b-better wait till you get the bill."

"Will you put the franchise through?"

"Goin' down to the capital soon?" Jethro inquired.

"I'm going down on Thursday."

"B-better come in and see me," said Jethro.



"Very well," answered Mr. Worthington; "I'll be in at two o'clock on Thursday." And then, without another word to either of them, he swung on his heel and strode quickly out of the store. Jethro did not move.

William Wetherell's hand was trembling so that he could not write, and he could not trust his voice to speak. Although Jethro had never mentioned Isaac Worthington's name to him, Wetherell knew that Jethro hated the first citizen of Brampton.

At length, when the sound of the wheels had died away, Jethro broke the silence.

"Er—didn't laugh—did he, Will? Didn't laugh once—did he?"

"Laugh!" echoed the storekeeper, who himself had never been further from laughter in his life.

"M-might have let him off easier if he'd laughed," said Jethro, "if he'd laughed just once, m-might have let him off easier."

And with this remark he went out of the store and left Wetherell alone.

## CHAPTER XIII

The weekly letter to the Newcastle Guardian was not finished that night, but Coniston slept, peacefully, unaware of Mr. Worthington's visit; and never, indeed, discovered it, since the historian for various reasons of his own did not see fit to insert the event in his plan of the Town History. Before another sun had set Jethro Bass had departed for the state capital, not choosing to remain to superintend the haying of the many farms which had fallen into his hand,—a most unusual omission for him.

Presently rumors of a mighty issue about the Truro Railroad began to be discussed by the politicians at the Coniston store, and Jake Wheeler held himself in instant readiness to answer a summons to the capital—which never came.

Delegations from Brampton and Harwich went to petition the Legislature for the franchise, and the Brampton Clarion and Harwich Sentinel declared that the people of Truro County recognized in Isaac Worthington a great and public-spirited man, who ought by all means to be the next governor—if the franchise went through.

One evening Lem Hallowell, after depositing a box of trimmings at Ephraim Prescott's harness shop, drove up to the platform of the store with the remark that "things were gittin' pretty hot down to the capital in that franchise fight."

"Hain't you b'en sent for yet, Jake?" he cried, throwing his reins over the backs of his sweating Morgans; "well, that's strange. Guess the fight hain't as hot as we hear about. Jethro hain't had to call out his best men."

"I'm a-goin' down if there's trouble," declared Jake, who consistently ignored banter.

"Better git up and git," said Lem; "there's three out of the five railroads against Truro, and Steve Merrill layin' low. Bije Bixby's down there, and Heth Sutton, and Abner Parkinson, and all the big bugs. Better get aboard, Jake."

At this moment the discussion was interrupted by the sight of Cynthia Wetherell coming across the green with an open letter in her hand.

"It's a message from Uncle Jethro," she said.

The announcement was sufficient to warrant the sensation it produced on all sides.

"'Tain't a letter from Jethro, is it?" exclaimed Sam Price, overcome by a pardonable curiosity. For it was well known that one of Jethro's fixed principles in life was embodied in his own motto, "Don't write—send."

"It's very funny," answered Cynthia, looking down at the paper with a puzzled expression. "'Dear Cynthia: Judge Bass wished me to say to you that he would be pleased if you and Will would come to the capital and spend a week with him at the Pelican House, and see the sights. The judge says Rias

Richardson will tend store. Yours truly, P. Hartington.' That's all," said Cynthia, looking up.

For a moment you could have heard a pine needle drop on the stoop. Then Rias thrust his hands in his pockets and voiced the general sentiment.

"Well, I'll be—goldurned!" said he.

"Didn't say nothin' about Jake?" queried Lem.

"No," answered Cynthia, "that's all—except two pieces of cardboard with something about the Truro Railroad and our names. I don't know what they are." And she took them from the envelope.

"Guess I could tell you if I was pressed," said Lem, amid a shout of merriment from the group.

"Air you goin', Will?" said Sam Price, pausing with his foot on the step of his buggy, that he might have the complete news before he left.

"Godfrey, Will," exclaimed Rigs, breathlessly, "you hain't a-goin' to throw up a chance to stay a hull week at the Pelican, be you?" The mere possibility of refusal overpowered Rias.

Those who are familiar with that delightful French song which treats of the leave-taking of one Monsieur Dumollet will appreciate, perhaps, the attentions which were showered upon William Wetherell and Cynthia upon their departure for the capital next morning. Although Mr. Wetherell had at one time been actually a resident of Boston, he received quite as many cautions from his neighbors as Monsieur Dumollet. Billets doux and pistols were, of course, not mentioned, but it certainly behooved him, when he should have arrived at that place of intrigues, to be on the lookout for cabals.

They took the stage-coach from Brampton over the pass: picturesque stage-coach with its apple-green body and leather springs, soon to be laid away forever if the coveted Truro Franchise Bill becomes a law; stage-coach which pulls up defiantly beside its own rival at Truro station, where our passengers take the train down the pleasant waterways and past the little white villages among the fruit trees to the capital. The thrill of anticipation was in Cynthia's blood, and the flush of pleasure on her cheeks, when they stopped at last under the sheds. The conductor snapped his fingers and cried, "This way, Judge," and there was Jethro in his swallow-tailed coat and stove-pipe hat awaiting them. He seized Wetherell's carpet-bag with one hand and Cynthia's arm with the other, and shouldered his way through the people, who parted when they saw who it was.

"Uncle Jethro," cried Cynthia, breathlessly, "I didn't know you were a judge. What are you judge of?"

"J-judge of clothes, Cynthy. D-don't you wish you had the red cloth to wear here?"

"No, I don't," said Cynthia. "I'm glad enough to be here without it."

"G-glad to hev you in any fixin's, Cynthy," he said, giving her arm a little squeeze, and by that time they were up the hill and William Wetherell quite winded. For Jethro was strong as an ox, and Cynthia's muscles were like an Indian's.

They were among the glories of Main Street now. The capital was then, and still remains, a typically beautiful New England city, with wide streets shaded by shapely maples and elms, with substantial homes set back amidst lawns and gardens. Here on Main Street were neat brick business buildings and banks and shops, with the park-like grounds of the Capitol farther on, and everywhere, from curb to doorway, were knots of men talking politics; broad-faced, sunburned farmers in store clothes, with beards that hid their shirt fronts; keen-featured, sallow, country lawyers in long black coats crumpled from much sitting on the small of the back; country storekeepers with shrewd eyes, and local proprietors and manufacturers.

"Uncle Jethro, I didn't know you were such a great man," she said.

"H-how did ye find out, Cynthy?"

"The way people treat you here. I knew you were great, of course," she hastened to add.

"H-how do they treat me?" he asked, looking down at her.

"You know," she answered. "They all stop talking when you come along and stare at you. But why don't you speak to them?"

Jethro smiled and squeezed her arm again, and then they were in the corridor of the famous Pelican Hotel, hazy with cigar smoke and filled with politicians. Some were standing, hanging on to pillars, gesticulating, some were ranged in benches along the wall, and a chosen few were in chairs grouped

around the spittoons. Upon the appearance of Jethro's party, the talk was hushed, the groups gave way, and they accomplished a kind of triumphal march to the desk. The clerk, desecrating them, desisted abruptly from a conversation across the cigar counter, and with all the form of a ceremony dipped the pen with a flourish into the ink and handed it to Jethro.

"Your rooms are ready, Judge," he said.

As they started for the stairs, Jethro and Cynthia leading the way, Wetherell felt a touch on his elbow and turned to confront Mr. Bijah Bixby—at very close range, as usual.

"C-come down at last, Will?" he said. "Thought ye would. Need everybody this time—you understand."

"I came on pleasure," retorted Mr. Wetherell, somewhat angrily.

Mr. Bixby appeared hugely to enjoy the joke.

"So I callated," he cried, still holding Wetherell's hand in a mild, but persuasive grip. "So I callated. Guess I done you an injustice, Will."

"How's that?"

"You're a leetle mite smarter than I thought you was. So long. Got a leetle business now—you understand a leetle business."

Was it possible, indeed, for the simple-minded to come to the capital and not become involved in cabals? With some misgivings William Wetherell watched Mr. Bixby disappear among the throng, kicking up his heels behind, and then went upstairs. On the first floor Cynthia was standing by an open door.

"Dad," she cried, "come and see the rooms Uncle Jethro's got for us!" She took Wetherell's hand and led him in. "See the lace curtains, and the chandelier, and the big bureau with the marble top."

Jethro had parted his coat tails and seated himself enjoyably on the bed.

"D-don't come often," he said, "m-might as well have the best."

"Jethro," said Wetherell, coughing nervously and fumbling in the pocket of his coat, "you've been very kind to us, and we hardly know how to thank you. I—I didn't have any use for these."

He held out the pieces of cardboard which had come in Cynthia's letter. He dared not look at Jethro, and his eye was fixed instead upon the somewhat grandiose signature of Isaac D. Worthington, which they bore. Jethro took them and tore them up, and slowly tossed the pieces into a cuspidor conveniently situated near the foot of the bed. He rose and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"Er—when you get freshened up, come into Number 7," he said.

Number 7! But we shall come to that later. Supper first, in a great pillared dining room filled with notables, if we only had the key. Jethro sits silent at the head of the table eating his crackers and milk, with Cynthia on his left and William Wetherell on his right. Poor William, greatly embarrassed by his sudden projection into the limelight, is helpless in the clutches of a lady-waitress who is demanding somewhat fiercely that he make an immediate choice from a list of dishes which she is shooting at him with astonishing rapidity. But who is this, sitting beside him, who comes to William's rescue, and demands that the lady repeat the bill of fare? Surely a notable, for he has a generous presence, and jet-black whiskers which catch the light, which give the gentleman, as Mr. Bixby remarked, "quite a settin'." Yes, we have met him at last. It is none other than the Honorable Heth Sutton, Rajah of Clovelly, Speaker of the House, who has condescended to help Mr. Wetherell.

His chamberlain, Mr. Bijah Bixby, sits on the other side of the Honorable Heth, and performs the presentation of Mr. Wetherell. But Mr. Sutton, as becomes a man of high position, says little after he has rebuked the waitress, and presently departs with a carefully chosen toothpick; whereupon Mr. Bixby moves into the vacant seat—not to Mr. Wetherell's unqualified delight.

"I've knowed him ever sense we was boys," said Mr. Bixby; "you saw how intimate we was. When he wants a thing done, he says, 'Bije, you go out and get 'em.' Never counts the cost. He was nice to you—wahn't he, Will?" And then Mr. Bixby leaned over and whispered in Mr. Wetherell's ear; "He knows—you understand—he knows."

"Knows what?" demanded Mr. Wetherell.

Mr. Bixby gave him another admiring look.

"Knows you didn't come down here with Jethro jest to see the sights."

At this instant the talk in the dining room fell flat, and looking up William Wetherell perceived a portly, rubicund man of middle age being shown to his seat by the headwaiter. The gentleman wore a great, glittering diamond in his shirt, and a watch chain that contained much fine gold. But the real cause of the silence was plainly in the young woman who walked beside him, and whose effective entrance argued no little practice and experience. She was of a type that catches the eye involuntarily and holds it,—tall, well-rounded, fresh-complexioned, with heavy coils of shimmering gold hair. Her pawn, which was far from unbecoming, was in keeping with those gifts with which nature had endowed her. She carried her head high, and bestowed swift and evidently fatal glances to right and left during her progress through the room. Mr. Bixby's voice roused the storekeeper from this contemplation of the beauty.

"That's Alvy Hopkins of Gosport and his daughter. Fine gal, hain't she? Ever sense she come down here t'other day she's stirred up more turmoil than any railroad bill I ever seed. She was most suffocated at the governor's ball with fellers tryin' to get dances—some of 'em old fellers, too. And you understand about Alvy?"

"What about him?"

"Alvy says he's a-goin' to be the next governor, or fail up." Mr. Bixby's voice sank to a whisper, and he spoke into Mr. Wetherell's ear. "Alvy says he has twenty-five thousand dollars to put in if necessary. I'll introduce you to him, Will," he added meaningly. "Guess you can help him some—you understand?"

"Mr. Bixby!" cried Mr. Wetherell, putting down his knife and fork.

"There!" said Mr. Bixby, reassuringly; "'twon't be no bother. I know him as well as I do you—call each other by our given names. Guess I was the first man he sent for last spring. He knows I go through all them river towns. He says, 'Bije, you get 'em.' I understood."

William Wetherell began to realize the futility of trying to convince Mr. Bixby of his innocence in political matters, and glanced at Jethro.

"You wouldn't think he was listenin', would you, Will?" Mr. Bixby remarked.

"Listening?"

"Ears are sharp as a dog's. Callate he kin hear as far as the governor's table, and he don't look as if he knows anything. One way he built up his power—listenin' when they're talkin' sly out there in the rotunda. They're almighty surprised when they l'arn he knows what they're up to. Guess you understand how to go along by quiet and listen when they're talkin' sly."

"I never did such a thing in my life," cried William Wetherell, indignantly aghast.

But Mr. Bixby winked.

"So long, Will," he said, "see you in Number 7."

Never, since the days of Pompadour and Du Barry, until modern American politics were invented, has a state been ruled from such a place as Number 7 in the Pelican House—familiarly known as the Throne Room. In this historic cabinet there were five chairs, a marble-topped table, a pitcher of iced water, a bureau, a box of cigars and a Bible, a chandelier with all the gas jets burning, and a bed, whereon sat such dignitaries as obtained an audience,—railroad presidents, governors and ex-governors and prospective governors, the Speaker, the President of the Senate, Bijah Bixby, Peleg Hartington, mighty chiefs from the North Country, and lieutenants from other parts of the state. These sat on the bed by preference. Jethro sat in a chair by the window, and never took any part in the discussions that raged, but listened. Generally there was some one seated beside him who talked persistently in his ear; as at present, for instance, Mr. Chauncey Weed, Chairman of the Committee on Corporations of the House, who took the additional precaution of putting his hand to his mouth when he spoke.

Mr. Stephen Merrill was in the Throne Room that evening, and confidentially explained to the bewildered William Wetherell the exact situation in the Truro Franchise fight. Inasmuch as it has become our duty to describe this celebrated conflict,—in a popular and engaging manner, if possible,—we shall have to do so through Mr. Wetherell's eyes, and on his responsibility. The biographies of some of the gentlemen concerned have since been published, and for some unaccountable reason contain no mention of the Truro franchise.

"All Gaul," said Mr. Merrill—he was speaking to a literary man—"all Gaul is divided into five railroads. I am one, the Grand Gulf and Northern, the impecunious one. That is the reason I'm so nice to everybody, Mr. Wetherell. The other day a conductor on my road had a shock of paralysis when a man paid his fare. Then there's Batch, president of the 'Down East' road, as we call it. Batch and I are out of this fight,—we don't care whether Isaac D. Worthington gets his franchise or not, or I wouldn't be telling you this. The two railroads which don't want him to get it, because the Truro would eventually become a competitor with them, are the Central and the Northwestern. Alexander Duncan is president of the Central."

"Alexander Duncan!" exclaimed Wetherell. "He's the richest man in the state, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Mr. Merrill, "and he lives in a big square house right here in the capital. He ain't a bad fellow, Duncan. You'd like him. He loves books. I wish you could see his library."

"I'm afraid there's not much chance of that," answered Wetherell.

"Well, as I say, there's Duncan, of the Central, and the other is Lovejoy, of the Northwestern. Lovejoy's a bachelor and a skinflint. Those two, Duncan and Lovejoy, are using every means in their power to prevent Worthington from getting that franchise. Have I made myself clear?"

"Do you think Mr. Worthington will get it?" asked Wetherell, who had in mind a certain nocturnal visit at his store.

Mr. Merrill almost leaped out of his chair at the question. Then he mopped his face, and winked very deliberately at the storekeeper. Then Mr. Merrill laughed.

"Well, well," he said, "for a man who comes down here to stay with Jethro Bass to ask me that!" Whereupon Mr. Wetherell flushed, and began to perspire himself. "Didn't you hear Isaac D. Worthington's virtuous appeal to the people at Brampton?" said Mr. Merrill.

"Yes," replied Wetherell, getting redder.

"I like you, Will," said Mr. Merrill, unexpectedly, "darned if I don't. I'll tell you what I know about it, and you can have a little fun while you're here, lookin' on, only it won't do to write about it to the Newcastle Guardian. Guess Willard wouldn't publish it, anyhow. I suppose you know that Jethro pulls the strings, and we little railroad presidents dance. We're the puppets now, but after a while, when I'm crowded out, all these little railroads will get together and there'll be a row worth looking at, or I'm mistaken. But to go back to Worthington," continued Mr. Merrill, "he made a little mistake with his bill in the beginning. Instead of going to Jethro, he went to Heth Sutton, and Heth got the bill as far as the Committee on Corporations, and there she's been ever since, with our friend Chauncey Weed, who's whispering over there."

"Mr. Sutton couldn't even get it out of the Committee!" exclaimed Wetherell.

"Not an inch. Jethro saw this thing coming about a year ago, and he took the precaution to have Chauncey Weed and the rest of the Committee in his pocket—and of course Heth Sutton's always been there."

William Wetherell thought of that imposing and manly personage, the Honorable Heth Sutton, being in Jethro's pocket, and marvelled. Mr. Chauncey Weed seemed of a species better able to thrive in the atmosphere of pockets.

"Well, as I say, there was the Truro Franchise Bill sound asleep in the Committee, and when Isaac D. Worthington saw that his little arrangement with Heth Sutton wasn't any good, and that the people of the state didn't have anything more to say about it than the Crow Indians, and that the end of the session was getting nearer and nearer, he got desperate and went to Jethro, I suppose. You know as well as I do that Jethro has agreed to put the bill through."

"Then why doesn't he get the Committee to report it and put it through?" asked Wetherell.

"Bless your simple literary nature," exclaimed Mr. Merrill, "Jethro's got more power than any man in the state, but that isn't saying that he doesn't have to fight occasionally. He has to fight now. He has seven of the twelve senators hitched, and the governor. But Duncan and Lovejoy have bought up all the loose blocks of representatives, and it is supposed that the franchise forces only control a quorum. The end of the session is a week off, and never in all my experience have I seen a more praiseworthy

attendance on the part of members."

"Do you mean that they are being paid to remain in their seats?" cried the amazed Mr. Wetherell.

"Well," answered Mr. Merrill, with a twinkle in his eye, "that is a little bald and—and unparliamentary, perhaps, but fairly accurate. Our friend Jethro is confronted with a problem to tax even his faculties, and to look at him, a man wouldn't suspect he had a care in the world."

Jethro was apparently quite as free from anxiety the next morning when he offered, after breakfast, to show Wetherell and Cynthia the sights of the town, though Wetherell could not but think that the Throne Room and the Truro Franchise Bill were left at a very crucial moment to take care of themselves. Jethro talked to Cynthia—or rather, Cynthia talked to Jethro upon innumerable subjects; they looked upon the statue of a great statesman in the park, and Cynthia read aloud the quotation graven on the rock of the pedestal, "The People's Government, made for the People, made by the People, and answerable to the People." After that they went into the state library, where Wetherell was introduced to the librarian, Mr. Storrow. They did not go into the State House because, as everybody knows, Jethro Bass never went there. Mr. Bijah Bixby and other lieutenants might be seen in the lobbies, and the governor might sign bills in his own apartment there, but the real seat of government was that Throne Room into which we have been permitted to enter.

They walked out beyond the outskirts of the town, where there was a grove or picnic ground which was also used as a park by some of the inhabitants. Jethro liked the spot, and was in the habit sometimes of taking refuge there when the atmosphere of the Pelican House became too thick. The three of them had sat down on one of the board benches to rest, when presently two people were seen at a little distance walking among the trees, and the sight of them, for some reason, seemed to give Jethro infinite pleasure.

"Why," exclaimed Cynthia, "one of them is that horrid girl everybody was looking at in the dining room last night."

"D-don't like her, Cynthy?" said Jethro.

"No," said Cynthia, "I don't."

"Pretty—hain't she—pretty?"

"She's brazen," declared Cynthia.

It was, indeed, Miss Cassandra Hopkins, daughter of that Honorable Alva who—according to Mr. Bixby was all ready with a certain sum of money to be the next governor. Miss Cassandra was arrayed fluffily in cool, pink lawn, and she carried a fringed parasol, and she was gazing upward with telling effect into the face of the gentleman by her side. This would have all been very romantic if the gentleman had been young and handsome, but he was certainly not a man to sweep a young girl off her feet. He was tall, angular, though broad-shouldered, with a long, scrawny neck that rose out of a very low collar, and a large head, scantily covered with hair—a head that gave a physical as well as a mental effect of hardness. His smooth-shaven face seemed to bear witness that its owner was one who had pushed frugality to the borders of a vice. It was not a pleasant face, but now it wore an almost benign expression under the influence of Miss Cassandra's eyes. So intent, apparently, were both of them upon each other that they did not notice the group on the bench at the other side of the grove. William Wetherell ventured to ask Jethro who the man was.

"N-name's Lovejoy," said Jethro.

"Lovejoy!" ejaculated the storekeeper, thinking of what Mr. Merrill had told him of the opponents of the Truro Franchise Bill. "President of the 'Northwestern' Railroad?"

Jethro gave his friend a shrewd look.

"G-gettin' posted—hain't you, Will?" he said.

"Is she going to marry that old man?" asked Cynthia.

Jethro smiled a little. "G-guess not," said he, "g-guess not, if the old man can help it. Nobody's married him yet, and hain't likely to."

Jethro was unusually silent on the way back to the hotel, but he did not seem to be worried or displeased. He only broke his silence once, in fact, when Cynthia called his attention to a large poster of some bloodhounds on a fence, announcing the fact in red letters that "Uncle Tom's Cabin" would be given by a certain travelling company at the Opera House the next evening.

"L-like to go, Cynthy?"

"Oh, Uncle Jethro, do you think we can go?"

"Never b'en to a show—hev you—never b'en to a show?"

"Never in my life," said Cynthia.

"We'll all go," said Jethro, and he repeated it once or twice as they came to Main Street, seemingly greatly tickled at the prospect. And there was the Truro Franchise Bill hanging over him, with only a week left of the session, and Lovejoy's and Duncan's men sitting so tight in their seats! William Wetherell could not understand it.

## CHAPTER XIV

Half an hour later, when Mr. Wetherell knocked timidly at Number 7,—drawn thither by an irresistible curiosity,—the door was opened by a portly person who wore a shining silk hat and ample gold watch chain. The gentleman had, in fact, just arrived; but he seemed perfectly at home as he laid down his hat on the marble-topped bureau, mopped his face, took a glass of iced water at a gulp, chose a cigar, and sank down gradually on the bed. Mr. Wetherell recognized him instantly as the father of the celebrated Cassandra.

"Well, Jethro," said the gentleman, "I've got to come into the Throne Room once a day anyhow, just to make sure you don't forget me—eh?"

"A-Alvy," said Jethro, "I want you to shake hands with a particular friend of mine, Mr. Will Wetherell of Coniston. Er—Will, the Honorable Alvy Hopkins of Gosport."

Mr. Hopkins rose from the bed as gradually as he had sunk down upon it, and seized Mr. Wetherell's hand impressively. His own was very moist.

"Heard you was in town, Mr. Wetherell," he said heartily. "If Jethro calls you a particular friend, it means something, I guess. It means something to me, anyhow."

"Will hain't a politician," said Jethro. "Er—Alvy?"

"Hello!" said Mr. Hopkins.

"Er—Will don't talk."

"If Jethro had been real tactful," said the Honorable Alvy, sinking down again, "he'd have introduced me as the next governor of the state. Everybody knows I want to be governor, everybody knows I've got twenty thousand dollars in the bank to pay for that privilege. Everybody knows I'm going to be governor if Jethro says so."

William Wetherell was a little taken aback at this ingenuous statement of the gentleman from Gosport. He looked out of the window through the foliage of the park, and his eye was caught by the monument there in front of the State House, and he thought of the inscription on the base of it, "The People's Government." The Honorable Alva had not mentioned the people—undoubtedly.

"Yes, Mr. Wetherell, twenty thousand dollars." He sighed. "Time was when a man could be governor for ten. Those were the good old days—eh, Jethro?"

"A-Alvy, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin's' comin' to town tomorrow—to-morrow."

"You don't tell me," said the Honorable Alva, acquiescing cheerfully in the change of subject. "We'll go. Pleased to have you, too, Mr. Wetherell."

"Alvy," said Jethro, again, "'Uncle Tom's Cabin' comes to town to-morrow."

Mr. Hopkins stopped fanning himself, and glanced at Jethro questioningly.

"A-Alvy, that give you an idea?" said Jethro, mildly.

Mr. Wetherell looked blank: it gave him no idea whatsoever, except of little Eva and the bloodhounds.

For a few moments the Honorable Alva appeared to be groping, too, and then his face began to crease into a smile of comprehension.

"By Godfrey, Jethro, but you are smart." he exclaimed, with involuntary tribute; "you mean buy up the theatre?"

"C-callate you'll find it's bought up."

"You mean pay for it?" said Mr. Hopkins.

"You've guessed it, Alvy, you've guessed it."

Mr. Hopkins gazed at him in admiration, leaned out of the perpendicular, and promptly drew from his trousers' pocket a roll of stupendous proportions. Wetting his thumb, he began to push aside the top bills.

"How much is it?" he demanded.

But Jethro put up his hand.

"No hurry, Alvy—n-no hurry. H-Honorable Alvy Hopkins of Gosport—p-patron of the theatre. Hain't the first time you've b'en a patron, Alvy."

"Jethro," said Mr. Hopkins, solemnly, putting up his money, "I'm much obliged to you. I'm free to say I'd never have thought of it. If you ain't the all-firedest smartest man in America to-day,—I don't except any, even General Grant,—then I ain't the next governor of this state."

Whereupon he lapsed into an even more expressive silence, his face still glowing.

"Er—Alvy," said Jethro presently, "what's the name of your gal?"

"Well," said Mr. Hopkins, "I guess you've got me. We did christen her Lily, but she didn't turn out exactly Lily. She ain't the type," said Mr. Hopkins, slowly, not without a note of regret, and lapsed into silence.

"W-what did you say her name was, Alvy?"

"I guess her name's Cassandra," said the Honorable Alva.

"C-Cassandry?"

"Well, you see," he explained a trifle apologetically, "she's kind of taken some matters in her own hands, my gal. Didn't like Lily, and it didn't seem to fit her anyway, so she called herself Cassandra. Read it in a book. It means, 'inspirer of love,' or some such poetry, but I don't deny that it goes with her better than Lily would."

"Sh-she's a good deal of a gal, Alvy—fine-appearin' gal, Alvy."

"Upon my word, Jethro, I didn't know you ever looked at a woman. But I suppose you couldn't help lookin' at my gal—she does seem to draw men's eyes as if she was magnetized some way." Mr. Hopkins did not speak as though this quality of his daughter gave him unmixed delight. "But she's a good-hearted gal, Cassy is, high-spirited, and I won't deny she's handsome and smart."

"She'll kind of grace my position when I'm governor. But to tell you the truth, Jethro, one old friend to another, durned if I don't wish she was married. It's a terrible thing for a father to say, I know, but I'd feel easier about her if she was married to some good man who could hold her. There's young Joe Turner in Gosport, he'd give his soul to have her, and he'd do. Cassy says she's after bigger game than Joe. She's young—that's her only excuse. Funny thing happened night before last," continued Mr. Hopkins, laughing. "Lovejoy saw her, and he's b'en out of his head ever since. Al must be pretty near my age, ain't he? Well, there's no fool like an old fool."

"A-Alvy introduce me to Cassandry sometime will you?"

"Why, certainly," answered Mr. Hopkins, heartily, "I'll bring her in here. And now how about gettin' an adjournment to-morrow night for 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'? These night sessions kind of interfere."

Half an hour later, when the representatives were pouring into the rotunda for dinner, a crowd was pressing thickly around the desk to read a placard pinned on the wall above it. The placard announced the coming of Mr. Glover's Company for the following night, and that the Honorable Alva Hopkins of Gosport, ex-Speaker of the House, had bought three hundred and twelve seats for the benefit of the



members. And the Honorable Alva himself, very red in the face and almost smothered, could be dimly discerned at the foot of the stairs trying to fight his way out of a group of overenthusiastic friends and admirers. Alva—so it was said on all sides—was doing the right thing.

So it was that one sensation followed another at the capital, and the politicians for the moment stopped buzzing over the Truro Franchise Bill to discuss Mr. Hopkins and his master-stroke. The afternoon Chronicle waxed enthusiastic on the subject of Mr. Hopkins's generosity, and predicted that, when Senator Hartington made the motion in the upper house and Mr. Jameson in the lower, the General Court would unanimously agree that there would be no evening session on the following day. The Honorable Alva was the hero of the hour.

That afternoon Cynthia and her father walked through the green park to make their first visit to the State House. They stood hand in hand on the cool, marble-paved floor of the corridor, gazing silently at the stained and battered battle-flags behind the glass, and Wetherell seemed to be listening again to the appeal of a great President to a great Country in the time of her dire need—the soul calling on the body to fight for itself. Wetherell seemed to feel again the thrill he felt when he saw the blue-clad men of this state crowded in the train at Boston: and to hear again the cheers, and the sobs, and the prayers as he looked upon the blood that stained stars and stripes alike with a holy stain. With that blood the country had been consecrated, and the state—yes, and the building where they stood. So they went on up the stairs, reverently, nor heeded the noise of those in groups about them, and through a door into the great hall of the representatives of the state.

Life is a mixture of emotions, a jumble of joy and sorrow and reverence and mirth and flippancy, of right feeling and heresy. In the morning William Wetherell had laughed at Mr. Hopkins and the twenty thousand dollars he had put in the bank to defraud the people; but now he could have wept over it, and as he looked down upon the three hundred members of that House, he wondered how many of them represented their neighbors who supposedly had sent them here—and how many Mr. Lovejoy's railroad, Mr. Worthington's railroad, or another man's railroad.

But gradually he forgot the battle-flags, and his mood changed. Perhaps the sight of Mr. Speaker Sutton towering above the House, the very essence and bulk of authority, brought this about. He aroused in Wetherell unwilling admiration and envy when he arose to put a question in his deep voice, or rapped sternly with his gavel to silence the tumult of voices that arose from time to time; or while some member was speaking, or the clerk was reading a bill at breathless speed, he turned with wonderful nonchalance to listen to the conversation of the gentlemen on the bench beside him, smiled, nodded, pulled his whiskers, at once conscious and unconscious of his high position. And, most remarkable of all to the storekeeper, not a man of the three hundred, however obscure, could rise that the Speaker did not instantly call him by name.

William Wetherell was occupied by such reflections as these when suddenly there fell a hush through the House. The clerk had stopped reading, the Speaker had stopped conversing, and, seizing his gavel, looked expectantly over the heads of the members and nodded. A sleek, comfortably dressed man arose smilingly in the middle of the House, and subdued laughter rippled from seat to seat as he addressed the chair.

"Mr. Jameson of Wantage."

Mr. Jameson cleared his throat impressively and looked smilingly about him.

"Mr. Speaker and gentlemen of the House," he said, "if I desired to arouse the enthusiasm—the just enthusiasm—of any gathering in this House, or in this city, or in this state, I should mention the name of the Honorable Alva Hopkins of Gosport. I think I am right."

Mr. Jameson was interrupted, as he no doubt expected, by applause from floor and gallery. He stood rubbing his hands together, and it seemed to William Wetherell that the Speaker did not rap as sharply with his gavel as he had upon other occasions.

"Gentlemen of the House," continued Mr. Jameson, presently, "the Honorable Alva Hopkins, whom we all know and love, has with unparalleled generosity—unparalleled, I say—bought up three hundred and twelve seats in Fosters Opera House for to-morrow night" (renewed applause), "in order that every member of this august body may have the opportunity to witness that most classic of histrionic productions, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'." (Loud applause, causing the Speaker to rap sharply.) "That we may show a proper appreciation of this compliment—I move you, Mr. Speaker, that the House adjourn not later than six o'clock to-morrow, Wednesday evening, not to meet again until Thursday morning."

Mr. Jameson of Wantage handed the resolution to a page and sat down amidst renewed applause. Mr. Wetherell noticed that many members turned in their seats as they clapped, and glancing along the

gallery he caught a flash of red and perceived the radiant Miss Cassandra herself leaning over the rail, her hands clasped in ecstasy. Mr. Lovejoy was not with her—he evidently preferred to pay his attentions in private.

"There she is again," whispered Cynthia, who had taken an instinctive and extraordinary dislike to Miss Cassandra. Then Mr. Sutton rose majestically to put the question.

"Gentlemen, are you ready for the question?" he cried. "All those in favor of the resolution of the gentleman from Wantage, Mr. Jameson—" the Speaker stopped abruptly. The legislators in the front seats swung around, and people in the gallery craned forward to see a member standing at his seat in the extreme rear of the hall. He was a little man in an ill-fitting coat, his wizened face clean-shaven save for the broom-shaped beard under his chin, which he now held in his hand. His thin, nasal voice was somehow absurdly penetrating as he addressed the chair. Mr. Sutton was apparently, for once, taken by surprise, and stared a moment, as though racking his brain for the name.

"The gentleman from Suffolk, Mr. Heath," he said, and smiling a little, sat down.

The gentleman from Suffolk, still holding on to his beard, pitched in without preamble.

"We farmers on the back seats don't often get a chance to be heard, Mr. Speaker," said he, amidst a general tittering from the front seats. "We come down here without any l'arnin' of parli'ment'ry law, and before we know what's happened the session's over, and we hain't said nothin'." (More laughter.) "There's b'en a good many times when I wanted to say somethin', and this time I made up my mind I was a-goin' to—law or no law."

(Applause, and a general show of interest in the gentleman from Suffolk.) "Naow, Mr. Speaker, I hain't ag'in' 'Uncle Tom's Cabin.' It's a good play, and it's done an almighty lot of good. And I hain't sayin' nothin' ag'in' Alvy Hopkins nor his munificence. But I do know there's a sight of little bills on that desk that won't be passed if we don't set to-morrow night—little bills that are big bills for us farmers. That thar woodchuck bill, for one." (Laughter.) "My constituents want I should have that bill passed. We don't need a quorum for them bills, but we need time. Naow, Mr. Speaker, I say let all them that wants to go and see 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' go and see it, but let a few of us fellers that has woodchuck bills and other things that we've got to get through come down here and pass 'em. You kin put 'em on the docket, and I guess if anything comes along that hain't jest right for everybody, somebody can challenge a quorum and bust up the session. That's all."

The gentleman from Suffolk sat down amidst thunderous applause, and before it died away Mr. Jameson was on his feet, smiling and rubbing his hands together, and was recognized.

"Mr. Speaker," he said, as soon as he could be heard, "if the gentleman from Suffolk desires to pass woodchuck bills" (renewed laughter), "he can do so as far as I'm concerned. I guess I know where most of the members of this House will be to-morrow night—" (Cries of 'You're right', and sharp rapping of the gavel.) "Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my resolution."

"The gentleman from Wantage," said the Speaker, smiling broadly now, "withdraws his resolution."

As William Wetherell was returning to the Pelican House, pondering over this incident, he almost ran into a distinguished-looking man walking briskly across Main Street.

"It was Mr. Worthington!" said Cynthia, looking after him.

But Mr. Worthington had a worried look on his face, and was probably too much engrossed in his own thoughts to notice his acquaintances. He had, in fact, just come from the Throne Room, where he had been to remind Jethro that the session was almost over, and to ask him what he meant to do about the Truro Bill. Jethro had given him no satisfaction.

"Duncan and Lovejoy have their people paid to sit there night and day," Mr. Worthington had said. "We've got a bare majority on a full House; but you don't seem to dare to risk it. What are you going to do about it, Mr. Bass?"

"W-want the bill to pass—don't you?"

"Certainly," Mr. Worthington had cried, on the edge of losing his temper.

"L-left it to me—didn't you?"

"Yes, but I'm entitled to know what's being done. I'm paying for it."

"H-hain't paid for it yet—hev you?"

"No, I most assuredly haven't."

"B-better wait till you do."

There was very little satisfaction in this, and Mr. Worthington had at length been compelled to depart, fuming, to the house of his friend the enemy, Mr. Duncan, there to attempt for the twentieth time to persuade Mr. Duncan to call off his dogs who were sitting with such praiseworthy pertinacity in their seats. As the two friends walked on the lawn, Mr. Worthington tried to explain, likewise for the twentieth time, that the extension of the Truro Railroad could in no way lessen the Canadian traffic of the Central, Mr. Duncan's road. But Mr. Duncan could not see it that way, and stuck to his present ally, Mr. Lovejoy, and refused point-blank to call off his dogs. Business was business.

It is an apparently inexplicable fact, however, that Mr. Worthington and his son Bob were guests at the Duncan mansion at the capital. Two countries may not be allies, but their sovereigns may be friends. In the present instance, Mr. Duncan and Mr. Worthington's railroads were opposed, diplomatically, but another year might see the Truro Railroad and the Central acting as one. And Mr. Worthington had no intention whatever of sacrificing Mr. Duncan's friendship. The first citizen of Brampton possessed one quality so essential to greatness—that of looking into the future, and he believed that the time would come when an event of some importance might create a perpetual alliance between himself and Mr. Duncan. In short, Mr. Duncan had a daughter, Janet, and Mr. Worthington, as we know, had a son. And Mr. Duncan, in addition to his own fortune, had married one of the richest heiresses in New England. *Prudens futuri*, that was Mr. Worthington's motto.

The next morning Cynthia, who was walking about the town alone, found herself gazing over a picket fence at a great square house with a very wide cornice that stood by itself in the centre of a shade-flecked lawn. There were masses of shrubbery here and there, and a greenhouse, and a latticed summer-house: and Cynthia was wondering what it would be like to live in a great place like that, when a barouche with two shining horses in silver harness drove past her and stopped before the gate. Four or five girls and boys came laughing out on the porch, and one of them, who held a fishing-rod in his hand, Cynthia recognized. Startled and ashamed, she began to walk on as fast as she could in the opposite direction, when she heard the sound of footsteps on the lawn behind her, and her own name called in a familiar voice. At that she hurried the faster; but she could not run, and the picket fence was half a block long, and Bob Worthington had an advantage over her. Of course it was Bob, and he did not scruple to run, and in a few seconds he was leaning over the fence in front of her. Now Cynthia was as red as a peony by this time, and she almost hated him.

"Well, of all people, Cynthia Wetherell!" he cried; "didn't you hear me calling after you?"

"Yes," said Cynthia.

"Why didn't you stop?"

"I didn't want to," said Cynthia, glancing at the distant group on the porch, who were watching them. Suddenly she turned to him defiantly. "I didn't know you were in that house, or in the capital," she said.

"And I didn't know you were," said Bob, upon whose masculine intelligence the meaning of her words was entirely lost. "If I had known it, you can bet I would have looked you up. Where are you staying?"

"At the Pelican House."

"What!" said Bob, "with all the politicians? How did you happen to go there?"

"Mr. Bass asked my father and me to come down for a few days," answered Cynthia, her color heightening again. Life is full of contrasts, and Cynthia was becoming aware of some of them.

"Uncle Jethro?" said Bob.

"Yes, Uncle Jethro," said Cynthia, smiling in spite of herself. He always made her smile.

"Uncle Jethro owns the Pelican House," said Bob.

"Does he? I knew he was a great man, but I didn't know how great he was until I came down here."

Cynthia said this so innocently that Bob repented his flippancy on the spot. He had heard occasional remarks of his elders about Jethro.

"I didn't mean quite that," he said, growing red in his turn. "Uncle

Jethro—Mr. Bass—is a great man of course. That's what I meant."

"And he's a very good man," said Cynthia, who understood now that he had spoken a little lightly of Jethro, and resented it.

"I'm sure of it," said Bob, eagerly. Then Cynthia began to walk on, slowly, and he followed her on the other side of the fence. "Hold on," he cried, "I haven't said half the things I want to say—yet."

"What do you want to say?" asked Cynthia, still walking. "I have to go."

"Oh, no, you don't! Wait just a minute—won't you?"

Cynthia halted, with apparent unwillingness, and put out her toe between the pickets. Then she saw that there was a little patch on that toe, and drew it in again.

"What do you want to say?" she repeated. "I don't believe you have anything to say at all." And suddenly she flashed a look at him that made his heart thump.

"I do—I swear I do!" he protested. "I'm coming down to the Pelican to-morrow morning to get you to go for a walk."

Cynthia could not but think that the remoteness of the time he set was scarce in keeping with his ardent tone.

"I have something else to do to-morrow morning," she answered.

"Then I'll come to-morrow afternoon," said Bob, instantly.

"Who lives here?" she asked irrelevantly.

"Mr. Duncan. I'm visiting the Duncans."

At this moment a carryall joined the carriage at the gate. Cynthia glanced at the porch again. The group there had grown larger, and they were still staring. She began to feel uncomfortable again, and moved on slowly.

"Mayn't I come?" asked Bob, going after her; and scraping the butt of the rod along the palings.

"Aren't there enough girls here to satisfy you?" asked Cynthia.

"They're enough—yes," he said, "but none of 'em could hold a candle to you."

Cynthia laughed outright.

"I believe you tell them all something like that," she said.

"I don't do any such thing," he retorted, and then he laughed himself, and Cynthia laughed again.

"I like you because you don't swallow everything whole," said Bob, "and—well, for a good many other reasons." And he looked into her face with such frank admiration that Cynthia blushed and turned away.

"I don't believe a word you say," she answered, and started to walk off, this time in earnest.

"Hold on," cried Bob. They were almost at the end of the fence by this, and the pickets were sharp and rather high, or he would have climbed them.

Cynthia paused hesitatingly.

"I'll come at two o'clock to-morrow," said he; "We're going on a picnic to-day, to Dalton's Bend, on the river. I wish I could get out of it."

Just then there came a voice from the gateway.

"Bob! Bob Worthington!"

They both turned involuntarily. A slender girl with light brown hair was standing there, waving at him.

"Who's that?" asked Cynthia.

"That?" said Bob, in some confusion, "oh, that's Janet Duncan."

"Good-by," said Cynthia.

"I'm coming to-morrow," he called after her, but she did not turn. In a little while she heard the carryall behind her clattering down the street, its passengers laughing and joking merrily. Her face burned, for she thought that they were laughing at her; she wished with all her heart that she had not stopped to talk with him at the palings. The girls, indeed, were giggling as the carryall passed, and she heard somebody call out his name, but nevertheless he leaned out of the seat and waved his hat at her, amid a shout of laughter. Poor Cynthia! She did not look at him. Tears of vexation were in her eyes, and the light of her joy at this visit to the capital flickered, and she wished she were back in Coniston. She thought it would be very nice to be rich, and to live in a great house in a city, and to go on picnics.

The light flickered, but it did not wholly go out. If it has not been shown that Cynthia was endowed with a fair amount of sense, many of these pages have been written in vain. She sat down for a while in the park and thought of the many things she had to be thankful for—not the least of which was Jethro's kindness. And she remembered that she was to see "Uncle Tom's Cabin" that evening.

Such are the joys and sorrows of fifteen!

## CHAPTER XV

Mr. Amos Cuthbert named it so—our old friend Amos who lives high up in the ether of Town's End ridge, and who now represents Coniston in the Legislature. He is the same silent, sallow person as when Jethro first took a mortgage on his farm, only his skin is beginning to resemble dried parchment, and he is a trifle more cantankerous. On the morning of that memorable day when, "Uncle Tom's Cabin" came to the capital, Amos had entered the Throne Room and given vent to his feelings in regard to the gentleman in the back seat who had demanded an evening sitting on behalf of the farmers.

"Don't that beat all?" cried Amos. "Let them have their darned woodchuck session; there won't nobody go to it. For cussed, crisscross contrariness, give me a moss-back Democrat from a one-boss, one-man town like Suffolk. I'm a-goin' to see the show."

"G-goin' to the show, be you, Amos?" said Jethro.

"Yes, I be," answered Amos, bitterly. "I hain't agoin' nigh the house to-night." And with this declaration he departed.

"I wonder if he really is going?" queried Mr. Merrill looking at the ceiling. And then he laughed.

"Why shouldn't he go?" asked William Wetherell.

Mr. Merrill's answer to this question was a wink, whereupon he, too, departed. And while Wetherell was pondering over the possible meaning of these words the Honorable Alva Hopkins entered, wreathed in smiles, and closed the door behind him.

"It's all fixed," he said, taking a seat near Jethro in the window.

"S-seen your gal—Alvy—seen your gal?"

Mr. Hopkins gave a glance at Wetherell.

"Will don't talk," said Jethro, and resumed his inspection through the lace curtains of what was going on in the street.

"Cassandry's, got him to go," said Mr. Hopkins. "It's all fixed, as sure as Sunday. If it misses fire, then I'll never mention the governorship again. But if it don't miss fire," and the Honorable Alva leaned over and put his hand on Jethro's knee, "if it don't miss fire, I get the nomination. Is that right?"

"Y-you've guessed it, Alvy."

"That's all I want to know," declared the Honorable Alva; "when you say that much, you never go back on it. And, you can go ahead and give the orders, Jethro. I have to see that the boys get the tickets. Cassandry's got a head on her shoulders, and she kind of wants to be governor, too." He got as far as the door, when he turned and bestowed upon Jethro a glance of undoubted tribute. "You've done a good many smart things," said he, "but I guess you never beat this, and never will."

"H-hain't done it yet, Alvy," answered Jethro, still looking out through the window curtains at the ever ganging groups of gentlemen in the street. These groups had a never ceasing interest for Jethro Bass.

Mr. Wetherell didn't talk, but had he been the most incurable of gossips he felt that he could have done no damage to this mysterious affair, whatever it was. In a certain event, Mr. Hopkins was promised the governorship: so much was plain. And it was also evident that Miss Cassandra Hopkins was in some way to be instrumental. William Wetherell did not like to ask Jethro, but he thought a little of sounding Mr. Merrill, and then he came to the conclusion that it would be wiser for him not to know.

"Er—Will," said Jethro, presently, "you know Heth Sutton—Speaker Heth Sutton?"

"Yes."

"Er—wouldn't mind askin' him to step in and see me before the session—if he was comin' by—would you?"

"Certainly not."

"Er—if he was comin' by," said Jethro.

Mr. Wetherell found Mr. Speaker Sutton glued to a pillar in the rotunda below. He had some difficulty in breaking through the throng that pressed around him, and still more in attracting his attention, as Mr. Sutton took no manner of notice of the customary form of placing one's hand under his elbow and pressing gently up. Summoning up his courage, Mr. Wetherell tried the second method of seizing him by the buttonhole. He paused in his harangue, one hand uplifted, and turned and glanced at the storekeeper abstractedly.

"Mr. Bass asked me to tell you to drop into Number 7," said Wetherell, and added, remembering express instructions, "if you were going by."

Wetherell had not anticipated the magical effect this usual message would have on Mr. Sutton, nor had he thought that so large and dignified a body would move so rapidly. Before the astonished gentlemen who had penned him could draw a breath, Mr. Sutton had reached the stairway and, was mounting it with an agility that did him credit. Five minutes later Wetherell saw the Speaker descending again, the usually impressive quality of his face slightly modified by the twitching of a smile.

Thus the day passed, and the gentlemen of the Lovejoy and Duncan factions sat, as tight as ever in their seats, and the Truro Franchise bill still slumbered undisturbed in Mr. Chauncey Weed's committee.

At supper there was a decided festal air about the dining room of the Pelican House, the little band of agricultural gentlemen who wished to have a session not being patrons of that exclusive hotel. Many of the Solons had sent home for their wives; that they might do the utmost justice to the Honorable Alva's hospitality. Even Jethro, as he ate his crackers and milk, had a new coat with bright brass buttons, and Cynthia, who wore a fresh gingham which Miss Sukey Kittredge of Coniston had helped to design, so far relented in deference to Jethro's taste as to tie a red bow at her throat.

The middle table under the chandelier was the immediate firmament of Miss Cassandra Hopkins. And there, beside the future governor, sat the president of the "Northwestern" Railroad, Mr. Lovejoy, as the chief of the revolving satellites. People began to say that Mr. Lovejoy was hooked at last, now that he had lost his head in such an unaccountable fashion as to pay his court in public; and it was very generally known that he was to make one of the Honorable Alva's immediate party at the performance of "Uncle Tam's Cabin."

Mr. Speaker Sutton, of course, would have to forego the pleasure of the theatre as a penalty of his high position. Mr. Merrill, who sat at Jethro's table next to Cynthia that evening, did a great deal of joking with the Honorable Heth about having to preside aver a woodchuck session, which the Speaker, so Mr. Wetherell thought, took in astonishingly good part, and seemed very willing to make the great sacrifice which his duty required of him.

After supper Mr. Wetherell took a seat in the rotunda. As an observer of human nature, he had begun to find a fascination in watching the group of politicians there. First of all he encountered Mr. Amos Cuthbert, his little coal-black eyes burning brightly, and he was looking very irritable indeed.

"So you're going to the show, Amos?" remarked the storekeeper, with an attempt at cordiality.

To his bewilderment, Amos turned upon him fiercely.

"Who said I was going to the show?" he snapped.

"You yourself told me."

"You'd ought to know whether I'm a-goin' or not," said Amos, and walked away.

While Mr. Wetherell sat meditating, upon this inexplicable retort, a retired, scholarly looking gentleman with a white beard, who wore spectacles, came out of the door leading from the barber shop and quietly took a seat beside him. The storekeeper's attention was next distracted by the sight of one who wandered slowly but ceaselessly from group to group, kicking up his heels behind, and halting always in the rear of the speakers. Needless to say that this was our friend Mr. Bijah Bixby, who was following out his celebrated tactics of "going along by when they were talkin' sly." Suddenly Mr. Bixby's eye alighted on Mr. Wetherell, who by a stretch of imagination conceived that it expressed both astonishment and approval, although he was wholly at a loss to understand these sentiments. Mr. Bixby winked—Mr. Wetherell was sure of that. But to his surprise, Bijah did not pause in his rounds to greet him.

Mr. Wetherell was beginning to be decidedly uneasy, and was about to go upstairs, when Mr. Merrill came down the rotunda whistling, with his hands in his pockets. He stopped whistling when he spied the storekeeper, and approached him in his usual hearty manner.

"Well, well, this is fortunate," said Mr. Merrill; "how are you, Duncan? I want you to know Mr. Wetherell. Wetherell writes that weekly letter for the Guardian you were speaking to me about last year. Will, this is Mr. Alexander Duncan, president of the 'Central.'"

"How do you do, Mr. Wetherell?" said the scholarly gentleman with the spectacles, putting out his hand. "I'm glad to meet you, very glad, indeed. I read your letters with the greatest pleasure."

Mr. Wetherell, as he took Mr. Duncan's hand, had a variety of emotions which may be imagined, and need not be set down in particular.

"Funny thing," Mr. Merrill continued, "I was looking for you, Duncan. It occurred to me that you would like to meet Mr. Wetherell. I was afraid you were in Boston."

"I have just got back," said Mr. Duncan.

"I wanted Wetherell to see your library. I was telling him about it."

"I should be delighted to show it to him," answered Mr. Duncan. That library, as is well known, was a special weakness of Mr. Duncan's.

Poor William Wetherell, who was quite overwhelmed by the fact that the great Mr. Duncan had actually read his letters and liked them, could scarcely utter a sensible word. Almost before he realized what had happened he was following Mr. Duncan out of the Pelican House, when the storekeeper was mystified once more by a nudge and another wink from Mr. Bixby, conveying unbounded admiration.

"Why don't you write a book, Mr. Wetherell?" inquired the railroad president, when they were crossing the park.

"I don't think I could do it," said Mr. Wetherell, modestly. Such incense was overpowering, and he immediately forgot Mr. Bixby.

"Yes, you can," said Mr. Duncan, "only you don't know it. Take your letters for a beginning. You can draw people well enough, when you try. There was your description of the lonely hill-farm on the spur—I shall always remember that: the gaunt farmer, toiling every minute between sun and sun; the thin, patient woman bending to a task that never changed or lightened; the children growing up and leaving one by one, some to the cities, some to the West, until the old people are left alone in the evening of life—to the sunsets and the storms. Of course you must write a book."

Mr. Duncan quoted other letters, and William Wetherell thrilled. Poor man! he had had little enough incense in his time, and none at all from the great. They came to the big square house with the cornice which Cynthia had seen the day before, and walked across the lawn through the open door. William Wetherell had a glimpse of a great drawing-room with high windows, out of which was wafted the sound of a piano and of youthful voice and laughter, and then he was in the library. The thought of one man owning all those books overpowered him. There they were, in stately rows, from the floor to the high ceiling, and a portable ladder with which to reach them.

Mr. Duncan, understanding perhaps something of the storekeeper's embarrassment, proceeded to

take down his treasures: first editions from the shelves, and folios and mistrals from drawers in a great iron safe in one corner and laid them on the mahogany desk. It was the railroad president's hobby, and could he find an appreciative guest, he was happy. It need scarcely be said that he found William Wetherell appreciative, and possessed of knowledge of Shaksperiana and other matters that astonished his host as well as pleased him. For Wetherell had found his tongue at last.

After a while Mr. Duncan drew out his watch and gave a start.

"By George!" he exclaimed, "it's after eight o'clock. I'll have to ask you to excuse me to-night, Mr. Wetherell. I'd like to show you the rest of them—can't you come around to-morrow afternoon?"

Mr. Wetherell, who had forgotten his own engagement and "Uncle Tom's Cabin," said he would be happy to come. And they went out together and began to walk toward the State House.

"It isn't often I find a man who knows anything at all about these things," continued Mr. Duncan, whose heart was quite won. "Why do you bury yourself in Coniston?"

"I went there from Briton for my health," said the storekeeper.

"Jethro Bass lives there, doesn't he" said Mr. Duncan, with a laugh. But I suppose you don't know anything about politics."

"I know nothing at all," said Mr. Wetherell, which was quite true. He had been in dreamland, but now the fact struck him again, with something of a shock, that this mild-mannered gentleman was one of those who had been paying certain legislators to remain in their seats. Wetherell thought of speaking to Mr. Duncan of his friendship with Jethro Bass, but the occasion passed.

"I wish to heaven I didn't have to know anything about politics," Mr. Duncan was saying; "they disgust me. There's a little matter on now, about an extension of the Truro Railroad to Harwich, which wouldn't interest you, but you can't conceive what a nuisance it has been to watch that House day and night, as I've had to. It's no joke to have that townsman of yours; Jethro Bass, opposed to you. I won't say anything against him, for he may be a friend of yours, and I have to use him sometimes myself." Mr. Duncan sighed. "It's all very sordid and annoying. Now this evening, for instance, when we might have enjoyed ourselves with those books, I've got to go to the House, just because some backwoods farmers want to talk about woodchucks. I suppose it's foolish," said Mr. Duncan; "but Bass has tricked us so often that I've got into the habit of being watchful. I should have been here twenty minutes ago."

By this time they had come to the entrance of the State House, and Wetherell followed Mr. Duncan in, to have a look at the woodchuck session himself. Several members hurried by and up the stairs, some of them in their Sunday black; and the lobby above seemed, even to the storekeeper's unpractised eye, a trifle active for a woodchuck session. Mr. Duncan muttered something, and quickened his gait a little on the steps that led to the gallery. This place was almost empty. They went down to the rail, and the railroad president cast his eye over the House.

"Good God!" he said sharply, "there's almost a quorum here." He ran his eye over the members. "There is a quorum here."

Mr. Duncan stood drumming nervously with his fingers on the rail, scanning the heads below. The members were scattered far and wide through the seats, like an army in open order, listening in silence to the droning voice of the clerk. Moths burned in the gas flames, and June bugs hummed in at the high windows and tilted against the walls. Then Mr. Duncan's finger nails whitened as his thin hands clutched the rail, and a sense of a pending event was upon Wetherell. Slowly he realized that he was listening to the Speaker's deep voice.

"The Committee on Corporations, to whom was referred House Bill Number 109, entitled, 'An Act to extend the Truro Railroad to Harwich, having considered the same, report the same with the following resolution: Resolved, that the bill ought to pass. Chauncey Weed, for the Committee.'"

The Truro Franchise! The lights danced, and even a sudden weakness came upon the storekeeper. Jethro's trick! The Duncan and Lovejoy representatives in the theatre, the adherents of the bill here! Wetherell saw Mr. Duncan beside him, a tense figure leaning on the rail, calling to some one below. A man darted up the centre, another up the side aisle. Then Mr. Duncan flashed at William Wetherell from his blue eye such a look of anger as the storekeeper never forgot, and he, too, was gone. Tingling and perspiring, Wetherell leaned out over the railing as the Speaker rapped calmly for order. Hysterical laughter, mingled with hoarse cries, ran over the House, but the Honorable Heth Sutton did not even smile.

A dozen members were on their feet shouting to the chair. One was



recognized, and that man Wetherell perceived with amazement to be Mr. Jameson of Wantage, adherent of Jethro's—he who had moved to adjourn for "Uncle Tom's Cabin"! A score of members crowded into the aisles, but the Speaker's voice again rose above the tumult.

"The doorkeepers will close the doors! Mr. Jameson of Wantage moves that the report of the Committee be accepted, and on this motion a roll-call is ordered."

The doorkeepers, who must have been inspired, had already slammed the doors in the faces of those seeking wildly to escape. The clerk already had the little, short-legged desk before him and was calling the roll with incredible rapidity. Bewildered and excited as Wetherell was, and knowing as little of parliamentary law as the gentleman who had proposed the woodchuck session, he began to form some sort of a notion of Jethro's generalship, and he saw that the innocent rural members who belonged to Duncan and Lovejoy's faction had tried to get away before the roll-call, destroy the quorum, and so adjourn the House. These, needless to say, were not parliamentarians, either. They had lacked a leader, they were stunned by the suddenness of the onslaught, and had not moved quickly enough. Like trapped animals, they wandered blindly about for a few moments, and then sank down anywhere. Each answered the roll-call sullenly, out of necessity, for every one of them was a marked man. Then Wetherell remembered the two members who had escaped, and Mr. Duncan, and fell to calculating how long it would take these to reach Fosters Opera House, break into the middle of an act, and get out enough partisans to come back and kill the bill. Mr. Wetherell began to wish he could witness the scene there, too, but something held him here, shaking with excitement, listening to each name that the clerk called.

Would the people at the theatre get back in time?

Despite William Wetherell's principles, whatever these may have been, he was so carried away that he found himself with his watch in his hand, counting off the minutes as the roll-call went on. Fosters Opera House was some six squares distant, and by a liberal estimate Mr. Duncan and his advance guard ought to get back within twenty minutes of the time he left. Wetherell was not aware that people were coming into the gallery behind him; he was not aware that one sat at his elbow until a familiar voice spoke, directly into his ear.

"Er—Will—held Duncan pretty tight—didn't you? He's a hard one to fool, too. Never suspected a mite, did he? Look out for your watch!"

Mr. Bixby seized it or it would have fallen. If his life had depended on it, William Wetherell could not have spoken a word to Mr. Bixby then.

"You done well, Will, sure enough," that gentleman continued to whisper. "And Alvy's gal done well, too—you understand. I guess she's the only one that ever snarled up Al Lovejoy so that he didn't know where he was at. But it took a fine, delicate touch for her job and yours, Will. Godfrey, this is the quickest roll-call I ever seed! They've got halfway through Truro County. That fellow can talk faster than a side-show, ticket-seller at a circus."

The clerk was, indeed, performing prodigies of pronunciation. When he reached Wells County, the last, Mr. Bixby so far lost his habitual sang froid as to hammer on the rail with his fist.

"If there hain't a quorum, we're done for," he said. "How much time has gone away? Twenty minutes! Godfrey, some of 'em may break loose and git here is five minutes!"

"Break loose?" Wetherell exclaimed involuntarily.

Mr. Bixby screwed up his face.

"You understand. Accidents is liable to happen."

Mr. Wetherell didn't understand in the least, but just then the clerk reached the last name on the roll; an instant of absolute silence, save for the June-bugs, followed, while the assistant clerk ran over his figures deftly and handed them to Mr. Sutton, who leaned forward to receive them.

"One hundred and twelve gentlemen have voted in the affirmative and forty-eight in the negative, and the report of the Committee is accepted."

"Ten more'n a quorum!" ejaculated Mr. Bixby, in a voice of thanksgiving, as the turmoil below began again. It seemed as though every man in the opposition was on his feet and yelling at the chair: some to adjourn; some to indefinitely postpone; some demanding roll-calls; others swearing at these—for a division vote would have opened the doors. Others tried to get out, and then ran down the aisles and

called fiercely on the Speaker to open the doors, and threatened him. But the Honorable Heth Sutton did not lose his head, and it may be doubted whether he ever appeared to better advantage than at that moment. He had a voice like one of the Clovelly bulls that fed in his own pastures in the valley, and by sheer bellowing he got silence, or something approaching it,—the protests dying down to a hum; had recognised another friend of the bill, and was putting another question.

"Mr. Gibbs of Wareham moves that the rules of the House be so far suspended that this bill be read a second and third time by its title, and be put upon its final passage at this time. And on this motion," thundered Mr. Sutton, above the tide of rising voices, "the yeas and nays are called for. The doorkeepers will keep the doors shut."

"Abbey of Ashburton."

The nimble clerk had begun on the roll almost before the Speaker was through, and checked off the name. Bijah Bixby mopped his brow with a blue pocket-handkerchief.

"My God," he said, "what a risk Jethro's took! they can't git through another roll-call. Jest look at Heth! Ain't he carryin' it magnificent? Hain't as ruffled as I be. I've knowed him ever sence he wahn't no higher'n that desk. Never would have b'en in politics if it hadn't b'en for me. Funny thing, Will—you and I was so excited we never thought to look at the clock. Put up your watch. Godfrey, what's this?"

The noise of many feet was heard behind them. Men and women were crowding breathlessly into the gallery.

"Didn't take it long to git noised araound," said Mr. Bixby. "Say, Will, they're bound to have got at 'em in the thea'tre. Don't see how they held 'em off, c-cussed if I do."

The seconds ticked into minutes, the air became stifling, for now the front of the gallery was packed. Now, if ever, the fate of the Truro Franchise hung in the balance, and, perhaps, the rule of Jethro Bass. And now, as in the distance, came a faint, indefinable stir, not yet to be identified by Wetherell's ears as a sound, but registered somewhere in his brain as a warning note. Bijah Bixby, as sensitive as he, straightened up to listen, and then the whispering was hushed. The members below raised their heads, and some clutched the seats in front of them and looked up at the high windows. Only the Speaker sat like a wax statue of himself, and glanced neither to the right nor to the left.

"Harkness of Truro," said the clerk.

"He's almost to Wells County again," whispered Bijah, excitedly. "I didn't callate he could do it. Will?"

"Yes?"

"Will—you hear somethin'?"

A distant shout floated with the night breeze in at the windows; a man on the floor got to his feet and stood straining: a commotion was going on at the back of the gallery, and a voice was heard crying out:—

"For the love of God, let me through!"

Then Wetherell turned to see the crowd at the back parting a little, to see a desperate man in a gorgeous white necktie fighting his way toward the rail. He wore no hat, his collar was wilted, and his normally ashen face had turned white. And, strangest of all, clutched tightly in his hand was a pink ribbon.

"It's Al Lovejoy," said Bijah, laconically.

Unmindful of the awe-stricken stares he got from those about him when his identity became known, Mr. Lovejoy gained the rail and shoved aside a man who was actually making way for him. Leaning far out, he scanned the house with inarticulate rage while the roll-call went monotonously on. Some of the members looked up at him and laughed; others began to make frantic signs, indicative of helplessness; still others telegraphed him obvious advice about reenforcements which, if anything, increased his fury. Mr. Bixby was now fanning himself with the blue handkerchief.

"I hear 'em!" he said, "I hear 'em, Will!"

And he did. The unmistakable hum of the voices of many men and the sound of feet on stone flagging shook the silent night without. The clerk read off the last name on the roll.

"Tompkins of Ulster."

His assistant lost no time now. A mistake would have been fatal, but he was an old hand. Unmindful of the rumble on the wooden stairs below, Mr. Sutton took the list with an admirable deliberation.

"One hundred and twelve gentlemen have voted in the affirmative, forty-eight in the negative, the rules of the House are suspended, and" (the clerk having twice mumbled the title of the bill) "the question is: Shall the bill pass? As many as are of opinion that the bill pass will say Aye, contrary minded No."

Feet were in the House corridor now, and voices rising there, and noises that must have been scuffling—yes, and beating of door panels. Almost every member was standing, and it seemed as if they were all shouting,—"personal privilege," "fraud," "trickery," "open the doors." Bijah was slowly squeezing the blood out of William Wetherell's arm.

"The doorkeepers has the keys in their pockets!" Mr. Bixby had to shout, for once.

Even then the Speaker did not flinch. By a seeming miracle he got a semblance of order, recognized his man, and his great voice rang through the hall and drowned all other sounds.

"And on this question a roll-call is ordered. The doorkeepers will close the doors!"

Then, as in reaction, the gallery trembled with a roar of laughter. But Mr. Sutton did not smile. The clerk scratched off the names with lightning rapidity, scarce waiting for the answers. Every man's color was known, and it was against the rules to be present and fail to vote. The noise in the corridors grew louder, some one dealt a smashing kick on a panel, and Wetherell ventured to ask Mr. Bixby if he thought the doors would hold.

"They can break in all they've a mind to now," he chuckled; "the Truro Franchise is safe."

"What do you mean?" Wetherell demanded excitedly.

"If a member hain't present when a question is put, he can't git into a roll-call," said Bijah.

The fact that the day was lost was evidently brought home to those below, for the strife subsided gradually, and finally ceased altogether. The whispers in the gallery died down, the spectators relayed a little. Lovejoy alone remained tense, though he had seated himself on a bench, and the hot anger in which he had come was now cooled into a vindictiveness that set the hard lines of his face even harder. He still clutched the ribbon. The last part of that famous roll-call was conducted so quietly that a stranger entering the House would have suspected nothing unusual. It was finished in absolute silence.

"One hundred and twelve gentlemen have voted in the affirmative, forty-eight in the negative, and the bill passes. The House will attend to the title of the bill."

"An act to extend the Truro Railroad to Harwich," said the clerk, glibly.

"Such will be the title of the bill unless otherwise ordered by the House," said Mr. Speaker Sutton. "The doorkeepers will open the doors."

Somebody moved to adjourn, the motion was carried, and thus ended what has gone down to history as the Woodchuck Session. Pandemonium reigned. One hundred and forty belated members fought their way in at the four entrances, and mingled with them were lobbyists of all sorts and conditions, residents and visitors to the capital, men and women to whom the drama of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" was as nothing to that of the Truro Franchise Bill. It was a sight to look down upon. Fierce wrangles began in a score of places, isolated personal remarks rose above the din, but your New Englander rarely comes to blows; in other spots men with broad smiles seized others by the hands and shook them violently, while Mr. Speaker Sutton seemed in danger of suffocation by his friends. His enemies, for the moment, could get nowhere near him. On this scene Mr. Bijah Bixby gazed with pardonable pleasure.

"Guess there wahn't a mite of trouble about the river towns," he said, "I had 'em in my pocket. Will, let's amble round to the theatre. We ought to git in two acts."

William Wetherell went. There is no need to go into the psychology of the matter. It may have been numbness; it may have been temporary insanity caused by the excitement of the battle he had witnessed, for his brain was in a whirl; or Mr. Bixby may have hypnotized him. As they walked through the silent streets toward the Opera House, he listened perforce to Mr. Bixby's comments upon some of the innumerable details which Jethro had planned and quietly carried out while sitting, in the window of the Throne Room. A great light dawned on William Wetherell, but too late.

Jethro's trusted lieutenants (of whom, needless to say, Mr. Bixby was one) had been commanded to

notify such of their supporters whose fidelity and secrecy could be absolutely depended upon to attend the Woodchuck Session; and, further to guard against surprise, this order had not gone out until the last minute (hence Mr. Amos Cuthbert's conduct). The seats of these members at the theatre had been filled by accommodating townspeople and visitors. Forestalling a possible vote on the morrow to recall and reconsider, there remained some sixty members whose loyalty was unquestioned, but whose reputation for discretion was not of the best. So much for the parliamentary side of the affair, which was a revelation of generalship and organization to William Wetherell. By the time he had grasped it they were come in view of the lights of Fosters Opera House, and they perceived, among a sprinkling of idlers, a conspicuous and meditative gentleman leaning against a pillar. He was ludicrously tall and ludicrously thin, his hands were in his trousers pockets, and the skirts of his Sunday broadcloth coat hung down behind him awry. One long foot was crossed over the other and rested on the point of the toe, and his head was tilted to one side. He had, on the whole, the appearance of a rather mournful stork. Mr. Bixby approached him gravely, seized him by the lower shoulder, and tilted him down until it was possible to speak into his ear. The gentleman apparently did not resent this, although he seemed in imminent danger of being upset.

"How be you, Peleg? Er—you know Will?"

"No," said the gentleman.

Mr. Bixby seized Mr. Wetherell under the elbow, and addressed himself to the storekeeper's ear.

"Will, I want you to shake hands with Senator Peleg Hartington, of Brampton. This is Will Wetherell, Peleg,—from Coniston—you understand."

The senator took one hand from his pocket.

"How be you?" he said. Mr. Bixby was once more pulling down on his shoulder.

"H-haow was it here?" he demanded.

"Almighty funny," answered Senator Hartington, sadly, and waved at the lobby. "There wahn't standin' room in the place."

"Jethro Bass Republican Club come and packed the entrance," explained Mr. Bixby with a wink. "You understand, Will? Go on, Peleg."

"Sidewalk and street, too," continued Mr. Hartington, slowly. "First come along Ball of Towles, hollerin' like blazes. They crumpled him all up and lost him. Next come old man Duncan himself."

"Will kep' Duncan," Mr. Bixby interjected.

"That was wholly an accident," exclaimed Mr. Wetherell, angrily.

"Will wahn't born in the country," said Mr. Bixby.

Mr. Hartington bestowed on the storekeeper a mournful look, and continued:—

"Never seed Duncan sweatin' before. He didn't seem to grasp why the boys was there."

"Didn't seem to understand," put in Mr. Bixby, sympathetically.

"For God's sake, gentlemen," says he, 'let me in! The Truro Bill!' 'The Truro Bill hain't in the theatre, Mr. Duncan,' says Dan Everett. Cussed if I didn't come near laughin'. 'That's "Uncle Tom's Cabin," Mr. Duncan,' says Dan. 'You're a dam fool,' says Duncan. I didn't know he was profane. 'Make room for Mr. Duncan,' says Dan, 'he wants to see the show.' 'I'm a-goin' to see you in jail for this, Everett,' says Duncan. They let him push in about half a rod, and they swallowed him. He was makin' such a noise that they had to close the doors of the theatre—so's not to disturb the play-actors."

"You understand," said Mr. Bixby to Wetherell. Whereupon he gave another shake to Mr. Hartington, who had relapsed into a sort of funereal meditation.

"Well," resumed that personage, "there was some more come, hollerin' about the Truro Bill. Not many. Guess they'll all have to git their wimmen-folks to press their clothes to-morrow. Then Duncan wanted to git out again, but 'twan't exactly convenient. Callated he was suffocatin'—seemed to need air. Little mite limp when he broke loose, Duncan was."

The Honorable Peleg stopped again, as if he were overcome by the recollection of Mr. Duncan's plight.

"Er—er—Peleg!"

Mr. Hartington started.

"What'd they do?—what'd they do?"

"Do?"

"How'd they git notice to 'em?"

"Oh," said Mr. Hartington, "cussed if that wuhn't funny. Let's see, where was I? After awhile they went over t'other side of the street, talkin' sly, waitin' for the act to end. But goldarned if it ever did end."

For once Mr. Bixby didn't seem to understand.

"D-didn't end?"

"No," explained Mr. Hartington; "seems they hitched a kind of nigger minstrel show right on to it—banjos and thingumajigs in front of the curtain while they was changin' scenes, and they hitched the second act right on to that. Nobody come out of the theatre at all. Funny notion, wahn't it?"

Mr. Bixby's face took on a look of extreme cunning. He smiled broadly and poked Mr. Wetherell in an extremely sensitive portion of his ribs. On such occasions the nasal quality of Bijah's voice seemed to grow.

"You see?" he said.

"Know that little man, Gibbs, don't ye?" inquired Mr. Hartington.

"Airley Gibbs, hain't it? Runs a livery business daown to Rutgers, on Lovejoy's railroad," replied Mr. Bixby, promptly. "I know him. Knew old man Gibbs well's I do you. Mean cuss."

"This Airley's smart—wahn't quite smart enough, though. His bright idea come a little mite late. Hunted up old Christy, got the key to his law office right here in the Duncan Block, went up through the skylight, clumb down to the roof of Randall's store next door, shinned up the lightnin' rod on t'other side, and stuck his head plump into the Opery House window."

"I want to know!" ejaculated Mr. Bixby.

"Somethin' terrible pathetic was goin' on on the stage," resumed Mr. Hartington, "the folks didn't see him at first,—they was all cryin' and everythin' was still, but Airley wahn't affected. As quick as he got his breath he hollered right out loud's he could: 'The Truro Bill's up in the House, boys. We're skun if you don't git thar quick.' Then they tell me' the lightnin' rod give way; anyhow, he came down on Randall's gravel roof considerable hard, I take it."

Mr. Hartington, apparently, had an aggravating way of falling into mournful revery and of forgetting his subject. Mr. Bixby was forced to jog him again.

"Yes, they did," he said, "they did. They come out like the theatre was afire. There was some delay in gettin' to the street, but not much—not much. All the Republican Clubs in the state couldn't have held 'em then, and the profanity they used wahn't especially edifyin'."

"Peleg's a deacon—you understand," said Mr. Bixby. "Say, Peleg, where was Al Lovejoy?"

"Lovejoy come along with the first of 'em. Must have hurried some—they tell me he was settin' way down in front alongside of Alvy Hopkins's gal, and when Airley hollered out she screeched and clutched on to Al, and Al said somethin' he hadn't ought to and tore off one of them pink gew-gaws she was covered with. He was the maddest man I ever see. Some of the club was crowded inside, behind the seats, standin' up to see the show. Al was so anxious to git through he hit Si Dudley in the mouth—injured him some, I guess. Pity, wahn't it?"

"Si hain't in politics, you understand," said Mr. Bixby. "Callate Si paid to git in there, didn't he, Peleg?"

"Callate he did," assented Senator Hartington.

A long and painful pause followed. There seemed, indeed, nothing more to be said. The sound of applause floated out of the Opera House doors, around which the remaining loiterers were clustered.

"Goin' in, be you, Peleg?" inquired Mr. Bixby.

Mr. Hartington shook his head.

"Will and me had a notion to see somethin' of the show," said Mr. Bixby, almost apologetically. "I kep' my ticket."

"Well," said Mr. Hartington, reflectively, "I guess you'll find some of the show left. That hain't b'en hurt much, so far as I can ascertain."

The next afternoon, when Mr. Isaac D. Worthington happened to be sitting alone in the office of the Truro Railroad at the capital, there came a knock at the door, and Mr. Bijah Bixby entered. Now, incredible as it may seem, Mr. Worthington did not know Mr. Bixby—or rather, did not remember him. Mr. Worthington had not had at that time much of an experience in politics, and he did not possess a very good memory for faces.

Mr. Bixby, who had, as we know, a confidential and winning manner, seated himself in a chair very close to Mr. Worthington—somewhat to that gentleman's alarm. "How be you?" said Bijah, "I-I've got a little bill here—you understand."

Mr. Worthington didn't understand, and he drew his chair away from Mr. Bixby's.

"I don't know anything about it, sir," answered the president of the Truro Railroad, indignantly; "this is neither the manner nor the place to present a bill. I don't want to see it."

Mr. Bixby moved his chair up again. "Callate you will want to see this bill, Mr. Worthington," he insisted, not at all abashed. "Jethro Bass sent it—you understand—it's engrossed."

Whereupon Mr. Bixby drew from his capacious pocket a roll, tied with white ribbon, and pressed it into Mr. Worthington's hands. It was the Truro Franchise Bill.

It is safe to say that Mr. Worthington understood.

## CHAPTER XVI

There are certain instruments used by scientists so delicate that they have to be wrapped in cotton wool and kept in ductless places, and so sensitive that the slightest shock will derange them. And there are certain souls which cannot stand the jars of life—souls created to register thoughts and sentiments too fine for those of coarser construction. Such was the soul of the storekeeper of Coniston. Whether or not he was one of those immortalized in the famous Elegy, it is not for us to say. A celebrated poet who read the letters to the Guardian—at Miss Lucretia Penniman's request—has declared Mr. Wetherell to have been a genius. He wrote those letters, as we know, after he had piled his boxes and rolled his barrels into place; after he had added up the columns in his ledger and recorded, each week, the small but ever increasing deficit which he owed to Jethro Bass. Could he have been removed from the barrels and the ledgers, and the debts and the cares and the implications, what might we have had from his pen? That will never be known.

We left him in the lobby of the Opera House, but he did not go in to see the final act of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." He made his way, alone, back to the hotel, slipped in by a side entrance, and went directly to his room, where Cynthia found him, half an hour later, seated by the open window in the dark.

"Aren't you well, Dad?" she asked anxiously. "Why didn't you come to see the play?"

"I—I was detained Cynthia," he said. "Yes—I am well."

She sat down beside him and felt his forehead and his hands, and the events of the evening which were on her lips to tell him remained unspoken.

"You ought not to have left Coniston," she said; "the excitement is too much for you. We will go back tomorrow."

"Yes, Cynthia, we will go back to-morrow."

"In the morning?"

"On the early train," said Wetherell, "and now you must go to sleep."

"I am glad," said Cynthia, as she kissed him good night. "I have enjoyed it here, and I am grateful to Uncle Jethro for bringing us, but—but I like Coniston best."

William Wetherell could have slept but a few hours. When he awoke the sparrows were twittering outside, the fresh cool smells of the morning were coming in at his windows, and the sunlight was just striking across the roofs through the green trees of the Capitol Park. The remembrance of a certain incident of the night before crept into his mind, and he got up, and drew on his clothes and thrust his few belongings into the carpet-bag, and knocked on Cynthia's door. She was already dressed, and her eyes rested searchingly on his face.

"Dad, you aren't well. I know it," she said.

But he denied that he was not.

Her belongings were in a neat little bundle under her arm. But when she went to put them in the bag she gave an exclamation, knelt down, took everything out that he had packed, and folded each article over again with amazing quickness. Then she made a rapid survey of the room lest she had forgotten anything, closed the bag, and they went out and along the corridor. But when Wetherell turned to go down the stairs, she stopped him.

"Aren't you going to say goodbye to Uncle Jethro?"

"I—I would rather go on and get in the train, Cynthia," he said. "Jethro will understand."

Cynthia was worried, but she did not care to leave him; and she led him, protesting, into the dining room. He had a sinking fear that they might meet Jethro there, but only a few big-boned countrymen were scattered about, attended by sleepy waitresses. Lest Cynthia might suspect how his head was throbbing, Wetherell tried bravely to eat his breakfast. He did not know that she had gone out, while they were waiting, and written a note to Jethro, explaining that her father was ill, and that they were going back to Coniston. After breakfast, when they went to the desk, the clerk stared at them in astonishment.

"Going, Mr. Wetherell?" he exclaimed.

"I find that I have to get back," stammered the storekeeper. "Will you tell me the amount of my bill?"

"Judge Bass gave me instructions that he would settle that."

"It is very kind of Mr. Bass," said Wetherell, "but I prefer to pay it myself."

The man hesitated.

"The judge will be very angry, Mr. Wetherell."

"Kindly give me the bill."

The clerk made it out and handed it over in silence. Wetherell had in his pocket the money from several contributions to the Guardian, and he paid him. Then they set out for the station, bought their tickets and hurried past the sprinkling of people there. The little train for Truro was standing under the sheds, the hissing steam from the locomotive rising perpendicular in the still air of the morning, and soon they were settled in one of the straight-backed seats. The car was almost empty, for few people were going up that day, and at length, after what, seemed an eternity of waiting, they started, and soon were in the country once more in that wonderful Truro valley with its fruit trees and its clover scents; with its sparkling stream that tumbled through the passes and mirrored between green meadow-banks the blue and white of the sky. How hungrily they drank in the freshness of it.

They reached Truro village at eleven. Outside the little tavern there, after dinner, the green stage was drawn up; and Tom the driver cracked his long whip over the Morgan leaders and they started, swaying in the sand ruts and jolting over the great stones that cropped out of the road. Up they climbed, through narrow ways in the forest—ways hedged with alder and fern and sumach and wild grape, adorned with oxeye daisies and tiger lilies, and the big purple flowers which they knew and loved so well. They passed, too, wild lakes overhung with primeval trees, where the iris and the waterlily grew among the fallen trunks and the water-fowl called to each other across the blue stretches. And at length, when the sun was beginning visibly to fall, they came out into an open cut on the western side and saw again the long line of Coniston once more against the sky.

"Dad," said Cynthia, as she gazed, "don't you love it better than any other place in the world?"

He did. But he could not answer her.

An hour later, from the hilltops above Isaac Worthington's mills, they saw the terraced steeple of Brampton church, and soon the horses were standing with drooping heads and wet sides in front of Mr. Sherman's tavern in Brampton Street; and Lem Hallowell, his honest face aglow with joy, was lifting Cynthia out of the coach as if she were a bundle of feathers.

"Upon my word," he cried, "this is a little might sudden! What's the matter with the capital, Will? Too wicked and sophisticated down thar to suit ye?" By this time, Wetherell, too, had reached the ground, and as Lem Hallowell gazed into his face the laughter in his own died away and gave place to a look of concern. "Don't wonder ye come back," he said, "you're as white as Moses's hoss."

"He isn't feeling very well, Lem;" said Cynthia.

"Jest tuckered, that's all," answered Lem; "you git him right into the stage, Cynthy, I won't be long. Hurry them things off, Tom," he called, and himself seized a huge crate from the back of the coach and flung it on his shoulder. He had his cargo on in a jiffy, clucked to his horses, and they turned into the familiar road to Coniston just as the sun was dipping behind the south end of the mountain.

"They'll be surprised some, and disappointed some," said Lem, cheerily; "they was kind of plannin' a little celebration when you come back, Will—you and Cynthy. Amandy Hatch was a-goin' to bake a cake, and the minister was callatin' to say some word of welcome. Wahn't goin' to be anything grand—jest homelike. But you was right to come if you was tuckered. I guess Cynthy fetched you. Rias he kep' store and done it well,—brisker'n I ever see him, Rias was. Wait till I put some of them things back, and make you more comfortable, Will."

He moved a few parcels and packages from Wetherell's feet and glanced at Cynthia as he did so. The mountain cast its vast blue shadow over forest and pasture, and above the pines the white mist was rising from Coniston Water—rising in strange shapes. Lem's voice seemed to William Wetherell to have given way to a world-wide silence, in the midst of which he sought vainly for Cynthia and the stage driver. Most extraordinary of all, out of the silence and the void came the checker-paned windows of the store at Coniston, then the store itself, with the great oaks bending over it, then the dear familiar faces,—Moses and Amandy, Eph Prescott limping toward them, and little Rias Richardson in an apron with a scoop shovel in his hand, and many others. They were not smiling at the storekeeper's return—they looked very grave. Then somebody lifted him tenderly from the stage and said:—

"Don't you worry a mite, Cynthy. Jest tuckered, that's all."

William Wetherell was "just tuckered." The great Dr. Coles, authority on pulmonary troubles, who came all the way from Boston, could give no better verdict than that. It was Jethro Bass who had induced Dr. Coles to come to Coniston—much against the great man's inclination, and to the detriment of his patients: Jethro who, on receiving Cynthia's note, had left the capital on the next train and had come to Coniston, and had at once gone to Boston for the specialist.

"I do not know why I came," said the famous physician to Dr. Abraham Rowell of Tarleton, "I never shall know. There is something about that man Jethro Bass which compels you to do his will. He has a most extraordinary personality. Is this storekeeper a great friend of his?"

"The only intimate friend he had in the world," answered Dr. Rowell; "none of us could ever understand it. And as for the girl, Jethro Bass worships her."

"If nursing could cure him, I'd trust her to do it. She's a natural-born nurse."

The two physicians were talking in low tones in the little garden behind the store when Jethro came out of the doorway.

"He looks as if he were suffering too," said the Boston physician, and he walked toward Jethro and laid a hand upon his shoulders. "I give him until winter, my friend," said Dr. Coles.

Jethro Bass sat down on the doorstep—on that same millstone where he had talked with Cynthia many years before—and was silent for a long while. The doctor was used to scenes of sorrow, but the sight of this man's suffering unnerved him, and he turned from it.

"D-doctor?" said Jethro, at last.

The doctor turned again: "Yes?" he said.

"D-doctor—if Wetherell hadn't b'en to the capital would he have lived—if he hadn't been to the capital?"



"My friend," said Dr. Coles, "if Mr. Wetherell had always lived in a warm house, and had always been well fed, and helped over the rough places and shielded from the storms, he might have lived longer. It is a marvel to me that he has lived so long."

And then the doctor went way, back to Boston. Many times in his long professional life had the veil been lifted for him—a little. But as he sat in the train he said to himself that in this visit to the hamlet of Coniston he had had the strangest glimpse of all. William Wetherell rallied, as Dr. Coles had predicted, from that first sharp attack, and one morning they brought up a reclining chair which belonged to Mr. Satterlee, the minister, and set it in the window. There, in the still days of the early autumn, Wetherell looked down upon the garden he had grown to love, and listened to the song of Coniston Water. There Cynthia, who had scarcely left his side, read to him from Keats and Shelley and Tennyson—yet the thought grew on her that he did not seem to hear. Even that wonderful passage of Milton's, beginning "So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed," which he always used to beg her to repeat, did not seem to move him now.

The neighbors came and sat with him, but he would not often speak. Cheery Lem Hallowell and his wife, and Cousin Ephraim, to talk about the war, hobbling slowly up the stairs—for rheumatism had been added to that trouble of the Wilderness bullet now, and Ephraim was getting along in years; and Rias Richardson stole up in his carpet slippers; and Moses, after his chores were done, and Amandy with her cakes and delicacies, which he left untouched—though Amandy never knew it. Yes, and Jethro came. Day by day he would come silently into the room, and sit silently for a space, and go as silently out of it. The farms were neglected now on Thousand Acre Hill. William Wetherell would take his hand, and speak to him, but do no more than that.

There were times when Cynthia leaned over him, listening as he breathed to know whether he slept or were awake. If he were not sleeping, he would speak her name: he repeated it often in those days, as though the sound of it gave him comfort; and he would fall asleep with it on his lips, holding her hand, and thinking, perhaps, of that other Cynthia who had tended and nursed and shielded him in other days. Then she would steal down the stairs to Jethro on the doorstep: to Jethro who would sit there for hours at a time, to the wonder and awe of his neighbors. Although they knew that he loved the storekeeper as he loved no other man, his was a grief that they could not understand.

Cynthia used to go to Jethro in the garden. Sorrow had brought them very near together; and though she had loved him before, now he had become her reliance and her refuge. The first time Cynthia saw him; when the worst of the illness had passed and the strange and terrifying apathy had come, she had hidden her head on his shoulder and wept there. Jethro kept that coat, with the tear stains on it, to his dying day, and never wore it again.

"Sometimes—sometimes I think if he hadn't gone to the capital, Cynthy, this mightn't hev come," he said to her once.

"But the doctor said that didn't matter, Uncle Jethro," she answered, trying to comfort him. She, too, believed that something had happened at the capital.

"N-never spoke to you about anything there—n-never spoke to you, Cynthia?"

"No, never," she said. "He—he hardly speaks at all, Uncle Jethro."

One bright morning after the sun had driven away the frost, when the sumacs and maples beside Coniston Water were aflame with red, Bias Richardson came stealing up the stairs and whispered something to Cynthia.

"Dad," she said, laying down her book, "it's Mr. Merrill. Will you see him?"

William Wetherell gave her a great fright. He started up from his pillows, and seized her wrist with a strength which she had not thought remained in his fingers.

"Mr. Merrill!" he cried—"Mr. Merrill here!"

"Yes," answered Cynthia, agitatedly, "he's downstairs—in the store."

"Ask him to come up," said Wetherell, sinking back again, "ask him to come up."

Cynthia, as she stood in the passage, was of two minds about it. She was thoroughly frightened, and went first to the garden to ask Jethro's advice. But Jethro, so Milly Skinner said, had gone off half an hour before, and did not know that Mr. Merrill had arrived. Cynthia went back again to her father.

"Where's Mr. Merrill?" asked Wetherell.

"Dad, do you think you ought to see him? He—he might excite you."

"I insist upon seeing him, Cynthia."

William Wetherell had never said anything like that before. But Cynthia obeyed him, and presently led Mr. Merrill into the room. The kindly little railroad president was very serious now. The wasted face of the storekeeper, enhanced as it was by the beard, gave Mr. Merrill such a shock that he could not speak for a few moments—he who rarely lacked for cheering words on any occasion. A lump rose in his throat as he went over and stood by the chair and took the sick man's hand.

"I am glad you came, Mr. Merrill," said Wetherell, simply, "I wanted to speak to you. Cynthia, will you leave us alone for a few minutes?"

Cynthia went, troubled and perplexed, wondering at the change in him. He had had something on his mind—now she was sure of it—something which Mr. Merrill might be able to relieve.

It was Mr. Merrill who spoke first when she was gone.

"I was coming up to Brampton," he said, "and Tom Collins, who drives the Truro coach, told me you were sick. I had not heard of it."

Mr. Merrill, too, had something on his mind, and did not quite know how to go on. There was in William Wetherell, as he sat in the chair with his eyes fixed on his visitor's face, a dignity which Mr. Merrill had not seen before—had not thought the man might possess.

"I was coming to see you, anyway," Mr. Merrill said.

"I did you a wrong—though as God judges me, I did not think of it at the time. It was not until Alexander Duncan spoke to me last week that I thought of it at all."

"Yes," said Wetherell.

"You see," continued Mr. Merrill wiping his brow, for he found the matter even more difficult than he had imagined, "it was not until Duncan told me how you had acted in his library that I guessed the truth—that I remembered myself how you had acted. I knew that you were not mixed up in politics, but I also knew that you were an intimate friend of Jethro's, and I thought that you had been let into the secret of the woodchuck session. I don't defend the game of politics as it is played, Mr. Wetherell, but all of us who are friends of Jethro's are generally willing to lend a hand in any little manoeuvre that is going on, and have a practical joke when we can. It was not until I saw you sitting there beside Duncan that the idea occurred to me. It didn't make a great deal of difference whether Duncan or Lovejoy got to the House or not, provided they didn't learn of the matter too early, because some of their men had been bought off that day. It suited Jethro's sense of humor to play the game that way—and it was very effective. When I saw you there beside Duncan I remembered that he had spoken about the Guardian letters, and the notion occurred to me to get him to show you his library. I have explained to him that you were innocent. I—I hope you haven't been worrying."

William Wetherell sat very still for a while, gazing out of the window, but a new look had come into his eyes.

"Jethro Bass did not know that you—that you had used me?" he asked at length.

"No," replied Mr. Merrill thickly, "no. He didn't know a thing about it—he doesn't know it now, I believe."

A smile came upon Wetherell's face, but Mr. Merrill could not look at it.

"You have made me very happy," said the storekeeper, tremulously. "I—I have no right to be proud—I have taken his money—he has supported my daughter and myself all these years. But he had never asked me to—to do anything, and I liked to think that he never would."

Mr. Merrill could not speak. The tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"I want you to promise me, Mr. Merrill!" he went on presently, "I want you to promise me that you will never speak to Jethro, of this, or to my daughter, Cynthia."

Mr. Merrill merely nodded his head in assent. Still he could not speak.

"They might think it was this that caused my death. It was not. I know very well that I am worn out,

and that I should have gone soon in any case. And I must leave Cynthia to him. He loves her as his own child."

William Wetherell, his faith in Jethro restored, was facing death as he had never faced life. Mr. Merrill was greatly affected.

"You must not speak of dying, Wetherell," said he, brokenly. "Will you forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive, now that you have explained matters, Mr. Merrill" said the storekeeper, and he smiled again. "If my fibre had been a little tougher, this thing would never have happened. There is only one more request I have to make. And that is, to assure Mr. Duncan, from me, that I did not detain him purposely."

"I will see him on my way to Boston," answered Mr. Merrill.

Then Cynthia was called. She was waiting anxiously in the passage for the interview to be ended, and when she came in one glance at her father's face told her that he was happier. She, too, was happier.

"I wish you would come every day, Mr. Merrill" she said, when they descended into the garden after the three had talked awhile. "It is the first time since he fell ill that he seems himself."

Mr. Merrill's answer was to take her hand and pat it. He sat down on the millstone and drew a deep breath of that sparkling air and sighed, for his memory ran back to his own innocent boyhood in the New England country. He talked to Cynthia until Jethro came.

"I have taken a fancy to this girl, Jethro," said the little railroad president, "I believe I'll steal her; a fellow can't have too many of 'em, you know. I'll tell you one thing,—you won't keep her always shut up here in Coniston. She's much too good to waste on the desert air." Perhaps Mr. Merrill, too, had been thinking of the Elegy that morning. "I don't mean to run down Coniston it's one of the most beautiful places I ever saw. But seriously, Jethro, you and Wetherell ought to send her to school in Boston after a while. She's about the age of my girls, and she can live in my house: Ain't I right?"

"D-don't know but what you be, Steve," Jethro answered slowly.

"I am right," declared Mr. Merrill "you'll back me in this, I know it. Why, she's like your own daughter. You remember what I say. I mean it.—What are you thinking about, Cynthia?"

"I couldn't leave Dad and Uncle Jethro," she said.

"Why, bless your soul," said Mr. Merrill "bring Dad along. We'll find room for him. And I guess Uncle Jethro will get to Boston twice a month if you're there."

And Mr. Merrill got into the buggy with Mr. Sherman and drove away to Brampton, thinking of many things.

"S-Steve's a good man," said Jethro. "C-come up here from Brampton to see your father—did he?"

"Yes," answered Cynthia, "he is very kind." She was about to tell Jethro what a strange difference this visit had made in her father's spirits, but some instinct kept her silent. She knew that Jethro had never ceased to reproach himself for inviting Wetherell to the capital, and she was sure that something had happened there which had disturbed her father and brought on that fearful apathy. But the apathy was dispelled now, and she shrank from giving Jethro pain by mentioning the fact.

He never knew, indeed, until many years afterward, what had brought Stephen Merrill to Coniston. When Jethro went up the stairs that afternoon, he found William Wetherell alone, looking out over the garden with a new peace and contentment in his eyes. Jethro drew breath when he saw that look, as if a great load had been lifted from his heart.

"F-feelin' some better to-day, Will?" he said.

"I am well again, Jethro," replied the storekeeper, pressing Jethro's hand for the first time in months.

"S-soon be, Will," said Jethro, "s-soon be."

Wetherell, who was not speaking of the welfare of the body, did not answer.

"Jethro," he said presently, "there is a little box lying in the top of my trunk over there in the corner. Will you get it for me."

Jethro rose and opened the rawhide trunk and handed the little rosewood box to his friend. Wetherell

took it and lifted the lid reverently, with that same smile on his face and far-off look in his eyes, and drew out a small daguerreotype in a faded velvet frame. He gazed at the picture a long time, and then he held it out to Jethro; and Jethro looked at it, and his hand trembled.

It was a picture of Cynthia Ware. And who can say what emotions it awoke in Jethro's heart? She was older than the Cynthia he had known, and yet she did not seem so. There was the same sweet, virginal look in the gray eyes, and the same exquisite purity in the features. He saw her again—as if it were yesterday—walking in the golden green light under the village maples, and himself standing in the tannery door; he saw the face under the poke bonnet on the road to Brampton, and heard the thrush singing in the woods. And—if he could only blot out that scene from his life!—remembered her, a transformed Cynthia,—remembered that face in the lantern-light when he had flung back the hood that shaded it; and that hair which he had kissed, wet, then, from the sleet. Ah, God, for that briefest of moments she had been his!

So he stared at the picture as it lay in the palm of his hand, and forgot him who had been her husband. But at length he started, as from a dream, and gave it back to Wetherell, who was watching him. Her name had never been mentioned between the two men, and yet she had been the one woman in the world to both.

"It is strange," said William Wetherell, "it is strange that I should have had but two friends in my life, and that she should have been one and you the other. She found me destitute and brought me back to life and married me, and cared for me until she died. And after that—you cared for me."

"You—you mustn't think of that, Will, 'twahn't much what I did—no more than any one else would hev done!"

"It was everything," answered the storekeeper, simply; "each of you came between me and destruction. There is something that I have always meant to tell you, Jethro,—something that it may be a comfort for you to know. Cynthia loved you."

Jethro Bass did not answer. He got up and stood in the window, looking out.

"When she married me," Wetherell continued steadily, "she told me that there was one whom she had never been able to drive from her heart. And one summer evening, how well I recall it!—we were walking under the trees on the Mall and we met my old employer, Mr. Judson, the jeweller. He put me in mind of the young countryman who had come in to buy a locket, and I asked her if she knew you. Strange that I should have remembered your name, wasn't it? It was then that she led me to a bench and confessed that you were the man whom she could not forget. I used to hate you then—as much as was in me to hate. I hated and feared you when I first came to Coniston. But now I can tell you—I can even be happy in telling you."

Jethro Bass groaned. He put his hand to his throat as though he were stifling. Many, many years ago he had worn the locket there. And now? Now an impulse seized him, and he yielded to it. He thrust his hand in his coat and drew out a cowhide wallet, and from the wallet the oval locket itself. There it was, tarnished with age, but with that memorable inscription still legible,—"Cynthy, from Jethro"; not Cynthia, but Cynthy. How the years fell away as he read it! He handed it in silence to the storekeeper, and in silence went to the window again. Jethro Bass was a man who could find no outlet for his agony in speech or tears.

"Yes," said Wetherell, "I thought you would have kept it. Dear, dear, how well I remember it! And I remember how I patronized you when you came into the shop. I believed I should live to be something in the world, then. Yes, she loved you, Jethro. I can die more easily now that I have told you—it has been on my mind all these years."

The locket fell open in William Wetherell's hand, for the clasp had become worn with time, and there was a picture of little Cynthia within: of little Cynthia,—not so little now,—a photograph taken in Brampton the year before. Wetherell laid it beside the daguerreotype.

"She looks like her," he said aloud; "but the child is more vigorous, more human—less like a spirit. I have always thought of Cynthia Ware as a spirit."

Jethro turned at the words, and came and stood looking over Wetherell's shoulder at the pictures of mother and daughter. In the rosewood box was a brooch and a gold ring—Cynthia Ware's wedding ring—and two small slips of yellow paper. William Wetherell opened one of these, disclosing a little braid of brown hair. He folded the paper again and laid it in the locket, and handed that to Jethro.

"It is all I have to give you," he said, "but I know that you will cherish it, and cherish her, when I am gone. She—she has been a daughter to both of us."

"Yes," said Jethro, "I will."

William Wetherell lived but a few days longer. They laid him to rest at last in the little ground which Captain Timothy Prescott had hewn out of the forest with his axe, where Captain Timothy himself lies under his slate headstone with the quaint lettering of bygone days.—That same autumn Jethro Bass made a pilgrimage to Boston, and now Cynthia Ware sleeps there, too, beside her husband, amid the scenes she loved so well.

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